

**Testimony of Chairman Leonard Forsman  
Suquamish Tribe  
Before the U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, & Related Agencies  
February 11, 2020**

**Summary of Budget Requests:**

- I. BIA's Tribal Resilience Program – Increase funding for the Program
- II. EPA's Geographic Programs – Increase funding for the Puget Sound
- III. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – Tribal Wildlife Grants

**Introduction & Background**

Good morning Chairwoman McCollum, Ranking Member Joyce, and Honorable Members of the Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies. My name is Leonard Forsman and I serve as the Chairman of the Suquamish Tribe. Thank you for the opportunity to testify about the Suquamish Tribe's funding priorities within the Subcommittee's jurisdiction. My testimony today will focus on the Tribe's continued needs related to our efforts to combat climate change.

The Suquamish name comes from the traditional Lushootseed phrase for “people of the clear salt water.” The Tribe is a signatory to the 1855 Treaty of Point Elliot. In exchange for ceding most of its aboriginal homeland, the Suquamish Tribe reserved the Port Madison Indian Reservation on the Kitsap Peninsula, as well as fishing, hunting, and gathering rights. The Tribe has roughly 950 enrolled citizens, half of whom reside on our Reservation, which is located west of Seattle, WA, across the Puget Sound. The Reservation encompasses approximately 7,600 acres, including 12 miles of Puget Sound shoreline.

The Suquamish lifestyle is largely shaped by the fact that we live on the bountiful Puget Sound. Having occupied this area since time immemorial, the Tribe relies on the Puget Sound for fish, shellfish, traditional plants, waterfowl, and land game for our economic, nutritional, and cultural needs. Seafood, game, and traditional plants remain essential to the Tribe's culture and diet to this day. In addition, around 20 percent of the Tribe's members help support their families by earning income from the harvest of fish and shellfish. Further, the proceeds from the Tribe's geoduck clam harvests support our elders' programs.

Being inextricably tied to our environment, the Suquamish is experiencing the growing impacts of climate change. Like many other tribes across the United States, the Suquamish Tribe is on the frontlines of this battle, one which threatens to disrupt our very way of life. We see firsthand the negative impact that climate change is having on the Kitsap peninsula, as well as the damages caused by the disastrous duo of warmer waters and ocean acidification.

The Suquamish Tribe's fisheries are vulnerable to climate change because of the unique hydrology of the Kitsap Peninsula, which is dominated by numerous, small, rain-fed streams. These streams are impacted by the longer, drier, and hotter summer seasons caused by climate change. Summer

rearing habitat for juvenile salmon is limited due to low water flows and higher water temperatures. During the late fall and early winter, climate change will likely increase the intensity and frequency of heavy rainfall, causing more robust and swifter stream flows, which can destroy salmon eggs.

The Tribe is also facing ocean acidification caused by climate change. As increasing amounts of carbon dioxide are absorbed by the ocean, the pH level of its waters decrease, making the ocean more acidic. This gives the water a corrosive quality that interferes with the ability of key species of shellfish to grow their shells. The combined, ongoing impacts of development, climate change, and ocean acidification threaten to radically change the availability of natural resources on which the Suquamish have always depended.

In response to these threats, the Suquamish Tribe has been proactively trying to find solutions to protect our way of life. In 2010, the Tribal Council adopted strategies to use the K-12 educational system to help change human behaviors that harm ecosystems. We developed computerized zooplankton imaging and identification tools researchers can use to detect and monitor changes at the base of the marine food web. The Tribe has also been investing in community education, including preparing our youth to take on the challenges of climate change through the Suquamish Youth Climate Change Club, and the development of an ocean acidification curriculum.

Partnerships have also been an invaluable tool in this effort. The Suquamish Tribe has partnered with the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission to study ocean acidification and sea level rise. We have collaborated with the University of Washington to develop a low-cost zooplankton imaging and computer identification system to study planktonic communities vulnerable to ocean acidification. The Tribe also worked with the University to project climate change effects on stream flows and temperature in Chico Creek, which is the most productive salmon stream on the Kitsap Peninsula. In addition, we have worked with our partners and neighbors to implement aggressive habitat restoration, including eelgrass restoration near Bainbridge Island and restoration of Chico Creek and its estuary.

The Tribe participates in climate change working groups at the regional, national, and international levels. These include the International Alliance to Combat Ocean Acidification, which brings together governments and organizations across the globe dedicated to taking action to protect coastal communities and livelihoods from the threat of ocean acidification; and the We Are Still In coalition, which is a coalition of mayors, county executives, tribal leaders, college and university leaders, businesses, and faith groups that have committed to continue striving towards the goals set forth in the Paris Agreement.

