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Indian Affairs seeks additional input on new regulations to protect Native American and Native Hawaiian cultural items

STOP Act protects cultural items from illegal export and trafficking

WASHINGTON – The Department of the Interior's Office of the Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs and the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Policy, Management, and Budget announced that they are seeking additional input from Indian Tribes and the Native Hawaiian Community on the development of regulations to implement the Safeguarding Tribal Objects of Patrimony (STOP) Act. The draft regulations would help prevent the international export of cultural items prohibited from trafficking under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act and the Archeological Resources Protection Act.

"Protecting and preserving the cultural heritage of Indian Tribes, Alaska Native Villages, and the Native Hawaiian Community and preventing the illegal trafficking of cultural items is important not just to these communities, but to the United States as a whole," said **Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Bryan Newland**. "As we finalize this regulation, we will listen to further input to make sure the final regulations enable the U.S. to uphold its responsibilities and prevent illegal transfer to foreign museums, auction houses, and private collectors. Instead, this rule will help ensure cultural items remain with their rightful owners as they should for time immemorial."

The STOP Act directs the Department of the Interior, in coordination with the Departments of State, Justice, and Homeland Security, to regulate export of Tribal archaeological resources and cultural items, facilitate voluntary repatriation of Native American tangible cultural heritage to Indian Tribes in the United States, and to operate a program to carry out core functions of issuing export certificates, consulting with Indian Tribes and the Native Hawaiian Community, and collecting fees and fines.

In 2023, the Department held five consultation sessions and accepted written comments on the development of draft regulations for the STOP Act. The draft proposed rule reflects input and recommendations received during the consultations. Indian Affairs will now gather further input on the draft regulations through two consultations in November 2024. Comments will also be accepted in writing until 11:59 p.m. ET on December 24, 2024, by email at consultation@bia.gov.

For details on dates and locations of consultation and how to submit comments, please visit https://www.bia.gov/service/tribal-consultations/upcoming-tribal-consultation-sessions. Please note that these Tribal consultations will be closed to the press and the public to protect confidential information that may be discussed during the sessions.

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The Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs advises the Secretary of the Interior on Indian Affairs policy issues; communicates policy to and oversees the programs of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Bureau of Indian Education, and the Bureau of Trust Funds Administration; provides leadership in consultations with Tribes; and serves as the DOI official for intra- and inter-departmental coordination and liaison within the Executive Branch on matters concerning American Indians and Alaska Natives and the federally recognized Tribes in the United States.