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CHAIR OF THE QUILEUTE TRIBE, LA PUSH WASHINGTON**

TESTIMONY ON H.R. 1162 QUILEUTE TRIBE TSUNAMI PROTECTION

**SEPTEMBER 15, 2011 LEGISLATIVE HEARING BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS, AND PUBLIC LANDS**

September 13, 2011

Mr. Chairman, on behalf of the Quileute people, thank you for allowing me to speak about how our children and elders could be killed in a tsunami unless we can move our village to higher ground. The Quileute people want to thank you in our language for holding this hearing and understanding the dangers we face. ***Wa-ta-lich-ta asoos ta, Wa-tal-lich asoos ta, Wa-tlich-ta asoos ta.*** Translation: Thank you from the bottom of my hearts. With me today are two other members of our Tribal Council, Carol Hatch and Deanna Hobson. We are here today to be the voice of our people, and to ask this Committee to act on Congressman Dicks' Quileute tsunami protection legislation, H.R. 1162.

Exactly six months ago, we were all watching the horrific scenes of destruction in Japan after the earthquake and tsunami. The Quileute people have been living for decades with the fear of tsunami and flooding, and the terrible scenes from Japan were a painful reminder to our people of the constant danger we face. Our Tribal school, elder center and administrative buildings at La Push are built basically at sea level, and there is a huge fault line right off our coast called the Cascadia subduction zone. Some ask why we have located our Tribal infrastructure in harm's way, but those who know the sadness of the Native American Tribes of Washington State know the answer: our Tribe was forced onto a one square mile reservation, with one way in and one way out. The Olympic National Park completely surrounds our reservation, and we have no more land to move our school and buildings in order to protect our tribe from extreme danger. In the past, our people lived, hunted and fished on many thousands of acres throughout the Olympic Peninsula, but now we are trapped between the sea and the Park. Congressman Dicks' legislation would give the Tribe a permanent way out of tsunami danger. In return, the thousands of visitors to the beautiful beaches of the Park will be forever assured of having access those beaches over a trail owned by the Tribe.

Many people have an impression of the Quileute people through the *Twilight* books and movies, but our reality is completely different. Our Tribe is small, and most of our economic livelihood depends on fishing. I have been involved in Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission issues for many years, and I can tell you that it is a constant struggle to maintain the right to fish in the areas my forefathers fished for centuries. Our fishing fleet is based in a marina at the mouth of the Quillayute River, and many times the fisherman cannot leave or return safely to the marina because the harbor has not been dredged properly. Hollywood's version of the Quileute

people does not show the economic hardships we face, nor the struggle we constantly face to preserve our culture and way of life when we are confined to a one-mile square reservation.

While many people learned for the first time in March about the terrible natural destructive power of a tsunami, we have been living with the knowledge of this threat for decades. Every time there is an earthquake in our area, we immediately think: *Is this the time we will die?* Just last Friday, there was an earthquake in the ocean not far from us, and once again we wondered whether the tsunami was coming. Fortunately, the tsunami did not come, but the anxiety and fear never ends for our people.

The time has come once again to make a difference for our people who have always had close cultural ties with the land since the beginning of time. It starts all over again, with Congressman Dicks' introduction of the Quileute tsunami protection and land transfer legislation. The challenges have been great; there has been consultation upon consultation for many years with the different leaderships of our village. Without this legislation, the tsunami danger could lead to the extinction of our Quileute people. We ask this Committee to understand that now is time to protect us, before it is too late. As Quileute people who have always had ancient cultural ties with our land and beneficiaries since the beginning of time, we know best when it is time to move freely as they had done back in the days. Freely is the key word that is not possible for today's Quileutes. We all know Mother earth gives as well as she has the power to take away.

Beyond the tsunami danger, our Tribe faces the constant threat of flooding from the Quillayute River. One of the realistic parts of the of *Twilight* movies is that fact that it rains on average 12 feet, 144 inches a year in our area. There is only one paved road in and out of La Push, and this road is often under water. When flooding occurs, we have to send a four-wheel emergency vehicle on an old timber road to evacuate any Tribal member who needs medical treatment. Another important part of Congressman Dicks' legislation would allow the Tribe and the Olympic National Park to work together to plan flood protection measures that would benefit both the Tribe and Park visitors.

Since the Japanese tsunami and the media coverage of the danger to our Tribe, I have been asked many questions about Congressman Dicks' legislation. Let me take this opportunity to tell this Subcommittee that H.R. 1162 is neither a "give-away" to the Quileute Tribe, nor a "take-away" from the Olympic National Park. First, the land transfers and permanent easements in the bill are a settlement of a decades-old boundary dispute between the Tribe and the Park. The Japanese tsunami did not suddenly convince the Tribe and Park to propose the land transfers in the legislation – we have been negotiating for higher land with the Park for more than 30 years, and Congressman Dicks was a key player in this process for most of that time. If there is no settlement of the boundary dispute, the Tribe has the right, as we did in the past, to close parts of the access trail to Second Beach. But our Tribe welcomes visitors to our beautiful land, and we want to be partners with the Olympic National

Park so that the public can enjoy forever some of the most precious natural settings in all of the United States. To achieve this, the Tribe is asking Congress to authorize the transfer of enough Park land so that the Tribe can move out of the tsunami danger zone.

