MEETING NOTES

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

**Tribal Attendees:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **NAME** | **TRIBE/ORGANIZATION** |
| Alfred Melbourne | Lakota Sioux, Three Sisters Gardens (Sacramento) |
| Allie Hostler | Hoopa/Klamath Trinity RCD |
| Athina Osmuss | Confederated Villages of Lisjan |
| Betsy Spaulding | IAC Northwest Technical Assistant Specialist |
| Cathy Buchanan | Bear River Band of Rohnerville Rancheria |
| Christina Mokhtarzadeh | Picayune Rancheria of Chukchansi Indians |
| Dean Tonenna | Mono Lake Kootzaduka Tribe |
| Elena Sisneros | Tolowa Dee-Ni’ Nation |
| Emily Burgueno | Iipay Nation of Santa Ysabel |
| Felecia Hill | Iipay Nation of Santa Ysabel |
| George Rodrigues | Iipay Nation of Santa Ysabel |
| Henry Najera | La Jolla Band of Luiseño Indians |
| Justice Rhodes | Cowlitz Indian Tribe |
| Justus Simon | Middletown Rancheria Band of Pomo |
| Jill McCormick | THPO, Fort Yuma Quechan Indian Tribe |
| Lena Ortega | IAC, CA Technical Assistance Specialist |
| Mary Chepo | North Fork Mono |
| Matt Williams | Yakama Nation |
| Marlene Dusek | Payomkawichum, Kumeyaay, and Cupa |
| Melissa Mitchum- Brown | Cachil Dehe Band of Wintun |
| Michael Lennox | Southeast Muskogee Santa Rosa Band in Florida |
| Naomie Peasley | IAC Northwest Technical Assistance Specialist |
| Natalie Solares | IAC, Interregional Manager, West |
| Pam Cubbler | Colfax-Todds Valley Consolidated Tribe |
| Pattie Harris | Fort Peck Tribes |
| Paula Aubrey | Yurok Tribe Food Sovereignty Department |
| Rebecca Blackwood | Manzanita Band of the Kumeyaay Nation |
| Richard Nelson | Yurok Watershed Restoration and Roads Director |
| Roman Worthey | Tolowa Dee-Ni’ Nation |
| Shasta Gaughen | THPO Pala Band of Mission Indians |
| Tanya Williamson | Picayune Rancheria of Chukchansi Indians |
| Toni Elliott | Manzanita Band of Kumeyaay Nation |
| Veronica Santos | THPO Manzanita Band of Kumeyaay Nation |
| William "Bill" Nelson | La Jolla Band of Luiseño Indians |
| Willie Carillo | Tule River Natural Resource Committee |

**NRCS/Agency Attendees:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **NAME** | **NRCS Position** |
| Allen Curry | Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations (ASTCFO) - Area 2 |
| Arnelis Crespo | Acting Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations - Area 4 |
| Brandon Bates | Assistant State Conservationist for Programs |
| Brandy Murphy | EQIP Program Manager |
| Carlos Suarez | CA State Conservationist |
| Christine Chavez | State Public Affairs & Outreach |
| Christopher Null | State Archeologist |
| Cody Leslie | State Tribal Liaison (Area 3&4) |
| Curtis Tarver | Assistant State Conservationist - Area 4 |
| Debra Denhart | Public Affairs |
| Jenny Johnson | Tribal Planner- Area 3 |
| John Gustafson | State Resource Conservationist |
| Johnnie Siliznoff | Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations (ASTCFO) - Area 3 |
| Kagat McQuillen | Tribal Liaison - Northern CA (Area 1&2) |
| Liz Colby | Acting State Conservation Engineer |
| Margaret Smither-Kopperl | Plant Materials Center (PMC) Manager |
| Mindy Graves | for Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations (Area 1) |
| RaeAnn Dubay | Deputy State Conservationist |
| Robert Boettcher | CSP Program Coordinator |

**INVOCATION - Ka-Ya Melissa Mitchum-Brown, Cachil Dehe Band of Wintun**

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

Review of the TAC purpose as a forum for Tribes to meet with [NRCS](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/conservation-basics/conservation-by-state/california) [State Executive Team](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/contact/state-office-contacts/california-state-office) and to provide NRCS direction on [Tribal](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/conservation-basics/conservation-by-state/california/tribal-assistance) priorities and natural resource concerns.

