



PRESS RELEASE

CONFEDERATED TRIBES OF THE COLVILLE RESERVATION

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Colville Tribes Applauds Passage of Indian Energy Bill

Nespelem, WA-- Rodney Cawston, Chairman of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, today expressed appreciation to the House Natural Resources Committee and the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs for securing passage of S.245, the "Indian Tribal Energy Development and Self-Determination Act Amendments of 2017." The U.S. Senate passed the legislation in late 2017 and today's passage by the U.S. House of Representatives sends the bill to the President for his signature.

The Colville Tribes developed Section 202 of the bill, the "Biomass Demonstration Project," which will provide new opportunities for tribes to conduct forest health and biomass utilization activities on federal forest land.

Working with the U.S. Forest Service and congressional committees, the Colville Tribes began developing the provision in 2010 and have been involved in shaping the legislation since. Various versions of the bill passed either the House or the Senate during the last three Congresses, but this is the first time both have passed the same version. "It's taken a while, but we are grateful that this will now be signed into law," said Cawston, who noted that members of the Colville Business Council have testified before Congress on several occasions in support of the bill.

"In 2015, we experienced the catastrophic Tunk Block and North Star wildfires that burned more than twenty percent of Colville Reservation, in part because of under-managed conditions on adjacent federal forest land," said Chairman Cawston. "This new authority is a major step toward preventing this from happening to the Colville Tribes and other tribes in the future."

Cawston said federal lands bordering tribal lands are in need of thinning and hazardous fuels reduction. Colville has long been committed to implementing restoration activities to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildland fires, disease, and insect infestations, he said. The legislative authority will allow Tribes to help suppress fire or disease threats that will encroach on Tribal lands and threaten Tribal communities.

Colville's land management practices have been praised by federal and state natural resources managers for being effective and efficient, Cawston said.

“Our goal has always been to improve the forest health and watersheds on our lands and on surrounding the federal land,” he said. “The biomass project provision in this important legislation will enhance the Tribes’ economic development efforts and benefit surrounding communities. Our team of natural resources experts will continue to help protect and manage healthy forests, as we have done for thousands of years.”

S.245 also makes other changes to federal law that will encourage tribal energy development. “This legislation empowers Tribes to manage their own energy resources, cuts red tape, drives economic growth and promotes energy development for Indian Country,” said Senator John Hoeven, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs. “I look forward to the President signing this bill into law,” Hoeven said.

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About the Colville Tribes:

Today, more than 9,520 descendants of 12 aboriginal tribes of Indians are enrolled in the Confederated Tribes of the Colville. The tribes, commonly known by English and French names, are: the Colville, the Nespelem, the San Poil, the Arrow Lakes, the Palus, the Wenatchi (Wenatchee), the Chelan, the Entiat, the Methow, the southern Okanogan, the Moses Columbia and the Nez Perce of Chief Joseph’s Bands.