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Tribal Transportation Program; Inventory of Proposed Roads

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Tribal Transportation Program: Inventory of Proposed Roads

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General Comment

On face value, the proposed change to in 25 CFR Part 170 specifically part 170.443 appears to meet the proposed justification put forth by the Department of Interior to reduce paperwork and provide regulatory clarity and flexibility, and remove an unfunded mandate. Under the surface of that, it is symptomatic of an ongoing pattern of removing any issues surrounding need, equity, and objectivity that has plagued the Tribal Transportation Program since the enactment of Map21.

In the opinion of the Red Lake Nation, there should be justification for keeping proposed roads on the NTTFI beyond a reasonable time period (e.g. 5-years) and that such proposed roads must be examined with an eye to the creation of the current funding formula and the problems that the formula has created in terms of safety, funding shortfalls for large land-based tribes, and the removal of true relative need and road conditions as a driver of the overall funding of the Tribal Transportation Program and the NTTFI itself.

It could be argued that this current effort to ignore data and continue proposed roads on the NTTFI is another instance of a desire by the Department of Interior to move even further away from the idea of fixing a system that has seen countless thousands of miles of non-Indian roads

(i.e. county and state roads) and proposed roads, that were often based on no supporting data, to shift the overall balance towards a system that has seen severe deficiencies and deterioration of existing tribal roads, leading to a maintenance backlog for much needed repairs to these roads that has grown exponentially (as discussed in the GAO report GAO-17-423).

We urge the rejection of this proposed change as it will only exacerbate existing problems in the lead up to negotiations for change or renewal of 25 CFR Part 170 in 2020.