

TESTIMONY
OF
MICHAEL BLACK
DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INDIAN, INSULAR AND ALASKA NATIVE AFFAIRS
HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ON
H.R. 1157, THE “SANTA YNEZ BAND OF CHUMASH MISSION INDIANS LAND TRANSFER ACT OF
2015”

JUNE 17, 2015

Chairman Young, Ranking Member Ruiz, and Members of the Subcommittee, my name is Michael Black and I am the Director for the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Thank you for the opportunity to present the Department of the Interior’s (Department) views on H.R. 1157, a bill to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to place certain lands located in the unincorporated area of the County of Santa Barbara, California into trust for the benefit of the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Mission Indians (Tribe), and for other purposes.

Taking land into trust is one of the most important functions that the Department undertakes on behalf of Indian tribes. Homelands are essential to the health, safety, and welfare of the tribal communities. Thus, this Administration has made the restoration of tribal homelands a priority. This Administration is committed to the restoration of tribal homelands, through the Department’s acquisition of lands in trust for tribes, where appropriate. The Department supports mandatory fee-to-trust legislation but takes no position on H.R. 1157 given that the 5 parcels identified in the H.R. 1157 are currently on appeal to the Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs at the Department.

H.R. 1157 authorizes the Secretary for the Department to place approximately 5 parcels of land into trust for the Tribe. H.R. 1157 clearly provides the legal description for the lands that will be held in trust for the Tribe. H.R. 1157, once the land is placed in trust for the Tribe, removes any restrictions on the property pursuant to California state law, but also provides that the legislation does not terminate any right-of-way, or right-of-use issued, granted or permitted prior to the date of the enactment of this legislation. H.R. 1157 also includes a restriction that the Tribe may not conduct any gaming activities on any land taken into trust pursuant to this Act.

Thank you for the opportunity to present the Department’s views on this legislation. I will be happy to answer any questions the Subcommittee may have.