

**Testimony of William Harris, Chief of the Catawba Indian Nation, South Carolina**  
**“Public Witness Testimony: FY 2020 Appropriations”**  
**House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies**  
**March 7, 2019**

---

**Recommendations:**

1. DOI – Invest in economic development programs that target non-gaming tribes.
2. DOI – Provide increased support for investment opportunities in Indian Country.
3. BIA – \$50 million for the BIA Road Maintenance Program.
4. IHS – Advance appropriations for the Indian Health Service.
5. IHS – \$60.72 increase in funding for Preventive Health services.
6. EPA – Maintain adequate funding to protect human health and the environment.
7. DOI – Full funding for the National Park Service.
8. BIA – \$30 million for the Tribal Climate Resilience Program.
9. DOI – \$30 million for Department-wide Landscape Conservation Cooperatives.

**Introduction.** Thank you Chairwoman McCollum, Ranking Member Joyce, and members of the Subcommittee for the opportunity to testify on critical funding needs for American Indian and Alaska Native programs under your jurisdiction. The people of the Catawba Indian Nation thank you for your hard work on behalf of Indian Country and for inviting tribal leaders to submit witness testimony on their communities’ behalf. My name is William Harris and I am the Chief of the Catawba Indian Nation, the only federally recognized tribe in the state of South Carolina. Like our traditional pottery, the Catawba have been created from southern soil, to be shaped and fired over time by unimaginable hardship, and now stand tall as a living testament to our ancestors and to the land we call home. To advance the socioeconomic development and well-being of my Nation and other Native communities, I offer the following budget recommendations for fiscal year 2020.

**I. Sustainable Economic Development for Smaller Tribes**

Increased Support for Non-Gaming Tribes. As a sovereign nation and industrious people, we are committed to achieving economic self-sufficiency. For the Catawba Indian Nation, this goal is immeasurably complicated by the terms of our 1993 Settlement Act with the State that inhibit meaningful tribal economic development. For example, our Nation is currently prohibited from establishing gaming operations on tribal lands under the terms of our Settlement Act. Instead, we are allowed to operate just two bingo halls—neither of which ever turned even a marginal profit for the Nation due to the mandatory 10% fee on gross bingo revenue that must be first transmitted to the state. It is our hope to come back to the Congress and ask for amendments to our Settlement Act that would restore some of our lost sovereignty and free-up our economic potential. In the interim, we continue to explore innovative avenues for economic growth. **We urge Congress to invest in economic development programs for non-gaming tribes to further the federal government’s policy of promoting tribal self-determination and economic self-sufficiency.**

Expanded Access to Investment Opportunities in Indian Country. Given adequate support and the appropriate resources, the majority of tribes would likely become—assuming they are not already—significant contributors to their local and regional economies. Tribes are economic engines of the tourism industry, renewable energies, small business development, commercial services, among many others. However, limited access to capital and investment financing remain substantial barriers in Indian Country. We struggle with uniquely burdensome federal restrictions

and regulations, poor infrastructure, and other challenges that limit their economies from flourishing. It is important to create avenues for investment funds, financial resources, and business models that are mutually advantageous to tribes and potential partners for economic advancement, stability, and diversification. **We encourage Congress to provide increased support for investment opportunities in Indian Country in the FY 2020 budget.**

## **II. Tribal Roads Infrastructure for Economic Diversification**

Connect Tribal Communities to the Local and Regional Economy Increased BIA Roads Construction and Maintenance Funding. Adequate and well-maintained roads are essential to connecting tribal members, businesses, and partners with economic opportunities both on and off reservation. The quality of a road network is often used to assess local development and the capacity of a region to support economic investment. If one were to evaluate the roads on our Reservation, as well as across Indian Country, many investors would find the infrastructure conditions to pose a business risk. Unsafe, underdeveloped roadways discourage investors from partnering with tribal communities. They also contribute to lost employment opportunities because companies hesitate to operate businesses in areas that lack the necessary infrastructure to efficiently move people and products between different markets.

Funding for the BIA Road Maintenance program has been level-funded at about \$30 million for several fiscal year cycles, despite the accumulation of over \$490 million in backlogged needs. Our Reservation, for example, has 33 miles of roads included on the BIA Roads Inventory. Maintaining these roads costs \$215,000 annually, but we receive only \$25,000 in federal assistance. The \$190,000 difference is taken from our Tribal Transportation Roads Program allocation, which in turn reduces the amount available for new roads construction to support our economic development, housing, and social service projects. As a small non-gaming tribal community we need to be able to rely on our roads for economic growth. **We urge Congress to provide \$50 million for the BIA Road Maintenance program to protect the health, safety, and welfare of Indian Country.**

