

Testimony of Gina James, Vice-President, Quinault Indian Nation
House Interior Appropriations Subcommittee
April 8, 2014

My name is Gina James, and I am Vice-President of the Quinault Indian Nation (“Quinault”). Quinault is located on the Quinault Reservation (“Reservation”) on the Olympic Peninsula, west of Seattle, Washington. I represent nearly 3,000 tribal members. I want to thank Chairman Calvert, Ranking Member Moran, and Members of the Subcommittee for holding this hearing on *American Indian and Alaskan Native Programs* to examine the critical funding needs of Indian Country.

My testimony focuses on the following priorities: (1) our plan to relocate Quinault people to higher, safer grounds due to impacts related to natural disasters; (2) need for reinforcement of a seawall to protect our village; (3) need for additional road to access our village; (4) request to support our Blueback salmon and Upper Quinault River restoration efforts; and (5) need for funding to support drug interdiction efforts.

U.S. Responsibility to Meet its Treaty and Trust Obligations to the Quinault People

Through treaties, executive orders, and other agreements, Indian Tribes ceded hundreds of millions of acres of our homelands to the Federal government to help build this great Nation. In return, the United States made promises to provide for the education, health, and welfare of reservation residents. For the Quinault, the promises of the United States were detailed in the Treaty of Olympia, which was signed on July 1, 1855, and on January 25, 1856 (11 Stat. 971). The boundaries of the Quinault Reservation consists of 208,150 acres of beautiful forest lands, mountains, rivers and 26 miles of unspoiled Pacific coastline. There are two major villages located within the Reservation. The village of Taholah, which is where the Quinault government operations are headquartered, is located in the southern portion of the Reservation. Taholah consists of two villages known locally as “Upper Village” and “Lower Village.” The village of Queets is situated in the northern portion of the Reservation.

Under our treaty, we have retained our status as a sovereign Nation with inherent rights to govern ourselves, our lands, properties and resources. This includes access to our usual and accustomed lands and waters, and the right to co-manage the natural resources outside of our Reservation border. The United States has legal treaty and trust responsibilities to keep the promises it made to the Quinault Indian Nation. Sadly, the U.S. has fallen short of meeting its obligations as decreased appropriations, sequestration, inflation and other factors impede our ability to meet the growing needs of our people. As a result, Quinault spends \$4.4 million annually to supplement lapses in Federal funding because the United States has failed to meet its solemn obligations.

Dire Need to Move the Quinault People to Higher Ground

“Noskiako’s” is a Quinault phrase that means “the water coming.” The phrase aptly describes the Lower Village, which is the ancestral home of the Quinault people and is located along the banks of the Quinault River at the mouth of the Pacific Ocean. The area is a tsunami hazard zone. Two weeks ago, Quinault declared a state of emergency due to a breach in the seawall that protects the Lower Village. Because the seawall was no longer capable of stopping the ocean from advancing into our village, Quinault also issued a voluntary evacuation order because the lives of our people and our properties were in imminent danger. The high winds and intense storms that caused the breach led to destruction of buildings and other properties in the Lower Village. Even though the

Corps of Engineers approved our request for emergency assistance, and responded with a temporary solution, the fact is that ongoing natural disasters related to climate change, sea level rise, tsunamis, flooding, storms, and liquefaction continue to be a major problem and the safety of our people and natural resources is a constant concern in the Lower Village. Compounding the issue of public safety is the lack of auxiliary surface roads for emergency access to and from the villages. The villages of Taholah and Queets each have direct access to only one highway.

The Lower Village is no longer a safe place for the Quinault. We are taking steps to relocate our people to higher grounds. In 2013, Quinault received a \$700,000 grant from the Administration for Native Americans (ANA) to develop a comprehensive master plan to move Quinault people from the Reservation's historic Lower Village that is located below sea level to the Upper Village, which is mostly protected from flooding because it is located approximately 120 feet above sea level. More than 70% of our tribal members live in the Lower Village. Quinault's governmental offices that administer health and natural resources services are located in the Upper Village, where approximately 25% of our tribal members live.

