MEETING NOTES

Meeting presentations and additional information available on the California NRCS [TAC webpage](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/conservation-basics/conservation-by-state/california/california-tribal-advisory-committee)

**Tribal Attendees:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **NAME** | **TRIBE/ORGANIZATION** |
| **Ali Meders-Knight** | California Open Lands, Mechoopda Indian Tribe |
| **Arlene Dutschke** | Ione Band of Miwok |
| **Athina Osmuss** | Confederated Villages of Lisjan |
| **Bill Matsubu** | Blue Lake Rancheria |
| **Cerise Palmanteer** | Sogorea Te' Land Trust - Lisjan Ohlone |
| **Charley Reed** | Hoopa, Yurok, Karuk (Karuk Tribe-Food Sovereignty Coordinator) |
| **David Newman** | Pechanga Environmental Coordinator |
| **Frances Ragle** | Colfax- Todds Valley Consolidated Tribe |
| **Heather Airey** | THPO Picayune Rancheria of Chukchansi Indians |
| **Heather Bernikoff** | Yuqui, CARCD Tribal Liaison |
| **Jesse Galvan** | THPO Buena Vista Rancheria of Me-Wuk Indians |
| **Jessica Brown** | Middletown Rancheria of Pomo, Elem Indian Colony |
| **Jessica Douglas** | Siletz Tribal Member - Ecotrust non-profit |
| **Jim Bowie** | Bear River Band of Rohnerville Rancheria |
| **Juanita Martinez** | Yocha Dehe Band of Wintun |
| **Kimberly Davis** | Hoopa Valley Tribe, Tsemata Nursery Manager & HVT Botanist |
| **Lacie McWhorter** | Dry Creek Rancheria Band of Pomo Indians |
| **Laura Galvan** | Yakima/Colville/ Hill Nisenan |
| **Laurie Harvey** | NR Manager Resighini Tribe of Yurok People |
| **Lena Ortega** | IAC, CA TA |
| **Leslie Bellas** | Lone Pine Paiute - Shoshone Tribe |
| **Luya Rivera** | Lake County Middletown |
| **Meghan Smith** | Buena Vista Rancheria Environmental Coordinator |
| **Melissa Mitchum- Brown** | Cachil Dehe Band of Wintun, Colusa Indian Community |
| **Nicole Rivera** | North Fork Rancheria |
| **Richard Nelson** | Yurok Watershed Restoration and Roads Director |
| **Rob Roy** | La Jolla Band of Luiseno Indians |
| **Shayna Williams** | Sherwood Valley Band of Pomo Indians |
| **Tanya Williamson** | Picayune Rancheria of Chukchansi Indians |
| **Vanessa Esquivido** | Northern Me Wuk Wintu |
| Inaudible (online) | Kumeyaay/Hoopa - Climate Science Alliance, So Cal |
| Inaudible (sat next to Melissa) | Cachil Dehe Band of Wintun |
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**NRCS/Agency Attendees:**

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| --- | --- |
| **NAME** | **NRCS Position** |
| **Allen Curry** | Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations - Area 2 |
| **Annie Konjevoda** | State Urban Conservation Program Manager |
| **Josue Gandia** | Acting State EQIP Program Manager |
| **Brook Raffaele** | Farm Service Agency, State Outreach Coordinator |
| **Carlos Suarez** | CA State Conservationist |
| **Christopher Null** | State Archeologist |
| **Cody Leslie** | Acting State Tribal Liaison/Tribal Planner - Area 4 |
| **Curtis Tarver** | Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations - Area 4 |
| **Debra Denhart** | Public Affairs Specialist |
| **Erin Taylor** | Tribal Planner - Area 1 |
| **Ernesto De La Riva** | State Engineer |
| **Jenna Ganoung** | Acting Assistant State Conservationist for Programs |
| **Jenny Johnson** | Tribal Planner- Area 3 |
| **Jon Gustafson** | State Resource Conservationist |
| **Johnnie Siliznoff** | Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations - Area 3 |
| **Jonathan Groveman** | State Public Affairs Specialist |
| **Kagat McQuillen** | Tribal Liaison - Northern CA (Area 1&2) |
| **Mindy Graves** | Acting Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations - Area 1 |
| **Christine Chavez** | State Outreach Coordinator |
| **Qi (Chi) Zhou** | CARCD - JEDI Program Manager |
| **Nancy Wahl-Scheurich** | CARCD Executive Director |

