



**THE COWLITZ INDIAN TRIBE**  
**TESTIMONY OF THE HONORABLE GREG HITCHCOCK, VICE CHAIRMAN**  
**U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS**  
**SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES**

**May 7, 2024**

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**Summary of Agency/Program and Funding Requests**

- 1. *Funding for Tribal Public Safety***
  - 2. *Funding for IHS and Tribal Healthcare***
  - 3. *Funding for Co-Stewardship of Federal Lands***
  - 4. *Funding for Green Energy and Other Economic Development Opportunities***
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**INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

Thank you Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the Cowlitz Indian Tribe. The Cowlitz have lived in southwest Washington since time immemorial. After unsuccessful treaty negotiations in the 1850's, the federal government opened Cowlitz lands to non-Indian settlement without congressional authorization. Our lands were lost and our people were scattered. Despite repeated requests, the federal government failed to set aside land for the Tribe, and the Tribe ultimately was forced to go through the Department of the Interior's administrative recognition process. After twenty five years, in 2002 the federal government finally confirmed our federal recognition, and in 2015, established our Reservation in Clark County, Washington.

Today, the Cowlitz Indian Tribe has nearly 5,000 enrolled members. Since the restoration of our federal recognition and creation of our reservation, the Tribe has worked to establish and expand our governmental capacity to protect our sovereignty, engage in self-determination and economic development, preserve our cultural traditions, and provide for our members. Funding from the federal government has been key to these efforts. The Tribe greatly appreciates the Subcommittee's commitment to providing Indian Country with this critically-needed funding. The Tribe requests that the Subcommittee prioritize funding for public safety, healthcare, co-stewardship of federal lands, and green energy opportunities to support tribal economic development.

**I. TRIBAL PUBLIC SAFETY**

The Cowlitz Tribe's Public Safety Department is central to the Tribe's efforts to develop the necessary public safety infrastructure to support its members and the Tribe's continued economic

The Forever People

growth. Cowlitz Tribal Police must patrol a large service area covering the Reservation, as well as tribal properties outside of the Reservation (stretching north to Toledo, about 50 miles away). The Tribal casino has approximately 36 events each year, with some events bringing in 800 to 12,000 patrons. The Cowlitz Public Safety Department struggles to adequately staff these events, which involves patrolling the Tribe's property and assisting with calls for service along the I-5 corridor from milepost 11 to milepost 21. Cowlitz has a mutual aid agreement with Clark County, and provides law enforcement services to the neighboring cities of Ridgefield, La Center, and Woodland. Cowlitz Tribal Police are often the first on the scene, particularly when responding to calls from the City of La Center, which does not have its own police force. The Tribe would like to hire more officers to meet the growing need for law enforcement presence on the Reservation and in neighboring communities, but there is no space to house additional personnel.

The Cowlitz Public Safety Department currently operates out of two 17x44 foot modular trailers, which house fifteen tribal officers and the Tribal Court. The trailers are not equipped to handle basic law enforcement responsibilities – Tribal Police do not have office space, a detention processing area, or holding cells. Public access is limited to a 5x5 foot entry area, and there is nowhere to securely store evidence and records, or to store supplies and equipment. The Tribal Court is has very limited space and personnel, which in turn limits the number and type of cases it can hear. The Tribe's Legal Department has similar limitations.

The Tribe has requested federal funding to help defray the cost of planning and design for a new Tribal Public Safety Building, and will seek additional federal funding for construction of the facility. But existing federal funding is wholly inadequate to meet the public safety and justice needs of Indian Country and support tribal law enforcement. According to a 2018 BIA analysis, the amount needed to fund the most basic law enforcement and detention services in Indian Country is \$1.54 billion.<sup>1</sup> That number continues to increase, and annual appropriations are nowhere near this estimated need. A substantial increase in funding for BIA and tribal law enforcement and facilities is desperately needed to begin to address the public safety and law enforcement needs facing Indian Country. Without that funding, the Cowlitz Public Safety Department will be unable to fulfill its basic mission: to protect the Tribe and its sovereignty while proactively integrating community policing and community outreach to reduce crime and solve problems, provide enhanced legal and justice services, and improve coordination of emergency response and collaboration with other public safety departments.

## **II. INDIAN HEALTH SERVICE (IHS) AND TRIBAL HEALTHCARE**

Like many tribes, because of its historical circumstances, the Cowlitz membership base is dispersed and not anchored to a concentrated reservation population. Today, the Tribe has members not only in southwest Washington and northern Oregon, but in many other areas across the country. The Cowlitz Indian Tribe compacts with IHS under the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (ISDEAA) to provide healthcare services to its members and others from its four clinics in Vancouver, Longview, DuPont, and Tukwila. The Tribe also wants to

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<sup>1</sup> National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) FY 2022 Budget Request at 43, available at [https://www.ncai.org/resources/ncai-publications/NCAI\\_IndianCountry\\_FY2022\\_BudgetRequest.pdf](https://www.ncai.org/resources/ncai-publications/NCAI_IndianCountry_FY2022_BudgetRequest.pdf).

provide healthcare for all of its members across the country, regardless of their proximity to the Tribe's medical clinics. The Tribe was able to work with IHS to clarify that the Tribe may use third-party revenues to provide access to healthcare for members of the Tribe who reside outside of the Tribe's purchased/referred care delivery area. The Cowlitz Tribe greatly appreciates the willingness of IHS to accommodate the Tribe's desire to serve all its members and to respect the Tribe's sovereignty and self-determination.