[Indigenous Stewardship Methods Evaluation (ISME)](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/2022-10/FY23_CEMA%20222_Indigenous%20Stewardship%20Methods%20Evaluation.pdf), [Conservation Evaluation & Monitoring Activity (CEMA)](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs-initiatives/eqip-environmental-quality-incentives/eqip-cpas-dias-and-cemas) – Our new conservation practice code #222 is for Tribes to develop a plan, with their designated Qualified Individual, incorporating Indigenous methods. We currently have 4 contracted in CA.

Programs: In 2024 there was $2.5 million allocated in CA Tribal funding ($1 million – Tribal [Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs-initiatives/eqip-environmental-quality-incentives/california/environmental-quality) and $1.5 million in [Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/conservation-basics/conservation-by-state/california/inflation-reduction-act-ira-california) Funds).

[Regional Conservation Program Partnership (RCPP)](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs-initiatives/rcpp-regional-conservation-partnership-program/california/regional) & Alternative Funding Arrangement (AFA).

○ Utilize alternative funding arrangements to provide funding directly to producers.

○ Tribes can enter into RCPP Agreements with NRCS in CA to address resource needs.

○ Tribes or Tribal Entities (IAC) are able to enter into AFA agreements on a national level.

Partnerships: NRCS has entered into National and State agreements with IAC to assist with collaborations in outreach, trainings/ workshops and youth internships.

Staff: Current Tribal Team: 5 full staff including 3 Planners and 2 Liaisons. There will be 7 additional Planner positions filled in 2025. Cody Leslie was selected for Tribal Liaison covering Central Valley (Area 3) and Southern CA (Area 4). His position as Planner will be filled as soon as possible.

**TRIBAL REPRESENTATIVES - PRIORITY CONCERNS**

Facilitated by Lena Ortega, Intertribal Agriculture Council - California Technical Assistance Specialist

In-Person Attendees

**Melissa Mitchum Brown, Colusa Indian Community -**

* Protecting gathering grounds from development.
* Section 106.
* Meaningful consultation.

**Dean Tonenna, Kootzaduka’a Tribe -**

* Consultation.
* Wildfires and cultural resources.

**Alfred Melbourne, Lakota Sioux Three Sisters Gardens -**

* Urban farming and their nursery.
* Funding for land.
* Food sovereignty and a diversified food system.

**Allie Hostler, Klamath Trinity Resources Conservation District Director, Hoopa Valley Tribe member-**

* Fuels reduction.
* Grassland/prairie restoration.
* Fisheries protection and the Sites reservoir
* Meaningful consultation and travel to Sacramento.
* Trinity River dams, restoration, and fisheries population depletion by about 90%.
* and as time goes on we work on restoring the fish population and haven't had a chance
* Functional irrigation system to support or local food production and agriculture and concerns over diversions.
* EQIP: land ownership and lease policies timeliness of the cultural resources review time.
* Section 106 process and the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) and THPO reviewing the same project.

**Richard Nelson, Yurok Tribe -**

* Deferred maintenance especially fuels management and roads on large quantities of timber harvest lands.
* NRCS practices don’t fund enough compared to the costs and prices in the remote territory of the Yurok, Hoopa, Karuk, and Tolowa.

**Justus Simon, Middletown Rancheria -**

* Upper Putah Creek watershed and the timeliness of fuels mitigation work, conservation of pine trees; and invasive scotch broom and beetles.
* Timeliness of the process to prescribe burn on federal land compared to private land.
* Solid waste on the reservation.

