

House Appropriations

Public Witness Hearing- American Indian & Alaska Native: Day 2

[Morning](#) and [Afternoon](#) Sessions

Highlights- The morning session mainly consisted of Indian Higher Education specialists, resulting in testimony relevant to the discussion of school lunch programs. The afternoon sessions featured witnesses from Indian Healthcare backgrounds, as well as Tribal Fisheries, and forest management. The topics discussed in the hearings are:

- Indian School Equalization Program (ISEP)
- Conservation/ Land in Trust
- Increase Funding Request for infrastructure, farm development.
- Tribal fisheries
- Forestry and Natural Resources
- Tribal Environmental Resiliency

- Indian School Equalization Program (ISEP)
 - [Sherry Parker](#), Chairwoman, [Hualapai Tribe](#), highlighted issues with the school lunch program at her Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) school, where inadequate funding from the USDA has forced them to use money from other sources like ISEP. She emphasized the disparity between the number of kitchen employees and the funding provided by USDA, having left the school to cover additional costs. Parker aligned with previous testimonies, urging the Subcommittee to address these systemic challenges. She concluded by invoking a treaty from 156 years ago, expressing her commitment to uphold its provisions.
 - [Testimony](#)
 - [Shawna Allison Becenti](#), Head of the [Navajo Preparatory School](#), highlighted the challenges faced by Tribally controlled schools, including the need to supplement funding for various essential services such as safety, food service, staffing, technology infrastructure, and education programs. She criticized the inadequacy of funding provided by the Indian School Equalization Program (ISEP), which does not account for pay parity or adequately support the needs of Tribal schools compared to state-funded schools. Becenti emphasized the significant disparity in funding between Tribal schools and other federally funded education systems, such as the Department of Defense Education Agency. She urged the Subcommittee to increase BIE funding to address these shortcomings and fulfill federal trust responsibilities outlined in Indian treaties.
 - [Testimony](#)
- Conservation/ Land in Trust

- [Ryan Wilson](#), President of the [Oglala Lakota/ National Alliance to Save Native Languages](#), expressed gratitude for the educational value of the Subcommittee's discussions, and emphasized the importance of considering diverse perspectives beyond one's own Tribe. He highlighted the significance of conservation efforts, particularly in preserving traditional medicines essential for Tribal ceremonies and ways of life. Wilson advocated for private-public partnerships in conservation and requests support for the American Indian Religious Freedom Act and urged a review of its implementation without additional cost. He concluded by acknowledging the progress made in language preservation efforts and encouraged continued momentum in this regard.
 - [Testimony](#)
- [Michael Rondeau](#), Chief Executive of the [Cow Creek band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians](#), discussed the Tribe's priorities, including land into trust, law enforcement funding, and wildfire suppression. He emphasized the Tribe's provision of various services to its members and highlighted the importance of ancestral ties to land. Rondeau expressed concern over off-reservation gaming projects, particularly one in Southern Oregon, which he argued lacks ancestral or cultural ties to the area and would harm other Tribes. He called for no funds to be appropriated for such projects and advocated for Tribal sovereignty in land decisions.
 - [Testimony](#)
- Increase Funding Request for infrastructure, farm development.
 - [Lionel Haskie](#), Director of Operations at [Navajo Agricultural Products Industry](#) (NAPI), testified before the Subcommittee on the critical need for increased funding for infrastructure, farm development, and maintenance at the [Navajo Indian Irrigation Project](#) (NIIP). NAPI operates a corporate farm for the Navajo Nation and supports food production for the Southwest. However, federal funding failures under Public Laws 87-483 and 93-638 have hindered NAPI's efforts. Haskie requested \$25.5 million for natural resources management irrigation operations and maintenance, \$35 million for irrigation rehabilitation and renovation, and \$30 million for irrigation construction. These funds are essential to address infrastructure issues and allow NAPI to fulfill its potential in food production for the Southwest.
 - [Testimony](#)
- Tribal fisheries
 - [Corinne Sams](#), representing the [Columbia River Treaty Tribes](#), emphasized the cultural and ecological significance of salmon and lamprey in the Columbia River Basin. She discusses the decline in fish populations due to historical development and highlights the importance of Tribal efforts in habitat restoration and resource management. Sams presented funding requests to support fisheries co-management, infrastructure and safety improvements for Tribal fisheries, and initiatives to address climate change impacts. She underscored the importance of

Tribal youth programs and calls for continued partnership between Tribes and the federal government to protect cultural heritage and environmental resources.

