

**TESTIMONY CONCERNING FISCAL YEAR 2021 APPROPRIATIONS
FOR THE BIA, BIE, EPA and IHS**
FOND DU LAC BAND OF LAKE SUPERIOR CHIPPEWA
KEVIN R. DUPUIS, SR., CHAIRMAN
BEFORE THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT AND RELATED AGENCIES
FEBURARY 11, 2020

Chairwoman McCollum, Ranking Member Joyce, and respected members of the Committee, I am Kevin Dupuis, the Chairman of the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa. On behalf of the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, I would like to thank you for inviting me to testify on FY 2021 appropriations for Indian programs funded through the Interior Department, Indian Health Service, and Environmental Protection Agency. We submit this testimony to urge Congress to increase, or, at the very least preserve, the federal funding levels for Indian programs that are provided through these federal agencies.

As we talk about funding needs in Indian country, it is essential to keep in mind that the problems that face communities nationwide are far more severe for Indian communities, with tribes having far fewer resources to address problems like drug and alcohol abuse, domestic violence, public safety, and homelessness.

The Fond du Lac Band has worked, and will continue to work, to find solutions for problems of this kind. With seed money from federal funds, we have implemented innovative programs and measures to provide health, education, social services, public safety and other governmental services to our 4,200 members and the more than 7,300 Indian people who live on and near our Reservation. For example, Fond du Lac built the first-of-its-kind supportive housing programs in Indian country, and the first such supportive housing for Veterans. We have undertaken to implement best practices in health care, using a range of programs and services to aid our people. In so doing, we have found that an important element to the success of these programs is building on our traditional cultural practices. Because of the importance of these practices, we are active in natural resource management and environmental protection so our water is safe to drink, fish are safe to eat, wild rice re-generates, game is plentiful, and natural resources remain available for cultural and religious practices that are central to our identity.

We are proud of what we have accomplished, but more remains to be done. The investment of federal funds is key to that effort. It allows us to use Band resources and attract private partners so we can provide jobs, grow the local economy, educate our children, prevent crime, and care for our elders and infirm. We urge Congress to continue to fund these programs.

BIA: Trust-Natural Resources Management.

There is nothing more important than preserving and protecting the territories and resources that our ancestors reserved for my people when they signed our Treaties with the United States. The Fond du Lac Band is committed to the management, conservation, and sustainability of the natural resources of the Fond du Lac Reservation and within our treaty protected areas.

The Fond du Lac Reservation consists of 101,153 acres, including forests, lakes and rivers that must be managed and protected for the current and future generations. In addition, the Fond du Lac Band retains hunting, fishing, and gathering rights in the 1837, 1842, and 1854 “Ceded Territories” which covers portions of Upper Michigan, Northern Wisconsin, and North Central Minnesota. The resources and challenges across the region are diverse and complex, from species restoration and reintroduction to adaptation to climate change. But, these resources are the foundation of who we are as a people and in fact who we are as a Nation. If we do not strive to preserve and protect these resources for future generations, we will lose a part of who the creator made us and we will be failing our children and our children’s children.

Natural resource management is vital in Indian country where the basic subsistence needs of many Indian people—especially those living in poverty—depend on natural resources. This is certainly true at Fond du Lac. By Treaties in 1837, 1842 and 1854, the United States acquired our aboriginal territory, but, to ensure that we could sustain ourselves, expressly promised that we retained rights to hunt, fish and gather natural resources within and outside our Reservation. Our members depend on and exercise these treaty-protected rights to put food on the table and for ceremonial practices that serve as the foundation for our culture. Full funding for Trust-Natural Resources Management, including, in particular, increased funding for Rights, Protection and Implementation, is essential in allowing us to protect, enhance, and restore natural resources.

Thus, we appreciate Congress’s decision to provide a \$19 million increases in funding for BIA Trust-Natural Resources programs in FY 2020. In particular, we are grateful that Congress continued the Cooperative Landscape Conservation program in the amount of \$14.9 million.

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). We appreciate that Congress has continued to provide federal funds for EPA, but we ask that funding for EPA in FY 2021 be increased. We rely on EPA grants to clean up brownfields and administer clean water and clean air programs. These grants enable us to protect the health of our community, so that we have safe water to drink and can continue to rely on fish, wild rice, and game to put food on the table.

- State and Tribal Assistancess Grants (STAG). We thank Congress for providing STAG funding in FY2020. We strongly urge Congress to increase funding for this Program, which has not seen substantive increase in years, notwithstanding the Band’s responsibilities continue to grow as we work to protect our land, water and air.

