

**TESTIMONY OF PHILIP RIGDON, PRESIDENT,  
INTERTRIBAL TIMBER COUNCIL, PRESENTED TO THE  
HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE FOR THE INTERIOR,  
ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES ON  
FY 2015 APPROPRIATIONS FOR THE B.I.A., DoI WILDLAND FIRE  
MANAGEMENT, AND THE U.S. FOREST SERVICE,  
APRIL 8, 2014**

**Summary**

Mr. Chairman, members of the Subcommittee, I am Phil Rigdon, President of the Intertribal Timber Council (ITC) and Deputy Director of Natural Resources for the Yakama Nation. The ITC offers the following recommendations for FY 2015 Indian forestry-related activities in the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), the Department of Interior (DoI) Office of Wildland Fire Management (OWF), and the U.S.D.A. Forest Service (USFS):

**BIA**

- 1) Increase BIA Forestry by \$25 million as a first step to providing the \$100 million needed for funding parity with other federal forestry programs, as recommended by the IFMAT III report.
- 2) Increase BIA Forestry Projects by \$12.7 million to initiate a BIA Forestry Workforce Development program, as recommended by IFMAT III.
- 3) Increase BIA Cooperative Landscape Conservation funding to \$20 million to support tribal participation.
- 4) Increase the BIA Endangered Species funding to \$10 million.
- 5) Support the BIA Invasive Species request of \$6.7 million.

**OWF**

- 6) Support the Preparedness increase of \$34 million.
- 7) Increase Fuels Management funding to \$206 million.
- 8) Support the Disaster Fire Funding legislative proposal. And
- 9) Support the \$30 million Resilient Landscapes initiative.

**USFS**

- 10) Encourage expanded support for the ITC *Anchor Forest* initiative.
- 11) Encourage the USFS to make implementation of the Tribal Forest Protection Act (TFPA) a “priority.”

**IFMAT III**

Many of our comments and recommendations reflect the third IFMAT report, the statutorily required (PL 101-630, Sec. 312) decadal review and report on tribal forests and forestry conducted by an independent Indian Forest Management Assessment Team (IFMAT). Previous IFMAT reviews and reports were done in 1993 and 2003. The 2013 report, IFMAT III, was mailed to this Subcommittee about a month ago. We urge the Subcommittee to review the report and consider its findings and recommendations in your FY 2015 deliberations.

The IFMAT III report examines tribal forests using a “FIT” framework: Fire, Investment and Transformation:

"Fire" represents the increasingly large role wildland fire and other threats present to the health and productivity of tribal forests;

"Investment" represents the need for federal funding and trust support to meet forest-related fiduciary obligations and ensure a sustainable future for Indian forests; and

"Transformation" represents the emergence of Indian forestry as a model for sustainable landscape management.

IFMAT III examines eight specific review areas required by the statute, including staffing and funding, and also looks at additional issues such as climate change, the Anchor Forests initiative, and implementation of the TFPA.

IFMAT III found that chronically insufficient funding and worsening staff shortages are threatening tribal forests and communities from both foregone economic opportunities and resource losses due to wildland fire, insects, disease, and climate change. Federal trust management funding of Indian forests is still only one third of that for National Forests; an additional \$100 million is needed to bring Indian forestry and wildfire management to parity. Staffing shortfalls are jeopardizing the capacity to care for forest resources; IFMAT III found that 800 additional positions in a wide variety of skill areas are needed to provide adequate staffing and \$12.7 million is needed annually for recruitment, training and retention.

Against this background, the ITC makes the following comments and requests for FY 2015.

### **BIA**

#### **1) Increase BIA Forestry by \$25 million as a first step to provide the \$100 million needed for funding parity with other federal forestry programs, as recommended by IFMAT III.**

We request that the FY 2015 BIA Forestry budget be increased by \$25 million, to \$70.9 million, to begin to reduce the glaring \$100 million funding disparity with other federal forestry programs as discussed in the IFMAT III report. Of the \$25 million increase, allocate \$20 million to TPA Forestry to strengthen base BIA and tribal forest staffing and management activities and \$5 million to Forestry Projects to reduce the Forest Development planting and thinning backlog that covers one sixth of the trust forest area. As additional staffing capacity is developed (see item 2 below), further budget movement toward parity funding can be accommodated.

#### **2) Increase BIA Forestry Projects by \$12.7 million to initiate a BIA Forestry Workforce Development program, as recommended by IFMAT III.**

BIA and tribal Forestry are facing a staffing crisis. The IFMAT III report states 800 additional BIA Forestry positions are needed, and an increasing number of existing positions are unfilled due to retirements and funding shortfalls. Trained personnel are needed to enable the sustainable trust management of our forests, including the harvest of timber needed to maintain forest health and support economies that provide jobs and income for tribal communities. For example, on the Yakama Reservation, 33 of the 55 BIA Forestry positions have not been filled for a long time, despite repeated Tribal pleas. Harvest targets sought by the Tribe are not being met, forest health is suffering, and economic opportunities are being lost. To begin to address this large and growing personnel shortage and its negative consequences on the federal trust and tribal economies, \$12.7 million is needed to start a program to attract, train and retain forestry staff.

