

**Senate Indian Affairs – [Bill Markup](#)**  
**1 May 2024**

Intro: Bill markup by Senate Indian Affairs, specific notes below concern agriculture and forestry-related issues with Tribes and the legislation pending before the committee.

Highlights:

- Senator Tina Smith (D-MN) discussed the legislation that would return thousands of acres of forest land to the Leech Lake Tribe of Minnesota.
- [S. 616 \(118\)](#), the "Leech Lake Reservation Restoration Technical Corrections Act of 2023"

Senator Tina Smith (D-MN) explained the motivation behind the S. 616, The Leech Lake Reservation Restoration Amendment Act, She noted that Congress passed a law in 2020 allowing for the transfer of land from the Chippewa National Forests in northern Minnesota Cass County to trust status for the Leech Lake Band. This covered thousands of acres taken from the band's reservation through secretarial transfer decades ago, with the 2020 legislation passed in hopes of reconciling those losses. However in recent years, the Department of Interior reviewed records in hopes of implementing that 2020 legislation and discovered an additional and substantial amount of acreage wrongly taken from the Tribe, thus this latest bill to return it.

Senator Smith noted she filed an amendment to the bill which changes the short title it makes two technical corrections:

- it clarifies the types of parcels that can be transferred into trust and strikes the final agency action provision.
- "These changes have been made with the consent of Leech Lake and also with a consultation with relevant federal agencies and all feedback has been incorporated with the consent of the Tribe."

Senator Lisa Murkowski, co-Chair of the Committee, noted that the legislation was necessary "So we can report it Leech Lake are the rightful owners of these National Forest System lands that were sold off by the federal government without their consent. So I think it's time for the Forest Service to do the right thing here return the lands to the tribe. I'm hopeful that we can work together to write some other wrongs like this one that had been perpetrated by the federal government in other parts of the country that landless native communities in southeast Alaska comes to mind."