



Quinault Indian Nation Testimony
United States House of Representatives Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife
Legislative Hearing on H.R. 335, H.R. 729, H.R. 2185, H.R.3115, H.R. 3237, H.R.
3510, H.R. 3541, H.R. 3596, H.R. 3723
July 25, 2019

Good morning Chairman Huffman, Ranking Member McClintock and members of the Subcommittee. My name is Fawn Sharp, I am President of the Quinault Indian Nation ("QIN"). The Quinault Reservation ("Reservation") is located on the southwestern corner of the Olympic Peninsula of Washington State and abuts the Pacific Ocean. Since time immemorial, QIN has relied on the waters of the Quinault and Queets Rivers and Pacific Ocean for sustenance and survival. The village of Taholah is the primary population, social, economic and government center of the QIN.

I want to thank the Subcommittee for holding this hearing and allowing me to speak on H.R. 729, the Tribal Coastal Resiliency Act. This bill is sponsored by our Representative, Derek Kilmer, and the funding to Tribes will assist in addressing a critical issue for all Tribes located by the ocean. I would like to thank Mr. Kilmer for introducing this bill and thank Mr. Young, Mr. Grijalva, Mr. Cole, Mr. Heck, Mr. Cook, Mr. Gallego, Ms. DelBene, Ms. Pingree, Ms. Moore, Mr. Luján, Mrs. Dingell and Chairman Huffman for co-sponsoring the bill.

H.R. 729 the Tribal Coastal Resiliency Act

The Quinault Indian Nation strongly supports the Tribal Coastal Resiliency act and requests the Subcommittee and full Committee consider and pass the bill expediently. This legislation will make available to Tribes grant funding for the protection and preservation of Tribal coastal zones and areas. This is funding that is critically needed by Tribes that are dealing with coastal and shoreline degradation and destabilization due to climate change. H.R. 729 also gives Tribes parity with states by allowing them to work directly with the federal government on these grants. This is a much needed change that will be beneficial for every Tribe that is dealing with coastal resiliency issues. I would like to share with you some of the unique issues that the Quinault Nation is facing as a Tribe with a reservation on the Pacific Ocean.

Fish Population Decline

QIN, as a signatory to the Treaty of Olympia (1856), has the reserved right of "taking fish, at all usual and accustomed fishing grounds and stations." This federally-protected treaty right guarantees every enrolled Quinault tribal member - now and into the future - the right to harvest any and all species of fish and shellfish, anywhere within the QIN's usual and accustomed area, in perpetuity, subject only to restrictions intended to conserve the fisheries.

However, since 2015, many QIN members have experienced fish harvest levels that are significantly lower than they have been in previous years. Because of this decline, the Nation requested through the Department of Commerce and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration a commercial fishery resource disaster be declared. The declaration was approved and QIN was awarded funding, however the harvest levels continue to decline because of water temperature change and deterioration of habitat brought on by climate change.

In both 2018 and 2019, Quinault closed its Blueback fishery on the Quinault River system due to historically low return runs. Blueback are a genetically distinct and culturally-critical sockeye that have sustained the Quinault people for millennia. The Anderson Glacier, which fed the Quinault River with cold water critical to the Nation's fish population, disappeared in 2018, exacerbating riverine habitat conditions. Blueback returning to the Quinault River in 2013 through 2015 experienced poor survival primarily because of a marine heatwave known as the Blob and the Godzilla El Nino (2015-2016), a global climate event.

These declines have been nothing short of devastating for QIN as our tribal members depend on fishing for commercial, subsistence, and recreational purposes, as well as sustaining ceremonial and traditional cultural practices.

Tsunami Threat

Our Nation has had Models prepared by the Washington Department of Natural Resources that show a potential of tsunami inundation of 40-50 feet in depth in most of the Lower Village of Taholah, well above the elevation of the tallest building in the village. A tsunami event at the Village of Taholah would be catastrophic for our tribe, including a significant loss of life and the destruction of our infrastructure, which would compromise QIN government operations indefinitely.

Historically, large earthquake/tsunami events along the Cascadia Subduction Zone have occurred every 300 to 500 years. The last such event happened in February, 1700, so the 300-year threshold has already been exceeded. Approximately 650 residents live within the tsunami zone in the Taholah Village. Important Quinault social and cultural institutions are located in the tsunami inundation zone and flood prone area (including the Senior Center, Head Start Day Care, the K-12 Taholah School, Community Center, fire cache, police station, jail and courts, Veterans Park, Taholah Mercantile, Fitness Center, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Housing Authority, Canoe Carving Shed, Enterprise Board, and the Museum, the repository of Quinault

culture). On a typical weekday, at least 60 employees of the Quinault Indian Nation also work in the lower Taholah Village.

A comprehensive 2012 report was contracted by QIN to understand the effects of climate change on sea levels. The report, entitled “Relative Sea Level Change Along Quinault Indian Reservation Marine Coastlines,” found that the combined effects of thermal expansion of ocean waters, vertical land deformation (e.g., tectonic movements), melting glaciers and ice fields and seasonal water surface elevation changes due to local atmospheric circulation effects will result in sea level increases that will substantially increase flood risks in the Lower Village of Taholah and in the Village of Queets. The Nation updated its Hazard Mitigation Plan in 2016, which noted that the changes posed by climate change, including increased winter precipitation, more frequent and intense heavy precipitation events, sea level rise, and storm surge will compound and increase the coastal and riverine flood risks to the lower Village of Taholah and the Village of Queets.

