

**TESTIMONY OF
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CHUGACH REGIONAL RESOURCES COMMISSION
HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT AND RELATED AGENCIES
ON THE FY2014 BUDGET
APRIL, 2013**

As Executive Director of the Chugach Regional Resources Commission (“CRRC”), located in Alaska, I am pleased to submit this testimony reflecting the needs, concerns and requests of CRRC regarding the proposed FY 2014 Budget. As is everyone, we are aware of the ongoing economic problems in the United States, and the growing concern over the federal deficit. While the government is trimming its spending, the federal government must still fulfill its legal and contractual spending obligations. The Bureau of Indian Affairs not only has a legal and contractual obligation to provide funding for the CRRC, but the CRRC is able to translate this funding into real economic opportunity for those living in the small Alaska Native villages located in Prince William Sound and Lower Cook Inlet.

We have reviewed the President’s FY2014 Budget and while we recognize and can appreciate the economic challenges set before you, we urge you to work together to pass an appropriations bill before the fiscal year end on September 30, 2013. The CRRC has yet to receive any of its FY2013 funding from the Bureau of Indian Affairs. We are a small Alaska Native nonprofit organization and as such, do not have the capital to carry the projects in the villages for an extended period of time. In order to keep the projects running, we had to obtain a \$100,000 line of credit from the bank. Given the time taken to pass a budget and the Department of Interior’s change to an electronic financial reporting system, the operations of CRRC projects and those of other Tribal organizations have been placed in jeopardy. The process currently in place that allows this amount of time to pass before getting the much needed funding to the Tribes must be improved.

We describe first, our specific requests and recommendations on the budget, and then why these are so important to us and the Alaska Native Villages and their members who we serve.

1. Budget Requests and Recommendations.

CRRC funding. We are once again very pleased that the BIA has recognized the importance of natural resource funding for CRRC and has requested \$350,000 for CRRC in FY 2014 as part of the Trust-Natural Resources program, Tribal Management/Development subactivity. In its FY 2014 Budget Justification, the BIA recognized CRRC’s role in developing the capabilities of its member Alaska Native Villages to better facilitate their active participation in resource use and allocation issues in Alaska. We urge the Subcommittee to include CRRC funding as proposed by the BIA.

BIA Trust-Natural Resources Management. We support the President’s overall proposal to increase the BIA’s Trust – Natural Resources Management programs, particularly the

increases to Fish, Wildlife and Parks, and funding for projects that engage youth in the natural sciences. We urge the Subcommittee to support this funding and include it in the final bill.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife. The President is proposing a significant increase to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service budget. Currently, Tribes in Alaska manage migratory birds through the Alaska Migratory Bird Co-Management Council (AMBCC), a regulatory body comprised of state, federal and Native representatives who develop regulations for the spring-summer harvest of migratory birds. The funding for this management program is provided and administered by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service; however, this funding is provided by decision of the Region 7 Regional Director on an annual basis and is financially inadequate to address all of the migratory bird issues currently being addressed by the AMBCC. We are requesting that \$1 million of the proposed increase to the USFWS budget be designated to the Alaska Migratory Bird Co-Management Council.

Contract Support Costs. In regards to Contract Support Costs, the Administration is proposing to cap FY2014 CSC payments to each Tribe. This action would reverse Supreme Court victories that directed the United States to honor fully Indian Self-Determination Act contracts and agreements. We do not support this proposed cap, nor do we support any amendments to the Indian Self-Determination through the appropriations process without any advance consultation with Indian and Alaska Native Tribes.

2. **Justification for CRRC's Budget Requests**

The importance of adequate funding for these programs is based on the following.

Chugach Regional Resource Commission History and Purpose. CRRC is a non-profit coalition of Alaska Native Villages, organized in 1987 by the seven Native Villages located in Prince William Sound and Lower Cook Inlet in South-central Alaska: Tatitlek Village IRA Council, Chenega IRA Council, Port Graham Village Council, Nanwalek IRA Council, Native Village of Eyak, Qutekcak Native Tribe, and Valdez Native Tribe. CRRC was created to address environmental and natural resources issues and to develop culturally-sensitive economic projects at the community level to support the sustainable development of the region's natural resources. The Native Villages' action to create a separate entity demonstrates the level of concern and importance they hold for environmental and natural resource management and protection – the creation of CRRC ensured that natural resource and environmental issues received sufficient attention and focused funding. The BIA, in its FY Budget Justification, summarizes CRRC's work, stating

Initially, the emphasis of the CRRC natural resource program was on the development of fisheries projects that would provide either an economic base for a village or create economic opportunities for tribal members. In FY 1996, CRRC initiated a natural resource management program with the objective of establishing natural resource management capabilities in the villages to facilitate their active participation in resource use and allocation issues that affect the tribes and their members. The success of these programs from both an economic and a social standpoint have made them an integral part of overall tribal development.