**INVOCATION - Melissa Mitchum-Brown, Cachil Dehe Band of Wintun, Colusa Indian Community**

**INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME - Carlos Suarez, State Conservationist**

Carlos welcomed attendees and expressed gratitude for the commitment, investment in conservation and partnerships. He values all tribal input and is requesting assistance in identifying your tribe’s needs which will aid NRCS working with you to meet your goals.

Carlos presented the history of the Tribal Advisory Committee (TAC) which started in Wisconsin to hear directly from the Tribes and enhance Government-to-Government relationships. Established in CA in 2006-07 with Ed Burton, former CA State Conservationist, established the EQIP Tribal fund pool of $1M due to a request from Tribes at a TAC meeting years ago, acknowledging our tribal relationships. Carlos has continued to maintain and exceeded $1M funding to CA Tribes and Native American individuals. All tribal applications have been funded with a total of $2.6M in contracts in 2023.

We have been working in partnership with IAC – Intertribal Ag Council. Thank you to IAC and Lena Ortega, for her input and assistance in ensuring we have a successful Tribal Advisory Committee meeting twice a year. I am especially grateful for your expertise and counsel through the year.

To implement our vision for increasing conservation on tribal lands, I rely heavily on our NRCS Tribal team and there have been quite a few changes in the last 6 months. Pedro Torres is now the National Tribal liaison for our agency. His duty station is still located in Southern California, but he will be overseeing our Agency’s tribal Liaison responsibilities on a national level.

RaeAnn Dubay took over the role as my Deputy State Conservationist replacing Gayle Barry. “Cody” Benjamin Leslie is the Acting Tribal Liaison in Southern California (Behind Pedro) and Kagat McQuillen is in Northern California. Our Tribal Planners include Jenny Johnson in Auburn and Erin Taylor in Humboldt. Cody is also a Tribal Planner in Area 4 in his regular role.

The Conservation title of the Farm Bill extended through 2031. Congress can still implement conservation funding without a renewal of a Farm Bill.

In 2023 California NRCS was #1 nationally in Farm Bill Program funding. We have experienced a significant increase 2024-2026 with Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funds. Our Agency has seen a historic amount of funding. $20 Billion dollars have been dedicated to NRCS by the President. Currently NRCS in California has the largest funding in the nation. In 2025 we will receive double funding.

Much of our field staff are new as of the past five years, and as part of our trust commitment to our Tribal communities, we are supporting any and all training opportunities for NRCS staff to learn more about working with tribes. The Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indianshosted our March course for (WEWAI) Working Effectively with American Indians where we had 30 participants from around the state engage for a full week of training. This course is designed to introduce tribal culture and history and discuss resource concerns from the California American Indian perspective so that NRCS staff can improve their ability to work with the tribes they serve.

We hope to exceed our $2.5M allocated to tribal customers (IRA 1.5M and 1M in farm bill funds). Statewide IRA allocation for FY24: $67.67M EQIP and $8.4M CSP.

On April 3rd, NRCS opened a notice of funding opportunity for the Regional Conservation Partnership Program, RCPP.  This year there may be assistance available to help with proposal development.  Due to the possibility of high volume, there may be a limit on the number of proposals that receive this support.  If your tribe is interested in RCPP and has a roughly defined project scope and region, I encourage you to use the link on the flyer for RCPP and submit a request for assistance as soon as possible. Chief Crosby has set aside $1.5Billion for RCPP in 2024. (RCPP FLYERS ARE ON THE TABLE).

