

Statement of
U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service
Before the
Subcommittee on Indian and Insular Affairs
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
Regarding
H.R. 8483, the “Barona Group of Capitan Grande Band of Mission Indians
Land Transfer Act of 2025”

May 21, 2026

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide the views of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) regarding H.R. 8483, the “Barona Group of Capitan Grande Band of Mission Indians Land Transfer Act of 2025.” The bill would transfer administrative jurisdiction of certain federal lands in San Diego County, California, and place those lands into trust for the benefit of the Barona Group of Capitan Grande Band of Mission Indians of the Barona Reservation, California.

H.R. 8483 would transfer approximately 836 acres of federal land into trust for the benefit of the Tribe, including approximately 160 acres currently administered by the Bureau of Land Management and approximately 676 acres currently administered by the USDA Forest Service through Parcel 2 and Parcel 3. The bill also preserves all valid existing rights on the affected parcels, including rights-of-way, easements, licenses, leases, permits, and reciprocal road rights-of-way agreements. It also ensures continued public access for recreational, scenic, scientific, and conservation uses, as well as motorized access to existing roads and trails, subject to reasonable Tribal rules and regulations developed in consultation with the Secretary. The bill further authorizes necessary rights-of-way for federal personnel to conduct emergency operations such as search and rescue, wildfire suppression, and public-safety evacuations. In addition, the legislation prohibits gaming on the transferred lands and preserves existing water rights and agreements.

The USDA Forest Service supports the overall intent of the legislation and appreciates the continued collaboration with the Tribe and the Committee. The USDA Forest Service recognizes the importance of land management decisions that support Tribal interests, cultural values, and long-term stewardship objectives. With respect to the approximately 160 acres currently administered by the Bureau of Land Management as Parcel 1, the USDA Forest Service defers to

the Department of the Interior regarding management considerations associated with that parcel.

The USDA Forest Service would, however, like to bring one technical issue to the attention of the Subcommittee regarding Parcel 3. Based on current management conditions, a portion of the northwestern boundary area of Parcel 3 functions as an important fuel break that contributes to wildfire risk reduction and provides protection to adjacent private lands and nearby communities. The USDA Forest Service seeks clarification regarding whether the intent of the legislation is to include this fuel-break area within the lands to be transferred into trust. If inclusion is intended, the USDA Forest Service believes it is important that the Subcommittee be aware that responsibility for maintenance and management of the fuels break and associated fire road would no longer reside with the FS following transfer of the land into trust status. The USDA Forest Service believes it is important that surrounding communities understand this change in management responsibility and the role the area currently serves in wildfire risk reduction and emergency response. Alternatively, if the intent is to exclude the fuel break and fire road from the transfer, the USDA Forest Service recommends that the bill language or accompanying map materials expressly clarify that exclusion to avoid future ambiguity regarding management responsibilities.

Similarly, we recommend express clarification regarding the jurisdictional status of the easements and rights-of-way for the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management as well as for public access once the land is taken into trust to avoid confusion over their Indian country status.

The USDA Forest Service appreciates the Committee's consideration of these technical comments and looks forward to continuing to work with the Committee as the legislation advances.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide this statement for the record.