

Tribal Leaders Climate Change Summit: Asserting Tribal Sovereignty on the Path to Climate Justice

Brief Event Summary

Indigenous communities in North America are at the forefront of the many harmful effects of climate change. They also lead the way in promoting policies, crafting climate adaptation strategies, incorporating traditional knowledges in solutions, and engaging elders and youth in the struggle to understand and adapt to the changing world. On Nov. 28-30, 2022, ATNI hosted the Summit at the Kalispel Tribe's Northern Quest Casino and Resort. This Tribal Leadership Climate Change Summit was the 5th in a series of summits sponsored by the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians and many tribal and non-tribal partner organizations. This Summit engaged Tribal leadership across the US in conversation on goals and strategies to successfully navigate climate change's cultural, economic, and social challenges.

The purpose of this Summit was threefold:

- 1) Hear from and speak to Tribal communities on the front line of climate change
- 2) Explore what it means to lead a just transition for Tribal Nations in the face of climate change



- 3) Explore how Tribal sovereignty and co-management can be strengthened to advance Tribal goals and objectives in the face of climate change.

By all measures, including participant surveys, ATNI's 2022 National Tribal Leaders Climate Change Summit was a great success.

This document offers a brief overview of the Summit, its speakers, and speaker topics. It is not intended to be a comprehensive review. A proceedings document will be produced soon, covering additional details and highlighting policy recommendations from speakers and the breakout sessions.

Event Keynoters

Debra Lekanoff – (Representative of the 40th Legislative District in Washington State)

Tlingit Tribe

Representative Debra Lekanoff shared thoughts on fighting climate change and saving salmon from two perspectives: one that reflected her heart as a mother and the other as a legislator. Rep. Lekanoff described ideas of cultural justice, her experiences as the only Native American in the Washington state legislature, the importance of inter-Tribal collaboration, the current status of climate legislation in Washington state (e.g., the Climate Commitment Act), and concrete opportunities in climate decision-making for Tribes in the upcoming year.

“It takes a lot of patience to be an Indian. A lot of patience. That’s why we’re still here.”

Billy Frank Jr. (quoted by Deb Lekanoff; WA State Legislator)

Andrea Carmen (International Treaty Council): Defending our rights and ways of life through international advocacy on Climate Change

Andrea Carmen described Indigenous peoples' work for climate justice in the international arena (e.g., UN Earth Summit, Paris Agreement, and COP24-26). Carmen emphasized the importance of Indigenous peoples speaking for and representing themselves and the right and responsibility to future generations as knowledge holders on the international stage. She also described key tenets of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), how the climate crisis disproportionately impacts Indigenous communities, and several recent "wins" for Indigenous peoples in the international arena.

Session 1 - Tribal communities on the frontlines of climate change

Keynoter speaker **Dr. Daniel Wildcat** (Haskell Indian Nations University) Yuchi member of the Muscogee Nation

Dr. Daniel Wildcat presented the idea of "indigenuity," or Indigenous ingenuity, and made four overarching arguments. First, Indigenous peoples need to play to our strengths, namely the recognition that our most significant insights and gifts came from life around us. Our cultures and lifeways emerge from deep relationships, so we must restore those relationships. Second, we must reevaluate our relationship with technology and assess if it enhances the 3 C's (community, culture, and communication) and our relationship with the environment. Third, we need to own responsibilities to our "world of relatives" rather than exploit a world of resources. Lastly, we must give our young people opportunities to participate in the solution via an Indigenous youth climate core guided by our intellectual, cultural, and spiritual traditions.

Panel Presentations

Dr. Frank Lake, Pacific Southwest Research Station, USFS, Karuk & Yurok - Indigenous fire stewardship (IFS) as a systems approach that can increase Tribal community adaptive capacity and restore forested landscapes.

Erin Sexton, Senior Scientist, Univ of Montana – proposed a coal mine complex in SE British Columbia and Tribal resistance, namely: the mine's potential impacts on the Kootenai watershed and Native Nations, the overarching adverse effects of coal mining, the shortcomings of active mine water treatment, and the transboundary Ktunaxa Nation's ongoing work to address these challenges.

Lauren Terbasket, LSIB Natural Resources, Lower Similkameen Indian Band; - Indigenous legal systems developed by the Okanagan Nation and other Nations in the face of burning forests across British Columbia. Through their legal orders, these Nations exercise their jurisdiction to manage lands and waters at the landscape level rather than on a project-by-project basis.

Joel Moffett, Dir of Environmental and Special Projects - Native American in Philanthropy, Nez Perce Tribe

- two new efforts from the Native Americans in Philanthropy, the Tribal Nations Initiative and the Tribal Conservation Fund. As philanthropic organizations are increasingly receptive to funding Tribally-led environmental work, Tribes must speak for themselves and be represented in decision-making.



Breakout Session Discussion Topics

1. What are some of the best practices to prepare for the dynamics between human health and infrastructure impacts of climate change?
2. What are some holistic perspectives to address climate impacts on the economy, health, infrastructure, and academic work?
3. What might be some foundational Tribal perspectives on traditional healing to help communities cope and adapt to climate change?
4. Are any new or improved resources available to Tribal communities to assist with climate planning, adaptation, and resilience?