Through its many important programs, CRRC has provided employment for up to 35 Native people in the Chugach Region annually – an area that faces high levels of unemployment – through programs that conserve and restore our natural resources.

An investment in CRRC has been translated into real economic opportunities, savings and community investments that have a great impact on the Chugach region. Our employees are able to earn a living to support their families, thereby removing them from the rolls of people needing state and federal support. In turn, they are able to reinvest in the community, supporting the employment and opportunities of other families. Our programs, as well, support future economic and commercial opportunities for the region – protecting and developing our shellfish and other natural resources.

Programs. CRRC has leveraged its \$350,000 from BIA into almost \$2 million annually to support its several community-based programs. Specifically, the \$350,000 base funding provided through BIA appropriation has allowed CRRC to maintain core administrative operations, and seek specific projects funding from other sources such as the Administration for Native Americans, the State of Alaska, Bureau of Indian Affairs, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the U.S. Department of Education, the *Exxon Valdez* Oil Spill Trustee Council, the North Pacific Research Board and various foundations. This diverse funding pool has enabled CRRC to develop and operate several important programs that provide vital services, valuable products, and necessary employment and commercial opportunities. These programs include:

Alutiiq Pride Shellfish Hatchery. The Alutiiq Pride Shellfish Hatchery is the only shellfish hatchery in the State of Alaska. The 20,000 square foot shellfish hatchery is located in Seward, Alaska, and houses shellfish seed, brood stock and algae production facilities. Alutiiq Pride is undertaking a hatchery nursery operation, as well as grow-out operation research to adapt mariculture techniques for the Alaskan Shellfish industry. The Hatchery is also conducting scientific research on blue and red king crab as part of a larger federally-sponsored program. Alutiiq Pride has already been successful in culturing geoduck, oyster, littleneck clam, and razor clam species and is currently working on sea cucumbers. This research has the potential to dramatically increase commercial opportunities for the region in the future. The activities of Alutiiq Pride are especially important for this region considering it is the only shellfish hatchery in the state, and therefore the only organization in Alaska that can carry out this research and production.

Natural resource curriculum development. Partnering with the University of Alaska, Fairbanks, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, CRRC has developed and implemented a model curriculum in natural resource management for Alaska Native students. This curriculum integrates traditional knowledge with Western science. The goal of the program is to encourage more Native students to pursue careers in the sciences. In addition, we are working with the Native American Fish & Wildlife Society and Tribes across the country (including Alaska) to develop a university level textbook to accompany these courses.

In addition, we have completed a K-12 Science Curriculum for Alaska students that integrates Indigenous knowledge with western science. This curriculum is being piloted in various villages in Alaska and a thorough evaluation process will ensure its success and mobility to other schools in Alaska.

Alaska Migratory Bird Co-Management Council. CRRC is a member of the Council responsible for setting regulations governing the spring harvest of migratory birds for Alaska Natives, as well as conducting harvest surveys and various research projects on migratory birds of conservation concern. Our participation in this state-wide body ensures the legal harvest of migratory birds by Indigenous subsistence hunters in the Chugach Region.

Statewide Subsistence Halibut Working Group. CRRC participates in this working group, ensuring the halibut resources are secured for subsistence purposes, and to conduct harvest surveys in the Chugach Region.

Conclusion

We urge Congress to sustain the \$350,000 included in the BIA's FY 2013 budget for CRRC. We further ask the Committee to support the President's requests for increased funding for the BIA's Trust Natural Resources Management and to for Fish and Wildlife Service, but to designate \$1 million of the proposed increase to the USFWS budget to the Alaska Migratory Bird Co-Management Council. We also urge Congress to reject the Administration's proposal to cap contract support costs.

We appreciate the opportunity to submit this important testimony.