

## [House Natural Resources/ Indian and Insular Affairs](#)

### Legislative Hearing

30 April 2025

Overview: The hearing focused on several bills related to Tribal land management and settlements, with testimonies from Tribal leaders and discussions on the importance of swift legislative action to address historical injustices, improve land management, and support Tribal sovereignty.

- [H.R. 1451](#) (Rep. Brecheen) “Quapaw Tribal Settlement Act of 2025”
  - Establishes a special deposit account to disburse \$137.5 million to Quapaw Tribal member claimants, resolving a lawsuit over mismanagement of trust assets.
- [H.R. 2302](#) (Rep. McClintock) “Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians Land Transfer Act of 2025”
  - Transfers 85 acres of Bureau of Land Management land and 118 acres of farmland into trust for the Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians to support growth and reduce wildfire risks.
- [H.R. 2389](#) (Rep. Randall), “Quinault Indian Nation Land Transfer Act”
  - Service land into trust for the Quinault Tribe for heritage and cultural purposes, addressing impacts of the General Allotment Act.
- [H.R. 2400](#) (Rep. LaMalfa) “Pit River Land Transfer Act of 2025”
  - Transfers 584 acres of Forest Service land and 40 acres of fee land into trust for the Pitt River Tribe to build an interpretive center commemorating the land's ancestral history.

#### Witnesses:

- [Bryan Mercier](#)- Director, Bureau of Indian Affairs, US Department of Interior.
- [John Crockett](#)- Deputy Chief of State Private and Tribal Forestry, US Forest Service
- [Wena Supernaw](#), Chair of the Quapaw Nation
- [Regina Cuellar](#), Chairwoman of the Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians
- [Tyson Johnston](#), Councilman of the Quinault Nation
- [Yatch Bamford](#), Chairman of the Pitt River Tribe

#### Hearing Notes:

- Both Mercier and Crockett expressed their department’s support for each bill.

- [Representative Tim Walberg \(R-MI\)](#) questioned Bryan Mercier about land management issues related to the Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians.
  - Mercier acknowledged the Tribe's effective forest management practices and the need for local management to prevent wildfires.
  - He also discussed the need for technical changes to H.R. 2302 and H.R. 2400 to ensure accurate land surveys and resolve existing rights.
- Rep. Walberg then asked John Crockett about the Pitt River Tribe's attempts to obtain the Four Corners land.
  - Crockett explained that the Forest Service no longer needed the land for administrative purposes and supported the Tribe's plans for a cultural center.
- Rep. Walberg confirmed with Mercier that there was no known opposition to placing the land in trust for the Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians.
  - Mercier agreed that local management of forests by Tribes is more effective.
- [Rep. Teresa Leger Fernandez \(D-NM\)](#) raised concerns about the lengthy process for Tribes to place land into trust through the Department of Interior, citing insufficient staff and resources at the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA).
  - She expressed worry that administrative actions like mass firings and funding freezes could further hinder this process and other critical BIA functions.
  - Mercier responded that no BIA offices had been closed, and that the Department was committed to fulfilling its trust responsibilities. He was unaware of any new requirements for land trust applications beyond those implemented a year ago.
- Rep. Leger Fernandez also questioned John Crockett about the impact of staff reductions on forest management, particularly during fire season.
  - Crockett acknowledged the uncertainty caused by employee removals and stated that terminated employees had been reinstated with full benefits, though he did not have specific numbers on staff departures.
- [Rep. Cliff Bentz \(R-OR\)](#) highlighted the importance of the land transfer bills being discussed and mentioned his own upcoming bill for larger land transfers to the Burns Paiute Tribe. Rep. Bentz asked Mercier about existing encumbrances on the land parcels being transferred.
  - Mercier explained that the Department supports the legislation but needs to verify and resolve any title defects or encumbrances before taking the land into trust.
- Rep. Bentz also inquired about the distribution of settlement funds in H.R. 1451, expressing concern about the complexity of sorting out claims.