We would also like to work with interested tribes on development of Tribal Alternative Funding Arrangements or AFA**.**  The agreement process allows NRCS to set aside funding at the national or state level to enter into agreements directly with tribes that have eligible projects.  The projects must fall under the purpose of NRCS existing programs.  NRCS will collaborate with Tribes to develop AFAs to help fund and implement conservation projects on land over which Tribes or their members have control.   Tribes must provide a written request to the State Conservationist and NRCS must provide a transparent process for selecting any AFA agreements.

If your tribe is interested in pursuing this, I encourage you to reach out early and let us know so we can begin preparation for 2025.

Staff updates: With increased funding through IRA, we will need the staffing to support technical and financial assistance. We are working to add seven new Tribal Conservation Planners to our core team. The positions have had the job descriptions written, we are just waiting for them to be advertised within the next month to 45 days. TAC is instrumental in providing recommendations to increase tribal staff. We are addressing recruitment incentives and retention.

**TRIBAL REPRESENTATIVES – PRIORITY CONCERNS FOR THEIR TRIBES AND COMMUNITIES**

**Laura Galvan – Hill Nisenan, village site in Coloma.** Goals are to ensure equal representation with all entities that represent Native American communities, both recognized and unrecognized. Unrecognized Tribes are working in the shadows with very little funding.

**Nicole Rivera – North Fork Rancheria of Mono Indians**

**– EPA Dept Admin Assistant** Attending to learn about how to heal lands and those impacted by fires.

**Melissa Mitchum Brown – Cachil dahe Band of Wintun, Colusa Indian Community**. Concerned about destruction of land including gathering spaces and Cemeteries with “Sites project” Pipeline out of Sacramento River. Potential for health concerns and water quality/quantity issues. in community

**Jessica Brown, Elim Indian Colony, Middletown Rancheria of Pomo**- 50ac of their lands, located in Sulfur Bank area of Lake County, have been designated a superfund site due to methyl mercury and arsenic contaminations in the soils. They haven’t been able to gather plants from the land for years. Soil health is a large concern. They are working with community members and EPA to extract metals out of soils. Used to be a fishing tribe, can no longer harvest fish for food. They are currently growing foods in raised beds due to soil contaminants. All tribal members have methyl mercery in their blood. There has been a loss of community members due to cancer on the reservation. Here to speak about water rights, soil remediations, trainings and getting assistance to bring gardens back to our future generations.

**Ali Medders Knight - Mechoopda, Wintun and non-profit CA open lands Director -** Basket weaver and teacher, provides children and adults in disadvantaged communities about land restoration and use of plants for food, fiber and medicine. Teaching the Intertribal Nursery Training the past 2 years with IAC Intertribal Ag Council. Focus on ”Acculturation rather than Assimilation”.

We are only 4 Grandmothers away from brutal massacres that took place on this land. We are trying to teach about TEK now and how we take care of ecosystems around us and why we should be prescribed to the land rather than a rancher or a farmer whose focus is financial gain. Would like the Feds to support Tribes rather than supporting the State Government who do not know how to treat us right being non-recognized tribes. The feds have a government-to-government relationship with the State just as much as Tribes do.

Would like to see Federal funds support NRCS for work done, without pulling from Tribes, to add staff with increased wages and technical support.

**Frances Ragle, Colfax Todds Valley Consolidated Tribe and non-profit the Todds Valley Miwok Maidu Cultural Foundation.**  – Reiteration of Ali’s comments and passion. We are not federally recognized, disseminated across the country with approximately 300 members, 15 located in the area Central. There is Trust land where a Tribal member was living on the land and forced to leave. Our federal recognition was terminated illegally in 1979. The funds in Trust fund disappeared and the tribe does not have control of their own land. We are working to conserve our culture and practices. We are attempting to manage Federal BLM lands to have access to ancestral lands through a permit. BLM has created barriers since we have attempted to manage. There has been successful collaboration with NRCS funding and partnership to bring the ecology and resources back to the land for our cultural needs. With the techniques and personnel to manage federal lands, they have created a red carded fire crew and BLM will not allow fuel reduction through fire. We can create a model for other agencies to follow with NRCS and other Tribal entities.