While some of the Park land that would be transferred to the Tribe is currently designated as wilderness, I want this Committee to know that this land is not a pristine rain forest as depicted in *Twilight*. The land has been logged, and there will be a forest screen between the new Tribal buildings and the Park trails and the beaches. For those who are concerned about the loss of some wilderness land, I ask that they think about the death and destruction that will occur when -- not if -- a tsunami hits La Push. Every detail of the land transfers and easements contained in Congressman Dicks' bill has been carefully evaluated and negotiated with the Park for many years, and the result is a fair settlement.

We are all concerned about the federal budget crisis, but I want to be very clear that Congressman Dicks' bill requires minimal federal costs. There are no federal dollars going to the Quileute Tribe for this settlement, only federal land. The Park will incur some small charges for survey and title costs, and will commit its staff's time to implementing the settlement. For our part, we have devoted hundreds of hours of time by our natural resources staff to identify and negotiate the land transfers and easements. In comparison to the federal dollars that would be spent in responding to a tsunami that would destroy our village and injure so many, the costs of this legislation are truly insignificant.

I want to express my sincerest appreciation and respect to all the current and past members of the Quileute Tribal Council and legal counsel who have worked for so long to preserve and protect our tribe. One part of the land transfer, the Thunder Field area, has tremendous cultural and historic value to our Tribe, and our forefathers would be happy that their descendants may once again call that special place our own. It is a sad fact that Thunder Field is in a flood zone, and the land is constantly eroding as the Quillayute River moves closer and closer to our village. But our Tribal Council recognizes our obligation and debt to our forefathers for whom Thunder Field was such a significant part of their values and traditions that we cherish. If the Quileute people can regain Thunder Field, then we will have made an important contribution to our cultural heritage.

The only way this legislation can be successful is that if the Congress moves quickly before a tsunami destroys La Push. We know that this Committee and the Congress have many other pressing matters to deal with, and we are fearful that this legislation will not be enacted soon enough. As Tribal Chair, I am constantly asked why it has taken so long for the federal government to recognize the injustice to our Tribe and the danger we face. As you can see from the video and pictures we are submitting to the Subcommittee's record, our Tribal School is at sea level next to the Pacific Ocean and the students ask their teachers: "*Could we be killed by the wave?*" and "*Could we get out in time?*" Some of those children have expressed their worries

in art work, and I will be submitting some of their pictures and drawings that show that our children understand the danger they face every day they attend school.

We now know that a wall of water 48 feet tall hit the Japanese nuclear plant. We now know that in the past an earthquake off the Oregon coast produced a tsunami that traveled all across the Pacific to hit Japan. We know that the Cascadia subduction zone has produced massive earthquakes in the past, and that another earthquake could happen at any moment. And most alarming, we the Quileute people know that, based on our practice tsunami evacuation drills, we may not have sufficient warning to get our children and elders to safety in time. To those people who discount the danger of tsunami, I say: *"Please come to La Push and see with your own eyes our immediate need"*.

We are also aware that some people do not understand the long history of our dispute with the Olympic National Park, and do not agree that the Tribe should receive any federal land. We are fearful that those people will slow the progress of this legislation, and that the potential for a Japan-type tsunami will become a horrible reality for our Tribe. To those people I say, please, think of the sad pictures of the child victims in Japan and imagine what it would be like to see similar pictures coming from La Push. We ask this Subcommittee to be a champion for our children, and to be a strong and constant voice for quick legislation action. For our part, we will continue to be a leader in tsunami awareness and preparation.

Mr. Chairman, in closing, I would like to thank Olympic National Park Superintendent, Karen Gustin, for her continued hard work on the land settlement, and to express our deepest appreciation to all the public officials, especially Congressman Norm Dicks, and to all the private citizens who care about the survival of the Quileute people and who are supporting H.R. 1162.

I am attaching for the record seven important items that I urge the Subcommittee to consider:

- (1) Letter of support from the Governor of the State of Washington;
- (2) Letter of support from the City of Forks, Washington;
- (3) Resolution of the National Congress of American Indians in support of H.R. 1162;
- (4) A video on the tsunami danger produced by the Quileute Tribal Council, viewable at http://quileutenation.org/flv/qtc_tv_60sec_v2.mov ;
- (5) Pictures of the past flooding from the Quillayute River;
- (6) A list of the scientific articles that explain the earthquake and tsunami danger from the Cascadia subduction zone; and

(7) A listing of the recent newspaper, television and radio reports that record the tsunami danger to the Quileute people.

I ask everyone to view our Tribal Council's tsunami video and to support Congressman Dicks' legislation.

As for many many moons, this has yet to become a reality for the Quileute people.

On behalf of the Quileute people I have come with a token for the Subcommittee, a hand-woven cedar basket that contains the hopes of our people.