



**2026 Annual Convention
Snoqualmie, Washington**

RESOLUTION # 2026 – 049

**“URGING STATE LEGISLATURES THROUGHOUT THE AFFILIATED
TRIBES OF NORTHWEST INDIANS (ATNI) REGION TO ESTABLISH
DEDICATED, RECURRING FUNDING FOR TRIBALLY LED
STEWARDSHIP AND YOUTH CONSERVATION WORKFORCE
PROGRAMS”**

PREAMBLE

We, the members of the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians of the United States, invoking the divine blessing of the Creator upon our efforts and purposes, in order to preserve for ourselves and our descendants rights secured under Indian Treaties and benefits to which we are entitled under the laws and Constitution of the United States and several states, to enlighten the public toward a better understanding of the Indian people, to preserve Indian cultural values, and otherwise promote the welfare of the Indian people, do hereby establish and submit the following Resolution:

WHEREAS, the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians (ATNI) are the representatives and advocates for national, regional, and specific Tribal concerns; and

WHEREAS, ATNI is a regional organization comprised of American Indians/Alaska Natives and Indian Tribal governments in the states of Washington, Idaho, Oregon, Montana, Nevada, Northern California, and Alaska; and

WHEREAS, the health, safety, welfare, education, economic and employment opportunity, and preservation of cultural and natural resources are primary goals and objectives of ATNI; and

WHEREAS, the Tribal nations of the ATNI region have stewarded these homelands since time immemorial, guided by the Creator’s law, ancestral teachings, and our traditional way of life; and

WHEREAS, wildfire has become a year-round and regionwide threat to the lands, waters, communities, natural, cultural, and treaty resources of ATNI member tribes across Washington, Idaho, Oregon, Montana, Nevada, Northern California, and Alaska; and

WHEREAS, the 2026 fire season has been among the most destructive on record across the region, with Washington State alone recording nearly 900,000 acres burned across almost 1,500 fires, a statewide wildfire emergency declared on August 1, 2026, and the State having reached Preparedness Level 5, the highest level; and

WHEREAS, Tribal communities have borne a disproportionate share of that destruction, including fires near White Swan on the Yakama Reservation in late July 2026 that destroyed 24 structures, among them a church and 16 occupied homes, and the Kaiser Canyon and Modrite fires on the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation that prompted evacuations, burned an estimated 200,000 acres, and destroyed more than 50 homes and other structures; and

WHEREAS, up to 80% of the world's remaining biodiversity is located on the traditional lands and territories of Indigenous Peoples and between 2010 and 2020 more than four million acres of Tribal land burned nationally, representing approximately seven percent of all Tribal land in the United States; and

WHEREAS, the Indian Forest Management Assessment Team's 2023 report (IFMAT IV) found that Tribal forestry programs operate at roughly one-third the per-acre funding of comparable federal forests; approximately three dollars per acre for Tribal programs compared to nine dollars per acre for the United States Forest Service and identified a \$96 million annual shortfall in Tribal forestry and fuels funding and a \$42 million deficit in wildland fire programs nationally, while the formula governing those allocations having not been updated in more than twenty years; and

WHEREAS, nearly every Indian Forest Management Assessment Team report issued since 1993 has documented severe and persistent funding and staffing deficiencies in Tribal and Bureau of Indian Affairs forest management programs; and

WHEREAS, that chronic underfunding and the structure of federal reimbursements have produced severe workforce loss across the region; and

WHEREAS, it is offensive to every nation represented in this body that the capacity, competence, and technical merit of Tribal governments should be placed in question by the same federal and state agencies whose century of fire exclusion and active suppression of Indigenous knowledge produced the fuel conditions now driving catastrophic wildfire across these homelands; and

WHEREAS, a documented lesson of Tribal guardian and stewardship programs across North America is that federal and state agencies have declined to recognize field training, technical certification, and demonstrated competence developed within Tribally administered programs as equivalent to credentials issued by universities, state agencies, and other non-Tribal training bodies, thereby excluding qualified Tribal practitioners from employment, contracting, incident assignment, licensure, and advancement for reasons wholly unrelated to their actual capability; and

WHEREAS, Tribal wildland fire personnel already qualify under the same National Wildfire Coordinating Group interagency standards applied to federal firefighters, and Tribal practitioners additionally carry cultural and ecological knowledge of these specific landscapes that no university curriculum confers, such that any burden of demonstration properly rests with the agency that would treat a Tribal credential as lesser, and not with the Tribal nations that issued it; and

WHEREAS, Shared Benefits: A Value Assessment of First Nations Guardians Programs, released in September 2026 by the Indigenous Leadership Initiative and prepared by EcoPlan, assessed sixty-eight First Nations Guardians programs and found that every dollar invested in Guardians programs generates an average of twelve dollars in benefits for communities and nine dollars in benefits for the Guardians themselves, with measured benefits including land stewardship, cultural knowledge and language transmission, youth connection to culture, skill development, health and wellbeing, and wildfire risk reduction; and

WHEREAS, the State of California has adopted a Tribal Stewardship Policy establishing a goal of expanding Tribal stewardship over “at least 7.5 million acres of California land and coastal waters,” and establishing standard practices to advance meaningful and durable Tribal stewardship through three pathways: (1) Ancestral Land Return, (2) Collaboration, and (3) Access; and based this policy on unfulfilled treaty obligations to California Tribal nations; and

