

Testimony of Terry Thompson, Commissioner, Lincoln County, Oregon

Regarding

H.R. 6141, to amend the Siletz Restoration Act

Chairman Young, it is my pleasure to appear before the Subcommittee on Indian and Alaska Native Affairs of the House Natural Resources Committee regarding H.R. 6141, a bill to amend the Siletz Restoration Act to allow the Siletz Tribe to process its fee-to-trust applications as on-reservation applications within the borders of the original 1855 Siletz Coast Reservation.

My name is Terry Thompson, I am a commissioner on the Lincoln County Board of Commissioners, located in Newport, Oregon. I have served on the Board since 2003, part of that time as chairman. Before that, I served six years in the Oregon House of Representatives. I have been a commercial fisherman along the Oregon Coast for more than 50 years. I am here today to testify in support of the tribe's goal to achieve a more efficient and effective means of bringing lands into trust.

Lincoln County has a long, positive and rewarding relationship with the Confederate Tribes of Siletz Indians. Lincoln County was established in 1893 out of the diminished Siletz Coast Reservation. Lincoln County acknowledges and nurtures the Siletz Tribe's strong historical connections to this stunning section of the Oregon Coast, which I wish all Committee members could experience for themselves.

As you know, the Siletz Tribe was terminated by Congress in 1954. Siletz Tribal members worked steadily for the next 33 years, forging life-long bonds and partnerships with the Lincoln County Community, to reverse this policy and to achieve restoration of its status as a federally recognized Indian Tribe. Lincoln County supported restoration, which marked the start of a long, mutually-rewarding partnership that continues to this day.

Restoration of tribal homelands and obtaining land in trust to provide essential services and benefits to tribal members has been critical to the revitalization of the Siletz Tribe. I have watched with great pride the huge strides the Tribe has made in the 35 years since restoration in meeting the needs of its people. These activities have never negatively affected Lincoln County; in fact, I can vouch for the positive effect the Tribe's presence and growth have had on county residents and the county business community.

Acquisition of additional trust lands has been a key to this growth. The Tribe has always been proactive in discussing its plans with the County and other local governments. Lincoln County has had an intergovernmental agreement in place with the Siletz Tribe since 2005. Under that agreement, the county no longer opposes fee-to-trust applications and the Tribe makes a yearly contribution to the County to offset the loss of property tax revenues when lands are taken into trust. The County Commission and Tribal Council meet regularly to discuss issues of mutual interest. The Tribe has committed to continuing this Agreement into the future, and applying to it any land taken into trust under this proposed legislation. As partners, we have been able to accomplish a number of worthwhile projects in areas ranging from forestry to health care. The

County has been pleased to honor the tribe's heritage by conveying lands of historical and cultural significance back to Tribal ownership.

The Tribe voluntarily provides a variety of services that benefit the larger community, including a health clinic, a charter school, and law enforcement, helping to relieve the burden on the County and other local governments. The Board of County Commissioners wishes to thank the Tribe for these services, which reflect our belief that all entities, including the Federal Government, should be partners in serving a region.

Lincoln County understands the difficulty the Siletz Tribe has encountered in obtaining land into trust because of its unique historical circumstances, where all of the Tribe's fee-to-trust applications are treated under the off-reservation fee-to-trust process. This has handicapped the Tribe's efforts to meet its members' needs for housing, economic development and culture. The Siletz Tribe also has the right to exercise sovereignty over its own homeland, and the County fully supports Tribal sovereignty.

The county originally requested inclusion of opt-in, opt-out language on whether individual trust applications would be treated as on-reservation or off-reservation. We understand that issue raised larger policy questions and jeopardized support for and passage of this legislation. We are fully confident that the County's interests will continue to be acknowledged and protected by the Siletz Tribe.

I would be glad to answer any questions the Sub-Committee might have, and I welcome the opportunity to testify before the Committee.

