

Collaboration among programs helps create new kitchen island in USDA

Healthy Traditions, Force Account, Housing Maintenance and USDA create new work space

By Diane Rodriguez

A new kitchen island will greet participants in food preservation and cooking classes this year thanks to the combined efforts of several Tribal programs.

The Healthy Traditions program has made quite an impact on the Tribe's USDA warehouse in Siletz, providing funding for a new stove and dishwasher in addition to the new island.

"We didn't have a good cooking classroom to use. These new things in the kitchen ... give us a central place to gather and share stories," said Sharla Robinson, Healthy Traditions Program coordinator. "Culturally, families used to cook together as a group."

The 5-by-10 island provides a large working space for classes and doubles as a storage area with cabinets underneath the countertop.

One end of the island is lower to accommodate disabled individuals and has no cabinets underneath.

Adrienne Crookes, community health advocate in the Eugene area office, designed the island. The Force Account crew framed and installed the cabinets at no charge. Precision Countertops in Wilsonville, Ore., made the countertops.

The Housing Maintenance crew installed the stove and dishwasher.



Photos by Diane Rodriguez

The new kitchen island (top right) provides a large work space for food preservation and cooking classes at the USDA warehouse in Siletz.

Adrienne Crookes, Joyce Retherford and Sharla Robinson (right) plan for future activities.

Joyce Retherford, USDA Food Program director (above), holds the new cloth bags available for USDA clients.



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non-monetary trust resources that, for far too long, have been a source of conflict between Indian Tribes and the United States," said Holder. "Our commitment to Tribes is the cornerstone of the Department of Justice's policies and initiatives in Indian Country and these settlements will enable the Tribal community to pursue the goals and objectives they deem to be appropriate while marking another step in our shared future built upon mutual respect and strong bonds of trust between Tribal governments and the United States."

"These important settlements reflect President Obama's continuing commitment to ensuring empowerment and reconciliation for American Indians," said Salazar. "It strengthens the government-to-government relationship with Tribal nations, helps restore a positive working relationship with Indian Country leaders and empowers American Indian communities. I want to commend Attorney General Holder, our Interior Solicitor Hilary Tompkins and other key officials who were involved in the long negotiations leading to these historic agreements. I look forward to working with Tribal leaders to further strengthen our government-to-government relationship based on mutual respect and a shared concern for the proper management of Tribal trust assets and funds."

The Department of the Interior manages almost 56 million acres of trust lands for federally recognized Tribes and more than 100,000 leases on those lands for

various uses, including housing, timber harvesting, farming, grazing, oil and gas extraction, business leasing, rights-of-way and easements. Interior also manages about 2,500 Tribal trust accounts for more than 250 Tribes.

Starting in the fall of 2009, lawyers for many of the Tribes with litigation pending against the U.S. wrote to the president and asked the administration to engage in expedited settlement discussions with their clients.

In April 2010, Associate Attorney General Tom Perrelli, Assistant Attorney General of the Environment and Natural Resources Division Ignacia Moreno, Interior Department Solicitor Hilary Tompkins and Treasury Department General Counsel George Madison met with attorneys for the Tribes and the parties embarked on a settlement process that the Tribes termed the Settlement Proposal to Obama Administration (SPOA), which led in part to this announcement.

In addition to the SPOA process, the departments of Justice, Interior and Treasury have engaged in other settlement processes involving other litigating Tribes. Those processes have been both positive and productive, resulting in the past settlement of other Tribal trust accounting and management cases.

The processes will continue for other ongoing cases. The U.S. is committed to resolving the trust accounting and trust management claims of the Tribes in a manner that is fair, honorable and reasonable to the Tribes and the U.S.

Under the negotiated settlement agreements, litigation will end regarding the Department of the Interior's accounting and management of the Tribes' trust accounts, trust lands and other natural resources.

With monies from the congressionally appropriated Judgment Fund, which is used to pay settlements or final judgments against the government, the U.S. will compensate the Tribes for their breach of trust claims and the Tribes will waive, release and dismiss their claims with prejudice.

The parties have agreed to information sharing procedures that will strengthen the management of trust assets and improve communication between Tribes and the Department of the Interior. The settlement agreements also include dispute resolution provisions to reduce the likelihood of future litigation.

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The Siletz Tribal Council is very pleased with NARF's representation of the Tribe in this case. NARF coordinated with our Tribal attorney, Craig Dorsay, throughout this case. The Tribe's \$9.14 million settlement award is subject to NARF's attorney fees, which are being determined.

The Siletz Tribal Council made it an express condition of settlement of this case that the Tribe does not waive any other claims it might have against the United States, including but not limited to pursuit of the Tribe's historical claims, treaty claims or contract support costs for federal contracts and services. The settlement is limited to the specific claims that were subject of this case.

The Tribal Council is planning for the use and placement of the settlement award. Use of the funds under the settlement agreement is completely up to the Tribe and is not subject to any further trust status.

The Siletz Tribal Council is satisfied that the United States has finally acknowledged its wrongful conduct against the Siletz Tribe for these claims and is looking forward to moving forward on all the other important issues that face the Tribe.