**Emily Burgueno – lipay Nation of Santa Ysabel Kumeyaay Nation**. Cultural practitioner, Chair of Kumeyaay Conservancy. The Intertribal Nursery Training at UC Davis does lack So Cal participation. Last year there was only two and this year only two. How can we improve accessibility to this training for So Cal Tribal Nations? Priority is access to resources and concerns raised about barriers regarding travel fund availability to Tribal partners. Prioritizing education and relationship with fire and cultural resources. Working with NRCS on a project prioritizing pond turtle habitat.

**Jesse Galvan, THPO Coordinator for Buena Vista Rancheria of Me-Wuk Indians-** Share awareness and obtain knowledge of Programs. Promoting Tribal involvement between Agencies and Tribes. Promoting awareness to Agencies who are incorrect in saying Tribes “used to” practice traditions and methods. Tribes are actively practicing cultural activities on the lands.

**?name Southern CA , Kumeyaay/Hoopa** – Traditional foods practitioner, gatherer & weaver . New role as Stewardship Coordinator for Climate Science Alliance. Would like to see better representation of Southern CA Tribes. At a pivotal turning point with climate change. Use of cultural fire important. Would like to see Tribes acknowledged for fire experience and knowledge.

**Lacie McWhorter - Dry Creek Rancheria Band of Pomo Indians.** Environmental Resource Manager. The Dry Creek Tribe's current priorities encompass land stewardship from the Oak woodland Forest, to Rancheria Creek and Russian River.

**Leslie Bellas Lone Pine Paiute** - Shoshone Tribe, Tribal Environmental Dept. as the Water Program Coordinator. attending learn all I can to protect the environment for the future generations

**Kimmberly Davis**, from the Hoopa Valley Tribe. I am the Tsemeta (sah-met-ah) Forest Nursery Manager. I am here to connect and learn how we can work together.

**Shayna Williams**. Pomo from Sherwood valley band of Pomo Indians. I work for my tribe’s environmental department as the assistant to the director.

**Vanessa Esquivido** Member of the Northern Me Wuk Wintu. My role is to listen and report back information to my tribe. I work at Sacramento City College as a director of the Native programs.

**Arlene Dutschke – Ione Band of Miwok.**  Looking to encourage conservation on lands newly in Trust. Has been to the PMC. I am here as  traditional woman land manager, gatherer, weaver, and traditional foods practitioner,  in our territories . I am also here as the newly hired Indigenous Stewardship Coordinator for Climate Science Alliance .

**Bill Matsubu** Environmental Director for Blue Lake Rancheria. I'm also here to listen and report back to Council. The Tribe’s goal is to increase resilience to the climate crisis, especially food supply chain issues in a food deserts.

**Jessica Douglas**. I am a Siletz tribal member and the Indigenous Community Engagement Manager for Ecotrust, a non-profit working in NorCal, Oregon, Washington and SE Alaska. We work to support tribes and their priorities as it relates to land stewardship. We are leading a Pacific Indigenous Agroforestry project with the goal to increase access to USDA funding resources and services related to agroforestry that protect and cultivate culturally significant materials and sites for Tribes while honoring holistic, integrated management goals. Some of the resources we hope to connect tribes too also include NRCS opportunities

**Charley Reed**. I am Hupa Yurok and Karuk person. I am tuning in on behalf of the Karuk tribe. As with many tribal folks we have a variety of issues. To name a few, we are constantly working to restore and reclaim our responsibility to land management practices; reclaiming responsibility to educate our youth and involve them in land management practices and active parts of our culture. Further, to continue to bridge the gap of access to healthy, traditional and affordable foods.

**Metessa Martin**, I am the environmental coordinator for the Buena Vista Rancheria of Me-Wuk Indians. I am here to build connections and learn more about opportunities to improve the cultural and environmental conditions on our reservation

**Rob Roy – La Jolla Band of Luiseno Indians,** Environmental Director – Tribe appreciates having Cody, Pedro visit to discuss projects. Gratitude to NRCS for attending Intertribal Earth Day event held at the La Jolla Band of Luiseno Indians campground this past Saturday. It was a great event with 465 people attending and 54 tribes, agencies, and organizations participating, and having NRCS there was fantastic. Thank you!

