



NCAI NEWS

For Immediate Release
September 17, 2002

Contact: Brian Stockes
(202) 466-7767

Cross Country ‘Sovereignty Run’ Charging Through Montana

(Washington D.C.) Runners representing hundreds of American Indian tribes and Alaska Native nations are already racing across Montana on an historic 2800 mile cross-country coast-to-coast relay run in an effort to raise public awareness for American Indian and Alaska Native tribal sovereignty – the right to self-government.

Tribal members, friends, civic and political leaders have all joined in to support tribal self-government and self-reliance. Runners of all ages, races and backgrounds are participating in the Run, underlining America’s commitment to strengthening tribal self-determination.

The “Sovereignty Run” began on Sept. 11 at the Pacific Ocean and will end on October 7 at the steps of the United States Supreme Court in Washington, D.C. – the site of a number of devastating court decisions that have been delivered against tribes over the past two decades. These decisions, made by the highest court in the land, are responsible for the continued erosion of tribal jurisdiction and authority, undermining the ability of Tribes to properly govern their lands, protect public safety and develop economically.

The “Sovereignty Run” is part of a larger program called the Tribal Governance and Economic Enhancement Initiative, also known as the Sovereignty Protection Initiative. The Initiative, which was launched in September 2001, is a coordinated all-tribal strategy designed to address the increasing diminishment of tribal self-government and jurisdiction as a result of recent Supreme Court rulings, such as Nevada v. Hicks and Atkinson Trading Co. v. Shirley – decisions that have raised strong concerns among tribes that the Supreme Court is on an accelerating trend over the past 20 years toward removing tribal jurisdiction within tribal territories. The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), the Navajo Nation and prominent American Indian tribal leaders are spearheading the Initiative and the Run.

“The response from America has been overwhelming,” said Fawn Sharp, a member of the Quinault Indian Nation and the Run’s primary organizer. “We’ve had people with cancer, kids of all ages, towns hosting parades, and mayors running for tribal self-government. It’s amazing how everyone is reacting, expressing so much support for something so vital to Indian people across the country.”

Once Montana is completed, the Run will then cross Wyoming and South Dakota. Runners from throughout the United States are participating in the Run, which will travel through the states of Washington, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, South Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Washington, DC. Upon the runners’ arrival at the steps of the Supreme Court on Oct. 7, tribal leaders will hold a rally to educate the audience and the media about the issues identified in the Initiative.

Founded in 1944, the National Congress of American Indians is the oldest, largest and most representative American Indian and Alaska Native organization in the country. NCAI advocates for more than 250 tribal governments with the federal government and Congress, promoting strong tribal-federal “government-to-government” policy and promoting a better understanding among the general public regarding American Indian and Alaska Native governments, peoples and rights.