Testimony of Secretary/Treasurer Aaron Dixon
Tribal Business Council, Susanville Indian Rancheria
Hearing on H.R. 2212
Indian, Insular, and Alaska Native Affairs Subcommittee
House Natural Resources Committee
June 10, 2015

Good afternoon Chairman Young, Ranking Member Ruiz, Congressman LaMalfa, and other Members of the Subcommittee. My name is Aaron Dixon. I serve as the Secretary/Treasurer on the Tribal Business Council of the Susanville Indian Rancheria ("Rancheria" or "Tribe").

I am honored to be here today to testify on H.R. 2212, a bill that would place approximately 301 acres of federal land, comprised of rugged, rocky terrain, located in the Hidden Valley area in California into trust for the benefit of the Rancheria. This land, defined as the area in the "Conveyance Boundary" in H.R. 2212, is adjacent to existing Rancheria trust lands upon which tribal housing is located. Years ago, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) identified the area in the Conveyance Boundary as suitable for disposal under the Federal Land Management and Policy Act because it is an isolated parcel of BLM land, making it difficult to manage. We deeply appreciate Rep. LaMalfa, our Congressman, and his efforts to introduce and advance H.R. 2212.

Background on Susanville Indian Rancheria

The Rancheria is a federally recognized Indian tribe in rural Northeastern California with aboriginal ties to four distinct tribes: Mountain Maidu, Northern Paiute, Pit River and Washoe. These tribes' treaties were among the 18 treaties negotiated with the U.S. between 1851-52 that would have created reservations in California totaling 11,700 square miles. However, with the discovery of gold in California in 1848 and the interest of California lawmakers in accommodating the interests of large landowners, new settlers, and miners, none of these treaties were ratified by the U.S. Senate. On July 8, 1852, the U.S. Senate voted in executive session to reject the 18 treaties - a fact that would remain undisclosed until the U.S. Senate removed the injunction of secrecy in 1905.

As a result of the unratified treaties and the Land Claims Act of 1851, our lands were taken from us. Our people became homeless and experienced extreme suffering, torture, and starvation through indentured servitude of Native Americans legalized in California in 1850. After 70 years of severe hardship, on August 15, 1923, the federal government purchased and put into trust 30 acres for the Rancheria under the Landless and Homeless Indian Act. Subsequently, on October 14, 1978, Congress enacted Public Law 95-459, which transferred 120 acres of BLM land into trust for the Rancheria, which forms a portion of our Upper Rancheria. Tribal residential housing and our water storage tanks are located on the Upper Rancheria. The area in the Conveyance Boundary that would be placed into trust for the benefit of the Rancheria under H.R. 2212 is adjacent to our Upper Rancheria trust lands.

Susanville Indian Rancheria's Connections to Area in Conveyance Boundary in H.R. 2212

In 1887, Congress passed the General Allotment Act that divided lands into parcels for individual Indians. The Act forced the division of tribal government-held lands into individual Indian-owned parcels and opened "surplus" lands to non-Indian settlement. The area in the Conveyance Boundary and much of the land adjacent to it was tribally held land that was then allotted to individual Indians. The Peconom and Streshley families, whose direct descendants are Rancheria members, had allotments adjacent to the area in the Conveyance Boundary. Other ancestors of Rancheria tribal members that had allotments nearby included Alfred Foxey, Eliza Norman, Nettie Norman, Edith Buckskin, George Evans, Fred Wilson, Sally Norman, Charlie Jackson, Billy Harrison, Kitty Harrison, Birdie Norman, Will Norman, Cora Cook, Charley Norman, and William Taylor. Unfortunately, the land granted to most allottees in this region was not viable for grazing or farming, and division of land between heirs upon the allottees' deaths resulted in land fractionalization and loss of land. Further, many Indian allotments were seized over time by predatory tax collectors for back taxes and sold to others. The Rancheria is committed to reacquiring aboriginal lands taken from us, including the land set forth in H.R. 2212, due to ill-conceived federal and state laws, forced relocation, massacre, starvation, and other atrocities.

The terrain of the area in the Conveyance Boundary is very rugged and hilly with large volcanic rock deposits. However, this land contains numerous cultural, historical, and archeological sites of great significance to the Rancheria. We seek to protect these sites and restore the natural ecological conditions of the land. The land and vegetation in area consist primarily of volcanic rock, juniper, sagebrush, bitterbrush, great basin wild rye and other herbaceous plants, bulbs, corms and roots that are important to the Rancheria for food, medicine, and basket-making. Some of the best Indian medicine grows in this vicinity, such as lokbom, an Indian tea that is boiled for stomach ailments and bukom, or "wild sunflower," which is eaten to heal sore throats as well as Sego Lily, Wild Carrot, Camas, and Brodiaea. The area contains mortar rocks that were once used by Rancheria ancestors to grind seeds and medicine.

