



# The Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation



Prepared Statement of the Honorable Sneena Brooks, Vice-Chairman  
Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation

House Committee on Appropriations,  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies

Public Witness Hearing—Native Americans

March 28, 2012

Good morning Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Moran, and members of the Subcommittee. On behalf of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation (“Colville Tribes” or the “Tribe”), I thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony to the Subcommittee. Today, I am pleased to share the Colville Tribes’ views on the President’s 2013 budget request for tribal programs. As a rural, land-based Indian tribe, the Colville Tribes and similarly situated Indian tribes rely heavily on Bureau of Indian Affairs (“BIA”) land and natural resources programs. **As explained below, the Colville Tribes supports the FY 2013 request for a \$15.4 million increase in the BIA’s Trust-Natural Resources account and asks the Subcommittee to fund the Criminal Investigations and Police Services account at the \$201.16 million level to allow tribes to hire and retain more police officers.**

## Background on the Colville Tribes

Although now considered a single Indian tribe, the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation is, as the name states, a confederation of 12 aboriginal tribes and bands from all across eastern Washington State. The present-day Colville Reservation is located in north-central Washington State and was established by Executive Order in 1872. At that time, the Colville Reservation consisted of all lands within the United States bounded by the Columbia and Okanogan Rivers, roughly 3 million acres. In 1891, the North Half of the 1872 Reservation was opened to the public domain. The North Half consists of approximately 1.5 million acres between the Canadian border and the northern boundary of the present-day Reservation. Colville tribal members exercise reserved hunting, fishing, and gathering rights on the North Half and the Colville Tribes maintains strong political and economic interests in this area.

Today, the Colville Tribes has more than 9,400 enrolled members, making it one of the largest Indian tribes in the Northwest. About half of the Tribes’ members live on or near the Colville Reservation. Between the tribal government and the Tribes’ enterprise division, the Colville Tribes collectively accounts for more than 1,700 jobs and is one of the largest employers in north-central Washington.

## **The Colville Tribes Supports Increases to Trust and Natural Resources Management Programs**

For land-based Indian tribes like the Colville Tribes that are not near major highways or interstates, our natural resources are our primary sources of revenue. Our ability to generate economic development opportunities is closely tied to our ability to have fee-to-trust applications, timber sales, grazing permits, and other land transactions processed and approved in a cost efficient and timely manner.

Most of these programs are funded in the Bureau of Indian Affairs' Natural Resources Management account. Tribes have proven that they are superior land managers and use natural resource management funds far more efficiently than comparable activities on other federal lands. For example, it often takes the U.S. Forest Service many months to procure a salvage log sale after a forest fire. The Colville Tribes and other tribes with timber resources, however, are usually able to complete this process in as little as two weeks — with a per acre forest management budget that is a fraction of what the U.S. Forest Service has traditionally enjoyed.

The Colville Tribes is therefore pleased that for the first time in many years, the FY 2013 request contains a significant increase, \$15.4 million, for the Trust Natural Resources Management programs. The increases will restore programs that were cut from previous budgets and provide tribal land managers with needed assistance to ensure tribal trust resources are protected.

One of the activities funded in this account allows the Colville Tribes' Natural Resource Officers to patrol the 161 shoreline miles of Lake Roosevelt, the reservoir of the Grand Coulee Dam and a National Recreation Area with more than 1.5 million visitors annually. Although the National Park Service also conducts patrols, the Colville Tribes' officers have exclusive responsibility for 35 percent of Lake Roosevelt and are the most visible presence on the Lake. The FY 2013 Budget contains a total of \$750,000 (a \$188,000 increase over FY 2012 enacted levels) for both the Colville Tribes and the Spokane Tribe for these activities. Dwarfing this amount is the President's Budget request for FY 2013 for the *National Park Service* for Lake Roosevelt: \$5.8 million.

The Colville Tribes is pleased that the FY 2013 request for Trust Natural Resources account would restore \$1.5 million to the attorney's fees and litigation support program. The FY 2012 spending bill eliminated this important program. Although this program may seem like a small amount of money against the backdrop of the total Indian Affairs budget, tribes nationwide rely on it to protect their trust resources. The Colville Tribes is a case study in this regard.

For at least 100 years, through the mid-1990's, the largest lead-zinc-copper smelter in the world dumped hundreds of thousands of tons of "slag" directly into the Columbia River from a location 10 miles north of the U.S./Canadian border. These contaminants traveled downstream, across the international border, and settled in not only the Colville Tribes' on-reservation trust

lands, but also federal lands administered by the National Park Service, the Bureau of Reclamation, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Despite the obvious interests of the Department of the Interior and its federal land management agencies to ensure that these federal lands are safe for the public at large, *only the Colville Tribes* (and later, the State of Washington) stepped forward to file suit in order to compel the company to clean up the contamination it caused. The Department of the Interior has never been a party to the litigation despite the Colville Tribes' formal request that it intervene. The Colville Tribes' efforts to protect this critical watershed for all U.S. citizens would not have been possible without funding from the attorney's fees and litigation support program.

### **Salaries for Tribal Police Officers**

The Colville Tribes and other large land-based tribes are pleased that funding for BIA law enforcement activities is again proposed for an increase in the President's Budget. The FY 2013 request seeks an \$11 million increase for law enforcement. Of that \$11 million, a \$3.5 million increase is proposed for the Criminal Investigations and Police Services account, which funds police officer salaries. As explained below, the Colville Tribes believes that this account should receive a \$15 million increase to enable tribes to hire and retain more tribal officers. This would require funding the Criminal Investigations and Police Services account at the \$201,162,000 level.

As the Committee is well aware, large land-based tribes usually lack a sufficient number of police officers, which leads to response times often in excess of two hours. There are occasions when the Colville Tribes has only a single officer on duty for the entire 1.4 million acre reservation. To make matters worse, the Colville Tribes has seen a rash of gang violence and drug smuggling activity in recent years, including airborne drug smuggling and trafficking activity with ties to Mexican cartels. Other Indian tribes have similar or even more harrowing stories.

This year, because BIA increases to have not kept pace with rising costs, the Colville Tribes may be forced to lay-off more than 20 tribal police officers. We are working with the Department on a short term solution, but without a larger increase in the Criminal Investigations and Police Services account, all the Department can offer is training or one-time funding for equipment – not officer salaries. Against this backdrop, the Colville Tribes asks the Subcommittee to increase this account by \$15 million to \$210,162,000.

I appreciate this opportunity to testify today. At this time I would be happy to answer any questions the Subcommittee may have.