November 3, 2010

Dear Interested Tribal Participant:

Recent events and litigation with Tribes make it clear that the Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Forest Service must review our policies related to sacred sites. Secretary Thomas J. Vilsack asked the USDA Office of Tribal Relations (OTR), who reports directly to the Secretary of Agriculture, and Forest Service to work closely to consult with American Indian and Alaska Native leaders on sacred site policies.

This Administration enthusiastically embraces the spirit of Executive Order (E.O.) 13175 on Tribal Consultation and E.O. 13007 on Tribal Sacred Sites. E.O. 13007 directs the Forest Service and other agencies with statutory or administrative responsibility for the management of Federal lands, to the extent practicable, permitted by law, and not clearly inconsistent with essential agency functions, to:

- Accommodate access to and ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites by Indian religious practitioners, and
- Avoid adversely affecting the physical integrity of such sacred sites.

E.O. 13007 also directs agencies to “maintain the confidentiality of sacred sites” where appropriate.

USDA OTR and the Forest Service want to hear from you regarding how to improve our policies for sacred sites while simultaneously balancing pursuit of the Forest Service’s mission to deliver forest goods and services for current and future generations. We need your help to examine the effectiveness of existing laws and regulations as well as recommendations for future policy or guidelines that will ensure a consistent level of sacred site protection that is more acceptable to Tribes. We believe this emerging effort will provide much needed attention to this important matter and will be in furtherance of the spirit of the President’s commitments to Tribal leaders. Current Forest Service laws, regulations, and policies impacting sacred sites and consultation can be found on the Forest Service’s OTR Web site: http://www.fs.fed.us/spf/tribalrelations/policies.shtml.

**Proposed Timeline**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date Range</th>
<th>Activity Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>November 2010 – February 2011</td>
<td>Conduct in-person and telephonic listening sessions with Tribal governments, spiritual leaders, and culture keepers</td>
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<tr>
<td>February – April 2011</td>
<td>Draft report and policy recommendations</td>
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<td>May – August 2011</td>
<td>Consult on report and draft policy recommendations</td>
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<tr>
<td>September – October 2011</td>
<td>Finalize report and proposed policy recommendations</td>
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<td>November 2011</td>
<td>Rollout final report and proposed policy recommendations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Post-November 2011</td>
<td>Take appropriate steps to adopt and finalize policy changes</td>
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An Equal Opportunity Employer
Throughout this initiative, you can provide comments about our sacred site policies and this effort at [http://www.fs.fed.us/spf/tribalrelations](http://www.fs.fed.us/spf/tribalrelations), or email TribalSacredSites@fs.fed.us.

**Listening Sessions:** The first national telephonic listening session is on November 29, 2010, to introduce the effort, to ask for your input on the proposed process, and hear your thoughts regarding improvements to our existing policies and recommendations for developing new policy. Following that call, from December through February, in-person and telephonic listening sessions will occur throughout the country. Another national telephonic listening session will be scheduled in mid-to-late February 2011 to summarize what we have heard, provide another opportunity for you to make your voice heard, and to set the stage for the next phases including Government-to-Government consultation, which should take place from May through August, 2011.

After the listening sessions are complete, the USDA OTR/Forest Service team working on this initiative will develop a draft report for the Secretary based on your recommendations for policy changes and draft proposed policy language. You can comment electronically throughout this process using the website and the email address above. Consultation with your Tribal Governments will take place beginning in May 2011. What we hear from you during the listening sessions will shape the consultation process. More information will be forthcoming on the consultation phase in spring 2011.

**We invite you to join us on November 29, 2010, for the first national listening session from 2:00-5:00 pm Eastern Standard Time.**

Please dial-in to the Roundtable at (888) 469-1285 and enter passcode 5116673.

Please join us on November 29, 2010, for our first national listening session on USDA and Forest Service sacred sites policies. We sincerely appreciate your assistance and look forward to hearing from you.

Very best regards,

[Signature]

HARRIS D. SHERMAN
Under Secretary
Natural Resources and Environment

THOMAS L. TIDWELL
Chief
U.S. Forest Service