

## **Ranking Member Don Young Opening Statement**

*Subcommittee for Indigenous Peoples*

*Hearing on October 26, 2021, “Strengthening Indigenous Communities Through Cultural and Environmental Preservation”*

Thank you, Madam Chair, for calling this oversight hearing entitled, “Strengthening Indigenous Communities Through Cultural and Environmental Preservation” to order.

Today’s hearing will focus on the importance of environmental conservation and stewardship in Native communities.

From harvesting salmon, managing forests, and ensuring a successful planting season, the Indigenous peoples have passed down traditions and stories of how to manage and live off the land.

Although the federal government has a fiduciary and trust responsibility to Indian tribes to protect tribal treaty rights, lands, and assets, Tribes have often taken certain administrative and management responsibilities from the federal government through contracts and agreements under the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act, commonly known as 638 contracts.

These contracts and agreements are critical to support tribal self-government and economic development.

One area that tribes have been active in is forest land management.

In 2004, the Tribal Forest Protection Act was signed into law.

It allows for Indian tribes to enter into agreements with the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior to perform forest management on public land that borders or is adjacent to an Indian tribe's land.

In 2018, this law was amended to expand the scope of federal lands eligible for tribal management.

In my home state of Alaska, Chugachmiut, an Alaska Native nonprofit tribal consortium partnered with the Forest Service to perform various forest restoration activities in the Chugach National Forest.

Chugachmiut has extensive experience partnering with BIA to manage forests on individual Native allotments that are in the Chugach region and the Kenai peninsula.

The agreement between the Forest Service and Chugachmiut brings employment and training opportunities to these Native communities and tackles restoration projects related to forest health.

Southcentral Alaska and the Chugach National Forest have been battling the spruce bark beetle epidemic, and part of this agreement is to help clear diseased trees and other fuel hazards to help with wildfire mitigation.

This current agreement wouldn't have been possible without the 2018 expansion of the Tribal Forest Protection Act.

And this is just one example of how tribes and tribal consortiums can be partners to responsibly steward forests and other natural resources throughout the United States.

I hope today's hearing will focus on ways Indian tribes have demonstrated that a balance can be achieved in maintaining cultural and environmental

conservation through with continued active management, without restricting access.

I also want to hear more of how we in Congress can support the goals tribes set for their lands.

Madam Chairwoman, thank you and I look forward to witness testimony.