



NATIONAL CONGRESS OF AMERICAN INDIANS

March 23, 2015

Secretary Sally Jewell
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC

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Tlingit

NCAI HEADQUARTERS

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**RE: IN SUPPORT OF PRESERVING THE BADGER-TWO MEDICINE AREA AND
REQUESTING THE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR TO CONSULT WITH THE
BLACKFEET TRIBE OF MONTANA**

Dear Secretary Jewell,

On behalf of the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), the oldest and largest representative organization of American Indian and Alaska Native tribal governments, I respectfully submit this letter in support of preserving traditional lands of the Blackfoot Tribe of Montana. Specifically, we are urging that the Department of the Interior cancel oil and gas permit leases around the Badger-Two Medicine area located within the Crown of the Continent ecosystem. This area encompasses traditional lands of the Blackfoot Tribe of Montana and holds significant cultural, religious, and ceremonial importance to their people.

The Badger-Two Medicine area is located between Glacier National Park and the Great Bear and Bob Marshall Wilderness areas. This place contains sensitive plant and wild life and holds immense cultural and religious significance to the Blackfoot people. In 1895, certain lands—inclusive of the Badger-Two Medicine area—were ceded to the United States by the Blackfoot Tribe of Montana. Although the land transfer was never meant to be permanent, Badger-Two Medicine was set aside in 1897, as the Lewis and Clarke Forest Reserve until it became a National Forest in 1906, and managed by the U.S. Forest Service. The Blackfoot people have continued to access and use the Badger-Two Medicine area for religious and ceremonial purposes despite the lands being transferred to federal control.

However in 1982, absent tribal consultation and a thorough review of environmental and cultural studies, the U.S Forest Service granted 47 oil and gas permit leases in and around the Badger-Two Medicine area. For over two decades the Blackfoot Tribe of Montana and many non-Native conservation and historical preservation groups have sought the cancellation of these permit leases. While a number of these leases have since been cancelled through Congressional action and other measures, the Blackfoot Tribe is still seeking the cancellation of remaining leases that would cause irreparable damage to Badger-Two Medicine.

Furthermore, in recognition of the significant cultural importance of Badger-Two Medicine to the Blackfoot of Montana, the keeper of the National Register of Historic Places determined that 90,000 acres of the Badger-Two Medicine area was eligible for listing as a traditional cultural district (TCD). The Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service have also previously recognized the eligible TCD status of Badger-Two Medicine in reviewing other applications for permit to drill.

The federal government has a record of support for protecting and preserving Badger-Two Medicine from these oil and gas permit leases. Due to the historical nature of this matter and the complexities associated with the mineral and oil lease arrangements previously made on these lands, we respectfully request that the Department of the Interior consult with the Blackfeet Tribe of Montana. Through engaged consultation with the Blackfeet Tribe of Montana we are hopeful that the Department of the Interior will move to cancel the remaining oil and gas leases that threaten the preservation of Badger-Two Medicine. Additionally, we would recommend that the federal agencies participating in the *MOU Interagency Coordination and Collaboration for the Protection of Indian Sacred Sites* engage in consultation with the Blackfeet Tribe as part of their ongoing work to improve the protection of and Indian access to sacred places.

We look forward to working with you regarding this important issue. If you have any questions please contact NCAI Legislative Associate, Brian Howard, at bhoward@ncai.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jacqueline Johnson Pata".

Jacqueline Pata
Executive Director
National Congress of American Indians