

**TESTIMONY CONCERNING FISCAL YEAR 2027  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT AND RELATED AGENCIES**

**FOND DU LAC BAND OF LAKE SUPERIOR CHIPPEWA  
BRUCE SAVAGE, CHAIRMAN**

**March 17, 2026**

Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and respected members of the Committee, I am Bruce Savage, the Chairman of the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa (Band). On behalf of the Band, I would like to thank you for inviting me to testify. We submit this testimony to urge Congress to increase, or, at the very least preserve and protect, federal funding levels for Indian programs.

As Congress knows, Indian tribes have a unique political and legal status recognized by the U.S. Constitution. Elimination or disruption of federal funding for Indian tribes has a huge impact on the ability of tribes to provide essential services to its members. Indeed, the problems that face communities nationwide are far more severe for Indian communities, with tribes having far fewer resources to address problems like substance abuse, domestic violence, public safety, and homelessness. The Band provides health, education, social services, public safety and other governmental services to our 4,200 members and more than 7,300 Indian people who live on and near our Reservation. We urge Congress to continue to fund federal programs relied on by tribes like the Band.

**BIA: Trust-Natural Resources Management.** There is nothing more important than preserving and protecting the territories and resources that our ancestors reserved for our people when they signed our treaties with the United States. The Band is committed to the management, conservation, and sustainability of the natural resources of the Fond du Lac Reservation and within our Ceded Territory, where we have treaty rights to hunt, fish, and gather. We urge you to provide full funding for Trust-Natural Resources Management in FY 2027, including increased funding for Rights Protection and Implementation, which will allow us to protect, enhance, and restore natural resources within our Reservation and Ceded Territory.

Our Reservation consists of 101,153 acres, and includes forests, lakes, and rivers that must be managed and protected for current and future generations. Our Ceded Territory covers 30 million acres in portions of Upper Michigan, Northern Wisconsin, North Central Minnesota, and all of Lake Superior within the United States. Our natural resources across the region face diverse and complex challenges. Band members depend on our Treaty rights to put food on the table and to engage in ceremonial practices that serve as the foundation for our culture. Our stewardship of those natural resources—through scientific study, resource management, and enforcement of Band laws that regulate tribal members who hunt, fish, and gather—is critical, and is also an important source of local employment.

Additional BIA support and funding for Fire Preparedness and Forest Inventory is needed. Fire Preparedness has been drastically underfunded for the last two decades, resulting in an inability to, for example, cycle out unreliable equipment. Instead, funding can only be used to maintain and repair outdated equipment. Inadequate funding for Forest Inventory positions slows our ability to expedite

timber sales and make management decisions or actions a reality.

**Tribal Historic Preservation Office and NAGPRA Implementation:** Protecting our ancestors and preserving our cultural heritage are as fundamental to our identity as the stewardship of our lands and waters. We urge Congress to provide funding for the Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO) to support the Band's ongoing efforts to review and consult under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). After the 2024 NAGPRA revisions, consultation requests from institutions receiving federal funding increased, placing an immense strain on our existing staff capacity. Our THPO requires additional resources to meet these expanding federal requirements. Increased funding is critical to support our capacity to review complex inventories and conduct meaningful consultations. This support ensures that ancestral remains, objects of cultural patrimony, sacred objects, and funerary objects are accurately identified and returned to the Band. Fulfilling these duties is essential for the healing of our community and the protection of ceremonial practices that serve as the foundation of our culture.

**Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).** We appreciate Congress's continued support to provide federal funds for EPA, but we ask that funding for EPA in FY 2027 be increased due to the federal trust responsibility and the Bands inherent treaty rights.

**State and Tribal Assistance Grants (STAG).** We thank Congress for continuing to support STAG funding, including increasing Clean Water Act Sections 106 and 319 funding. We strongly urge Congress to increase funding for the Section 106 Program, which has not seen a substantive increase in years, even as the Band's responsibilities continue to grow and face increasing pressures and obstacles. We appreciate the increase to Section 319 program funding, which now supports one-half of a full-time position in our Water Program.

**Water Quality.** We have a robust federally approved water quality standards program under the Clean Water Act (CWA). Given the current threats to water resources in our region, we urge that the Tribal Section 106 funding be doubled so that we can protect our waters. Additionally, Congress should continue funding the EPA to support tribal training in ATTAINS, the national water quality assessment database, as well as training funding to assist tribes in conducting and reporting on water quality assessments. Finally, as tribes apply for, and receive, treatment as a state status to implement various CWA regulatory programs, such as 303(c) or water quality standards, 404 wetland dredge and fill permitting, 402 NPDES permitting, or 303(d) impaired waters listing and Total Maximum Daily Load implementation, there should be financial support for that authority. This vital funding for CWA implementation could be sourced through more stable State and Tribal Multipurpose Grant awards.

**Air.** The Band holds treatment as a state status under the Clean Air Act § 505(a)(2) for air related activities that take place near the Reservation and/or other tribal lands. There are health impacts from air pollution both on and off Reservation from industrial, commercial, and local sources. The Band maintains a long-standing air monitoring program, which is consistent with federal, state, and local organizations, to aid in research and pollution control endeavors. This program has faced funding declines in over the years, and we request more funding to assist with technical support and staff capacity.

**Sustainability Initiatives.** We request funding for the planning, preparation, and adaptation required to deal with impacts to our natural resources and access to our treaty resources both on and off

Reservation and in our Ceded Territories.