## **III. A Healthy Workforce for Long-Term Economic Gain**

Provide Advance Appropriations for the Indian Health Service. The United States has a trust responsibility to provide for Indian healthcare. Yet, decades of underfunding and under-resourcing the IHS have contributed to severe healthcare crises across Indian Country. Full advance appropriations for the IHS would promote greater stability in services, medical personnel recruitment and retention, and facilities management. It would also provide the IHS with parity to other federal healthcare agencies, such as the Veterans Health Administration, that have demonstrated success in delivering consistent medical services under advance appropriations that have otherwise been interrupted by budget-related complications like continuing resolutions. We are also pleased to see that Contract Support Costs have been fully funded under previous fiscal years, and we urge that support to continue going forward. **We urge Congress to provide advance appropriations for the IHS under the FY 2020 budget and beyond.**

Plan for the Future with Dedicated Funding for Preventative Health Services. The Catawba depend on the IHS for the delivery of healthcare services in our community through the local Catawba Service Unit. Access is limited, however, due to the Service Unit's restricted operating hours and

lack of emergency and urgent care services. Untreated conditions translate into lost working hours that harm the welfare of individuals, families, and businesses. The disproportionately high rates of chronic illness, unemployment, and poverty in Indian Country make it clear that the Federal Government must address these issues in tandem in order to achieve positive change in any one.

For its part, the Catawba Indian Nation is planting the seeds for a healthy workforce and community through our Wellness Warriors program. The mission of the Wellness Warriors is to improve overall community health through crosscutting programs, health education, physical activity, nutrition, and tobacco cessation. The program serves as a trellis for life-long community fitness and engagement. We believe that increased federal funding for preventive care services as an IHS sub-activity would enable other tribes to cultivate and sustain similar programs in their communities. The result would be significant long-term savings for the Federal Government by reducing future incident rates of chronic illness and associated medical costs, as well as increased life-savings and economic opportunities by promoting the vitality of tribal members. **We urge Congress to invest heavily in the future health and well-being of Indian Country by providing an increase of \$60.72 million for Preventive Health.**

#### **IV. Environmental Protection for Healthy Economies and Communities**

Maintain Adequate Support for the EPA. We depend on the EPA's fulfilment of its trust responsibilities and partnership obligations to protect human health and our shared environment. A healthy environment is the literal foundation of a healthy community and economy. Our Tribe, for example, currently receives funding for the General Assistance Program, Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act and Brownfield 128a Program. We have used and leveraged these resources to advance our environmental programs with benefits at the tribal, local, and state levels. For example, we developed an ambient air monitoring program that measures ozone and particulate matter 2.5 micron and smaller. The data is posted on Air Now South Carolina, providing tribal members and state residents with accurate air quality information. We also partner with the State to generate air quality forecasts for a three county area. Through these and other programs, we are working to protect the health of our people and natural resources. The job is not finished. **We urge Congress to maintain adequate funding for the EPA so that we can achieve a cleaner, healthier and more prosperous country today and for future generations.**

Support Eco-Tourism with Full Funding for the National Park Service. Protecting America's biodiversity is vital to our economy, history, cultural and aesthetic values, and overall health. For example, according to a recent National Park Foundation report, our National Park system is valued at \$92 billion for the Federal Government.<sup>1</sup> National Parks, Forests, and Wilderness Areas provide vital sources of eco-tourism and recreational dollars for local economies, including tribal economies. Biodiversity also carries with it an intrinsic value that is rooted in the flora, fauna, and landscapes themselves, regardless of their interactions with or use by mankind. To protect and effectively manage these resources for present and future generations, Congress must maintain adequate support for the National Park Service and other natural resource management agencies within the Department of the Interior. **We recommend that Congress provide full funding to the National Park Service in FY 2020.**

---

<sup>1</sup> Total Economic Valuation of the National Park Service Lands and Programs: Results of a Survey of the American Public (June 30, 2016), available at <https://www.nationalparks.org/sites/default/files/NPS-TEV-Report-2016.pdf>.

Maintain Funding for the Tribal Climate Resilience Program and Interior Landscape Conservation Cooperatives. Communities across the U.S. are facing increasing public health, safety, and natural resources management challenges associated with our progressively unstable natural environment. Water availability, catastrophic wildfires and floods, invasive species, disappearing tree lines, and accelerated rates of erosion are but limited examples of how our world is changing. Tribes are often among the first to feel the effects of these developments on our subsistence, hunting, and gathering activities. The BIA Tribal Climate Resilience Program and Department-wide Landscape Conservation Cooperatives run in agencies like the BLM, FWS, NPS, BIA, and BOR are intended to provide tribes with the tools to manage resource stressors and develop adaptive management plans in coordination with federal, state, and local actors to mitigate and prevent environmental degradation. Furthering this progress is critical for the health and economic well-being of all Americans. **We urge Congress to provide \$30 million for the BIA Tribal Climate Resilience Program and \$30 million for Interior Cooperative Landscape Conservation programs.**

---

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on these important considerations for tribal economic development under the FY 2020 budget. We look forward to working with you on advancing these complex, interconnected needs going forward.