



Implementation of the DoD “American Indian & Alaska Native Policy:” A Strategic Plan

Project #
05-254

Background:

This project addressed the need to implement the DoD “American Indian and Alaska Native Policy” at the tribal government and DoD installation command (policy) levels more effectively. There is a long history of interaction between the U.S. military and tribes, which continues to occur today. Military activities affect tribal lands, natural resources, cultural resources and tribal cultural practices. Tribal rights are highly protected, as defined in treaties, federal laws, and policies. When conflicts or mis-communications occur between tribal governments and DoD, the military preparedness mission and various legally-held tribal rights can be adversely affected.

Objective:

This strategic planning effort identified the need for a practical tool: a “desk guide,” that could assist both tribal governments and DoD installations achieve more meaningful government-to-government communication on a sustained basis. In turn, conflicts could be resolved or mitigated prior to becoming problematic.

Summary of Approach:

The Institute for Tribal Government (Institute) is experienced at working with elected tribal governments and federal agencies regarding the federal trust responsibility to tribes. In this project, the Institute worked with various branches of DoD and over 50 tribes. Efforts intensified with those tribes most involved with, or affected by, DoD activities. NALEMP representatives, regional tribal organizations (such as Affiliated Tribes of NW Indians), and a broad geographic spectrum of tribal policy leaders, including the Institute’s all-tribal Policy Board, assisted in this project. Based upon participant contributions received, the Institute developed a prototype “desk guide” dated May 6, 2006. The prototype was reviewed, and revised to incorporate input. At the annual NALEMP meeting in Sitka, AK, enthusiastic support and comments were received by military representatives and tribal governments. This especially productive and detailed discussion also solicited suggestions.

Benefit:

The Desk Guide is a tool endorsed by the involved tribes, military participants, and field personnel who work on cultural and natural resources issues. If the steps identified are incorporated into installation command procedures, the Desk Guide can assist government-to-government communication, instill mutual cooperation, and help reduce or avoid conflicts. Significant tribal concerns can more effectively be identified to DoD across a broad spectrum of issues, including cultural and natural resources protection, cultural practices, and even economic development and partnership opportunities for tribes. The DoD preparedness mission, especially with regard to field operations, would be improved by anticipating and institutionalizing communication protocols with tribal governments, as recommended in the Desk Guide.

Accomplishments:

The final “Desk Guide” was completed and submitted in August 2006. *It is recommended that this product be used for its intended purpose as a practical tool for developing and sustaining productive government-to-government communications at the installation and tribal government levels.* This requires the commitment of DoD installation commands and neighboring tribes.

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