



**YAKAMA NATION TESTIMONY
TO THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE
FOR THE INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES – FY 2027**

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Provided by:
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Addressing The Following Agencies and Programs:
Appraisal and Valuation Services; Bureau of Indian
Affairs.

I. Introduction

Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree and distinguished members of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment and Related Agencies, I submit this testimony on behalf of the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation (“Yakama Nation”). The Yakama Nation is a sovereign Tribal Nation with reserved rights and privileges pursuant to the 1855 Treaty between the United States and the Yakamas (“Treaty”).¹ In our Treaty, the Yakama Nation reserved rights that extend broadly throughout our 12-million-acre Treaty Territory. Article II of our Treaty established a 1.4-million-acre Reservation – lands for the Yakama Nation’s exclusive use and benefit. Article I and Article III of our Treaty further established our reserved and perpetual right to access, use, and derive income and other benefit from lands stretching from the North Cascade Mountains down to the Columbia River, and from the crest of the Cascades east to the Snake River – our “Treaty Territory.”

The United States and the Yakama Nation co-exist as partners. This includes the shared responsibility of managing resources, applying laws, and enforcing police powers across the Yakama Nation’s Treaty Territory. The Yakama Nation does this for the benefit of its more than 11,000 enrolled Yakama citizens. The United States does this to fulfill its federal trust and Treaty obligations it owes to the Yakama Nation.

II. Federal Trust Relationship

The federal trust relationship is a unique legal and moral obligation that the United States has towards federally recognized Tribal Nations. It stems from treaties, statutes, court decisions, and executive orders, and it forms the foundation of the *government-to-government* relationship between the United States and Tribal Nations. The federal trust relationship is a complex and evolving concept, but it remains a cornerstone of federal Indian law and policy.

Tribal Nations are *political* entities, possessing a unique government-to-government relationship with the United States. Tribal Nations, unlike states, lack the tax revenue base to withstand federal funding freezes or reductions, making us especially sensitive to any disruption in resources. Federal programs we depend on are not simply handouts; they are the continuation of a centuries-long *political* relationship, a fulfillment of trust and Treaty obligations, and a crucial component of our ability to self-govern and thrive as sovereign nations.

Given the foregoing, the Yakama Nation respectfully requests the Appropriations Subcommittee to take every action at its disposal to ensure there are no further pauses, restrictions, decreases, or cancellations of Tribal-federal program funds, as such actions would have devastating impacts for Tribal Nations across this country. In addition to preserving existing funding levels, the Yakama Nation respectfully requests that you prioritize the following critical items, which have not received adequate attention or remain underfunded:

¹ See Treaty with the Yakamas, U.S. – Yakama Nation, June 9, 1855, 12 Stat. 951.

III. Appraisal Backlog for Probate, Leasing, and Trust Transactions (AVSO and BIA)

The Yakama Nation has engaged with the Appraisal and Valuation Services Office (“AVSO”) in government-to-government consultation and initiated the process of developing the model for standardized mass appraisals. This project has assisted in addressing the backlog of probate appraisals that exists at the Yakama Nation. Over a thousand cases have been accelerated and completed with approved probate appraisals. Success depends not only on implementing the mass appraisal model as has been done, but also sufficient staffing within AVSO, the Office of Hearing and Adjustments, and the realty services section of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (“BIA”) to process this incredible project. The importance of having probate hearings with the appropriate number of Judges and their supporting staff is critical to taking care of the backlog of probates. We ask that you please ensure this project continues to receive the resources it needs to succeed.

Besides probate, appraisals are critical to many federal functions, including federal leasing and federal trust transactions. The Yakama Nation Appraisals Program is a federal trust function administered through federal contracts pursuant to the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (Public Law 93-638). Current funding appropriated under the Yakama Nation’s 638 contract for appraisal services only allows for the hiring of a *single full-time appraiser*. This single appraiser’s workload is driven by requests that come directly from the BIA’s realty services section. With only one full-time appraiser, the Yakama Nation Appraisals Program lacks sufficient resources to effectively manage a heavy, federally driven appraisal workload. The Yakama Nation asks for an additional appropriation of \$120,000 to its appraisal services 638 contract to cover the expense of a second full-time appraiser.

