

On December 5, 2012, the Departments of the Interior, Defense, Agriculture, and Energy and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation entered into a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to improve the protection of and Indian access to sacred sites through interagency coordination and collaboration. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack included an announcement about this historic MOU at the 2012 White House Tribal Nations Conference in his remarks.

The MOU is a 5-year commitment by the signatories to carry out specific action items as well as a review of existing federal authorities. The action items revolve around 5 themes including training and guidance; management practices and capacity building; confidentiality of information; communication; and policy review. The MOU also commits the signatories to consult with Indian tribes in developing and implementing the action items.

#### **ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN 2013:**

- A staff level working group, called the Core Working Group, was immediately established to facilitate implementation of the MOU and to develop the action plan called for in the MOU.
- The Core Working Group began initial public outreach efforts through email and in-person briefings.
- The action plan was released on March 5, 2013 and established an executive working group of policy-level officials from each of the signatories.
- The Core Working Group began implementation of the Action Plan. Each of the signatories also identified subject matter experts within their departments to assist with implementation. Five working groups carry out the tasks under the MOU and Action Plan:
  - Training
  - Confidentiality Standards
  - Management Practices and Capacity Building
  - Public Outreach and Communications
  - Policy Review

#### **PROGRESS REPORT:**

The signatories will issue an annual progress report outlining each year's accomplishments. The 2013 report was in production and scheduled for release by the White House Tribal Nations Conference on November 13, 2013. Due to the lapse in appropriations which caused a partial government shutdown, the signatories were unable to meet this deadline. However, the progress report will be issued in mid to late December 2013. It will be posted at <http://www.fs.fed.us/spf/tribalrelations/sacredsitesmou.shtml> and [www.achp.gov](http://www.achp.gov). Notice of the availability of the report will be sent via email to tribal leaders.

#### **NEXT STEPS FOR 2014:**

The MOU commits the signatories to consult with Indian tribes in developing and implementing the specific actions or tasks. While the focus of the MOU is coordination and collaboration among the signatories, the MOU does require the development of substantive products such as guidance, training, and public outreach information. The signatories anticipate consulting with Indian tribes regarding the substance of such products. In 2014, the signatories will develop a plan for tribal consultation, post it on the web sites indicated above, and provide it to tribal leaders via email.