Relocation Project

The Quinault relocation project has five components: (1) Land Acquisition; (2) Master Planning for Upper Village Development and Lower Village Reclamation; (3) Infrastructure Development; (4) Engineering and Architectural Planning; and (5) Workforce Development and Construction. Completion of the project is estimated at 10 years. We hope to secure funding for the relocation project through a combination of public and private sources.

The first phase of the plan is the acquisition of 5 parcels of land that total 246 acres of fractionated interests in individual land allotments in the Upper Village. The area is mostly undeveloped and will require infrastructure development. The Quinault Indian Nation will work cooperatively with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to buy the individual allotments to be taken into tribal trust for uses that will benefit the entire community. Due to the highly fractionated land on the Reservation, we estimate this process alone will take up to 18 months per parcel because of BIA requirements such as surveys, appraisals and notice to land owners that need to be completed. Phases one and two of the project will occur concurrently.

When completed, the community will fulfill Quinault's goal of promoting the health, safety and well being of our people. We plan to build sustainable and affordable housing for our members. We envision the development of green infrastructure for roadways to foster pedestrian and bicycle-friendly environments, transit access, water systems and utilities design. Our construction plans for the area include an emergency operation center, and a mixed-use community facility to accommodate early education, daycare and workforce training programs. In addition, the project will create jobs on our Reservation, which has an unemployment rate of 19.5%. We will provide the training and certification necessary to provide Quinault members the skills to assist in the relocation development of the Upper Village.

Coastal Tribes are among the most vulnerable populations to suffer the devastating impacts of natural disasters. Funding from both State and Federal agencies are too often emergency based and do not adequately cover preventative measures to address ongoing hardship, property loss and infrastructure damage to our villages. The BIA's FY15 budget request provides \$184 million for Trust-Natural Resources Management programs, and includes \$9.9 million for the Cooperative

Landscape Conservation (CLC) program. The BIA acknowledges the unique challenges that coastal Tribes face. Accordingly, CLC funding supports activities related to ocean and coastal planning, technical assistance, vulnerability assessments, monitoring, and pilot resiliency and restoration projects. ***We urge the Subcommittee to direct the BIA to work with Federal partners that provide specialty assistance, such as the U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Homeland Security, Housing and Urban Development, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Department of Transportation, to develop long-term planning. This should include the development of mitigation/preventative support and relocation plans to address the ongoing damage that coastal Tribes face due to natural disasters.***

Need for Seawall Reinforcement to Protect the Lower Village

While the Quinault Indian Nation implements our relocation project, we are committed to protecting our ancestral homelands located in the Lower Village. As experienced by our village recently, temporary mitigation efforts to reinforce our seawall are failing despite the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers addition of 800 tons of riprap rock in January. Quinault's coastal defenses desperately require more. Our 2010 FEMA-approved All Hazard Mitigation Plan includes seawall reconstruction as a mitigation project. The cost of building a new concrete seawall is \$3.5 million, which includes engineering, materials and construction costs. ***We urge the Subcommittee to direct the BIA to work with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and other Federal partners to develop a plan to fund construction of a new seawall to permanently protect our homelands.***

Request Funding for an Additional Road to Access Quinault's Village of Taholah

Exit and entry access to the village of Taholah, where Quinault's government offices are located, is limited to a single highway. Limited access to adequate roads threaten the safety of our people as emergency vehicles may not have access to our village due to downed trees and a flooded road. Reoccurring natural disasters can leave our village inaccessible for days. These factors have already contributed to the death of an elder when access to our village was shut off due to the impact of storms. As a result, the Quinault Indian Nation proposes to link an old, unused service road, known as BIA Road 29 or McBride Road, which is 8.2 miles long and connects the village of Taholah to a nearby highway so that two exits and entry points will be available to access our village. We estimate that this project will cost \$3.5 million for road construction and improvement activities. The BIA Road Maintenance Program funding has been stagnant for 30 years. The BIA's FY15 budget request for this program is \$24.4 million. ***We urge the Subcommittee to increase funding for the BIA Road Maintenance Program in FY15 to address the safety concerns of tribal communities that have limited access to roads to their communities.***

