

119TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 2160

To reaffirm and clarify the Federal relationships of the Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians of Michigan as a federally recognized Indian Tribe, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

JUNE 25 (legislative day, JUNE 24), 2025

Mr. PETERS (for himself and Ms. SLOTKIN) introduced the following bill;
which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Indian Affairs

A BILL

To reaffirm and clarify the Federal relationships of the Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians of Michigan as a federally recognized Indian Tribe, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Grand River Bands
5 of Ottawa Indians Restoration Act of 2025”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress finds that—

1 (1) the Tribe consists of the 19 bands of Indi-
 2 ans who occupied territory in what is now west
 3 Michigan, including the counties of Kent, Ottawa,
 4 Muskegon, Newaygo, and Oceana;

5 (2) the Tribe consists of descendants of, and
 6 political successors to, signatories of the 1821 Trea-
 7 ty of Chicago (7 Stat. 218), the 1836 Treaty of
 8 Washington (7 Stat. 491), and the 1855 Treaty of
 9 Detroit (11 Stat. 621);

10 (3) in 1994, the Little Traverse Bay Bands of
 11 Odawa Indians and the Little River Band of Ottawa
 12 Indians Act (Public Law 103–324; 108 Stat. 2156)
 13 recognized 2 Michigan Ottawa Indian Tribes whose
 14 histories are virtually identical to that of the Grand
 15 River Bands, the Little River Band of Ottawa Indi-
 16 ans, and the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa
 17 Indians;

18 (4) the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Morris
 19 Thompson, and Congress, in the Little Traverse Bay
 20 Bands of Odawa Indians and the Little River Band
 21 of Ottawa Indians Act (Public Law 103–324; 108
 22 Stat. 2156), specifically recognized that the North-
 23 ern Michigan Ottawa Association and the Grand
 24 River Bands Descendant’s Committee, whose mem-
 25 bership included the Grand River Bands, were func-

1 tioning as or at least are accepted as Tribal political
2 entities by the Minneapolis Area and Great Lakes
3 Agency;

4 (5) the State of Michigan has acknowledged the
5 Tribe as a State historic Indian Tribe that, as of
6 2025, continues to exist as a Tribal entity;

7 (6) in 1997, the Michigan Indian Land Claims
8 Settlement Act (Public Law 105–143; 111 Stat.
9 2652) reserved a percentage of the funds appro-
10 priated for payment of land claims to “newly recog-
11 nized or reaffirmed tribes described in section 110”,
12 in which section 110 of that Act (111 Stat. 2663)
13 states that eligible non-recognized Indian Tribes are
14 those—

15 (A) that are a signatory to the 1836 Trea-
16 ty of Washington (7 Stat. 491) or the 1855
17 Treaty of Detroit (11 Stat. 621);

18 (B) whose members are predominately
19 Chippewa and Ottawa; and

20 (C) that file a documented petition by De-
21 cember 15, 2000;

22 (7) as of the date of enactment of this Act, the
23 Tribe is the only unrecognized Michigan Indian
24 Tribe that met the requirements of section 110 of

1 the Michigan Indian Land Claims Settlement Act
2 (Public Law 105–143; 111 Stat. 2663);

3 (8) the Tribe was instrumental in the filing of
4 the original land claim;

5 (9) the Tribe filed a fully documented petition
6 with the Bureau of Indian Affairs on December 8,
7 2000, and thus met the filing deadline described in
8 section 110(a) of the Michigan Indian Land Claims
9 Settlement Act (Public Law 105–143; 111 Stat.
10 2663);

11 (10) after the Tribe filed its petition in 2000,
12 the Director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs did not
13 issue a technical assistance letter until 2005, to
14 which the Tribe responded fully in 2006, but still
15 has not been recognized;

16 (11) the Director of the Bureau of Indian Af-
17 fairs did not meet their legal requirement under the
18 Michigan Indian Land Claims Settlement Act (Pub-
19 lic Law 105–143; 111 Stat. 2652) to recognize the
20 Tribe, and the Tribe is still in the recognition proc-
21 ess almost 26 years later;

22 (12) the Tribe met all of the criteria for dis-
23 tribution of the judgment funds reserved for an un-
24 recognized Indian Tribe under section 110 of the
25 Michigan Indian Land Claims Settlement Act (Pub-

1 lic Law 105–143; 111 Stat. 2663), but the Tribal
2 funds reverted back to the Treasury, which was a
3 gross miscarriage of justice because the Tribe was a
4 full participant in the claims litigation before the In-
5 dian Claims Commission that gave rise to the judg-
6 ment award;

7 (13) for every year that the Director of the Bu-
8 reau of Indian Affairs does not act on the Tribe’s
9 petition, the Tribe is unable to meet any needs for
10 its members for social services, education, housing,
11 and elder care;

12 (14) the Tribe filed for reorganization of its ex-
13 isting Tribal governments in 1935 under the Act of
14 June 18, 1934 (48 Stat. 984, chapter 576; 25
15 U.S.C. 5101 et seq.) (commonly known as the “In-
16 dian Reorganization Act”);

17 (15) Federal agents who visited the Tribe, in-
18 cluding Commissioner of Indian Affairs John Collier,
19 attested to the continued social and political exist-
20 ence of the Tribe and concluded that the Tribe was
21 eligible for reorganization but, due to a lack of Fed-
22 eral appropriations to implement the Act of June
23 18, 1934 (48 Stat. 984, chapter 576; 25 U.S.C.
24 5101 et seq.) (commonly known as the “Indian Re-

1 organization Act”), the Tribe was denied the oppor-
2 tunity to reorganize;

