

**TESTIMONY
OF
DONALD R. (D.R.) MICHEL
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE UPPER COLUMBIA UNITED TRIBES
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ON THE PRESIDENT'S FISCAL YEAR 2018 BUDGET
FOR INDIAN AFFAIRS
MAY 16, 2017, 2:20 P.M.**

Good afternoon Chairman Frelinghuysen and Ranking Member Lowey, and members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the Department of the Interior on the President's Budget Request for Indian Affairs for Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 to continue support of the \$16 million of base budget funding of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Trust - Natural Resources Management Account, Sub-activity - Tribal Management/Development Program. This funding requires current programmatic level funding which serves important tribal and regional interests. This work provides the foundation of any economic development originating from the healthy ecosystems of these tribal lands.

I am the Executive Director of the Upper Columbia United Tribes (UCUT), one of the robust organizations in this base BIA funding, which supports professional staff that protect and steward tribal-related natural resources management efforts across the country. These organizations provide essential and diverse services that include the Montana Bison Range, Lake Roosevelt Management in Washington State and Circle of Flight and other diverse services in many states. The Upper Columbia United Tribes (www.ucut.org) was formed in 1983 and is comprised of the Coeur d'Alene Tribe, Kootenai Tribe, Colville Confederated Tribes, Kalispel Tribe, and Spokane Tribe. Together, these tribes as the UCUT use these funds to perform essential governmental functions necessary to fulfill federal trust responsibilities concerning the protection and restoration of fish, natural resources and wildlife conservation in the Pacific Northwest.

Combined, the five UCUT member tribal governments represent over 15,000 enrolled tribal members; and retain management duties over 2 million acres of reservation lands, 14 million acres of aboriginal territories, and includes over 500 miles of waterways, 40 interior lakes, and 30 dams and reservoirs. The UCUT responsibilities encompass diverse land uses ranging from wilderness to timber, grazing, mining and industrial zones and growing urban areas.

The benefits of a healthy ecosystem provide employment and new economic opportunities in fish, wildlife, and habitat managed by these tribes yielding millions of dollars of value to the fishing, hunting, sustainable forestry, recreational, and cultural economies of Idaho, Washington, Oregon and most of the west. In eastern Washington and northern Idaho, the UCUT strive to manage and improve natural systems and resources for the benefit of all.

This aspect of the FY 2018 budget supports the most crucial function, which is to develop regional partnerships, that bring together local and regional governments to promote and assist in the beneficial use of our land and water. Specific examples of the benefits of the UCUT are:

The Health of the Columbia River Affects Everyone

The Tribal Management/Development Program assists the UCUT in the sustainable stewardship of resources in the Columbia River Basin. We have been able to create partnerships that allows for the successful management, development, and protection of Indian trust land and natural resources. These programs assist tribal landowners to optimize sustainable stewardship and use of resources, providing benefits such as revenue, jobs, and the protection of cultural, spiritual, and traditional resources. UCUT has garnered the trust and support of cities, counties, states, and U.S. members of both sides of the House and Senate in our efforts to implement cost-effective partnerships that support our management of trust resources and compliance with federal statutory mandates. The funding will target areas across the states that promote tribal cooperative management of fish and wildlife and improve access to subsistence resources on Federal lands and waters.

Regional Solutions Can Strengthen Sound Stewardship

Supporting Indian families and ensuring public safety are top priorities for the President and tribal leaders. We have helped lead the region to a consensus recommendation for the future of the Columbia River Treaty that includes a healthy ecosystem as a primary foundation of future river operations. We want to make sure that what we do for the river on the upper reaches does not harm the lower reaches – and conversely, what is done to manage the lower river does not harm the upper river region.

Increasing Resilience of Natural Resources in Indian Country

Tribes throughout the U.S. are already experiencing the impacts of a changing climate including drought, intensifying wildfires, changes in plants and animals important to subsistence and cultural practices, impacts to treaty and trust resources, and coastal erosion and sea-level rise. The UCUT seeks to leverage cost-share projects to complete large cost-effective workloads for which no other sources of funding exist, such as assistance with the shared mark-selective salmon harvest of the Colville Tribes, the UCUT Wildlife Monitoring and Evaluation Project, Timber Fish and Wildlife Program, outreach-and education programs, and continuing efforts that share the resources of all the member tribes of the UCUT.

Funds provide support for tribal development of and access to science, tools, training, and planning. The best available science supports the Tribes and region to build resilience into resource management, infrastructure, and community and economic development activities. Tribal lands, particularly in the West are by their geography and location on the frontline of climate variability, yet many of these communities face immense challenges in planning for and responding to the far-reaching impacts on infrastructure, economic development, food security, natural and cultural resources, and local culture. Many communities have experienced increasingly devastating wildfire, storms, droughts, floods, sea-level rise, and threats to subsistence resources. The Spokane and the Colville Confederated Tribes suffered tremendous losses in 2015 with wildfires devastating an area larger than greater Los Angeles. The damage to habitats, water regimes, fish and timber industry has cost the tribes into the hundreds of millions

of dollars. This Tribal Management/Development Program budget supports adaptation and resilience by funding training, studies, scenario planning, natural resource and infrastructure projects, public awareness and outreach efforts, capacity building, and other projects.

These priorities include the protection and restoration of ecosystems and important landscapes; stewardship of land, water, ocean, and energy resources; resilience in the face of a changing climate; and clean and sustainable energy development; again, for the benefit of all.

Summary

The proposed FY 2018 Tribal Management/Development Program budget must remain at current levels going forward to maintain strong and meaningful relationships with Native communities, while strengthening government-to-government relationships with federally recognized tribes and local, state and federal government agencies to promote efficient and effective governance, and supporting nation-building and self-determination. The FY 2018 budget request delivers community services, strengthens regional partnerships, empowers tribal stewardship of their homelands, fulfills commitments related to water and other resource rights, executes fiduciary trust responsibilities, supports the stewardship of energy and other natural resources, creates economic opportunity, expands access to education, and assists in supporting community resilience in the face of a changing climate.

As Secretary Zinke recently said, “(We) I have a great obligation to make sure as the steward of our public lands to make sure that we have value on it, that it's multiple-use,” he said. “Some lands are best kept where man is an observer with the lightest footprints but a lot of our lands are in multiple use where they are for the benefit and enjoyment of people.” The UCUT stand committed to work with this Administration, just as the past Administrations, to achieve this goal together of sound stewardship of our lands, waters and wildlife for the benefit of all.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am happy to answer any questions the Committee may have.