

1. H.R. 8483 would place BLM and U.S. Forest Service (USFS)-managed land into trust for the Barona Band. How well is this land currently taken care of by the B-L-M and USFS, and how would that change if taken into trust for the tribe?

We recognize that the BLM and USFS manage nearly 500 million acres of land across the United States. These lands are currently managed subject to budgets and staff and of course priority. When these lands are taken into the trust on behalf of the tribe many of the current management challenges will be eliminated. As was mentioned, these lands hold great cultural significance to Barona and their management will be a priority to the tribe. It is impossible to envision a scenario where the BLM and USFS would manage these lands more effectively and with greater care than the tribe. Additionally, shortcomings in land management carry a cost far greater than public policy. In 2003, 95% of the Barona Indian Reservation burned in the cedar creek fire, homes and lives were lost that day. Since then, Barona has prioritized fuel reduction within the reservation and surrounding areas to prevent a catastrophic reoccurrence.

a. How does the Barona Band plan to manage this land once placed into trust?

Considering the location of these lands are contiguous to the Barona Indian Reservation, they have been a part of an ongoing maintenance of truck trails and fuel breaks and will continue to be prioritized. Barona will continue to manage these lands through fuel reduction, fuels management, controlled burns and cooperative coordination with neighboring agencies.

2. In the USFS' Statement for the Record concerns were raised regarding an important fuel break located on the northwestern boundary area of Parcel Three. As we move into wildfire season, how will the Barona Band commit to working with the USFS to address this fuel break issue?

For over fifteen years, Barona has worked with USFS to ensure the truck trails on these lands have proper clearance. In addition to road improvements, Barona has partnered with USFS on wildfire training, controlled burns, coordinated weed abatement, fuels management through fuel reduction and through continuous meetings. Barona stands firm on our commitment to continue these efforts and relationships as they are beneficial to the Barona Fire Department, the USFS and to the community residents.

a. Does the Barona Band commit to working with the USFS, the Bureau of Land Management, and this committee to ensure any outstanding concerns related to public access and rights-of-way are addressed if this legislation is to be enacted?

Yes, as noted in our response to Question 2, Barona stands firm on our commitment to continue these efforts and relationships as they are beneficial to the agencies and to the community residents. Currently, a formal agreement is being prepared.

3. Please explain how the Barona Band intends to ensure public access remains where applicable.

We will collaborate and work with the USFS to maintain the current situation for public access.

4. What positive impacts does local land management have on your tribe and on the surrounding communities?

Local land management practices on the Barona Indian Reservation provide crucial environmental and safety benefits. These practices directly uplift the Tribe while significantly safeguarding neighboring communities like Lakeside and Ramona.

Barona operates the Barona Water Reclamation Plant that allows the Tribe to recycle wastewater for extensive irrigation, landscaping, and maintenance. This practice diversifies our water portfolio and preserves vital groundwater levels. Additionally, Barona recently finalized water agreements to bring both potable and recycled water from the Ramona Municipal water District to the Barona community. Having a secure and sustainable water source for our community means the ability to build and protect homes, sustain our businesses and ensure future generations can thrive.

The proactive stewardship of Barona's 7,400 acres of flat and rocky ancestral terrain protects native ecosystems. This ensures that younger generations maintain a physical and spiritual connection to the land, supported heavily by educational outreach at the Barona Cultural Center and Museum.

Additionally, Barona partners with agencies like CAL FIRE San Diego to conduct large-scale controlled burns. Targeted fuel-reduction projects have cleared hundreds of acres of highly flammable annual grasses and non-native weeds. This creates vital fuel breaks that lower wildfire risks for the entire Wildcat Canyon and Ramona valley corridor.

The Barona Fire Department is fully integrated into California's mutual aid agreements. Equipped with advanced firefighting apparatus, tribal emergency personnel protect both reservation land and adjacent off-reservation communities during wildfire seasons, in addition to coordinated fuels management.