

**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 2025 BUDGET
May 7, 2024**

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. We appreciate the House Interior Appropriations Subcommittee for its dedication to the needs of Indian Country and the opportunity to present testimony concerning these important appropriations.

For thousands of years the Bitterroot Salish, Upper Pend d'Oreille, and Kootenai people thrived in portions of what is now Montana, Idaho, and British Columbia. Under the Hellgate Treaty of 1855, the Flathead Reservation was reserved as our permanent homeland and 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. Our Reservation has a total Reservation population of roughly 30,000 people.

As a Self-Governance tribe we have for decades carried out all functions of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Indian Health Services on our Reservation, as well as 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 present significant challenges for the delivery of services. These challenges have been exacerbated by unprecedented drought, mental health, and addiction facing our communities.

INDIAN HEALTH SERVICE FUNDING

Our Reservation continues to face a serious mental health and addiction crisis worsened by the introduction of fentanyl and other opioids to our Reservation. Existing resources and methods are inadequate to effectively combat the complexities associated with opioid abuse. We are dedicated to providing needed mental health care and substance abuse treatment. We are engaged in several promising initiatives that, with adequate resources, will produce results. However, full funding for the Indian Health Service is a critical component to adequately address this mental health and addiction crisis.

BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS

Social Services, Public Safety and Housing. Our Tribal Council has undertaken an aggressive response to the mental health, addiction and housing crisis faced by our people. Perhaps the most significant component of our response is our participation in the Tiwahe Initiative. Tiwahe was established in 2015 to improve the health and wellbeing of families in Tribal communities by reducing poverty, substance abuse, domestic violence, and associated outcomes, such as youth suicide.

We appreciate the Subcommittee's support for Tiwahe, and strongly encourage additional support for Fiscal Year 2025. The President's 2025 budget requests an increase of \$28.6 million for additional support for Tiwahe Social Services, Housing, Tribal Justice Support, Tiwahe Indian Child Welfare Act programs, services, functions, and activities, including support for Tribal capacity building, and direct funding opportunities to Tribes seeking to develop and operate Healing to Wellness courts. At CSKT we have had tremendous success with our efforts to reduce recidivism and with our drug and wellness courts. Through our participation in Tiwahe, we intend to expand these important programs to help families and individuals struggling with substance abuse to access critical services so that they can be successful in housing, employment, and sobriety.

Since joining Tiwahe we have made significant strides in the development steps leading to a well-coordinated system of change resulting in positive outcomes for our children and families. We have identified the need to create a coordinated service delivery system to break through silos and have implemented a cross-disciplinary team to co-case manage children in need of care and services. We are working to incorporate Tribal language and cultural perspectives into our programming, reviewing our codes and policies to address current challenges, and eager to begin subsequent phases through action and strategic planning.

In addition to the President's FY 2025 requested increases, we also encourage the Subcommittee to provide an additional \$2 million in Tiwahe Job Placement/Training funds and \$5 million to establish a Tribal Economic Development component within the Tiwahe Initiative to further development and deployment of multi-disciplinary socioeconomic solutions. Funding will support Tribes in developing and operating comprehensive, integrated economic and community development programs.

In addition to Tiwahe funding, we support increased resources for social services, housing, Tribal Court, law enforcement and corrections. Homelessness and overcrowding are at all-time highs across Indian country. The housing situation on our Reservation is further complicated by the drug and mental health crisis we face, as eligibility for tribal housing may be impacted by addiction issues and drug and mental health events of one individual may have wide-reaching impacts on all members of that individual's household. The average home price on our Reservation far exceeds what a typical Tribal family can afford with a price tag of \$725,000. Increased federal funds are necessary to enable the Tribal government to increase housing availability for Tribal members on the Reservation. And importantly, housing funding must include the resources for infrastructure to ensure all new housing has water, sewer, electricity, and broadband access.

Social services are critical to the wellbeing of families on the Reservation. For example, we provide services that support Tribal people in entering into and staying in the workforce, as well as parenting programs that help parents acquire the tools and practices of good parenting, which in turn helps keep many children out of the foster care system.

