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Biden-Harris Administration Makes \$135 Million Commitment to Support Relocation of Tribal Communities Affected by Climate Change

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Funding from Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act Supports Community-Driven Relocation for Threatened Communities

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WASHINGTON — The Biden-Harris administration today announced the launch of a new Voluntary Community-Driven Relocation program, led by the Department of the Interior, to assist Tribal communities severely impacted by climate-related environmental threats. Through investments from President Biden’s Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act, the Department is committing \$115 million for 11 severely impacted Tribes to advance relocation efforts and adaptation planning. Additional support for relocation will be provided by the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) and the Denali Commission.

Recognizing the real and immediate threat of climate change, this program is one of the first designed to coordinate closely with community leaders to help begin the process of relocating crucial community infrastructure away from imminent threats and build long-term resilience to climate impacts. These projects will yield critical information to inform replication in other communities and initiate a long-term strategy for future relocation and climate resilience efforts.

“As part of the federal government’s treaty and trust responsibility to protect Tribal sovereignty and revitalize tribal communities, we must safeguard Indian Country from the intensifying and unique impacts of climate change,” said **Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland**. “Helping these communities

move to safety on their homelands is one of the most important climate related investments we could make in Indian Country.”

“From wildfires out west to typhoons in Alaska, I have seen firsthand the devastating affect climate change and extreme weather has on communities across the nation, especially in Indian Country. That is why FEMA and the entire Biden-Harris administration take seriously our responsibility to provide tailored assistance to Tribal Nations before, during and after disasters,” said **FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell**. “While FEMA continues to help Tribal Nations plan for future conditions and strengthen tribal community resilience through our suite of hazard mitigation tools and resources, we are excited to partner with our federal family on larger projects such community-driven relocation to further support all Tribal Nations.”

“The Denali Commission (Commission) commends the Biden-Harris administration in recognizing the climate adaptation needs of Alaska Native Villages with the significant announcement of the demonstration project,” said **Garrett Boyle, Federal Co-Chair of the Commission**. “The Commission commits its support for this effort and the participating Alaska Native Villages. This effort comes at a pivotal moment of need for the Villages and the environment and builds on the Commission’s previous investments of nearly \$50 million for strategic climate adaptation and resilience efforts.”

The announcement was made during the 2022 White House Tribal Nations Summit, which provides an opportunity for the Administration and Tribal leaders from the 574 federally recognized Tribes to discuss ways the federal government can invest in and strengthen nation-to-nation relationships as well as ensure that progress in Indian Country endures for years to come.

Alaska Native villages are at risk of severe infrastructure damage due to climate-related environmental impacts, including sea-level rise, coastal erosion and extreme weather events. Tribal communities in the contiguous 48 states are at risk of similar threats plus threats from flooding, drought and wildland fire. A 2020 [BIA study](#) estimated that up to \$5 billion will be needed over the next 50 years to address Tribal relocation infrastructure needs in response to climate change impacts.

The Interior Department and FEMA jointly established a Community-Driven Relocation (CDR) Subcommittee as part of the White House National Climate Task Force. This interagency Subcommittee will convene agencies to explore key considerations, issues and strategies for working in partnership with communities to support voluntary movement away from high-risk regions.

The investments announced today will support two types of grants: relocation grants for severely impacted communities currently ready to implement relocation and managed retreat plans, and planning grants for communities that need additional planning support in evaluating climate threats and mitigation strategies.

Relocation Grants

The Newtok Village and Native Village of Napakiak, both in Alaska, as well as the Quinault Indian Nation in Washington have been selected to receive \$25 million each to begin community driven relocation, for a total of \$75 million in funding. The initial steps for these communities will serve as demonstration projects for future climate resilience efforts by providing early learning opportunities

for best practices, developing standard guidelines and tools to serve as a blueprint for future efforts, and demonstrating the success of a consolidated and coordinated interagency approach to relocation and managed retreat. The demonstration projects will focus on the relocation and establishment of core infrastructure identified by the communities to create a center of gravity for full community relocation. Community relocation will be a staged process that will occur in the coming years.

