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Land Buy Back response deadline near

The deadline to respond to a purchase offer from the Warm Springs Buy Back program is coming up soon, on Tuesday, April 24.

If you have already returned your paperwork, no further action is necessary. Otherwise, if you have received an offer and are interested in selling, staff is available to answer questions, or assist in completing the paperwork.

You can reach the Warm Springs Land Buy Back office at 541-615-0997.

The coordinator is Randy Scott, and the outreach coordinator is Tiffney Yallup.

Randy and Tiffney have their offices at the Media Center, 4174 Highway 3, Warm Springs. You can email: randy.scott@wstribes.org

Principal parties in the Warm Springs Buy Back—Mr. Scott, and Fiduciary Trust Officer Charles Jackson—met recently with Tribal Council.

At the time of the meeting last week, only 111 responses to the Buy Back offers had come in. Of that total, 103 had been accepted.

The total was in response to 677 offers that had been made to land-owners of Warm Springs Reservation allotments. The total response to the offers was low; or at least the responses so far had been coming in at a slow pace, Mr. Jackson said.

To state the situation another way: The Warm Springs Buy Back

program has available approximately \$4 million for purchases among the Warm Springs allotment owners.

To make the purchases from the 103 who had so far accepted (these numbers as of early last week), the cost would be about \$440,000.

That would leave unspent a large part of the available \$4 million.

Funds that remain unspent at the close of the Warm Springs program would revert back to the Land Buy-Back Program for Tribal Nations. These funds would no longer be available to benefit the Confederated Tribes, or Warm Springs allottees.

'Fair market value'

The Buy-Back Program implements the land consolidation component of the *Cobell* Settlement. The settlement provided \$1.9 billion—the largest component of the *Cobell* Settlement—to purchase fractional interests in trust or restricted land from willing sellers at fair market value.

On the Warm Springs Reservation, allotment interests that are purchased through the Buy-Back program go to the Confederated Tribes.

Having a consolidated land interest would allow the tribes to determine, and then potentially implement, the best use of the land.

Best use is precluded when multiple people—heirs of the original allottee—own fractions of an interest in the particular parcel.

After the April 24 deadline passes, it is possible this year that the Buy Back program will have a second series of offers. This could help address the low response to the first wave of offers, Mr. Jackson said.

Councilman Jody Calica raised the issue of the Buy Back program assessment of 'fair market value' of the allotments in questions.

Tribal Council had raised the fair market value issue in February, when Council met with appraisers from the Office of Appraisal Services, an office of the Department of the Interior. Appraisers from this office have worked with tribes and the BIA to implement the Buy-Back component of the *Cobell* settlement.

The Office of Appraisal Services last year used a process called 'mass appraisal' to come up with fair market value calculations for more than 340 tracts on the Warm Springs Reservation.

Mass appraisal is used to calculate fair market values for large numbers of parcels. This is a less expensive alternative to site specific appraisals.

The mass appraisal value of a parcel can be quite different from the site specific value, in some cases a much lower value. In these instances, the appraisers evaluate the information in order to reconcile the figures, with the hope of achieving a fair market value.

Willing sellers

Land Buy Back purchases are made only from willing sellers at fair market value, as set by the Office of Appraisal Services.

Consolidated interests are immediately restored to tribal trust ownership for uses benefiting the reservation community and tribal members. Benefits of the program, as described in the Buy Back literature:

Returning fractionated lands to tribes in trust has potential to improve tribal community resources by increasing home site locations, improving transportation routes, spurring economic development, easing approval for infrastructure and community projects, and preserving traditional cultural or ceremonial sites.

Fractionated interests in property make good use difficult, because of the number of people—hundreds, even thousands—with an interest. The land buy-back program would give fair market value to each individual who has an interest in an allotment, plus \$75.