Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Moran and Members of the Committee.

My name is Jimmie Mitchell, a citizen of the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians and the Director of Natural Resources for my Tribe. During the past nine years, I have been appointed by the leadership of my Nation to serve as the representative for Treaty Rights Implementation and Protection.

First let me say that it is an honor to be here to provide testimony on behalf of our request to establish base-funding that will serve to assist my Nation and the others that we have aligned with regarding our resource management and conservation enforcement requirements specific to Treaty Preserved Inland Gathering Rights.

Exactly one-hundred and seventy six years ago, to this date, twenty-nine of our Chiefs, whom had traveled to Washington DC at the request of the United States, did so to formulate a peaceable agreement that would affirm and protect the exercise of our sovereignty within our ancestral homelands. The Chiefs did so in exchange for the United States desire to acquire the territory for statehood. That agreement, while not written entirely in the best interest of the Tribes, has remained in effect to this date and is known and referenced to as the Treaty of Washington 1836.

The Treaty has upheld two very important aspects of our sovereignty that remain in effect to this day. The first aspect agreed to provide the Tribes with access to a "Ceded Territory" a contiguous tract of land nearing 13.8 million acres located in the Northern Lower and Eastern Upper Peninsulas of Michigan.

The establishment of the Ceded Territory was necessary to fulfill the second aspect in the Treaty which secured the Tribes inherent Right to Hunt, Fish and Gather along with the other usual privileges of occupancy. This right was essential then, as well as it is today, to maintain our connectedness to the lands, waters and the natural occurring species required to provide subsistence, uphold cultural practices and employ stewardship initiatives that are required to maintain sustainability of the resources.

The natural resources that existed at the time of the newly formed State of Michigan were rich, diverse and bountiful in amounts that were presumed at the time, to be inexhaustible. However, not long after the marks that each Tribal Chief made on the Treaty had dried, the pristine old-growth forests were quickly vanishing due to the enormous influx of settlers that came in droves, laying claim to our Ceded Lands, carving out homesteads and towns at an unprecedented rate.

Much to our dismay, the resources our Chiefs had so carefully negotiated to sustain our physical, spiritual and cultural needs, entirely disappeared within one generation. It would certainly take more than five days, let alone five minutes to surmise the devastating effects that have occurred as a direct result in the loss of these culturally-significant resources and equally, the responsibility that is the core of our belief system to ensure culturally significant resources are preserved and available for the next seven generations beyond our own.

I share this daunting depiction with you, in your role as the supreme protectorates, to help convey the sense of urgency that drives our Rights Protection Implementation request, as well as to provide the "why" that is central to our request and so vitally imperative for us to participate equally as sovereigns.

To effectively participate in collaborative resource management, requires the managers possess the authority and the wherewithal to ensure comprehensive and sustainable resource management practices are established, maintained and completed. Beyond sustainable resource management, the addition of restoration, reclamation and enhancement objectives are the vital steps required in the recreation of a rich and diverse ecosystem, to be realized and enjoyed by all.

The Little River Band of Ottawa Indians is one of five Tribes that have elected to combine our respective sovereignties into one natural resource management board that has co-management authority within the Ceded Territory. This board has evolved over the past 30 years with various titles into what is now known as the Chippewa, Ottawa Resource Authority, (CORA).

The CORA Board is comprised of the Bay Mills Indian Community, the Sault Ste. Marie Band of Chippewa Indians, the Little Traverse Bay Band of Odawa Indians, Grand Traverse Band of Chippewa and Ottawa Indians, and the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians. The CORA Board provides resource management oversight to approximately sixty-thousand enrolled Tribal citizens.

The State of Michigan has been compelled to bring several law suits against the CORA Tribes over the past 30 years, primarily, challenging the existence of the Rights that were affirmed and protected in the Treaty of 1836. The most recent suit was presented in Federal District Court in 2004, targeting again, the Treaty preserved Right to Hunt, Fish and Gather within the Ceded Territory.

The suit was quickly set aside at the request the Tribes in exchange for discussions to reach an agreement. The Tribes fought especially hard to affirm, protect and enforce our management responsibilities on an equal footing to that of the State.

The importance to possess co-management of the resources throughout the Ceded Territory is critical to the CORA Tribes on many levels. Of them, our largest concern comes at the harsh reality these tough economic conditions inflict upon us all as managing sovereigns.

Despite their best attempts, the State of Michigan, the US Forest Service and US Fish & Wildlife are besieged in their respective capacity to uphold resource management responsibilities over our shared natural environment. Further limiting, is their inability to respond to the immerging threats found in the introduction of invasive species that continue to plague our waters, our forests, the wildlife, our respective-cultures and the uncertain future of a world we were raised in, being sustained much beyond our own existence.

This is the unfortunate downside that results when budget cuts limit and diminish any management agencies financial wherewithal to accomplish their responsibilities to sustain and promote a robust and viable natural occurring environment.

The Little River Band of Ottawa Indians view our inherent stewardship responsibility with great care and conviction. We strive to safeguard the existence and sustainability of our precious resources that include twenty percent of the world's fresh water supply, the decimation of native species occurring from climate changes, the infestation of invasive species like the Emerald Ash Borer, the Asian Carp and the ever-expanding list of others.

To answer to the growing demands required to implement sound and responsible resource management solutions today and forward, the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians is currently mentoring Tribal students both with the tenents of Indigenous stewardship practices in conjunction with their higher education studies to successfully usher in the next generation of Tribal Biologists, Rights Protection Attorneys, Policymakers and Conservation Officers.

Under our restoration, reclamation and enhancement plan, the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians have successfully collaborated with other resource management partners that include the US Forest Service and US Fish & Wildlife to successfully restore the remnant Sturgeon population of the Big Manistee River from the brink of extinction through the use of a Stream-side rearing facility that we designed and have demonstrated through peer review to greatly increase the survivability of this culturally important species. This design has since been used in the State of Michigan and State of Wisconsin's Sturgeon programs.

We are also currently conducting feasibility studies in partnership with Universities to reintroduce extirpated species such as the Grayling and Elk within our homelands as well as monitoring threatened and endangered species including Marten and Moose.

On behalf of my Nation, we respect the concerns our attempt to establish base-funding for our Treaty preserved inland resource management requirements have generated, especially during these financially challenging times. However, I would be remised if I failed to share this story that includes our history, our struggles, the concerns and subsequent effects that are currently existing within our Ceded Territory, yet at the same time, demonstrating our sense of optimism, willingness and determination to participate as effective resource managers alongside the other managing sovereigns with a goal to align our abilities to create the changes that are so desperately needed to preserve and protect the sanctity of our environment that the Tribes, our neighbors and the future generations are depending upon.

Miigwetch ogiimiizhiyaan bizindoshin

(Thank you for listening)