



HOUSE BILL FOR FEDERAL RECOGNITION OF THE MONO LAKE KUTZADIKAA<sup>a</sup> TRIBE INTRODUCED  
BY CONGRESSMAN PAUL COOK

From the MONO LAKE KUTZADIKAA Tribal Council  
September 14, 2020

Congressman Paul Cook, who represents California's 8<sup>th</sup> District, is introducing a new bill to the House of Representatives, establishing Federal Recognition for the Mono Lake Kutzadika<sup>a</sup> Tribe.

The Mono Lake Kutzadika<sup>a</sup> have existed since time immemorial in the Mono Basin of east-central California. Though first encountered in 1825 by early trappers in the area, they were not officially documented by the Federal Government until June 1852. The tribe has sought federal recognition for decades.

Believing that recognition might lead to land for the Tribe, the Tribe submitted a letter of "Intent to Petition for Recognition" in 1976 to the Office of Federal Acknowledgement and began working on a petition for recognition, an effort that continues today.

In 1977, the Tribe adopted formal Articles of Association to define its enrollment criteria and election of Tribal leaders. That same year, the Tribe petitioned and was recognized by the BIA as an "*adult Indian community of one-half degree of Indian blood*" under the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 (25 U.S.C. 5101 et seq).

However, the Bureau of Indian Affairs made clear that this status did not give Federal recognition to the Tribe. The status did solidify that Tribal members were recognized as "*Indians*" and entitled to Federal benefits and services.

The Tribe has remained a political force and the protector of Mono Lake, Kutzapaa', which is at the center of the Tribe's culture and history and provided its ancestors with a critical food source. On March 19, 1983, Jessie Durant, a revered Tribal elder, testified before the Subcommittee on Public Lands and National Parks on the importance of Mono Lake to the

Mono Lake people and Culture. Mono Lake is now known as the Mono Lake Tufa State Natural Reserve thanks in large part to the efforts of the Tribe and the Mono Lake Foundation.

The Federal agencies that now manage Federal lands which are the ancestral lands of the Tribe, acknowledge that the Kutzadika<sup>a</sup> members are the aboriginal people of the Mono Basin. Small examples: in protecting the Tribe's "Indian" cemetery located in part on Forest Service lands; the Forest Service specifically dedicated the trees in "honor of the Mono Lake Kutzadika<sup>a</sup> Elders who have historically harvested the Piaga from the area known as "Piaga Park"; the National Park Service issued a directive to all Yosemite Entrance Station personnel the members of the Tribe were to be granted entrance to the Yosemite National Park at no cost; Federal, State and County agencies consult with the Tribe on proposed environmental projects, land management planning and repatriation of Tribal funerary objects and artifacts under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act when encountered on Federal, State and County lands; the Tribe partnered with the Mono County Board of Supervisors to complete the Mono Lake Indian and Lee Vining Community Center through a State Community Development Block Grant; and recognized Indigenous Day in October 2020.

The Tribe established the "Mono Lake/Yosemite Traditional Walk", which is the revitalization of the walk our ancestors took from Mono Lake to Yosemite in order to trade with family and neighboring tribes.

The Mono Lake Kutzadika<sup>a</sup> Tribe has been enduring the process of recognition for decades. As Tribal Chairman, Charlotte Lange, stated, "It saddens my heart to hear our elder's comment, 'I won't see it in my life time.'" Unfortunately, we have lost many of our tribal elders this past year. My grandfather fought for the tribe and his strength keeps my dedication to follow in his path. One day I can feel our people who passed on to the other side feel complete in all their efforts in which the Tribal Council is doing today for their loved ones. We promise to our elder's and our relatives we will continue this process to build our community and keep applying for recognition and perhaps one day the government titles us "*Federally Recognized Indians*" for our people to come home."

This congressional process started with Congressman Cook and his staff during a visit to our community in October 2019. John Sobel and Jocelyn Boseman, Senior Staff for Congressman Paul Cook's Office, have been instrumental in moving the process along. Dorothy Alther, California Indian Legal Service, has committed her hard work and support for many years. The Mono Lake Kutzadika<sup>a</sup> Tribe would like to express our appreciation and gratitude to all of those mentioned above for their efforts to present this bill for Federal Recognition.