Zoom Participants

**William Nelson La Jolla Band of Luiseño Indians -**

* Gold Spotted Oak borer (GSOB) management and conservation of oak trees..
* Fuel reduction.
* NRCS Programs: cultural resources review timelines and signing requirements.
* NRCS hiring tribal-facing staff for additional help.

**Cathie Buchanan, Bear River Band of the Rohnerville Rancheria -**

* Offshore wind power development.
* Mining and groundwater protection
* Industrial agriculture water use: drying out forests, without compensation or NEPA/CEQA review.

**Felicia Hill, Iipay Nation of Santa Ysabel -**

* Drought and high temperatures resulting in hazardous algae blooms in surface water.
* GSOB and how they affect critical species.
* Southwestern pond turtle restoration.

**Paula Aubrey, Yurok Tribe -**

* Capacity building and the limited scope of grants for bringing local and traditional foods to the people.
* Food sovereignty efforts, food villages, food systems and prescribed fire.
* Impacts from offshore wind development.

**Henry Najera, La Jolla Band of Luiseño Indians -**

* Cultural burning to suppress the GSOB.
* Cultural resources considerations.

**Willie Carillo, Tule River Indian Tribe -**

* Protecting trees and the impact from beetles.
* Wolf management planning and wolves impact on beavers and beaver conservation.

**Pattie Harris,** **Fort Peck Tribal member-**

* Teaching young adults about food sovereignty and indigenous land management.
* Water and the availability of water.
* Aquaculture systems to raise food crops.

**Emily Burgueno, Iipay Nation of Santa Ysabel -**

* 7 more NRCS tribal planners coming on as San Diego County has the most Tribal Nations in the state with 18 Federally Recognized Tribes.
* NRCS needs training in-person about tribal culture.
* Tribal data sovereignty.
* Feasible solution for GSOB: a culturally appropriate solution is cultural burning and not pesticide use.
* Cultural burning with NRCS: getting help with implementation requirements.
* Traditional water catchment practices such as dam removals.
* Other means of communication besides email.
* Quarterly meeting instead of bi-annual meetings.

**Marlene Dusek, Payomkawichum, Kumeyaay, and Cupa people -**

* GSOB and losing oak trees in their territory, a critical food source.
  + Pesticide use for control of GSOB on the base of the tree or the limbs getting into acorns or other plants tribes gather under oak trees.
* Food sovereignty and land control.
* Pesticide concerns: agency use, public data availability, human ingestion, soil contamination, waterways, contamination onto Rincon and Pala reservations; and access to land that hasn't been sprayed.
* San Luis Rey River and traditional waterways damned and canaled interrupting fishing and traditional harvesting.
* Cultural burning: funding and tribal community input from elders or youth.
* Wildfire concerns.

From the Zoom Chat

**Tanya Williamson, Picayune Rancheria of the Chukchansi Indians -**

* Grow Tribe’s capacity: EPA Program and Natural Resource Department.
* Conservation of: traditional foods, native plants and animals
* Invasive species eradication.
* Recycling.
* Protection of cultural territories.

**Michael Lennox, Southeast Muskogee Santa Rosa Band in Florida -**

* Cultural resources stewardship and watershed restoration.
* Barriers to intertribal partnerships in urban areas.

**Veronica Santos, Manzanita Band of the Kumeyaay Nation -**

* GSOB concerns.
* Returning prescribed fire to the land as trees need smoke.
* Food sovereignty
* Section 106 consultation
* The Tribe’s water.