Further, the area is an important traditional hunting ground for pronghorn antelope, deer, marmots, and groundhogs – traditional foods of Rancheria tribal members. Many historical hunting blinds and petroglyphs consisting of light inscriptions on rocks are located in the area in the Conveyance Boundary and other parts of Hidden Valley as well as deer and pronghorn trails. The area contains an ancient Native American trail with a rock alter used to pray for good hunting as well as projectile points and hammerstone used to make these projectiles along with obsidian, chert, and basalt chips. Rancheria tribal members continue to hunt in this area. Since time immemorial, Rancheria ancestors and members have conducted traditional ceremonies, including the Bear Dance, in this area. In addition, the remains of a historic Native American village, which the Maidu referred to as Supom, or "Groundhog," were located in this area.

The Rancheria's long-term vision for the land that would be placed into trust under H.R. 2212 is to build a recreational area (soccer fields, softball and baseball fields, and outdoor basketball courts), Pow Wow grounds, and a cultural center and museum that would allow us to share our culture with anyone visiting the area. However, because the terrain is very rocky and hilly, use of the land will be very limited.

The Rancheria has no intention of conducting gaming activities on this land, and the proposed legislation contains a gaming prohibition provision.

Provisions of H.R. 2212

H.R. 2212 is modelled after Public Law 113-127, which Congress passed in the 113th Congress to take certain BLM land in California into trust for the benefit of the Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians. We were very encouraged to see passage of Public Law 113-127 last year as it evidenced congressional support for taking certain BLM parcels into trust for Indian tribes.

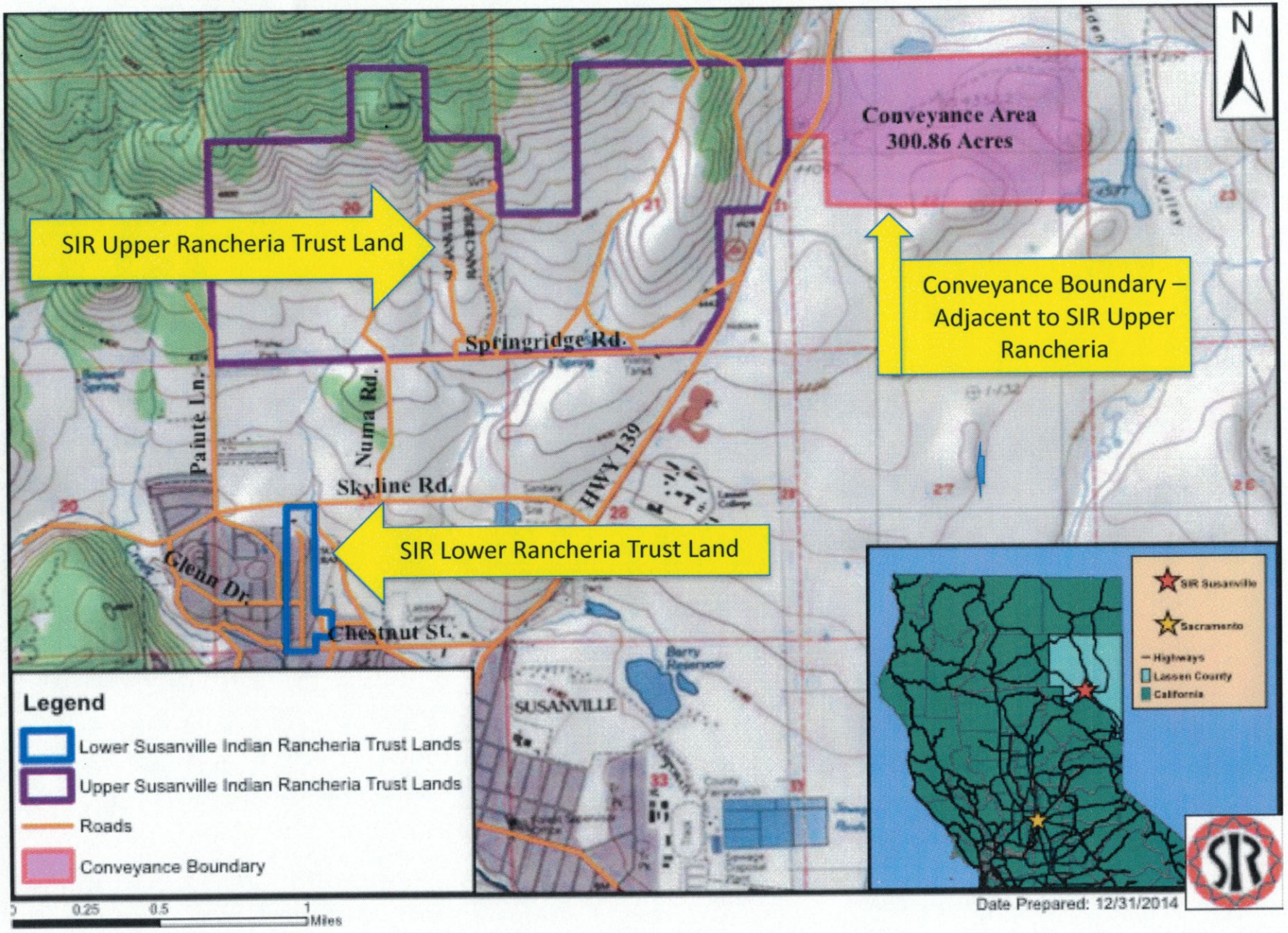
Like Public Law 113-127, H.R. 2212 would take certain BLM land in California into trust for the Susanville Indian Rancheria. Further, similar to Public Law 113-127, H.R. 2212 contains a gaming prohibition, as mentioned above.

