

Re: Request for Conveyance of Muddy Ridge Excess Lands Parcel

Dear Secretary Burgum:

We write on behalf of the Wind River Inter-Tribal Council (comprised of the Eastern Shoshone Tribe and the Northern Arapaho Tribe, collectively, the "Tribes"), located on the Wind River Indian Reservation ("Reservation") in west-central, Wyoming. The purpose of this letter is to formally request conveyance of roughly 69,000 acres of land within the Reservation that the United States Bureau of Reclamation ("Reclamation") has deemed excess and no longer needed for the Riverton Reclamation Project. Accordingly, these lands must be transferred from the United States to the Tribes, pursuant to **40 U.S.C. § 523 - Excess real property located on Indian reservations.** (Pub. L. 107-217, Aug. 21, 2002, 116 Stat. 1083).

By way of background, the excess land at issue (known as part of the "Muddy Ridge" parcel) is part of the Tribes' territory and was temporarily transferred to the federal government to use for reclamation purposes, with an understanding (and subsequent statutory requirement), that these lands would be transferred back to the Tribes once this use concluded. The Tribes' cultural and ceremonial plants/medicines are found in this vicinity. The Muddy Ridge and other parcels of Reservation land were withdrawn from our territory as early as 1918, and since that time, our Tribes have consistently and successfully pursued the return of excess and unused lands from the United States.

In relation to the Muddy Ridge parcel, Reclamation has confirmed on multiple occasions throughout the years,¹ including, most recently, at a meeting held with the Tribes on February 13, 2025 (attended by Doug Linn, Senior Advisor to the Office of the State Director, BLM Wyoming State Office), that these lands were determined to be in excess to the needs of the federal government. Because the Muddy Ridge parcel is located within Reservation boundaries, 40

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U.S.C. § 523 mandates the transfer of this land back to the Tribes. Given this clear statutory requirement, we expect the transfer of this land to take place without delay.

As stated, the Muddy Ridge parcel - similar to other parcels of Reservation land withdrawn for purposes of the Riverton Reclamation Project - is administered by Reclamation and not the Bureau of Indian Affairs ("BIA"); therefore, a separate process is required for transfer of these excess lands.² Specifically, the BIA Division of Real Estate Services ("DRES") is required to communicate Tribal interest in the excess lands to the United States General Services Administration ("GSA"), following a determination of Section 523 eligibility. As such, we ask that the BIA coordinate with the GSA as quickly as possible to convey our Tribes' interest

¹ This has been confirmed through official documentation from Reclamation, dated as early as 1943, and as recently as 2022.

in the Muddy Ridge Parcel and proceed with preparation and submission of the corresponding transfer request package. An accompanying Resolution of the Wind River Inter-Tribal Council is enclosed for reference to begin the BIA's required coordination with the GSA. Respective letters of interest from the Eastern Shoshone Tribe and the Northern Arapaho Tribe will be sent separately.

We stand ready to work with the Department's agencies and officials to efficiently complete this statutorily mandated land transfer process. Please do not hesitate to contact us if further information is needed.

² See <https://www.bia.gov/policy-fonns/handbooks/52-iam-16-h-excess-real-property-transfers-handbook>; at Section 3.2, p. 12.