

Statement of the Hon. Denny Rehberg  
Acting Chairman, Committee on Resources  
Hearing on HR 2941  
April 21, 2004

The subject of today's hearing is a bill that would restore about 16,000 acres of lands to the Colorado River Indian Reservation, and accordingly adjust the Reservation's boundary. The reservation presently consists of about 270,000 acres in Arizona and California.

As with many issues affecting Indian Country, the background behind this issue is complicated, stretching back more than 100 years.

The Colorado River Indian Reservation was created by an Act of Congress in 1865. In order to prevent encroachment by non-Indians, President Grant issued Executive Orders to expand the boundaries of the reservation. Included in this expansion was an area called the La Paz lands.

The Reservation expansion was originally defined by a survey performed by someone named Chandler Robbins. This survey established the Reservation's southern boundary at the La Paz Arroyo.

After this survey was done, there was some dispute as to where the La Paz Arroyo was precisely located. Unfortunately, some if not all of the dispute over the location of the arroyo seemed to arise from dishonorable motives by certain non-Indians who wished to have the use of these lands.

A number of re-surveys were then attempted in order to confirm or correct the proper boundary of the Reservation. The one which appears to have formally reconfirmed the original Robbins Survey was one performed by a surveyor named Guy Harrington.

Nonetheless, for reasons that are unclear, a different survey of dubious merit was used as the basis for the issuance in 1915 of Executive Order Number 2273. This Executive Order deleted the 16,000-acre La Paz lands from the Reservation.

I've just covered a few of the basic facts surrounding this issue, and as you can see it is complicated and confusing.

Senators Barry Goldwater and Dennis DeConcini introduced two bills in the early 1980's to restore the La Paz lands to the Colorado River Indian Tribes. A hearing was held on one of the bills, but no further action occurred. And here we still have a matter that is unresolved even though we have a problem that goes back to the turn of the century.

I look forward to the testimony of today's witnesses to help establish what the just resolution of this problem should be.