Seawall Status

In March 2014, two large storms with wave heights in excess of 20 ft. and 13.5 ft. coincided with high tides and caused significant erosion at the toe of the 2,000-foot seawall protecting the Village of Taholah. The seawall failed, resulting in severe flooding of many homes and buildings.

In March 2014, a storm surge breached the seawall that protects Taholah, causing the QIN to declare a state of emergency. While the seawall was repaired by the Army Corps of Engineers after that event, the seawall is not a permanent solution. In December 2015, waves nearly topped the seawall during a minor storm. In March 2016, residents could canoe between First Street and the police station because of localized flooding. The seawall was also breached in December 18, 2018, when heavy rains also caused a landslide that closed Highway 109, blocking all travel to and from Taholah for the day.

Developing a Plan to Relocate the Taholah Lower Village

In 2012, the QIN determined through multiple public processes, including a General Council resolution (a vote taken by the entire Tribe), that enabling the movement of residents, businesses, and institutions from the lower village of Taholah to a new Upper Village Relocation Area was the only solution to the threats posed by the effects of climate change.

This prioritization prompted the Nation to apply for a grant in 2013 from the Administration for Native Americans (U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services) to prepare a plan to relocate the village to higher ground. The grant was received and resulted in the Taholah Village Relocation Master Plan (“Master Plan”). The Master Plan was adopted by the Quinault Indian Nation Business Committee (the governing body of the Nation) on June 26, 2017. The NEPA Environmental Review was completed through the Bureau of Indian Affairs and HUD.

The Master Plan document presents land uses, conceptual neighborhood layouts, design principles, suggestions for energy efficiency measures, preliminary development cost estimates,

resilience measures and required zoning changes. Although the Quinault Nation isn't subject to state zoning requirements of the Growth Management Act of Washington State (GMA), this Master Plan meets numerous goals and requirements of the GMA. This includes: community participation; concentrated development near transit lines and existing adequate infrastructure; encouragement of pedestrian travel; a range of housing choices; convenient access to services; and, water quality. The Master Plan was in part based on feedback received at community meetings and surveys. A Space Needs Assessment was compiled with input from every department at the Nation regarding future space needs.

The project area governed by the Master Plan is located directly to the east of the existing Administration Building on land ranging in elevation from 125 feet to 165 feet, well above the tsunami danger zone. The Roger Saux Health Center is the only existing building at this time within the Relocation Area. The Relocation Area is approximately 180 acres and is accessed by two roads from the west. The Master Plan provides the blueprint for the Nation to build its future village, including housing, community facilities, energy facilities, a K-12 school, and park areas.

A primary goal of the Plan is to create a rural community comprised of residential neighborhoods around a central corridor of community facilities. The heart of the community will be the school, the Health Center, the Generations Building, a new Community Center, the Museum and the Mercantile. The Generations Building (Wenasgwəlləʔəw in the Quinault language) will be the first building to be constructed and will house the Head Start, Day Care and Senior programs; these programs serve the most vulnerable populations and were identified by the community as the priority programs to relocate prior to the Plan starting. The new Community Center would also serve as an evacuation center. As part of the Plan, a schematic design was done for the building with oversized restrooms and showers and storage for tents and cots. The Mercantile is the only store and serves as a social hub for the Village. The Village has been laid out so that these community facilities are within a five to ten minute walk of each neighborhood. To this end, new paths have been plotted and the existing Wellness Program walking routes connected to the new path network. The paths will enable connection back to the River and the ocean that the residents are leaving, as well as allowing easy access to the community services at the heart of the new village.

A conscious effort was made to tailor the Master Plan to the community context. The land for the village is owned by the Quinault Nation – private developers will not speculatively develop this project; some development will be undertaken by the Housing Authority, but most of the housing will likely be developed by individual landowners. These landowners will not mass produce homes where strict design guidelines can be applied. In many cases families will be installing modular homes or simple homes where design guidelines might be onerous.

Current Status of the Village Relocation

With completion and adoption of the Master Plan, the Nation has a blueprint for redevelopment of the village, safe from flooding and tsunamis that incorporates the vision of the community members, sustainable practices, culture, amenities and upgraded community facilities.

Construction has begun on the first building in the new village, the WenasgwəllaʔaW (Generations Building). WenasgwəllaʔaW will house the Senior Program and children's programs (Head Start, Early Head Start and Day Care), at a cost of nearly \$15 million. The Nation is also in the process of designing the first residential neighborhood of the Master Plan so that there is a place for residents of the Lower Village to relocate as soon as possible. However, the Master Plan has an estimated price tag of \$150 to \$200 million, which means that the Quinault Nation will not be able to fully fund the plan. We will need assistance, including from our trustee, the federal government, to complete this project.

Conclusion

Again, thank you for allowing me to testify to the Subcommittee today on H.R. 729 and to speak on the issues our Tribe is dealing due to climate change. QIN is taking the necessary steps to protect our citizens from the effects of climate change with the Master Plan the centerpiece of our strategy. We will need more assistance from our trustee to protect our citizens. The grants created by H.R. 729 will be a very positive step toward assisting the Nation in addressing with these issues.