The BLM Eagle Lake Field Office wrote a letter dated October 3, 2014, to the Rancheria expressing support for having the land set forth in the Conveyance Boundary taken into trust for the Rancheria. We very much appreciate their support, efforts, and collaboration with us on this bill.

Conclusion

H.R. 2212 would allow the Rancheria to reacquire ancestral homelands taken from us due to misguided historical federal and state policies and allow us to protect areas of cultural, archeological, and historical importance to us. The Rancheria is thankful for the Subcommittee's efforts to hold this important hearing on H.R. 2212. We respectfully urge swift enactment of this bill. I would be happy to answer any questions.

Susanville Indian Rancheria Map Accompanying HR 2112



SUSANVILLE INDIAN RANCHERIA

February07, 2015

The Honorable Doug LaMalfa
U.S. House of Representatives
506 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
Email: [redacted]

Re: Susanville Indian Rancheria BLM Land Transfer Bill

Dear Congressman LaMalfa:

On behalf of the Susanville Indian Rancheria (Rancheria), we deeply appreciate your efforts on proposed legislation to transfer approximately 300 acres of BLM excess inventory land in the Hidden Valley area into trust for the benefit of the Rancheria that is adjacent to our existing trust lands located at our Upper Rancheria.

As you know, the Rancheria is a federally recognized Indian tribe in Northeastern California with aboriginal ties to four distinct tribes: Mountain Maidu, Northern Paiute, Pit River and Washoe. We are committed to reacquiring aboriginal lands taken from us due to ill-conceived federal and state laws, forced relocation, massacre, starvation, and other atrocities. The excess inventory BLM land that would be transferred into trust for the Rancheria's benefit under the proposed bill is a part of the Rancheria's aboriginal territories and were once owned by Rancheria ancestors.

The Mountain Maidu, Northern Paiute, Pit River and Washoe lost their aboriginal lands, including the BLM land. Specifically, these tribes' treaties were among the 18 treaties negotiated with the U.S. between 1851-52 that would have created reservations. However, with the discovery of gold in California in 1848, none of these treaties were ratified by the Senate due to opposition from the California Legislature and California Senators. As a result of the unratified treaties and the Land Claims Act of 1851, most California Indians, including Rancheria ancestors, became homeless.

In 1887, Congress passed the General Allotment Act that divided lands into parcels for individual Indians. The Act forced the division of tribal government-held lands into individual Indian-owned parcels and opened "surplus" lands to non-Indian settlement. The BLM land and much of the land near it was tribally held land that was then allotted to individual Indians. Unfortunately, the land granted to most allottees in this region was not viable for grazing or farming, and division of land between heirs upon the allottees' deaths resulted in land fractionalization and loss of land. Further, many Indian allotments were seized over time by predatory tax collectors for back taxes and sold to others.

745 JOAQUIN STREET · SUSANVILLE, CA 96130 · (530) 257-6264 · FAX 257-7986

After being homeless for over 70 years, on August 15, 1923, the federal government purchased and put into trust 30 acres for the Rancheria under the Landless and Homeless Act. Subsequently, on October 14, 1978, Congress enacted Public Law 95-459, which transferred 120 acres of BLM land into trust for the Rancheria, which forms a portion of our Upper Rancheria.