**FARM BILL PROGRAM UPDATES -Jenna Ganoung, Acting Assistant State Conservationist for Programs** and **Robert Boettcher, CSP Program Manager**

NRCS Program Website: <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/conservation-basics/conservation-by-state/california>

NRCS works with private landowners to develop Conservation Plans that consider the needs of the landscape and the objectives of the customer.

* Landowners work with conservation plannersto develop a plan that meets their operational, economic, and landscape goals.
* Technical assistanceand input are provided by a diverse cadre of conservation professionals including: soil scientists, agronomists, rangeland specialists, engineers, biologists, foresters, cultural resource specialists, and others.
* NRCS combines efforts with conservation partners, including Tribes and Resource Conservation Districts (RCD’s) to ensure local priorities are addressed.

California NRCS – Priority Resource Concerns Areas in the 5yr Strategic Plan (2020 -2025)

* Plant and forest health/ productivity
* Air quality associated with agriculture operations
* Surface and groundwater quality
* Enhance surface and groundwater quantity
* Improve soil health
* Enhance habitat for terrestrial and aquatic species

IRA (Inflation Reduction Act) - 2002 Bill established for climate for clean energy solution. We have 8 years to get IRA funds on the ground. IRA is not a program; it is a funding vehicle to address unmet demand from producers who have previously sought funding for climate-smart conservation activities.

2024 Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) Allocations in California:

* + EQIP – Environmental Quality Incentive Program, $67.7M (89%) **– IRA Tribal $1,5M of allocation**
  + CSP – Conservation Stewardship Program , $8.3M (11%)

**EQIP Farm Bill Allocation Requirements:**

10% Wildlife 5% Beginning Farmer/Rancher 5% Socially Disadvantaged Farmer/Rancher

2024 Primary Farm Bill Programs in California:

* + EQIP – Environmental Quality Incentive Program, $80.9M (77%) – **Tribal EQIP $1M of allocation**
  + CSP – Conservation Stewardship Program , $12.6M (12%)
  + ACEP – Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, $11.1M (11%)
  + CSP - $12.6M + IRA $8.3M = Total $21M

**EQIP Farm Bill Allocation Requirements:**

50% Livestock 10% Wildlife 5%Beginning Farmer/Rancher

5% Socially Disadvantaged Farmer/Rancher 5% Conservation Incentives Contracts (CIC)

**2024 CA Tribal Funding budgeted $2.5M which includes $1M Farm Bill funds + $1.5M IRA funds**

**FY24 Financial Assistance Established Program Deadlines**:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Program** | **Application Cutoff** | **100% Obligation Deadline** |
| EQIP-Classic and  EQIP-CIC | November 3, 2023 | July 12, 2024 |
| EQIP – IRA | February 16, 2023 | July 12, 2024 |
| CSP-Classic | April 26, 2024 | September 4, 2024 |

**Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)**

* Voluntary program that helps build existing conservation efforts while strengthening ag operations
* CSP can help find new ways to meet operation and conservation goals
* NRCS helps work one on one with producers to identify natural resource problems and provide technical and financial assistance to solve those problems, or attain higher stewardship
* Based off individual operation needs and goals. Custom tailored conservation plan
* CSP contracts are for five years, with the opportunity to compete for a contract renewal
  + Minimum annual payment increased from $1,500 to $4,000. Minimum contract total is $20,000 (pending personal payment limits)
  + First time in history CSP is offering Historically Underserved (HU) rates
    - Will be applied to Annual Payments, based on existing conservation
    - $1,800 per eligible land use, per year HU $3,000 per eligible land use, per year

**FARM SERVICE AGENCY (FSA) UPDATE -Brook Raffaele, State Outreach Coordinator, FSA**

Contact information: Email: [Brooke.Raffaele@usda.gov](mailto:Brooke.Raffaele@usda.gov) Phone (530) 219-7747

Farm Programs

\*Disaster Assistance \*Risk Management Tools \*Conservation

\*Organic Cost Share \*Farm Storage Facility Loans

Farm Loans

\*Ownership Loans \*Operating Loans \*Microloans \*Loan Guarantees

Emergency Relief Program (ERP) 2022 - On December 29, 2022, President Biden signed into law the Disaster Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2023 (Pub. L. 117-328) which includes over $3.74 billion in assistance to agricultural producers impacted by wildfires, qualifying droughts, hurricanes, winter storms, and other eligible disasters experienced during calendar year 2022.

