

# The National Congress of American Indians

## 2002 ACTIVITY SHEETS

### ◆ SOVEREIGNTY PROTECTION INITIATIVE

Sovereignty lies at the heart of Tribal government. However, a disturbing trend in recent U.S. Supreme Court decisions has emerged that threatens to gut Tribal jurisdiction and shift federal Indian law away from the long held principles of Tribal sovereignty and self-determination. Recognizing that Tribes must act with unity now to secure their sovereignty for the future, NCAI has spearheaded an ambitious, multifaceted initiative to address both short and long-term protection of Tribal sovereignty.

### ◆ TRUST REFORM TASK FORCE

The Department of Interior's mismanagement of Indian trust lands and funds has reached a crisis point. The Secretary of the Interior is faced with very serious legal pressures and a mandate from Congress to clean up the accounting and management of Indian trust funds. In response, the Secretary has proposed a plan to create a new Bureau of Indian Trust Asset Management and strip the trust functions from the Bureau of Indian Affairs. NCAI has unanimously adopted a resolution opposing this transfer of the responsibilities out of the BIA, because it would not accomplish trust reform and because it would threaten the ability of the BIA to fulfill its larger trust and treaty obligations to protect and promote Tribal sovereignty and provide for the needs of Tribal communities. NCAI has been successful in delaying implementation of the BITAM, and convincing the Secretary to consult with tribes and work with a Task Force of Tribal leadership. NCAI has been providing communications, meeting logistics, and overall coordination and facilitation Tribal participants in the Task Force. NCAI anticipates that this issue will require a high degree of attention at the policy level for at least the next five years.

### ◆ LEGISLATIVE & POLICY DEVELOPMENT

The NCAI legislative staff is continually advocating on behalf of Tribes and championing issues that affect American Indian and Alaska Native Governments. This includes:

- a. Tracking of issues
- b. Monitoring the Appropriations process
- c. Providing the NCAI Membership with updates, summaries and calls to action on all relevant issues.

### ◆ PUBLIC EDUCATION & COMMUNICATIONS

As set forth in the mission of our founding fathers to educate the general public regarding American Indian and Alaska Native governments, people and rights, we provide these tools, publications, and services:

❖ **NCAI Web site** - Tribal leaders have asked NCAI to improve its Internet presence, and we have heard the message loud and clear. Over the last six months, we have worked with Nativeres, an Indian-owned and operated web development firm, to help us turn [www.ncai.org](http://www.ncai.org) into the preeminent Internet tool for Tribal governments and policymakers that want timely information about the critical issues affecting Indian Country. The redesigned web site is easier to navigate, contains a more complete and better organized issues section, and has several new functions, including: Online meeting registration; Search engines; Members-Only section; and Direct electronic contact to Members of Congress.

❖ **Publications** - Every year NCAI produces valuable educational pieces such as "The Sentinel" and the "Introduction to Indian Nations Handbook." These publications have proven to be instrumental educational pieces for members of Congress and the Administration, schools and Universities as well as the general public.

❖ **Broadcast e-mail and fax service** - In order to be more efficient and cost-effective, we have turned to the Internet as our primary communications tool. This has enabled us to send time sensitive alerts and information as well as the ability to send a greater amount of supplementary materials.

### ◆ ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

While a small and very visible handful of Tribes have begun to reap the benefits of successful business ventures in recent years, the vast majority of Tribes continue to struggle with depressed economies. Building strong, diversified economies is essential to support healthy Tribal governments, and NCAI is taking the lead in addressing the need for sustainable economic development in ways that are complementary to cultural preservation and is working in collaboration with the Harvard University Honoring Nations program to do so.



#### ◆ RESEARCH INSTITUTE

The oral tradition of our ancestors taught us the importance of passing along our history and traditions to new generations. In a new century, Native people must develop the tools and resources that will enable us to store, share and learn from our elders and others, as well as to collect and interpret the data necessary to understand and begin to address the needs of Indian Country. The NCAI Research Institute will include a library and archives, capacity for data collection and analysis, a speaker's bureau, seminar series, and other educational components.

#### ◆ NATIVE VOTE 2004

One of the most visible successes of 2000 was NCAI's "Native Vote 2000" initiative, which demonstrated to the nation that as a united block, Indian people could not only make a difference, but could also make history. NCAI recognizes the need to maintain and build upon the momentum of 2000 as we prepare for the 2004 elections.

#### ◆ SACRED SITES

NCAI Resolution #SPO-01-162 calls for the creation of a Sacred Lands Protection Coalition (SLPC) to be coordinated by NCAI in collaboration with the Seventh Generation Fund, the Native American Rights Fund, and the Association on American Indian Affairs. The SLPC will play a key role in efforts to strengthen legal protections for sacred sites and to secure administrative accommodations for the use of sacred places by Indian religious practitioners. The coalition will focus on education, consultation, and legislation. *NCAI is seeking \$100,000 in operating expenses to administer the SLPC.*

#### ◆ CAPITAL SUPPORT: "BUILDING FUND"

The NCAI Headquarters office space has always been leased; therefore, the sum of monthly rent over the past years has well exceeded the amount of money needed to own our own office building. Ownership would not only provide a financial asset that could be sold at a future date, but also provide a "permanent home" which will make our organization more attractive to funders who are looking for evidence of NCAI's stability. Nonprofit owners are often also exempt from real estate tax, which can be a significant savings.

