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UTE INDIAN TRIBAL AND ALLOTTED LANDS EXEMPT FROM DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR OIL AND GAS PERMITTING ORDER

Ft. Duchesne, UT (Jan. 26, 2021) — On Monday, Jan. 25, the Biden Administration issued a correction to U.S. Department of the Interior Secretarial Order No. 3395, clarifying that energy development on the Ute Indian Tribe's Uintah and Ouray Reservation will continue without being subject to the department's newly imposed restrictions pertaining to federally managed public lands. The Ute Indian Tribe is a major oil- and gas-producing tribe that uses revenues from its energy development to fund essential tribal governmental services, which in turn provides direct support and assistance to its tribal membership.

This energy development supports thousands of jobs on the Uintah and Ouray Reservation in northeastern Utah, the second largest reservation in the United States. It also generates hundreds of millions of dollars in economic development.

On Jan. 20, the Ute Indian Tribe became aware that the Department of the Interior's secretarial order, issued soon after President Biden's inauguration, directed all energy drilling permits and approvals on federal and Indian lands be suspended by the department's local agency and regional offices and subject to further review by the department's leadership in Washington D.C. The order threatened to disrupt and delay economic development for all Indian tribes — particularly in the area of energy development, which requires regular and timely approval of many complex and overlapping permits. In response to the Ute Indian Tribe's concerns, the order is now being corrected to exempt leases and permits on Indian lands.

“A delay in energy permitting in the middle of the coronavirus pandemic would have been devastating to our economy and the health and safety of our tribal members,” said Chairman Luke Duncan on behalf of the Ute Indian Tribe Business Committee, the elected governing body of the Tribe's nation. “We appreciate the willingness of the Biden Administration to listen to our concerns and take quick action to resolve this issue in fulfilling their solemn trust responsibility to this country's first peoples: Native American tribes.”

The Ute Indian Tribe asked the Biden Administration to clarify that Indian lands are not federal public lands and should not be included in the order. Indian lands are managed for the benefit of tribes according to the United States' trust responsibility owed to Indian tribes, while federal public lands are managed for the general public according to principles of multiple use.

“Our lands are more than just forests and rangelands,” Duncan continued. “We have lived and worked on our lands since time immemorial. These are our homelands, and we rely on our natural resources to generate economic development. The Tribe's oil and gas development has been carried out on our lands according to our sustainable development priorities in an environmentally responsible way. The Ute Indian Tribe has centuries of experience developing our natural resources to support our members and tribal communities.

“This development also provides indirect support to the local non-Indian regional economy and communities through the thousands of jobs that are sustained and created each year from our resource development,” he continued. “We have used our experience and indigenous knowledge to develop our resources in a responsible and sustainable manner on our reservation by being integrally involved in the protection of endangered species on our lands and instituting comprehensive tribal natural resource management plans to ensure our communities are kept safe. ‘Environmentalism’ isn’t just an -ism to us; it lies at the heart of our culture, our spirituality, and our traditional life ways.”

The Ute Indian Tribe is also working with the Biden Administration and Department of the Interior to ensure that Indian lands are excluded from any executive order suspending energy leasing on federal lands. In contrast to state and local governments, the Tribe has a direct sovereign government-to-government relationship with the federal government. Before issuing any executive order involving Indian lands and interest, President Biden and federal agencies are required to work in consultation with the Ute Indian Tribe and to obtain the free, prior, informed consent of tribal elected leadership before taking actions that directly impact tribal lands and resources.

***About the Ute Indian Tribe** - The Ute Indian Tribe resides on the Uintah and Ouray Reservation in northeastern Utah. Three bands of Utes comprise the Ute Indian Tribe: the Whiteriver Band, the Uncompahgre Band and the Uintah Band. The Tribe has a membership of more than three thousand individuals, with over half living on the Uintah and Ouray Reservation. The Ute Indian Tribe operates its own tribal government and oversees significant oil and gas deposits on its 4.5 million acre Reservation. The Tribal Business Committee is the governing council of the Tribe.*

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