There are numerous cultural and archeological sites on this land, and the Rancheria seeks to protect these sites. The remains of a historic Native American village were located in this area. The area is an important traditional hunting ground for pronghorn antelope, deer, marmots, and groundhogs – traditional foods of Rancheria tribal members. Many traditional hunting blinds and petroglyphs are located on the BLM land as well as deer and pronghorn trails. Rancheria tribal members continue to hunt in this area. Some of the best Indian medicine grows in this vicinity, such as lokbom, an Indian tea that is boiled for stomach ailments and bukom, or "wild sunflower," which is used for sore throats and eaten. Since time immemorial, Rancheria ancestors and members have conducted traditional ceremonies, including the Bear Dance, in Hidden Valley where the BLM land is located.

The Rancheria's long-term vision is to build a recreational area (soccer fields, softball and baseball fields, and outdoor basketball courts), Pow Wow grounds, and a cultural center and museum that would allow us to share our culture with anyone visiting the area. The terrain is very rocky and hilly, so use of the land is very limited.

The Rancheria has no intention of conducting gaming activities on this land, and the proposed legislation contains a gaming prohibition provision.

Thank you for your support of the proposed legislation. Hopefully we can thank you in person soon. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Mr. Stacy Dixon
Tribal Chairman

Cc: Susanville Indian Rancheria Tribal Business Council

United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Eagle Lake Field Office
2950 Riverside Drive
Susanville, CA 96130
www.blm.gov/ca/eaglelake

In Reply Refer To:
1120P
CAN050

October 3, 2014

Susanville Indian Rancheria
Mr. Stacy Dixon, Chairman
745 Joaquin Street
Susanville, California 96130

Dear Chairman Dixon:

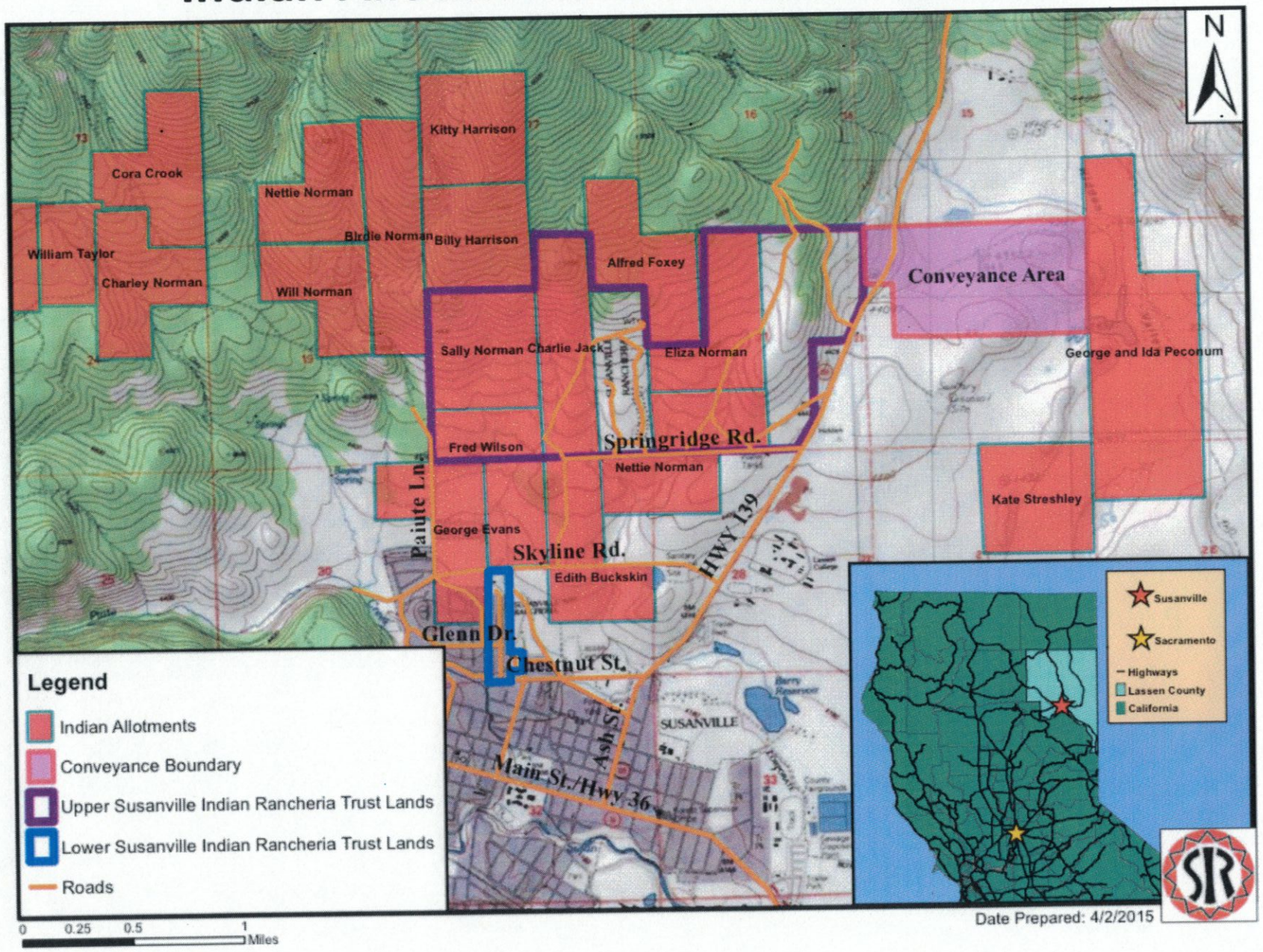
Based on recent conversations with members from the Susanville Indian Rancheria, it is my understanding that there is a continued interest in the status of public land adjacent to Highway 139 in Hidden Valley. The land of interest was identified in our Resource Management Plan as suitable for disposal, because it is an isolated parcel making it difficult for the Bureau of Land Management to manage. This designation was made in accordance with the Federal Land Management and Policy Act.

