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United States Department of the Interior

Bureau of Indian Affairs  
Anadarko Agency  
P. O. Box 309  
Anadarko, Oklahoma 73005

October 6, 2005

LaRue Parker, Chairperson  
Caddo Nation  
P.O. Box 487  
Binger, Oklahoma 73009

Dear Chairperson Parker:

It has come to the attention of this office that, on occasion, descendants of Caddo family members buried in family cemeteries have been denied access or been discouraged from visiting these cemeteries to pay respects, aid in the maintenance of the cemetery, or for other purposes.

Please be advised that all next of kin and other descendants of persons buried in family cemeteries have the right and responsibility to maintain these cemeteries and cannot be denied access to them. They may carry out actions designed to keep a cemetery in a state of repair, visit family members buried there or place markers that further establish the location of family members buried there for purposes of protection and identification. Family members may conduct these activities even though they may not have ownership of the land, be it Individual Indian allotted land remaining in trust or land that has been removed from trust status, on which the cemetery is located.

Once a cemetery has been established it remains a cemetery, even if new interments do not occur, the grounds are unkempt or headstones are not cared for. A cemetery is not considered abandoned until the bodies buried there have been removed with the consent of the descendants.

It is in the interest of all involved to insure that all family members that have people buried in a cemetery have access to those cemeteries for purposes of visitation and maintenance, not only because it is a right but also because in these times when American Indian cemeteries continue to be desecrated or otherwise abused and are being lost to memory at an ever increasing rate that any actions that ensure that these cemeteries stay recognizable will go a long way toward ensuring their protection.

Thank you for your cooperation in this matter.

Sincerely,

Superintendent