



INTER-TRIBAL COUNCIL OF NEVADA, INC.

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SHOSHONE-PAIUTE
BUSINESS COUNCIL
DUCKWATER
SHOSHONE
TRIBAL COUNCIL
ELKO BAND
COUNCIL
ELY SHOSHONE
COUNCIL
FALLON BUSINESS
COUNCIL
FT. McDERMITT
PAIUTE-SHOSHONE
TRIBES
GOSHUTE BAND
COUNCIL
LAS VEGAS PAIUTE
TRIBAL COUNCIL
LOVELOCK TRIBAL
COUNCIL
MOAPA BUSINESS
COUNCIL
PYRAMID LAKE
TRIBAL COUNCIL
RENO/SPARKS
TRIBAL COUNCIL
SOUTH FORK
BAND COUNCIL
STEWART
COMMUNITY COUNCIL
SUMMIT LAKE
PAIUTE COUNCIL
TE-MOAK TRIBAL
COUNCIL
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TRIBE
WALKER RIVER
PAIUTE TRIBAL
COUNCIL
WASHOE TRIBAL
COUNCIL
WELLS BAND
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YOMBA TRIBAL
COUNCIL

To Whom it May Concern,

This body, the **House Interior Appropriations Subcommittee**, is responsible for appropriating funding for Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies. You all have one of the broadest jurisdictions of any committee in Congress, and with that comes great responsibility.

In the Biden-Harris Administrations Year One Report on America the Beautiful (December 2021), it states that this administration will “Honor Tribal Sovereignty and Support Priorities of Tribal Nations.” Further in that report, it states that this Administration has strengthened Tribal Consultation, Tribal Co-Stewardship of Public Lands and Waters, committed to Protecting Tribal Treaty Rights, committed to improving the Protection of, and Access to, Indigenous Sacred Sites, empowered the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) ability to Review and Approve Applications to Place Land Into Trust, elevating the importance of Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge (ITEK), replace Derogatory Names, Advance Place-based Priorities, and committed to providing Grants and Funding for Native American Tribes.

These priorities of the Biden-Harris administration, require collaboration with federally recognized Tribes and Native American groups, in order to see the desired results. Implementation of these priorities require federal agency representatives to meet with tribal leaders and tribal employees, to work on plans, schedules, projects, and the administrative work needed to get to those tangible results.

You are the people who appropriate the money for this work, and it is vital that you understand that Nevada Tribes simply don't have the money to meet our end of this collaboration.

Out of the 27 federally constituent Tribes of ITCN, only 1 Tribe owns a small casino in Nevada, and another owns some gambling machines in their truck stop. Some of our Tribes have small businesses like gas stations, auto shops, tourist stores near beautiful locations, and now we are seeing growth of cannabis dispensaries. But our Tribes don't have the capital to employee the technical experts and tribal personnel needed to do the essential work needed to protect the environment, and so we rely on government grant funding.

Nevada is a mining state. We have gold, silver, copper, and now we have lithium, and other rare earth mineral mining needed to extract minerals to

support green technology. Tribes are told to respond to requests for comment within 30 days, to read and comment on large Environmental Impact Statements (EIS), to walk areas with federal land management agencies and identify locations and to tell these federal agency representatives what our priorities are, and what we think you need to protect and preserve.

We simply do not have the money to pay staff to do this work, and if we do secure funding through grants, they are underfunded and restrictive on what we can or can't do. If we accept help from non-profit environmental groups, we become beholden to their agendas that may conflict with our positions.

ITCN understands the importance of new technology to lower carbon emissions, we also appreciate the importance of jobs for Nevada citizens, and that Nevada is a mining state. When there is lack of capacity on the tribal side, it delays projects. We want to meet with you and get the work done, and we don't want to revisit you later through media and litigation if we don't have to do that. But we need regular funding to employ our staffs.

You may have heard all of this before, or maybe have not, and the Inter-Tribal Council of Nevada is not here to complain and whine, we come to you with appropriations solutions.