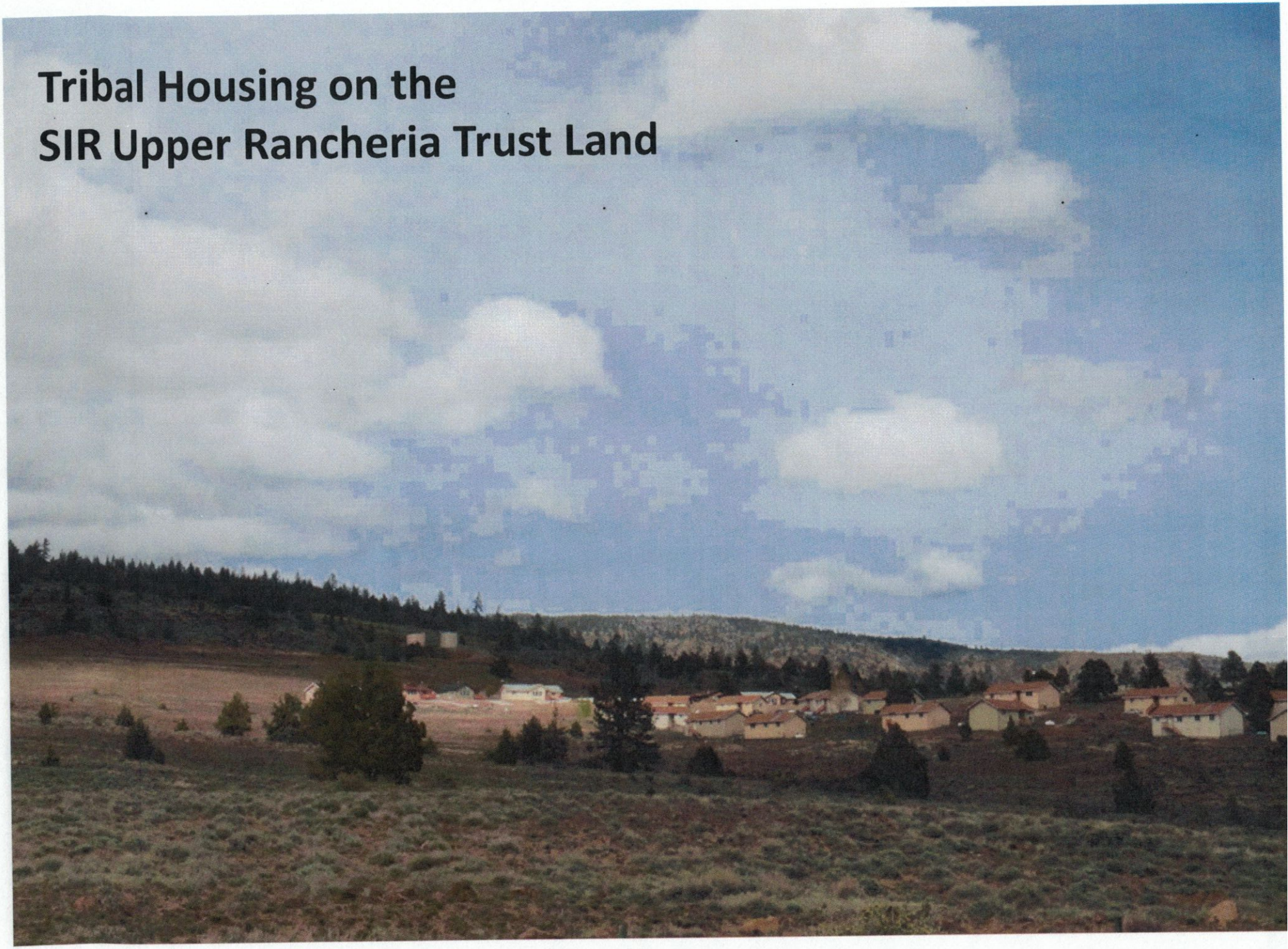
If the Susanville Indian Rancheria pursues the acquisition of this land then the Eagle Lake Field Office (ELFO) is committed to providing assistance with the transaction. The ELFO would help with the preparation of the necessary environmental documentation, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act, and other aspects of the land transfer process, such as, a land appraisal and survey work, when appropriate.