Session 2 - A just transition and opportunities for Tribal Nations

Keynote Speaker - **Ann Marie Chischilly** (Vice President, Office of Native American Initiatives at Northern Arizona University) Diné

Discussed the problems of asking questions but don't listen to people. To make a just transition for communities, we must listen to what THEY want. Three things to think about:



Tribal people can return to those lands

1. Are we respectfully listening to our people? Does the Tribe know about this research? Have you gone before Council to ask them? Are you asking the right people who will be impacted the most?
2. Can we move people into a renewable workforce? We want social and economic engines of mobility to be accessible to everyone. Can we retrain people and send them back to school? Do we have funding? Are we subsidizing to allow for just transition to occur?
3. How are we looking at the environment? How are we healing Mother Earth? How will the land be rehabilitated? Are we looking at Tribal co-management? Are we looking at ways to ensure

Keynote Speaker – **Bobby Whitener** (General Manager Whitener Group LLC) Squaxin Tribe

Bobby discussed his background in natural resources, from the fish wars, economic development, and now focused on climate change messages. Technology can be part (not all) of the solution. Technological solutions need to have community involvement. We need to know how we are going to control it. How do we, as tribes, come together to look at this, and will anyone assist us in that process to become leaders or guides for the emerging issue?

Panel Presentations

Moderator - Amelia Marchand, ATNI Tribal Climate Liaison, Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation.

Aja DeCoteau, Exec. Dir., Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, Yakama Nation – Just transition embodiment of who we are as Indigenous people.

Rebecca Ponzio, Dir. of Climate and Fossil Fuel Program, WA Environmental Council – Climate Commitment Act in WA State and tribal opportunities to develop the legislation and affect outcomes.

“Tribes are sovereigns, not stakeholders.”
Aja DeCoteau; Yakama Nation

Mike Williams, Chief, Yup'ik and Akiak Native Community – Climate impacts on Alaskan native communities. Change is happening before our eyes; the Indigenous People of this nation have answers.

Micah McCarty, Artist, past Chair Makah Tribal Council, Makah Tribe – Opportunities to combine the purchasing power of all tribal entities to find energy solutions and reprogram existing budgets that we are already spending.

Jake Glavin, Midwest Tribal Energy Resources Assoc - Principles for Tribes involved in energy development: make sure it is tribally led; tribes have a seat at the table and need the capacity to participate. Focus on training and workforce development,

Breakout Session Discussion Topics

1. Which Just Transition principles relate most to your work and the challenges of your communities?
2. How can these principles help your community's path to climate justice?
3. Where are opportunities and areas to collaborate with Tribal and non-traditional non-tribal organizations to advance mutual Just Transition outcomes (national, regional, state, regional, local)? What are the barriers and cautions to these collaborations?
4. What is the role of youth in a Just Transition?

Session 3 - Opportunities for Tribal young professionals

Opportunities for Young Professionals

Moderator Coral Avery, Natural Resource Specialist at the BIA Branch of Tribal Climate Resilience, Shawnee Tribe – Tribal Visual Arts Contest as an opportunity to involve youth and the connection of art and science. Covered Native Youth Climate Action Leadership Congress, including high school youth BIA Pathways, an internship program for enrolled citizens of federally recognized tribes.

Lisa Vandever, Native Youth Program Manager, NCAI Tribal Youth Program Manager – Youth commission and White House Office of Science and Technology and encouraged youth to learn about programs and become involved.

Mike Durglo, Head of Tribal Historic Preservation Office, Confederated Salish Kootenai Tribes – EAGLES program for youth engagement; and Environmental Advocates for Global and Local Ecological Sustainability

Dehlia Wolftail, (UO graduate student) Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indigenous people – Described that navigating university alone is not easy; mentors can help youth with guidance, support in school, and access to scholarships.

Lyndsi Lewis (Intern at Affiliated Tribe of the Northwest Indians) Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation – Importance of Tribes creating plans to engage with youth, including both TEK and western science. Encouraged the creation of summer youth internships and camps, hands-on educational tools.

Tribal youth perspectives

This session featured four tribal youth leaders who shared their stories of growth, leadership, and journeys toward advancing sovereignty, Indigenous culture, and the urgent need to address climate change.

Speakers included:

Kailani Sirois, Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation

Kieren Daley Laursen, Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians

Michel Lenihan, ATNI Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians

Jessica Douglas, EcoTrust Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indigenous people



Session 4 - Tribal sovereignty and co-management

Keynote Presentation – **Don Sampson** (Executive Director) Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation

Don explored the impacts of climate change on tribal sovereignty, trust resources, and treaty rights and examined how co-management and other federal policies can assist Tribes in achieving goals related to Tribal sovereignty and climate change. Spoke about the upside of what's going on now; indigenuity, innovation, according to our values, many of our Tribal leaders in the White House now; climate change and resiliency are top agenda items at the tribal leaders' Summit. Exciting that it's a national priority.

