

**TESTIMONY OF COUNCIL MEMBER CAROLE LANKFORD OF THE  
CONFEDERATED SALISH AND KOOTENAI TRIBES OF THE FLATHEAD  
RESERVATION TO THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR AND RELATED AGENCIES ON THE IHS, BIA  
AND EPA FY 2024 BUDGET**

**March 3, 2023**

My name is Carole Lankford and I am a member of the Tribal Council of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Reservation. I would like to thank the House Interior Appropriations Subcommittee for the opportunity to present testimony concerning appropriations for the Indian Health Service (IHS), the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

The Flathead Reservation was reserved as our permanent homeland under the Hellgate Treaty of 1855. The Reservation encompasses over 1.2 million acres in western Montana situated around the southern half of Flathead Lake, the largest freshwater lake west of the Great Lakes. Our Tribes are made up of approximately 8,000 enrolled tribal members, with approximately 5,000 tribal members living on the Reservation. We have a total Reservation population of approximately 30,000 people.

We are a Self-Governance tribe and have carried out all functions of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Indian Health Services on our Reservation for decades. We have also carried out the functions of the Environmental Protection Agency under the Treatment as States authorities for many years. Local control and wise fiscal management have allowed us to stretch limited resources far beyond the capabilities of the federal government. Despite the efficiencies our Tribal government can achieve, limitations on federal resources presents a significant challenge for the delivery of services. As Congress has long recognized, the foundation for economic development and prosperity in Indian country is rooted in community stability, begins with quality health care, including care for mental illness and addiction, public safety, safe roads and infrastructure, resilient forestlands, abundant fish and wildlife, and a clean environment.

**INDIAN HEALTH SERVICE FUNDING**

We zealously advocated for full funding for the Indian Health Service for decades. The COVID-19 pandemic showed the nation the chronic health care deficiencies in Indian country. Native people acquired and died of this disease at some of the highest rates in the nation, especially in Montana where Native deaths from COVID accounted for over one-third of all deaths statewide. These statistics were undoubtedly influenced by higher rates of comorbidities experienced by Tribal people as a result of inadequate health care and infrastructure funding.

My colleagues and I are now focusing on the emerging health crisis involving mental health and addiction. We have faced challenges with mental health and addiction for many years, but those challenges have been exacerbated by the COVID pandemic. We are committed to providing needed mental health care and substance abuse treatment, but we lack adequate resources to address these critical needs.

## **BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS**

### Social Services, Public Safety and Housing

Due in no small part to the mental health and addiction challenges faced by our people, there is a dire need for increased funding for our Tribal Social Services program. Unfortunately, Congress has not increased BIA's social services program for several years. Social services are critical to families to support good parenting keeping children out of the foster care system and supporting Tribal people into the workforce.

We appreciate the increased funding for Tribal Courts that Congress has provided, but it has not been enough. Tribal Courts also face significant challenges associated with mental health and addiction. Tribal courts are essential to a strong economy and safe communities. Our Tribal Defender's office is leading several cutting-edge efforts to reduce recidivism including case management and supportive housing but needs additional funding.

Similarly, law enforcement and corrections are in dire need of additional funding throughout Indian country, especially as illegal substance use increases as people self-medicate to treat mental illness. Most cases handled by our law enforcement and in our jail have a substance abuse component.

Homelessness and overcrowding in housing at all-time highs across Indian country, both of which have undoubtedly contributed to the high death rates of Native people throughout the COVID pandemic. The situation is further complicated by the drug and mental health crisis we face. Importantly, housing funding must include the resources for infrastructure to ensure any new housing has water, sewer, electricity, and broadband access.

### Natural Resources: Wildland Fire and Aquatic Invasive Species

My tribe is encouraged by the trending increases in federal wildland fire appropriations. Pending increases in Fuels reduction, preparedness and prevention funding is improving. However, there needs to be constant, intentional attention to parity, equity, and inclusion of tribal wildland fire management programs during the Agency allocation of these funds

Our Reservation was ravaged by fire during the 2021 and 2022 fire seasons. CSKT's Division of Fire, which engages in a full host of fire management activities was stretched to the breaking point, due in large part to inadequate infrastructure to support an evolving fire landscape. Lack of available space and facilities for permanent and emergency personnel and equipment is a problem that has grown exponentially over the past few years. To that end, we have undertaken planning to identify the appropriate infrastructure and facilities necessary for our Division of Fire to protect our Reservation and the region. These facility needs include:

- Airport security fencing to improve aviation security and safety by eliminating wildlife from runways;

- Construction of a single engine air tanker (SEAT) base facility to provide adequate amenities to the management, pilots, and crews;
- Construction of adequate containment areas for the SEAT base to increase capacity to 12,000 gallons of retardant. This would improve SEAT retardant delivery to fires within the Northern Rockies;
- Field personnel facilities with crew locker rooms, briefing and staging areas, showers, restrooms, kitchen area, and sleeping quarters;
- Vehicle bays for BIA vehicles and engine crew room to protect the vehicle chassis, pumps and equipment reducing maintenance costs and increasing longevity of critical suppression resources as well as accommodations for engine crews, briefing areas, and management;
- BIA and Tribal facilities needs Assessments are critical to determine adequate funding for facilities and maintenance in order to comply with applicable safety regulations.