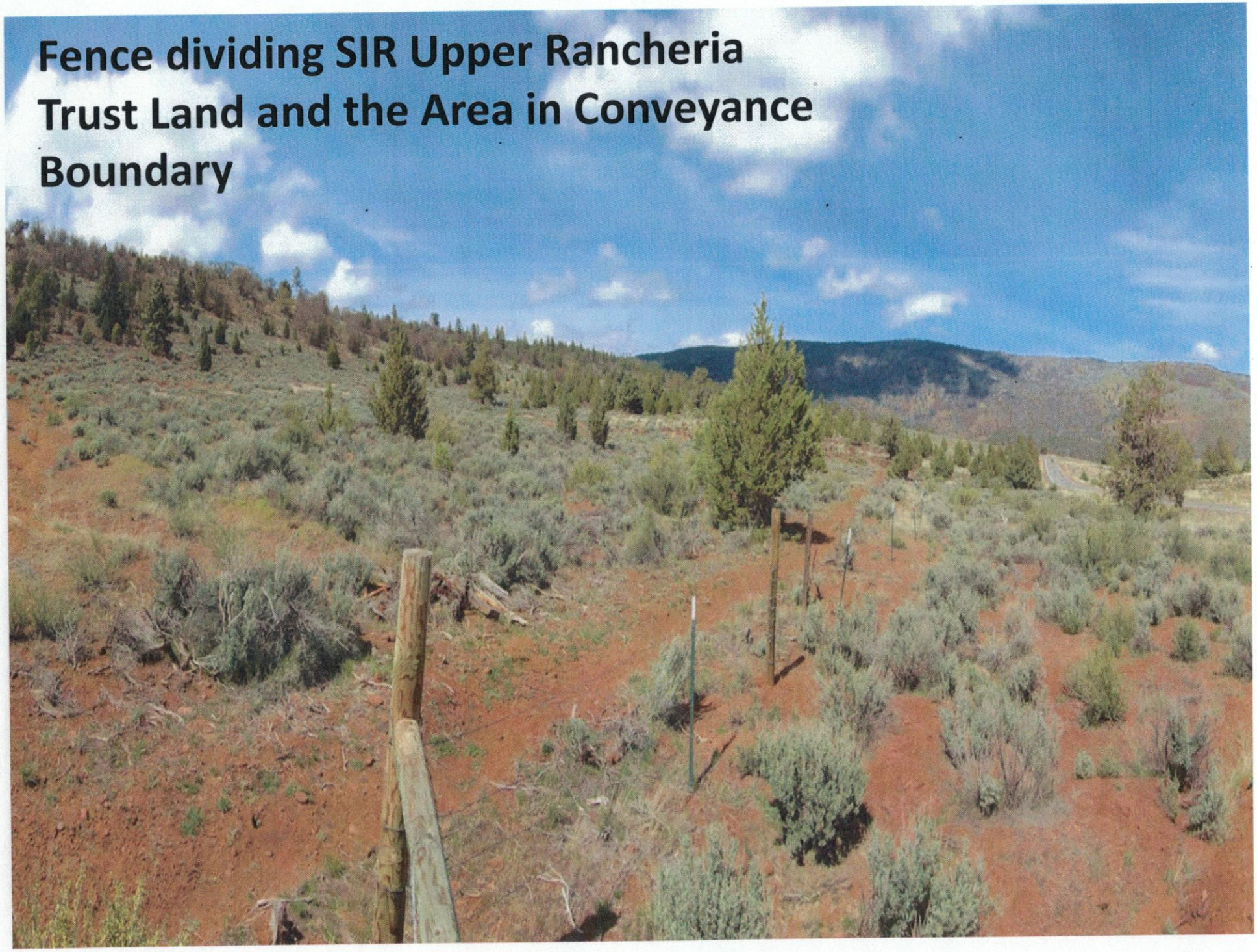
Sincerely,

Kenneth R. Collum
Field Manager

