



# USET

SOVEREIGNTY PROTECTION FUND

711 Stewarts Ferry Pike  
Suite 100  
Nashville, TN 37214  
P: (615) 872-7900  
F: (615) 872-7417  
www.usetinc.org

*Transmitted Electronically*

May 2, 2022

The Honorable Debra Haaland  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C St. NW  
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Haaland,

We write on behalf of United South and Eastern Tribes Sovereignty Protection Fund (USET SPF) to express our support for the leaders of member Tribal Nations who have submitted applications to serve on the Department of Interior's (DOI) Secretary's Tribal Advisory Committee (STAC), as well as share our views on selection criteria and agenda. We continue to support the establishment of the STAC as an opportunity to elevate the voices of Tribal Nations to the highest levels of the Department and improve upon the execution of federal trust and treaty obligations.

USET SPF is a non-profit, inter-tribal organization advocating on behalf of thirty-three (33) federally recognized Tribal Nations from the Northeastern Woodlands to the Everglades and across the Gulf of Mexico.<sup>1</sup> USET SPF is dedicated to promoting, protecting, and advancing the inherent sovereign rights and authorities of Tribal Nations and in assisting its membership in dealing effectively with public policy issues.

As was first announced during the 2021 White House Tribal Nations Summit, DOI recently began accepting nominations for its first-ever STAC. According to DOI, the STAC, "will ensure Tribal leaders have direct and consistent contact and communication with the current and future Department officials to facilitate robust discussions on intergovernmental responsibilities, exchange views, share information and provide advice and recommendations regarding Departmental programs and funding that impact Tribal Nations." This is an important role, as DOI's bureaus have varying relationships with Tribal Nations and Indian Country.

### **USET SPF Support for the Nominations of Tribal Leaders from Member Tribal Nations**

One of USET SPF's greatest strengths is that our 33-member Tribal Nations reflect the diversity found across all of Indian Country. In this respect, USET SPF itself is illustrative of the national diversity of Indian country. With this in mind, USET SPF fully supports the applications of the following Tribal leaders from

---

<sup>1</sup> USET SPF member Tribal Nations include: Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas (TX), Catawba Indian Nation (SC), Cayuga Nation (NY), Chickahominy Indian Tribe (VA), Chickahominy Indian Tribe–Eastern Division (VA), Chitimacha Tribe of Louisiana (LA), Coushatta Tribe of Louisiana (LA), Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (NC), Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians (ME), Jena Band of Choctaw Indians (LA), Mashantucket Pequot Indian Tribe (CT), Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe (MA), Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida (FL), Mi'kmaq Nation (ME), Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians (MS), Mohegan Tribe of Indians of Connecticut (CT), Monacan Indian Nation (VA), Nansemond Indian Nation (VA), Narragansett Indian Tribe (RI), Oneida Indian Nation (NY), Pamunkey Indian Tribe (VA), Passamaquoddy Tribe at Indian Township (ME), Passamaquoddy Tribe at Pleasant Point (ME), Penobscot Indian Nation (ME), Poarch Band of Creek Indians (AL), Rappahannock Tribe (VA), Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe (NY), Seminole Tribe of Florida (FL), Seneca Nation of Indians (NY), Shinnecock Indian Nation (NY), Tunica-Biloxi Tribe of Louisiana (LA), Upper Mattaponi Indian Tribe (VA) and the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah) (MA).

*Because there is Strength in Unity*

within our membership. The selection of any of the below Tribal leaders would serve to incorporate considerable diversity of experience to help the STAC reflect the unique circumstances and variations among Tribal Nations:

- Chairwoman Cheryl Andrews-Maltais (Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah))
- Chief Cyrus Ben (Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians)
- Chairwoman Stephanie Bryan (Poarch Band of Creek Indians)
- Chairman Rodney Butler (Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation)
- Chairman Marshall Pierite (Tunica-Biloxi Tribe of Louisiana)
- Principal Chief Richard Sneed (Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians)

Each of these leaders is highly qualified. They are all strong leaders with deep commitment to the promotion and advancement of Tribal sovereignty and self-determination. USET SPF knows that whichever of them may be selected by DOI to serve on the STAC, the others will remain engaged to work in collaboration to advance the views of our member Tribal Nations and Indian country as a whole.

### **The STAC Membership Should Reflect the Diversity of Indian Country**

While we appreciate and understand the STAC will be regionally representative, it will be most effective if it reflects the greater diversity found within Indian Country. This will allow the STAC to develop comprehensive guidance that reflects variety of unique circumstances found across Indian Country. There are many elements in which diversity can be considered, below are only a few examples:

- Land-base: STAC members should represent Tribal Nations with diverse landholdings, including small land-bases, Tribal Nations without trust lands, and those with large land-bases;
- Form of Engagement with Federal Government: the STAC should include leaders from Self-Governance Tribal Nations, from Tribal Nations that carry out federal programs under Indian Self-Determination Act contracts and from Tribal Nations who receive program support through direct services;
- Economic Development Activity and Experience: Members should include the leaders of Tribal Nations who have achieved independent economic success as well as those whose economies continue to develop;
- Administration of Schools and Education Systems: Indian Country is diverse in the way children are educated. The children of some Tribal Nations attend federal Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools; some Tribal Nations operate schools funded by the BIE; while students from other Tribal Nations attend public schools. For many Tribal Nations, a combination of these school systems serves their communities; and
- Cultural Traditions: As DOI well knows, cultural traditions and practices vary considerably across Indian Country and at the same time, all Tribal leaders have a distinct and unique responsibility to ensure that the cultural and traditional needs of our citizens are met. This diversity and solemn charge should be reflected in the STAC's membership and agenda.

### **STAC Membership Must be Well-Versed in Trust and Treaty Obligations, Tribal Sovereignty, the Application of the Indian Canon of Construction and the policies of Self-Determination and Self-Governance.**

The STAC will play a vital role in advising DOI on a wide variety of issues, including many core aspects of federal trust and treaty obligations and the future of our diplomatic relationship with the United States. All STAC appointees should have a superior understanding of the inherent rights and authorities of Tribal Nations, as well as the obligations of the U.S. government. STAC members should further have a demonstrated record of protecting and advancing Tribal sovereignty.

**The STAC should take on substantive issues in an effort to improve DOI's execution of trust and treaty obligations, as well as its defense of Tribal sovereignty.**

USET SPF is encouraged by the broader nature of the STAC's duties as outlined in the body's charter. There are myriad issues that the STAC may feel the need to address with the Secretary and maximum flexibility must be afforded to STAC as it seeks to facilitate their discussion and resolution. As the Secretary and STAC consider agenda items for early meetings, we recommend and request ongoing discussion around the attached topics.

**Conclusion**

Again, USET SPF strongly supports the nominations of the above Tribal leaders, as well as the creation of the STAC as an opportunity for DOI to further build upon its relationship with Tribal Nations and its implementation of Tribal guidance. We look forward to close collaboration with the STAC and DOI on positive change in our government-to-government, sovereign-to-sovereign relationship. This includes the enactment of policies that uphold our status as sovereign governments, our right to self-determination and self-governance, and honor the federal trust obligation in full. Should you have any questions or require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact Ms. Liz Malerba, USET SPF Director of Policy and Legislative Affairs, at (615) 838-5906 or by e-mail at [lmalerba@usetinc.org](mailto:lmalerba@usetinc.org).

Sincerely,



Chief Kirk E. Francis, Sr.  
President



Kitcki A. Carroll  
Executive Director

Enclosure: USET SPF Priority Issue Areas for Incoming DOI STAC