

**Statement of Bryan Mercier
Director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs
U.S. Department of the Interior**

Senate Committee on Indian Affairs

**Legislative Hearing on:
S.630, Quapaw Tribal Settlement Act of 2025
S.1514, Quinault Indian Nation Land Transfer Act
S.3219, Albuquerque Indian School Act of 2025
S.2796, Yuhaaviatam of San Manuel Nation Land Exchange Act
S.2871, Pit River Land Transfer Act of 2025
S.3475, Akwesasne Mohawk Land Claim**

June 3, 2026

Introduction

Chairman Murkowski, Vice Chairman Schatz, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding the bills discussed below. My name is Bryan Mercier, and I am the Director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) at the Department of the Interior (Department).

Quapaw Tribal Settlement Act of 2025

S. 630 would establish a Special Deposit Account in the Department's Bureau of Trust Funds Administration (BTFA), to be known as the Quapaw Bear Settlement Trust Account (Settlement Trust Account). The Secretary of the Interior (Secretary), by and through the BTFA, would administer all funds appropriated to the Settlement Trust Account. S. 630 would authorize the Secretary to pay to claimants \$137,500,000 out of any Treasury funds, not otherwise appropriated, following the Secretary of the Treasury's transfer of those funds to the Settlement Trust Account. The bill also contains provisions relating to the process for determining the distribution plan of the settlement proceeds either through a mutually agreed upon distribution plan following successful completion of mediation through a third-party mediator or through a Secretarial determination.

The Department supports the intent of S. 630 to effectuate the payment of settlement funds, in resolution of the legal and equitable claims against the United States, brought by the claimants. However, the Department would not support measures that expose the United States to additional liability, among other concerns. The Department would welcome the opportunity to work with

the sponsor and Committee to provide technical assistance.

Quinault Indian Nation Land Transfer Act

S. 1514 would transfer approximately 72 acres of federal lands administered by the Forest Service, known as Allotment 1157, in Grays Harbor County, Washington to the Secretary of the Interior to be held in trust for the Quinault Indian Nation. The lands would be part of the Quinault Indian Reservation and administered in accordance with the laws and regulations generally applicable to property held in trust by the United States for an Indian Tribe. The land placed into trust would not be eligible for gaming under the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (Pub. L. 100-497). S. 1514 also states that the legislation would not affect treaty rights under the Treaty between the United States and the Qui-nai-elt and Quil-leh-ute Indians, done at the Qui-nai-elt River July 1, 1855, and Olympia January 25, 1856 (12 Stat. 971).

Additionally, S. 1514 would require the Secretary to meet disclosure requirements for hazardous substances, pollutants, or contaminants under section 120(h) of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act of 1980 (42 U.S.C. 9620(h)). The Secretary would not be required to remediate or abate such hazardous substances, pollutants, or contaminants.

Allotment 1157 is adjacent to the Quinault Indian Reservation. The land is of cultural significance to the Quinault Indian Nation and would be used for educational and cultural purposes.

Congress, through its plenary authority, can direct the Department to accept and administer lands to be held in trust for the benefit of a Tribe through legislation. Acquisition of land in trust for the benefit of Indian Tribes is essential to Tribal sovereignty and empowers Tribal self-determination in the use of Tribal lands to best serve their communities and create economic growth. The Department supports the goals of S. 1514, and would like to work with the sponsor and Committee to address technical changes. The Department defers to the USDA regarding any impacts to lands managed by the Forest Service.

Albuquerque Indian School Act of 2025

S. 3219 would transfer approximately 9.89 acres of federal land into trust for the educational, health, cultural, business, and economic development of the 19 Pueblos in the State of New Mexico - the Acoma, Cochiti, Isleta, Jemez, Laguna, Nambe, Ohkay Owingeh (San Juan), Picuris, Pojoaque, San Felipe, San Ildefonso, Sandia, Santa Ana, Santa Clara, Santo Domingo, Taos, Tesuque, Zia, and Zuni. The federal land, managed by the General Services Administration, was historically part of the Albuquerque Indian School. The bill would prohibit gaming activities on the land.

The Department supports this legislation as it would further advance tribal sovereignty and self determination. We welcome the opportunity to work with the Sponsor and the Committee on technical modifications.

Yuhaaviatam of San Manuel Nation Land Exchange Act

S. 2796 would authorize a land exchange between the United States and the Yuhaaviatam of San Manuel Nation. The exchange would respect tribal sovereignty, consolidate federal land holdings, and enhance stewardship of the San Bernardino National Forest. The Department looks forward to working with the sponsors and the Committee to ensure that all applicable easements and encumbrances are provided to the Department prior to finalizing the exchange. The Department defers to the U.S. Department of Agriculture regarding the disposition of lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service under this bill.

Pit River Land Transfer Act of 2025

S. 2871 would transfer approximately 583.79 acres of federal land, including improvements and appurtenances thereon, currently administered by the Forest Service to the Secretary of the Interior to be held in trust for the Pit River Tribe, California. The bill would exclude approximately 20.03 acres of roads, highways, and public rights-of-way subject to existing easements within the proposed area. The land placed into trust would not be eligible for class II or class III gaming under the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (Pub. L. 100-497).

Congress, through its plenary authority, can direct the Department to accept and administer lands to be held in trust for the benefit of a Tribe through legislation. Acquisition of land in trust for the benefit of Indian Tribes is essential to Tribal sovereignty and empowers Tribal self-determination in the use of Tribal lands to best serve their communities and create economic growth.

The Department supports the goals of S. 2871, and would like to work with the sponsor and Committee to address technical changes to clarify that the survey of the lands is completed before any lands are transferred into trust. The Department defers to the USDA regarding any impacts to lands managed by the Forest Service.

Akwasasne Mohawk Land Claim Settlement Act

S. 3475 would authorize, ratify, and confirm the Agreement of Settlement and Compromise to Resolve the Akwasasne Mohawk Land Claim in the State of New York (Settlement Agreement) entered into by the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe, the Mohawk Council of Akwasasne, the State of New York, the Counties of Franklin and Saint Lawrence, New York, the Towns of Fort Covington and Bombay, New York, and the New York Power Authority. The bill would also authorize, ratify, and confirm any transfer of land, right-of-way, or easement that is the subject of claims in the Canadian Saint Regis Band of Mohawk Indians v. New York et al. (82–CV–783); the Canadian Saint Regis Band of Mohawk Indians v. New York et al. (82–CV–1114); and the

Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe, by the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribal Council and the People of the Longhouse at Akwesasne, by Mohawk Nation Council of Chiefs v. The State of New York, et al. (89–CV–829). S. 3475 would also classify lands owned or subsequently acquired by the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe within an area defined in the Settlement Agreement as Indian Country as defined at 18 U.S.C. 1151(a).

If enacted, S. 3475 would resolve the Akwesasne Land Claim. We believe any settlement should be responsible with taxpayer dollars and serve the national interest.

Conclusion

We look forward to working collaboratively with Congress, Tribal Nations, and our Federal partners to address technical considerations and support the successful implementation of these proposals. Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I would be happy to answer any questions the Committee may have.