We are keenly concerned with the detection, prevention and eradication of invasive species and on the resiliency of our Tribal lands. There has been little to no coordinated effort across the Columbia River Basin for the protection against the introduction of Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS), such as the zebra and quagga mussels. Because it only takes is one boat to infect an entire watershed, every potential vector is a threat to the entire region. At the same time it's critical to empower local parties, who are best suited to guard against invasion, and build strong partnership among local parties throughout a basin. In our view federal monetary support and assistance in coordination are the keys to adequately protect the vital water resources of the Pacific Northwest. Because of the interconnectedness of waterways, protection against AIS is an area where federal funds can match or supplement local efforts in a cost-effective manner.

Importantly, the Federal Highway system is the primary vector for transmission of invasive species, including AIS. The best way to build a robust line of defense against invasive species is establish permanent check stations on all federal highways in and out of the Basin. Working in tandem the Transportation and Interior Departments could ensure that traffic is safely and efficiently moved into check stations, where watercraft can be inspected safely by local staff from Tribes, states, and local governments. These check stations could be constructed in conjunction with rest areas and weigh stations throughout the Columbia Basin. Similarly, federal reservoir managers, in order to fulfill their trust responsibility to Indian tribes, must ensure that no watercraft leaves a water body without certifying that the craft has been inspected, is clean, and free of invasive species, but they need the resources to do so.

CSKT operates a number of programs that defend against the introduction of invasive species and mitigate the invasions that have already occurred. But funding for our efforts in sparse and inconsistent. Again, the most significant barriers in our efforts are the lack of coordinated response and adequate resources.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY**

Finally, we strenuously urge Congress to prioritize adequate funding for the Environmental Protection Agency programs for Tribal communities. Over the past 12 years, we have seen funding for Tribal EPA programs steadily decrease. Moreover, many EPA grants provide only short-term funding and come with onerous reporting requirements. CSKT must therefore devote considerable

staff time to monitoring, applying for, and administering federal grants—which are shrinking in size. This inadequate funding system is a drain on our government and makes it increasingly difficult for CSKT to sustain vital programs to monitor, reduce, and prevent pollution on our Reservation.

The federal government, which includes EPA, has a trust responsibility to provide Tribes with a livable homeland. A livable homeland must be one where pollution levels are safe for people, wildlife, and the environment. In administering EPA programs in the Agency's stead, CSKT and other Tribes play a critical role in protecting human health and the environment.

The current funding and grant systems undermine the obligations of the United States. Without stable funding, CSKT cannot build sustainable and effective programs to protect our environment and community. Unfortunately, EPA's budget for tribal environmental programs does not increase even when the number of Tribes operating these programs does.

Over the past six years the Clean Water Act Section 106 Water Quality Program has seen a 20% reduction in funding. This reduction has greatly impacted the Program's ability to fund full-time staff who can perform necessary monitoring and water pollution assessments on the Reservation. Similarly, the Clean Water Act Section 319 Non-Point Source Pollution Program has never been adjusted for cost of living increases. As a result, we are now unable to support a full-time position alone on EPA funding allocations.

We have relied on EPA Wetland Program Development Grant funding since 2004. However, high competition and low total funding for EPA WPDG's has resulted in poor retention of Wetland Program Coordinators (we have had eight coordinators in 16 years) and three years without any monitoring or assessment. A higher amount of regularly-available EPA WPDG funding would be an enormous benefit to the 40,000 acres of wetland habitat on the Reservation.

Clean Air Act Section 103 and Section 105 Air Quality Program funding has dwindled in a similar fashion. As late as 2003, our Tribal Air Quality Program budget carried four full-time employees. This fiscal year funding is barely sufficient for one full-time employee with no allowance for cost-of-living adjustments or pay raises. For Fiscal Year 2022 Air Quality budget is 62% of what it was 15 years ago while the workplan elements remain essentially the same.

Solid and Hazardous Waste and Brownfields Program has remained stagnant as well while our staff struggles to deal with the needs of the growing population on the Reservation. At the same time Underground Storage Tanks and Leaking Underground Storage Tanks Program has seen a 50% reduction in funding presenting an alarming outcome of family and community drinking water supply sources.

Our Tribal Federal Insecticide Fungicide Rodenticide Act ("FIFRA") Program provides routine and for-cause inspections, compliance assistance, and Native Pollinator Protection and Pesticide Safety educational outreach in regard to pesticide use on the several Indian Reservations in Montana. Because EPA funding has remained the same since 2009, except for nominal cost-of-living increases, the program's staffing capacity has steadily decreased.