

**TESTIMONY OF CODY DESAUTEL, PRESIDENT  
INTERTRIBAL TIMBER COUNCIL  
PRESENTED TO THE  
HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE FOR THE INTERIOR,  
ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES ON  
FY 2025 APPROPRIATIONS FOR THE B.I.A., DOI WILDLAND FIRE  
MANAGEMENT,  
MAY 8, 2024**

**Introduction and Summary**

I am Cody Desautel, President of the Intertribal Timber Council (ITC) and Executive Director of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation in Washington State. The ITC is a 48-year-old association of forest owning tribes and Alaska Native organizations dedicated to improving the sustainable ecological and economic management of our 19.3 million acres of timberland and woodland held in BIA trust.

Indian forest management creates \$3 for every \$1 of investment. Indian forestry employs nearly 20,000 people. It manages wildlife habitat, aquatic resources, and forests to provide sources of food and medicine for Indian people. Management of Indian forests also generates significant revenue for tribal governments to fund essential governmental services, such as social services, law enforcement, and education.

80% of all the timber produced from Department of Interior lands come from Indian forests. Yet, this harvest level is only half the sustainable annual targets set by tribal governments. Imagine what tribes – big and small – would be able to do with twice the revenue and economic activity they see from current funding levels.

Every ten years, an independent team of scientists review the management of tribal forests and presents their report to Congress, as mandated by statute. The fourth Indian Forest Management Assessment Team report was finalized and presented to Congress last summer. IFMAT IV noted that harvest levels had dropped from 730 million board feet in 1991 to 342 million board feet in 2019, which was the lowest harvest level since the Depression era. Over that same time forested trust land has increased from 15.6 million acres to 19.3 million acres, which is an increase of almost 24 percent.

The 2023 IFMAT report –and those that preceded it--documents the significant and persistent inequity of federal funding for Indian forest management versus other federal forests, such as the U.S. Forest Service and BLM. Based in the IFMAT report's finding, BIA Forestry is funded at about \$2.89 per acre for tribes without hazardous fuels funding and \$4.89 for those who receive hazardous fuels funding.

Compare that to an estimated \$12.24 for National Forest System lands and \$41.41 for western Oregon BLM lands. Thus, forests managed by the BIA for tribes receive four times less than the Forest Service and 14 times less than BLM forests.

With respect to wildfire-related funding, the IFMAT report found that BIA receives \$3.98 per acre for preparedness -- compared to \$10.88 per acre for the U.S. Forest Service. The BIA received \$2.34 per acre for hazardous fuels reduction, while the Forest Service receives \$3.53 per acre. Also, much of this funding is competitive, which makes it difficult to build the capacity needed within tribal programs to treat landscapes at scale with funding uncertainty.

The IFMAT report documents that:

*“[BIA] forestry funding, in real terms, has declined 21% over the last 30 years. During this 30-year period Indian forest trust lands have increased from 15.6 million acres to 19.3 million acres, meaning that on a per-acre basis, funding, in real terms, has declined by almost 36% over the last 30 years. Some tribes have expressed that they have not had a budget increase in 30 years; others have had budgets or services reduced.”<sup>1</sup>*

The result of this inequity is catastrophic on Indian communities. The IFMAT report found reduced funding to BIA for forest management resulted in \$400 million in foregone timber revenue to tribes between 2010-2019. That means \$400 million was not generated to provide essential social, educational, and public safety services to some of the most vulnerable Americans. In addition to the \$400 million in foregone timber revenue, uncharacteristic wildfires have caused additional unquantified losses to timber, wildlife, aquatic, and cultural resources. Those impacts and losses could have been mitigated or reduced with fully funded and staffed programs. The Colville Tribe for example has lost over 1 billion board feet of timber since 2015, with a current market value of approximately \$500 million.

The IFMAT report found that budget parity between BIA-responsible forests, National Forest System and BLM forests would require an additional \$96 million per year for BIA Forestry and \$42 million in additional wildfire funding. In addition, the IFMAT report noted an additional \$1.33 billion needed for upgrading 46,900 miles of roads located on Indian trust lands. The report also noted an additional \$313 million to address the backlog of planned treatments that were not initiated, such as 500,000 of planting, and 500,000 acres of pre-commercial thinning. Other funding issues identified in the report include law enforcement, wild horse and burro management, and facilities.

For comparison, the BLM was appropriated \$141,972,000 for the wild horse and burro program in the Consolidated Appropriations Act for 2024. That is more than twice what all Indian forests receive nationwide.

This funding inequity can no longer be ignored. The ITC requests that Congress prioritize funding for Indian forests in its FY2025 appropriations bill. This is an urgent matter and tribes continue to pay the price of each additional year of funding inequity.

Unfortunately, the now-enacted FY24 appropriations law reduces BIA “Trust/Natural Resources Management” by nearly \$11 million from the FY23 enacted level. That includes a consequent \$3.1 million cut to BIA Forestry – bringing funding down to \$62 million.

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<sup>1</sup> Indian Forest Management Assessment Team, “Assessment of Indian Forests and Forest Management in the United States (2023), p.55

This was a significant move in the wrong direction.

President Biden's FY25 budget justification includes a proposed \$3.1 million increase in BIA Forestry, which would reverse the reduction in the FY24 enacted bill. Given inflation, flat funding continues to move tribal forest management backwards.

## **Recommendations for FY 2025**

### **BIA**

In light of the findings of congressionally-chartered IFMAT report, the ITC requests that this committee make a historic decision to fund Indian trust forests on parity with National Forest and BLM funding. This would require an *increase* in base level BIA Forestry funding by \$96 million, for a total of approximately \$162 million.

### **DOI Office of Wildland Fire Management**

The Bipartisan Infrastructure bill provided \$500 million in boosted pay and benefits for federal wildland firefighters. However, the law inadvertently neglected to include tribally contracted firefighters who are fighting federal fires on federal lands just like their non-tribal counterparts. Many tribes contract this function from the Department of the Interior. Yet the disparate treatment between tribal and non-tribal firefighters has complicated recruitment and retention of them in Indian Country.

Since June 2022, the ITC has requested the Interior Department resolve this inequity. DOI has provided Congress with draft legislative language to address the situation, but no solution has been enacted as we go into yet another fire season.

I urge this Committee to work with the Administration to identify and fund a mechanism that respects the role of tribal firefighters in the federal budget and system.

Likewise, as noted in the IFMAT report, parity with other federal forest management agencies would require an increase of \$42 million in fire preparedness funding.

The ITC would also request that the Department of Interior fuels budget be returned to fiscal year 2023 levels.