

Date: 6/20/2024

For Immediate Release

Winnebago Tribe News Release



The Winnebago Land Transfer Act to be Signed into Law

WINNEBAGO, NE – Today marks a historical day for the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska as the United States Senate just approved the Winnebago Land Transfer Act, a bill to restore approximately 1,600 acres of land to the Tribe. The bill now goes to the White House where President Biden will soon sign the bill into law.

“This is a truly historic moment for the Winnebago Tribe as lands that were taken from us over 50 years ago will soon be restored to the Tribe,” said Winnebago Chairwoman Victoria Kitcheyan. “Our ancestors, including the late Louis LaRose, fought tirelessly to secure and protect our homelands. We are honored to carry on their work and help send this bill to the President in their honor,” Chairwoman Kitcheyan continued.

History

In the mid-1800s, the Winnebago people were forcibly removed by the United States Army from Wisconsin to Minnesota, Iowa, South Dakota, and finally in 1865, to the Winnebago Indian Reservation in Nebraska and Iowa. The 1865 treaty promised that land was “set apart for the occupation and future home of the Winnebago Indians, forever....”

In 1970, when the late James “Louis” LaRose was serving as the Winnebago Chairman, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (“Army Corps”) improperly and illegally condemned approximately 1,600 acres of the reservation in Iowa and Nebraska for a proposed recreation project, a project that never came to fruition.

The Tribe turned to the court system to defend its lands but initially lost in both the Nebraska and Iowa district courts. The Tribe appealed those decisions with the 8th Circuit court, and eventually, the court found both the Nebraska and Iowa condemnations were illegal. Despite these victories, the court did not have the authority to return the Iowa lands to the Winnebago people due to a technicality.

Congressional Action

After exhausting its remedies in the court system, the Tribe began working with Congress to restore the 1,600 acres taken by the Army Corps. This effort resulted in the development of the Winnebago Land Transfer Act, which was first introduced in September 2017. Since then, the Tribe has made numerous DC advocacy trips to urge Congress to approve the bill. However, for reasons beyond the Tribe’s control, previous bills never moved through the legislative process.

The bill that will be signed by President Biden, H.R. 1240, was introduced by Representative Randy Feenstra of Iowa and cosponsored by the entire Nebraska and Iowa Congressional Delegations as well as Representative Sharice Davids — a member of the Winnebago’s sister tribe, the Ho-Chunk Nation. After being approved by the House Committee on Natural Resources, the House of Representatives passed the bill by voice vote on February 5, 2024.

Over in the Senate, Senator Deb Fischer (R-NE), along with Senators Pete Ricketts (R-NE), Chuck Grassley (R-IA), and Joni Ernst (R-IA), introduced an identical bill, S. 3230. The Senate Committee on Indian Affairs held a hearing on the bill, then subsequently approved the House version of the bill by unanimous consent. The full Senate then approved the bill by unanimous consent on June 20, 2024 sending it to the President for his signature.

Next Steps

President Biden will soon sign the bill into law. Subsequently, the Tribe will meet with the Department of the Interior to discuss the logistics of transferring the land, which will be held in trust for the Tribe. Once officially restored to the Tribe, the Winnebago Wildlife and Parks Department will be responsible for managing this land. The Tribe plans to use the land for conservation and is committed to improving the overall management of the land.

The Winnebago Tribal Council is planning to hold a recognition ceremony and a blessing at a site on the restored lands. Details to be announced.

Thank You

The Winnebago people have waited for more than 50 years to have the lands that were wrongfully seized by the Army Corps restored to the Tribe. The enactment of the Winnebago Land Transfer Act is a testament to the Winnebago peoples’ persistence, determination, and commitment to being a good neighbor. “The Tribal Council would like to thank the Winnebago people for entrusting us to fight for this land that is forever ours,” said Chairwoman Kitcheyan.

The Tribe will be forever grateful to Representative Randy Feenstra, Senator Deb Fischer, Senator Chuck Grassley, Senator Pete Ricketts, Senator Joni Ernst, Representative Sharice Davids, Representative Mike Flood, Representative Zach Nunn, Representative Adrian Smith, Representative Mariannette Miller-Meeks, Representative Don Bacon, Representative Ashley Hinson, the House Committee on Natural Resources, the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, and the Department of the Interior for *aikiruti*, standing arm in arm, with the Winnebago through this momentous effort.

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For more information on the Winnebago Tribe and the Winnebago Land Transfer Act

<https://winnebagotribe.com/wtn-land-transfer-act/>

About the Winnebago Tribe

The Winnebago Tribe / Hocak Nisoc Haci [aka People of the Big Voice] is a Federally recognized tribe organized under the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act. As a governmental body for the people, the nine (9) member Tribal Council directs actions of the Tribal organization. Our constitution was established in 1936, amended in 1968, with various updates passed into law by the people since. Our people are originally from the Ouisconsin and western Great Lakes region. Our language is a Siouxan dialect unique to our people and spoken mainly during ceremonial activities. Our people belong to 12 unique clans, each with specific rights and responsibilities. With approximately 7500 members globally, the headquarters of the tribe are in Winnebago, NE. A sovereign race since time immemorial, the Winnebago people vigorously uphold our rights of self-determination, sharing robust diplomatic relationships with both Inter-tribal and State and Federal agencies. For more information visit: www.winnebagoTribe.com

Contact:

Garan Coons

Winnebago Tribe Communications Officer

402-878-2272 ext. 4000

Email: garan.coons@winnebagoTribe.com