

House Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Indian and Insular Affairs
Topic: Various Legislation

9 September 2025

Highlights: This hearing examined five bills addressing Tribal leasing authority, disaster resilience funding, land exchanges, and Tribal membership. Tribal leaders stressed sovereign authority over membership and land use.

There was consensus on cutting interagency red tape—both for disaster resilience funding (TERRA Act) and for land-exchange processes. Several witnesses framed legislation as remedies for broken federal commitments under ANCSA, oil spill recovery, and historical land claims. Each land-exchange or leasing proposal couples cultural site protection with economic development opportunities, aiming for sustainable Tribal futures.

Witnesses:

- [Cheryl Andrews-Maltais](#), Chairwoman of the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head
- [Sheri Buretta](#), Chairman of the Board of the Chugach Alaska Corporation
- [John Crockett](#), Deputy Chief of State, private, and Tribal forestry in the U.S. Forest Service
- [Brian Harris](#), Chief of the Catawba Nation
- [Quintin Swanson](#), Chairman of the Shoalwater Bay Indian Tribe
- [Bryan Mercier](#), Director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs
- [Joe Maarango](#), Councilman for the Yuhaaviatam of San Manuel Nation

Key Points:

Bills Considered and Testimony Provided-

- [H.R. 681](#) – Amends the Long-Term Leasing Act to grant the Mashpee Wampanoag and Aquinnah (Gay Head) Wampanoag Tribes 99-year lease authority.
 - Chairwoman Cheryl Andrews-Maltais of the Aquinnah Wampanoag spoke on H.R. 681. She described dire housing costs on Martha's Vineyard (avg. \$1.5 million) and how 25-year lease caps hinder homeownership and community services. She argued 99-year leases align with other Tribes, unlock financing, and support sustainable economic development, cultural preservation, and local control.
- [H.R. 3654](#) (TERRA Act) – Creates a single, Tribe-driven DOI framework to consolidate climate resilience and relocation funding, streamline permitting/reporting, and honor traditional ecological knowledge.
 - Chairman Quinton Swanson of the Shoalwater Bay Tribe spoke on H.R. 3654, detailing catastrophic coastal erosion (around 100 ft/year), tsunami risk, and

urgent need to relocate off a sea-level reservation. She cited a 2023 example where HUD and DOT funding misalignment delayed roads and housing, increasing costs and hazard exposure. She gave support for a one-stop DOI plan modeled on the 477-workforce program to cut red tape, unify funding, and accelerate life-safety projects.

- [H.R. 3903](#) – Chugach Alaska Land Exchange Oil Spill Recovery Act of 2025 authorizes a negotiated swap to resolve the Exxon Valdez split-estate by conveying 65,403 acres of federal surface estate to Chugach Alaska Corporation in exchange for subsurface interests.
 - Sheri Buretta from the Chugach Alaska Corporation gave information over H.R. 3903. She traced 36-year efforts to resolve ANCSA and Exxon Valdez land-promise failures of federal surface acquisitions fractured native subsurface rights. She continued by framing the exchange as a government "front-door" analogy- federal government gains uniform conservation lands; Chugach acquires contiguous, culturally and economically vital lands. Concluding, she highlighted parcels adjacent to youth/elder camps and potential for tourism, forestry, minerals.
- [H.R. 3925](#) – Yuhaaviatam (San Manuel Nation) Land Exchange Act directs a 1,400-acre swap between the San Bernardino National Forest and the Tribe, consolidating lands around the culturally significant Arrowhead Springs.
 - Councilman Joe Maarango of the San Manuel Nation testified for H.R. 3925. He described seven years of administrative delays after securing 1,475 acres for Arrowhead Springs and contiguous reservation lands. He the recounted leadership turnover and shifting USFS parcel preferences that forced the Tribe to spend \$4 million locating exchange parcels. He urged Congress to finish the land exchange within 120 days while continuing administrative coordination under new USFS leadership.