



**Edwin Romero
Tribal Chairman
Barona Band of Mission Indians**

Testimony on: S. 3193, To make technical corrections to the legal description of certain land to be held in trust for the Barona Band of Mission Indians, and for other purposes. *“Barona Band of Mission Indians Land Transfer Clarification Act of 2012.”*

December 4, 2012

Good afternoon Chairman Young, Ranking Member Lujan and members of the Subcommittee. I am Edwin “Thorpe” Romero, Tribal Chairman of the Barona Band of Mission Indians in California. On behalf of our tribe, I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify today on S. 3193, a bill that would clarify the legal description of a parcel of land that was legislatively placed into trust for our tribe back in 2004.

Located in San Diego County, California, the Barona Band of Mission Indians was federally recognized in 1932 and today is made up of approximately 500 tribal members. Although our current reservation is roughly 7,000 acres, our history in the region dates back more than 10,000 years to a time when our native lands stretched from the Pacific Ocean to the dunes of the Colorado River and south to Mexico. At that time our ancestors were known as the Kumeyaay-Diegueño, and were among the original native inhabitants of the San Diego County region.

However, beginning with the Spanish invasion of 1769, continuing through the Mexican Period of 1826 to 1848, and on through the American Period, the Kumeyaay-Diegueño were forced off their ancestral lands. Nearly all of the Kumeyaay-Diegueño lands were taken into private ownership or made U.S. government holdings. In 1875, the federal government established the Capitan Grande Reservation for the native people living in the area at that time. About 40 years later in 1918, the city purchased the prime area of the Capitan Grande Reservation, where many of the families lived, to build a reservoir and the people were removed from their land.

In retrospect, this was a very critical time for our tribe. Without a homeland but with some federal monies allotted from the sale, a group of the Capitan Grande tribal members, under strong leadership, pooled their monies and purchased the Barona Ranch, which today is the Barona Indian Reservation. For many years living without

electricity and other services, our tribal members made a living through the ranch and farming. In spite of the hardships we have endured, our tribal government has always done its best to keep our people together and to provide for the needs of our tribal membership. My responsibility, along with the other six members of our tribal council, is to carry on that tradition of strong leadership and to do our part in building a solid foundation for the future generations of our tribe.

As our tribal community continues to grow, one of the key challenges in providing for the needs of our people is having the necessary space. With this in mind, the tribe has over the years intentionally sought to acquire land near or adjacent to our existing reservation whenever it became available for sale. In 2002, the tribe purchased roughly 85 acres for the purpose of tribal housing and at that time had entertained the possibility of bringing additional water onto the reservation through construction of a pipeline that would run through the parcel. In 2004 we were successful in gaining passage of federal legislation that would bring those 85 acres into federal trust status. However, in the fall of 2005 as the BIA attempted to process the trust acquisition, the County of San Diego challenged the legal description that was later determined could only be remedied through federal legislation.

Although the tribe ultimately chose not to pursue the possibility of bringing additional water onto the reservation, the fact that it was even discussed created political challenges that needed to be addressed before it was feasible to introduce a legislative remedy. As this committee well knows, water in western states is not without controversy; and if you think negotiating water access is difficult, I can tell you that negotiating access to imaginary water is even more difficult.

I want to thank Congressman Duncan Hunter, because without his leadership on this issue we may still be negotiating. He has been both a friend to the tribe and an honest broker in the stakeholder discussions that ultimately allowed us to find the common ground necessary to resolve this issue. In the end, S. 3193 represents a great success in bringing the tribe, the local community, county government, and our congressional delegation in both the House and the Senate together to find a solution.

With all of the stakeholders invested, I respectfully request that the committee move quickly to pass this bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I welcome any questions you may have.