



**Quinault Indian Nation Testimony  
United States House of Representatives Committee on Natural Resources  
Subcommittee for Indigenous Peoples of the United States  
Hearing on the Impacts of Climate Change on Tribal Communities  
February 12, 2019**

Good afternoon Chairman Gallego, Ranking Member Cook and members of the Subcommittee. I am Tyson Johnston, Vice-President of the Quinault Indian Nation ("QIN"). I want to thank the Subcommittee for holding this hearing on the impacts and challenges tribal communities face due to climate change. It is critically important for the federal government, as trustee to Quinault and other Tribal Nations, to examine this issue and work with tribal governments to address the challenges we face.

**Climate Change Today on the Quinault Indian Reservation**

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 River and Pacific Ocean for sustenance and survival. The village of Taholah is the primary population, social, economic and government center of the QIN. It is facing imminent threats from potential tsunamis and potential damage from the sea level rising.

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 habit brought on by climate change. This

decline has been nothing short of devastating for QIN as our tribal members depend on fishing for commercial, subsistence, and recreational purposes, as well as ceremonial and cultural ones.

Our Nation has had Models prepared by the Washington Department of Natural Resources 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, the loss of life and destruction of our infrastructure would compromise QIN government operations.

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 breached. 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. The report noted that the changes posed by climate change, including increased winter precipitation, soil saturation and flow into the Quinault River, will compound and increase the coastal flood risks to the lower Village of Taholah.

Already, high tides, high winds and storm surge conditions have led to waves breaking over the seawall that protects the Lower Taholah Village from coastal surges. The seawall was breached in 2014, prompting a state of emergency to be declared. While the Army Corps of Engineers replaced the seawall, it is not a permanent solution. During minor storm events, areas around First Avenue in Taholah flood regularly with seawater.

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 because of these threats.

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 (a governing body of the Nation) on June 26, 2017. The NEPA Environmental Review was completed through the Bureau of Indian Affairs and HUD.

### **The Plan to Relocate the Taholah Lower Village**

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 county (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 Relocation area is adjacent to development on higher ground that is served by adequate infrastructure. The Master Plan provides a blueprint for the 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 (WenasgwəllaʔaW 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 in the village 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.

QIN expects substantial demand for housing in the Upper Village. The Census (2000) data indicates that during that period Washington State had an 8.7% vacant housing rate, while the QIR had a 1.8% vacant housing rate. Taholah’s average household size is 3.68. The Quinault

Housing Authority maintains a housing waiting list of families and maintains that if more housing were developed on the QIR, there would be increases both in off-Reservation Tribal members who would apply for a new home, and on-Reservation Tribal members that now share a home that houses two or more families, would apply for additional housing. There are over 125 families on the waiting list. Thus, the Master Plan was designed to accommodate those needing to move to higher ground and those seeking to move back to the Reservation.

Taholah is a rural community with limited public transportation options; high density residential housing would not be appropriate here, as it may be in larger towns. The Master Plan sought to create a walkable community, while retaining a rural feel and creating opportunities for a mix of housing types and sizes to serve the varying demand of residents. Each neighborhood is required to include a mix of unit type and lot size, so all segments of the population can be served throughout the Relocation process, with denser unit types and lot sizes closer to the center of the community (and likely bus stops) and density lessening towards the edges. This should allow for mixed-income neighborhoods. An effort has been made to include Quinault art in the new village and to engage Quinault artists in the integration of art and culture into the built environment. Low impact development for stormwater has been utilized to protect the salmon runs in the Quinault River. Resilience to disaster and sustainability have been included in the Plan to best determine how the concepts could be integrated physically into the new village.

A conscious effort was made to tailor the Master Plan to the community context. The context is somewhat different than other municipalities around Washington. 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. Thus, the Master Plan does not impose such guidelines on residents; it merely suggests energy efficiency measures homeowners should consider when constructing a home. Many homeowners require larger lots for storage of nets and boats, as they fish for a livelihood. Thus, the plan supports traditional rural lifestyles.

The Master Plan is also designed to concentrate development in Taholah as opposed to on scattered sites around the Reservation, creating a limited area of intensive rural development. The Plan creates neighborhoods of higher density than those developed on the Reservation during the past 50 years with a mix of housing, from large lot housing to tiny homes for those transitioning back into the community. This compact development will encourage pedestrian travel and convenient access to services in the new village.

### **Moving Forward with the Master Plan**

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. Design has begun on the first building in the new village, the Wenasgwella?aw (Generations Building).

WenasgwəlləqəW will house the Senior Program and children's programs (Head Start, Early Head Start and Day Care). 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 and the Quinault Nation will not be able to fully fund the plan. We will need assistance from our trustee, the federal government, to continue the Master Plan and to ensure that our citizens and government operations continue.

### **Conclusion**

Again, thank you for allowing me to testify to the Subcommittee today on this critical issue to the Quinault Indian Nation. QIN is taking the necessary steps to protect our citizens from the effects of climate change, but we will need the federal government's assistance in doing this. I'm happy to answer any questions in person at this hearing.