



*Securing the future for the next generation of tribal citizens also means protecting the water, land, and environmental quality of local communities.  
Photo credit: Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission*

## Environmental Protection

Tribal peoples maintain spiritual, cultural, practical, and interdependent relationships with their homelands and natural resources. Consequently, tribal peoples face direct and often disproportionate impacts of environmental degradation including climate change. Federal funding to support environmental protection for Indian reservations was not forthcoming until more than 20 years after the passage of the Clean Water and Clean Air Act. Tribes are still trying to catch up, and a significant gap remains.

Today, nearly 40 years later, only 40 tribes have Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) -approved water quality standards, which are a cornerstone of the Clean Water Act. Nearly all states have been implementing the Clean Water Act through approved water quality standards for decades. As indicated earlier, approximately 12 percent of tribal homes lack access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation, a figure that is nearly 20 times higher than the national average and one that indicates the unsafe conditions facing many Native families. Significant gaps in environmental protection that should be met through the implementation of monitoring, regulatory, and on-the-ground activities still remain in many areas of Indian Country. The realization of the EPA Indian Policy remains a daunting challenge. The federal government must ensure tribes have fair and equal opportunities to realize, preserve, and enhance the environmental quality of Indian Country for present and future generations and to sustain tribal cultures. In the recommendations below, Indian Country requests that EPA tribal programs at least receive amounts to achieve parity with states through sustainable targeted base funding.

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## Key Recommendations

### ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

*Interior - Environment Appropriations Bill*

#### Indian Environmental General Assistance Program (GAP)

- Increase funding for GAP to \$96 million.

Program capacity building is a top environmental priority identified by tribes as part of the EPA National Tribal Operations Committee National Tribal Caucus. The General Assistance Program (GAP) is unique among federal programs in that it provides a foundation which tribes can leverage to support other greatly-needed programs, such as planning for climate change and natural resource management, energy efficiency activities, and small scale renewable energy projects. GAP funding is particularly critical to Alaska Native villages, where it provides 99 percent of the overall funding to address their fundamental and often dire needs, such as inadequate safe drinking water and basic sanitation, and the on-the-ground presence to help confront profound climate change impacts, such as eroding shorelines, thawing permafrost, threats to subsistence resources, and permanent relocation of Alaska Native communities.

This increased collaborative leveraging potential makes GAP a wise investment of federal dollars. However, GAP funding has not kept pace with the growth of tribal environmental programs over the years, forcing tribes to perform the increased duties of maturing programs with fewer funds. Furthermore, the average cost for tribes to sustain a basic environmental program was set at \$110,000 per tribe in 1999 and has not been adjusted for inflation since then. Tribal demand for program implementation across various media includes a very pressing need to establish climate change adaptation plans. A \$175,000 per tribe distribution (totaling approximately \$98 million) reflects an equitable adjustment. Tribes request \$96 million for GAP funding in FY 2014.

### ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

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#### Safe Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (SRF)

- The tribal set-aside for the Safe Drinking Water SRF should be increased to 4.5 percent of the national Drinking Water SRF.

The lack of access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation in Indian Country continues to threaten the public health of American Indian and Alaska Native communities. As noted previously, approximately 12 percent of tribal homes do not have safe water or basic sanitation facilities. This is twenty times as high as the 0.6 percent of non-Native homes in the United States that lacked such infrastructure in 2005, according to the US Census Bureau.<sup>48</sup> The fundamental inequity in the quality of tribal water systems must be addressed.

Recognizing the severity of these circumstances, memorandums of understanding signed by EPA, IHS, DOI, and USDA resulted in the creation of an interagency Infrastructure Task Force. This group's mission is to meet the US commitment to the United Nations Millennium Development Goal to address lack of access to clean and safe drinking water in tribal communities by 50 percent by the year 2015. The unmet need is over \$2 billion. An IHS report to the Office of Management and Budget noted that \$67.2 million per year is needed until the year 2018 to reduce the number of tribal homes lacking access by 67 percent.

In 2010, the tribal set-aside under the Safe Drinking Water SRF was funded at \$27 million nationally. Tribal compliance with drinking water standards is consistently below those of other community water systems due to lack of funding for operations and maintenance. The tribal set-aside for the Drinking Water SRF should be increased to 4.5 percent of the national Drinking Water SRF.

## ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

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### Clean Water Act State Revolving Fund (Tribal Waste Water Facilities)

- Increase the national Clean Water Act SRF Tribal Set-Aside to \$46.5 million.
- Permanently lift the funding cap on the Clean Water SRF Tribal Set-Aside for wastewater facilities.

