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Testimony submitted to the House Appropriations Subcommittees
on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
Regarding FY 2020 Indian Programs Appropriations

March 6, 2019

The Council of Athabascan Tribal Governments (CATG) is a consortium of ten tribal governments located along the Yukon River and its tributaries in northeastern Alaska. The Gwich'in and Koyukon Athabascan peoples of the Yukon Flats live in remote villages, who united to form the Council: Arctic Village, Beaver, Birch Creek, Canyon, Chalkyitsik, Circle, Fort Yukon, Rampart, Stevens, and Venetie. Tribal leadership has clear vision: stable self-sufficient economies built upon strong local self-governance. Our organization provides a variety of services to the tribal citizens of our region, including full healthcare services at the Yukon Flats Health Center and village-based clinics in four of our Villages. We have Self-Governance agreements with the Fish and Wildlife Service and with the Bureau of Land Management.

CATG requests the following considerations be implemented in the FY 2020
Appropriations cycle:

- **Natural Resource Priorities:** Ensure Adequate funding for co-management
- **Expand Self-Governance:** Expand Self-Governance and fully fund Annual Funding Agreements with Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Land Management, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife
- **Section 105(l) Leases:** Support funding for health care facility leases under Section 105(l) of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (ISDEAA).
- **Budget Increases:** Support behavioral health increases to the IHS and BIA budgets.
- **Advance Appropriations for IHS:** Support advance funding for the IHS and other tribal programs.
- **Contract Support Cost (CSC) Funding:** Support continued full and mandatory CSC funding for the IHS and BIA.

Natural Resources: The traditions of our grandparents live on through our ability to hunt and fish, which include the ceremonies that accompany these cultural practices. As Native peoples, access to our traditional food resources is critical for our culture, health, wellbeing, economic

security and food sovereignty. The Council advocates for Alaskan hunting and fishing management policy and regulations to provide for Alaska Native food security, community wellbeing, and traditional ways of life. We ask for funding to protect Alaska Native hunting and fishing rights.

The Porcupine Caribou Herd are our relatives, they are the backbone of our culture, and they provide for our health, wellbeing, economic security, and food security. The Gwich'in Nation and the Council stand unified in our call for full protection of the "Sacred Place Where Life Begins," birthing grounds of the Porcupine Caribou Herd along the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge since 1988. Last year, Congress opened up the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) through the budget process. The Council asks Congress to ensure meaningful government to government consultation, and participation by all impacted Tribes in all federal actions related to the Porcupine Caribou Herd and their habitats.

Salmon are our relatives, they are the backbone of our culture, and they provide for our health, wellbeing, economic security, and food security. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) has confirmed the importance of this critical resource, "the state's rural residents harvest approximately 22,000 tons of wild foods each year – an average of 375 pounds per person. Fish make up about 60% of this harvest statewide. Nowhere else in the United States is there such a heavy reliance upon wild foods." CATG asks Congress to support tribal co-management, through full funding of the Yukon River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission.

Expand Self-Governance: CATG is proud to be one of the first Tribal consortium in the country to develop non-Department of the Interior (DOI) Self-Governance Annual Funding Agreements (AFA) for agencies other than the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). We remain concerned that DOI scopes of work are being limited and the original intent and practice of Self-Governance, which is to build tribal capacity to take on increasing levels of responsibility, is not being properly carried out. We request your support to expand Self-Governance practice and agreements beyond BIA.

Since 2004, the CATG has had an Annual Funding Agreement (AFA) under Title IV of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (ISDEAA) with the USFWS. Through the AFA, the CATG has implemented selected PFSAs of the Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge (YFNWR), namely: 1) Cooperative Moose Management Planning; 2) education and outreach programming; 3) harvest data collection and reporting; 4) logistical maintenance of the only logistical outpost in the Refuge; and 5) Refuge Information Technician staffing.

The AFA's success and growth has been limited by funding levels that have remained fairly static since the 1st agreement was signed (estimated at \$60,000 annually), lacking funding for staff time to complete PFSAs and for contract support costs. We appreciate recent positive developments with YFNWR leadership in working to expand and fully fund the AFA, as it is a beneficial relationship for the YFNWR staff, the wildlife and habitat, and Tribal Governments. At this time, it has been demonstrated CATG needs to implement harvest data collection and reporting activities for adequate moose management. CATG has demonstrated its commitment to a successful working relationship with the YFNWR, and seeks to expand and fully fund the AFA. CATG asks Congress to ensure continued, fully funded, and expanded self-governance

agreement with USFWS YFNWR.

