



**THE PRAIRIE ISLAND INDIAN COMMUNITY
TESTIMONY OF THE HON. GRANT JOHNSON, PRESIDENT**

**U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES**

March 17, 2026

Summary of Agency/Program and Funding Requests

- 1. Funding for Tribes Impacted by Federally-Constructed or Licensed Projects***
 - 2. Funding for Tribal Law Enforcement and Emergency Response***
 - 3. Funding for Tribal Emergency Plan Development***
 - 4. Funding for Safe Drinking Water and Cultural Resources Protection***
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INTRODUCTION

Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to testify on behalf of the Prairie Island Indian Community. My name is Grant Johnson, and I am the President of the Prairie Island Indian Community Tribal Council. Our Tribe and our Mdewakanton Dakota ancestors have resided along the banks of the Mississippi River for countless generations. Nearly a century ago the United States established our main reservation on Prairie Island, which is an island located in the Mississippi River between Minnesota and Wisconsin. Unfortunately, federal and federally-licensed infrastructure projects at Prairie Island continuously threaten the health and safety of our members who live there, and threaten the continued viability of the Tribal economy we have developed. Further, the recent discovery of PFAS “forever” chemicals in our drinking water at a tribal housing development and a tribal elder care facility now inflict additional threats to our health and well-being.

These health and safety threats underpin our request that the Subcommittee ensure robust funding for: (1) development of new, safer trust lands for Tribal communities facing existential threats caused by federal infrastructure, (2) tribal law enforcement and emergency response, (3) development of emergency plans for deployment on reservation lands, and (4) safe drinking water (including contaminant remediation) and related cultural resources protection.

THREATS FACED BY THE PRAIRIE ISLAND INDIAN COMMUNITY

Due to the federal government’s construction of Lock and Dam No. 3, our Reservation constantly faces the risk of flooding. Flooding endangers our citizens, threatens our livelihood, and prevents safe housing and economic development on our Reservation. In response to each flood event, we are forced to use our own resources to construct expensive safeguards to protect our employees, patrons, and the tribal businesses (primarily our gaming facility) that generate funding to run our government. Our Reservation also is frequently inundated by “major flood” events, most recently in 2023, leading to the issuance of a Presidential declaration of a “major disaster” for our Community.¹ The National Weather Service describes a “major flood” event as one in which there is “*extensive inundation of structures and roads in addition to the possible significant evacuations of people and/or transfer of property to higher elevations.*”² Over the last three decades our Reservation has been subjected to *four* “major flood” events – meaning the youngest generation of our Tribal members has experienced the “significant evacuations of people and/or transfer of property to higher elevations” four times already – something most other Americans never experience in a lifetime. In addition to the major flood that occurred in 2023, major floods have been recorded on our Reservation in 1951, 1952, 1965, 1969, 1997, and twice in 2001.³ The National Weather Service also has recorded floods at lower but still damaging levels in multiple years since, including as recently as 2024.⁴ During these flooding events, we are forced to use our own financial and human resources to build temporary sandbag barriers and to take other actions to try to protect homes, sacred and cultural sites, government offices, and Tribal businesses.

Compounding this threat is the fact that in 1973 and 1974 the federal government licensed the operation of the Prairie Island Nuclear Generating Plant on our same island less than 700 yards from our Reservation. Although it is already one of the oldest nuclear plants in the United States, the Plant’s operators plan to run the facility through 2054. Because there is no permanent federal repository for spent nuclear fuel,⁵ the nuclear power plant stores an ever-increasing amount of nuclear waste on-site at Prairie Island pursuant to a license issued by the federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission in 1993 and renewed more than a decade ago. Currently more than 1,000 tons of nuclear waste are licensed for storage, and that storage also is located less than 700 yards from our Reservation. The Plant’s request to *double this amount* of stored nuclear waste recently was granted.⁶

¹ 88 Fed. Reg. 48279 (July 26, 2023); *see also, e.g.*, “Mississippi crests in Red Wing at highest levels since 2001,” CBS News (Apr. 26, 2023), available at <https://www.cbsnews.com/minnesota/news/mississippi-crests-in-red-wing-at-highest-levels-since-2001/>.

² Flood Preparedness Week - Flooding and Related Phenomena, National Weather Service, available at https://www.weather.gov/ffc/flood_awareness_flooding, (emphasis added).

³ *See* National Weather Prediction Service, Mississippi River at Red Wing – Below Lock and Dam #3, available at <https://water.noaa.gov/gauges/rdwm5>.

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *See* U.S. Gov’t Accountability Off., GAO-21-603, “Commercial Spent Nuclear Fuel: Congressional Action Needed to Break Impasse and Develop a Permanent Disposal Solution” (2021).

⁶ Order Granting Certificate of Need With Conditions, Minnesota Public Utilities Commission, Docket No. E002/CN-24-68 (October 17, 2025).

No other community in the United States has been forced to live in such close proximity to a nuclear plant or nuclear waste. Further, our ability to address emergency situations on Prairie Island is hampered by the existence of a busy rail line that runs nearly the length of our Reservation. Trains using this route frequently carry hazardous cargo, which creates an inherently dangerous situation if we need to be evacuated in an emergency or receive emergency services. Derailments in East Palestine, Ohio and Raymond, Minnesota further elevated our concerns.