#### **3) Increase BIA Cooperative Landscape Conservation (CLC) funding to \$20 million to develop tribal capacity.**

We request that CLC funding be increased by \$10 million, with the additional amount dedicated to supporting sustained tribal technical and administrative engagement in DoI's climate initiatives. Because of dependence on place and natural resources, tribes are particularly vulnerable to climate change. The BIA's FY 2015 CLC budget of less than \$10 million is

inadequate to support the needs of the 566 federally-recognized tribes to monitor and address the impacts of climate change over the long term.

**4) Increase BIA Endangered Species funding to \$10 million.**

ITC requests BIA ESA be funded at \$10 million so the myriad listed species throughout Indian Country nationwide can be better addressed. BIA's \$2.7 million request for ESA is an improvement over past years, but the proposal is just half of the ESA per-acre funding for BLM and still below the \$3 million appropriated for BIA ESA in FY 2002. A further significant increase in BIA ESA to \$10 million is fully warranted.

**5) Support the BIA Invasive Species request of \$6.7 million.**

Invasive species are inflicting increasing damage on tribal trust resources, including tribal forests. The \$6.7 million request is needed and welcome to help stem the invasive species encroachment that is threatening trust resources.

**DoI Wildland Fire Management**

**6) Support the \$34 million Preparedness increase.**

The increase will alleviate the penalty BIA and the tribes now bear in absorbing contract support costs (CSCs) for carrying out Preparedness functions. This is in line with the policy goal of fully funding CSCs without harming services. The requested increase also strengthens tribal wildfire management capacity and provides for recruitment and training of future generations of Native American wildland fire fighters, whose jobs are a source of pride and economic opportunity in tribal communities and provide a national asset in wildland fire fighting.

**7) Increase Fuels Management funding to \$206 million.**

ITC supports FY 2015 Fuels Management funding restored to its FY 2010 \$206 million level. The Department's fuels reduction backlog remains huge, preventative projects are much more cost effective than suppression, and fuels funding has never come close to the projected amount needed to reduce risks of fuels. Within the FY 2015 Fuels Management appropriation, ITC strongly supports the designation of \$10 million for tribal resource management landscape restoration, to allow tribes to engage in proactive fuels and forest health projects on or off trust lands to protect tribal trust assets and treaty rights. The ITC wishes to extend our gratitude to OWF for moving beyond the difficult HFPAS fuels fund allocation process, and its efforts to seek the involvement of tribes in determining how available funding can best be allocated to protect tribal communities and values.

**8) Support the Disaster Fire Funding legislative proposal.**

ITC supports the legislative proposal to treat extreme fire costs (above 70% of the 10 year average) as the natural disasters that they are, reducing the consequences of fire costs both on DoI's operations and budgets.

**9) Support the \$30 million Resilient Landscape initiative.**

With the initiative, fuels and health projects can be more broadly applied beyond the wildland-urban interface (WUI).

## **USFS**

### **10) Encourage expanded support for the ITC *Anchor Forest* initiative.**

We ask that you support, and encourage continued Forest Service support of, the ITC's *Anchor Forest* initiative. The initiative is fostering long-term collaborative active forest management across the landscape to maintain ecological functions and sustain economically viable infrastructure for harvesting, transportation, and processing forest products. Tribes, with long-term commitment to stewardship, can and must play a key role in fostering *Anchor Forests*. Currently, the ITC *Anchor Forest* initiative involves three study areas in the states of Washington and Idaho (involving Yakama, Colville, and the Spokane and Coeur d'Alene Tribes), with participatory and resource support from the USFS Regional Office. The project is bringing diverse interests to the table to begin to develop the collaborative process of working together in common purpose. Now, tribes in the Lakes States, the Midwest and the Southwest are expressing interest in the *Anchor Forest* concept for landscape-based forests. We ask the Subcommittee to encourage the USFS and other agencies within the Department of Agriculture, such as the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Rural Development Administration, to support and participate in *Anchor Forests*.

### **11) Encourage the USFS to make implementation of Tribal Forest Protection Act (TFPA) a “priority.”**

Finally, we ask that you urge the USFS to make reform and implementation of the TFPA (PL 108-278) a “priority.” The TFPA was enacted to enable tribes to undertake fuels management and forest restoration projects on Forest Service or BLM lands that pose a fire, disease or other threat to tribal trust forests, reserved rights and cultural resources. But only a handful of TFPA projects have been implemented in the decade since the authority was enacted. USFS has been painfully slow in adoption of the recommendations of an ITC review of TFPA implementation, done in collaboration with the USFS and BIA. An effective TFPA will help restore the landscape to a healthy and resilient condition. We ask that you urge the Forest Service to make the TFPA a “priority” to save landscapes at high risk to climate change.

### **Intertribal Timber Council background.**

The ITC is a 38 year old association of some 60 forest owning tribes and Alaska Native organizations that collectively manage more than 90% of the 18 million acres of BIA trust timberland and woodland. These forests cover about one third of the Indian trust land base and provide thousands of jobs and significant economic activity in and around Indian Country. Beyond their economic importance, forests also store and filter the water and purify the air to sustain life itself. They sustain habitats for the fish and wildlife, produce foods, medicines, fuel, and materials for shelter, transportation, and artistic expression. In short, our forests are vital to our economies, cultures and spiritual well being.

Mr. Chairman, Subcommittee members, we invite you to come visit our reservations and our forests to see what we have done and what we hope to do in the future.

That concludes my statement. Thank you.