The Cowlitz Tribe also wants to emphasize the importance of continued and increased funding for IHS. The Tribe provides basic healthcare services, mental health and state-of-the-art drug treatment services including medication-assisted treatment (MAT) and day treatment. Cowlitz clinics serve thousands of patients every year, both Native and non-Native. Substance abuse and addiction treatment provided by licensed, caring professionals is one of the Tribe's (and the larger community's) most important resources to mitigate the impacts of the current opioid epidemic, and treat the disproportionate number of Native Americans suffering from substance abuse and mental health problems. Funding for IHS and tribal healthcare must continue to keep pace. Funding for the Special Diabetes Program for Indians (SDPI) is also critical to support healthcare for Native Americans. Congress must fully fund and reauthorize SDPI on a long-term or permanent basis, and should allocate SDPI funding under tribal ISDEAA compacts and contracts with IHS, rather than through grants. This would ensure that tribes receive regular increases in funding and contract support cost reimbursement to continue this valuable work in Indian Country.

Providing reliable and efficient health care also is highly dependent on an efficient and modern health information system that will replace the IHS's forty-year old Resource and Patient Management System (RPMS). The Cowlitz Indian Tribe supports full funding for the transition to the new enterprise program that will better support both tribes and IHS.

### **III. INCREASED FUNDING TO SUPPORT CO-STEWARDSHIP OF FEDERAL LANDS**

The Cowlitz Indian Tribe supports the active engagement of tribes in the stewardship and management of federal lands. Tribes have unique traditional and historical knowledge about these lands and natural resources that they can bring to bear, working together with federal land managers, to better manage, conserve, and use these federal resources. Since 2022, the Departments of the Interior, Agriculture and Commerce have been working together to enhance the role of tribal governments in the stewardship of federal lands. Joint Secretarial Order 3403 directs agencies of these Departments to collaborate with tribal governments and consider tribal expertise and Indigenous knowledge when making decisions about federal land management.<sup>2</sup> Through co-stewardship agreements, tribal governments can partner with the federal government to manage and steward federal lands and resources.

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<sup>2</sup> See Joint Secretarial Order 3403, Amendment No. 1, Fulfilling the Trust Responsibility to Indian Tribes in the Stewardship of Federal Lands and Waters (Nov. 21, 2022) (directing agencies to “[m]ake agreements with Indian Tribes to collaborate in the co-stewardship of Federal lands and waters under the Departments’ jurisdiction”).

The Cowlitz Tribe recently submitted a co-stewardship request to the Superintendent of the Fort Vancouver National Historical Site, which is within the Tribe's historical territory, about fifteen miles from the Cowlitz Reservation and just blocks from the Tribe's Foundation Office. The Fort is located at the confluence of the Columbia and Willamette Rivers, and the location was a place of inter-tribal trade long before the Fort was established. The Tribe looks forward to working with the Park Service as well as other tribes that traveled and traded in the area of the Fort to provide the public with a better understanding of the Indigenous populations and their historical and cultural contributions to the Site. For generations, the Cowlitz have lived and cared for the natural resources that are part of the Tribe's homelands – many of which are now owned by the federal government. Co-stewardship provides Cowlitz with the opportunity to incorporate Indigenous traditions and expertise into federal land management decisions.

While tribes are able to access funds appropriated for the federal management and operation of various National Parks, National Forests, and other federal lands, Congress should strengthen these partnerships between tribes and federal land managers by making additional funds available specifically to support tribal co-stewardship agreements for federal lands. These agreements benefit tribes, federal land managers and the federal lands and resources they manage, but more importantly, they benefit the general public that uses and enjoys these federal lands.

#### **IV. INCREASED FUNDING FOR GREEN ENERGY OPPORTUNITIES TO SUPPORT TRIBAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Efforts to reduce carbon emissions will require substantial investment in green energy production capacity, and tribes stand ready to help meet this goal. Through innovative and sustainable energy production methods, tribes can harness their sovereignty, lands, resources, and members to help bring green energy projects to completion across the country – wind, solar, hydrogen, and others. Green energy presents a mutually beneficial opportunity for tribes and the federal government to deliver clean energy while supporting tribal economic development and self-sufficiency.

While the Office of Indian Energy within the Department of Energy has provided support for many tribes seeking to develop green energy projects, the Department of the Interior also plays an important role in supporting tribal energy development – through approval of energy leases, and through its Indian Energy Service Center, which supports both renewable and conventional energy development on Indian lands. Providing funding for Interior programs that support tribal energy and mineral development is important to support and encourage tribal participation in renewable energy development and related economic development.