

## United States Senate

September 29, 2015

House Committee on Natural Resources  
Subcommittee on Indian, Insular and Alaska Native Affairs  
1324 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Young, Ranking Member Ruiz, and Members of the Subcommittee,

I appreciate the subcommittee holding this important hearing on an issue that matters a great deal to me: federal recognition of the Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians. Last Congress, as a member of this subcommittee, I introduced the Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians Restoration Act, and I'm proud that my friend and colleague Congressman Ryan Zinke has done the same in the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress. I was proud to introduce the companion bill this Congress with Senator Jon Tester, and I offer my full support to the legislation before the committee today.

The Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians Restoration Act of 2015, which is supported by the entire Montana Congressional delegation, the governor, the attorney general, Montana's seven federally recognized tribes, and the local communities that have Little Shell members, would end the injustice of denying the Little Shell Tribe the rights that they deserve. While the Little Shell Tribe applied for federal recognition in 1978, their struggle for the basic rights owed to them by the US government goes back much farther than that. The Tribe is a successor to the signatories of the 1863 Pembina Treaty, where they ceded a large area of land in North Dakota before coming to Montana, where they still reside today.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Commissioner of Indian Affairs, John Collier, attested to the Tribe's eligibility to receive trust land, but there weren't enough funds during the Depression to acquire this land. After their application for recognition was submitted in 1978, the Tribe received a favorable finding from the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the year 2000, stating that the Tribe satisfied the criteria for federal acknowledgment. In 2009, BIA inexplicably reversed its finding without notice and issued a final determination against Federal acknowledgment, despite not receiving any negative comments of substance against the Tribe.

While the Department of Interior this year instituted an updated process for federal recognition of Indian Tribes, Congress cannot continue to defer the authority to recognize Indian tribes to the executive branch. In fact, since 1960 Congress has recognized seventeen tribes. Given Little Shell's universal support, it's time to make them the eighteenth.

I thank the subcommittee again for their consideration of this piece of legislation, and I look forward to working together to restore the rights of the Little Shell Tribe and righting this historical wrong.

Sincerely,



STEVE DAINES  
United States Senator