



Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe

Testimony Before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies May 10, 2017

Request: Maintain Full Funding for EPA (\$1,821,703) and Fully Fund EPA Programs Impacting Indian Country

Chairman Calvert and Ranking Member McCollum tekwanonhwerá:tons sewakwé:kon | we give greetings to you all,

The Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe (“SRMT” or “the Tribe”) is deeply troubled by the Trump Administration’s skinny budget which proposes the elimination of a number of critical Environmental Protection Agency (“EPA”) competitive grant programs that allow our Tribe to maintain a robust Environment Division, provide our members with clean water, monitor the river for containments, support subsistence living, prevent costal erosion, and maintain the overall health and biodiversity of the St. Lawrence River. We request the House Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies maintain full funding for the operation of EPA programs positively impacting Indian Country, particularly the following grant programs: Air Quality, State and Tribal Assistance, Water Pollution Control, Brownfields, Superfund, Pesticides, Solid Waste, the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (“GLRI”), and Environmental Justice.

The Saint Regis Mohawk Tribal Council is the federally recognized tribal government responsible for promoting the health, safety, education and welfare of all of our community members. The Tribe is located on the Akwesasne Mohawk Territory in New York and has over 15,600 enrolled tribal members, with approximately 8,000 tribal members living on the reservation.

With three off-reservation Superfund sites located directly upstream and upwind from where we draw our drinking water and reside, the Tribe has worked diligently to establish a robust Environmental Division. The proposed elimination of more than \$85.6 million in EPA program funding, would decimate SRMT’s environmental efforts. Approximately 65 percent of our program funding would be eliminated forcing the Tribe to reduce its workforce and discontinue many of its monitoring and restoration programs.

The responsibility of EPA to assist, support, and work with Indian Tribes on important environmental issues that promote the well-being of our communities has been acknowledged and supported by every Administration since President Richard Nixon. The SRMT is gravely concerned with the substantial reductions in funding proposed by this

Administration for EPA programs that are critical to protecting the public health and well-being of our tribal community. For this reason, the Tribe requests the following:

1. Fully Fund the State and Tribal Assistance Grant Program

The EPA currently provides \$12.8 million in air program funding to tribes under the State and Tribal Assistance Grant Program. Tribal governments often have limited revenue sources, so this funding is critical in ensuring that tribal governments are able to operate and maintain environmental protection programs on tribal lands. Tribes have used the tribal air quality programs to establish air quality programs, target critical needs such as indoor air quality, keep pace with increased major source permitting activities, and repair and replace aging air monitoring equipment. SRMT currently uses the State and Tribal Assistance Grant Program to support the Tribe's Air Quality and Environment programs, including:

- Monitoring and establishing criteria for pollutants at two sites for hazardous air pollutants, and other pollutants under the National Atmospheric Deposition Program;
- Conducting two emission inventories that were submitted to EPA in 2008 and 2011;
- Monitoring of over 36 Tribal river miles for water quality parameters and Tribally developed water quality standards approved by EPA; and
- Provide environmental oversight of three large Superfund sites immediately upstream of SRMT Tribal lands.

2. Fully Fund the Water Pollution Control Grant Program

In September 2007, SRMT became the first tribe in Region 2 to implement EPA approved water quality standards. Utilizing Clean Water Act authority, the Tribe is able to administer various sections of the Act and manage ambient water quality, non-point source pollutants, construction activities, and direct discharges to waters of the reservation. The purpose of the standards is to protect the Tribe's unique designated uses of surface and groundwater for use by tribal members and future generations. Other projects are funded by competitive grants. Currently, the Tribe monitors surface water for consumption and public safety, non-point source pollutant mitigation for construction and agriculture oversight and shoreline restoration, and to rehabilitate sturgeon, reintroduced Atlantic Salmon, conduct a fisheries population assessment, and provide fish advisories and contaminant monitoring.

