



Cowlitz Indian Tribe

THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES
HEARING ON FUNDING FOR AMERICAN INDIAN AND ALASKA NATIVE PROGRAMS

Testimony Presented by the Hon. Taylor Aalvik, Cowlitz Tribal Council

April 8, 2014

Chairman Calvert, Ranking Member Moran, distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, including our own Congresswoman Jaime Herrera Beutler, I want to thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to testify in support of funding for certain programs for American Indians and Alaska Native. They include programs under the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Indian Health Service, Environmental Protection Agency, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Secretary of Interior's Office, and the National Park Service. My name is Taylor Aalvik. I have served on the Cowlitz Indian Tribal Council since 2005, and I also serve as Director of our Natural Resources Department. I serve on a variety of other boards and committees (both tribal and non-tribal) in connection to our community's well-being.

BACKGROUND

Since the Cowlitz Indian Tribe was restored to federal recognition in 2002, we have strived to develop services to protect and promote the well-being of our members. We have approximately 3,800 tribal members with the majority residing within or close to our traditional homelands in southwestern Washington State. Although we still have no reservation, our leaders continue to move forward the vision to provide for its membership. We have established several Departments and Programs since 2002. The work of this Subcommittee is critical in our ability to continue to serve for our memberships' needs.

Federal grant programs are particularly critical to our well-being because without a reservation, we have no trust land on which to conduct economic development to fund governmental services. Making our situation even more difficult, we are ineligible for the wide variety of federal grant programs that are tied to reservation lands. As a result, the federal grant programs discussed in this testimony are of even more critical importance to the Cowlitz Indian Tribe.

Despite the fact that we are landless, we do what we can to provide essential services to our members, and in so doing we believe we also directly and indirectly benefit surrounding communities. We also participate extensively at the local, state, and federal level through established and emerging partnerships across a broad range of programs and initiatives. We believe that it is important to not only provide for our memberships' well-being, but work to be a positive and contributing influence with our neighbors. Planning, supporting, and implementing activities that restore and protect our economies, natural surroundings, and future stability is important to us. The Cowlitz Tribal leadership is very much appreciative and dependent on the programs under this Subcommittee's jurisdiction. It would be impossible for us to be a contributing partner without your support.

THE COWLITZ TRIBE'S SEVEN PRIORITIES

The Cowlitz Indian Tribe respectfully requests that the Subcommittee:

1. *Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) "Aid to Tribal Government" Program*: Increase program funding from the \$24.614 million proposed in the President's FY15 budget to \$30 million.
2. *Indian Health Service (IHS) FY2015 Appropriations Report Congress*: Ensure IHS makes revisions to the Health Facilities Construction Priority System as directed in the FY2000 Interior Appropriations Bill.
3. *Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) "Indian General Assistance Program" (GAP)*: Support the President's FY15 budget request of \$96.4 million.
4. *U.S. Fish and Wildlife Agency's (USFWS) "Tribal Wildlife Grant Program"*: Increase proposed FY15 budget from \$4 million to \$10 million.
5. Support \$1.25 million to be directed to the Office of the Secretary of Interior's Leadership and Administration Activity for FY15 for Federal/Tribal collaborative analytical work and consultations during domestic reconsideration of the Columbia River Treaty.
6. *BIA administered tribal transportation programs*: Support the Tribal Transportation Unity Caucus's (TTUC) proposed increase for FY15.
7. *National Park Service (NPS) proposed FY2015 for "National Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act Grants"*: Increase funding from the President's \$1.657 million request to \$2 million.

1. BIA "Aid to Tribal Government" Funding Increase: The primary backbone of support for our Tribe's general operations is funded through BIA's Aid to Tribal Government program. It is an essential source of funds that supports the general operations of our Administration, Natural & Cultural Resources Department, and provides many other services critical to our membership and governance. With this core funding, we have been able to provide essential government services, employment opportunity, regional partnerships, grant programs, and to provide increased security for our membership and employees. For a Tribe that continues to struggle in obtaining our own economic base, this funding source remains critical to keep governmental operations functioning. Funding under this program does not meet all the needs of our tribe, but as we try and obtain our own economic base, it improves our Tribe's ability to oversee program implementation and allows us to deliver essential services to our members. In sum, funding for tribal administration of programs is a key element towards our ability to support tribal self-governance.

2. IHS Facilities Construction Priority System: The IHS system is significantly underfunded and an imbalance of resources has developed within the system. An example of this is the frozen

facilities construction list. We respectfully request the Subcommittee to address this underfunding and also the delivery system imbalance and require the IHS to report to Congress its revisions to the Health Facilities Construction Priority System as directed in the FY 2000 Interior Appropriations Bill. The current system was developed over 23 years ago and prioritizes construction projects on antiquated data in a completely changed health care delivery environment. Most projects would not score high enough to be funded today relative to the needs of other tribes nationally. The system is broken and unfairly prohibits tribes from accessing important facilities construction funding on an equal basis as the tribes on the current priority list. The Subcommittee should direct IHS to develop a facility construction priority system to address the unmet facility construction needs of all tribes and not just those on the current priority list. A new priority system should also incorporate the staffing needs for those Tribes that have built their own health facilities without IHS resources. The Cowlitz Tribe received its appropriation for funding its Health Systems in 2000. In November 2002 we received funding for Contract Health Services only and no funding for direct services.

