



# Squaxin Island Tribe

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Testimony of Councilman Jim Peters, Squaxin Island Tribe  
Submitted to the House Interior, Environment and Related Agencies  
Appropriations Subcommittee  
On the Fiscal Year FY 2016 Budgets for the  
Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Indian Health Service  
March 24, 2015

Good morning distinguished members of this Subcommittee and special congratulations to Congressman Derek Kilmer, a new member from the State of Washington. On behalf of the Tribal Leadership and citizens of the Squaxin Island Tribe, it is an honor to provide our funding priorities and recommendations for the FY 2016 Budgets for the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and Indian Health Service (IHS). Squaxin Island Tribe requests that Tribal program funding throughout the Federal government be exempt from future sequestrations, rescissions and disproportionate cuts.

We support the President's FY 2016 proposal to fully fund the BIA and IHS contract support costs (CSC) as a mandatory funding line item beginning in 2017. And, for the first time ever a new proposal in the FY 2016 budget to request \$277 million, which based on the most recent analysis, will again fully fund Tribal contract support costs in 2016 which is consistent with the full funding for CSC in both FY 2014 and 2015.

## THE FY 2016 SQUAXIN ISLAND TRIBAL SPECIFIC REQUESTS:

1. \$500,000 Shellfish Management Program – BIA
2. \$2 Million to Build and Operate an Oyster and Clam Nursery for Southern Puget Sound – BIA
3. \$1.5 Million Increase for Northwest Indian Treatment Center (NWITC) Residential Program in IHS

## THE FY 2016 SQUAXIN ISLAND REGIONAL REQUESTS:

1. +\$4.7 million increase for Rights Protection
2. Fully support the budget requests from the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Washington (ATNI) and the Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board (NPAIHB) and the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission

## NATIONAL REQUESTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS – BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS

1. *Restore 2013 Sequestered Cuts (\$119 million) to Tribal Program Funding*
2. *+26% Increase for Natural Resources; \$48 million over FY 2015*
3. *+ \$139 million increase for Tribal Priority Allocations to be provided via Tribal base funding agreements*
4. *Fully fund all the provisions of the Tribal Law and Order Act of 2010*

## NATIONAL REQUESTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS – INDIAN HEALTH SERVICE

1. *Restore 2013 Sequestered Cuts (\$220 Million) to Tribal Health Services*
2. *+\$368.9 million increase for IHS Mandatory Funding (maintain current services)*
3. *+\$70.3 million support proposed increase for Purchased and Referred Care (PRC)*

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**OTHER - Provide Funding Increases - Office of Tribal Self-Governance (IHS) and the Office Self-Governance (DOI) to fully staff and support the number of Tribes entering Self-Governance**

**SQUAXIN ISLAND TRIBE BACKGROUND**

We are native people of South Puget Sound and descendants of the maritime people who lived and prospered along these shores for untold centuries. We are known as the *People of the Water* because of our strong cultural connection to the natural beauty and bounty of Puget Sound going back hundreds of years. The Squaxin Island Indian Reservation is located in southeastern Mason County, Washington and the Tribe is a signatory to the 1854 Medicine Creek Treaty. We were one of the first 30 Federally-recognized Tribes to enter into a Compact of Self-Governance with the United States.

Our treaty-designated reservation, Squaxin Island, is approximately 2.2 square miles of uninhabited forested land, surrounded by the bays and inlets of southern Puget Sound. Because the Island lacks fresh water, the Tribe has built its community on roughly 26 acres at Kamilche, Washington purchased and placed into trust. The Tribe also owns 6 acres across Pickering Passage from Squaxin Island and a plot of 36 acres on Harstine Island, across Peale Passage. The total land area including off-reservation trust lands is 1,715.46 acres. In addition, the Tribe manages roughly 500 acres of Puget Sound tidelands.

The Tribal government and our economic enterprises constitute the largest employer in Mason County with over 1,250 employees. The Tribe has a current enrollment of 1,040 and an on-reservation population of 426 living in 141 homes. Squaxin has an estimated service area population of 2,747; a growth rate of about 10%, and an unemployment rate of about 30% (according to the BIA Labor Force Report).

**TRIBAL SPECIFIC REQUESTS JUSTIFICATIONS:**

**1. \$500,000 – SHELLFISH MANAGEMENT** - The Squaxin Island Tribes faces a budget deficit to maintain and operate the shellfish program at the current level. To effectively grow and develop the program, an annual minimum increase of \$500,000 to address the shortfall and ensure the continuance of this program is requested.

Shellfish have been a mainstay for the Squaxin Island people for thousands of years and are important today for subsistence, economic and ceremonial purposes. The Tribe's right to harvest shellfish is guaranteed by the 1854 Medicine Creek Treaty. ***It is important to remember that these rights were not granted by the Federal government. They were retained by the Tribe in exchange for thousands of acres of Tribal lands.*** On December 20, 1994 U.S. District Court Judge Edward Rafeedie reaffirmed the Tribe's treaty right to naturally occurring shellfish. Rafeedie ruled that the Tribe(s) has the right to take up to 50 percent of the harvestable shellfish on Washington beaches.

