

State to pay legal fees in land claim suit

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WATERLOO, N.Y. --New York state has agreed to pay most of the legal fees incurred by counties in opposing Indian efforts to put land into federal trusts.

Seneca County had been seeking reimbursement from the state since the trust process began a year ago. The state originally refused to pay, citing an opinion by the state attorney general's office. However, Seneca County Attorney Steven Getman said Attorney General Eliot Spitzer said this week that state law allowed reimbursement to counties for legal costs associated with defending the claims.

Getman said the state agreed to pay both future costs and approximately 90 percent of costs already incurred by Seneca and Cayuga counties against claims made by the Cayuga Indians. The ruling also affects the case involving the Oneida Indian Nation, which wants to place nearly 17-thousand acres of central New York property in a federal land trust.

Any Indian land placed in trusts would be exempt from local and state laws and taxes.