



**Testimony of Aja DeCoteau, Executive Director
Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
March 17, 2026**

Summary of Budget Requests for FY2027:

Overall funding request for BIA Rights Protection Implementation line item to all intertribal agencies - \$66 million

Of this, the request to the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission includes:

1. Columbia River Fisheries Management - \$6.4 million
2. Columbia River-In Lieu Sites Law Enforcement - \$2.18 million
includes funding for the following specific items:
 - a. Enforcement one-time funding to establish a K-9 unit - \$130,000
 - b. Victim's Advocates reoccurring funding - \$200,000
3. Columbia River Fishing Access Site Operations and Improvements - \$2.059 million
4. U.S. Canada Pacific Salmon Treaty - \$7.42 million
5. BIA Youth Program Initiatives - \$555,000

The Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (CRITFC) appreciates this opportunity to submit outside witness testimony regarding the Department of Interior Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) FY 2027 appropriations.

CRITFC was founded in 1977 by the four Columbia River treaty tribes: the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon, the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, and the Nez Perce Tribe. CRITFC provides coordination and technical assistance to these tribes in national and international efforts to protect and restore our shared salmon, steelhead, Pacific lamprey, and white sturgeon resources and the habitat these species depend on.

Our combined ancestral homelands are 66,591 square miles of the Columbia River basin in Idaho, Washington, and Oregon, which is slightly larger than the State of Florida. This area covers nearly one-third of the U.S. portion of the Columbia basin and comprises 88% of the rivers and streams still accessible to anadromous fish above Bonneville Dam.

In 1855, the U.S. entered into treaties with our four tribes whereupon we ceded tens of millions of acres of our homelands. In return, the U.S. pledged to honor our ancestral rights, including the right to fish in all Usual and Accustomed stations. Unfortunately, a perilous history has brought Columbia River anadromous fish populations to the edge of extinction. Many historic stocks have been extirpated in our homelands and twelve Columbia Basin salmon and steelhead populations are listed under the Endangered

Species Act. Pacific lamprey have declined 95% from historic numbers, and dam-locked white sturgeon populations are struggling to recruit new generations of fish.

The CRITFC member tribes are internationally recognized leaders in fisheries restoration and management. We are well-recognized principals in the region's efforts to halt the decline of anadromous populations and rebuild them to levels that support thriving tribal and non-tribal economies. Columbia River fish stocks form the core of high value fisheries from the Interior West to Southeast Alaska. To restore these fish populations, our actions emphasize 'gravel-to-gravel' management, including supplementation of natural stocks, healthy watersheds, and collaboration with state, federal, and private entities.

For CRITFC to continue to do this critical work, we need adequate Congressional funding that emphasizes self-determination. The funding mechanisms provided by Public Law 93-638 allows us to take control and implement restoration and management work that impacts our treaty-reserved resources and takes advantage of the unique local knowledge and expertise we have developed over time. These federal appropriations are necessary to continue the exercise of our treaty-reserved rights to harvest fish on the Columbia River.

RPI Funding: Columbia River Fisheries Management

Request: \$6.4 million

The tribes are leaders in one of the nation's largest fishery restoration efforts. Management is increasing in complexity and sophistication requiring increasing technical expertise, collaboration, and enforcement. The BIA's Columbia River Fisheries Management budget supports the core fishery program efforts at CRITFC and our member tribes.

CRITFC and our member tribes are principal co-managers in the region and committed to actions that improve regional and international harvest and fish production coordination, critical investments in habitat restoration, and resolving contentious issues within the Columbia River basin. The overall management responsibilities of the tribal programs have grown exponentially and need commensurate increases in BIA base funding. For example, when Congress enacted the Endangered Salmon Predation Control Act, P.L. 115-329, CRITFC and our member tribes were recognized as part of the regional effort to manage Columbia River sea lion predation. This recognition brought significantly increased engagement and workload but failed to include funding to undertake these management activities. We request continued funding of the Columbia River Fisheries Management line at **\$6.4 million**.

RPI Funding: Columbia River-In Lieu Sites Law Enforcement

Request: \$2.18 million

Public safety is a high priority for CRITFC and our member tribes. Our conservation and criminal enforcement officers are the cornerstone of public safety in the heavily used Columbia River Gorge area, patrolling 150 miles of the river and its shorelines in Oregon and Washington. We are the primary provider of enforcement services at 31 In-Lieu/Treaty Fishing Access Sites (IL-TFAS) developed on federal lands and under federal jurisdiction

pursuant to P.L. 87-14 and P.L. 100-581 for use by treaty fishers. CRITFC's officers possess BIA Special Law Enforcement Commissions to enhance protection and service to tribal members and federal trust properties along the river.

