

**TESTIMONY OF MARC LUKER
COUNCILMAN OF THE PECHANGA BAND OF INDIANS
BEFORE THE HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INDIAN AND INSULAR AFFAIRS
NOVEMBER 18, 2025**

Good morning Chairman Hurd, Ranking Member Leger Fernandez, and members of the Committee. My name is Marc Luker, and I am a Tribal Council Member of the Pechanga Band of Indians from Southern California. I am honored to testify before you on behalf of our nation.

I am here today to discuss H.R. 5682, a bill that would direct the United States to take certain federal land in the State of California into trust for the benefit of the Pechanga Band of Indians.

I would first like to thank Congressman Darrell Issa for his strong support of the Pechanga Band of Indians and for introducing this important piece of legislation.

H.R. 5682 would transfer approximately 1,261 acres of land that is currently owned by the Bureau of Land Management (“BLM”) to the Pechanga Band in trust. This land is located adjacent to the existing Pechanga Indian Reservation near Temecula, California in Riverside County, and has immense cultural, historical, and religious significance to our Tribe.

I. The Pechanga Band of Indians

The Pechanga Band of Indians have called the Temecula Valley home for more than 10,000 years. As a people, we call ourselves Payómkawichum (the People of the West).

The Spanish Missionaries first arrived in the region in 1797, and by 1798 they established Mission San Luis Rey de Francia within the borders of our ancestral territory. The Spanish called the Payómkawichum San Luiseños, and later, just Luiseños. Under Spanish occupation, our population was decimated by disease, starvation, and a strict social structure that separated our people by age and gender, almost completely eradicating our culture.

We endured Spanish occupation until Mexico gained its independence, and by that time, our population had almost been rendered extinct. Those of us that were left lived in small isolated villages throughout Temecula Valley.

The conclusion of the Mexican-American War led to the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo 1848. Under the terms of the treaty, the territory ceded to the United States included California and our ancestral homelands.

Following the establishment of California statehood in 1850, a group of Temecula Valley ranchers petitioned the District Court of San Francisco for a Decree of Ejection of Indians living on land in the Temecula Valley, which the court eventually granted in 1873. Between the days of September 20 and 23, 1875, the Sheriff of San Diego County began what would be three days of evictions where our people were removed from their homes and taken to the hills south of the Temecula River.

On June 27, 1882, an Executive Order signed by President Chester A. Arthur established the Pechanga Indian Reservation, which was named for the place where our people settled after we were evicted from in 1875, just seven years prior. This reservation was but a fraction of our vast ancestral homeland, which encompasses several hundred square miles that run north to Riverside and Corona, east to Hemet, south to Escondido, and west to San Nicolas Island.

Today, the gross total land area of the Pechanga Reservation is 7,403 acres.

While our reservation is small in comparison to our historic footprint, the Pechanga Band of Indians feels a deep responsibility to preserve and protect all of our ancestral homeland. In the present day, there are multiple landmarks and places that hold cultural significance to our people, but are not officially within our reservation boundary. We work to preserve these areas wherever possible.

II. Pu'éska Mountain

Located within our ancestral homelands is Wexéwxi Pu'éska, commonly known as Pu'éska Mountain, which is one of the most sacred places in our history. Pu'éska is the place of many significant events during the Creation of the World, and knowledge of Pu'éska's many important places, such as 'Éxva Teméeku and Naxá'chish, have been passed from elder to child for generations.

While Wexéwxi Pu'éska is located within our historic territory, it was not located within our existing reservation boundary until recently, leaving it unprotected against efforts to develop its natural resources.

In 2007, a company called Granite Construction proposed development of the Liberty Quarry at Wexéwxi Pu'éska. The quarry would have been one of the largest open-pit mines in the United States, and, if it had been completed, would have destroyed the mountain, leaving a huge hole in its heart. Losing Pu'éska Mountain would have been devastating to Pechanga and other Luiseño bands because it would have stripped her of her cultural significance and physical beauty.

Between 2008 and 2012, the Pechanga Band of Indians collaborated with the City of Temecula, the organization Save Our Southwest (“SOS”) Hills, and other community organizations in the Temecula Valley to oppose the proposed quarry. To end the long-running battle with Liberty Quarry, the Pechanga Band ultimately purchased Pu’éska Mountain in November 2012, and in 2015, the land was put into trust by the federal government. This acquisition not only saved the sacred mountain, but also prevented the air pollution and extensive environmental damage the quarry would have caused throughout the Temecula Valley.

To celebrate the success of their joint effort to protect Pu’éska and the significance of the site, Temecula city leaders made November 15 an annual city holiday called Pechanga Pu’éska Mountain Day.

Since Pu’éska Mountain is such an important place to our people, the Tribe successfully pursued a nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. On October 28, 2014, it was deemed eligible by the Keeper of the National Park Service and listed on the National Register.

III. H.R. 5682

Today, the Bureau of Land Management owns multiple isolated parcels of land that are adjacent to or near the Tribe’s trust land and existing reservation, and within the Tribe’s ancestral territory. Included in those parcels is approximately 1261 acres of land adjacent to the Tribe’s trust land on Pu’éska Mountain, which is shown in the map attached to our testimony.

This legislation would transfer this adjacent parcel of land on Pu’éska Mountain into trust for the benefit of the Pechanga Band of Indians, allowing us to be the stewards of an area that is of fundamental importance to our people. This land transfer would consolidate most of Pu’éska Mountain into Tribal trust land and make it part of the reservation.

IV. Conclusion

In closing, I thank you for your time and attention, and the opportunity to present this testimony today. I would also like to invite you to visit Pechanga – we would be honored to show you our homeland.