



**Quinault Indian Nation Testimony  
United States House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies  
Public Witness Hearing on Tribal Programs  
March 7, 2019**

Good afternoon Chairwoman McCollum, Ranking Member Joyce and Members of the Subcommittee. I am Tyson Johnston, Vice-President of the Quinault Indian Nation (“Quinault” or “QIN”). I want to thank the Subcommittee for holding this hearing to examine the critical funding needs of Indian Country.

Before getting into the specific funding request we have, I would like to thank this Subcommittee for increasing funding for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Bureau of Indian Education and the Indian Health Services by over \$303 million from FY 2018 to FY 2019.

The Quinault Reservation (“Reservation”) is located on the southwestern corner of the Olympic Peninsula of Washington State and abuts the Pacific Ocean and has over 3,000 tribal members. My testimony today focuses on the following priorities: 1. Funding for Tribes to address the many negative impacts of climate change on their reservations; 2. Increased funding for the Housing Improvement Program (HIP); and 3. The need for additional roads to access our village.

**U.S. Responsibility to Meet its Treaty and Trust Obligations to the Quinault People**

Through treaties, executive orders, and other agreements, Indian Tribes ceded hundreds of millions of acres of our homelands to the Federal government to help build this great nation. In return, the United States made promises to provide for the education, health, and welfare of reservation residents. For the Quinault, the promises of the United States were detailed in the Treaty of Olympia, which was signed on July 1, 1855, and on January 25, 1856 (11 Stat. 971). The lands and waters of the Quinault Reservation consist of 207,150 acres of beautiful forestlands, mountains, rivers, a lake, and 25 miles of relatively undisturbed Pacific coastline. In recent years, the United States has continued to fall short of meeting its treaty obligations as appropriations cuts, sequestration, government shut-downs, inflation and other factors impede the federal government’s ability to meet its trust responsibility. As a result, Quinault spends about \$6 million annually to supplement inadequate levels of Federal funding.

**Funding Request for the Taholah Village Relocation Project**

There are two major villages located within the Reservation. The Village of Taholah and the Village of Queets. Taholah is located in the southern portion of the Reservation at the mouth of the Quinault River on the Pacific coast and consists of two locations known as the “Upper Village” and “Lower Village,” the latter of which is located below sea level. Our Nation has had Models prepared by the Washington Department of Natural Resources that show a potential of tsunami inundation of 40-50 feet in depth in most of the Lower Village of Taholah, well above the elevation of the tallest building in the village. A tsunami event at the Village of Taholah would be catastrophic for our tribe, the loss of life and destruction of our infrastructure would compromise QIN government operations.

Historically, large earthquake/tsunami events along the Cascadia Subduction Zone have occurred every 300 to 500 years. The last such event happened in February 1700, so the 300-year threshold has already been breached. Approximately 650 residents live within the tsunami zone in the Taholah Village. Important Quinault social and cultural institutions are located in the tsunami inundation zone and flood prone area. For example, the Senior Center, Head Start Day Care, the K-12 Taholah School, Community Center, fire cache, police station, jail and courts, Veterans Park, Taholah Mercantile, Fitness Center, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Housing Authority, Canoe Carving Shed, Enterprise Board, and the Museum, the repository of Quinault culture, all currently exist in this vulnerable area. On a typical weekday, at least 60 employees of the Quinault Indian Nation work in the lower Taholah Village.

A comprehensive 2012 report was contracted by QIN to understand the effects of climate change on sea levels. The report, entitled “Relative Sea Level Change Along Quinault Indian Reservation Marine Coastlines,” found that the combined effects of thermal expansion of ocean waters, vertical land deformation (e.g., tectonic movements), melting glaciers and ice fields and seasonal water surface elevation changes due to local atmospheric circulation effects will result in sea level increases, substantially increasing flood risk in the Lower Village of Taholah. The report further noted that the changes posed by climate change, including increased winter precipitation, soil saturation and flow into the Quinault River, will compound and increase the coastal flood risks to the lower Village of Taholah.

