



TRUST LAND RESOURCES • RESOURCES STEWARDSHIP • RESULTS THAT MATTER

Message from the Deputy Director

Greetings,
 I returned from a lengthy detail to the BIA, Office of Indian Services at the end of 2023 and coming back to Office of Trust Services felt like I had returned home. On my detail I had oversight of the Indian Services side of the BIA house (Social Services, Transportation, Tribal Government, the 477 Program, and Tourism) and I gained a new appreciation for the broad spectrum of Indian Affairs programs available to Tribes.

Back in Trust Services we have some exciting new programs we will be implementing in 2024. The first is the Bison Program and the Division of Indigenous Connectivity and Technology. You can read more about these programs in the pages that follow. A final rule of Fee to Trust regulations effective on January 11, 2024, makes the process more efficient, simpler, and less expensive to support restoration of Tribal homelands.

Recruitment of key positions at the Central office and across the country through single open ended job announcements has been a success. We filled key positions with talented staff who will be introduced in this and future newsletters.

Johnna Blackhair
 Deputy Bureau Director-Trust Services

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Blackfeet Wisdom

“What is life? It is the flash of a firefly in the night. It is the breath of a buffalo in the wintertime. It is the little shadow which runs across the grass and loses itself in the sunset”.

Time is valuable. Spend it with the ones you love.

TRUST SERVICES OVERVIEW



JOB OPENINGS

Vacancies

Program	Grade	Position	Location	Closes
Real Estate	GS-5/7/9/11	Realty Specialist	Multiple	6/17/2024
Natural Resources	GS-14	Natural Resource Spec.	Lakewood, CO	2/27/2024
Deputy Director	GS-14	Supy Mgmt & Program Analyst	Remote	2/15/2024
Environmental Services	GS-14	Program Manager	Remote	2/27/2024
Geodata Evaluation	GS-7/9	GIS Information System Specialist	2 Remote	3/01/2024

STAFFING CHANGES

Welcome New Employees in 2023

Name	Program	Position	Location
Jeffrey Good	Water & Power	Division Chief	Lakewood, CO
Barb Mamersma	Indian Energy	Production Accountability Spec.	Lakewood, CO
Kerri Gallant	Indian Energy	Mineral Revenue Specialist	Lakewood, CO
Nathan Lillie	Trust Services	Specialist Assistant	Oklahoma City

Promotions

Name	Position	Location
Trina Locke	Directorate, Environmental & Natural Resources	Albuquerque, NM
Justin Gallegos	Supervisory Minerals Specialist	Lakewood, CO

Best Wishes to Employees Departing Trust Services in 2023

Name	Program	Title	State	Reason
Steven Mesa	Geospatial	GIS Specialist	CO	Retired
Thomas Lowell	Forestry	Forester	CO	Transfer
Jana Waters	Realty	Realty Specialist	MT	Transfer

NEWSLETTER DISCLAIMER

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FACE TO FACE AFTER COVID

OTS Staff Ready to Reconnect

COVID restrictions put a damper on face-to-face meetings. Communications transitioned from in-person meetings to text or chat messages, emails, or Microsoft Teams video calls. It was great to have OTS staff together for an in-person staff meeting. After hours we spent time visiting over dinner. OTS employees onboarded during the pandemic were introduced to existing staff and our FY2023 accomplishments were celebrated.

The afterhours meet and greet at a local Albuquerque restaurant was well attended. Photos depict how happy we were to put the pandemic behind us. It was a wonderful time reconnecting with colleagues.



Amanda Garrison, Supervisory Minerals Revenue Specialist, and her husband Matt



OTS Team after hours meet and greet



Darin Begay, Property Management Specialist, and his wife Victoria



Sherry Kircher, Branch Chief, Environmental Resources and Ryan Portalatin, Fish & Wildlife Resource Specialist



Michelle Morrison, Fiduciary Trust Officer/IESC, Dawn Selwyn, Trust Officer, Judy Jones, Management Analyst



Micah Runnels, Deputy Superintendent, Uintah & Ouray Agency and Payton Batliner, Director (Acting), Indian Energy Service Center



Karen Herrera, Pathways Program Specialist, Albert Bond, Division Chief, Energy and Minerals, Charlene Toledo, Division Chief, Trust Asset Ownership & Title



BIA Permitting Initiatives

The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) provided unprecedented funding to Federal agencies to support the timely, efficient, and effective environmental review and permitting of critical infrastructure projects.

\$5 Million to Support Tribal Engagement

With IRA funds provided to the [Federal Permitting Improvement Steering Council](#) (Permitting Council) Environmental Review Improvement Fund (ERIF), the Permitting Council Executive Director (ED) is making an initial \$5 million available to Tribal governments to support Tribal engagement in the environmental review and authorization process for FAST-41 covered projects. The ED will refer to ERIF funding set aside for Tribal governments as the [Environmental Review Improvement Fund Tribal Assistance Program](#) (ERIF TAP).

What is FAST-41?

On December 4, 2015, the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act) was signed into law. Title 41 of this Act (42 U.S.C. § 4370m et seq.), referred to as the "FAST-41," created a new governance structure, set of procedures, and funding authorities to improve the Federal environmental review and authorization process for covered and infrastructure projects.

