



VIA E-Mail

June 3, 2021

Chairman Raul Grijalva
Natural Resources Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Snoqualmie Indian Tribe Comments —RESPECT Act

Dear Chairman Grijalva,

The Snoqualmie Indian Tribe (“Tribe”), a federally recognized sovereign Indian tribe and signatory to the Treaty of Point Elliott of 1855, with reserved rights thereunder, submits this letter in support of the RESPECT Act. The Tribe thanks the Committee for its consideration of the RESPECT Act and for its plans to move the Act forward. The Tribe believes the RESPECT Act is a significant step towards protecting sacred sites, and ensuring effective and meaningful consultation between the United States and Indian tribes regarding federal activities that affect tribal lands and interests.

The provisions of the RESPECT Act that address sacred sites are particularly important to the Tribe. Snoqualmie Falls has stood as the Tribe’s most sacred site since time immemorial, and is central to the Tribe’s creation history and traditional and religious practices. Snoqualmie Falls is a 268-foot waterfall that lies on the Snoqualmie River within the Tribe’s historic ceded homeland, and remains the most significant religious site for the Tribe. The Tribe believes that a powerful spirit resides in the plunge pool below the Falls and that the mist generated by Snoqualmie Falls connects the earth to the heavens and carries the prayers of the Snoqualmie people up to Creator. The Snoqualmie people have used Snoqualmie Falls and the surrounding area since time immemorial to conduct their sacred religious ceremonies and as burial grounds.

Snoqualmie Falls continues to serve as the center of who the Snoqualmie are as a Tribe. The Falls remains a place for the Snoqualmie people to gather to pray, meditate, worship, and to connect with their ancestors and spiritual powers. In further recognition of the pre-contact history and current importance of the Falls to the Tribe, the Falls was designated as Traditional Cultural Property on the National Register of Historic Places in 2009.

Snoqualmie Falls and the surrounding area have been severely impacted by Puget Sound Energy’s (“PSE”) hydroelectric plant. In 1898, Puget Sound Power & Light Company built a hydroelectric generating plant at Snoqualmie Falls, which involved discretion of this sacred site in the form of blasting the face of



Snoqualmie Falls and excavation of an underground cavern. In 1957, PSE built another power plant below Snoqualmie Falls that diverted most of the water that flows through the Falls. As a result, the water flow through the falls was reduced to a trickle, nearly eliminating the sacred mist. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission ("FERC") issued the original license for the Snoqualmie Falls Project in 1975. The license, made retroactively effective as of 1956, expired in 1993. PSE applied for a license application with FERC again in 1991, and FERC issued a new 40-year license for the Snoqualmie Falls Project in 2004.

The Tribe has fought for decades to protect Snoqualmie Falls and surrounding area from further desecration and degradation. Despite the inexpressible importance of Snoqualmie Falls to the Snoqualmie people and its designation as a Traditional Cultural Property, Snoqualmie Falls and the surrounding area remain subject to the constant threat of irresponsible development and the FERC-licensed hydroelectric facility at and within Snoqualmie Falls. Consultation is critical to ensure that the Tribe has an opportunity to stop any action that may disturb, desecrate or otherwise impair the integrity of the tangible and intangible characteristics of this unquestionably sacred site.

Too often, sacred sites are unacknowledged or misunderstood when implicated by a proposed federal activity. In order to strengthen protection of sacred sites, ensure that sacred sites are acknowledged and adequately understood by federal agencies throughout the tribal consultation process, the Tribe suggests minor amendments to the discussion draft of the RESPECT Act, which are appended to this letter. The Tribe thanks the Committee for its consideration of these proposed amendments.

The preservation and protection of sacred sites is of paramount importance to the Tribe, and the Tribe is grateful to the Committee for its efforts to honor and protect sacred sites through the RESPECT Act. The Tribe also thanks the Committee for embracing tribal sovereignty and self-determination, the United States' trust and treaty responsibilities to Tribal Governments, and its efforts to meaningfully improve tribal consultation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert M. de los Angeles".

Snoqualmie Tribal Council
Chairman Robert de los Angeles