WHEREAS, California has to date appropriated \$110 million in state funds for a Tribal Nature-Based Solutions Program directed toward escrow-ready, multi-benefit ancestral land return projects; and invested more than \$21 million since 2024 through a Tribal Wildfire Resilience grant program to fund cultural and prescribed burning, fuel reduction, native vegetation restoration, workforce development, and management planning led by tribes; and

WHEREAS, California has supported five new Tribally led youth conservation corps through direct grants to tribes and has appropriated additional state budget resources to establish further Tribal corps, and has dedicated Tribal allocations within its climate bond, demonstrating that a state can fund Tribally led stewardship at scale; and

WHEREAS, at the 2025 Annual Convention of the Alaska Federation of Natives, the largest gathering of Native people in the country, delegates adopted a resolution recognizing Sentinel, Ranger, and Guardian programs as a pathway to strengthening Tribal sovereignty, food security, and climate resilience, and calling upon the Alaska Congressional Delegation, the State of Alaska, federal agencies, and philanthropic partners to secure permanent, recurring investment

in those programs and to incorporate them into Tribal, state, and federal co-management frameworks; and

WHEREAS, dozens of Alaska Native communities already have Guardians on the ground including the Aleut Community of St. Paul Island, the Native Village of Igiugig, Tlingit & Haida, and the Native Village of Paimiut; with many more seeking to launch programs, and the pattern common to every successful example is the same: a modest initial investment of Tribal and philanthropic funds, followed by documented results, followed by sustained public appropriation; and

WHEREAS, Tribal nations throughout the ATNI region are each independently developing workforce, training, and stewardship programs, duplicating administrative effort and cost that could be reduced through regional coordination, shared best practices, and common training standards; and

WHEREAS, in 2021 the Washington State Legislature enacted House Bill 1168, committing \$125 million per biennium over eight years to the Wildfire Response, Forest Restoration and Community Resilience account, and ATNI adopted Resolution #2025-52 urging continued and increased appropriations to that account, yet no portion of that account is presently dedicated to Tribally led wildfire and forest stewardship workforce development; and

WHEREAS, the Department of the Interior has consolidated wildland fire suppression into a single United States Wildland Fire Service, assuming fire suppression functions historically managed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and it remains uncertain how fire functions and programs contracted or compacted under P.L. 93-638 will be incorporated, increasing the urgency of state-level investment in permanent Tribal capacity; and

WHEREAS, state legislatures throughout the ATNI region will convene in 2027 and are presently formulating their budgetary responses to the 2026 fire season, and no dedicated place for Tribally led stewardship and youth workforce programs has been identified within those responses; now

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that ATNI supports the establishment, launch, and expansion of Tribally led stewardship and youth conservation workforce programs throughout the ATNI region, grounded in Ancestral knowledge, languages, and cultural practices; inclusive of forestry, forest management planning, fuels reduction, wildfire preparedness, ecological restoration, and the return of cultural and prescribed fire to the landscape; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Tribal governments retain sole authority to certify the competence of their own personnel, and that any framework for evaluating or according reciprocity to Tribal training and credentials shall be developed with Tribal governments through government-to-government consultation and grounded in parity and reciprocity so that training delivered, certifications issued, and competencies assessed by Tribal governments and Tribally administered stewardship programs shall be recognized as fully equivalent to comparable credentials issued by federal agencies, state agencies, and accredited institutions without

additional demonstration, re-testing, or validation not required of non-Tribal credential holders; and

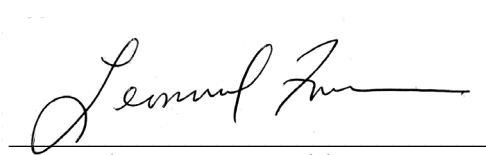
BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that ATNI urges the United States Department of the Interior and the Bureau of Indian Affairs to update the funding allocation formula governing Tribal forestry and wildland fire programs, which has not been revised in more than twenty years, to restructure reimbursement so that Tribal fire and stewardship crews may be employed year-round, and to ensure that programs contracted and compacted under P.L. 93-638 are fully protected in the reorganization of federal wildland fire functions; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that ATNI supports proposed legislation from the States of Washington, Idaho, Oregon, Montana, Nevada, California, and Alaska to establish dedicated and recurring state funds for Tribally led stewardship and youth conservation workforce development, structured to support year-round rather than seasonal employment and to scale with the growth of the Tribal workforce pipeline; and

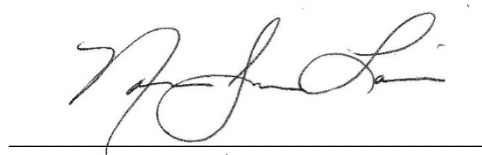
BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that this will be the policy of ATNI until it is withdrawn or modified by subsequent resolution(s).

CERTIFICATION

The foregoing Resolution was adopted at the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians 2026 Annual Convention held at the Snoqualmie Casino and Hotel in Snoqualmie, Washington, on September 13-17, 2026, with a quorum present.



Leonard Forsman, President



Norma Jean Louie, Secretary