The Permitting Council ED recognizes the capacity issues that Tribes face when participating in the Federal environmental review and authorization process for infrastructure projects, including FAST-41 covered projects.

Funding provided will support capacity building for Tribal governments to meaningfully participate in the following actions:

- Environmental reviews such as the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and
- Consultations under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act

This will help make the environmental review and authorization process for FAST-41 covered projects timelier and more efficient.

BIA and Permitting Council MOUs

OTS is entering into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Permitting Council and will serve as a pass-through office in support of this effort.

In addition, OTS will enter into a separate MOU for \$8 Million over three years through July 2026 to acquire contracted support for direct service Tribes or those Tribes who prefer BIA manage the permitting activities for Tribal FAST-41 covered projects. OTS is coordinating with BIA Regions respective programs to identify a plan to ensure this support will aid in modernizing the way BIA completes and tracks permitting while ensuring all Tribal FAST-41 projects are successful. Contractors are anticipated to begin in March 2024.



Photo: 2023 Indigenous Connectivity Summit in Alaska flyer

New! Division of Indigenous Connectivity and Technology

The Indigenous Connectivity and Technology Division (ICTD) is the news of the OTS Divisions. The mission builds upon the Bureau’s unique role and fiduciary duty to manage tribal assets, including natural resources and energy. The Division is responsible to consolidate, coordinate, develop, manage, and advance tribal interest on tribal lands for each of the following areas:

- Wireless communications encompassing broadband
- Electromagnetic spectrum
- Technology
- Electric vehicle initiatives.

Role as DOI Liaison and Policy Development

The Division serves as the primary interagency and interdepartmental liaison, tasked with effectively communicating Secretarial tribal priorities, contributing to the development of new national policies, and fostering consistent intergovernmental and tribal communications on these vital topics in line with federal trust responsibilities.

ICTD will work on a national policy strategy on tribal broadband and electromagnetic spectrum initiatives for the benefit of Tribal Nations, including participation with the [White House Office of Science Technology and Policy](#) (OSTP) National Strategy and the American Broadband Initiative (ABI) that has historically excluded tribal priorities.

Electromagnetic Spectrum Resources

ICTD will have a special focus on advancing the Department’s role in promoting the management and agency coordination of Tribal Nations’ electromagnetic spectrum resources on Tribal lands for new economic development opportunities with a focus on Tribes’ “opportunistic use” of spectrum through new spectrum audit pilot programs, including funding coordination (potentially through existing OIED broadband infrastructure funds). Tribal broadband and radio services improvement, including resolving DOI’s existing download/upload speeds to meet industry standards

- Assistance with OCIO’s non-federal government radio frequency use agreements
- Electric vehicles
- Wireless networks, especially resolving existing BIA/BIE connectivity issues
- Drone operations and programs at BIE post-secondary schools
- LiDAR contracting under new 638 agreements
- National policy planning related to Tribes’ digital and technological resources
- Technical assistance including digital infrastructure appraisals and federal grants

DIRECTORATE, ENVIRONMENTAL & NATURAL RESOURCES



The Bureau of Indian Affairs, Deputy Bureau Director, Trust Services announced the selection of its newest senior executive, Trina Locke, an enrolled member of the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation from Fort Berthold, North Dakota, to lead the Environmental and Natural Resources programs within the Office of Trust Services. (Pictured above).

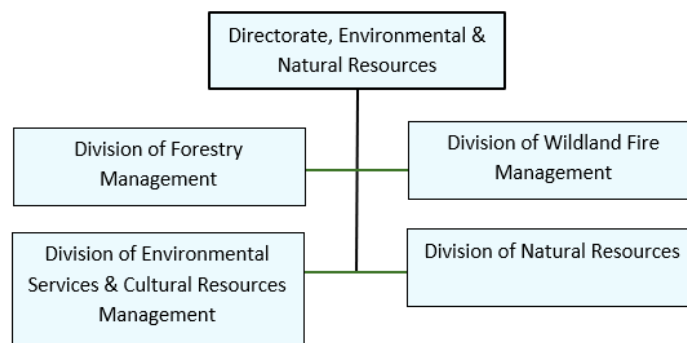
The Directorate, Environmental and Natural Resources is responsible for providing coordination, management, planning and oversight for the development and protection of trust land and natural resources on privately owned Indian forested, agricultural and range lands held in trust by the United States of America.

Trina's long career has included serving as a program analyst within the Office of the Assistant Secretary - Indian Affairs' Division of Facilities Management and Construction. She moved to the BIA, Office of Trust Services as the Division Chief, Program Management and Coordination (PMC) for the Office of Trust Services where she has spent three years working for the office.

In the PMC she built partnerships across DOI and other Federal agencies, providing support to Tribes at their request, on behalf of those partners such as the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, she oversaw BIA's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act funding, and drove keystone initiatives in Ecosystem Restoration and Bison across DOI for the benefit of Tribes while ensuring equity.