Tribal courts are essential to a strong economy and safe communities. Our Tribal Court system provides an important venue for resolution of conflicts on the Reservation. And our Tribal

Defender's office is leading several cutting-edge efforts to reduce recidivism which include novel approaches to case management and the provision of wraparound services like supportive housing. But these efforts need additional funding. This is especially the case because the Tribal Court system faces additional burdens and significant challenges associated with mental health and addiction.

Similarly, law enforcement and corrections are in dire need of additional funding throughout Indian country, especially as opioid and other 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.

In addition, the Tribal Council is facing significant uncertainty as the State of Montana and its political subdivisions are anticipated to seek retrocession of felony criminal jurisdiction under Public Law 280 within the next few weeks. If the State is successful in withdrawing from its public safety obligations, CSKT will necessarily need to assume a dramatic increase in public safety related services. Full funding for law enforcement and corrections is imperative if we are to adequately police our communities.

Importantly, if CSKT is required to assume additional public safety obligations due to State retrocession, existing infrastructure will be wholly inadequate. Our criminal justice programs are spread out among different buildings and locations, hindering collaboration. Funding for tribal justice centers with space aligned with the Tribal restorative justice values and objectives will be vital in consolidating justice-related programs, ensuring adequate detention capacity, implementing effective treatment programs to address addiction and reduce recidivism, and providing vocational and other training and educational services to help people to leave the justice system with the ability to return to their communities and find meaningful work.

Natural Resources: Wildland Fire and Aquatic Invasive Species. We thank the Committee for recent increases in federal wildland fire appropriations and appreciate continued attention to additional funding for future challenges particularly in light of unprecedented drought conditions. We also encourage continued support for parity, equity, and inclusion of tribal wildland fire management programs during the Agency allocation of these funds. Current criteria limits funding to full-time, permanent wildland firefighters. However, due to our remote location and limited resources we regularly rely on part-time and seasonal employees as well as employees with other responsibilities in addition to just firefighting to fight fires when they arise.

CSKT's Division of Fire was stretched to the breaking point during with fires in 2021 and 2022 that ravaged our homelands 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. With dry conditions expected this season we continue to see the critical need for a single engine air tanker base facility, personal facilities, vehicle bays for engines, and training and assessment facilities.

We also 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 one boat to infect an entire watershed, every potential vector is a threat to the entire region. It is therefore critical to empower local parties who are best suited to guard against invasion with additional resources *and* to build strong partnerships throughout the Basin. In our view, federal monetary support and assistance in enhancing coordination are key to adequately protecting 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.

Additionally, and just as importantly, because the Federal Highway system is the primary vector for transmission of invasive species, including AIS, any robust line of defense against invasive species must involve the establishment of permanent check stations on all federal highways in and out of the Columbia 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 Basin.

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 is sparse and inconsistent. We must have adequate resources and support for coordinated efforts among the various sovereigns in the region.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

Finally, we thank the Committee for additional resources provided in recent cycles for Solid and Hazardous Waste and the Brownfields Program. However, we strenuously urge Congress to prioritize adequate funding for the Environmental Protection Agency programs for Tribal communities. Tribal EPA programs steadily decreased for nearly a decade and a half, placing an unreasonable drain on our government and our ability to sustain vital programs to monitor, reduce, and prevent pollution on our Reservation. The federal trust responsibility requires the United States to ensure the Tribes continue to have a livable homeland where pollution levels are safe for people, wildlife, and the environment. Without stable funding, CSKT cannot build sustainable and effective programs to protect our environment and community.

Critical programs for protecting the Tribes' permanent homeland have seen stagnation or decreases in funding over the past decade or so. These critical programs include the Clean Water Act Section 106 Water Quality Program, the Wetland Program Development Grant program, the Clean Air Act Section 103 and Section 105 Air Quality Program, the Underground Storage Tanks and Leaking Underground Storage Tanks Program, and Tribal Federal Insecticide Fungicide Rodenticide Act ("FIFRA") Program.