A Department of Justice grant helped develop a program to address violence against women and assist victims of crime. These Victim Advocate positions play a critical role in providing trauma informed, culturally grounded services to crime victims at the IL-TFAS. These advocates deliver crisis intervention, safety planning, emergency services, protection order assistance, and coordination with community partners, including the four CRITFC member tribes. Their work addresses disproportionately high rates of violence experienced by Native people and fills essential service gaps at geographically dispersed sites where victims often have limited access to local resources. We would like to integrate this into our existing IL/TFAS law enforcement program and request a \$200,000 increase to this line.

We are also looking to expand our policing capabilities through acquisition of a K-9 Unit. Our police agency operates in a uniquely complex environment that spans multiple jurisdictions, remote regions, and difficulty in being able to call for immediate back-up. This multi-jurisdictional and geographically dispersed operating area creates challenges that traditional patrol resources alone cannot effectively overcome. A trained K-9 team would provide enhanced officer safety, improved search efficiency, and significantly increased ability to detect narcotics and locate suspects or endangered persons. This is a one-time \$130,000 increase to this line.

CRITFC originally entered a P.L. 93-638 contract with BIA in 2011 for enforcement services along the Columbia River. This long-term reoccurring funding has led to increased stability of this public safety effort. We request Columbia River-In Lieu Sites Law Enforcement funding at **\$2.18 million**.

Columbia River Fishing Access Site Operations and improvements

Request: \$2.059 million

CRITFC contracts with BIA to perform operations and maintenance and improvement of the 31 IL-TFAS across 150 miles of the Columbia River along the Washington and Oregon border. These sites were created to ensure tribal member access to the river after the development of the federal Columbia River Power System flooded and destroyed access to fishing grounds that had been utilized from time immemorial.

Due to the deteriorating condition of the 31 IL-TFAS from age and use, Congress passed PL 116-99 which called for a human health and safety assessment of these sites and appropriations of federal funds to address these shortcomings. We have started the most urgent improvements at the highest priority sites which are the oldest, most heavily used sites including Lone Pine, Cooks and Cascade Locks in lieu sites and the Lyle Treaty Fishing Access Site. We request continued P.L. 116-99 Implementation funding and operations and maintenance funding at **\$2,059,000**.

U.S. Canada Pacific Salmon Treaty

Request: \$7.42 million

In response to declining salmon populations and pending treaty fishing rights litigation, the U.S. and Canada signed the Pacific Salmon Treaty (PST) in 1985. The goal of the PST is to conserve and rebuild salmon stocks, provide for optimum production, and control salmon interceptions in the Pacific Ocean. The Columbia River is the largest salmon system on the West Coast and produces chinook salmon that support fisheries and communities from Riggins, Idaho to Sitka, Alaska.

The PST established the Pacific Salmon Commission (PSC) as a forum to collaborate on intermingled salmon stocks. The U.S. Section of the PSC annually develops a coordinated budget for tribal, state, and federal programs to ensure cost and program efficiencies. The 2008 agreement, which expired at the end of 2018, represented a step forward in ensuring the conservation and rebuilding of the shared salmon resource.

For tribal participation in the PST, the U.S. Section identified a continuing program need of \$7.42 million for the 25 participating tribes to implement the revised agreement. These funds provide for direct tribal participation with the Commission, panels, and technical committees. This funding maintains tribal resource assessment and research programs structured to fulfill required treaty implementation activities which protect trust resources and ensures that our tribal fishers receive an equitable portion of the harvestable fish numbers. We request U.S. Canada Pacific Salmon Treaty funding at **\$7.42 million**.

Youth Program Initiatives

Request: \$555,000

CRITFC strives to build a tribal workforce of Native American scientists, policy analysts, technicians, and managers to lead Columbia Basin fisheries management into tomorrow. CRITFC's Workforce Development Program allows CRITFC to create opportunities for tribal members of all ages to get hands-on, culturally relevant experience in fisheries science, ecology, and policy. The most prominent effort in this program is the week-long Salmon Camp, an annual camp for tribal middle school students to foster an interest in STEM-related careers connected to salmon and other natural resources.

From 2014-2017, CRITFC offered paid research internships to college students interested in fisheries and natural resources using BIA Youth Initiative funding. CRITFC hopes to continue these opportunities for our tribal communities and developing tribal professionals.

We support Youth Program Initiatives funding at **\$555,000**.

On behalf of the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, thank you for the opportunity to provide the Subcommittee with our funding priorities for Fiscal Year 2027.