Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

Discusses federal support for economic development, tribal sovereignty, addressing climate-change impacts

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KITSAP PENINSULA, Wash. – Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell today met with representatives of Pacific Northwest tribes to discuss federal efforts to address the economic, social and climate change challenges facing American Indian and Alaska Native governments and helping them to build strong, prosperous and resilient communities.

In keynote remarks at a conference organized by U.S. Rep. Derek Kilmer (WA-6) and hosted by the Suquamish Tribe at the Port Madison Indian Reservation on Bainbridge Island, the Secretary outlined President Obama's budget priorities to spur investment and enterprise in tribal communities, responsibly develop their mineral, energy and other natural resources, consolidate and restore tribal homelands and address the impacts of climate change and ocean acidification that threaten their lands, waters, wildlife and ways of life.

"The President and his Administration are firmly committed to our trust and treaty responsibilities and to upholding a strong government-to-government relationship with tribal nations. I want to thank Congressman Kilmer for his leadership in organizing today's summit, which is part of an important ongoing dialogue with tribes in the Pacific Northwest and around the country as we work together toward tribal self-determination and self-governance and promoting prosperous and resilient tribal nations," said Jewell. "As chair of the White House Council on Native American Affairs, what we heard today will help us in our comprehensive efforts to enable agencies across the federal family to work more collaboratively and productively with tribal leaders to advance tribal economic, social and environmental priorities."

Jewell was joined at the conference by Larry Roberts, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs. Following her remarks, she accompanied Suquamish Tribe Chair Leonard Forsman on a visit to the Tribe's geoduck operations, museum and resort.

"The ideas and actions shared today will be central to the steady growth of our region's tribes," said Kilmer. "Together with local tribal leaders, we were able to shine a national spotlight on the issues tribes in our area are facing. Secretary Jewell was able to hear first-hand how our region's strength is its diversity – economically and culturally – and how the region's tribes are critical to that. While challenges such as costal resiliency and job creation lay ahead, today we showed we are ready to meet them head on."

"It is a great honor to welcome the Secretary of the Interior and neighboring tribal nations to the Port Madison Indian Reservation ," said Suquamish Tribe Chairman Leonard Forsman. "This is the first time a Cabinet Secretary has visited our reservation, a place with a long and sometimes challenging

relationship with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, an Interior agency. We and the other 6th District Tribes look forward to showing Secretary Jewell our progress, identifying what we need to keep moving forward and thank her for the Obama Administration's Indian Country initiatives that have helped us."

The conference, held in the House of Awakened Culture, brought together representatives from the nine tribes in the 6th U.S. Congressional District, including the Hoh, Lower Elwha, Makah, Quinault, Quileute, Jamestown S'Klallam, Port Gamble S'Klallam, and Skokomish. Other national tribal leaders also participated, including Billy Frank, President of the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission, and Brian Cladoosby, President of the National Congress of American Indians.

Jewell noted that the President's fiscal year 2015 budget request for Indian Affairs was informed by consultation with the Tribes and reflective of their priorities. The request calls for $2.6 billion – a $33.6 million increase above the FY 2014 enacted level. Interior's overall FY 2015 budget includes $612 million for programs in other bureaus in support of Native Americans and Tribes. Together with the Indian Affairs budget, the total request for Indian programs is $3.2 billion, an increase of $76 million or 2.5 percent from FY 2014 enacted levels.

Interior bureaus' support for tribal communities include: $200 million for wild land fire programs; $186.5 million in Bureau of Reclamation Native American programs, including $112 million for enacted Indian Water Rights Settlements; $35 million in the Office of Natural Resources Revenue for managing royalty assets from Indian trust properties; an increase of $21.6 million for Bureau of Land Management energy programs directly supporting Tribes in the permitting and inspection of tribal oil and gas leases; $10.7 million for Fish and Wildlife Service hatchery maintenance and Tribal Wildlife Grants; and $7.6 million for USGS Tribal Science Partnerships.

Tribal communities are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, including severe droughts, floods, wildfires and snowstorms, Jewell said. She noted how federal agencies recently assisted the Quinault Indian Nation, whose Lower Village seawall was breached by a storm surge, and the Quileute Nation, which has been forced to move to higher ground to avoid tsunami areas.

"We are working with the tribes to address these impacts and to strengthen tribal capacity by increasing funding for tribal climate change adaptation planning, training and vulnerability assessments," said Jewell. "The Bureau of Indian Affairs team is helping draft climate action plans to include climate considerations into all federal Indian programs."

The BIA funded 19 climate change tribal grants in fiscal year 2013, including several for tribes at the conference, for cooperative vulnerability assessments of culturally and economically important Northwest fish and wildlife. Direct tribal funding for climate impact planning in fiscal year 2014 has increased to $8 million and includes new programs in cooperative tribal ocean and coastal planning efforts for Pacific Northwest tribes.

Taking land into trust to restore Tribal homelands has been a top priority for this Administration, Jewell told tribal leaders. Since 2009, there have been 1, 592 'fee-into-trust' applications processed nationwide and 242,703 acres brought into trust.

"My goal is to take 500,000 acres of fee lands into trust and I encourage the Tribes to continue to submit their applications and emphasize this administration's commitment to processing these applications," said Jewell.