

**TESTIMONY OF BRYAN MERCIER
DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**

**BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON INDIAN AND INSULAR AFFAIRS
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
LEGISLATIVE HEARING ON H.R. 681, TO AMEND THE ACT OF AUGUST 9, 1955
(COMMONLY KNOWN AS THE “LONG-TERM LEASING ACT”), TO AUTHORIZE
LEASES OF UP TO 99 YEARS FOR LAND HELD IN TRUST FOR THE MASHPEE
WAMPANOAG TRIBE AND THE WAMPANOAG TRIBE OF GAY HEAD
(AQUINNAH), AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES; H.R. 3654, TERRA ACT; H.R. 3925,
YUHA AVIATAM OF SAN MANUEL NATION LAND EXCHANGE ACT; H.R. 4463, TO
AMEND THE CATAWBA INDIAN TRIBE OF SOUTH CAROLINA LAND CLAIMS
SETTLEMENT ACT OF 1993**

SEPTEMBER 9, 2025

Good afternoon Chairman Hurd, Ranking Member Leger Fernández, and Members of the Subcommittee, I am Bryan Mercier, Director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs at the Department of the Interior (Department). Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on legislation affecting Tribal Nations. The Department appreciates the Subcommittee’s continued leadership in advancing tribal sovereignty, land management, and community resilience.

H.R. 681, To amend the Act of August 9, 1955 (commonly known as the "Long-Term Leasing Act"), to authorize leases of up to 99 years for land held in trust for the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe and the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah), and for other purposes

H.R. 681 would amend the Long-Term Leasing Act so that the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe and the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah) can agree to leases of their lands for extended terms. This legislation would provide parity with other federally recognized tribes that already possess long-term leasing authority. The Department supports the authority for the Tribes to enter into leases for 99 years as tribal governments are in the best position to determine the duration of such leases.

H.R. 3654, Tribal Emergency Response Resources Act (TERRA Act)

The Department supports the intent of H.R. 3654, which would streamline access to federal resources for tribes facing environmental threats and natural disasters. Modeled after the successful “477 Program,” the Act would authorize integration of federal funding under a single tribal plan, designate the Department as lead agency, and recognize Traditional Ecological Knowledge in planning. This legislation would enhance tribal sovereignty, improve interagency

coordination, and reduce administrative burdens. We look forward to working with the sponsor and the Subcommittee to ensure efficient and effective implementation.

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

H.R. 3925 would authorize a land exchange between the United States and the Yuhaaviatam of San Manuel Nation. The exchange would respect tribal sovereignty, consolidate federal land holdings, and enhance stewardship of the San Bernardino National Forest. The Department looks forward to working with the sponsor and the Subcommittee to ensure that all applicable easements and encumbrances are provided to the Department prior to finalizing the exchange. The Department defers to the U.S. Department of Agriculture regarding the disposition of lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service under this bill.

H.R. 4463, To amend the Catawba Indian Tribe of South Carolina Land Claims Settlement Act of 1993

The Department supports H.R. 4463, which would modernize membership criteria by removing the requirement of “continued political relations.” Membership is a matter of inherent tribal sovereignty, and this amendment provides clarity and fairness without affecting the Tribe’s government-to-government relationship, land base, or federal funding. The bill reflects a respectful update to tribal enrollment consistent with self-determination.

Conclusion

Thank you, and I am pleased to answer any questions the Subcommittee may have.