#### ◆ TRIBAL EMERGENCY RESPONSE PREPAREDNESS TRAINING

As sovereign nations, Tribes are obligated to accept additional responsibilities, such as emergency response preparedness. This type of training assists Tribes in developing emergency management infrastructure. NCAI conducts a Tribal Response/Emergency Preparedness (TREP) Workshop designed to inform Tribal government officials and first responders about basic emergency response training concepts, and assist Tribes in all hazardous emergency preparedness programs. The quality level of the NCAI TREP curriculum has been recognized by FEMA officials.

#### ◆ NATIONAL ALCOHOL & SUBSTANCE ABUSE PREVENTION TASK FORCE

Established under an agreement among the Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs, the President of NCAI, and membership of the former National Committee on Indian Alcohol and Substance Abuse. The purpose for NCAI's leadership involvement is to expand efforts and membership of the National Committee to include a more geographically diverse representative group of Tribal Leaders throughout Indian Country. The goal of the NIASA Task Force is to assist Tribal communities in the prevention of alcohol and substance abuse and their healing, recovery, and lifetime wellness, as well as improve the quality of life among American Indian and Alaska Native and communities, and focus leadership attention to the devastating problem of alcohol and substance abuse in Indian Country.

#### ◆ NUCLEAR WASTE PROGRAM

The work of the NWP is a long standing program, tracking issues impacting Tribal cultures, lands and people, as well as Department of Energy studies that construct a geologic repository for the disposal of spent nuclear fuel and high-level radioactive waste at Yucca Mountain in Nevada. The NWP also monitors the Environmental Protection Agency, as well as transportation and interim storage matters related to radioactive waste management programs. The NWP also works with the Department of Defense to identify and address environmental and safety concerns related to munitions that remain at former DOD ranges that are no longer operational. NCAI coordinates and disseminates information to assist tribes to become better informed about DOE and DOD issues.

#### ◆ WELFARE REFORM PROGRAM

For the past four years, NCAI has been facilitating work in Indian Country around the implementation of welfare reform and its related programs: TANF, Child Care, Employment and Training, Child Support, Medicaid and Food Stamps. NCAI convenes Tribes operating or interested in operating TANF on a quarterly basis to share best practices, provide information about federal and state policies, and organize to impact TANF reauthorization. After the reauthorization of TANF, NCAI will continue to assist Tribes with the development and dissemination of information on the implementation. NCAI will also continue to work with national organizations representing the interests of state human service programs in order to have dialogue about the coordination of state and tribal programs.

#### ◆ ENDOWMENT FUND

NCAI is seeking assistance in establishing an endowment fund for the organization. This type of fund will serve as a source of long-term, permanent investment income that would ensure the continuing presence and financial stability of NCAI.

#### ◆ **TEA-21 REAUTHORIZATION TASK FORCE**

In November 2001, the Tribal TEA-21 (Transportation Equity Act of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century) Reauthorization Task Force was established by NCAI, per resolution SPO-01-149. The goal of the Task Force is to formulate a Tribal consensus on the reauthorization of TEA-21, the legislation that authorizes federal funding for transportation projects. Two Task Force working groups have been formed, as part of the overall effort: Funding and Data Collection; and Legal, Legislative, and Policy Issues. Funding is needed to support Task Force meetings and materials; and for the dissemination of critical information about the reauthorization process to Tribes.

#### ◆ **DIGITAL DIVIDE TASK FORCE**

In 2000, NCAI established a Tribal Leaders Task Force to explore community-based solutions to the Digital Divide in a wide range of areas, from access and economic development to workforce training and content. The Task Force held two national summits designed to gather policy recommendations from Tribal Leaders from around the country, as well as to inform Tribal Leaders about various technology policy issues. The recommendations from these two summits form the NCAI's report, "Connecting Indian Country: Tribally-Driven Telecommunications Policy." Additional support is needed to implement the recommendations contained in "Connecting Indian Country" and to improve and maintain [www.indiantech.org](http://www.indiantech.org), NCAI's web-based technology and telecommunications policy clearinghouse.

#### ◆ **DIABETES RESEARCH**

Type-two diabetes poses an enormous health risk to Native Americans, with an alarmingly high percentage of Indian people (more than 50 percent in some communities) affected by the disease through hereditary and increasingly poor eating and exercise habits. NCAI is committed to efforts that will greatly diminish and eventually eradicate the incidence of diabetes among our people. Financial resources are needed to facilitate meetings of like-minded health officials from both the federal government and Tribal sides, and to produce written materials and other information that is suitable for Tribal communities.