"Trina has had an outstanding career in program administration within Indian Affairs for the past 20 years, most recently serving as the Acting Deputy Bureau Director for the Office of Trust Services," said **Deputy Bureau Director, Trust Services Johnna Blackhair**. "I am pleased to announce her promotion to executive leadership as she is well prepared for this key position."

The Directorate, Environmental & Natural Resources oversees four (4) Divisions





*Swinomish Indian Tribal Community members and staff tend the clam garden.
Photo Credit: Swinomish Fisheries Department.*

BRANCH OF TRIBAL CLIMATE RESILIENCE

Swinomish Clam Garden Project: Building Climate Resilience Through Sustaining First Foods & Connecting Communities

The Swinomish Indian Tribal Community (SITC) is revitalizing the ancient practice of clam gardening not just for food sustainability or climate resilience but to strengthen community bonds and share knowledge with other Indigenous groups.

Since summer 2022, they have been constructing the first modern clam garden in the U.S., aiming to boost native clam abundance and improve the well-being of community members. These clam gardens, maintained by Northwest Coastal Indigenous people, not only support clams but also enhance biodiversity, offering a solution to threats like ocean acidification and sea level rise.

SITC is sharing ancestral teachings and collaborating with Indigenous communities, including Coast Salish First Nations in British Columbia, fostering connections and hope amid environmental challenges.

The success of this project goes beyond ecological outcomes, already achieving success by bringing community members together to share stories on the beach. For further details, you can access the full story at <https://www.bia.gov/news/swinomish-clam-garden-project-building-climate-resilience-through-sustaining-first-foods>.



Swinomish Indian Tribal Community members, Josephine Jefferson, and Alana Quintasket, add rocks to the clam garden wall during a gathering of Indigenous aquaculture practitioners. Photo Credit: Swinomish Fisheries Department.





Alaska village of Napakiak, Alaska is at risk of severe erosion by the nearby Kuskokwim River. Photo credit U.S. Air Force/Alaska National Guard 2019.

ArcGIS Story Map: Voluntary Community-Driven Relocation Program

The BIA Branch of Tribal Climate Resilience joined forces with the Branch of Geospatial Support to develop an ArcGIS Story Map focused on the Voluntary Community-Driven Relocation program. This collaborative initiative stems from the Biden-Harris Administration's announcement in November 2022, unveiling a groundbreaking program aimed at assisting Tribal communities severely impacted by climate-related environmental threats.

Under the guidance of the Department of the Interior, the Voluntary Community-Driven Relocation program features Tribally led demonstration projects, supported by a substantial financial commitment of \$115 million. This funding, sourced from President Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), will be allocated to 11 severely affected Tribes, enabling them to pursue relocation, managed retreat, and protect-in-place efforts, along with comprehensive climate adaptation planning.

The collaborative efforts extend further with additional support from the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) and the Denali Commission. The ArcGIS Story Map will serve as a powerful tool to visualize and communicate the significance and impact of these initiatives in promoting climate resilience within Tribal communities.

For a detailed exploration of these initiatives and their impact, you can view the Story Map at

<https://biamaps.geoplatform.gov/TCR-CDR/>.

DESCRM Announces Winners of the [Young Tribal Leaders Art Contest](#)

Native youth and young professionals across the nation submitted their art pieces centering themes of culture, environment, and climate. A handful of winners were selected in February with travel sponsorship to share their work at the [2024 National Tribal and Indigenous Climate Conference](#) in Anchorage, Alaska this September.



Digital photograph by Jenni Rose

NYCALC 2024

Applications are open to Native high schoolers until March 15. TCR partners with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in collaboration with multiple federal, Tribal, and non-governmental organizations to offer an experiential, youth-driven conservation leadership training for Native high school and college-aged youth known as the Native Youth Climate Adaptation Leadership Congress (NYCALC). Learn more about NYCALC and encourage others to apply at www.nycalc.org.



For over 2,000 years, the Hopi People have farmed on land with only 6–10 inches of annual precipitation. Today, Hopi children learn both the practices and process of Hopi dryland farming and the values, customs, and identities that underpin them. Photo credit: Michael K. Johnson

TCR Staff contribute to the recently published 5th National Climate Assessment (NCAS)

Matt Laramie (Northwest Regional Coordinator) was the Federal Coordinating Lead Author of the Tribes and Indigenous Peoples Chapter of NCAS. On January 19, he presented during the chapter webinar, a recording of which will be available on the report website. Coral Avery (Natural Resource Specialist) had beadwork and digital art featured in the report in the Art X Climate section and Tribes and Indigenous Peoples chapter.

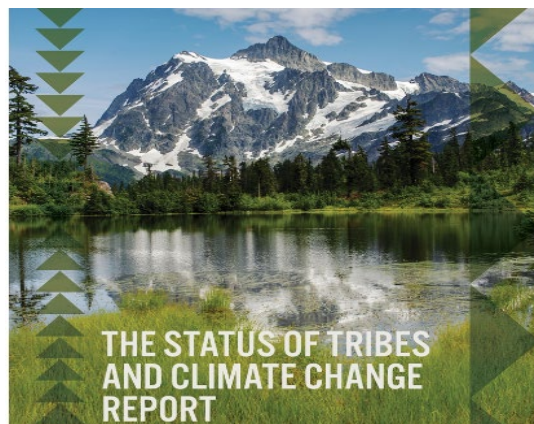
View the report and register for the upcoming chapter webinars at <https://globalchange.gov/our-work/fifth-national-climate-assessment>.