3. Fully Fund the Brownfields Grant Program

In 2016, SRMT Environment Division's Brownfields Project received a \$200,000 grant from EPA to inventory, investigate, and prioritize petroleum sites in Akwesasne for future cleanup efforts. This grant allows SRMT to enter into a cooperative agreement with EPA to assist the Tribe in developing its Brownfields response capacity in four areas throughout our territory. Cleaning up and reinvesting in these properties protects the environment, reduces blight, takes development pressures off green spaces and working lands, and protects many essential cultural, medicinal, ceremonial, traditional, and historical uses of natural resources exclusive to our territory. Through Brownfields grant funding, the SRMT Environment Division is working to develop a community-wide inventory and assessment, collect input from community members, and train tribal staff in Brownfield monitoring and mitigation activities to better serve our community.

4. Fully Fund the Superfund Program

Akwesasne is adjacent to the GM Central Foundry Division Superfund Site, Reynolds Metal Superfund Site, and the Grasse River Superfund Site. Because of this, we have been disproportionately burdened by the pollution caused by these industrial facilities. In 1990, the EPA provided significant financial and technical assistance to the Tribe to expand its Environment Division and to implement an environmental protection program. This funding has helped the Tribe achieve a number of its priorities, including: conducting a comprehensive community health assessment; remediating and redeveloping abandoned gas stations; assessing indoor air quality in homes; supporting the decommissioning and deconstruction of the Hogansburg Dam, and improving the maintenance of drinking water and wastewater systems. Despite these efforts, SRMT remains concerned about EPA's Superfund Remediation practices and the persistent pollutants that are damaging our water and air. Failure to actively remediate these sites due to a lack of federal funding endangers our people and way of life and is a violation of the federal trust responsibility.

5. Fully Fund the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative

Since 2010, SRMT has utilized GLRI funding to conduct several projects evaluating the health of the St. Lawrence River, to promote the health of its members who participate in subsistence traditions, mitigate the impacts of tribal environmental projects, and to restore critical species. In 2010, the Tribe received a \$1.2 million grant to conduct a population, habitat quality, reproductive health, and contaminant analysis of biota tissue on turtles, avian, fresh water mussels, furbearers, and fish. This data was shared with relevant state, tribal, and federal resources agencies to update restrictions on fish and wildlife consumption. In 2010, SRMT received another \$723,000 grant to conduct a sturgeon restoration project by investigating suitable spawning habitat. For SRMT, this project not only allowed for resources to be allocated toward protecting a culturally important species, but it also created training opportunities for the Mohawk community and youth on the importance of lake sturgeon life cycle and restoration, establishing best management practices for Mohawk fisherman who rely on sturgeon for subsistence practices, and creating relevant educational materials. Because of the success of SRMT's prior work, the Tribe received another \$98,000 grant in 2016 to survey, salvage, and relocate freshwater mussel from the Hogansburg Dam, which was decommissioned by the Tribe that year.

6. Fully Fund the Pesticides grant program

The SRMT Environmental Division has worked diligently to create awareness about the use of dangerous pesticides for human, wildlife, and environmental health of our territory. In 2016, SRMT's Environmental Division received a \$50,000 grant to, among other tasks, host a pesticides forum on integrated pest management, preventing infestations, monitoring for pests, and the risk of using pesticides. The Pollinators Protection Plan was also discussed in an effort to reduce the use of pesticides negatively impacting bees and other pollinators along with other best practices for creating welcoming environments for pollinators.

7. Fully Fund the Environmental Justice Small Grants Program

In 2013, SRMT's Environmental Division received a \$30,000 grant to help fund an outreach program that educated the tribal community on ways to reduce exposure to substances in the indoor environment that can trigger asthma attacks. This type of funding is critical to ensuring the health and wellbeing of our members.

With all of the great work that the Tribe has been able to conduct to promote the health and wellbeing of our environment and our community, we urge you to not only oppose the President's proposed EPA budget reductions for Fiscal Year ("FY") 2017 and FY 2018, but to fully fund critical programs that promote tribal self-determination and sovereignty, and promote the public health and well-being of our tribal members.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact the Office of Tribal Council.

Skén:nen | In peace,

THE SAINT REGIS MOHAWK TRIBAL COUNCIL