

**TESTIMONY OF RAYMOND WELCH
CHAIRMAN OF THE BARONA BAND OF MISSION INDIANS
BEFORE THE HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INDIAN AND INSULAR AFFAIRS
MAY 21, 2026**

**Hearing on H.R. 8483 Taking Certain Federally Owned Lands into Trust for the
Benefit of the Barona Group of Capitan Grande Band of Mission Indians**

Good afternoon, Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am Raymond Welch, Chairman of the Barona Band of Mission Indians, formally known as the Barona Group of Capitan Grande Band of Mission Indians. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to present testimony on behalf of my People.

I am here in support of H.R.8483, a bill that would transfer and place into trust certain federal lands for the benefit of the Barona Band of Mission Indians.

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

H.R. 8483 would transfer 714 acres of land that is currently owned by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) to the Barona Band in trust. This land is located adjacent to the existing Barona Indian Reservation near Ramona, California in San Diego County, and has deep cultural and historical significance to our Tribe.

I. The Barona Band of Mission Indians

The Barona Band of Mission Indians reside on the 7,500-acre Barona Indian Reservation located in San Diego County, about 30 miles north east of the City of San Diego. We are 648 members strong and growing. However, Barona is not our first reservation. Our ancestors purchased the Barona property in 1932 after a forced removal from our original reservation, Capitan Grande.

The Capitan Grande Reservation, which Barona still has rights to, was established by the federal government in 1875 for the native people that were living in the area at that time, my ancestors.

Capitan Grande had a free-flowing river running through it and when the City of San Diego needed a place to store water, they negotiated a deal with the federal government that allowed them to buy a portion of the Capitan Grande Reservation to build a reservoir. That

portion of land was where our families lived, where they tended their gardens, and where we buried our ancestors.

The dispossession of land split our community and families, and forced our people to move from their land and relocate the bodies of our ancestors.

As the crow flies, Capitan Grande is about two miles north of Barona. A portion of the land in between the two reservations is what this legislation seeks to transfer.

Despite being a very rough terrain that includes steep hillsides and rough, rocky surfaces, the land has cultural and spiritual value much greater than its actual value. This land would represent a bridge that connects our two reservations.

For the Barona people, this issue is not merely administrative or procedural—it is deeply personal and tied to our identity as a sovereign Tribal nation. The lands at issue are not new to us. They are part of our ancestral homeland—lands our people have occupied, stewarded, and depended upon since time immemorial.

Long before the United States existed, our ancestors lived on and cared for these lands. Our ancestors hunted, gathered, conducted ceremonies, and built enduring cultural traditions that remain vital to our community today. These lands hold sacred sites, traditional use areas, and cultural resources that continue to define who we are as a people.

However, like many Tribes across this country, my people were dispossessed of significant portions of our ancestral lands through federal policies that fragmented Tribal land bases and undermined Tribal sovereignty. The result is that today, much of what was once our homeland is under federal management rather than Tribal stewardship.

II. H.R. 8483

In an effort to reclaim stewardship of these ancestral territories, we have been collaborating with both the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management to carefully consider the lands that were included in H.R.8483. We have spent several months working to exclude from the final boundaries rights-of-way, public trails, and encumbrances that could potentially present management challenges.

Trust acquisition is one of the primary mechanisms by which the federal government fulfills its longstanding trust responsibility to Tribal nations. H.R. 8483 would transfer into trust 714

acres of land that is adjacent to the Barona reservation, as shown in the map attached to our testimony.

Taking these federal lands into trust represents an opportunity to correct, in part, that historical injustice and will allow us to, once again, serve as the primary steward of lands we know intimately—lands we have cared for across generations.

Essentially, at its core, this request is about restoring a connection that was never truly broken—only interrupted. It is about reaffirming the federal government's commitment to Tribal sovereignty and self-determination. And it is about recognizing that the Barona people remain, as we have always been, the rightful stewards of our ancestral lands.

III. Conclusion

Thank you again for your time and consideration. We respectfully urge the Subcommittee to support passage of H.R.8483.