

**Testimony of
Regina Cuellar, Chairwoman
Shingle Springs Band of Miwok**

**Before the House Committee on Natural Resources Subcommittee on Indian and Insular
Affairs**

**H. R. 2302 To take certain Federal land in the State of California into trust for the benefit
of the Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians, and for other purposes.**

April 30, 2025

Good morning, Chairman Hurd, Ranking Member Leger Fernandez, and members of the Committee. Thank you for holding this hearing today and for the opportunity to testify.

My name is Regina Cuellar, and I am the Chairwoman of the Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians. I am accompanied today by the General Counsel for the Tribe, Mr. Nicholas Bryson.

I am here to testify in support of H.R. 2302, an important piece of legislation that would transfer certain federal lands in El Dorado County, California, into trust for the Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians. This transfer is vital to our Tribe's future, advancing our self-determination and enabling sustainable growth for generations to come.

I. Background of the Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians

The Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians is a federally recognized Tribe located near Placerville, California, in the western Sierra Nevada foothills. Over the years, we have been able to acquire additional trust land and have grown our trust lands from 160 acres to 317 acres.

Our Tribe consists of over 582 Tribal citizens, with 140 living on our reservation and the remainder residing in the surrounding area. Our original reservation, 160 acres known as the Verona Tract (160 acres)—were set aside for our Tribe in the early 20th century by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. These lands were critical for our development, but the Verona Tract was landlocked and legal access was only possible through the El Dorado Tract, an adjacent 80 acre parcel set aside for another tribe. However, despite the importance of these lands, our Tribe's ability to fully utilize them was soon threatened by external forces, eliminating our access and threatening any ability of the tribe to create housing or other development.

It took us over 40 years to regain full legal access to our land, giving us the ability to provide services for our citizens and even members of the local community.

Today, we ask for your support to ensure that our future generations have the resources they need to continue thriving.

Acquiring the land identified in H.R. 2302 is a step toward enhancing our sovereignty, allowing us to manage our resources and affairs in a manner that reflects our cultural values and meets the needs of our people.

II. Challenges with Access and Development

In the 1950s, CalTrans began planning the construction of Highway 50 and, in the early 1960s, requested permission to survey the El Dorado and Verona Tracts to determine the best placement for the highway. Ultimately, CalTrans selected a route that crossed over the El Dorado Tract – the only legal access point to the Verona Tract. The construction of Highway 50 severed our access to the Verona Tract, rendering the Tribe landlocked and the tribe unable to utilize the Verona Tract for development. Despite efforts by the California Council of Federated American Indians and assurances from the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to maintain access, 28 acres of the El Dorado Tract were sold to make way for the highway, and the remaining land was lost to private ownership. We were deprived of access to our own land and no tribal members lived on the reservation.

Throughout the years, the Tribe made several attempts to regain access, including efforts to secure a permanent right of way through an adjacent housing development - the Grassy Run Subdivision. Unfortunately, these attempts were unsuccessful, leading to ongoing disputes and physical restrictions on our entry to the rancheria.

Ultimately we resolved our access problem by building an off ramp from highway 50 to our rancheria, but we continue to encounter challenges whose roots go back to the original decision of the BIA to transfer the El Dorado Tract for the construction of Highway 50.

Once the Tribe gained full access to the Reservation, we built housing for our members, a government center, a gaming facility and a health care center that serves both our citizens and the local community. But we do not have enough land to provide housing to everyone who needs it on our original 160-acre rancheria.

We tried purchasing homes in the adjacent subdivisions to provide homes for citizens who want to live in our community, but this is an inefficient use of our funds as the homes in these subdivisions are expensive.

Ultimately, we found the answer to our housing shortage less than 3 miles away from the Rancheria.

III. H.R. 2302

H.R. 2302 proposes to transfer land into trust to the Shingle Springs Band Miwok, including 85.3 acres of BLM land and the 188.84 acre Indian Creek Ranch parcel, which we own in fee. This transfer will not only enable the Tribe to build much-needed housing and infrastructure for our citizens, but it will also create significant opportunities for sustainable community growth. These acquisitions will strengthen our ability to support current and future generations, ensuring that the Tribe can provide much needed housing for tribal citizens who want to live near the Rancheria.

The Tribe's current need for land for housing is more pressing than ever. We have a record 187 families on our wait list for housing. Until just last year, the only way for someone to acquire a home assignment was to inherit it from a family member because we just didn't have homes available. So even though we had a wait list, we hadn't actually been able to match anyone on the wait list with a home for almost twenty years. Finally this past year we granted 20 new home assignments. We can't wait another twenty years to help our members move back to our community and now we believe we have a way to ease our housing needs.

Two years ago we purchased land less than 3 miles from the Rancheria, a quick five-minute drive on Highway 50 from our tribal headquarters at a proposed subdivision named Indian Creek Ranch. The plans for the subdivision were approved by El Dorado County on February 3, 2009, just as the housing market crashed. The homes were never built. The approved plans for the subdivision include 75 residential lots and several open space areas, affording us room to make future improvements. This is a perfect solution for us to address our housing crisis.

Shortly after we acquired the Indian Creek Ranch property we learned that there was a smaller property adjacent to it owned by the BLM. This property (we learned later) was designated for use as a U.S. Forest Service Experiment Station but had never been developed or used. This property was not maintained and was overgrown.

We began to maintain it, clearing the undergrowth and managing it to minimize fire risk.

If Congress approves the transfer, we will continue to maintain the property as we have, and have no plans to develop it. Right now we propose to use it as open space, potentially an area that can be used for recreational purposes but as part of a unified landscape with the rest of the Indian Creek Ranch property.

Additionally, there are two other small BLM properties nearby that are not utilized or maintained by the BLM. We propose to acquire these properties with no proposed change in use, which we will also maintain and manage for fire risk.

In addition to the BLM transfer, we are requesting that the Indian Creek Ranch property be placed in trust.

Though we generally have had a good experience with the Bureau of Indian Affairs fee to trust process, the backlog with applications can cause delays with processing and approvals. We are hopeful that we can avoid any delays associated with the current backlog of applications by including the fee to trust transfer of the Indian Creek Ranch property in this legislation. This would allow us to build homes much sooner than if we spent several years moving through a backlogged fee to trust process.

At Congressman McClintock's request, we worked with El Dorado County to secure their support for the legislative fee to trust transfer and they submitted a letter in support of this legislation. We have submitted this letter to the Committee for the record.

The attached map, dated April 23, 2025, outlines the parcels included in the proposed transfer.

IV. Conclusion

The Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians wholeheartedly supports the transfers authorized by H.R. 2302, which will allow us to provide much-needed housing and room to plan for the future of our tribe and its citizens.

Before I conclude, I want to especially recognize Congressman Tom McClintock for his long term friendship with the Shingle Springs Band of Miwok and his sponsorship of this legislation. His strong belief in tribal sovereignty stems from his years as a state official, where he consistently supported tribes and tribal issues generally, and the Shingle Springs Band of Miwok specifically.

Thank you for your continued commitment to the Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians and for recognizing the importance of land consolidation for the Tribe's future.

Thanks also for the opportunity to provide this testimony in support of H.R. 2302.