

STATEMENT OF
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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FOREST SERVICE
BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON INDIAN AND INSULAR AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

REGARDING:
H.R. 3903 – “CHUGACH ALASKA LAND EXCHANGE OIL SPILL RECOVERY ACT OF 2025”

September 9, 2025

Chairman Hurd, Ranking Member Leger Fernandez, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service’s views on H.R. 3903, the “Chugach Alaska Land Exchange Oil Spill Recovery Act of 2025,” and H.R. 3925, “Yuhaaviatam of San Manuel Nation Land Exchange Act.”

The USDA Forest Service manages 193 million acres of national forests and grasslands, including lands that are in proximity to Tribal lands. The Forest Service works closely with the Tribal Nations through land stewardship, including forest management, wildfire mitigation, resource restoration, and cultural preservation efforts. We acknowledge the Tribes’ deep cultural, historical, and ecological connection to the lands identified in these bills and are committed to continued interagency and Tribal coordination where overlapping interests or adjacent lands exist.

USDA defers to the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) as to the effects of these bills on any DOI bureaus and the federal lands under their jurisdiction.

H.R. 3903, “Chugach Alaska Land Exchange Oil Spill Recovery Act”

H.R. 3903 directs a land exchange between the federal government and Chugach Alaska Corporation (CAC) subject to valid existing rights. As proposed, the legislation requires an exchange of 231,036 acres of subsurface estate owned by CAC for 65,403 acres of fee simple land owned by the federal government including 63,414 acres of NFS lands managed by the Forest Service. The land exchange is required not later than one year following enactment, if the CAC offers to convey all rights, title and interest in and to the non-federal land. Additionally, the legislation directs federal acquisition of approximately 100,000 acres of CAC subsurface estate that underlies non-federal surface estate – where the surface estate is owned by Native village corporations or the State of Alaska.

The proposed legislation references the 2022 Chugach Region Land Study and Report (CLS), which was required by the Dingell Act and submitted to Congress by the Department of the Interior in December 2022. USDA worked in coordination with DOI and in consultation with the CAC to produce the study and identify sufficient acres of accessible and economically viable federal land that can be offered in exchange for CAC land identified

by CAC as available for exchange.

The Forest Service supports the intention of this bill. The land exchange proposed in this bill is intended to reconcile overlapping land interests, in surface and subsurface ownership, that have caused jurisdictional and conservation issues in the region. This bill is consistent with (and supplements) the policy goals of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, in an effort to ensure the continued prosperity of the communities that depend on these lands and fostering responsible stewardship.

The Forest Service looks forward to working with the bill sponsors and Committee to resolve any issues on the parcels identified in the bill for exchange that were not originally identified by the Agencies in the 2022 study and report.

H.R. 3925, “Yuhaaviatam of San Manuel Nation Land Exchange Act”

H.R. 3925 authorizes a land exchange between the federal government and the Yuhaaviatam of San Manuel Nation, a federally recognized tribe also known as the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians, contingent upon an offer made to the Secretary of Agriculture. The proposed exchange involves approximately 1,460 acres of land owned by the Nation for 1,475 acres of National Forest System Land managed by the Forest Service, including all easements, subsurface rights, and improvements on both sides of the exchange. The land exchange must occur as soon as practicable within the 120 days of the Secretary receiving the offer. As a condition of the exchange, the Nation must enter into an agreement with the Secretary –within 120 days of enactment – to preserve the historical and cultural integrity of the Arrowhead landmark site. The legislation also exempts this exchange from the public land exchange provisions of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act.

The Forest Service has pursued a potential land exchange with the Yuhaaviatam of San Manuel Nation since 2022, following the execution of a formal Agreement to Initiate. In 2023, the agency conducted a public consultation, leading to subsequent amendments. The Forest Service is currently working with the Bureau of Land Management to obtain mineral valuation guidance and develop a statement of work.

The Forest Service is generally supportive of this bill and would welcome the opportunity to work with the Committee to streamline the land exchange process while addressing several important concerns. These include the standards for survey and appraisal requirements for both the parcels and the mineral estate, the role of the Secretary of the Interior in the survey and transfer of these assets to the Yuhaaviatam of San Manuel Nation, and the need for a project exemption from requirements under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, and from any additional requirements under the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 that have not already been completed. Additionally, we seek to clarify the financial responsibility for any unforeseen or outstanding costs associated with the parcel exchange.

That concludes my testimony. Again, I thank Chairman Hurd, Ranking Member Leger Fernandez, and members of the Subcommittee for the opportunity to present the USDA Forest Service's views on this proposed legislation.