



BIG PINE PAIUTE TRIBE OF THE OWENS VALLEY *Big Pine Paiute Indian Reservation*

December 3, 2021

Inyo County Clerk of the Board
P.O. Drawer N
Independence, CA 93526

Subject: Inyo County Redistricting – Tribal Community of Interest

Dear Inyo County Redistricting Committee:

This letter expresses the Big Pine Paiute Tribe's desire that the Committee adopt a map that includes a district that contains all the tribal trust land of the five tribes that call Inyo County home. The creation of such a district would give Native Americans in Inyo County a unified voice in County government. We believe such a district will also improve relationships between the tribes, as well as those between the County and Native residents, which has historically been strained at times.

We are submitting this letter, to support the Bishop Tribe's request for Inyo County to adopt the new map, which is attached, of the newly proposed districts.

The Indigenous Population is Nearly a Fifth of the County Population

The 2020 Census identified 13.5% of the County population that identifies as only Native American.¹ People in Inyo County who identify as two or more races or ethnicities make up 3.6% of the population. We believe there are many tribal members in our communities who fall in this 3.6% who identify as not only Native American. Accordingly, we estimate that Native Americans make up approximately 15-17% of the County population. This is nearly one-fifth of the population. Because our communities are distinct but closely related 'communities of interest', the creation of a majority-Native American district connecting all the tribes would promote fair and effective representation for our people in County government.

The Fair Maps Act Supports the Creation of Majority Native District

The Fair Maps Act of 2019 (AB 849) specifies certain redistricting criteria that apply to Inyo County. Specifically, the Fair Maps Act prioritizes minimizing the division of "communities of interest" for purposes of fair and effective representation. This is **the most important priority** after geographical contiguity (no islands), and more important than keeping cities or census designated places together in the same district, making district boundaries easily identifiable and understandable by residents, and geographical compactness:

(c) The board shall adopt supervisorial district boundaries using the following criteria as set forth in the following order of priority:

- (1) To the extent practicable, supervisorial districts shall be geographically contiguous. Areas that meet only at the point of adjoining corners are not contiguous. Areas that are separated by water and not connected by a bridge, tunnel, or regular ferry service are not contiguous.

¹ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/inyocountycalifornia/HCN010212>

(2) To the extent practicable, the geographic integrity of any local neighborhood or local community of interest shall be respected in a manner that minimizes its division. A "community of interest" is a population that shares common social or economic interests that should be included within a single supervisorial district for purposes of its effective and fair representation. Communities of interest do not include relationship with political parties, incumbents, or political candidates.

(3) To the extent practicable, the geographic integrity of a city or census designated place shall be respected in a manner that minimizes its division.

(4) Supervisorial district boundaries should be easily identifiable and understandable by residents. To the extent practicable, supervisorial districts shall be bounded by natural and artificial barriers by streets, or by the boundaries of the county.

(5) To the extent practicable, and where it does not conflict with the preceding criteria in this subdivision, supervisorial districts shall be drawn to encourage geographical compactness in a manner that nearby areas of population are not bypassed in favor of more distant populations.

Election Code § 21500 (c) (emphasis added).

Section 2(d)(4) of Article XXI of the California Constitution defines a community of interest as (emphasis added):

A community of interest is a contiguous population which shares **common social and economic interests** that should be included within a single district for purposes of its effective and fair representation. Examples of such **shared interests** are those common to an urban area, a rural area, an industrial area, or an agricultural area, and **those common to areas in which the people share similar living standards, use the same transportation facilities, have similar work opportunities, or have access to the same media of communication relevant to the election process.** Communities of interest shall not include relationships with political parties, incumbents, or political candidates.

The five tribes of Inyo County are five distinct, but in significant respects closely related, communities of interest. This is especially true when it comes to matters of County governance. For example, the County Sheriff has concurrent criminal jurisdiction on all tribal trust land. The County is also the government entity that oversees the implementation and compliance with the Long Term Water Agreement, serving on the Standing Committee and sharing responsibility for ensuring LADWP complies with its obligations. The Native American residents of Inyo County should have a voice in county government when it comes to these matters.

Areas of Cultural Significance

Our proposed map, and specifically the proposed 3rd District that includes all tribal trust land, is distinct from other maps that have been proposed in a number of significant ways that are important to our Tribe, and, we believe, to the larger Native Community in the County on the whole. The proposed 3rd District includes:

- All tribal trust land in the County;
- Manzanar, a space where Japanese Americans and Native Americans share parallel histories of displacement and forced relocation;
- Many areas of cultural significance to Nüümü (Paiute), Newe (Shoshone), and Timbisha People, including:
 - The Volcanic Tablelands, an area of spiritual significance containing many petroglyphs;
 - Other areas containing petroglyphs;

- The White Mountains and Inyo Mountains, where our people have hunted and gathered Pine Nuts for thousands of years;
- Winnedumah, the 80-foot stone monument east of Independence that is prominent in our traditional stories;
- The Alabama Hills, an area of spiritual significance;
- The Owens Dry Lake, historically the primary source of life, dwelling locations, and ceremony locations at the southern end of the valley; in the past century it has become one of the largest sources of particulate matter (PM10) in the United States and is a lasting reminder of the history of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power in the valley and the impact of their water diversions and pumping on our people;
- Conglomerate Mesa, an area of spiritual significance.

Our people have been stewards of Payhuunadü; 'the land of flowing water' (the Owens Valley) for thousands of years, and putting these areas of cultural and spiritual significance within the bounds of a majority-Native American District will aid our people in advocating for their continued protection from within County Government.

For the reasons above, we respectfully support the Bishop Tribe's request and submit the Big Pine Paiute Tribe of the Owens Valley's request that the Inyo County Redistricting Committee adopt the proposed map that Bishop Tribe has submitted, or one that is substantially similar.

Sincerely,



Leaux Stewart, Tribal Chairperson
Big Pine Paiute Tribe of the Owens Valley

Cc: Inyo County Board of Supervisors