In 1991, Senator John McCain, from the great state of Arizona, led the charge to direct the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to establish an Indian Environmental General Assistance Program (GAP) to provide grants to eligible Indian tribal governments or intertribal consortia for planning, developing, and establishing environmental protection programs on Indian lands. This is a great program and the funding foundation for almost all Nevada tribal environmental programs. It allows Tribes to get someone in an environmental office to write basic work plans, write budgets, write robust environmental plans, to grow a program and gather new funding to grow the tribal programmatic capacity needed to pull off our end of the collaboration, and to provide our tribal leadership the technical experts to help our elected leaders to make wise and prudent decisions related to protection of our air, water, and earth.

It's a great program and essential to Tribes. Why then do you cut funding almost every year for the program? Why have funding levels been about the same for almost 20 years? The GAP funding comes into regions under State and Tribal Assistance Grant (STAG) funding. This committee needs to increase the EPA budget with the understanding that increase goes to STAG to help Tribes and states.

The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) has their Rural Development Water and Environmental Programs, and these programs are dynamic and essential for small rural communities and Nevada Tribes, yet they are historically underfunded. Under these programs they have their Individual Water & Wastewater Grants, and few people not in the environmental field discuss wastewater yet we all create that type of waste. As we grow as a nation, and as water quantity is impacted by the rise in ambient temperature, we need to fund wastewater sustainability to avoid future health disasters.

The Committee needs to increase funding to USDA, specifically USDA rural programs. These are the people in the field doing the hard work collecting soil and water samples and coordinating environmental projects with the Army Corp of Engineers, US Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, State departments, EPA, other agencies, and Tribes.

Directly related to these environmental priorities laid out by the Biden-Harris administration, are their four racial equity memos. Environmental Justice is tied to racial equity and has become a priority and ITCN fully supports Environmental Justice for the humans, animals, and plants. Everything is connected.

Each of the federal agencies under your purview have or will have environmental justice programs, and those programs should be adequately funded to assist Nevada Tribes that are overly burdened with environmental challenges coupled with Tribes and their low economic, educational, administrative, and programmatic capacities.

Do you know that out of the 27 federally recognized Tribes in Nevada, only two have full-time grant writers? ITCN does not have a paid grant writer. This is an environmental justice issue. In response to the pandemic, the federal government made available to Tribes an assortment of grant opportunities, but Nevada Tribes have only two grant writers on staff and many of the grants were competitive. How do you think that turned out for our Tribes? ITCN feels that funding should be made available under environmental justice funding to support grant writers, and technical experts to read and comment on environmental documents. Please increase funding to each agency for EJ activities.

Finally, the Department of Interior has many agencies under it. Nevada Tribes work directly with the US Forest Service (USFS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) because in Nevada the federal government owns approximately 85% percent of the land.

Both land agencies have large wildfire mitigation projects to respond to the increase in temperature and the impact on trees and bushes, and the erosion and other cascading environmental issues caused by large wildfires. More funds need to be appropriated to the agencies for them to effectively mitigate and recover from wildfire disasters.

More than any other agency, the problems at DOI are indicative of the problems all federal agencies have related to working effectively with Tribes. No agency adequately funds for staff that must work with Tribes. Often federal agencies are adding work to employees with other existing job duties. In practice, Tribes are to be worked with, but in reality we view federal agencies looking at Tribes as discretionary. This is because there is no true consequence or reward for agencies that make decisions based on feedback from Tribes.

ITCN understands that this is not a policy committee, but this body can appropriate money to employ full-time staff at each of the agencies to support staff that must work with Tribes. If the funds are made available to pay for the staff, ITCN feels that Tribes will be taken more seriously.

Thank you for your time, and if you have any questions, please contact me or ITCN Executive Director, Deserea Quintana at (775) 355-0600.

Respectfully,

Serrell Smokey,
President, Inter-Tribal Council of Nevada, Inc.