Testimony
Paul Tsosie
Chief of Staff
Office of the Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs
United States Department of the Interior
House Natural Resources Committee
H.R. 5468, Bridgeport Indian Colony Land Trust, Health, and Economic Development Act

July 28, 2010

Thank you for the invitation to testify on H.R. 5468, the Bridgeport Indian Colony Land Trust, Health, and Economic Development Act. The legislation directs that approximately 39 acres of land currently administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) be taken into trust for the Bridgeport Paiute Indian Colony of California (Tribe). The Department supports this legislation, and would like to work with the sponsor and Committee to make minor technical modifications to ensure that the property to be transferred is accurately described.

Background

The Bridgeport Indian Colony is a federally-recognized tribe located near the town of Bridgeport, in Mono County, California. The Tribe's 40-acre reservation is located approximately a quarter mile from Highway 182, and currently has no highway frontage or pass-through traffic.

The Tribe seeks to have two parcels of BLM managed land transferred to their reservation and held in trust by the United States. The 31.86-acre Bridgeport Parcel, which was identified by the BLM for disposal in a 2004 amendment to the Bishop Resource Management Plan, lies between the Tribe's current reservation and Highway 182. The Bridgeport Parcel is contiguous to the existing Colony. Trust status for this parcel would enable the Tribe to construct housing and a community activity center, and facilitate economic development. The 7.5-acre Bridgeport Camp Antelope Parcel, near the small town of Walker, is currently under lease to the Toiyabe Indian Health Project for operation of a community health clinic under the Recreation and Public Purposes Act. The Toiyabe Indian Health Project is operated by a consortium of tribes. The clinic is currently closed, but the Bridgeport Indian Tribe has expressed a desire to reopen this facility, which has suffered major interior water damage and has been vacant since December, 2005. We suggest that the bill state that any structures on the parcel would remain the property of the tribe and would not become part of the trust property.

H.R. 5468

Under H.R. 5468, the United States would hold in trust for the Tribe both the Bridgeport and Bridgeport Camp Antelope Parcels, subject to valid existing rights. The Tribe has sought a means to acquire the Bridgeport parcel for many years, and the BLM has been working cooperatively to help them achieve this goal under existing authorities. The Bridgeport Camp Antelope Parcel has been under Recreation and Public Purposes Act lease since 1987.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to present a statement for the record to express the Department's support for H.R. 5468. We would be happy to answer any questions the Committee may have.