New Tribal Success Story highlights collaborative partnerships and cultural revitalization.

TCR and the USGS Climate Adaptation Science Centers (CASCs) partner with Tribal organizations across the nation to host the [Tribal Climate Resilience Liaison Network](#). In 2022, the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community (SITC) completed the first modern Clam Garden project in the U.S. with significant funding from the Northwest CASC.

Two Northwest Liaisons, Coral Avery (Tribal Youth & Climate Liaison) and Kylie Avery (Assistant Tribal Liaison) represented the NW CASC for a day of building as funders were invited to contribute to the project and learn how this traditional practice builds resilience in the face of climate change. TCR has supported several climate projects with SITC through financial and technical assistance. Read the full story at <https://www.bia.gov/service/tcr-annual-awards-program>.

Status of Tribes and Climate Change (STACC) Report



TCR and ITEP Tribes & Climate Change Program begin the second volume of the *Status of Tribes and Climate Change (STACC) Report*. Volume II will be published in 2024. Read the first report at <https://sites.google.com/view/stacc2021-item/home>.

DIVISION OF FOREST MANAGEMENT



Youth Camps planned for Nanwalek, Alaska and Bad River, Wisconsin

Division of Forestry Sponsors Tribal Forestry Summer Youth Camps

BIA Forestry is committed to engaging with Tribal youth. Summer camps provide an excellent forum for tribal youth to learn about forestry and career opportunities.

Indian forestry has witnessed a decline in the number of students completing college forestry programs and pursuing forestry careers. The BIA has a trust responsibility to help Tribes manage forests to provide a sustained yield of forest products and to restore and maintain resilience and ecologically functional lands. The BIA supports tribal goals aimed at achieving a balance of the protection of valued landscapes with the production of economic benefit through active forest management. Engaging tribal youth to promote Indian forestry and education is a positive step toward fostering interest in the management of Indian forests.

Workforce development is a current priority for the BIA. There are approximately 19.1 million acres of Indian forest lands that require management for the benefit of Tribes. At present, there are approximately 90 professional foresters across 12 Regions. In comparison, in 2011, the BIA employed approximately 160 professional foresters.

Requests for Proposals

In July of 2023 BIA Forestry announced the request for proposals for Tribal Forestry Summer Youth Camps aimed at advancing BIA and tribal forestry objects and supporting education and participation in Forestry and Natural Resources activities for tribal youth.

Twenty-eight (28) proposals were received at the Regional Offices in August 2023 where they were ranked and returned to Central Office. Utilizing available funding, BIA Forestry was able to fund eight (8) proposals that will collectively provide summer camp opportunities for approximately 240 Tribal youth. The camps are planned to begin in the summer of 2024.

- Camp at Nanwalek, Alaska to support a community effort to host a local 5-day camp with a series of workshops and guest speakers to educate youth on forestry, wildfire prevention, firewood gathering, and subsistence users.
- Camp at Bad River, Wisconsin to focus on forestry science, management skills, ethics, and traditional ecological knowledge.
- Other camps were funded at Cherokee, Mashantucket Pequot, Sault Ste. Marie, and Alabama-Coushatta.
- Confederated Tribes of the Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians camp, Oregon is planning another two-week camp where tribal youth will perform forestry and ethnobotany field research, and learn to read maps, run transects, perform fixed and variable radius inventory plots, perform plant keying and identification, establish soil pits, and use various scientific instrumentation.

Responses were positive, and the Division of Forestry hopes to provide additional Tribal Forestry Summer Youth Camp opportunities in FY 2025, dependent upon available funding.

2023 CTCLUSI Forestry/Ethnobotany Field Camp

Attendees participate in digging a soil pit with Oklahoma State University, College of Forestry Dean Tom DeLuca



Attendees dig a soil pit

Why Dig a Soil Pit?

Digging soil pits allow foresters to understand the characteristics, or the “soil profile” in a given area. The structure and function of forest soil is important in providing water, nutrients, and substrate support for the growth and stability of forest trees as well as other plants that grow in the forest.

What are Transects, and Why are They Important for Monitoring Natural Resources?

A transect is a straight line that cuts through a natural landscape so that standardized observations and measurements can be made. Transects are the building blocks of field observations. They are used to help measure, make observations, and record data across multiple monitoring plots. It allows the technician to track the complexity of the environment over time and compare it to others.



Source: National Park Service technician uses transect to conduct measurements of a coastal scrub plan

BRANCH OF FORESTRY INVENTORY & PLANNING

What You Missed at the 2024 ProGreen Expo: Highlights and Takeaways

The Branch of Forest Inventory and Planning (FIP) forester Chris LaCroix attended the [2024 ProGreen Expo](#), which was a three-day event that took place from January 30 to February 1 at the Colorado Convention Center in Denver, Colorado. The ProGreen expo is described as “the only green industry conference in the Rocky Mountain Region of its kind” and has occurred in Denver every year since 1993.