ERP 2022 covers crop production, including certain quality losses, and losses of trees due to qualifying natural disaster events that occurred in calendar year 2022.

For impacted producers, FSA will be administering emergency relief to eligible producers through a two-track process:

* Track 1 will leverage existing Federal Crop Insurance or Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) data as the basis for calculating initial payments.
* Track 2 will be intended to fill additional assistance gaps and cover eligible producers who did not participate in existing risk management**.**

**INTERTRIBAL AGRICULTURE COUNCIL (IAC) UPDATE: Lena Ortega**

Lena Ortega – New California Technical Assistant Specialist for IAC Email: [Lena@indianag.org](mailto:Lena@indianag.org)

* IAC hosting and travel support for tribes to attend NRCS Tribal Advisory Committee
* Intertribal Nursery Training – Goal of training is building tribal capacity for technically skilled practitioners and build Tribal/Agency partnerships for sourcing and propagating native plants. NRCS funds assisted with participant travel and teachings. Ali Meders-Knight is the primary TEK and UC Davis arboretum Teaching Nursery managers Abbey Hart. 2024 has 17 participants representing 18 CA Tribal Nations as staff or tribal members/
* Food Sovereignty Agreement – IAC Pacific Region Summit will be in August 2024. Details TBD. Topics may include food sovereignty, TEK, climate change, cultural burning, farming, culturally significant plants and live demos of acorn processing and traditional food tastings.
* Assisting NRCS staff with Working Effectively with American Indians (WEWAI) trainings for NRCS staff on working with Tribes. 2024 training hosted by Shingle Springs Band of Miwok. Approximately 40 attendees over 5 days

**TRIBAL SUCCESS STORY:- Jonathan Groveman and Erin Taylor -**

**Blue Lake Rancheria stream restoration project through Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)**

Weblink <https://medium.com/nrcs-california-storyteller/reweaving-the-basket-at-blue-lake-rancheria-ca1a942baedd>

**PARTNER PRESENTATION – CA ASSOCIATION OF RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICTS (RCDS) – Heather Bernikoff, Yaqui/Yoeme member, CARCD Tribal Liaison and Qi (Chi) Zhou Program Manager for Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion. (JEDI)**

**Heather Bernikoff - Project Manager, Pollinator & Wildlife Habitat/Tribal Liaison**

**Email:** [**heather-Bernikoff@carcd.org**](mailto:heather-Bernikoff@carcd.org)

**Phone: 916-931-0969 ext 354**

**CARCD - Tribal Liaison Role**

**❖ New position**

**❖ Role still evolving ➢ Input welcome!**

**❖ Main goals**

**➢ Connect Indigenous governments, nonprofits and communities with RCD resources**

**➢ Assist Indigenous governments with establishing RCDs if desired**

**➢ Act as a bridge, as needed, to ensure Indigenous inclusion**

**Tribal Outreach Work:**

**RCD Tribal Outreach**

**❖ RCDs have relationships with tribal governments/communities in their districts**

**❖ Two examples - Mendocino RCD and Mariposa RCD**

Mendocino- WCB intertribal Workshop, Salmonid surveys, Culturally Significant Plants, Land Access, Invasive Species surveys, Carbon farm planning.

Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation project – Restoration of butterfly habitat

**CARCD Direct Tribal Work**

**❖ 100 RCD employees received tribal outreach training**

**❖ Still have over 50 RCD employees are interested and on the waiting list**

**Closing remarks, Carlos Suarez –**

Feedback the groups provided will be used in getting assistance to your communities. At any point, feel free to engage with our staff at local offices in your communities and we’ll be happy to work with you.

Next meeting will be in Fall 2024.