

**Testimony of Joseph Wildcat, President  
Lac Du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians  
Before the House Appropriations Subcommittee  
On Interior, Environment and Related Agencies  
Concerning IHS, BIA AND EPA Programs in the FY 2019 Budget  
April 30, 2018**

My name is Joseph Wildcat, I am the President of the Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians, located in Vilas, Oneida and Iron Counties Wisconsin. Our Tribe of 3,400 members is the largest employer in Vilas County. Together with tribal enterprises, the Tribe employs 800 individuals, with nearly 25% or 190 employees paid in full or in part with appropriations made under this Subcommittee's jurisdiction. Our reservation has one of the densest concentrations of fresh water in the country and our lands and waters are sacred to the Band and its members. Within our 86,600-acre reservation, there are 260 lakes, 71 miles of streams and rivers, approximately 42,000 acres of forested land and roughly 42,000 acres of water and wetlands. We are working hard to build and maintain a stable, healthy tribal community, amid many challenges. Like many rural areas, we are dealing with opioid abuse and the challenges of creating and maintaining jobs for our citizens and residents.

My testimony today addresses IHS, BIA and EPA programs that are vital to the Lac du Flambeau Band. The Tribe thanks the Subcommittee for its leadership and commitment to Indian tribes which honors the Nation's trust responsibility to the Indian people. The Tribe appreciates that Congress provided increased funds in FY 2018 for BIA, IHS and EPA programs and the other programs across the federal government.

Please recognize the interconnectedness of IHS, BIA and EPA programs which help promote healthy tribal members and healthy communities; essential building blocks for stable communities where Tribal parents can raise Native youth in safety and security so that they may realize their fullest potential and contribute to their community's and the Nation's future.

**I. INDIAN HEALTH SERVICE PROGRAMS**

The Tribe recognizes the increase Congress provided for FY 2018 for the IHS. With that being said, the I.H.S. funding only cover 32% of our financial need! The Tribe operates the Peter Christensen Health Center, Dental Program, a Family Resource Center, and an In-patient Treatment Center with a total annual operating budget in excess of \$24 million. The Tribe's annual funding for FY2018 is \$7.7million. These programs are vital to ensuring the support and preservation of family life and wellbeing by providing such services as outpatient mental health, inpatient & outpatient alcohol and other drug abuse, and psychological consults. The Health Center provides quality health care and offers a full range of family medical services by Board Certified family physicians, advanced practice nurse practitioner and physician-assistants serving 5,500 patients and providing 48,000 patient appointments annually. Together, our Tribal Health Program employs a staff of 150 individuals. The Tribe asks that Congress increase IHS funding in 2019.

Our rationale for this funding increase is borne of necessity. We are seeing how important proactive and preventive health services are for our community. In particular, like the rest of the Nation, our community is in the throws of the opioid epidemic. It has tragically claimed the lives of numerous Lac Du Flambeau members, with approximately 100 members overdosing on opioids. Approximately 60 percent of the Tribe's annual births result in opioid-addicted babies. In 2017 alone, 48 of the Tribe's 80 births resulted in opioid-addicted babies. Early treatment is critical. We urge the Subcommittee to increase funds for preventive health programs such as Drug Endangered Children (D.E.C.) and Drug Endangered Elders (D.E.E.). These programs can save lives and empower our Tribe to help our citizens address addictions and mental health issues, especially targeting our tribal youth. Please continue to prioritize increases in FY 2019 IHS funding for Hospitals and Clinics, mental health, substance abuse treatment and P/RC funds so that we can take a proactive stance by investing wisely in preventive health services.

## **II. NATURAL RESOURCES (EPA AND BIA)**

The Tribe has one of the leading tribal Natural Resources programs in the Country. Our program includes a Fish Hatchery for several species of fish, Fisheries Management, Waterfowl habitat protection, Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, Conservation Law Enforcement, Wildlife protection, Historic Preservation, and numerous environmental programs, including water resources. Our Natural Resources Department employs fish biologists, wildlife biologists, fish hatchery operators, hydrologists, technicians and administrators, many of whom are paid in full or in part with EPA and BIA funds and critical to our work protecting the resources that were promised to us in our Treaties. We urge the Subcommittee not to jeopardize our Natural Resources programs that are critical to protecting our culture, our health and our economy, that is part of Wisconsin's \$19 billion hunting, fishing, recreation and tourism industry.

The proposed reduction in EPA funding and cuts to BIA Natural Resources programs would be devastating to our Program. Even with existing funding, we struggle to meet the demands we face to maintain clean air, water and lands from the many contaminants that threaten our community. The highest concentrations of mercury tainted lakes are in the State's northern most counties, including Vilas and Oneida. Minnesota and Wisconsin lead the nation with mercury-contaminated lakes. At present, there are more than 146 lakes with fish health mercury advisories in place in Wisconsin. This presents a direct threat to our culture because we cannot eat contaminated fish that are otherwise a staple of our diet. A continuing threat to our treaty protected resources is Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD), it has been detected in deer in our ceded territories and is moving closer to the deer population on our Reservation. There is no silver-bullet to this challenge, but we need resources to ensure proper monitoring and management.

