

Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs Reaffirms Decision to Place Camp 4 Into Trust



On February 25, 2019, Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs Tara Sweeney reaffirmed the 2017 decision to place Camp 4 into trust. Her action on behalf of the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians ensures the tribal land will not be removed from trust on a technicality.

Less than two weeks prior, District Court Judge Stephen Wilson overturned a 2017 decision by the Bureau of Indians Affairs to place Camp 4 into trust for the tribe. That lawsuit by tribal opponents claimed that the former Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary who signed the order in 2017 did not have the right to do so as he was no longer serving as the Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs.

The new Assistant Secretary, Tara Sweeney, who was confirmed by the U.S. Senate in 2018 and has full authority to sign fee-to-trust applications, re-analyzed the case and agreed with the decision by former Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary that appeals to the 2014 Notice of Decision are without merit. Her decision, and authorizing signature, satisfies the legal requirements of Judge Wilson.

“We are pleased with Assistant Secretary Sweeney’s decision to dismiss the 2014 appeals under her signature,” stated Kenneth Kahn, Chairman for the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians. “The 2017 decision was recently overturned on a technicality. There was never any concern about the merits of the application itself. Assistant Secretary Sweeney’s swift action and subsequent signature confirms that.”

The tribe purchased Camp 4 in 2010 to be used for housing for the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians’ membership. The tribe plans to build 143 housing units and a small tribal administrative building while protecting the vast majority of the property as agricultural land or environmental open space.

In 2013, the tribe filed a federal fee-to-trust application to take Camp 4 into trust to make it part of its reservation. As part of the fee-to-trust application, a thorough

environmental assessment was conducted that followed the strict federal guidelines of the National Environmental Policy Act to which a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) was reached signifying that the project outlined for Camp 4 do not have a significant effect on the environment.

“We are working tirelessly to provide housing for our membership,” stated Chairman Kahn. “We have one of the smallest reservations in the state, at only 144 acres. Our small land base allows for only 17 percent of our families to live on the current reservation. Housing on Camp 4 will allow our membership to come home to our ancestral land, live together and continue to thrive culturally.”

The Santa Ynez Reservation is located in Santa Barbara County and was established and officially recognized by the federal government on December 27, 1901. Today, the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians remains the only federally recognized Chumash tribe in the nation. The tribe is a self-governing sovereign nation and follows the laws set forth in its tribal constitution.

Suquamish Tribe Calls for Action After Latest Toxic Spill

The Suquamish Tribe in Washington State continues to be frustrated and dismayed by the U.S. Navy’s inability to properly manage and dispose of its untreated wastewater. A statement from the tribe said:

Over the past three years, the Navy repeatedly released tens of thousands of gallons of sewage into our ancestral marine waters. Untreated sewage contaminates fishery resources that would otherwise be harvested by our tribal members. [The most recent] release of 4,000 gallons of untreated sewage from neglected sewer infrastructure into our ancestral waters in Sinclair Inlet is unacceptable. This ineffective monitoring at the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard (PSNS) is a health hazard and exemplifies a failure to act. The Navy must put proper measures in place to prevent this kind of dangerous and damaging pollution. We value and respect the service of our local Sailors and the relationship we enjoy with the wider Navy community, but we cannot abide the mistreatment of this most important natural resource. There is no excuse for the Navy’s failure to uphold its environmental stewardship responsibilities in local marine waters and throughout Puget Sound. Navy leadership needs to uphold its commitment to upgrade its infrastructure and take the actions necessary to prevent these spills that have become far too commonplace. The President and Congress need to make the investment in wastewater treatment systems at PSNS a priority and recognize that this is a true emergency. ♣