



## Climate Change Community of Practice Convening Report

Sunday, June 1, 2008  
9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Reno, NV: John Ascuaga's Nugget Casino and Resort

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### **I. Participation**

The participants represented the following tribes, organizations and agencies:

- Snoqualmie Tribe
- Michigan Department of Environmental Quality
- Tulalip Tribes
- University of South Dakota Government Research Bureau
- Muckleshoot Tribe
- National Tribal Environmental Council
- Cankdeska Cikana Community College (Spirit Lake Tribe, ND)
- Washington State University
- National Wildlife Federation Tribal Lands Program
- EPA American Indian Environmental Office
- Native American Rights Fund
- Northwest Indian College
- Institute for Tribal Environmental Professionals
- Walker River Paiute Tribe
- Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California
- Sitting Bull College
- Haskell Indian Nations University
- American Indian and Alaska Native Climate Change Working Group
- Law & Justice Committee, Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians

### **II. Agenda for Discussion**

Policy Research Center staff facilitated a discussion to assess:

- Emerging Policy Issues
  - o What are the significant issues emerging in Indian Country related to climate change?
  - o What perspectives do policymakers, practitioners, and researchers have about climate change?
  - o What issues have organizations and individuals mobilized to address? What is the scope of their respective work on climate change?
- What might a comprehensive agenda to address climate change entail, given the CoP concept, state of efforts to address climate change in Indian country, and the resources (people, organizations, technology) currently available to us?
  - o Who else needs to be involved in this effort? How should we recruit them?

- What data and research are necessary to support our work? What are our data and research priorities?
- What tools/resources are needed to build capacity to address climate change in Indian Country?

### III. Emerging Policy Issues

The discussion centered around two major themes: community adaptation and “greening” energy production.

#### Community Adaptation

Many comments in the convening related to **how tribes will adapt to the effects and impact of climate change**. Adaptation can be very expensive. A number of participants raised concerns about how everyday tribal members would afford the measures often required to adapt to climate change. Participants noted that a lot of reservation residents are not accustomed to paying for services such as water, garbage pick-up, etc. There was also significant discussion about returning to more traditional practices which work to address climate change.<sup>1</sup>

**Accessible public education** about climate change was also a key issue mentioned at the convening. There was strong agreement that better public education programs need to be put in place to help residents of tribal communities understand the impact of climate change, while also offering ways that residents can participate in lessening the impact of climate change in their community. An important education issue to think about going forward is how to translate hard-to-grasp, technical concepts underlying the climate change issues so that they may be understood by the whole community.

Participants also strongly agreed that we must **rely on stories and traditional wisdom and practices** to help communicate about the impact of climate change in Indian Country. A number of organizations and communities have already done some work to gather stories about the local and real effects of climate change in their own backyards. For instance, one participant shared how climate change has affected their tribe’s traditional rabbit drives because the drives rely on a certain balance of rain storms and snow pack. All the residents of this community would be able to understand the very real impact of climate change when explained through this cultural tradition. There was a strong desire on the part of participants to gather more information about how traditional knowledge can inform the future direction of each culture and community in adapting to this challenge. Finally, it was suggested that many cultures and communities may already practice customs and traditions that can incorporate information gathering. For example, many of the Northwest tribes participate in an annual traditional canoe journey in the summer and can take water samples along the way.<sup>2</sup> What other ways can traditional practices assist tribes in doing their own climate change research?

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<sup>1</sup> Some suggested simple, inexpensive programs that are based on historical practices, such as promoting the practice of bringing your plate and cup in a pillowcase when visiting grandma’s house instead of relying on styrafoam plates and cups, which will end up in landfills.

<sup>2</sup> The practice of taking water samples along traditional canoe journeys in the Pacific Northwest has already been occurring. Developed by the Yukon Watershed Program in Canada, they began teaching other native nations such as the Tulalip Tribes how to incorporate this kind of sample gathering into their traditional journeys. Tulalip is now in the process of training several other neighboring Northwest tribes to participate.

A number of ways were suggested to **incorporate Native students** in adapting to climate change. A large network of tribal community colleges with students eager to do this kind of research in their communities already exists. Participants expressed interest in figuring out ways to engage these students in research projects. There was also a desire for more information about how to structure a good internship program with tribal ecology departments to involve these students in the work.

