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Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt today transmitted proposed Congressional legislation to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives that would allow several small parcels of Bureau of Land Management land to be transferred to California tribes throughout the State.

"The draft bill I submitted fulfils a promise made by the Clinton Administration to several California tribes with an inadequate land base that we would try to help them," Babbitt said. "This land will be used to build housing or for non-gaming businesses that will benefit their economies and those of surrounding communities."

The land being proposed for transfer has been the subject of broad local consultation and has received formal support from governing bodies of adjacent non-Indian communities. The land under consideration does not include habitat for threatened or endangered species. No disturbance of the land's sub-surface would be authorized in the draft bill.

If Congress passes legislation and the President signs it into law, the following tribes would receive land taken in trust for future benefit: 561.69 acres to the Pit River Tribe; 40 acres to the Bridgeport Indian Colony; 240 acres to the Utu Utu Gwaitu Paiute Tribe (Benton Paiute reservation); 200.06 acres to the Fort Independence Community of Paiute Indians; 5.03 acres to the Barona Group of Capitan Grande Band of Mission Indians; 40 acres to the Morongo Band of Mission Indians; 59.20 acres to the Pala Band of Mission Indians; 1,360 acres to the Cuyapaipe Band of Mission Indians; 1000.78 acres to the Manzanita Band of Mission Indians; and 299.04 acres to the Fort Bidwell Community of Paiute Indians.

All of the parcels are adjacent to existing reservations, and will be added to the reservation lands if the draft bill is enacted. All valid existing rights will be preserved, and any grazing privileges will be maintained for two years from the date of enactment. No appropriation of funds will be necessary to accomplish the transfer, and each parcel has been subject to environmental analysis. Further environmental analysis would be required by the Bureau of Indian Affairs before any development activities could take place.

"This legislation could provide great relief and economic benefit to tribes that were never given an adequate reservation area," Babbitt said. "This is a win for the tribes and a win for nearby communities who can expect more economic opportunities as a result of these transfers. I urge Congress to move quickly to support and sponsor this draft bill."