The ProGreen expo famously attracts more than 5,000 green industry professionals from the public and private sectors that are involved in fields such as urban and community forestry, arboriculture, landscaping, and turf.

ProGreen is an excellent opportunity for attendees to not only keep up with green industry trends, but also network and connect with like-minded industry leaders. For example, Chris LaCroix had the pleasure of connecting with Dana Coelho, Urban & Community Forestry National Program Manager with the USFS, which will hopefully create a new partnership and funding source for tribes and tribal nations to complete urban and community forestry projects. Chris received an excitedly open invitation for a representative from the BIA forestry team to be a guest on the industry favorite podcast titled ‘Discovering Forestry’ after introducing himself to the host of the podcast, Korey Lofy.

The expo offers a variety of educational sessions with opportunities for [International Society of Arboriculture](#) (ISA) certified arborist and other credentialed professionals to earn continuing education units to keep their certification up to date.

Day 1

Education presentations from respected industry members and Colorado State University extension staff covered topics such as Colorado urban tree identification, tree appraisal, the role of pH in tree success in Colorado, how to properly plan for trees when designing/redesigning landscapes, Dutch Elm Disease, the science of leaf color, fire blight, Japanese beetle, and rejuvenating parks through community tree restoration. This is just a short list of 100+ educational sessions that attendees could attend over the course of the three-day event.

Day 2

The second day of the expo kicked off with an unforgettable keynote speech titled “The Art of Amazement...How to Create More Value” led by Jon Petz. Jon Petz is a telecommunication salesman turned professional magician that used his magic to captivate the audience and spread his message of creating a wow effect in the workplace and going the extra mile to get increased engagement and attention in everyday mundane workflows.

The expo has an expansive show room floor that features over 100 exhibitors showcasing the latest products, services, and technologies for the green industry.

Arborist Corner



Also found on the expo floor is the “Arborist Corner”, which features a live 30-foot ash tree in which volunteer expo climbing arborists with the ISA Rocky Mountain chapter demonstrate and educate attendees on topics such as Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and how to routinely check climbing gear, rigging and climbing tips and tricks, aerial rescue, tree risk assessments, discussions on the [American National Standards Institute](#) (ANSI) Z133 safety requirements for arboriculture operations, plant health care demonstrations, and tree removal to name a few.

Indigenous People Underrepresented

ProGreen offered a variety of topics and interests, but it did not address the role of indigenous people and their land in the green industry. Indigenous people and their land underrepresented at ProGreen is a missed opportunity for Indigenous people to showcase their contributions and challenges in the green industry.



Chris attended an educational session that started with a prayer from a Native American from [Spirit of the Sun](#), an Indigenous-led nonprofit in Denver, was the only instance of Native American presence. There were no booths or speakers representing indigenous perspectives or projects. Future ProGreen expos should include more participation and collaboration from Native American nations, to highlight the benefits of working with tribes and tribal communities, the potential of urban forestry on tribal lands, and the opportunities for indigenous people in the green profession.



Orphan Wells Program Office (OWPO)

Weekly meetings between the OWPO, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the IESC are held to follow-up on Tribal Grants. These coordination meetings with OWPO focus on issuing the second round of grant awards for the \$150 Million Bipartisan Infrastructure Legislation available to Tribes for plugging and remediation of orphaned wells on Tribal lands.

The group includes work on development of Standard Operation procedures for in lieu of grants administered by the IESC and the coordination of future Tribal consultation sessions.

The IESC is working with the OWPO to finalize the BLM Indefinite Delivery, Indefinite Quantity (IDIQ) contract for the BIA Crow Agency In-Lieu of grant application.

Open Application Period

In preparation for announcing Phase 2 Tribal Orphaned Well grant and in-lieu-of grant opportunities, the Department invited Federally Recognized Tribes to attend listening sessions and provide feedback on proposed enhancement and updates to application requirements. The listening sessions were held on the following dates. All times are Mountain Standard Time:

- Wednesday, January 24, 1:00-2:00 p.m.
- Wednesday, January 31, 1:00-2:00 p.m.
- Wednesday, February 7, 1:00-2:00 p.m.

Award of grants and in-lieu-of-grants will be completed during August – September 2024.

Technical Assistance Opportunities

Technical assistance is available through the Orphaned Wells Program Office's Tribal Program Division. Contact the BIA at:

Email: DOI_OrphanedWells_Tribal@ios.doi.gov
Office: (202) 219-3283

Training Webinars and Open Office Hours

Information on the 2024 webinars and office hours will be posted as soon as it is available. Visit our [Tribal Orphaned Well website](#) for the latest information.

Tribes are encouraged to attend applicable webinars and office hour sessions. Office hours will be an open question and answer format for Tribes to ask any questions about the Orphaned Wells Program or grant application process.