- Water Quality. We have a federally-approved water quality standards program that has seen annual funding decline while the need and Band’s responsibilities have increased. Given the current threats to water resources in our region, we urge that Tribal Section 106 funding be doubled so that we can do the work needed to protect the water we drink, which is critical to the fish and game that are central to our and the state’s economy.

- Air. We also have a long-standing air monitoring program that has faced a steady decline in federal funding. We request that air quality program funding for tribes be increased.

- Wetlands. One-half of our reservation is made up of wetlands. Proper management and restoration of this valuable resource is impossible without adequate and consistent federal funding. We request sustained wetland monitoring and protection program funding.

- Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. The Band fully supports this initiative, and asks that Congress maintain the \$320 million level of funding for this initiative. This initiative has broad-reaching benefits to resources of importance for all stakeholders (state, tribal and private) in the Great Lakes region. The Great Lakes hold three-quarters of the earth's supply of fresh water and it is well established that if their quality is compromised the quality of the earth's health is compromised.

BIA: Public Safety and Justice. A significant part of protecting our territory and environment is having a fully staffed and trained law enforcement Department. We appreciate Congress's decision to increase funding for BIA's Public Safety and Justice, including increased funding for criminal investigations and police services and to help people affected by opioid addiction. The largest law enforcement problems we face are due to opioids and other drugs, including methamphetamines and prescription drugs. The large drug problem has also increased thefts, burglaries, and assaults. In addition, we find (and the federal government has also recognized), that a disproportionately large number of Native American women are the victims of sex trafficking. Our law enforcement also responds to a wide range of calls, including domestic disputes, disturbances, disorderly conduct, property damage, trespass, suspicious activity, unwanted persons, medical emergencies, fire, neglected children, missing persons, suicide threats, and traffic offenses. The demand on law enforcement increases each year.

We address law enforcement by a combination of tribal and available federal funds and cooperative agreements with local law enforcement agencies. To meet need, we should have 25 full time officers. Five of those officers would be assigned to investigations, with two investigators dedicated to narcotics enforcement. We currently have 3 administrative staff, but should have one more person to gather intel and manage an intelligence page linked to other tribal agencies.

Funding is also needed for training. With an increase in the drug epidemic and related crimes, our officers need, but are not receiving, vital training for undercover work, narcotics detection, investigative procedures, interview and interrogation, use of force, de-escalation, firearms, and community policing. Budget restraints also restrict us from buying patrol vehicles and proper equipment to combat the drug problems on our Reservation. Uniform costs increase due to contamination from drugs and blood-borne pathogens from drug users. That includes duty gear and equipment, and patrol vehicles, which need to be decontaminated more frequently. There is also need for personal protective gear and other basic equipment (e.g., binoculars, video cameras and digital recorders).

Bureau of Indian Education. With funding from the BIE and the Department of Education, we operate the Fond du Lac Ojibwe School serving an average of 220 children from pre-K through 12th grade. More than 90% of our students come from very low-income households, as 96% receive free or reduced-price lunch. We are slowly making progress in improving the outcomes for our students. While the high school graduation rates for American Indians in Minnesota is at 51%, we are now at 59%, which is still far behind the state-wide rate of 81%. We need to do more.

However, we are handicapped by limited resources. BIE funding has never kept pace with need, which prevents us from providing the educational services needed for our students. Because education is so critical to success later in life, we urge Congress to continue to increase federal funding for Indian education.

Indian Health Service. We appreciate Congress's decision to increase funding for IHS in FY 2020, which is essential to address the substantial unmet need for health care among Indian people and the increasing costs of medical care due to high rates of medical inflation. Indians at Fond du Lac, like Indians throughout the Nation, continue to face severe disparities across a broad range of health issues. In addition to the extraordinarily high mortality rates due to the opioid epidemic, Indians in Minnesota are far more likely to die prematurely than all others in the state, and suffer from the highest mortality rates for causes of death due to cancer, heart disease, diabetes, suicide, and unintentional injury.

We are working to address these issues every day. We serve over 7,300 Indian people at our clinics, but the current funding level meets only 33% of our health care funding needs. To make progress in reducing the disparities in Indian health, we urge Congress to continue to increase funding for IHS. We urge an increase for FY 2021 in order to fully fund IHS programs, with the top priorities given to Hospitals & Health Clinics; Purchased/Referred Care; Mental Health; Alcohol & Substance Abuse; and Dental Health. Expanded resources for treatment and community education capacity are especially needed to combat the epidemic of drug abuse.

Miigwech. Thank you.