#### “Greening” Energy Production

**Finding better, environmentally friendly ways to produce energy**, or “greening” energy production, was the second major theme around which participants discussed climate change. Many participants expressed interest in more research about **“cap and trade” systems**<sup>3</sup> and how tribal enterprises and energy production projects could participate in such systems. Some tribal governments have come together to create their own cap and trade systems, while others are participating in larger systems with state and local governments. Participants want to know in what ways tribes around the country are working to reduce their “carbon footprint”<sup>4</sup> through market driven systems like cap and trade. A lot of interest was also expressed in researching “carbon sequestration” programs.<sup>5</sup>

The discussion about greening energy production also produced a lot of brainstorming about **developing new job opportunities**, or “green collar jobs.” The group wanted to know more about how green energy projects might offer new local job opportunities and how they can maximize that potential. Some participants suggested that research projects dealing with developing local “green” economies could be very useful. Additionally, there was a lot of agreement that tribal leaders need better tools to understand and negotiate green energy projects that properly benefit their communities.

#### IV. Moving a Tribal Climate Change Agenda Forward: Next Steps

Participants expressed a strong need for **gathering stories and knowledge** about the specific ways that climate change is affecting their communities. It was agreed that the Community of Practice (CoP) needed to identify those organizations, communities, and individuals who have already started recording and documenting stories and knowledge about climate change in Indian Country. This could be done by convening those already working on gathering stories to get a sense of what information is being gathered, how it is being gathered, how it is being used, and how it is being shared. This group can develop a toolkit for other communities who would like to gather their own stories. The NCAI Policy Research Center (PRC) could work to develop a web-based method to collect and share these stories, if such a resource is desirable. There was considerable enthusiasm about finding ways to involve tribal community colleges as key partners for this kind of work.

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<sup>3</sup> “The Cap and Trade system involves trading of emission allowances, where the total allowance is strictly limited or ‘capped’. A regulatory authority established the cap which is usually considerably lower than the historic level of emissions.” Source: Climate Change Philanthropy Action Network, <http://www.climatephilanthropists.org/basics>.

<sup>4</sup> A carbon footprint is the “representation of the effect human activities have on the climate in terms of the total amount of greenhouse gases produced (measured in units of carbon dioxide).” Source: Royal Geographical Society, <http://www.esd.rgs.org/glossarypopup.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Carbon sequestration “refers to the process by which atmospheric carbon is absorbed into carbon sinks such as the oceans, forests and soil.” Source: Royal Geographical Society, <http://www.esd.rgs.org/glossarypopup.html>.

After a convening of the child welfare CoP earlier this year, the PRC staff presented the idea of **developing a social networking map**. The PRC can work with web developers to create a map that will allow CoP participants to place information about their organizations and work on a map that will serve as a national directory of work being done on tribal climate change. This visual representation would allow for easy identification of organizations' agendas and the relationships between organizations. Participants in the climate change CoP were very enthusiastic about developing this tool.

Due to the complexity and technical elements of how climate change is impacting Indian Country, participants expressed a strong desire to provide an **introductory session on climate change for tribal leaders**. The PRC can work with interested partners in the CoP to develop a training for tribal leaders as a "101" on climate change issues, greening energy production, community adaptation, use of traditional knowledge, engaging state legislators to address common concerns, etc. This training could take place at NCAI's annual convention in October 2008 in Phoenix, Arizona.

In the discussion, a number of existing web resources to address climate change in Indian Country were highlighted. However, it was the sense of the group that some resources are better developed than others, and many participants are not fully aware of many of the sites available that might be useful to them in their work to address climate change. There was agreement among the participants that it would be useful for the PRC to **convene various groups with climate change websites to discuss the ways in which we can better link information** and identify where it would be most appropriate to build a "go-to" climate change website based on the most widely used and developed resources. Participants were very enthusiastic about the development/identification of live news feeds about climate change, blogs to share information, stories and gatherings, a comprehensive online database of people and organizations working around the country, document library with up-to-date research and information, and a social networking map.