IESC Welcomes New Staff Members



Ms. **Barb Hamersma**, **Production Accountability Specialist** (PAS) BLM NOC-IESC comes to IESC from the BLM Buffalo Field Office (BFO) in Wyoming where she worked in the Inspection & Enforcement Department as a Production Accountability Technician for 16 years and as a Legal Assistant for 1 year.



Barb Hamersma

In her free time, she enjoys hiking, hunting, fishing, taking pictures, rock hounding and watching my crazy chickens with her husband and 2 dogs.

Mr. **Jordan Clark**, **ONRR-IESC Minerals Revenue Specialist** has been a government employee for four years. He began his career at IBC Payroll Operations and later moved to IBC Payroll Benefits.

Jordan was born and raised in Oklahoma and travels back frequently to visit family. He has lived in Colorado for 8 years with his wife, Danielle and Pomeranian, Sophie. In his free time, he enjoys playing games with friends, spending time with family, and going to the gym.



Jordan Clark

Ms. **Kerri Gallant**, **ONRR-IESC Minerals Revenue Specialist** has been with ONRR for 11 years and worked in various areas of the organization, as well as performed multiple functions within ONRR-DISC for the last 7 years. Kerri is a proud member of the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe of South Dakota, as well as proud mother of one child that is days away from turning 18! In her free time, she enjoys attending concerts and the theater, as well as walking and hiking the beautiful state of Colorado.



Kerri Gallant with her spouse



Abandoned well and solar panels

IESC congratulates Justin Gallegos on New Promotion within the ONRR section at the IESC

Mr. Justin Gallegos was recently promoted from a Mineral Revenue Specialist to ONRR – IESC Supervisory Minerals Revenue Specialist. Justin will supervise the ONRR Support Team at the IESC.

Justin began his federal career in 2011 with the BLM as a Cartographic Technician. Justin also held positions with BLM as a GIS Specialist and a Land Law Examiner with the Colorado Fluid Minerals Division. Justin joined ONRR and the IESC Support team in August 2019.



In his spare time Justin enjoys spending time with his wife, Elizabeth, and newborn son William. He and his wife enjoy getting away to Steamboat Springs for hiking, mountain biking and skiing.

Standard Operating Procedures Fluid Minerals – Indian Training

Standard Operating Procedures Fluid Minerals – Indian Training is tentatively scheduled to be held virtually on March 26-27, 2024.

Multi-Agency Standard Operating Procedures Training - The Onshore Energy and Mineral Lease Management Interagency Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) establishes policies for government agency collaboration for energy and mineral leasing on federal and Indian trust land. The SOP establishes common standards and methods for creating efficient and effective working relationships between government agencies to achieve the DOI goal of accurate energy and minerals accountability for onshore federal and Indian lands.

The SOP is a living document that can be adjusted to reflect the evolving needs of stakeholders. Regular reviews and coordinated updates with the impacted organizations throughout DOI improve the performance of interagency activities by eliminating procedural ambiguities, establishing clear responsibilities, and updating organizational references.

Federal Partner Charters	Meeting Dates	Scheduled Time (Mountain Standard)
Southwest Region	January 9, 2024	9:00 AM – 12:00 PM
Oklahoma, Texas, Kansas	February 6, 2024	8:30 AM – 12:00 PM
Fort Berthold (Feds Only)	TBD	8:30 AM – 3:30 PM
Fort Berthold with MHA Nation	TBD	8:30 AM – 4:30 PM
Rocky Mountain Region	March 7, 2024	8:30 AM – 11:30 AM

Federal Partnership Charter Meetings

The purpose of a Federal Partnership team is to serve as a Department of the Interior inter-bureau/office forum for Indian energy and mineral resource development, royalty management coordination, and information exchange at the local office level.

The departmental bureaus and offices represented on the Partnership team operate under the Federal trust responsibility to Federally recognized Indian Tribes, Indian allottees, and Alaska Natives.

Upcoming Federal Partner’s Meeting Federal Partner meetings have been scheduled for the Fiscal Year.

Executive Management Group (EMG) Meeting

The Executive Management Group (EMG) will provide the IESC Director with a broader scope of expertise, technical assistance, and advocacy. The EMG may provide guidance on how to navigate the multi-agency aspects of strategic planning and may assist in prioritizing future projects. The EMG is comprised of the following: Director, BIA or their delegate, Director, ONRR, or their delegate, Assistant Director for Energy, Mineral and Realty Management, BLM, or their delegate, and Director, BTFA, or their delegate.

The next EMG Meeting is scheduled for February 21, 2024, in Lakewood, CO.

Indian Energy and Minerals Steering Committee (IEMSC) Meeting

The IEMSC is comprised of senior level management representatives from bureaus and offices within the Department of the Interior with direct responsibility for managing Indian energy and mineral resources and revenue management.

The BIA, BLM, the Office of Indian Energy and Economic Development (IEED), the Office of Surface Mining (OSM), the Office of Natural Resources Revenue (ONRR), the Bureau of Trust Funds Administration (BTFA), and the Office of Minerals Evaluation (OME). The IEMSC’s goal is to share information and solve issues involving energy and mineral development and revenue management on Indian lands at the lowest level feasible and to raise issues that cannot be resolved or that would require policy changes to the attention of the appropriate Assistant Secretary(s) or the Special Trustee.

