



**Testimony of Chairman Eric White
Stillaguamish Tribe of Indians --- Arlington, Washington
to the United States House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations,
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
American Indian and Alaska Native Public Witness Day
February 26, 2025**

Good afternoon, Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee. My name is Eric White, I am Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Stillaguamish Tribe of Indians. I have served as Chairman of our Tribe for five years and on the Tribe's Board of Directors for thirteen years. Thank you for holding this hearing today.

The Stillaguamish Tribe is located in Northwest Snohomish County outside of Arlington, Washington. The stuləg^wábš (Stoluck-absh) people, now called the Stillaguamish, have lived on the main branch and bays of the Stillaguamish river, and bays on or near north Puget Sound since time immemorial. Stulek^w means river in our language, Northern Lushootseed. We are the River People. Our ancestors were a party to the Treaty of Point Elliott of 1855, and our tribe continues its tradition of hunting, fishing, and gathering as well as being stewards of the local fish and wildlife populations. Since our re-recognition by the federal government in 1974, we have steadfastly worked to restore our ancestral homelands. Our reservation currently spans 66 acres; we own 4,000 acres in trust properties; and our Tribe is comprised of 400 members.

This is my first time testifying before the Subcommittee. In light of recent developments in Washington, we felt it was crucial to address the impacts of pauses and potential cuts to federal programs affecting our Tribe, as well as ongoing restoration efforts. My testimony today addresses the following:

1. Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program Grant

In 2024, the Stillaguamish Tribe received a Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program Grant to design and construct a wildlife overcrossing near Red Cabin Creek. This project aims to reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions and improve habitat connectivity for elk and other species. The program is specifically designed to address the critical issue of wildlife-vehicle collisions while simultaneously enhancing habitat connectivity for both terrestrial and aquatic species. The project site is located within a critical wildlife corridor along the Red Cabin Creek riparian area. This corridor connects federal forest and industrial timberlands north of State Route 20 ("SR 20") with state and federally managed forests to the south and is formed by the convergence of multiple riparian corridors around the Skagit River Valley.



The North Cascades elk herd is one of ten herds in Washington State with non-migratory sub-herds residing in the Skagit Valley along SR 20. Responsible management of this herd requires consideration of societal impacts such as frequent road crossings and elk-vehicle collisions. The Washington Department of Transportation (“WSDOT”) ranks a segment of SR20—mileposts 66-86—in the top ten for elk-vehicle collisions in the state. In 2021, the Stillaguamish Tribe partnered with WSDOT to examine elk-vehicle incident data (carcass removals, salvage reports, state patrol reports) and elk road crossing events within this stretch of highway. Elk-vehicle incident (“EVI”) data and elk GPS collar data indicated four hotspots within the target segment. With 108 EVIs and 190 road crossing events from 2012 to 2021, the Red Cabin Creek area was identified as a priority for highway safety mitigation. This region contains multiple riparian corridors that connect forestlands to the north and south of SR20 to the Skagit River Valley. These corridors are used by multiple species including elk, black-tailed deer, coyotes, and black bear. These wildlife crossing structures in combination with fencing are an effective method of reducing wildlife-vehicle collisions and improving habitat connectivity for a wide range of species.

These ongoing efforts are threatened by funding disruptions by the federal government. On January 20, 2025, the Administration issued an Executive Order titled “Unleashing American Energy,” which imposed a freeze on disbursements for programs funded under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act. This funding freeze has had profound and detrimental impacts, disrupting critical initiatives and programs.

Just days later, on January 27, 2025, the Office of Management and Budget (“OMB”) issued memorandum M-25-13, titled “Temporary Pause of Agency Grant, Loan, and Other Financial Assistance Programs.” As the title indicates, this memo caused a broad suspension of most federal financial assistance programs, including the Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program. Although the OMB rescinded the memorandum on January 29, 2025, many funding streams under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the Inflation Reduction Act, and other federal financial assistance programs remain frozen. Alarmingly, there are reports indicating the potential for permanent suspension or complete termination of these programs.

The Stillaguamish Tribe respectfully requests that Subcommittee Members advocate for President Trump to immediately release funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the Inflation Reduction Act, and other essential federal programs on which Tribal Nations depend. Additionally, we urge the Subcommittee to include language in the FY 2026 Interior Appropriations bill directing the release of funding for the Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program, allowing the program to resume and continue supporting vital infrastructure and conservation efforts.



2. The Environmental Programs and Management (“EPM”) account of the Environmental Protection Agency – Puget Sound Program

Funding from the Puget Sound Program is critical to the Stillaguamish Tribe and other Washington Tribes, supporting scientific research and restoration efforts aimed at improving the health of the Puget Sound ecosystem. These funds enable essential work to address pollution, habitat degradation, and declining wildlife populations in the Puget Sound region. Specifically, the Stillaguamish Tribe has utilized this funding to implement habitat restoration projects, conduct ecosystem monitoring, and advance fish population recovery efforts. With these funds, we have restored critical habitat, improved fish passage, and expanded our capacity for addressing environmental challenges in the Puget Sound watershed.

We deeply appreciate the Subcommittee's allocation of \$54 million to the Puget Sound Program in the FY 2025 bill. However, due to rising costs and the increasing scale of restoration efforts necessary to combat the ongoing environmental challenges in the region, we strongly recommend increasing the program's funding to \$65 million for FY 2026. This increase will allow Tribes and other stakeholders to continue making meaningful progress in restoring the Puget Sound and preserving its ecological and cultural significance

3. United States Fish and Wildlife (“USFWS”) Tribal Wildlife Grants Program.

The Tribal Wildlife Grants Program is an essential funding source that supports the conservation of local wildlife and the restoration of critical habitats. The Stillaguamish Tribe has relied on this program to undertake projects that protect culturally significant species, restore degraded habitats, and support the recovery of threatened and endangered species. For example, these grants have been instrumental in our efforts to conserve species, restore riparian zones, and improve wildlife population in our region.

We respectfully request that the Subcommittee allocate \$12 million to the USFWS Tribal Wildlife Grants Program for FY 2026. This funding will allow Tribes to continue vital conservation efforts that protect biodiversity, enhance ecosystem resilience, and preserve the natural and cultural heritage of Tribal lands.

Conclusion

The Stillaguamish Tribe of Indians requests that the Subcommittee support the continued disbursement of federal financial assistance to Tribes and fund the requests outlined in this testimony to address the needs of our local fish and wildlife populations. These funds are critical to protecting culturally significant resources and ensuring the continued stewardship of our ancestral lands.



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Thank you again for allowing me to testify today.