Already, high tides, high winds and storm surge conditions have led to waves breaking over the seawall that protects the Lower Taholah Village from coastal surges. The seawall was breached in 2014, prompting a state of emergency to be declared. While the Army Corps of Engineers replaced the seawall, it is not a permanent solution. During minor storm events, areas around First Avenue in Taholah flood regularly with seawater.

QIN determined through multiple public processes, including a General Council Resolution (a vote taken by the entire Tribe), that enabling the movement of residents, businesses, and institutions from the lower village of Taholah to a new Upper Village Relocation Area was the only solution because of these threats.

This prioritization prompted the Nation to apply for a grant in 2013 from the Administration for Native Americans (U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services) to prepare a plan to relocate the village to higher ground. The grant was received and resulted in the Taholah Village Relocation Master Plan (“Master Plan”). The Master Plan was adopted by the Quinault Indian Nation Business Committee (the governing body of the Nation) on June 26, 2017. The NEPA Environmental Review was completed through the Bureau of Indian Affairs and HUD.

With completion and adoption of the Master Plan, the Nation has a blueprint for redevelopment of the village, safe from flooding and tsunamis that incorporates the vision of the community members, sustainable practices, culture, amenities and upgraded community facilities. Design has begun on the first building in the new village, the WenasgwəllaʔaW (Generations Building). WenasgwəllaʔaW will house the Senior Program and children’s programs (Head Start, Early Head Start and Day Care). The Nation is also in the process of designing the first residential neighborhood of the Master Plan so that there is a place for residents of the Lower Village to relocate as soon as possible. However, the Master Plan has an estimated price tag of \$150 to 200 million and the Quinault Nation will not be able to fully fund the plan.

*We will need assistance from our trustee, the federal government, to continue the Master Plan and to ensure that our citizens are safe and our government operations continue. We request the Subcommittee to direct the BIA and the Environmental Protection Agency to prioritize funding for tribes who are dealing with Reservation loss and displacement due to climate change. We also urge the Subcommittee to include report language that mandates funding criteria that will our Tribe and others dealing with the negative impacts of climate change to address the needs described above.*

### **Funding Request for the Housing Improvement Program (HIP)**

QIN has been utilizing the Housing Improvement Program (HIP) for members of the Nations for years. HIP is a home improvement and home replacement program that assists Tribal members who have substandard housing or no housing options at all. The funding the Nation obtains from this program assists its citizens that are in the most need and has had very positive tangible results for these citizens. Cutting this funding would be devastating to the people that need it most and utilize it.

*We thank the Subcommittee for not following the Administration’s FY 2019 request to zero out this program and for funding it at \$9.7 million in FY 2019. Because there is a continued need for this program at QIN and throughout Indian Country, we ask the Subcommittee to increase funding to \$11 million in FY 2019.*

### **Funding Request for an Additional Road to Access Quinault’s Village of Taholah**

Exit and entry access to the village of Taholah is limited to a single highway. Access to the village is cut off during natural disasters and weather events such as downed trees, mudslides, and treacherous conditions that make the road impassible. In late December, we had a very large

mudslide shut down that single highway for a number of days. When this access is cut off, emergency vehicles are unable to reach or leave the Taholah. Our community remains vulnerable to similar emergency response failures if we do not address this critical concern.

QIN proposes to link an 8.2-mile service road, known as BIA Road 29 or McBride Road, primarily used for forest management and harvest activities, to a nearby highway. This will create two exit and entry points to our village. We estimate that this project will cost \$3.5 million for road construction and improvement activities once either the lands or the right-of-ways are acquired.

***We thank the Subcommittee for funding the BIA Road Maintenance Program in FY 2019 at \$35.8 million. We ask that the Subcommittee increase funding for this program to \$45 million to meet the current high demand of Tribes. We also urge the Subcommittee to include report language giving funding priority to tribes with safety and emergency access concerns.***

### **Conclusion**

The Quinault Indian Nation is taking the steps necessary to protect and build a brighter future for our people. We are guided by our traditions and deep desire to control our own destiny. We are doing our part to improve the lives of our people and to keep them safe and create opportunity on the Reservation, but we cannot do it alone. We urge the Subcommittee to honor treaty and trust responsibilities to Quinault and to support our requests. Thank you for allowing me to testify to the Subcommittee today.