The next IEMSC meeting is for February 22, 2024, in Lakewood, CO.

TAAMS Mineral Leasing Training

The next Web-Ex virtual TAAMS Mineral Leasing training is scheduled for February 27-29, 2024, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. MST.

Training will be provided to BIA and Tribal Contract/Compact Staff. Training is provided by CGI and a Realty Specialist from the Indian Energy Service Center. The IESC will continue to post additional trainings and overview sessions as they are scheduled.



Indian Affairs Invests \$1.5 Million in Bison Herd Expansion and Ecosystem Restoration

The Department of the Interior’s Office of the Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs announced on January 9, 2024, \$1.5 million from President Biden’s Investing in America agenda to support the restoration of bison populations and grassland ecosystems in Tribal communities. The funding will be divided between three Tribal led initiatives that aim to strengthen bison conservation and expansion, improved management of existing herds, and ecosystem restoration efforts in native grassland habitats. These investments also advance the Biden-Harris administration’s [America the Beautiful Initiative](#).

“Bison are vitally important culturally, economically, and ecologically. These investments from the President’s Investing in America agenda support our efforts to revitalize Tribal cultures and communities and help conserve and restore important ecosystems that benefit all Americans,” said Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs, Bryan Newland. “This exemplifies the Biden-Harris administration’s dedication to building a more resilient and sustainable future for Tribal nations and all Americans.”

Bison are a keystone species that plays a crucial role in maintaining the ecological balance of diverse landscapes, while also supporting economic development and Indigenous food sovereignty and security. The projects will focus on habitat restoration, genetic diversity preservation, and the expansion of bison populations in collaboration with Indigenous communities utilizing [Indigenous Knowledge](#).

This funding will help advance bison restoration efforts, which can enhance soil development, restore native plants and wildlife, and promote carbon sequestration, providing benefits for agriculture, outdoor recreation, and Tribes. The funding, provided through [the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law](#), is part of the Department’s [Grasslands Keystone Initiative](#), unveiled as part of a Restoration and Resilience Framework that is guiding \$2 billion in investments from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and inflation Reduction Act to restore lands and waters and advance climate resilience. The Framework also includes a commitment to restoring core sage brush areas across Western States and into Alaska where bison once thrived.

Bison Herd Expansion Projects:

Cheyenne and Arapaho Bison Expansion Project:

The project aims to enhance the existing bison herd of around 650 by doubling the pasture area on Tribal lands, addressing infrastructure needs, and incorporating climate-smart practices. The project will increase herd size, improve ecosystem health, and explore a market for bison products resulting in ecological restoration, cultural preservation, and economic development in Northwest Oklahoma.

Three Affiliated Tribes of the Fort Berthold
Reservation, North Dakota

Hans Creek Bison Company Expansion and Ecological Restoration: The project focuses on expanding the Twin Buttes Hans Creek bison range by building a 10,000-acre pasture on Tribal lands to support the expansion of the existing 250-head bison herd. Expansion would allow an increase in capacity of up to 4,000 bison. The program, rooted in Indigenous values, seeks ecological restoration by rewilding, acknowledging the critical role of large-scale bison herds in maintaining ecosystem health. Indian Affairs will provide funding for fencing materials to complete the pasture expansion, supporting spiritual and cultural beliefs of the Nueta while also supporting sustainable bison management practices.

Shoshone Bannock Tribes of the Fort Hall
Reservation, Idaho

The project seeks to reintroduce buffalo on traditional grazing lands, enhancing food and economic sovereignty for the Shoshone Bannock Tribes. With a current buffalo count of 465, the project aims to expand the herd to 1,100 by introduction of additional buffalo, fostering cultural significance, employment opportunities, and economic gain. The project aligns with goals of environmental resilience and mitigating climate change impacts through soil health management. Indian Affairs funding will support infrastructure for animal control, management, and public safety by repairing or replacing fencing and watering systems.



American bison once numbered 60 million in North America, with the population anchored in what is now the central United States. Many Indigenous cultures, especially in areas where the species was most abundant, developed strong ties with bison and relied upon them for sustenance, shelter, and cultural and religious practices.

In the 19th century, bison were nearly driven to extinction through uncontrolled hunting and a U.S. policy of eradication tied to intentional harm against and control of Tribes. By 1889, only a few hundred wild bison remained. The persecution of bison contributed to the decline of healthy grassland ecosystems and, eventually, to the Dust Bowl in the 1930s. The loss of the keystone species, coupled with land conversion, led to declines of other important grassland wildlife, such as migratory birds and pollinators.



BRANCH OF RESOURCE SOLUTIONS

BIA's Solution Trust Accountability Tracker (STAT) is in the wrapping up the testing phase and is now prepared for the Security Control assessment. We anticipate receiving the necessary Authority to Operate in the coming months.

This STAT system will offer a mechanism to digitize workflows and track metrics needed for reporting and program evaluation. This is a tremendous step in providing the tools necessary for programs to evaluate services to all our stakeholders and work towards improving the BIA customer experience. Future integrations will include external user access, upgrading authentication to Azure AD, and additional tools.

