

**STATEMENT OF  
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DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS  
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
BEFORE THE  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INDIAN AND INSULAR AFFAIRS**

**April 30, 2025**

Good afternoon Chairman Hurd, Ranking Member Leger Fernández, and Members of the Subcommittee. My name is Bryan Mercier, and I am the Director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) at the Department of the Interior (Department).

Thank you for the opportunity to present this statement on behalf of the Department regarding H.R. 1451, Quapaw Tribal Settlement Act of 2025; H.R. 2302, Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians Land Transfer Act of 2025; H.R. 2389, Quinault Indian Nation Land Transfer Act; and H.R. 2400, Pit River Land Transfer Act of 2025.

**H.R. 1451, Quapaw Tribal Settlement Act of 2025**

H.R. 1451 would establish a Special Deposit Account in the Department's Bureau of Trust Funds Administration (BTFA), to be known as the Quapaw Bear Settlement Trust Account (Settlement Trust Account). The Secretary of the Interior (Secretary), by and through the BTFA, would administer all funds appropriated to the Settlement Trust Account. H.R. 1451 would authorize the Secretary to pay to claimants \$137,500,000 out of any Treasury funds, not otherwise appropriated, following the Secretary of the Treasury's transfer of those funds to the Settlement Trust Account. The bill also contains provisions relating to the process for determining the distribution plan of the settlement proceeds either through a mutually agreed upon distribution plan following successful completion of mediation through a third-party mediator or through a Secretarial determination.

The Department supports the intent of H.R. 1451 to effectuate the payment of settlement funds, in resolution of the legal and equitable claims against the United States, brought by the claimants. However, the Department would not support measures that expose the United States to additional liability, among other concerns. The Department would welcome the opportunity to work with the sponsor and Subcommittee to provide technical assistance.

**H.R. 2302, Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians Land Transfer Act of 2025**

H.R. 2302 would take land in El Dorado County, California, into trust for the benefit of the Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians. The bill would revoke Public Land Order 3309 (29 FR 609) and transfer the administrative jurisdiction of 40 acres of Federal land utilized by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service to the Secretary. Those acres, in addition to 45.3 acres of Bureau of Land Management (BLM)-managed lands and 118.84 acres of Tribally-owned fee land would also be placed into trust for the benefit of the Tribe. The combined lands,

approximately 204.14 acres, would be part of the Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians reservation and administered in accordance with the laws and regulations generally applicable to property held in trust by the United States for an Indian Tribe. The land placed into trust would not be eligible for class II or class III gaming under the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (Pub. L. 100-497).

The lands that would be placed into trust under H.R. 2302 are noncontiguous to the existing Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians trust lands. The Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians has stated that the lands would be used to support housing and essential services for Tribal members. If H.R. 2302 were enacted, the Department would effectuate the change in status in the Trust Asset Accounting Management System within 180 days. Under the bill, the land transfer would be subject to valid existing rights. The Department notes that valid existing rights on the affected BLM-managed parcels may include a right-of-way issued to the Bureau of Reclamation in perpetuity for a main waterline from Placerville to El Dorado Hills.

Congress, through its plenary authority, can direct the Department to accept and administer lands to be held in trust for the benefit of a Tribe through legislation. Acquisition of land in trust for the benefit of Indian Tribes is essential to Tribal sovereignty and empowers Tribal self-determination in the use of Tribal lands to best serve their communities and create economic growth. The Administration supports conveying these lands into trust for the Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians, and would like to work with the sponsor and Subcommittee to address technical changes, including language under Section 2(b) to require a land description review to determine if a land survey is required. We would also welcome the opportunity to work with the sponsor to verify the acreage numbers referenced in the bill.

#### **H.R. 2389, Quinault Indian Nation Land Transfer Act**

H.R. 2389 would transfer approximately 72 acres of federal lands administered by the Forest Service, known as Allotment 1157, in Grays Harbor County, Washington to the Secretary of the Interior to be held in trust for the Quinault Indian Nation. The lands would be part of the Quinault Indian Reservation and administered in accordance with the laws and regulations generally applicable to property held in trust by the United States for an Indian Tribe. The land placed into trust would not be eligible for gaming under the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (Pub. L. 100-497). H.R. 2389 also states that the legislation would not affect treaty rights under the Treaty between the United States and the Qui-nai-elt and Quil-leh-ute Indians, done at the Qui-nai-elt River July 1, 1855, and Olympia January 25, 1856 (12 Stat. 971). Additionally, H.R. 2389 would require the Secretary to meet disclosure requirements for hazardous substances, pollutants, or contaminants under section 120(h) of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act of 1980 ([42 U.S.C. 9620\(h\)](#)). The Secretary would not be required to remediate or abate such hazardous substances, pollutants, or contaminants.

Allotment 1157 is adjacent to the Quinault Indian Reservation. The land is of cultural significance to the Quinault Indian Nation and would be used for educational and cultural purposes.

Congress, through its plenary authority, can direct the Department to accept and administer lands to be held in trust for the benefit of a Tribe through legislation. Acquisition of land in trust for the benefit of Indian Tribes is essential to Tribal sovereignty and empowers Tribal self-determination in the use of Tribal lands to best serve their communities and create economic growth. The Department supports the goals of H.R. 2389, and would like to work with the sponsor and Subcommittee to address technical changes. The Department defers to the USDA regarding any impacts to lands managed by the Forest Service.

### **H.R. 2400, Pit River Land Transfer Act of 2025**

H.R. 2400 would transfer approximately 583.79 acres of federal land, including improvements and appurtenances thereon, currently administered by the Forest Service to the Secretary of the Interior to be held in trust for the Pit River Tribe, California. The bill would exclude approximately 20.03 acres of roads, highways, and public rights-of-way subject to existing easements within the proposed area. The legislation would also transfer approximately 40.18 acres of Tribally-owned fee land into trust for the Pit River Tribe, California. The combined lands, approximately 603.82 acres, placed into trust would be part of the Pit River Tribe Reservation and administered in accordance with the laws and regulations generally applicable to property held in trust by the United States for an Indian Tribe. The land placed into trust would not be eligible for class II or class III gaming under the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (Pub. L. 100-497).

Congress, through its plenary authority, can direct the Department to accept and administer lands to be held in trust for the benefit of a Tribe through legislation. Acquisition of land in trust for the benefit of Indian Tribes is essential to Tribal sovereignty and empowers Tribal self-determination in the use of Tribal lands to best serve their communities and create economic growth. The Department supports the goals of H.R. 2400, and would like to work with the sponsor and Subcommittee to address technical changes to clarify that the survey of the lands is completed before any lands are transferred into trust. The Department defers to the USDA regarding any impacts to lands managed by the Forest Service.

### **Conclusion**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I would be glad to answer any questions the Subcommittee may have.