

Schatz's Native Tourism Bill Signed Into Law

President Barack Obama recently signed the Native American Tourism and Improving Visitor Experience (NATIVE) Act into law. The bipartisan legislation introduced by U.S. Senators Brian Schatz (D-HI) and John Thune (R-SD) will enhance and integrate native tourism, empower native communities, and expand unique cultural tourism opportunities in the U.S.

"I'm incredibly proud to have worked with our native communities on this legislation, and I'm pleased the President has signed it into law," said Senator Schatz. "This new law gives our native communities a real opportunity to grow their local economy and share their history and culture with the rest of the world."

The Native Act will require federal agencies with tourism assets and responsibilities to include tribes and native organizations in national tourism efforts and strategic planning. It will also provide Native Hawaiian, Alaska Native, and American Indian communities with access to resources and technical assistance needed to build sustainable recreational and cultural travel and tourism infrastructure and capacity; spur economic development, and create good jobs.

U.S. Senators Jon Tester (D-MT), Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), Tom Udall (D-NM), Dean Heller (R-NV), Al Franken (D-MN), Mike Rounds (R-SD), Dan Sullivan (R-AK), Heidi Heitkamp (D-ND), John Hoeven (R-ND), and Gary Peters (D-MI) are cosponsors of the Native Act.

The Native Act is supported by a broad coalition of stakeholders including the Council for Native Hawaiian Advancement, Native Hawaiian Hospitality Association, Sovereign Councils of the Hawaiian Homeland Assembly, U.S. Travel Association, American Indian and Alaska Native Tourism Association, Southeast Tourism Society, Western States Tourism Policy Council, National Congress of American Indians, Alaska Federation of Natives, and the Native Enterprise Initiative of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

U.S. Representative Markwayne Mullin (R-OK) led companion legislation in the House of Representatives.

Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe Advocates Environmental Justice for Akwesasne

Members of the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribal Council participated in the Fourth Annual Tribal Leaders Listening Session hosted by U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Director Gina McCarthy in Washington, D.C. Tribal Chiefs Eric Thompson and Beverly Cook were in attendance to share the tribe's concerns with cleanup efforts at two industrial sites located immediately upwind and upriver from the Akwesasne community.

"We have made it a priority to voice our community's

environmental issues to federal agencies and to insist we be included in the development, implementation and monitoring of cleanup efforts at polluted industrial sites," said Tribal Chief Eric Thompson. He added, "We appreciate the invitation by EPA Director McCarthy to participate in the listening session as we continue advocating for the complete removal of contaminated materials at the RACER site and our dissatisfaction with the proposed remediation of the Grasse River. We completely object to the EPA's less expensive proposal to cap the toxic sediment and on-site storage remedy."

The Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe submitted its own recommendation for the cleanup of the Former-General Motors site that entailed the removal of all PCB-contaminated sediment. The approved remedy however, includes placing a 'cap' over the toxic material that will remain at the RACER site. Despite the tribe's objections, a similar remedy will allow toxins discharged by ALCOA to remain in the Grasse River.

"We take immense pride and responsibility to preserve and protect the environment for the benefit of our community members now and into the future" said Tribal Chief Ron LaFrance. He further stated, "Industries have come and gone from our area, but they have been allowed to leave their toxic legacy behind in Superfund sites. We cannot allow that to happen again and encourage ALCOA to leave a legacy of being environmentally responsible by properly remediating the Grasse River."

The Tribal Council's outreach efforts have gained traction and most recently, have contributed to Congressman Dr. Raul Ruiz (D-CA) requesting an investigative report from the U.S. Governmental Accountability Office on the effectiveness of government-to-government consultation and the extent to which the impacts of Superfund sites located on or near tribal lands are being mitigated. In addition, there will be an examination of federal policies intended to protect the health and environment of tribal communities.

"The health of our people and our ecosystem are intertwined and the efforts to safeguard them lie on our shoulders," said Tribal Chief Beverly Cook. "Our environment has endured decades of contaminants. Through clinical and social research, an emerging body of evidence indicates ongoing exposure to lighter chlorinated PCB's that are being released into the air are linked to the development of diabetes and disruption of reproductive systems in our community. Speaking to Director McCarthy, we were able to reinforce why our recommendations for the cleanup of the Superfund sites, specifically the removal of all PCB-contaminated material, is so important to the health of our community." ♣