In 2011, the CATG implemented the first self-governance AFA under Title IV of the ISDEAA with the Bureau of Land Management/Alaska Fire Service (BLM/AFS). The Council has demonstrated their commitment to running a successful Emergency Fire Fighter training and certification program ever since. But the 2018 federal government shutdown resulted in our BLM AFA getting hung up in the process, leaving CATG with substantial uncertainty. Announcements are now also coming late for contract work with BLM, and these are all jobs that our communities count on. The Council has developed a productive partnership with the BLM/AFS to more efficiently and effectively use government resources. The Council asks for Congress to ensure continued self-governance agreement with the BLM AFS through full funding, and we encourage Congress to facilitate BLM's cooperation in finalizing and implementing the AFA, and other contract work, within this Fiscal Year 2019, not simply kicking the can down the road to FY 2020 as it relates to CATG.

Section 105(l) Clinic Leases: Tribes and tribal organizations increasingly rely on section 105(l) leases to address chronically underfunded facilities operation, maintenance, and replacement costs. We are gratified that IHS has been funding Section 105(l) leases for tribal health clinics. This responsibility was confirmed by the 2016 federal court decision in *Maniilaq v. Burwell*, which held that section 105(l) of the ISDEAA provides an entitlement to full compensation for leases of tribal facilities used to carry out ISDEAA agreements. We appreciate your supplemental appropriations in FY 2019 to cover these costs, and we ask that funding continue to be made available for these important leases. This Committee has invited IHS to submit a report on the budget impact of meeting its responsibility. We oppose any appropriations rider, such as those included in the Administration's budget proposals for FY2018 and FY 2019, which would allow IHS to avoid its responsibility to compensate Tribes fully for these costs. We ask that Congress again decline to include such a provision in the FY 2020 IHS appropriation.

Budget Increases: CATG's communities in rural Alaska have extreme rates of suicide, alcohol and substance abuse; issues that contribute to a multitude of other adverse problems such as crime, domestic violence, child abuse and neglect. We have been encouraged by new funding to address the opioid crisis that impacts many of our communities. Thank you for the new \$10 million opioid grant program in the FY 2019 IHS budget. However, frequently, tribes in Alaska have difficulty working through the State of Alaska to provide behavioral and social services, which adds burdensome layers and undue regulation. We appreciate that HHS this year distributed the \$50 million in tribal opioid funds via formula.

CATG believes that tribes and tribal organizations should receive behavioral funds directly, because programs that implement traditional cultural values have proven to be far more successful than those that do not. We ask for your support in this effort. CATG also asks for support in expanding the *Generations Indigenous (Gen-I)* initiative, which provides increased resources for tribes to address youth behavioral, mental health and substance abuse issues, as well as expansion of the *Tiwahe Initiative*, designed to address the inter-related problems of poverty, violence and substance abuse faced by Native communities. We appreciate that last year Congress rejected the Administration's proposal to reduce funding for this important initiative.

Advance Appropriations for IHS: We thank Chairman McCollum for introducing legislation to provide advance appropriations for IHS and programs in the BIA and BIE and for Ranking Member David Joyce’s co-sponsorship of this legislation. IHS healthcare is similar to Veterans healthcare in that both the VA and the IHS provide direct medical care and both are the result of federal policies. Predictability, continuity, and certainty are essential for providing stable quality health care. This issue continues to be important to Alaska Native and American Indian patients, particularly in a budget climate of seemingly endless Continuing Resolutions (CR). When IHS funding is subject to a CR, as it has been repeatedly over many years, tribal healthcare providers receive only a portion of funding at a time, making it particularly difficult to implement long-range planning and to effectively use and leverage limited resources. Partial funding also requires the same processing and manpower for each incomplete payment as one full apportionment. Having advance notice of funding levels would greatly aid CATG and other tribal health providers in program planning, recruitment and retention of essential healthcare professionals. Under advance appropriations, we would know a year in advance what the budget would be and it would resolve much of the uncertainty we have experienced because full appropriations were not enacted at the first of the federal fiscal year. The IHS budget should be afforded the same status consideration as VA health programs.

Contract Support Cost (CSC) Funding: CATG would like to thank the House and Senate Subcommittees for their leadership and commitment to fully funding CSC for IHS and BIA ISDEAA agreements. We appreciate the full funding of CSC over the past few fiscal years, that the funding is indefinite (“such sums as may be necessary”,) and that the funding is in separate accounts in the IHS and BIA budgets. We request that the Subcommittees continue to fully fund CSC. Such action is crucial to strengthening the ability of tribal governments’ to successfully exercise their rights and responsibilities as sovereign nations.

Telecommunications Subsidies: As you know, internet connectivity is critical to providing health care services to our remote villages. Last year you heard from us and other Tribes regarding the cap on Universal Service rural health care funds. We appreciate the work that was done to eliminate the cap.

Conclusion

CATG greatly appreciates your consideration of our requests outlined in this testimony. On behalf of our organization and all of the people we serve, I would be happy to provide any other additional information as requested by the Subcommittees.