Who is eligible to inherit your trust lands and retain trust status?

If you pass away without a written will on or after June 20, 2006, the American Indian Probate Reform Act of 2004 (AIPRA) determines who is eligible to inherit your trust property and retain its trust status.*

Definition of eligible heir under AIPRA

Under AIPRA, your trust land can retain its trust status if it passes to eligible heirs. AIPRA defines eligible heirs as your:

- Children
- Grandchildren
- Great-grandchildren
- Brothers and sisters
- Half brothers and sisters by blood
- Parents

Any of the above are eligible heirs, as long as they are Indian (defined this fact sheet, page 2), or lineal descendants within 2 degrees of an Indian, or trust owners of the same parcel for purposes of inheriting by descent.

Under AIPRA, eligible heirs do not have to be enrolled members of the tribe. Aunts, uncles, and cousins are not considered eligible heirs under AIPRA because they are not within two degrees of consanguinity. Consanguinity is a legal term that describes a blood relationship or biological kinship among relatives.

* Except Alaska, the Five Civilized Tribes, and Osage.
Definition of Indian under AIPRA

Eligible heirs must also meet the AIPRA legal definition of Indian if they are to inherit your interests in trust or restricted status.

Under AIPRA a person who meets any one of the parts of the definitions of Indian below can inherit land and IIM accounts in trust or restricted status on June 20, 2006 and thereafter. * Under AIPRA, an Indian:

- Is a member of a federally recognized Indian tribe.
- Is eligible to become a member of a federally recognized Indian tribe.
- Was a trust owner of an undivided interest in trust or restricted land on October 27, 2004.
- Meets the definition of Indian under any one of the following parts of the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) of 1934:
  - Is enrolled in an IRA tribe.
  - Is an aggregate of 1/2 Indian blood (from any tribe).
  - Is a descendent of an IRA tribal member who was living on a reservation in 1934.
- Is a person of any degree of Indian ancestry who owns trust or restricted land in California. (A California Indian must meet the AIPRA definition of Indian to inherit land on reservations outside California).

Written wills and trust status land

Your lineal descendants and any trust co-owners in an allotment can inherit land in trust if it is left to them in your written will whether or not they meet the definition of Indian. In other words, you can leave your undivided interest in trust land to your children, grandchildren or great-grandchildren by naming them in a written will. They will inherit the land in trust regardless of whether they are enrolled tribal members.

A non-Indian cannot inherit any of your undivided interests in allotments in trust status. Even if you write a will naming a non-Indian as a beneficiary, he or she will not be permitted to inherit the land in trust. You can, however, write a will and leave a life estate in trust land to a non-Indian with the remainder to someone who meets the AIPRA definition of Indian.

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Disclaimer

The information appearing in this fact sheet is presented for informational purposes only. The objective of the fact sheet is to help you develop an understanding of the American Indian Probate Reform Act (AIPRA). The contents should not be considered as legal advice or be used as such. For legal information specific to your situation, contact appropriate legal counsel with your tribe or an attorney.

Future change in laws cannot be predicted and statements in this fact sheet are based solely on the rules and regulations in force on the date of publication.

* Except Alaska, Five Civilized Tribes, and Osage

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