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CSKT TESTIFIES IN SUPPORT OF AMENDING THE TRIBAL ENERGY DEVELOPMENT ACT

(Washington, D.C.) On April 30, 2014, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribal Vice Chairwoman Carole Lankford traveled to Washington, D.C. where she was invited to provide testimony regarding Senate Bill 2132. The bill, sponsored by Senator John Barrasso of Wyoming, would amend the Indian Tribal Energy Development and Self-Determination Act of 2005.

The Committee Chairman, Montana Senator Jon Tester, welcomed Lankford, and other witnesses including the Honorable Kevin Washburn, Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs-U.S. Department of the Interior; Ms. Tracey LeBeau, Director-Indian Energy Policy and Programs, U.S. Department of Energy; the Honorable Michael O. Finley, Chairman-Confederated Tribes of the Colville Indian Reservations and First Vice-President, National Congress of American Indians; the Honorable Aletha Tom, Chairwoman-Moapa Band of Paiutes; and the Honorable James "Mike" Olguin, Acting Chairman-Southern Ute Indian Tribe.

"It is an intense experience to testify and answer questions before the Indian Affairs Committee of the United States Senate," said Vice Chairwoman Carole Lankford. "But most importantly, it is an honor to be a part of shaping policy that will affect Tribes across the nation. CSKT is truly leading the way on energy issues in Indian Country with the acquisition of Kerr Dam and our initial evaluations of biomass energy generation— so there is a lot of pride in sharing our story to help elected officials understand what is needed and what works in our communities."

Some of the highlights of Senate Bill 2132 include:

- Amends the Federal Power Act to include Indian tribes, along with states and municipalities, as having preference for the receipt of preliminary hydroelectric licenses.
- Amends the Tribal Forest Protection Act of 2004 to direct the Secretary to enter into agreements with Indian tribes for the conduct of demonstration projects to promote biomass energy production on Indian forest land and in nearby communities by providing them with reliable supplies of woody biomass from federal lands.
- Amends the Energy Policy Act of 1992 to direct the Secretary of the Interior to provide Indian tribes with technical assistance in planning their energy resource development programs.

- Makes intertribal organizations eligible for Department of Energy (DOE) Indian energy education planning and management assistance program grants. Allows such grants to be used to increase tribal capacity to manage energy development and efficiency programs.
- Makes tribal energy development organizations eligible for DOE energy development loan guarantees.

“This legislation will have significant impacts on energy projects currently underway and will help protect valuable energy resources of the Flathead Indian Reservation,” said Energy Keepers, Inc. CEO Brian Lipscomb. “We support this bill, especially the section that would allow for Tribes to be on par with states and municipalities when acquiring hydro licenses, in addition to the funding the bill provides for biomass demonstration projects. Both of these provisions could help CSKT, as well as other tribes, to further develop their economies and become more self-sufficient.”

In her testimony, Lankford provided background on CSKT and about the Kerr Project acquisition in addition to the proposed biomass energy generation facility that is currently being assessed.

Lankford also reiterated the importance of taking over the Kerr Project, testifying that through acquisition of the dam, “CSKT launches into a new era of control over our own resources, as well as being a producer of clean, renewable energy.”

“By acquiring the Kerr Project, CSKT will be restoring ownership and control over lands of the Flathead Indian Reservation, our treaty-reserved homeland,” Lankford said. “By assuming control over Kerr Dam, CSKT will be asserting management and control over Flathead Lake and the Flathead River, two critically important water resources of the Flathead Indian Reservation. And by selling the electricity generated at the Kerr Project, CSKT will receive more income than it gets from rental of the Project land, which will allow the tribe to better meet the needs of our people.”

Lankford concluded her testimony by thanking the Committee for working toward empowering tribes to develop and manage their energy resources.

“Your support for tribal self-determination and tribal sovereignty is greatly appreciated,” she said. “Indian energy development is a key component of our ability to control our destiny and provide for our people. We look forward to working further with Congress to figure out how CSKT and other tribes can further maximize our energy potential, and we invite future discussions on how to create win-win scenarios for both the tribes and the federal government.”

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