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Executive Committee

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Sue Flensburg  
Bristol Bay Native Association

January 9, 2014

Gina McCarthy  
Administrator  
Environmental Protection Agency  
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Administrator McCarthy:

On behalf of the National Tribal Air Association's (NTAA) Executive Committee, we are writing to voice our concern regarding funding for tribal air programs. We recognize the current resource limitations EPA is enduring due to sequestration and we are concerned that these limitations may drive EPA to reduce the tribal portion of State and Tribal Assistance Grant funding (STAG) dedicated to Tribal Air Programs. Should reductions to STAG funds occur, tribes stand to be disproportionately impacted, and tribal nations stand to lose the presence of programs that protect the health and welfare of vulnerable tribal populations. Last year's reduction in STAG funds caused an immediate reduction in grants or grant amounts to tribes with immediate repercussions to staff including, reduced work hours, training and travel. All of which will affect the long term sustainability of our programs.

As you know, NTAA works to support tribal air programs throughout the country to ensure the health of tribal members and the environment are not adversely impacted by air pollution. Often times, this pollution comes from sources off tribal lands but it becomes the responsibility of tribal leaders and their staff to assess and respond accordingly. Over 100 federally recognized tribes have worked hard and very closely with EPA to develop their air quality management capacity. They have done so, prudently and efficiently, using STAG funds over the past two decades in collaboration with EPA. A reduction in STAG funding would mean an erosion of a program that is already underfunded and stretched to its limits. These reductions would also exacerbate the impacts from cuts in SIRG (State Indoor Radon Grants) that help tribes mitigate indoor air pollution from radon. Many tribes do not even have tribal air programs and those that do require increased funding for staffing as well as to replace aging equipment. There is also an increased need for tribes to address issues such as the implementation of the Minor New Source Rule, and rising concerns with climate change, indoor air, and carbon pollution.

Tribal Air programs are historically underfunded and additional reductions in STAG funding for Tribes could set back the progress made to date ensuring basic public health and environmental protection on Tribal lands. Protecting these lands is an important trust responsibility the federal government must provide as a basic service to tribes' impacted by sources of pollution often off tribal lands. It is critical that EPA address these concerns and demonstrate that tribal air programs are important and necessary to the mission of EPA. Tribal air programs need more not less funding to ensure that basic public health and environmental protection is maintained on tribal lands.

On Behalf of the NTAA Executive Committee,

Bill Thompson, Chairman, NTAA