Request to Support Blueback Salmon and Upper Quinault River Restoration

The Quinault Indian Nation is leading the effort to restore the Upper Quinault River and the productivity of Blueback salmon (Blueback). Our most important salmon resource is the Blueback, which is native only to the Upper Quinault River (river). The Blueback as well as other salmon stocks native to the river have declined significantly over the past 50 years due primarily to habitat loss associated with instability of the river caused by removal of floodplain forests and other factors. In 2008, we developed a river restoration plan to restore the Upper Quinault River. Support for our plan includes: the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Marine Fisheries Service, and the Army Corp of Engineers. State partners who support our plan include: the State

of Washington, including the Governor's Salmon Recovery Office, Department of Natural Resources, Department of Fish and Wildlife, Department of Ecology, Washington Coast Sustainable Salmon Partnership, and the Pacific Coast Salmon Coalition. Federal land managers include the Olympic National Park and the U.S. Forest Service. In addition, numerous non-governmental organizations support our plan.

The Quinault has contributed greatly to this restoration effort having raised and invested approximately \$5 million in grant funding and tribal dollars over the past decade. We continue to seek funding from State and Federal partners to assist with this effort. In 2013, the Washington State Legislature appropriated \$1.8 million for restoration activities in 2014 and 2015. The BIA's FY15 budget request of \$35.4 million for the Rights Protection Implementation program make important investments in the State of Washington and in other states that support salmon and other restoration projects that are mandated by court orders. Further, the budget request of \$9.2 million for the Tribal Management/Development program supports restoration activities unrelated to court orders. Our restoration efforts align with existing investments made by the BIA in Indian Country. *We urge the Subcommittee to provide \$5.79 million over a period of 5 years to support our restoration efforts of the Upper Quinault River and Blueback salmon, which will result in the restoration of 7.7 miles of river, 860 acres of new floodplain, 140 engineered logjams, 537 acres of new forest and 61 permanent and seasonal jobs.*

Need for Funding for Drug Interdiction Efforts

The Quinault has an urgent need for funding to support drug interdiction efforts. Our Reservation is remote, consists of 31 miles of oceanfront property, and is accessible to a major highway. As a result, there are 27 points of possible entry onto the Reservation, which appeals to drug cartels, smugglers and poachers. In response to cartel activities, we established our own drug enforcement team called the Quinault Nation Narcotic Enforcement Team (QNNET). This team is highly professional and efficient. Quinault invests \$500,000 in tribal funds annually to pay for our drug enforcement efforts. Unfortunately, access to Federal drug interdiction grant programs is difficult to obtain. In recent years, Congress has taken steps to make Indian Country safer and more secure. BIA, Indian Health Service, and the Department of Justice are working together to implement the Tribal Law and Order Act the Violence Against Women Act, and other laws to strengthen law enforcement efforts in tribal communities. The BIA's FY15 budget request for the Public Safety and Justice program is \$351.8 million to support law enforcement activities. *We urge the Subcommittee to direct the BIA to work with the Department of Justice, Office of National Drug Policy and other Federal partners to fund drug interdiction efforts in Indian Country, especially coastal and border Tribes which are among the most susceptible to drug cartels and smugglers.*

Conclusion

The Quinault Indian Nation is taking steps build a brighter future for our people. We are guided by our traditions and deep desire to control our own destiny. We are doing our part to improve the lives of our people and to create opportunity on the Reservation, but we can't do it alone. We urge the Subcommittee to honor treaty and trust responsibilities to Quinault and to support our requests.

Thank you