Just this last year, the Tribe also received confirmation that our elder's residential facility and numerous tribal homes are plagued with drinking water that is contaminated with "forever chemicals" known as PFAS. Testing of residents' drinking water shows contamination exceeding federal and State of Minnesota limits for Maximum Contaminant Levels (MCLs) for perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) and perfluoro octane sulfonic acid (PFOS), which together are referred to as per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). Harmful impacts from PFAS on human health include immune suppression and decreased vaccination response, thyroid disease, changes in liver function (such as higher cholesterol, elevated liver enzymes), reproductive issues, pregnancy-induced hypertension and preeclampsia, and lower birth weight. In addition, lifetime exposure to PFOA has also been associated with kidney and testicular cancers. Most sensitive to the potentially harmful effects of these contaminants are pregnant women, fetuses, infants, and children.

For all of these reasons and for the safety of our Tribe and future generations we urge Congress to provide critically needed federal funding as follows.

I. FUNDING FOR TRIBES IMPACTED BY FEDERAL PROJECTS

The federal government played a primary role in the creation of the threats we face at our Prairie Island reservation; yet we were forced on our own to acquire additional land within our historical territory, located at a safer distance from these threats. We expended very significant resources to buy this new land, which we call Elk Run, and to do the work necessary to have it put into trust, but the Department of the Interior does not appear to have the resources to complete its work on our fee-to-trust application for housing and economic development. Not only do we need the land placed into trust, we need federal help to be able to develop infrastructure, housing, and employment opportunities at North Elk Run. We urge the Subcommittee to fully fund programs that help Tribes finance and build roads, water and sewer infrastructure, and tribal housing, and that support economic development on tribal lands. This also means that it is crucial that the Bureau of Indian Affairs be adequately funded and staffed to fulfill its obligations to complete work on fee-to-trust requests, and to review and approve leases, rights-of-way and other development-related agreements that require federal approval. The Tribe has been disappointed that its fully complete fee-to-trust application for housing and non-gaming economic development at North Elk Run has languished for nearly a year and a half given the very real health and safety threats it faces.

II. TRIBAL LAW ENFORCEMENT, PUBLIC SAFETY AND EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Given the severe threats faced by our Tribe, adequate law enforcement, public safety and emergency response infrastructure is crucial so that we can protect our citizens, patrons, and employees. Our tribal police and emergency personnel must be prepared to respond to a wide range of emergencies that could occur on our Reservation at Prairie Island, whether that be a nuclear event, flooding, train derailment or other natural or man-made disasters. Yet federal funding for law

enforcement, public safety and emergency response does not come close to meeting Indian Country's needs. In 2024 the BIA's Office of Justice Services estimated that it would cost over \$3 billion to address unmet public safety and justice program needs in Indian Country,⁷ a need that has only increased since then. We urge Congress to prioritize funding to meet this need.

III. DEVELOPMENT OF TRIBAL EMERGENCY PLANS

Without adequate planning, chaos inherently follows an emergency event. Moreover, at Prairie Island, flooding or other threats could trigger another event and lead to an even greater catastrophe, *e.g.*, a train derailment that hampers flood or nuclear emergency management response. Yet our Federal Trustee has never developed a comprehensive emergency plan to respond to the threats we face. If and when an emergency takes place, we have nowhere to go to obtain help coordinating communications with the multiple federal agencies that would be involved (*e.g.*, Interior, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Nuclear Regulatory Commission, and possibly the Department of Transportation). Further, with our governmental infrastructure compromised and our businesses shuttered, we would have no funding to pay for emergency services (*e.g.*, emergency personnel, expert assistance, infrastructure redevelopment, and temporary housing) in the aftermath of the catastrophe and no way to rebuild afterwards. We need a single point of federal contact to be identified and funding for the development of an emergency plan.

IV. SAFE DRINKING WATER AND CULTURAL RESOURCES REMEDIATION

We appreciate the administration's focus on the impact of synthetic chemicals in our environment, including PFAS, which are used in a wide variety of products.⁸ We are deeply concerned about PFAS contamination in our drinking water, as well as contamination in the plants and animals on which we depend. This exposure has had far-reaching effects on our community's health and cultural resources and devastating impacts on our Tribe at all levels – from the water that our children and elders drink, to the plants that our tribal buffalo herd consumes, to the maple syrup that we have harvested for centuries. We urge that Subcommittee ensure that EPA's safe drinking water programs and other programs that fund contaminant remediation efforts (such as EPA's State and Tribal Assistance Grants; Drinking Water State Revolving Fund), receive robust funding to help Tribes like ours combat these serious health threats.

CONCLUSION

The Prairie Island Indian Community is very appreciative of the Subcommittee's interest in our concerns and our funding needs. We are happy to answer any questions you may have, and we look forward to working with you.

⁷ BIA, Office of Justice Services, *Report to the Congress on Spending, Staffing, and Estimated Funding Costs for Public Safety and Justice Programs in Indian Country, 2021* at 1 (Feb. 2024), available at: https://www.bia.gov/sites/default/files/media_document/2021_tloa_report_final_508_compliant.pdf.

⁸ The MAHA Report - Make our Children Healthy Again: Assessment (May, 2025), available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/MAHA-Report-The-White-House.pdf>.