

**TESTIMONY OF CODY DESAUTEL, PRESIDENT
INTERTRIBAL TIMBER COUNCIL
PRESENTED TO THE
HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE FOR THE INTERIOR,
ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES ON
FY 2027 APPROPRIATIONS FOR THE BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS
MARCH 18, 2026**

Introduction and Summary

I am Cody Desautel, President of the Intertribal Timber Council (ITC) and Executive Director of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation in Washington State. The ITC is a 50-year-old association of forest-owning tribes and Alaska Native organizations dedicated to improving the sustainable ecological and economic management of our 19.3 million acres of timberland and woodland held in trust by the BIA.

Importance of Tribal Timber Production

Indian forest management creates \$3 for every \$1 of investment. Indian forestry employs nearly 20,000 people. It manages wildlife habitat, aquatic resources, and forests to provide sources of food and medicine for Indian people. Management of Indian forests also generates significant revenue for tribal governments to fund essential governmental services, such as social services, law enforcement, and education.

More than 50% of all the timber produced from Department of Interior lands comes from Indian forests. Yet, this harvest level is only half the sustainable annual target set by tribal governments. In 2024, Indian forests held in trust produced over 307 million board feet, while the allowable cut exceeds 687 million board feet. Imagine what tribes – big and small – would be able to do with twice the revenue and economic activity they see from current funding levels.

Disparate Funding for Tribal Forest, Wildfire Management

Every ten years, an independent team of scientists reviews the management of tribal forests and presents their report to Congress, as mandated by statute. The fourth Indian Forest Management Assessment Team report (IFMAT IV) was finalized and presented to Congress in 2023. IFMAT IV noted that harvest levels had dropped from 730 million board feet in 1991 to 342 million board feet in 2019, which was the lowest harvest level since the Depression era.

Over that same time, forested trust land has increased from 15.6 million acres to 19.3 million acres, an increase of almost 24 percent. The 2023 IFMAT report – and those that preceded it – documents the significant and persistent inequity of federal funding for Indian forest management versus other federal forests, such as the U.S. Forest Service and BLM.

Based on the IFMAT report's findings, BIA Forestry is funded at about \$2.89 per acre for tribes without hazardous fuels funding and \$4.89 for those who receive hazardous fuels funding. Compare that to an estimated \$12.24 for National Forest System lands and \$41.41 for western Oregon BLM

lands. Thus, forests managed by the BIA for tribes receive three times less than the Forest Service and 14 times less than BLM forests.

With respect to wildfire-related funding, the IFMAT report found that BIA receives \$3.98 per acre for preparedness – compared to \$10.88 per acre for the U.S. Forest Service. The BIA received \$2.34 per acre for hazardous fuels reduction, while the Forest Service receives \$3.53 per acre. Also, much of this funding is competitive, which makes it difficult to build the capacity needed within tribal programs to treat landscapes at scale with funding uncertainty.

The IFMAT report documents that: “[BIA] forestry funding, in real terms, has declined 21% over the last 30 years. During this 30-year period Indian forest trust lands have increased from 15.6 million acres to 19.3 million acres, meaning that on a per-acre basis, funding, in real terms, has declined by almost 36% over the last 30 years. Some tribes have expressed that they have not had a budget increase in 30 years; others have had budgets or services reduced.”

The result of this inequity is catastrophic on Indian communities. The IFMAT report found reduced funding to BIA for forest management resulted in \$400 million in foregone timber revenue to tribes between 2010-2019. That means \$400 million was not generated to provide essential social, educational, and public safety services to some of the most vulnerable Americans. In addition to the \$400 million in foregone timber revenue, uncharacteristic wildfires have caused additional unquantified losses to timber, wildlife, aquatic, and cultural resources. Those impacts and losses could have been mitigated or reduced with fully funded and staffed programs. The Colville Tribe, for example, has lost over 1 billion board feet of timber since 2015, with a current market value of approximately \$500 million.