IV. Necessary Public Safety & Law Enforcement Funding (BIA-OJS)

The Yakama Nation Police Department is another federal trust function administered through a 638 contract. With only 8 Game Wardens for the 12-million-acre Treaty Territory and 20 patrol officers funded for the 1.4 million-acre Reservation—the largest Treaty Reservation in Washington State—we have roughly a quarter of the officers needed to adequately protect our communities. Despite repeated requests, to simply keep pace with inflation, federal funding for our law enforcement 638 contract has remained stagnant for two decades. The BIA’s Office of Justice Services is constrained by its own budget limitations, leaving the Yakama Nation Police Department to grapple with increasingly complex challenges while being forced to do more with less, year after year. While we appreciate that all communities are requesting additional law enforcement funding, we cannot plead with our citizens for patience when they reasonably demand more than the available resources can provide.

The Yakama Nation faces an overwhelming confluence of public safety crises. We have experienced a surge in violent and property crimes, the highest rate of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women/People in the region, and an alarming rise in Latin American gang and cartel-related drug activity, including (but not limited to) the pervasive and deadly fentanyl epidemic. Our current law enforcement resources are woefully insufficient to address these escalating threats. Despite the commitment of the Yakama Nation Department of Public Safety, to cooperation/collaboration/innovation in the pursuit of safety for all residents of the Yakama Indian Reservation, the overwhelming factors arrayed in opposition require a proportional level of support. The Yakama Nation Police Department urgently requires additional officers, updated equipment, and improved public safety infrastructure to effectively serve the community’s public safety needs. We ask for any additional appropriations you can provide.

V. Treaty Resources: Columbia Basin Fisheries Restoration (BIA)

When the Yakama Nation signed its 1855 Treaty and reserved fishing rights in the Columbia Basin, around 17 million salmon and steelhead returned to the Columbia River each year. Today, we are lucky if we see 2 million fish return. For over four decades, salmon recovery funding has failed to keep pace with

the level of mitigation required to offset the 5-11 million salmon that are killed each year because of the impacts of the federal hydroelectric system.

Due to insufficient operations and maintenance funding, the Columbia Basin Hatcheries are not meeting the mitigation goals established when the dams were constructed. While the Pacific Northwest reaps the benefits of the Federal Hydro Power System, salmon and steelhead populations continue to fall well below the levels promised to affected Tribal Nations. The federal government has obligations under its Treaty with the Yakama Nation, as well as under the Northwest Power Act and other federal laws, to restore healthy and abundant native fisheries in the Columbia Basin. These efforts must be prioritized and properly resourced.

The Yakama Nation's fisheries and wildlife 638 contract funding from the BIA needs to be increased. We need to keep pace with inflation rates and expand our capacity to implement restoration projects for Treaty fisheries. The Yakama Nation's fish and wildlife programs are also facing human resources challenges as intergovernmental efforts with federal agencies, states, and Tribal Nations continue to grow and as regional fish restoration efforts expand in scope to include intersectional energy, water, transportation, and recreation efforts. The Yakama Nation's current 638 contract funding level is inadequate to recruit additional personnel and expertise to address intergovernmental efforts and regional needs, especially in light of recent reductions in the Federal workforce. We ask for additional appropriations to support the restoration of our Treaty fisheries resource.

One critical area of funding in the BIA natural resources budget that we depend on is Rights Protection Implementation (RPI). The Yakama Nation receives funding through four lines in the BIA's RPI budget: Washington Timber, Fish, and Wildlife (TFW); Washington Fisheries Management (WFM); Columbia River Fisheries Management (CFM) and Tribal Fish and Game Management (F&G). Yakama's RPI programs cover 14 Watersheds, Columbia River, and Puget Sound and is currently critically underfunded. As a signator of the TFW Agreement, Yakama Nation has been a critical proponent of the holistic management approach to forest practices and our TFW team reviews more than 1,200 forestry related projects per year on private, state, and federal lands in the 14 Watershed Work Area for the protection of Yakama Fish, Wildlife, and Cultural Resources. Our work within WFM and CFM is at a broader level across the state; while F&G is largely enforcement activities. Increased and adequate RPI funding is essential to protect Yakama Treaty Resources. Our RPI Funding has been stagnant for many years and has a total current annual estimated shortfall of \$2.55 million. TFW has an unmet need of \$1.1 million; and WFM and CFM are in need of \$950,000, while F&G has a shortfall of \$500,000. We request that this subcommittee provide RPI funding at a level that will result in Yakama programs receiving an additional \$2.55 million to the FY26 funding level, bringing total Yakama RPI funding to \$4.625 million in FY27. This level of base funding is paramount to safeguard Yakama Nation Treaty Reserved Rights.