3 (16) in 1939, agents of the Federal Govern-
4 ment made an administrative decision not to provide
5 services or extend the benefits of the Act of June 18,
6 1934 (48 Stat. 984, chapter 576; 25 U.S.C. 5101 et
7 seq.) (commonly known as the “Indian Reorganiza-
8 tion Act”) to any Indian Tribes in Michigan’s lower
9 peninsula;

10 (17) in spite of such denial, the Tribe continued
11 their political and social existence with a viable Trib-
12 al government;

13 (18) the Tribe, along with other Michigan
14 Odawa/Ottawa groups, including the Little Traverse
15 Bay Bands of Odawa Indians, the Grand Traverse
16 Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, and the Lit-
17 tle River Band of Ottawa Indians, formed the
18 Northern Michigan Ottawa Association in 1948,
19 which subsequently pursued a successful land claim
20 with the Indian Claims Commission;

21 (19) between 1948 and 1975, the Tribe carried
22 out many of its governmental functions through the
23 Northern Michigan Ottawa Association, while retain-
24 ing individual Tribal control over local decisions; and

1 (20) the Federal Government, the government
2 of the State of Michigan, and local governments
3 have had continuous dealings with the recognized
4 political leaders of the Tribe from 1821 to present.

5 **SEC. 3. DEFINITIONS.**

6 In this Act:

7 (1) MEMBER.—The term “member” means an
8 individual who is enrolled in the Tribe pursuant to
9 section 7.

10 (2) SECRETARY.—The term “Secretary” means
11 the Secretary of the Interior.

12 (3) TRIBE.—The term “Tribe” means the
13 Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians of Michigan.

14 **SEC. 4. FEDERAL RECOGNITION.**

15 (a) IN GENERAL.—Federal recognition of the Tribe
16 is hereby affirmed.

17 (b) EFFECT OF FEDERAL LAWS.—Except as other-
18 wise provided in this Act, all Federal laws (including regu-
19 lations) of general application to Indians and Indian
20 Tribes, including the Act of June 18, 1934 (48 Stat. 984,
21 chapter 576; 25 U.S.C. 5101 et seq.) (commonly known
22 as the “Indian Reorganization Act”), shall apply to the
23 Tribe and members.

1 **SEC. 5. FEDERAL SERVICES AND BENEFITS.**

2 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Tribe and each member shall
3 be eligible for all services and benefits provided by the
4 United States to Indians and federally recognized Indian
5 Tribes as prescribed by law, without regard to—

6 (1) the existence of a reservation for the Tribe;

7 or

8 (2) the location of the residence of any member
9 on or near an Indian reservation.

10 (b) SERVICE AREA.—For purposes of the delivery of
11 services and benefits to members, the service area of the
12 Tribe shall be Newaygo, Oceana, Kent, Muskegon, and Ot-
13 tawa Counties, Michigan.

14 **SEC. 6. REAFFIRMATION OF RIGHTS.**

15 (a) IN GENERAL.—Nothing in this Act diminishes
16 any right or privilege of the Tribe or any member that
17 existed before the date of enactment of this Act.

18 (b) CLAIMS OF TRIBE.—Except as otherwise pro-
19 vided in this Act, nothing in this Act alters or affects any
20 legal or equitable claim of the Tribe to enforce any right
21 or privilege reserved by, or granted to, the Tribe that was
22 wrongfully denied to, or taken from, the Tribe before the
23 date of enactment of this Act.

24 **SEC. 7. MEMBERSHIP ROLL.**

25 (a) IN GENERAL.—As a condition of receiving rec-
26 ognition, services, and benefits pursuant to this Act, not

1 later than 18 months after the date of enactment of this
2 Act, the Tribe shall submit to the Secretary a membership
3 roll consisting of the name of each individual enrolled in
4 the Tribe.

5 (b) DETERMINATION OF MEMBERSHIP.—The quali-
6 fications for inclusion on the membership roll of the Tribe
7 shall be determined in accordance with the governing doc-
8 uments of the Tribe.

9 (c) MAINTENANCE OF ROLL.—The Tribe shall main-
10 tain the membership roll under this section.

11 **SEC. 8. ACQUISITION OF LAND.**

12 (a) HOMELAND.—The Secretary shall—

13 (1) acquire, for the benefit of the Tribe, trust
14 title to land within Muskegon, Newaygo, or Oceana
15 Counties, Michigan; and

16 (2) accept into trust any real property located
17 in those counties for the benefit of the Tribe, if—

18 (A) conveyed or otherwise transferred to
19 the Secretary; and

20 (B) at the time of such acceptance, there
21 are not adverse legal claims on such property,
22 including outstanding liens, mortgages or taxes
23 owed.

24 (b) ADDITIONAL ACQUISITIONS; TRUST LAND.—The
25 Secretary may—

1 (1) acquire additional land for the benefit of the
2 Tribe pursuant to section 5 of the Act of June 18,
3 1934 (48 Stat. 984, chapter 576; 25 U.S.C. 5108)
4 (commonly known as the “Indian Reorganization
5 Act”); and

6 (2) take into trust, for the benefit of the Tribe,
7 any land held in fee by the Tribe, if such lands are
8 located within the boundaries of Kent and Ottawa
9 Counties, Michigan.

10 (c) DEADLINE FOR DETERMINATION.—The Sec-
11 retary shall—

12 (1) not later than 18 months after the date on
13 which the Tribe submits a request for land to be
14 taken into trust under subsection (a)(1), make a
15 final written determination; and

16 (2) immediately make that determination avail-
17 able to the Tribe.

18 (d) RESERVATION STATUS.—Any land taken into
19 trust for the benefit of the Tribe pursuant to this section
20 shall, on request of the Tribe, be considered part of the
21 reservation of the Tribe.

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