

Committee on Resources

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The Honorable Mark Macarro
Tribal Chairman
Pechanga Band of Luiseño Indians

Testimony
Before the Committee on Resources
United States House of Representatives

Legislative Hearing on H.R. 4908, To transfer certain land in Riverside County, California, from the Bureau of Land Management to the United States to be held in trust for the Pechanga Band of Luiseno Mission Indians, and for other purposes.

September 21, 2004

Mr. Chairman, I thank you and the other distinguished members of the Committee for the opportunity to present testimony on behalf of the Pechanga Band of Luiseño Mission Indians. I am here today to respectfully ask your support of H.R. 4908, the Pechanga Band of Luiseño Mission Indians Land Transfer Act of 2004. If passed into law, this bill would protect approximately 990 acres of land in Riverside County, California, adjacent to our existing reservation, and important to the Luiseño people, by transferring it into trust for the benefit of the Tribe.

The Tribe has called the Temecula Valley home for more than 10,000 years and 10,000 years from now, tribal elders will share with tribal youth, as they do today, the story of the Tribe's creation in this place. Since time immemorial, through periods of plenty, scarcity and adversity, the Pechanga people have governed ourselves and cared for our lands. This land is witness to our story.

The history of the Tribe begins with our ancestral home village of Temeeuku, which was a center for all the Payomkawichum, or Luiseño people. After the establishment of the state of California in 1850, a group of Temecula Valley Ranchers petitioned the District Court in San Francisco for a Decree of Ejection of Indians living on the land in Temecula Valley, which the court granted in 1873.

In 1875 the sheriff of San Diego County began three days of evictions. The Luiseño people were taken into the hills south of the Temecula River. Being strong of spirit, most of our dispossessed ancestors moved upstream to a small, secluded valley, where they built new homes and re-established their lives.

A spring located two miles upstream in a canyon provided them with water. We have always called this spring Pechaa'a, which comes from pechaq, which means to drip. This spring is the namesake for Pechaa'anga or Pechaanga, which means "at Pechaa'a" or "at the place where water drips."

On June 27, 1882, seven years after being evicted, the President of the United States issued an Executive Order establishing the Pechanga Indian Reservation. Several subsequent trust acquisitions were made in 1893, 1907, 1931, 1971 and 1988, each one increasing the size of the reservation.

Today, the total land area of the Pechanga reservation is approximately 5,500 acres. As a people of this ancestral land that spreads from the center of Temecula out 60 miles north and south and approximately 45 miles east to west, we have always been respectful of and responsible for the environmental, social and economic relationships that exist upon it.

It is because of our history and cultural affiliation with these lands that the passage of H.R. 4908 is so important to the Tribe. Our identity and existence as Luiseño people is dependent upon our connection to and protection of these ancestral lands.

Today, our tribal government operations, such as our environmental monitoring and natural resource management programs, exist to fully honor and protect the land and our culture upon it. In particular, we are

concerned about watershed and wellhead protection for our surface and ground water resources and the availability of water for our community. The land that would be placed into trust under H.R. 4908 is part of the recharge area for some of these resources and would help protect the quality and ensure an adequate supply of water for the Tribe and surrounding communities.

These lands are also home to important cultural resources, including pictographs and petroglyphs unique, not only to Luiseño territory, but to all of Indian country and our Nation. While these lands have a unique historical and cultural value for the Pechanga people, they are also important for their broader aesthetic value to communities throughout the Temecula Valley.

Protecting the sanctity of these lands through conservation and resource management is of the highest priority for the Tribe. Our mandate is to protect and enhance the sustainability and well being of the Pechanga way of life. Accordingly, the tribal government issued an Executive Order zoning the land to be transferred under H.R. 4908 for conservation and management of wildlife and cultural values. Such zoning would make any commercial or other significant development of the lands contrary to tribal law.

Recognizing the importance of these lands to the Pechanga people, the Tribe began working almost 15 years ago to place these lands into trust. It is our understanding that the Bureau of Land Management is supportive of this trust transfer. Thus, on behalf of the Pechanga Band of Luiseño Mission Indians, I respectfully request your support for H.R. 4908. Thank you for your time and consideration of this matter.