



TRIBAL PRIORITIES FOR SOLVING THE CLIMATE CRISIS

The Congressional Action Plan for a Clean Energy Economy and a Healthy, Resilient, and Just America.



Photo Credit: Jonathan Long

RESTORE ECOLOGICAL RESILIENCE AND MAINTAIN TRIBAL ACCESS TO FIRST FOODS AND OTHER CULTURAL RESOURCES

Tribes are essential partners in restoring ecological resilience. Ecological resilience means the amount of disturbance, such as wildfire or severe insect outbreak, that an ecosystem can withstand without changing ecological productivity and other fundamental functions. The Traditional Knowledges that Tribes have accrued has protected and conserved large landscapes and the biodiversity of forests, rangelands, wetlands, and other ecosystems. For instance, Tribes have accrued an expansive knowledge of traditional fire use. Partnerships between federal agencies and Tribes are promoting the restoration of ecological resilience and should be expanded. Yet Tribal governments and science programs, as well as federal land management agencies, have been chronically underfunded and have a large management backlog. Congress should invest in the natural resources science and management capacity of Tribal governments, inter-tribal organizations, and allied entities.

From a Tribal perspective, a major ecological resilience goal is restoring the productivity and access to first foods and other cultural resources. First foods, including water, fish, big game, plants, roots, and berries, are fundamental to traditional lifestyles and livelihoods. These foods — and the harvesting, gathering, preparation, and ceremonial practices therein — are a cornerstone of Tribes' histories, cultures, lifeways, community cohesion, and status as sovereign nations. Tribes are obligated to care for and protect these resources. Hydropower facilities pose an especially large concern, because they often reduce the abundance of fish species.

The federal government has a trust responsibility to protect trust and restricted fee lands, trust resources, and treaty and similarly recognized rights. There are many science-based strategies to promote upholding the federal trust responsibility: a watershed approach to fisheries and wildlife management; interdisciplinary approaches to floodplain management; and protection of wildlife corridors spanning Tribal and non-Tribal lands; among others. It is very important that federal agencies involved in land management, natural resources, and related sectors respect the need for Tribal consultation, co-management, and participation in decisions that affect Tribes.

Tribes are essential partners in restoring ecological resilience and thereby achieving carbon neutrality. Tribes have accrued Traditional Knowledge to steward ecosystems since time immemorial. The protection and cultivation of first foods and other cultural resources is based in ecological resilience. At the same time, the federal trust responsibility obligates the U.S. to protect trust and restricted fee lands, trust resources, and treaty and similarly recognized rights. Climate change impacts treaty rights, traditional lifestyles and homelands.¹ Congress must make generous investments in the natural resources science and management capacity of Tribal governments and inter-tribal organizations; uphold and strengthen Tribal consultation (Executive Order 13175); direct federal agencies to co-manage natural resources relevant to Tribes; and direct agencies to include Traditional Knowledges in natural resources monitoring, planning, and management decision-making, while adhering to the principle of [Free, Prior, and Informed Consent](#).

TRIBAL PRIORITIES THAT CONGRESS SHOULD CONSIDER:

>> Protect, restore, and ensure access to the habitats and ecosystems of first foods and other cultural resources.

- The impacts of hydropower dams on salmon and other Tribally-important fisheries are a major concern. Restore impacted fisheries. Prioritize non-hydropower alternatives for clean energy.
- Protect and restore floodplains, riparian corridors, salt marshes, and other wetlands, which perform critical ecological functions to maintain productive fisheries and other aquatic wildlife. Prohibit or rigorously regulate infrastructure construction on floodplains, wetlands, and similar ecosystems.
- Restore forest and rangeland resilience to wildfire and insect outbreaks. These ecosystems harbor essential first foods and other cultural resources. Tribes' traditional wildfire management practices are valuable tools and pose good opportunities for co-management between federal land management agencies and Tribes.

>> Invest in the natural resources science and management capacity of Tribal governments, inter-tribal organizations, and allied entities.

- Expand support for key programs of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, including the Tribal Resilience Program and the Rights Protection Implementation (RPI) program; the General Assistance Program of the Environmental Protection Agency; and the Cooperative Landscape Conservation Network of multiple federal, tribal, and other partner entities.



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TRIBAL PRIORITIES THAT CONGRESS SHOULD CONSIDER (Cont'd):

>> Assign value to Traditional Knowledges in natural resources monitoring, planning, and management decision-making.

- Adhere to the principle of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent and ensure that Tribes retain authority over the communication and application of Traditional Knowledges.

>> Uphold and strengthen the federal policy of Tribal consultation (Executive Order 13175). In particular, direct agencies to engage in meaningful Tribal consultation and address frequent weaknesses, such as the need for improved timeliness and accountability.

>> Direct and authorize federal land management agencies to co-manage natural resources (forests, range, fisheries of oceans and freshwaters, wildlife, and other resources) with Tribes to restore the ecological productivity of and access to First Foods.

>> Protect and preserve Heritage Areas of Native Americans, which are administered by the National Park Service. Agreements with Tribal partners are essential to restoring ecosystems and relationships between federal agencies and Tribes.²

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FOR MORE INFORMATION:

[ATNI Tribal Review of the Congressional Action Plan](#)

Endnotes

1 U.S. Congress. Hearing before the Committee on Indian Affairs, United States Senate. Impacts of Environmental Changes on Treaty Rights, Traditional Lifestyles and Tribal Homelands. Date: July 19, 2012. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-112shrg78095/pdf/CHRG-112shrg78095.pdf>. (accessed 12/14/20).

2 Ruppert, D., 2003. Building partnerships between American Indian Tribes and the National Park Service. Ecological Restoration, 21(4), pp.261-263.