Achieving Budget Parity

The IFMAT report found that budget parity between BIA-responsible forests, National Forest System, and BLM forests would require an additional \$96 million per year for BIA Forestry and \$42 million in additional wildfire funding. In addition, the IFMAT report noted an additional \$1.33 billion needed for upgrading 46,900 miles of roads located on Indian trust lands. The report also noted an additional \$313 million to address the backlog of planned treatments that were not initiated, such as 500,000 acres of planting and 500,000 acres of pre-commercial thinning.

Other funding issues identified in the report include law enforcement, wild horse and burro management, and facilities. For comparison, the BLM was appropriated \$141,972,000 for the wild horse and burro program in the Consolidated Appropriations Act for 2024. That is more than twice what all Indian forests receive nationwide. This funding inequity can no longer be ignored.

The ITC requests that Congress prioritize funding for Indian forests in its FY 2027 appropriations bill. This is an urgent matter, and tribes continue to pay the price of each additional year of funding inequity. Recent funding levels for BIA Forestry underscore the ongoing challenges. In FY 2023, BIA Forestry was funded at \$66 million. This was maintained in FY 2024 at \$66 million under the annualized continuing resolution, though final enacted adjustments brought it to \$62 million. FY 2025 enacted funding remained at \$62 million, and FY 2026 funding remained at \$62 million.

These functionally declining funds exacerbate the disparities highlighted in IFMAT IV and hinder tribes' ability to sustainably manage forests.

Alignment with Administration Policy Goals

President Trump's Executive Order of March 1, 2025, on increasing timber production from federal lands represents a critical opportunity to address these inequities while advancing national goals for forest health, economic growth, and reduced wildfire risk. In December 2025, President Trump formally recognized the national security importance of domestic timber production.

The Executive Order directs federal agencies to develop plans for boosting timber harvests, emphasizing the need for more efficient management of federal forests. Indian trust forests under BIA jurisdiction are uniquely positioned to meet these goals. BIA-managed trust forests produce more than 400 million board feet of timber annually on just 19.3 million acres – twice the volume of BLM forests, which yield less than 300 million board feet on three times the acreage (58 million acres).

At their peak, tribal forests produced over 1 billion board feet per year. Current harvests represent only 45% of the Allowable Annual Cut (AAC), meaning maximization of AAC could generate an additional 350 million board feet annually without compromising sustainability. This decline in production stems not from litigation, as with BLM lands, but from chronic underfunding – a 36% per-acre drop in real terms over 30 years.

Importantly, tribal forests achieve this productivity at a fraction of the cost. By prioritizing funding for tribal lands, federal appropriations can be allocated where timber is produced most economically, yielding the greatest return on investment for taxpayers while supporting tribal self-determination and economic sovereignty.

This approach aligns directly with the Executive Order's emphasis on increasing timber supply efficiently, reducing regulatory burdens, and promoting forest restoration through activities like thinning and salvage. Managing tribal lands to their full potential would not only boost national timber output but also enhance wildfire resilience, protect cultural resources, and generate revenue for essential tribal services.

Timber Production Pilot Program

In light of the President's Executive Order and the proven efficiency of tribal forests, we ask Congress to allocate a portion of federal appropriations on the basis of where timber can be produced most economically – and utilized by existing manufacturing infrastructure. Specifically, we request that the Committee set aside \$20 million in the Interior Appropriations bill to be distributed jointly by the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior to agencies –competitively-- based on their assessment of where timber sales can be generated the fastest, at the lowest cost to the federal government, and best utilized by the forest products manufacturing sector. We also request report language in the Interior Appropriations bill requiring both Departments to report to Congress on per-acre spending and timber production efficiency across federal forest agencies, using models from the IFMAT report. This transparency will guide future allocations toward high-yield, low-cost areas.

Alternatively, at a minimum, BIA forestry should be increased from \$62 million to \$158 million to achieve parity with other federal forests, as identified in IFMAT IV. This would address backlogs in treatments, road upgrades, and other critical needs, enabling tribes to maximize AAC and contribute to the Administration's timber production goals. This increase in funding and capacity would also allow tribes to increase their use of cross boundary authorities such as the Tribal Forest Protection Act (TFPA), Good Neighbor Authority (GNA), and shared stewardship agreements. Adding tribal capacity to the management of federal lands can increase the pace and scale of restoration and fire resilience objectives, similar to those included in the Fix Our Forests Act.