



July 28, 2025

The Honorable Mike Simpson, Chair  
House Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
2007 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski, Chair  
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
522 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chellie Pingree, Ranking  
Member  
House Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
2354 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jeff Merkley, Ranking  
Member  
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
141 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

**Re: Protecting Funding for Tribal Historic Preservation Officers**

Dear Chairs Simpson and Murkowski, and Ranking Member Pingree and Merkley:

On behalf of the undersigned Tribal organization members of the Coalition for Tribal Sovereignty (CTS),<sup>1</sup> we write to request protection of funding for Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (THPO) in Fiscal Year (FY) 2026, and we ask that this funding be increased to \$34 million. THPOs conduct vital cultural resource protection work for Tribal Nations. In doing so, they facilitate important development and other activities that may not legally proceed until such cultural resource reviews have taken place. This funding request directly supports the fulfillment of the United States' trust and treaty obligations to Tribal Nations.

Tribal Nations exercise their sovereignty, in part, through THPOs who are appointed by federally recognized Tribal Nation governments to engage in the Section 106 process under the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). Many Tribal Nations have agreements under NHPA with the U.S. Department of the Interior to assume the federal compliance role of the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) for their lands. THPOs play a critical role in ensuring federal actions comply with federal law and respect Tribal inherent, trust, and treaty rights, including the protection of access to lands, waters, sacred places, and traditional resources. When potential development or permitting may affect these areas, THPOs utilize Section 106 reviews to help identify potential impacts and provide critical cultural and historical expertise to assist federal agencies in the fulfillment of their obligations to Tribal Nations.

The Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) is the sole source of federal funding for THPOs, and an increase in this funding is both long overdue and greatly needed. Tribal Nations are grateful for the continued funding of THPOs in recent years, which has allowed Tribal Nations—through the work of THPOs—to more fully exercise Tribal sovereignty and protect and preserve cultural

---

<sup>1</sup> CTS consists of more than 35 Tribal organization members. A CTS briefing paper on the formation and messaging of CTS can be found [here](#), and more information about CTS can be found on our website [here](#).



resources and sacred places. Yet, for the past three fiscal years (FY 2023-25), funding for THPOs has remained static at \$23 million.

Even if there were no changes to the number of THPOs in operation, nor to the number of potential development projects requiring review, level funding does not account for the significant rate of inflation in recent years, resulting in an effective reduction in spending power.

In addition to inflation, the reality is that there has been growth in the number of THPOs as Tribal Nations gain the capacity to step into that important role. While the funding for the HPF Tribal line item stayed at \$23 million from FY 23 to FY 25, the number of THPOs increased from 211 to 228. The combination of level funding with increases in the number of THPOs has resulted in the average amount of funding that each THPO receives declining from \$108,000 in 2023 to approximately \$100,900 for FY 25. Moving forward, the number of THPOs is expected to increase as more Tribal Nations seek to assume these responsibilities, which will further dilute already inadequate resources and jeopardize the ability of Tribal Nations to meet mandated obligations.

Exacerbating the impacts of the decreased funding per THPO is the growing workload placed on each THPO in response to increased proposals for development projects on lands with Tribal significance—a trend that is likely to continue given Administration priorities. Not only does this mean each THPO is charged with more responsibility, but it also means Tribal Nations will be required to hire more staff for their THPO offices to keep up with the increased workload.

Ensuring THPOs have adequate funding not only allows THPOs to carry out their duties but also benefits the Administration's implementation of its policy priorities. Compliance with NHPA and its implementing regulations is a legal requirement for federal undertakings. The presence of well-funded THPOs allows for government-to-government consultation between the United States and Tribal Nations on projects the Administration has prioritized. In addition to respecting Tribal sovereignty and complying with federal law, engaging in meaningful Tribal consultation allows for the identification of potential legal risks upfront, which in turn helps protect federal agencies from exposure to costly delays and litigation in the future.

We urge Congress to appropriate \$34 million so that Tribal Nations can be partners with the federal government in carrying out the requirements of the NHPA. This funding level would provide the 228 federally recognized THPOs an average of \$149,123 each to run their programs. THPO funding at this rate would provide Tribal Nations with the financial wherewithal to more fully carry out their oversight authorities on more than 50 million acres across more than 30 states as well as other culturally significant areas. Fully funding THPOs and staff also creates jobs, generates economic development, and spurs community revitalization. Additionally, providing \$34 million to THPOs for FY 26 would strengthen the permitting process while, at the same time, making sure Tribal Nations' cultural resources and sacred places are protected and preserved.

We also urge Congress to take the necessary steps to ensure that Tribal Nations receive THPO funding promptly after any appropriations act is signed into law. Due to the critical work THPOs carry out on relatively small budgets, any delays in releasing funding produces major disruptions in Tribal Nations' ability to carry out necessary cultural resource review functions. No one benefits



when THPOs are unable to fulfill their mandates, and every step must be taken to ensure that all funding appropriated to the HPF for THPOs is sent out to Tribal Nations in a timely manner.

The importance of the work that THPOs do is immeasurable. At its core, THPOs' work helps maintain and reconnect Native people to their cultural heritage, traditions, and sacred places, and it helps ensure the federal government's undertakings are carried out responsibly and legally. To continue this work in Indian Country, it is essential that THPO offices receive increased funding, and we urge you to take all steps necessary to fund THPOs at \$34 million in FY 26.

Sincerely,

Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians (ATNI)  
Alaska Native Women's Resource Center (AKNWRC)  
American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC)  
California Tribal Chairpersons' Association (CTCA)  
Great Plains Tribal Chairmen's Association (GPTLCA)  
Great Plains Tribal Leaders Health Board (GPTLHB)  
Indian Gaming Association (IGA)  
Midwest Alliance of Sovereign Tribes (MAST)  
Native American Indian Housing Council (NAIHC)  
National Association of Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (NATHPO)  
National Congress of American Indians (NCAI)  
National Council of Urban Indian Health (NCUIH)  
National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA)  
National Indian Education Association (NIEA)  
National Indigenous Women's Resource Center (NIWRC)  
Native American Rights Fund (NARF)  
Rocky Mountain Tribal Leaders Council (RMTLC)  
Seattle Indian Health Board (SIHB)  
United South and Eastern Tribes Sovereignty Protection Fund (USET SPF)

CC:

Secretary Doug Burgum, Department of the Interior  
Mr. Scott Davis, Exercising the delegated authority of the Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs, Department of the Interior  
Reid Nelson, Executive Director, Advisory Council on Historical Preservation