3. EPA Indian General Assistance Program (GAP): GAP has been a vital program for our Tribe since federal acknowledgement. It has allowed for our ability to build capacity for the many natural resource programs and tends to the needs of our memberships health and well-being. It gave us the ability to deal with very important resources issues of the tribe such as representation on key resource management concerns in the region. It has allowed our ability (and maintain) to forge positive relationships and work with local communities to protect and restore resources. EPA heard from the tribes in past years that funding under this program was well short to meet the needs to build capacity for addressing environmental issues within their homelands. We believe that this is a key program that needs to be maintained adequately well into the future in order to protect and restore the quality of life and culture for Indian Country.

4. USFWS Tribal Wildlife Grant Program Increase: Our Tribe has been fortunate to receive two Tribal Wildlife Grants (TWG) administered by USFWS. With these grants we continue to contribute toward positive partnerships with State and Federal managers over recovery efforts of endangered Columbian White-tailed deer (CWTD) of the Lower Columbia River region. This species was one of the first to be listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in the 1970s. Since we received our TWG, our involvement has heightened awareness to the issue of recovery of this long-standing recovery concern. We brought fresh new skills and thoughtfulness as to what was needed to create a path to recovery and eventual de-listing under ESA. We are proud to be one of the primary participants that are leading CWTD towards recovery and eventual de-listing. We believe it is important that collaborative partnerships with Tribal, Federal, and State resource managers are the key to achieve success towards species recovery efforts. The TWG program provides tribes capacity and opportunity to contribute to efforts that is deeply tied to traditional and cultural life-ways. We request that funding be restored to this program so other tribes can experience the great work that can be accomplished under this program.

5. Columbia River Treaty Coordination and Technical Capacity Funding: There are 15 Columbia Basin tribes, supported by three tribal organizations of the Columbia Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, Upper Columbia United Tribes, and the Upper Snake River Tribes, who have participated in the development of a regional consensus based recommendation on the modernization of the Columbia River Treaty between the U.S. and Canada. The Columbia Basin

tribes have been key participants in the development and adoption of the U.S. Entity's regional recommendation (coordinated by the Bonneville Power Administration and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers). The Cowlitz Tribe along with other tribes, participated extensively in this effort and continues to be committed towards future improvements on how the Columbia Basin water resources are managed. The recommendation is currently being considered by the U.S. Department of State to determine next steps in working with Canada to modernize the Treaty. During this time there is a need for on-going evaluation and coordination by the Columbia Basin tribes. The tribes have very limited availability of time and funds to conduct this vital work. The Columbia Basin tribes need approximately \$1.25 million to continue to collaborate on necessary technical evaluations and assessments, as well as to consult with the U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Entity, other sovereigns, and stakeholders for FY2015.

6. BIA Administered Tribal Transportation Programs: Transportation infrastructure serving tribal communities is the most unsafe, rudimentary and under-maintained transportation network in the Country. Approximately 1,069 of 4,400 Indian Reservation Roads (IRR) Program bridges are currently rated as deficient. Cost of rehabilitating or replacing the 1,069 IRR bridges is likely to exceed \$595 million. Consistent with TTUC recommendations, we support and request for an increase in funding levels for FY15 to \$1,050,000,000 for Federal Lands Highway (FLH) Program: (A) Indian Reservation Roads under section 204 of title 23; increase funding levels for FY 15 to \$100 million for FLH program: (XX) Indian Reservation Road Bridge Program under Section 202(d)(4); and increase Highway Trust Fund funding for Tribal High Priority Projects Program for FY15 with \$35 million including \$5 million annual increases until FY2020.

7. National Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act Grants: The Cowlitz Tribe has in the past received a NAGPRA grant which helped fund a successful multi-tribe consortium to allow the re-interment of multiple ancestors at Fort Vancouver, Washington. The success of this project has created great opportunity for future multi-tribal projects to deal with long-standing concerns about repatriation issues. We would like to see continued funding of such projects, because there are still Native people and materials needing to be returned to their rightful places, as well as other projects the Cowlitz Tribe would like to undertake so we can continue to address these or similar situations as they arise.

CONCLUSION

The Cowlitz Tribe would like to re-iterate our thanks and appreciation for the opportunity to testify on the development of appropriations under this Subcommittee's jurisdiction. We look forward to working with members of Congress to continue to build upon our successes and address future needs. We urge Congress to uphold its solemn promises to tribes, even as policymakers seek to reduce the deficit through spending reductions and revenue generation. The federal government's obligations to Indian tribes reflect the federal government's general trust responsibility for tribes and are based on numerous long-standing agreements made between tribes and the United States.

The Cowlitz Indian Tribe is happy to answer any questions Congress may have about the testimony we have provided here or about the programs we implement. Thank you again for your time today.