**NRCS PROGRAM UPDATES - Brandon Bates - Asst. State Conservationist for Programs**

FY 2024 EQIP, Tribal (All applications funded)

Total Contracts = 9 Total Obligation Amount = $698,075 Total Contracted Acres = 1,726

Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), Tribal (All applications funded)

Total Contracts = 4 Total Obligation Amount = $676,544 Total Contracted Acres = 829

2025 Application Deadlines:   
November 15 - EQIP  
January 31, 2025 - IRA Act Now  
April 15, 2025 - CSP

**PARTNER PRESENTATION - Allie Hostler, Klamath Trinity Resources Conservation District (KTRCD)**

* The Klamath Trinity RCD is chartered under Hoopa Tribal Business codes.
* Promote land stewardship and sovereignty as Hoopa People as river People.
* KTRCD has a cooperative agreement with NRCS CA, they are on the 3rd year to bridge the gap of NRCS and Tribal producers.
* They want to empower their community to reclaim healthy lifestyles.
* Sees the healing that occurs when they interact with the food system and with the land.
* Host 14-16 Farmers markets per year and helps produce opportunity for local food producers.
* Partner with CalFresh to support the Market Match for Snap and CalFresh benefit holders who can get fresh produce at their market and have a system set up with the farmers to get reimbursed on the spot.
* Work to provide food producer education opportunities.
* Youth livestock project to raise cattle, swine, and chickens. Helped them with financial planning similar to 4-H.
* Develop a Food Hub with the LFPA program and the Hoopa Valley Tribe for tribal producers.
* KTRCD awarded a Track 2 grant from California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) to further develop the Food Hub with the Nutritious School Lunch Initiative.
* Conservation of foraged foods with no tribal laws on it; don’t want to create a market for traditional-foraged foods.
* Improve access to NRCS programs.
* NRCS Program policy issues:
  + Land ownership requirements as assignment land causes issues. The tribe assigns grazing assignments for 4 years and NRCS requires 5 years for leases.
  + The THPO concurrence process. The timeliness of the planning process and the cultural resources review. When the cultural resources process requires both SHPO and THPO review, overworked local NRCS staff, paperwork, and not having the funds to cover up front costs before receiving the payment from NRCS.

**CULTURAL RESOURCES AND SECTION 106 PROCESS DISCUSSION -**

**Chris Null, NRCS State Archeologist,**

**Shasta Gaughen, THPO Pala Band of Mission Indians, and**

**Jill McCormick, THPO Fort Yuma Quechan Indian Tribe**

* **Chris Null:**
  + Section 106 is antiquated and has had no new regulations for 20 years and does not reflect the current environment or needs of tribes and the state of CA is 40 years behind on this.
  + NRCS must observe the trust responsibility of tribes and recognize their sovereignty.
  + Consult with 180 tribes including some non-recognized tribes.
  + Acknowledgement of tribes as the subject matter experts.
  + Carlos as the agency official directs how NRCS does this in California.
  + Two challenges include addressing the concerns tribes have with their ancestral lands and facilitating requests for accessing lands to survey for monitoring.
  + Tribes cannot force a landowner to allow access for monitoring on private property, the landowner has the right to refuse access.
  + Currently NRCS has no funds to pay tribal monitors but would like to do this in the future.
  + Received approval to treat tribes’ projects as a priority.
* **Shasta Gaughen (view her PowerPoint):**
  + What should Consultation include:
    - Understanding of tribal Sovereignty.
    - Respect for tribal ways of knowing and defining significance.
    - Early and frequent communication.
    - Time for tribes to respond.
    - Understanding the need for confidentiality.
    - Protecting sensitive information.
    - Following up.
* **Jill McCormick**:
  + Not a THPO yet, has worked for the Ft Yuma Tribe for 6 years and has experience for 20 years with different Tribes. Does a lot of similar functions as a THPO.
  + The Tribe has created a ‘Nope List’ together with BIA and recommends other tribes make one.
  + Recommends having an additional meeting other than the TAC to discuss Section 106.

**ACTIONS ITEMS FOR NRCS PRIOR TO SPRING 2025 TAC:**

* Create presentations for NRCS Programs such as [Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs-initiatives/csp-conservation-stewardship-program/california/conservation-stewardship) and [Alternative-Funding-Arrangement Regional Conservation Partnership Program (AFA-RCPP)](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs-initiatives/rcpp-regional-conservation-partnership-program/california/regional).
* Provide guidance on assignment lands related to eligibility.

**CLOSING REMARKS**

**Next meeting will be in the Spring 2025.**