

**TESTIMONY OF TIM VREDENBURG
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PRESENTED TO THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INDIAN AND INSULAR AFFAIRS
LEGISLATIVE HEARING ON H.R. 5515
THE INDIAN TRUST ASSET REFORM AMENDMENT ACT
November 19, 2025**

Chairman Hurd, Ranking Member Fernandez and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians. I appreciate the Committee's leadership in advancing Tribal priorities in forest restoration, wildfire resilience, and the exercise of true self-determination. I am here today to express strong support for the Indian Trust Asset Reform Amendment Act, which would prevent the Indian Trust Asset Reform Act (ITARA) from lapsing, and expand the scope of trust asset management that Tribes can assume from the federal government. The proposed amendments also include changes that would facilitate broader Tribal participation in ITARA and further strengthen Tribal sovereignty in management of trust assets. I also want to share the successes that our Tribe has achieved through ITARA, to show why it is so important that Congress extend and expand ITARA by passing the Indian Trust Asset Reform Amendment Act.

Background on ITARA

In 2016, Congress enacted ITARA to reaffirm the federal government's trust responsibilities to Tribal Nations while promoting self-determination through Tribal management of certain trust assets. Specifically, Title II of ITARA authorized a 10-year demonstration project allowing Tribes to develop Indian Trust Asset Management Plans (ITAMPs), which empowered Tribes to assume greater responsibility for managing certain forestry trust assets and surface leases in Indian Country. However, to date, only three ITAMPs have been approved nationwide, largely due to the fact that many Tribes are unaware of its existence.

The demonstration authority is scheduled to sunset in 2026. Without congressional action, Tribes who have invested time and resources to implement ITARA could lose this critical tool for expanding Tribal self-determination.

Findings from IFMAT IV

ITARA is a logical extension of the existing Tribal opportunities for trust asset management. The most recent Indian Forest Management Assessment Team Report (IFMAT IV) highlighted that many Tribes have already assumed some measure of management authority over a large majority of forested trust acres in Indian Country. Approximately 80% of Tribal trust forested acres are already managed wholly or partially under Public Law 93-638 contracts, self-governance compacts, or cooperative agreements. ITARA represents the next logical step, by giving Tribes the option to assume full management over certain trust assets, while still meeting all environmental laws federal standards, and protecting the United States from any resulting liability, if any. I had the honor to serve as a technical specialist on the fourth IFMAT team. We visited over 40 Tribal forestry

programs and no two were the same. It is important to remember that Tribal trust assets are to be held in trust for the exclusive beneficial use of Tribal governments. Who better to make those management decisions than the Tribal governments themselves?

While ITARA has been a huge success for Tribes like the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians, its scale has been limited. The IFMAT IV Team found that the lack of funding support, and uncertainty about the scope of the United States' remaining trust responsibility have prevented ITARA's full implementation. There has also been concern that a Tribe could invest significant time and energy into the development of the program, only to have the law sunset in 2026.

The IFMAT IV Team recommended several reforms that align directly with this legislation: extending ITARA indefinitely, clarifying the Secretary's trust responsibility after the implementation of an ITAMP, and providing training for BIA and Tribal leaders.

Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians' Experience with ITARA

The Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians was among the very first Tribes in the nation to implement ITARA. We were the first Tribe to approve a forest management activity under ITARA authority. Since then, we have consistently met or exceeded our forest management goals and objectives, demonstrating the promise of ITARA when it is allowed to work.

- **Wildfire Preparedness & Resilience:** We have built many miles of fuel breaks that protect both Tribal lands and neighboring U.S. Forest Service lands. This proactive work has reduced wildfire risk and enhanced safety for our citizens and the public.
- **Ecosystem Restoration:** Fish have returned to streams where they had not been seen in decades, showing the ecological benefits of Tribal-led management.
- **Efficiency & Cost Savings:** Management costs have decreased, efficiencies have increased, and we can act with speed. Under ITARA we were able to prepare and implement projects in a matter of months, instead of following the current Bureau of Indian Affairs' process that can take years.
- **Economic Benefits:** Due to cost savings and a greater ability to respond to fluctuating market conditions, our revenues from forest management have grown, expanding our ability to fund vital Tribal services.
- **Wildfire Response Capacity:** The Tribe has increased its ability to respond quickly and effectively to suppress wildfires and restore burned areas across Tribal lands.

These are not theoretical or abstract outcomes. They represent real improvements in the lives of our people and our neighbors. ITARA has allowed us to fulfill our responsibility as stewards of the land while creating economic opportunity and ecological resilience.

Trust Responsibility and Self-Determination

It is critical to underscore that ITARA is not a weakening of the federal trust responsibility. Instead, ITARA represents the fulfillment of that responsibility. The federal trust responsibility must always be recognized and honored. What ITARA changes is how that trust responsibility is carried out: by

placing more of the decision-making in the hands of Tribes, who are best positioned to balance cultural, economic, and ecological priorities.

Support for the Indian Trust Asset Reform Amendment Act

The Indian Trust Asset Reform Amendment Act addresses the challenges identified in IFMAT IV and by Tribes like the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians. The legislation would make ITARA permanent, remove unnecessary application barriers, expand eligibility to Tribal organizations, clarify the definition of trust assets, and allow Tribes to adopt or amend forest management plans without redundant federal approval.

I strongly urge Congress to act quickly. Without this legislation, the ITARA demonstration will expire in 2026, threatening to undo the progress Tribes have made in advancing self-determination through effective trust asset management.

Closing

In closing, ITARA has proven itself to be a powerful tool for self-determination, effective stewardship, and community resilience. The Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians has demonstrated what is possible when Tribes are trusted to manage their lands and trust resources. I respectfully urge this Subcommittee and the Congress to pass the Indian Trust Asset Reform Amendment Act so that these benefits can be realized more broadly across Indian Country.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to your questions.