

**TESTIMONY OF CHAIRMAN ROBERT BLANCHARD  
BAD RIVER BAND OF THE LAKE SUPERIOR TRIBE OF CHIPPEWA INDIANS OF WISCONSIN  
BEFORE THE U.S HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT AND RELATED AGENCIES  
REGARDING FISCAL YEAR 2018 APPROPRIATIONS  
MAY 17, 2017**

Boozhoo (Greetings) My name is Robert Blanchard, I am the Chairman and Chief Executive Director of the Bad River Band of the Lake Superior Tribe of Chippewa Indians of Wisconsin. I am very pleased and thankful to see that many of the Committee Members have introduced and passed legislation which has had a positive effect on Native Peoples. Again I thank you in behalf of my Tribal Community for those efforts.

A little about my People: The Bad River Band Of Lake Superior of Chippewa Indians is located on a 126,000+ acre Reservation in Northern Wisconsin on the South Shore of the Western Lake Superior Region of the United States. Lake Superior has 10% of the worlds fresh unfrozen water supply. The Tribe has over 7,000 members, the majority living off the reservation, about 1,500 live at Odanah on the Reservation. Our people migrated to the Western Lake Superior Region and what is now Odanah, WI, for it was prophesized that we would settle when we came across food that grows on water, the Manomin or Wild Rice.

Manomin, or Wild Rice as you know it, is our Sacred Food. The Bad River and Kakagon Slough areas are the largest pristine freshwater wetland estuaries in the Lake Superior Region, and contain the Wild Rice beds that my People harvest annually.

Protection of Native gathering, hunting, and fishing rights is a part of federal law throughout the United States. Few places is it more important than in the Western Lake Superior Region, and for my People the Bad River and Kakagon Slough areas. What we call subsistence is not a relic from the past. It continues to be the foundation of my People's society and culture. A vast majority of my Tribe's People still participate in gathering, hunting and fishing for food during the year. Subsistence resources remain central to their nutrition, economies and spiritual connection to each other.

**I come to you today, to address four main issues that directly affect my people:**

- \* The environment**
- \* Infrastructure needs**
- \* Health**
- \* Community's Response to Opioid and Methamphetamine Abuse**



## **The Environment**

The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative allows for investigation, education, and solutions to protect culturally significant water resources, historic harvesting techniques and healthy food access, helps funding to restore wetland, wild rice and brook trout habitats and protect spawning grounds critical to Lake Superior fisheries in addition to creating jobs. The Bad River Tribe requests you support the continuation of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.

The Bad River Tribe is one of only 42 tribes with EPA-approved water quality standards. The environmental protection funding we receive through the EPA helps prevent pollution and keep our waters and air clean and our community healthy. It allows us to base our management decisions on sound science. The natural resources management funding we receive through the BIA supports our Hatchery Operations ( raising around 4 million walleye annually) Sustaining and increasing the environmental and natural resources BIA funding is crucial at a time

EPA Funding provided through the Save Drinking Water Act, the 2016 Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act (WIIN Act) and the Clean Water Act and IHS funding through the Sanitation Deficiency System, provides vital funds, that helps resolve critical infrastructure deficiencies, which are required to meet the health needs for the members of the Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians.

## **Infrastructure**

The Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Act: A Legacy For User (SAFETEA-LU) which was designed to supplement the Tribal Roads Maintenance Programs is now the main funding for roads of the vast majority of tribes. An increase in this funding is absolutely necessary to maintain and improve the transportation infrastructure of the Bad River Community.

The Tribal Road, Bridges and Trails infrastructure serve a critical purpose for access for gathering, hunting and fishing, for access to work, and for access to recreational activities and the economic benefit that access provides. For example, development of a recreational trail across the Reservation is a project that my Tribe wants to continue to develop, and in part with Bureau of Indian Affairs funding if funded.

## **Health**

Our tribe is very proud of the new and modern tribal Medical Clinic & Wellness Center which is available to members and non-members. However, with the drug epidemic growing the ability to treat the drug addict and family while maintaining normal health services is strained to the maximum now. Indian Health Services (IHS) cannot alone provide the funds required. Our clinic is self sustaining and relies heavily on third party

funding. Decreasing Medicaid funding will only increase the financial burden on the health care system.

### **My Community's Response to Opioid and Methamphetamine abuse**

Bad River Tribe is in the midst of an influx of illicit drugs being distributed on the reservation and meth is the number one drug. Our Social and Family Services programs are experiencing an increase in case load involving tribal members who are struggling with drug addiction and violence, as well as, children suffering from neglect, abuse, and trauma due to violence. The meth epidemic requires that The Department of Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) funding is increased to address these hard core issues.

Our Bad River Housing Authority reported as of May 3, 2017, that 9 residential homes have tested positive for the presence of meth with tests on 5 additional homes in process. These potential hazard waste properties require special staff training, equipment, cleaning solutions and manpower to make the properties livable again. This has cost the BRHA an additional \$60,000 the past 90 days. It is a staggering challenge for our tribal community. Cutting funding is not the answer.

For my people, we have the potential solution to address these problems. It is essential to keep working to honor treaties with my Tribe and my neighbor Tribes in the Western Lake Superior Region and quickly provide funding to support pristine water and air that we rely on, safe and sanitary housing and related infrastructure, and adequate health care through the Indian Health Service so that we can exercise our protected rights.

The Federal Government has an obligation and duty to level the playing field when it comes to assistance to tribes that are historically disadvantage in large part due to a long history of good interactions and promises made by the Federal Government and Indian tribes by the way of treaties.

**In summary it is critical that funding be maintained or improved in the following four areas:**

- \* **Water, Environmental and Natural Resource Protection funding at least at current levels by:**

**Great Lakes Restoration Initiative Funding**

**EPA Environmental Protection Funding**

**EPA Safe Drinking Water Act and the Clean Water Act**

**IHS Sanitation Deficiency Funding**

- \* **Improved transportation/roads through adequate funding through**



**SAFETEA-LU Act**

- \* Community Health supported by maintain or increasing Medicaid Funding**
- \* The Tribal Community Solutions for Substance Abuse through increased or maintaining BIA Funding**

Respectfully submitted,

Miigwech (Thank You)

**Robert Blanchard**

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