## **I. BIA's Tribal Resilience Program**

Despite the Tribe's best efforts, we are still facing an uphill battle. Therefore, we need stronger federal investments with programs such as the Bureau of Indian Affairs' Tribal Resilience Program (TRP). This program supports tribal resilience and coastal management by assisting tribes to better prepare for extreme events and address harmful trends that impact tribal treaty and trust resources, economies, infrastructure, and human health and safety. The TRP provides grant funding, resilience training, and technical support services in coordination with other federal, tribal, and

state partners to support tribes in building cooperative solutions through improved access to resources, training, and tools.

Over the last several years, the Tribe has received multiple awards through the Tribal Resilience Program, including projects titled “Building resilience for the Suquamish Tribe: Integrating changes in streamflow and water temperatures into a vulnerability assessment for salmonoids in the Chico Creek Watershed” and “Building Tribal Youth Connections through Climate Change.” Last year, the Tribe was awarded TRP funding for a project to coordinate sampling with the Puget Sound Restoration Fund, NOAA and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife; perform intertidal and sub-tidal surveys; assess for genetic structure within Puget Sound; determine distribution of neoplasia, assess larval response to ocean acidification; and develop potential restoration and resilience management strategies based on results.

In 2019, the Tribal Resilience Program awarded a total of \$8.7 million for 119 different projects. Considering that the Administration proposed to eliminate this program, we are grateful that funding was still made available. However, in order to address the ever-increasing impacts of climate change, the Suquamish Tribe urges the Subcommittee to consider a substantial increase in funding for the Tribal Resilience Program in the Fiscal Year 2021 budget.

## **II. EPA’s Geographic Programs – Puget Sound**

The Environmental Protection Agency’s Puget Sound program provides funding to tribes and tribal consortia to address environmental and human health risks, as well as tribal capacity building and project implementation. Despite the effectiveness of the Puget Sound Geographic Program, the EPA’s Fiscal Year 2020 budget request called for its elimination. “EPA will encourage state, tribal, and local entities to continue to make progress in restoring the Puget Sound from within core water programs,” stated the Agency’s FY 2020 Budget in Brief.

Despite EPA’s proposal to eliminate the Program, the Suquamish Tribe was pleased to see \$33 million included in the budget deal reached by Congress, which was an increase of \$5 million from the previously enacted level. While the increase is certainly appreciated, the Puget Sound Program suffered a drastic reduction in funding from the \$50 million it previously received. Therefore, the Tribe encourages the Subcommittee to continue increasing the funding available for EPA’s Geographic Programs – Puget Sound account to at least the previous level of \$50 million.

## **III. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – Tribal Wildlife Grants**

The Suquamish Tribe has also been involved in the recovery of the sea cucumber population in the Puget Sound. Due to overharvesting that occurred over 20 years ago, many areas where the sea cucumber once thrived in abundance, are still struggling in population numbers. The sea cucumber is part of the Puget Sound’s rich community of organisms and the Tribe is committed to ensuring all organisms within that community are protected and can thrive.

The Suquamish Tribe was fortunate to receive funding from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Tribal Wildlife Grants to help protect and ensure future generations of sea cucumbers. With this important grant funding, the Tribe partnered with several organizations to start a sea cucumber

restoration project. The project focused on overharvested areas in the Puget Sound and created a hatchery program. This funding will help to reintroduce sea cucumbers from the hatchery to some of the areas most damaged by overharvesting.

Last year, the Administration proposed reducing the entire State and Tribal Wildlife Grant funding by over 50%. Fortunately, Congress rejected that recommendation and decided to fund this important grant funding with an increase of \$4 million. The Tribe appreciates Congress' recognition of the value that this program is creating and the positive impacts it has on the environment.

The Suquamish Tribe urges the Subcommittee to continue its support of this important grant funding and expanding it to more pilot projects. Further, the Tribe asks that Congress increase tribal access and funding levels. Of the \$62.6 million enacted level for State and Tribal Wildlife Grants in FY 2017 to help conserve and recover imperiled fish and wildlife, only \$4.2 million was dedicated to competitive grants for tribes. The amount of their own resources that tribes are pouring into efforts to protect and restore wildlife warrant special attention and support from Congress.

## **Conclusion**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Subcommittee. I am available to answer any questions that the Subcommittee may have regarding my testimony.