According to the IHS 2008 Sanitary Deficiency Service Database, tribal water and sewer infrastructure needs a total of close to \$2.4 billion, including drinking water needs. Basic human health and environmental protection for thousands of tribal homes could be achieved with increased funding for sewage treatment construction programs.

## ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

*Interior - Environment Appropriations Bill*

### Tribal Water Pollution Control, Clean Water Act Section 106

- Increase the tribal allocation to 20 percent.

Clean Water Act (CWA) Section 106 grants are critical to tribal efforts to control water pollution, including water quality planning and assessments; developing and implementing water quality standards and total maximum daily loads; ground water and wetland protection; and nonpoint source control activities. Since 1998, the number of eligible tribes to receive CWA Section 106 funding increased from 141 to 257 in 2010. Tribal recipients are now required to submit their water quality data through the Water Quality Exchange (WQX) as part of their Section 106 reporting requirements without any increase in Section 106 program funding. The national CWA 106 allocation to tribes has flat-lined and – in certain cases – decreased in some years during the same time period (e.g., 15.49 percent in 1998 to as low as 11.55 percent in 2005). Successful CWA implementation requires at least 20 percent of the national CWA Section 106 allocation to keep pace with the expansion of tribal programs.

Figure 5 shows the ongoing disparity between tribal and state allocations for Section 106 grants. The graph shows that the number of tribes developing their water quality programs has far outpaced the funding available to tribes to maintain water quality programs. The lack of adequate and continuous funding for implementation and enforcement hinder the effectiveness of tribal water programs.

**Figure 5: Tribal Program Clean Water Act Section 106  
National Allocation vs. Tribal National Allocation**



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### Nonpoint Source Pollutant Control – Clean Water Act Section 319

- Eliminate the cap on tribal funding for Nonpoint Source Pollutant Control.
- Provide \$26 million for the Tribal Nonpoint Source Pollutant Control.

Clean Water Act Section 319 provides tribes with grants to develop and implement polluted runoff and other nonpoint source control programs that address critical water quality concerns identified in the 106 program and other monitoring programs. As mentioned above, few tribes have EPA-approved WQS compared to 96 percent of states. WQS are the necessary foundation to engage in water pollution control activities, making this program critical, particularly as climate change will significantly affect water quality and collaboration across jurisdictions will be required. As tribal demand for this competitive funding exceeds availability, tribes request a permanent elimination of the one-third of one percent cap placed on the tribal allocation to help close the vast inequity in funding and programmatic implementation compared with states.

## ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

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### Exchange Network

- *Set aside a minimum of 10 percent of Environmental Information Exchange Network funding for tribes, without restrictions for start-up or basic infrastructure development.*

The EPA Exchange Network is an innovative partnership among tribes, states, and the EPA to provide better access to high-quality environmental data and facilitate data management and the submission of data efficiently. Environmental information is critical to understanding environmental challenges and developing responses for improvements. However, concerns about data privacy and lack of tribal capacity had previously prevented a more robust flow of data from tribes to EPA, limiting the ability of tribes to make informed environmental decisions and hindering EPA from assessing environmental progress in Native communities. Beginning in 1998, states assisted in the development of the Exchange Network and received several million dollars to develop requisite information technology infrastructure. Tribal governments were brought in years later, with limited capacity and unequal access to the resources. Both tribes and the EPA have recognized the importance of improving the flow of tribal data and environmental information. Tribes have been able to take a more active role in improving data collection as a result of tribal grants offered as part of the Environmental Information Exchange Network (EIEN).

At present, all 50 states operate nodes for the exchange of information over the internet, while only 10 tribes do (eight tribes operate node clients), with 17 in the planning phase. Tribes urge sustained funding for tribal access to the Exchange Network, with a minimum 10 percent tribal set-aside from overall EIEN funding, without restrictions for providing development and implementation support for tribes that are just coming on board, and operations and maintenance funding to tribes with operating programs.

## ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

*Interior - Environment Appropriations Bill*

### Great Lakes Restoration Initiative

- *Maintain funding at \$3 million for tribes as part of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.*

Tribes in the Great Lakes region have joined together to establish a tribal-federal-state collaboration, which stands as a model for replication across the country. The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative is the largest investment in the Great Lakes in two decades. A task force of 11 federal agencies developed an action plan to implement the initiative. This action plan covers fiscal years 2010 through 2014 and targets the most significant problems in the ecosystem, such as aquatic invasive species, nonpoint source pollution, and toxics and contaminated sediment. Over 100 projects and programs are to be implemented through grants and agreements with tribes, states, municipalities, universities, and other organizations. This initiative received an overall allocation of \$475 million in FY 2010 for restoration activities in the Great Lakes region. Of this amount, \$3 million was allocated to tribes. Funding for tribes under the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative should be maintained in FY 2014 at the FY 2010 enacted level.