

December 11, 2020

Dear Chair Hall and Members of the Nevada County Board of Supervisors:

I write this letter to commend the Nevada County Board of Supervisors in proposing to support the restoration of Federal recognition to the Nevada City Rancheria Nisenan Tribe. I am an anthropologist at the University of Pennsylvania, and I study Federally terminated and unrecognized tribes in the United States. I have spearheaded the California Indian Terminated Tribes Project to address the historical injustices experienced by terminated and unrecognized tribal communities, especially in northeastern California. The Nevada City Rancheria Nisenan Tribe is one such previously acknowledged, California Native American Tribe that has been denied its rightful status as a Federally recognized tribe due to capricious changes in Federal Indian policy.

Nevada County has long demonstrated an interest in the welfare of the Native American community that survived the Gold Rush near Nevada City. Due in large measure to activism by Nevada County citizens, on May 6, 1913, President Woodrow Wilson issued Executive Order 1772, which established a 75.48-acre reservation known as the Nevada City Rancheria. However, by the mid-twentieth century, Federal Indian policy swung toward a goal of outright assimilation, rather than acknowledgment of treaty rights or other trust obligations to Indian tribes. California became the experimental grounds for these detrimental policies. In 1958, Congress enacted the California Rancheria Termination Act to remove forty-one rancherias from trust status, including the Nevada City Rancheria. In 1964, the Nevada City Rancheria was sold at auction, and the Tribe has since struggled to regain its rightful status as a Federally recognized tribe.

In the years since, the policy of Indian termination has been entirely discredited. In 1970, President Richard M. Nixon called for an end to termination policies and for Indian governments to have the right of self-determination. In 1988, Congress repudiated and rejected "any policy of unilateral termination of Federal relations with any Indian nation" (25 U.S.C. 5301(f)). In 1997, the Federal Advisory Council on California Indian Policy urged Congress to "enact comprehensive legislation establishing a process for the expedited restoration of the remaining terminated California tribes[.]" These calls remain unheard, and restoration of Federal recognition to the tribes whose lands were sold by the California Rancheria Termination Act is not automatic.

The resolution contemplated by Nevada County is a vital and necessary first step for the Nevada City Rancheria Nisenan Tribe to achieve the restoration of Federal recognition; without support from a county, it is exceedingly difficult for a tribe to be restored. In supporting the Tribe, the County will demonstrate, in a concrete and tangible way, its commitment to addressing a great historical wrong. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at danielsb@sas.upenn.edu or (650) 888-9215.

Sincerely,



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Director of Research and Programs
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