

**Statement of  
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Deputy Director  
Bureau of Indian Affairs  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
Senate Committee on Indian Affairs  
S. 1986, Moapa Band of Paiutes Land Conveyance Act  
October 7, 2015**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on S. 1986, which declares that approximately 25,977 acres of public land in southern Nevada shall be held in trust for the benefit of the Moapa Band of Paiutes. The bill also declares that approximately 88 acres of land currently held in fee by the Tribe shall be held in trust as part of the reservation of the Tribe. The Department supports S. 1986 and would like to work with the sponsor and the Committee on modifications concerning energy transmission corridors, recreational opportunities, and protection of sensitive species.

**Background**

The Moapa Band of Paiute Indians (Tribe) is a federally recognized Indian tribe that resides on the Moapa River Reservation (Reservation). The Reservation was initially set aside in 1874, and currently comprises approximately 71,954 acres in southern Nevada. The lands proposed in S. 1986 to be held in trust for the Tribe are adjacent to the existing Reservation.

**S. 1986**

Subject to valid existing rights, S. 1986 declares that approximately 25,977 acres of public land currently administered by the BLM and the Bureau of Reclamation shall be held by the United States in trust for the Tribe. In addition, S. 1986 declares approximately 88 acres of land currently held in fee by the Tribe shall be held by the United States in trust for the Tribe. Under the bill, the Secretary of the Interior would be required within 180 days of enactment to complete a survey to establish the boundaries of the land to be held in trust. S. 1986 provides that this land shall not be used for class II or III gaming. The Department would like to thank the sponsor and the Committee for adopting a more standard process for taking land into trust in this version of the legislation.

Currently, several important rights-of-way cross the lands proposed to be held in trust in S. 1986, including the West Wide Energy Corridor, which crosses the western portion of the proposed lands. The Old Spanish Trail, a national historic trail, crosses the southern portion of the proposed lands, and many of the lands identified are also important recreation areas. The southern portion of the proposed lands is also habitat for the three-corner milkvetch, a BLM-sensitive plant species, listed by the State of Nevada as “critically endangered.” In addition, the eastern portion of the proposed lands overlaps several Nevada Department of Transportation mineral materials rights-of-way. All of these matters will be addressed in revising the Las Vegas Resource Management Plan (RMP), which will cover 3.1 million acres in southern Nevada, including all of the acreage identified to be held in trust in S. 1986.

The Department supports S. 1986, and recommends it be amended to address the land management concerns identified above regarding energy transmission. To ensure that this area

continues to be an important corridor for renewable energy development and transmission in the future, we recommend that energy transmission be an identified use of the lands under the bill. The Department would also like to work with the sponsor and the Committee on proposed modifications to the bill, including minor technical amendments and boundary adjustments to enhance manageability. More specifically, we recommend the addition of language or boundary modifications that address resource issues related to existing recreation areas, the Old Spanish Trail, and habitat for the three-corner milkvetch. The Department would also like to work with the sponsor and the Committee on adjustments to the timeframes outlined in the bill because they are insufficient to complete the required cadastral surveys. Finally, the Department notes that the "Reservation Expansion Lands" as depicted on the map includes non-Federal land. We would like the opportunity to provide a corrected map that resolves this issue.

### **Conclusion**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this legislation which will provide important benefits to the Tribe.