- [Testimony](#)
 - [Rep. Derek Kilmer \(D-WA\)](#) asked Chair Corinne Sams to elaborate on the significance of BIA rights protection funding and its impact when adequately funded versus underfunded. Chair Sams emphasized the importance of clean and healthy fishing grounds for Tribal fishers to maintain their ceremonial fishing practices and ensure a sustainable food source for Tribal communities. She highlighted the historical impact of hydro systems on Tribal villages and the ongoing need for resources to revitalize and protect fishing access sites.
- [Guy Capoeman](#), representing the [Northwest Indian Fish Commission](#), highlighted the profound impact of climate change on Tribal communities and ecosystems. He emphasized the importance of preserving cultural identity and the environment for future generations. Capoeman advocated for increased funding for programs such as BIA rights protection, salmon habitat assessment, wildlife management, and EPA geographic programs to address these challenges and sustain Tribal livelihoods.
 - [Testimony](#)
- [Ed Johnstone](#), Chair of the [Northwest Indian Fish Commission](#) and member of the Cornell Tribe, emphasized the extensive management responsibilities of the commission, which was created after the United States versus Washington Boldt decision. He discussed the complex relationships the commission maintains with various entities, including the Coastwide Pacific Fisheries Management Council, the U.S.-Canada salmon treaty, and state governments. Johnstone highlighted the impact of climate change on Tribal ecosystems, citing examples such as the need to relocate the Quinault reservation due to rising sea levels. He advocated for funding programs critical to Tribal management responsibilities, including BIA rights protection, salmon and steelhead habitat inventory and assessment, and wildlife management rules. Johnstone underscored the importance of maintaining and rebuilding salmon stocks for the cultural identity and health of future generations. He expressed gratitude for the support provided to Tribes and emphasizes the ongoing work towards legislative initiatives and funding allocation for environmental programs.
 - [Testimony](#)
- Forestry and Natural Resources
 - [Cody Desautel](#), representing [the Intertribal Timber Council](#), highlighted the significant funding disparities and challenges faced by Tribal forestry programs compared to other federal forest management agencies. He cited statistics from the IFMAT report, noting the decline in Tribal Forest harvest levels and the substantial inequity in funding between BIA forestry and other federal forest agencies. Desautel emphasized the detrimental impact of funding disparities on Tribal communities,

including foregone timber revenue and losses due to uncharacteristic wildfires. He urged the committee to prioritize historic decisions to fund Indian trust forests on parity with other federal agencies and increase funding for DOI wildland fire management to address these challenges effectively. Additionally, Desautel called for the inclusion of Tribal firefighters in federal firefighting compensation benefits and emphasized the importance of adequate funding and staffing to support Tribal forestry programs.

- [Testimony](#)
- [Willow Hetrick-Price](#), Executive Director of the [Chugach Regional Resources Commission \(CIRC\)](#), addressed two key issues. First, she advocated for an increase in funding for the BIA Tribal Management Development Program (TMDP) to bring it in line with overall program budget increases, citing the essential natural resource management services provided by CIRC across 31 million acres of Tribal homelands. She emphasized the disparity in funding compared to other federal agencies managing smaller areas. Second, Hetrick-Price urged fiscal oversight to ensure timely payments from the BIA to Tribes, highlighted delays in receiving funding and the resulting financial strain on Tribal operations.
 - [Testimony](#)
- Tribal Environmental Resiliency
 - [Quinton Swanson](#), Chairman of the [Shoalwater Bay Indian Tribe](#), stressed the urgent need for increased funding for Tribal environmental resilience programs, especially for communities facing threats like sea level rise. He expressed disappointment over funding limitations in 2024 and introduces [HR 7859, the Tribal Environmental Resiliency Resources Act \(TERRA Act\)](#), as a solution to streamline access to resources for Tribes. Swanson calls for bipartisan support for the TERRA Act and advocates for increased IHS funding, including mandatory funding for certain programs. He invited Subcommittee members to visit Shoalwater Bay to witness the Tribe's resilience firsthand. Swanson also explained the challenges his Tribe face due to disparate agency rules and timelines, highlighted the need for a more streamlined approach facilitated by the TERRA Act. He hoped the Act will enable more efficient project execution by removing barriers and red tape associated with accessing resources from multiple agencies.
 - [Testimony](#)