

**TESTIMONY OF
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CHUGACH REGIONAL RESOURCES COMMISSION**

**HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE SUBCOMMITTEE ON
INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT AND RELATED AGENCIES
CONCERNING THE BIA'S FY 2020 BUDGET**

March 6, 2019

The Chugach Regional Resources Commission (CRRC) is pleased to submit written testimony reflecting the needs, concerns and requests of CRRC for FY 2020 appropriations for the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). Our recurring funding is included in the Administration's annual budget within the BIA's Tribal Management Development Program (TM/DP) account. The Bureau of Indian Affairs not only has a legal and contractual obligation to provide funding for the CRRC, but the CRRC is able to translate this funding into real economic opportunity for those living in the small Alaska Native villages located in Prince William Sound and Lower Cook Inlet. We leveraged a meager budget of well under a half million dollars in BIA funds and to operate with a budget of nearly \$2 million to support community-based programs (almost a five-to-one ratio). In previous years, the Administration has proposed to cut TMDP funding by 25 percent and slash our funding. Reducing the already-modest funding we and other organizations like ours receive would be a mistake, and we urge this Committee to consider expanding on the resources we have available to do our critical work.

For example, a modest increase of \$100,000 in FY 2020 funding for CRRC may translate into as much as \$500,000 in additional revenues that we can use to serve our Alaska Native communities. As noted in the Administration's budget request for FY 2019 concerning the BIA's TM/DP:

[T]he Tribal Management/Development Program (TMDP) supports tribal self-determination by allowing tribal management of fish and game programs . . . Contract agreements are executed with individual fish and wildlife resource tribes [and consortia] to accomplish management objectives. Tribes administer programs that contribute significantly towards economic development [].

CRRC is an intertribal organization organized in 1987 by the seven Native Villages located in Prince William Sound and Lower Cook Inlet in South-central Alaska; namely, Tatitlek Village IRA Council, Chenega IRA Council, Port Graham Village Council, Nanwalek IRA Council, Native Village of Eyak, Qutekcak Native Tribe, and Valdez Native Tribe. The success of our programs, from both an economic and social standpoint, make them an integral part of our constituent Tribes' ongoing development. Reductions in our BIA funding will limit our out- reach and ability to leverage additional Federal, State, local and other tribal resources which are critical to our program's and our constituent tribes' success.

CRRC was created to address environmental and natural resources issues and to develop culturally-sensitive economic projects at the community level to support the sustainable

development of the region's natural resources. The Native Villages' action to create a separate tribal entity demonstrates the concern and importance the Tribal governments hold for environmental and natural resource management and protection – which is the wellspring for jobs and the perpetuation of our Alaska Native communities and culture.

Through its many important programs, CRRC provides employment for up to 35 Native people in the Chugach Region annually – an area of high unemployment – through programs that conserve and restore our natural resources and ensure a future for our Tribal communities.

Federal investment in CRRC has translated into real economic opportunities, savings and community investments that have a great impact on the Chugach region. Our employees are able to earn a living and support their families, thereby removing them from the rolls of people needing Alaska State and Federal support. This contributes to family and community stability and is a bulwark against depression, substance abuse, suicide and other ills that plague remote Tribal communities. With the job opportunities made possible by CRRC programs, Alaska Native members are able to reinvest their wages into the community, supporting the employment of and opportunities for other Alaska Native and non-Native families. Our programs also support future economic and commercial opportunities for the Prince William Sound and Lower Cook Inlet regions – protecting and developing our shellfish industry and other natural resources.

Programs. CRRC has leveraged its recurring BIA funding into almost \$2 million to support our community-based programs. Specifically, the \$410,000 in base funding provided through BIA appropriations has allowed CRRC to maintain core administrative operations and seek specific project funding from other sources such as the Administration for Native Americans (ANA), the State of Alaska, Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the U.S. Department of Education, the *Exxon Valdez* Oil Spill Trustee Council, the North Pacific Research Board and other foundations. This diverse funding pool has enabled CRRC to develop and operate several important programs that provide vital services, valuable products, and necessary employment and commercial opportunities. These programs include:

Alutiiq Pride Shellfish Hatchery. The Alutiiq Pride Shellfish Hatchery is the only shellfish hatchery in the State of Alaska. The 20,000 square foot shellfish hatchery is located in Seward, Alaska, and houses shellfish seed (cockles, littlenecks and butter clams), brood stock and algae production facilities. Alutiiq Pride is undertaking a hatchery nursery operation, as well as grow-out operation research to adapt mariculture techniques for the Alaskan Shellfish industry. The Hatchery is also conducting scientific research on blue and red king crab as part of a larger Federally-sponsored program.

Alutiiq Pride has already been successful in culturing geoduck, oyster, littleneck clam, and razor clam species and is currently working on sea cucumbers. This research has the potential to dramatically increase commercial opportunities for the region in the future. The activities of Alutiiq Pride are especially important for the region; as the only shellfish hatchery in the state, it is uniquely qualified to carry out this research and production.

Alutiiq Pride staff are working on developing a shellfish sanctuary concept in Port Graham and Resurrection Bay, acquiring land use permits from the Department of Natural

Resources for Port Graham and from the Alaska Railroad for Resurrection Bay. Port Graham has been stocked with 220 little neck, 200 cockles and 220 butter clam adults and CRRC is working to reduce predation and ensure greater survival rates.

Alutiiq Pride also devotes considerable time to its Ocean Acidification (OA) monitoring lab, processing 300 discrete samples collected from villages and scientific partners. A Burk-O- Later, an instrument that tests for aragonite saturation, required for shellfish to form their shells, requires frequent maintenance and calibration.

Alutiiq Pride recently implemented a preventive maintenance program to prolong the useful life of essential capital equipment. Alutiiq Pride installed chillers at its facility that were donated by the University of Alaska. The chillers will house king crab brood stock in case water temperatures are too high. In 2016, warm waters caused the crabs to release their larvae early which reduced survivability.

Natural resource curriculum development. Partnering with the University of Alaska, Fairbanks, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, CRRC continues its model curriculum in natural resource management for Alaska Native students. This curriculum integrates traditional knowledge with Western science. The goal of the program is to encourage more Native students to pursue careers in the sciences. In addition, we are working with the Native American Fish & Wildlife Society and Tribes across the country (including Alaska) to develop a university level textbook to accompany these courses.

In addition, we have completed a K-12 Science Curriculum for Alaska students that integrates Indigenous knowledge with western science. This curriculum is being piloted in various villages in Alaska and a thorough evaluation process will ensure its success and mobility to other schools in Alaska.

Alaska Migratory Bird Co-Management Council. CRRC is a member of the Council responsible for setting regulations governing the spring harvest of migratory birds for Alaska Natives, as well as conducting harvest surveys and various research projects on migratory birds of conservation concern. Our participation in this state-wide body ensures the legal harvest of migratory birds by Indigenous subsistence hunters in the Chugach Region. After a nearly 30-year moratorium, the Alaska Board of Game lifted a ban on the harvest of Emperor Geese once the geese population reached sustainable levels. We are proud to have participated in this work.

Statewide Subsistence Halibut Working Group. CRRC continues to participate in a working group to ensure halibut resources are secured for subsistence purposes, and to conduct harvest surveys in the Chugach Region.

Conclusion

We urge the Subcommittee and Congress to protect *and increase* CRRC's FY 2019 appropriation level of \$410,000 in the BIA's FY 2020 budget for TMDP. With a five-to-one return on every Federal dollar invested in CRRC, we clearly demonstrate our ability to effectively administer these dollars. Thank you for the opportunity to present our testimony.