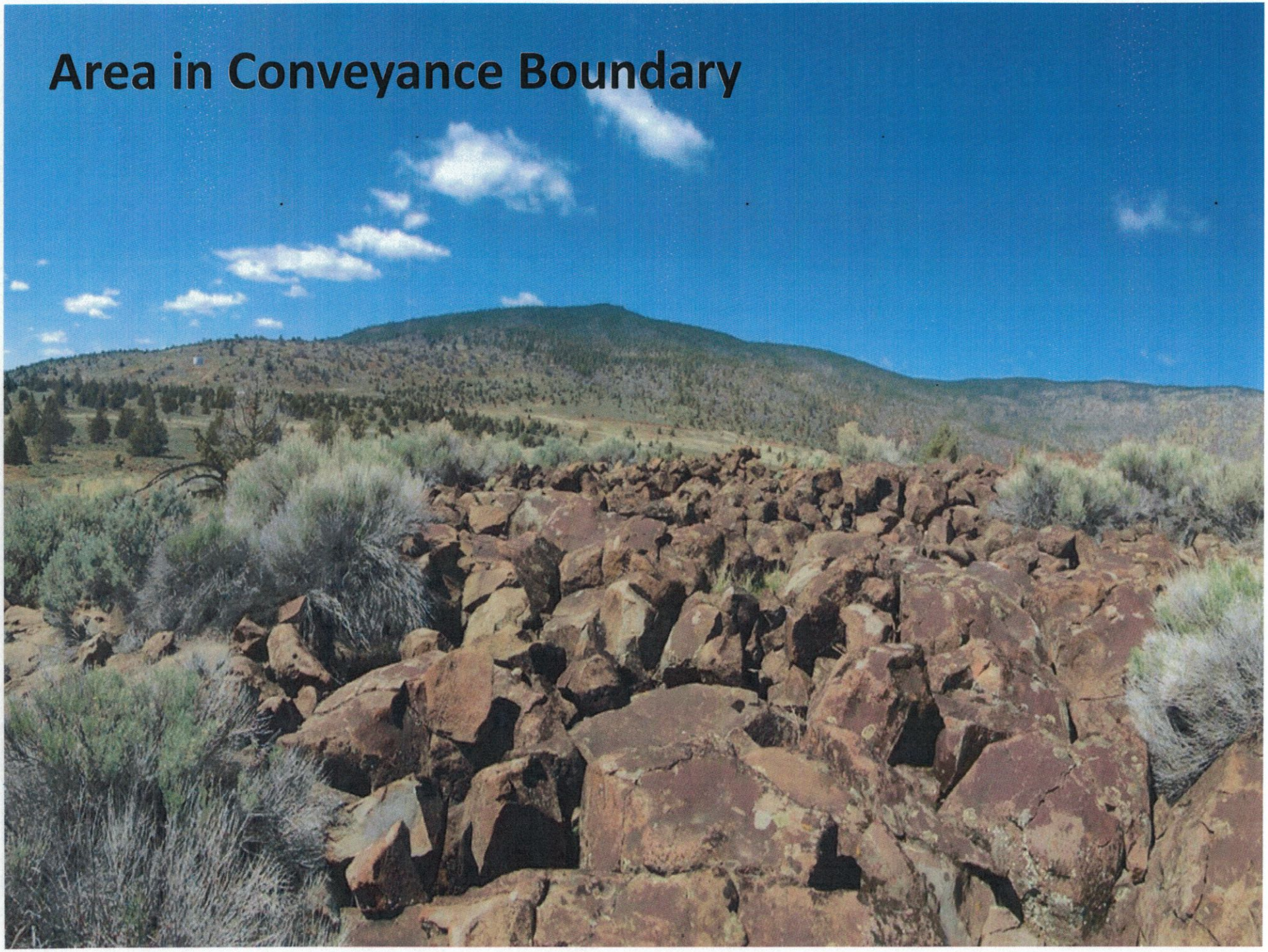
Indian Allotments in the Susanville Area