**A. Trust-Natural Resources Management.** In FY 2018, Congress appropriated \$204 million for the BIA's Trust-Natural Resources Management programs, a \$3.2 million increase from FY 2017. We greatly appreciate this, but given the importance of our natural resources to our culture and economy more is needed. Our Tribe alone needs nearly a \$500,000 increase for our Tribal Fish Hatchery Operations and Tribal Management/Development Program for FY 2019.

**B. Circle of Flight: Wetlands Waterfowl Program.** We urge the Subcommittee to continue to provide support for the BIA Circle of Flight Program (about \$707,000). This modest BIA program supports Tribal efforts throughout the Great Lakes Region to restore and preserve wetlands and waterfowl habitat and enhances wild rice gathering within Tribal territories throughout the three states along the Mississippi flyway.

**C. Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.** Thank you for funding the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative at \$300 million in FY 2018. Do not terminate this vital program. For the indigenous people of Wisconsin, the Great Lakes represent the lifeblood of our culture and the foundation of our economies. The protection and preservation of the Great Lakes is a necessity.

**D. EPA Tribal General Assistance Program.** Congress approved \$3.5 billion for State and Tribal Assistance Grants, including \$2.461 billion for Infrastructure assistance grants and \$1.066 billion for categorical grants (maintaining Tribal air quality management grants and Tribal general assistance program (Tribal GAP) grants at \$12.8 million and \$65.4 million, respectively). The Tribal GAP program provides base environmental funding to assist Tribes in building their environmental capacity to assess environmental conditions, utilize available data and build their environmental programs to meet their local needs. While we strongly support the Tribal GAP funding, that funding is limited to capacity building and it is critical that we expand Tribal EPA funding to include program implementation.

**E. Underground Storage Tank Fund (LUST).** We remain concerned that annual reductions to the Underground Storage Tank fund (LUST) permits ongoing contamination of ground waters that threaten tribal and other communities. We encourage the Subcommittee to instruct EPA to give greater consideration to tribal cleanup standards and help Indian tribes remediate unsafe conditions on reservations. We would ask Congress to direct EPA to work with Tribes to address these sites that present a continuing threat to our Reservation.

### **III. BIA and BIE APPROPRIATIONS**

**A. Law Enforcement.** The Tribe is working collaboratively with our state and local partners to address drug trafficking and gang activity on and off the reservation. In December, we lost a young tribal member, related to these activities. We want to ensure that this does not happen again. There is a greater need for cooperation among the Tribe, the State and federal law enforcement agencies to address the significant impact of drug trafficking on the public safety of our community.

As a Tribe in P.L. 280 states we have long suffered from the lack of sufficient support by the federal government for our law enforcement and tribal court needs. We have one full time judge who handle a range of cases ranging from domestic abuse orders to child support enforcement. In addition, we have three court clerks and a prosecutor. We greatly appreciate the Appropriations Committee support of Tribal justice systems for Tribes in P.L. 280 states, we provide an important service to the people of our Reservation that if we did not do it, the state courts would have to do it. We would urge Congress to continue this funding.

Related to this is the need to provide specific funding for conservation law enforcement officers. Our conservation officers, provide a critical role in the management of our natural resources and sometimes are the first line in identifying drug and other illegal activities on the Reservation.

**B. Indian Education.** Congress provided \$34.9 million for Adult Scholarships and restore the \$2.9 million for special higher education scholarships for FY 2018. We recommend this Subcommittee continue to support these programs that provided needed support to tribal members seeking higher education.

The Lac du Flambeau Public School and Lakeland Union High School educate our tribal youth. The High School is approximately 23% Native American and 86% of high school graduates went on to attend four- and two-year colleges/technical schools, 9% entered the workforce or pursued other activities and 5% entered the military. For this reason, we oppose any effort to eliminate the Johnson O'Malley Program, the goal of which is to address the unique cultural needs of Indian students attending public schools through a supplemental program of services planned, developed and approved by the Local Indian Education Committee, comprised of parents of eligible Indian students. The \$14.9 million JOM Program must be protected, so that Indian children are provided the supplemental programs that honor and celebrate their Native heritage and help them grow into confident, well-adjusted adults who contribute to their families. Given our experience in calculating our native student count in our schools, we are troubled by the BIA's inability to provide Congress with an accurate student count.

**C. Road Maintenance Program.** The Tribe appreciates Congress including \$4.3 million increase in funding for the Road Maintenance Program for FY 2018. We believe a \$10 million increase is justified for FY 2019. The Tribe receives less than \$90,000 to maintain nearly 180 miles of BIA-owned roads. Our budget requirements for road maintenance are closer to \$2 million annually. A year's entire road maintenance budget can be consumed in the winter months removing snow and salting/sanding roads to ensure freedom of movement. Transportation barriers undermine federal and tribal efforts to improve Native health, educate our youth and attract businesses and jobs to remote, rural communities like ours. The "historical" formula for the BIA Road Maintenance Program makes little sense to us. We ask the Subcommittee to include report language for FY 2019 that directs the BIA to explain the allocation methodology, verify each Tribe's road inventory that generate Road Maintenance dollars, and make publicly available to tribes their relative share of funds.