



**Region 10 Tribal Consortium
P.O. Box 689
Spokane, WA 99210**

June 4, 2020

Andrew Wheeler, Administrator
Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20460

RE: EPA Actions During COVID Crisis

Dear Administrator Wheeler:

This letter is submitted on behalf of Tribal Caucus of the EPA Region 10 Tribal Operation Committee (“RTOC”). This letter is not sent on behalf of EPA or any EPA official.

The RTOC has heard from Tribes across Region 10 concern that the agency is proceeding with significant environmental actions without regard for the COVID crisis. During the COVID crisis, EPA has advanced several policies that significantly impact the protection of tribal lands, human health, and tribal resources, including fish and wildlife that many tribal members depend upon. This is most vividly illustrated by the recent release of changes to the 401 Water Quality Certification process.

In many cases, Tribes have requested in person consultation with agency decisionmakers and extensions of comment periods to accommodate consultation and, now, to allow greater time in light of the challenges of closures and off-site working for meaningful review of agency proposals. Requests for additional information, opportunities for consultation, and extension of comment periods were provided by Tribes in the recent WOTUS rulemaking, the 401 rulemaking process, and the revisions to the Washington water quality standards. Most of these requests fell on deaf ears. This has significantly impacted the ability of Tribes to meaningfully participate in the process. For example, in the case of the WOTUS process, Tribes were not provided information about water bodies within their reservation impacted by the rulemaking.

We urge EPA to be sensitive to the needs of Tribes by delaying any further significant changes to environmental regulations until the end of the COVID crisis and, at a minimum, to design comment periods to provide extended time for review and consultation.

We appreciate your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Raymond Paddock
RTOC Co-Chair