VI. Forest Management – Direct Federal Duty (BIA)

The Yakama Nation's rights to its forest resources are rooted in the Treaty of June 9, 1855, which reserved approximately 650,000 acres of forested land for the exclusive use and benefit of the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation. The Treaty explicitly lists timber harvest and processing, including an agreement by the United States to provide and maintain a sawmill to support tribal economic self-sufficiency. Under federal trust responsibility, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) assumed management of the Yakama Reservation Forest with the obligation to manage the resource for sustained yield and maximum benefit to the Yakama people. The BIA Forest Management Plan (FMP), last approved in 2005, established an Annual Allowable Cut (AAC) of approximately 143 million board feet.

Current BIA management on the Yakama Reservation is producing only a small fraction of the timber volume necessary to sustain long-term forest health and natural fire resilience. Annual harvest levels have averaged approximately 14 to 20 percent of the established AAC, with some years yielding as little as

20 to 30 million board feet. This shortfall is closely tied to critical staffing deficiencies, with more than 40 vacant forestry positions at the Yakama Agency, including essential technical and leadership roles such as a Silviculturist. Recent federal workforce reductions and reduction-in-force actions threaten to further erode program capacity, severely limiting planning, NEPA compliance, timber sale preparation, and contract administration. In some years, only one or two BIA managed timber sales have progressed to an actual harvest. Compounding these challenges, the outdated 2005 Forest Management Plan remains in effect despite multiple internal analyses recommending revised AAC levels in 2010 and 2015. The absence of a current, Forest Management Plan has constrained active management, elevated wildfire risk, contributed to insect and disease pressures, and hindered proactive forest restoration.

These systemic constraints directly affect Yakama Forest Products (YFP) which is a tribal owned sawmill agreed upon by the Yakama Nation and US Government into the Treaty of 1855. Insufficient and inconsistent log supply (due to the lack of BIA timber sales), shrinking residual markets, and aging mill infrastructure have combined to create significant operational and financial strain. Reduced harvest activity has also diminished opportunities for tribally owned logging, trucking, and reforestation efforts, weakening local workforce capacity and potentially the loss of 300 forestry related jobs on the Yakama Reservation. Without adequate staffing, modernized planning, and sustainable harvest levels, both forest health objectives and the long-term resilience of the forest products sector remain at risk. BIA's failure to fulfill these duties not only jeopardizes the health and productivity of the Yakama Forest but also undermines the Yakama Nation's sovereignty and ability to manage our own resources. Without a fix, the Yakama Nation will continue to endure the consequences of lost revenue, economic damage, and accelerated wildfire risk.

Despite ongoing structural and funding constraints, the Yakama Nation has designed a strategic action plan to fix forestry operations, improve data integrity, and strengthen self-determination in forest management. To address concerns with the reliability of legacy inventory data, the Tribe invested in advanced forest inventory and planning technologies, including single-tree LiDAR. Building on these improvements, the Yakama Nation Department of Natural Resources is leading development of a modern, adaptive Forest Management Plan after the Bureau of Indian Affairs was unable to deliver an updated plan. Initiated in 2022, the new plan is designed to streamline consultation, improve NEPA efficiency, and enable more responsive, active management; an Environmental Assessment is underway with a draft anticipated in 2026, while AAC and five-year cutting schedules remain subject to BIA approval and Tribal Council authorization.

Most critically, the Yakama Nation is advancing a Public Law 93-638 Self-Determination contract to assume greater control over the BIA Branch of Forestry, supported by detailed proposals addressing scope, budgeting, workforce development, and equipment needs. This transition is intended to rebuild institutional capacity and align staffing with tribal priorities. For the Yakama Nation to successfully achieve self-determination, sustained federal financial support and technical guidance will be essential both during the transition period and to ensure long-term operational stability and program sustainability.

VII. Closing

The federal government's trust and Treaty obligations must be upheld through sustained support for federal programs that benefit Tribal communities. Fulfilling the requests outlined in this testimony represents a crucial step toward honoring these obligations and empowering the Yakama Nation to self-govern and thrive as a sovereign entity.

Thank you for your attention to these important matters affecting the Yakama Nation.