



Leaders say climate is changing Native way of life

By Online Editor

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Native American and Alaska Native leaders told of their villages being under water because of coastal erosion, droughts and more on Thursday during a Senate hearing intended to draw attention to how climate change is affecting tribal communities.

The environmental changes being seen in native communities are “a serious and growing issue and Congress needs to address them,” Tex Hall, chairman of the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation of New Town, N.D., said

Mike Williams, chief of the Yupit Nation in Akiak, Alaska, said in the informational Senate Indian Affairs Committee hearing, that villages are literally being wiped out by coastal erosion.

Williams said he can cast a net and catch salmon at his childhood home because the home is under water, he said. He also described how the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race, in which he participates, has been moved because of lack of snowfall and that dogs must run at night to stay cool.

“We've always lived off the land and off the waters and continue to do that. But we're bearing the burden of living with these conditions today,” Williams said.

Senator Daniel Akaka, committee chairman, acknowledged that environmental changes are widespread, but the Hawaii Democrat said native communities are disproportionately impacted because they depend on nature for traditional food, sacred sites, and for cultural ceremonies. Several tribes already are coming up with plans to adapt to the changes and federal agencies are assisting with resources, Akaka said.

Members of several West Coast tribes and Alaska communities have been in Washington this week for a symposium at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian on the impact of climate change on indigenous people and their communities. The symposium, titled First Steward, brought together tribal leaders, people experiencing the changes and scientists.

Williams said Congress needs to come up with a strategic plan to address the impact to help ensure Alaska Natives and American Indian tribes continue to exist. He said in coming up with

the plan, Congress should consider Native practices and traditional knowledge.

SOURCE: AP/PACNEWS