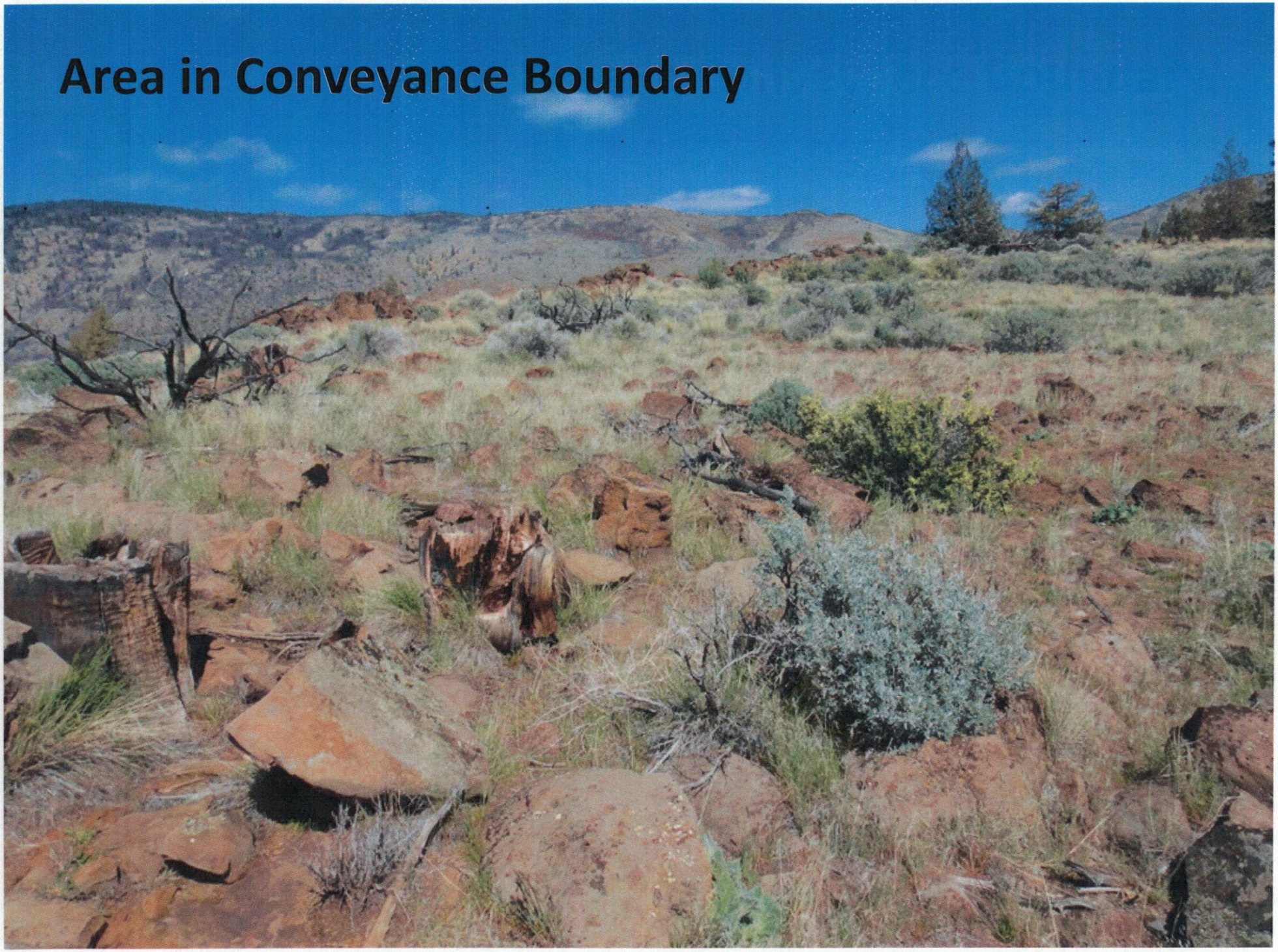



Tribal Housing on the
SIR Upper Rancheria Trust Land


Fence dividing SIR Upper Rancheria
Trust Land and the Area in Conveyance
Boundary

Area in Conveyance Boundary




Area in Conveyance Boundary

Susanville Indian Rancheria
Cultural Camp