



**Verbal Testimony**

**Secretary Treasurer, Arthur LaRose, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe**

**United States House Committee on Natural Resources**

**Subcommittee for Indigenous Peoples of the United States**

**June 5, 2019**

The Honorable Chairman Ruben Gallego (Gah-yay-go), Ranking Member Paul Cook and Members of the Committee, Boozhoo and greetings. My name is Arthur LaRose, and I am proud to serve as the Secretary/Treasurer of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe.

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to testify before you today and for taking the time to review H.R. 733, the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe Reservation Restoration Act. Congresswoman McCollum, I want to thank you for introducing this important legislation and working closely with the Committee to advance it. We deeply appreciate your unwavering commitment to Indian country and we thank you for your many years of leadership and service to our community.

The Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe is part of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe, located in north-central Minnesota and is comprised of over 9,500 Members. Our band holds the smallest land percentage of its reservation out of the 11 tribes in Minnesota. The passage of this legislation will go a long way to restore our limited land base while preserving the land for future generations.

Of the 864,158 original acres, nearly 300,000 acres are surface area of three big lakes in our region. Further, the Chippewa National Forest holds over seventy-five percent of the land within the boundaries of the reservation which leaves less than 5% of land owned by the Leech Lake Band.

Currently, the band's main federal priority is the successful passage of this legislation, which would transfer 11,760 acres of Chippewa National Forest land back to the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe.

Starting in the year 1948, the Bureau of Indian Affairs incorrectly interpreted a Department of Interior executive order and believed that they had the authority to sell these individual tribal allotments without the consent of the rightful owners. This land was taken from owners of tribal allotments through a process called "Secretarial Transfers".

These sales ceased in 1955 following a memo the Bureau of Indian Affairs received from the United States Field Solicitor that advised them that these sales were illegal. Of the 17,000 acres of tribal lands that were taken through this process, the biggest share – 11,760 acres - is located in Cass County.

The Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe has no immediate intention of changing the use of these lands. We would honor current agreements, and anticipate that these lands would be held until we develop a broader plan that will allow for a gradual subdivision for economic and residential development. The land will continue to be open to the public for hunting, fishing and other recreation.

We believe a significant tribal land base is the foundation of tribal sovereignty and self-determination. Federally recognized lands form the geographical limits of each tribe's jurisdiction, supports our residing tribal populations, is the basis of our tribal economy, and provides an irreplaceable forum for our cultural usage, practices and traditions.

Within the Leech Lake community the lack of land has a direct impact on our Members' ability to access adequate housing. This has been proven to jeopardize the health and safety of our Tribal Members and as you know, the lack of housing remains a serious concern for not only Leech Lake but for many tribes across the country. The passage of this legislation that would return 11,760 acres of land that was illegally taken from our band over 70 years ago, is critical to

increase housing options and will positively impact band Members of our tribe now and for generations to come.

We came very close to passing this legislation last Congress and I urge the Committee to work to swiftly pass this legislation in the House and Senate so this bill can be signed into law. As you have heard, this legislation would restore the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe's limited land base, while at the same time, honor current agreements and preserve the land for future generations.

On behalf of Leech Lake, Chi-Miigwetch for the invitation to testify today. We know there are many important matters which come before this Committee and are honored that you would take the time to review the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe Reservation Restoration Act.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Mr. Ranking Member. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.