Panel Presentation

Andrea Carmen, Executive Director, International Indian Treaty Council, Yaqui Nation – Political sovereignty is linked to food sovereignty. Value and challenges of COP 27.

Haley Case-Scott, Climate advisor for White House Office of Science & Technology Policy, Climate & Environment, Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians – Recommitment to executive order 13175, White House initiative to elevate Indigenous knowledge in federal decision making.

Bryan Mercier, Regional Director of BIA - Northwest Office, Grand Ronde Tribal member – Tribal resiliency funding, and new program funds for Tribal community relocation.

Patrick Gonzales-Rogers, Distinguished Practitioner in Residence at the Yale Center for Environmental - Part of America the Beautiful board, which is the backbone of Biden's 30x30 initiative, emphasizing that



Tribes have a voice in where dollars are going. Tribes are in a unique position because of government status and government-to-government basis.

James Rattling-Leaf, Principal, Wolakota Lab, LLC, Rosebud Sioux Tribe – Importance of not forgetting where you come from, who you are, responsibility to the land and water, and how we relate to them

“Sovereignty is what sovereignty does.”

Don Sampson

Breakout Session Discussion Topics

1. How is climate change impacting tribal sovereignty, trust resources, and treaty rights?
2. What *programs and policies* can most benefit Tribal decision-makers in achieving sovereignty and climate priorities?
3. What tools are needed among Tribes and the federal government to effectively strengthen their ability to design co-management projects for several generations?

In Memoriam

This session was a tribute to the late Terry Williams and provided space to honor other tribal leads who fought for tribal sovereignty and the urgent need to address climate change.

Speakers included:

- **Preston Hardison**, retired from Tulalip Tribe – Provided comments on Terry’s work on treaty rights and climate change.
- **Daryl Williams**, Environmental Consultant, Tulalip Tribes – spoke of Terry's life and leadership
- **Davis "Yellowash" Washines**, Government Relations Liaison, Yakama Nation – provided prayer and memory song.

Session 5 - Looking to the Future

The closing session consisted of closing comments, priorities, and recommendations from Tribal leaders to strengthen their nations as they

work to achieve a path to climate justice. The conversation was guided by questions on 1) hope and vision for tribal sovereignty and climate justice, environmental priorities, 2) human health priorities, and 3) messages to deliver to policy-makers and the

“Tribal sovereignty is not something we can mess around with. It’s what we have, and nobody [can] take that away.”

Chief Mike Williams; Yup’ik and Akiak Native Community

White House on upholding federal trust responsibilities, treaty rights, tribal sovereignty, and data sovereignty to strengthen the health and well-being of Tribal citizens.

Speakers included:

- **Moderator: Clarita Lefthand-Begay, Ph.D.** (Assistant Professor, University of Washington) Navajo citizen
- **Mike Williams**, Chief of Yup'ik and Akiak Native Community

- **Frank Ettawagesek**, (Executive Director of United Tribes of Michigan), Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians
- **Kylie Avery**, (ATNI and SEI Climate Corps) Shawnee Tribe
- **Cindy Marchand** (Councilwoman with the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation) Sinixt
- **Mike Durglo**, Head of Tribal Historic Preservation Office) Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes.

“Something that strengthens our identity is our responsibility . . . to the water, to the land, to each other.”

James Rattling-Leaf

Acknowledgments

Additional event speakers and notetakers

Nikki Cooley, Inst. Of Tribal Environmental Professionals – Event emcee
 Dara Craig, University of Oregon – Notetaker
 Amelia Marchand, ATNI – Event support, notetaker, panel moderator
 Kieren Daley Laursen, ATNI – Notetaker
 Kylie Avery, ATNI – Notetaker
 Jesse Brisbois, UW - Notetaker

Event Planning Team

- Chas Jones, Amelia Marchand, Lyndsi Lewis, Michel Lenihan, Tyrel Ott – ATNI
- Kathy Lynn - U of Oregon
- John Mankowski - Mankowski Environmental LLC
- Clarita Lefthand-Begay – University of Washington
- Luhui Whitebear - Oregon State University
- Jody Olney - Washington Environmental Council
- Nikki Cooley - Inst. Of Tribal Env. Professionals
- Coral Avery - Bureau of Indian Affairs

Tribal Advisory Team

22 Tribal citizens, staff, and intertribal organization staff

Attendees

Registered attendees (536 total)

- 118 Tribal Nations and Alaska Native Communities were represented
- 50 Tribal organizations, businesses, and intertribal organizations
- Tribal elders (4)
- Tribal leaders/citizens (101)
- Tribal/intertribal organization staff (73)
- Tribal college students (11)

- Tribal youth (under 18 years) (4)
- Tribal vendors (12)
- Tribal virtual attendees (120)
- non-Tribal college students (5)
- non-Tribal attendees (119)
- non-tribal virtual attendees (66)
- Exhibitor tables (5)

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Please visit the [ATNI Climate Change Summit website](#) for additional information and reports.

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