

**TOM STRONG, VICE-CHAIRMAN  
THE SKOKOMISH TRIBE OF WASHINGTON STATE  
BEFORE THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE  
ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES  
BIA AND IHS  
FISCAL YEAR 2026 BUDGET**

The Skokomish Indian Tribe is responsible for providing essential governmental services to the residents of the Skokomish Indian Reservation, a rural community located at the base of the Olympic Peninsula with a population of over 2,000 people, including approximately 700 Tribal members. The Tribe provides services through various departments – Tribal Administration, Community Development, Information Services, Early Childhood Education (including Head Start), Education, Health Clinic, Housing, Legal, Natural Resources, Public Safety, Public Works, and Tuwaduq Family Services. The Tribal government also works closely with community members to identify needs and prioritize services. Adequate federal funds are critical to the Tribe’s ability to address the extensive unmet needs of our community.

**I. BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS**

**Law Enforcement.** We increased funding for BIA Public Safety and Justice Programs. The Skokomish Department of Public Safety (SDPS) provides 24/7 law enforcement services for the Tribe. SDPS is responsible for patrolling and enforcing justice both within the Tribe’s 5,300-acre Reservation, and throughout the Tribe’s 2.2 million-acre Treaty area where the Tribe has Treaty-protected hunting, fishing and gathering rights.

But with only 7 officers available for day-to-day patrol duties, individual officers often work alone. Understaffing exposes both the community members in need of assistance and SDPS officers to undue danger. Unfortunately, this is SDPS’s reality. To meet mandated responsibilities, staffing must be increased. Vacancies due to illness, training and other leave force the Chief of Police to handle patrol duties. Budget limitations severely restrict overtime.

**Natural Resources.** We strongly support continued funding for the BIA’s Trust-Natural Resources Management programs. Increased funding to foster sustainable stewardship and development of natural resources and support fishing, hunting and gathering rights on and off-Reservation, is essential to our people who depend on natural resources for their livelihood.

For example, the Pacific Salmon Treaty grant supports the Tribe’s federally mandated salmon sampling program. Throughout the entire salmon season, and to ensure proper management of the resources, we must collect scale and coded-wire tag samples from Chinook and coho, and scale samples from chum on 20% of our catch. This information is used to determine run size and allows fisheries managers to properly structure the fisheries. Current funding levels have been sufficient to achieve this goal. Without proper funding for this program, it will become very difficult, if not impossible, for the Tribe to ensure the safety of ESA-listed salmon which may result in a loss of a Treaty-reserved resource and our members’ ability to support themselves from that resource. We urge Congress to increase the current level of funding for this vital program.

Hatchery cyclical maintenance funds are also invaluable for supporting the Federal government's investment in tribal hatcheries. Most tribal hatcheries are underfunded and each year brings more decay to the facilities. Here too, adequate funding for hatchery maintenance is imperative to prevent these important pieces of the salmon restoration puzzle from crumbling away. Because of habitat destruction, the only reason we continue to have salmon for Treaty-harvest activities is the operation of salmon hatcheries. Congress cannot allow the main pillar of this all important Treaty right to take a reduction in funding.

A few years ago the Tribe was able to cobble together a wildlife program consisting of one biologist and one technician. The program is partially funded by Timber, Fish, and Wildlife funds of about \$95,000 with the Tribe supplementing the program with an additional \$35,000. Wildlife grants are few and far between. The Tribe needs wildlife program funds not only to support biologists, but additional funding is required to staff three dedicated wildlife enforcement officers who will not only enforce the Tribe's regulations but ensure that poaching of the Tribe's wildlife resources does not occur from outside entities who sometimes fail to recognize the Tribe's Treaty rights.

**Social Services.** We urge the Subcommittee to increase funding for social services program, including the Indian Child Welfare Act program.

## **II. INDIAN HEALTH SERVICE**

The Skokomish Tribe supports increased funding for the Indian Health Service. We operate a small ambulatory clinic with a staff of 31 people. We provide direct care services as well as purchased/referred care. To be clear, recent funding levels have barely kept up with inflation. This means the amount of care that we can provide to our Tribal members will be diminished. This means our children will not see the dentists as often, and our elders will not have the check-ups they need.

We continue to see the effects of heroin/opioid use in all ages at an alarming rate. The Skokomish Tribe struggles to find the resources to adequately address the treatment and long term needs of those addicted. We see the need for more long term care facilities to address the needs of those addicted and continue their journey of wellness far reaching the current 30 to 45 day in patient treatment process. This is often not adequate time to be healed from addiction and they often return only to re-establish their old habits and slip back into addiction.

We strongly support the requests to exempt the Indian Health Service from any future sequestration. The Indian Health Service is the only major federal health care provider/program that is not exempt from sequestration cuts.

## **III. CONTRACT SUPPORT COSTS – BIA and IHS**

We fully support the legislative proposal to reclassify contract support costs as mandatory funding.