Wetlands. Wetlands make up one half of our Reservation. Funding for sustained wetland monitoring and protection, as well as for management and restoration of this invaluable resource, is needed.

Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI). The Band fully supports this initiative and thanks Congress for its continued bipartisan support. We ask that Congress maintain the current level of funding for this initiative, which provides broad-reaching benefits to important resources for all stakeholders (state, tribal, and private) in the Great Lakes region. Funding helps support our wildlife programs, wild rice restoration efforts, fisheries stewardship, and environmental staffing capacity. A good example of how this funding has a regional impact is the Band's partnership, in an effort supported by the GLRI, to restore wild rice (manoomin) in the St. Louis River Estuary. Over the past decade, approximately 200 acres of wild rice habitat have been restored to a level that now supports local harvest opportunities as well as provides wildlife habitat. Additionally, GLRI funding enables the Band to monitor for inventory and combat a wide array of invasive species that threaten ecosystems and species highly important to the Band's culture and way of life.

**BIA: Public Safety and Justice.** A significant component to protecting our homeland is having a fully staffed and trained law enforcement department. We appreciate Congress's decision to dedicate funds to improve Tribal law enforcement training, hiring, and anti-opioid activities. Our law enforcement responds to a wide range of issues and calls, and is seeing an increase in calls related to domestic violence and substance abuse.

Our law enforcement officers patrol a lot of ground. We currently staff Investigators (General Crimes, Sex Trafficking, Narcotics), Patrol Sergeants, Patrol Officers, a Victim Advocacy Officer, a School Resource Officer, and a K-9 Officer. Tribal law enforcement currently patrols approximately 154 square miles. All of our officers are licensed by the state and the Band. In the last year alone, we responded to over 7,000 calls across two counties. Despite our successes, more funding is needed. To meet our current needs, we require three more officers.

We also need funding for training. We strive for our officers to maintain current and effective standards when performing their duties but need increased funding for vital training, including for dealing with an increase in people with mental health issues. We continue to see increases in the drug epidemic and related crimes. We have consistently seen a growth in heroin and fentanyl overdoses, including fatal overdoses. Many drug related incidents correlate with general crimes like burglary, theft, and assault. We also have a regular need to replace equipment for both administrative and field-related demands. Specifically, we need funding to help replace aging fleet vehicles. The rising costs of goods and services compresses our already strained budget. We need Congress to ensure that funding accounts for the increased costs of goods and services.

Our Reservation has seen an increase in missing persons. This means that our officers have to work overtime hours, which further strains our limited resources and equipment. We have also seen an increase in criminal sexual conduct cases involving both adults and juveniles. These cases are complicated, and take time and resources to work and investigate. This further depletes our limited budget. We urge Congress to recognize the growing disparities facing Indian country and increase funding for law enforcement and law enforcement related services.

**Bureau of Indian Education.** Using funding from the BIE and the Department of Education, we

operate the Fond du Lac Ojibwe School, which serves an average of 170 K-12 students. But BIE has failed to increase funding for schools or transportation. Rising inflation and new economic realities means that the support we do receive from the Federal government has less impact than it did in previous years. Over 96% of our students come from very low-income households, and 100% receive free or reduced-price lunch. As a rural school, our students have limited internet access, preventing them from benefiting from the wealth of online resources that continue to become more important in K-12 education. Nevertheless, we are steadily improving student outcomes. While the high school graduation rate for American Indians in Minnesota is at 51%, our students are now at 99.3%, which is above the statewide rate of 83.3%.

Still, with need outpacing BIE funding, we are prevented from providing the services that our students require. Our students need more academic support. More and more of our students and their families need housing and nutritional support. Our special education programs need funding. We need to retain and attract talented staff. We need financial support for our athletics, transportation, and after-school programs. These persistent needs interfere with our students' academic progress. We urge Congress to significantly increase federal funding for Indian education and ensure that the funding reaches tribes, with tribes deciding how best to use that funding.

**Indian Health Service.** While we appreciate Congress's continued support to increase and advance funding for IHS, we urge Congress to provide full funding. Our members continue to face severe disparities across a broad range of health issues. We serve over 7,300 Indian people at our clinics, but the current funding level meets only 33% of our health care funding needs. At the very least, we ask that Congress ensure that all IHS appropriations are indexed to keep pace with inflation.

We support the preservation of Medicaid, as well as the continuation of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act (IHCIA) and other Indian-specific provisions in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. We believe there must be dedicated funding to begin implementing the new authorities contained in the IHCIA.

We support the proposal to make both Contract Support Costs and the 105(l)-leasing funding mandatory so that this non-discretionary funding obligation for the agency no longer competes with discretionary funding. We ask that Congress also provide additional funding within IHS to allow tribes to keep up with today's fast-paced IT developments and cybersecurity risks.

We also support permanent reauthorization of the Special Diabetes Program for Indians (SDPI) with funding at \$250 million per year indexed for inflation. Tribes and tribal organizations should also be authorized to receive SDPI awards through P.L. 93-638 contracts or compacts. We ask that Congress provide funding for, and full reimbursement, of traditional healing treatments.

Congress has recognized the lack of infrastructure funding and support for tribes, and we urge support of an increase of \$627.5 million with recurring funding to support Public Health Infrastructure—and Congress should provide tribes flexibility in how they use that funding to meet their needs. Lastly, Congress should authorize Federally Operated health facilities and IHS headquarters to use federal dollars efficiently and adjust programmatic fund flexibility across accounts at the local level, in consultation with tribes.

Miigwech. Thank you.