In addition to the Interior Department's dedicated funds, FEMA has awarded, or is in the process of awarding, approximately \$17.7 million to assist the three communities in their efforts to acquire, demolish and build new infrastructure out of harm's way.

- The **Newtok Village**, located on the Ninglick River in Alaska, is experiencing progressive coastal erosion from ocean storms and degrading permafrost. Multiple erosion studies conclude that there is no cost-effective way to halt this process, and that the people of Newtok must relocate to a new site. At the current rate of erosion of approximately 70 feet per year, the river is expected to threaten structures within two years and the village's critical infrastructure within four years. Mertarvik is the site of the new village, located approximately nine miles across the Ninglick River from Newtok. The new village site has roads but only a handful of homes.
- The **Native Village of Napakiak**, located on the Kuskokwim River in Alaska, is experiencing serious erosion that is threatening the school, fuel farm, water supply well, airport, homes and other critical infrastructure. Severe weather, storm surges and flooding are also major concerns. The ongoing erosion is estimated to be 25-50 feet per year. Most of the current critical infrastructure is expected to be destroyed by 2030. The village has comprehensive plans for managed retreat and relocation, but implementation has been delayed by lack of funding.
- The **Quinault Indian Nation**, located on the Olympic Peninsula in Washington, seeks to relocate its Taholah Village. Taholah lies at the confluence of the Quinault River and Pacific Ocean, and is particularly vulnerable to sea level rise, storm surges, and river flooding. The village also faces tsunami hazards from the more frequent distant earthquakes on the Pacific rim and the more destructive local tsunamis caused by earthquakes near the western coast of the United States. The Tribe identified an area at higher elevation for relocation. Efforts have been made to begin the relocation process, but the lack of funding has made relocation a piecemeal process.

In December, the federal government will begin a community-driven 120-day planning period that will include the Interior Department and partnering federal agencies traveling to the three communities to establish formal relationships and begin the planning process with discussions on:

- the communities' goals and needs;
- the roles and responsibilities of the communities and Federal agencies;
- the project scope and components;
- timelines, funding, and budget; and
- risk identification and management.

Three Tribal relocation coordinators funded by the Interior Department's Bureau of Indian Affairs' (BIA) Branch of Tribal Climate Resilience (TCR) annual grants will manage implementation at each community, oversee a local support team, and serve as the main points of contact. TCR will provide financial and technical assistance to support Tribal strategies and provide coordination to match the communities to federal financial and technical assistance.

Planning Grants

Eight additional communities that need further planning support to reach decisions and prepare for relocation or increased climate resilience measures will receive \$5 million, for a total of \$40 million. These communities face significant and widely varied climate risks, including coastal and riverine erosion, permafrost degradation, wildfire, flooding, food insecurity, sea level rise, hurricane impacts, potential levee failure and drought.

Planning grants of \$5 million each are being awarded to:

- Native Village of Point Lay (Alaska);
- Huslia Village (Alaska);
- Native Village of Fort Yukon (Alaska);
- Native Village of Nelson Lagoon (Alaska);
- Havasupai Tribe (Arizona);
- Yurok Tribe (California);
- Chitimacha Tribe (Louisiana); and
- Passamaquoddy Indian Tribe (Maine).

Communities were evaluated by TCR using a structured interagency evaluation that ensured a thorough review of community risk, preparedness, response plans, capacity, needs and intent.

The [Bipartisan Infrastructure Law](#) provides a total of \$466 million to the BIA over five years, including \$216 million for climate resilience programs, provided as \$43.2 million annually for five years. Of that funding, \$130 million is provided for community relocation and \$86 million is provided for Tribal climate resilience and adaptation projects. The Inflation Reduction Act provides BIA with an additional \$220 million for climate adaptation and resilience, of which the Department anticipates spending \$40 million to support Voluntary Community-Driven Relocation efforts, with the remainder supporting broader Tribal climate resilience activities.

Today's announcement is in addition to \$45 million in [Tribal Climate Resilience awards](#) made by BIA earlier this month. With support from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, these awards will fund a variety of climate resilience efforts, including six grants for relocation.

For more information on projects funded by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law in Tribal communities through the BIA, visit the [BIA's interactive map](#).

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