- Mercier agreed and suggested working with the Committee to find a more efficient way to distribute the funds.
- [Rep. Emily Randall \(D-WA\)](#) questioned about staffing and support for land transfer programs at the USDA and Department of Interior. She expressed concerns about the impact of workforce efficiency efforts on these programs and emphasized the need for government-to-government consultation with Tribes.
  - Bryan assured that the BIA had not been significantly impacted by workforce changes and was conducting extensive consultations with Tribes.
  - Crockett acknowledged voluntary separations due to workforce reshaping but committed to ensuring resources are available for land transfers and meaningful Tribal consultations.
- Rep. Randall stressed the importance of including Tribal nations in future administrative decisions to avoid detrimental impacts on their programs.
  - Both Mercier and Crockett committed to maintaining Tribal sovereignty and ensuring proper consultation processes.
- Wena Supernaw testified in support of H.R. 1451, the Quapaw Tribal Settlement Act of 2025. She highlighted that:
  - Early 20th-century lead and zinc mining on Quapaw land caused severe environmental damage and health issues.
  - Mining companies left massive waste piles, contaminating water and air, leading to the area being designated a Superfund site.
  - The Quapaw Nation sued the U.S. for mismanagement of trust assets, resulting in a \$137.5 million settlement recommendation.
  - H.R. 1451 aims to authorize the payment and establish a distribution process.
  - Supernaw urged the Subcommittee to support the bill for justice and compensation for the Quapaw Nation.
- Regina Cuellar, Chairwoman of the Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians, testified in support of H.R. 2302. She explained that:
  - This bill helps address housing shortages and provides access to essential services.
  - The Tribe is actively reducing wildfire risks and maintaining the land.
  - There is strong backing from El Dorado County and streamlines the fee-to-trust process.
  - Cuellar urged support for the bill to enhance Tribal sovereignty, safety, and sustainable growth.
- Tyson Johnston testified in support of H.R. 2389, the Quinault Indian Nation Land Transfer Act.

- He explained that allotment 1157 was part of the Quinault Indian Reservation, established by the Treaty of Olympia in 1856, but was later sold off due to the Dawes Act.
- The land holds ancient cedar trees and remnants of ancestral carvings, making it culturally significant.
- The Quinault Nation aims to preserve the land and prevent commercial logging.
- Johnston urged the Subcommittee to support H.R. 2389 to restore the land to the Quinault Nation for cultural and environmental preservation.
- Yatch Bamford, Chairman of the Pitt River Tribe, testified in support of H.R. 2400, the Pitt River Land Transfer Act of 2025. Key points:
  - Bamford explained that the Four Corners property is central to the Tribe's ancestral lands and Indian activism history. The land holds profound cultural value and is commemorated annually by the Tribe.
  - The Tribe aims to manage and preserve the land for future generations.
  - Bamford thanked Congressman LaMalfa for his sponsorship and urged the Committee to support the bill.
- Rep. Emily Randall (D-WA) asked how transferring the land into trust would further protect and preserve it for future generations.
  - Johnston explained that Tribal management would enhance protection and governance, addressing jurisdictional issues caused by the Dawes Act. He emphasized the effectiveness of local control and self-governance in managing culturally and ecologically significant lands.
- Rep. Tim Walberg (R-MI) questioned Wena Supernaw about the Quapaw Nation's land management.
  - Supernaw explained that if the Tribe had managed their land, they would have mined responsibly and avoided environmental damage. She highlighted the BIA's role in declaring landowners incompetent, allowing harmful mining practices.
- Rep. Walberg also asked Regina Cuellar about the Indian Creek subdivision.
  - Cuellar noted the lengthy fee-to-trust process and emphasized the importance of H.R. 2302 for providing housing quickly.
- Rep. Walberg questioned Yatch Bamford about acquiring the Four Corners land.
  - Bamford described past efforts and the significance of the land for the Tribe's economic development.
- Rep. Teresa Leger Fernandez (D-NM) emphasized the importance of addressing historical injustices through the Subcommittee's work. She expressed a desire to

move the bills forward quickly to enact them into law. She asked the witnesses why swift action is necessary:

- Yatch Bamford: Highlighted plans for a cultural center and collaboration with California State Parks for a Welcome Center.
  - Regina Cuellar: Stressed the urgent need for housing for Tribal members.
  - Tyson Johnston: Emphasized the cultural and ecological significance of the land and the benefits of Tribal management.
  - Wena Supernaw: Noted the loss of Tribal members since the settlement decision and the importance of timely justice.
- Rep. Leger Fernandez concluded by underscoring the need for prompt action to acknowledge and rectify past wrongs.