



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Partnerships for Indigenous Stewardship



Tule River Tribe Uses Conservation Stewardship Program to Restore and Maintain Burned Forestland

In the realm of forestland conservation, the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) can play a major role in maintaining healthy forest conditions achieved through good stewardship and Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) practices.

CSP provides a unique opportunity to implement bold and progressive enhancements which benefit the land, wildlife, and our vulnerable pollinators while encouraging a higher level of stewardship and getting much needed conservation on the ground. Forestland on the Tule River Tribe's reservation in Tulare County, California, is a great example.

The Tribe has been doing conservation work on their forestland with full-time forester, Brian Rueger, since 1985. During the summer of 2017, a large wildfire burned over 4,000 acres of the reservation's forestland. On one of the most severely impacted land units, the Tribe has been implementing 746 acres of woody residue treatment and 86 acres of Tree and shrub establishment in a large EQIP contract that will soon be completed.

All this work is taking place in one of the old groves that harbors some of the oldest and most impressive Giant Sequoias on the reservation. These majestic trees took some damage but are still standing strong today.

For the past three years, the Tule River Tribe has been restoring the burn area with native plants,

such as Blue Elderberry, Wild Rose, Honey Suckle and sage; not knowing which plants will come back. The rehabilitation process has been successful due to partner contributions, and assistance provided by the NRCS office in Visalia has helped make the rehabilitation process smooth sailing.

"The Visalia office and the Tribe have a good working relationship," said Rueger. "The rehabilitation process has been time consuming, using physical labor to bring water to each plant. The Visalia office has been very helpful and supportive."



Byron Morgan, Brian Rueger and Mikey Franco installing native vegetation.

CSP enhancements include tree and shrub establishment for wildlife cover; conservation cover to provide habitat continuity for pollinators and beneficial insects; and Integrated

"Last year we planned a Conservation Stewardship Program project on the Tribe's forestland," said NRCS Range Management Specialist Alex Hepler. "All the enhancements were planned on the same land unit where the EQIP project is being carried out."



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Pest Management (IPM) PAMS (Prevention, Avoidance, Monitoring and Suppression) techniques to reduce ozone precursor emissions related to pesticides.

Hepler says the establishment of native trees, shrubs, and pollinator plants will help stabilize the mountain and prevent further erosion and provide crucial ecosystem benefits for wildlife and the forest. IPM PAMS techniques will be used to control noxious weeds and unwanted re-sprouts on the planting site as well as the Giant Sequoia grove. The Tribe

will have ground crews removing invasive weeds by hand annually without the use of any herbicides to protect beneficial pollinators and insects, and they will maintain the healthy condition of the forest using both EQIP practices and CSP enhancements.

“The success of this project was only possible due to the Tule River Tribe’s commitment to conservation,” said Hepler. “They have participated in EQIP on forestland and rangelands, CSP on rangelands, and the National Air Quality Initiative. Their

participation in multiple programs and addressing a wide variety of resource concerns has made them ideal candidates for CSP.”

Collaboration between NRCS and the Xerces Society also played a crucial role in the design, implementation and success of this project. Xerces Society’s Pollinator Biologist Kathryn Prince and NRCS Biologist Jesse Bahm were both essential in facilitating the success of this project with all their technical skills and recommendations.



Tribal forestry crew River Brown, Byron Morgan, and Travis Savage.



Pollinator Biologist Kat Prince from the Xerces Society preparing willow cuttings.



Mikey Franco, Bernard Baga, Travis Savage, Keri Vera, Andrew Glazier, and Kaelin Manual planting willows.



Team members: Alex Hepler and Ryann Smith (back); Brian Rueger, Mikey Franco, Byron Morgan, Travis Savage, and River Brown (middle); Bernard Baga, Andrew Glazier, Kaelin Manual and Cade Vera (front).



Brian Ruegar, Alex Hepler and Jesse Bahm with rebar planters created to install willow cuttings.



Brian Ruegar and Andrew Glazier installing willow cuttings.

Want to learn more about conservation assistance available to tribes?

www.ca.nrcs.usda.gov

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