The Squaxin Island Natural Resources Department (SINRD) is charged with protecting, managing and enhancing the land and water resources of the Tribe, including fish and shellfish habitat and species. In so doing, the Department works cooperatively with state and Federal environmental, natural resources and health agencies. The shellfish management work of the SINRD includes working with private tideland owners and commercial growers; surveying beaches; monitoring harvests; enhancing supply (prepping, seeding, monitoring beds) and licensing and certifying harvesters and geoduck divers. We estimate that 20% of treaty-

designated state lands and 80-90% of private tidelands are inaccessible to us due to insufficient funding.

In FY2011, the shellfish program represented only \$250,000 of the \$3.3 million budget. The result is we are unable to fully exercise our treaty rights due to lack of Federal support for shellfish.

## **2. \$2 Million - Build and Operate an Oyster and Clam Nursery for Southern Puget Sound**

In the past few years, problems with seed production have developed in the shellfish industry. These problems have been primarily caused by weather and or other environmental factors, and their effects on the industry have resulted in the lack of viable and large enough seed for growers. The Squaxin Island Tribe recognizes that it is uniquely positioned to develop a new nursery to serve the shellfish growers of the South Puget Sound region. A shellfish nursery is a capital project that is both proven and a cost effective technology that takes small oyster and clam seeds and provides a safe and controlled environment for the seeds to grow to a size that can survive integration onto a regular beach placement. We have an ideal location for a nursery because it will not be disturbed by residents or recreational boaters.

Our efforts will be an extension of another project that was created through a U.S. Department of Agriculture appropriation nearly two decades ago for the Lummi Tribe, which created an oyster and clam hatchery in Northern Puget Sound. The Lummi project over years has been very successful and they have supplied not only their own beaches but other Tribes' in their region as well. The project would benefit not just Squaxin Island Tribe. It would further improve the quality and quantity of seed and make the seed process more effective for Tribal and non-Tribal growers. The users of the facility would be the Squaxin Island Tribe, other Tribes, and non-Tribal clam and oyster businesses that have been largely unable to find sites for this type of operation.

The Tribe's project will be a joint venture with the Lummi Nation, in that Lummi would be a primary larvae supplier. The project, with the expected grow-out and expansion of the industry attributable to the improved supply of seed, would offer jobs in a depressed employment area. Once established, the venture would be fully self-sustaining through sales of the product grown and at the nursery.

This project would be a capital cost of approximately \$2 million. The Tribal in-kind contribution to the efforts would include land and shoreline and operating costs. Comparable land and shoreline, if privately owned, would be easily valued in the millions.

## **3. \$1.5 Million Increase for Northwest Indian Treatment Center (NWITC) Residential Program in IHS "D3WXbi Palil" meaning "Returning from the Dark, Deep Waters to the Light" – NWITC has not received an adequate increase in its base Indian Health Service budget since the original Congressional set-aside in 1993.**

The Squaxin Island Tribe has been operating the Northwest Indian Treatment Center (NWITC) since 1994. Ingenious in creativity, the center offers a wide variety of cultural activities and traditional/religious ceremonies, making it a natural place to heal - body, mind and soul. Fittingly, the center was given the spiritual name "D3WXbi Palil" meaning "Returning from the Dark, Deep Waters to the Light." Since the original Congressional set-aside in 1993, NWITC has not received an adequate increase in the base Indian Health Service budget. It is critical to increase the NWITC's annual base in order to sustain the current services to the Tribes of the Northwest. An increase of \$1.5 million would restore lost purchasing power and meet the

need to add mental health and psychiatric components to the treatment program through other funding agents. This increase would allow NWITC to continue its effective treatment of Native Americans.

NWITC is a residential chemical dependency treatment facility designed to serve American Indians from Tribes located in Oregon, Washington and Idaho who have chronic relapse patterns related to unresolved grief and trauma. NWITC is unique in its integration of Tribal cultural values into a therapeutic environment for co-occurring substance abuse and mental health disorders. It is a 28 bed, 30-60 day residential facility.

Welcomed and hailed by Tribal Leaders who felt the urgent need for such a facility, NWITC is centrally located in Grays Harbor County between Olympia and Aberdeen, on 2.5 acres in the small rural town of Elma, Washington. NWITC accepts patients that are referred through outpatient treatment programs, parole and probation services, hospitals, assessment centers and child and family service centers. Medical care is provided through local Indian Health Service clinics and other medical service providers. NWITC has responded with an overwhelming success rate of nearly 65 percent.

In 2011, the NWITC served 225 patients from 28 Tribes and added intensive case management and crisis support to alumni in order to continue to promote positive outcomes for clients. Despite funding challenges, NWITC has continued to develop and deliver innovative, culturally appropriate services to meet increasingly complex demands.

The Treatment Center's traditional foods and medicines program is supported through a partnership with the Northwest Indian College and is funded through grants from the Washington Health Foundation, the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, The Potlatch Fund and several Tribes. Weekly hands-on classes focus on traditional foods and medicines, including methods for growing, harvesting, processing, and preparation. Twice a month, Tribal elders, storytellers, and cultural specialists speak as part of the program. A monthly family class allows patients to share what they are learning with their loved ones. Patients gain hands-on experience by working in three on-site teaching gardens. This program serves as a model for other Tribal communities.

It is ironic that we were forced into a lifestyle and to give up our land, and that which we retained or have since regained is threatened by the promises you made and have since recanted!

Thank you.