The BRS was a key contributor to compiling a proposal for an IT System feasibility study funding award for Right-of-Way Permitting. DRIS and BRS are active participants in the OTS Permitting Team and anticipate assisting with system modernization in order to enhance indigenous connectivity and technology capabilities, while ensuring appropriate cybersecurity controls are in place.

BRANCH OF GEODATA EXAMINATION & VALIDATION

The Branch of Geodata Examination and Validation (GDEV) Fee to Trust GIS Team attended The Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians in Portland Oregon in January. The Team presented on NW Regions 2023 Stats on Fee to Trust Land Description Evaluation & Validation (LDEV) applications processed by the GDEV team. The NW Region was the leading region in Fee to Trust LDEV applications.



Photo: Marlon Dick, Geographic Information System (GIS) Specialist, Brandon Larrabee, GIS Specialist, Bryan Newland, Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs, Trisha Johnson (TJ), GIS Specialist

DIVISION OF TRUST LAND CONSOLIDATION



Mission

The Mission of the Division of Trust Land Consolidation is to facilitate sound land management and administration, support Tribal sovereignty and self-determination, and promote economic opportunity in Indian Country by reducing [Indian land fractionation](#).

Land Acquisition Reservations

The Trust Land Consolidation implemented land acquisition efforts at the following four reservations:

- Fort Belknap Indian Community of the Fort Belknap Reservation of Montana
- Oglala Sioux Tribe
- Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation
- Wind River Indian Reservation: Eastern Shoshone Business Committee and Northern Arapaho Business Committee

Umatilla Trust Land Consolidation Sales

As of February 21, 2024, the total number of fractional interests acquired was 69 for 40 tracts. The approved dollar amount of Trust Land Consolidation sales for the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) was \$387,841.93. The CTUIR is now preparing a Tribal Resolution to begin Tribally Funded offers.

Next Sale Locations

Wind River Reservation has been identified as the next location for land acquisitions. The DOI [Appraisal and Valuation Services Office](#) (AVSO) has completed the appraisal of 751 tracts. The offer set has not yet been decided.

Ongoing efforts continue with the Eastern Shoshone Tribe and Northern Arapaho Tribe of the Wind Reservation to obtain the Tribal acquisition priorities.

Upcoming Tribal Consultation



DLTC will conduct three Tribal Consultation sessions for the DTLC Strategic Plan FY 2022-2026:

- Session 1: July 16, 2024
- Session 2: July 17, 2024
- Session 3: July 18, 2024

All sessions will be held from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. EST.



Two Medicine Dam, Blackfeet Reservation, Montana

Mission

The mission of the Division of Water and Power (DWP) is to promote self-determination, economic opportunities, and public safety through the sound management of irrigation, dam and power facilities owned by Bureau of Indian Affairs. DWP's mission also includes the protection of Indian water rights, water development projects, litigation support and attorney's fees as well as the Bureau's responsibilities under the Federal Power Act in re-licensing hydropower projects that affect Indian trust resources. The DWP includes three branches:

- Branch of Irrigation and Power
- Branch of Safety of Dams
- Branch of Water Resources

The Safety of Dams Branch is the focus of this issue of the Newsletter.

New Division of Water & Power Chief

The Division of Water and Power is pleased to welcome Jeff Good as the new Division Chief.



Jeff Good, new Division Chief

A native of Eunice, New Mexico, Jeff Good is a member of the Osage Nation. He graduated from the United States Coast Guard Academy in 1993 with a Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering; from the University of Illinois in 1997 with a master's in civil engineering; and from Duke University in 2014 with a master's in engineering management. He earned a Professional Engineering License in Civil Engineering from the State of Alaska, Project Management Professional Certification, and Certified Facility Manager.

After graduating from the Coast Guard Academy Jeff spent a majority of his 27 years of active duty in Civil Engineer, Naval Engineering, Facilities Management and Construction Management. After retiring from the Coast Guard, Jeff spent the last 2 years as the City and Borough Manager for Wrangell, Alaska where he currently resides. Jeff and his wife Christy have two children, Chase, and Keely.

Oglala Dam Rehabilitation Project, Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, South Dakota

The BIA recently announced a \$15 million investment from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law for repairs to the Oglala Dam on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota. Oglala Dam is located on White Clay Creek one mile south of the town of Oglala. This investment is in addition to over \$21 million allocated for the project last year, as part of a \$29 million investment for dam safety programs in Tribal communities across the country.



Aerial view of the Oglala Dam, Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, South Dakota, and a sinkhole that developed near the dam spillway during the 2019 flood event.

“This project will reduce flooding risk to communities, while enabling the Oglala Sioux Tribe to continue to manage precious natural resources,” said Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Bryan Newland. “The Oglala Dam provides drinking water, irrigation water, and recreation opportunities, supporting the local economy. This investment from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law is an example of how we’re working to uphold our trust and treaty responsibilities and revitalize Tribal communities.”

These investments are necessary to protect downstream communities and improve overall performance of the dams. The reservoir formed by Oglala Dam was drained in 2019 to protect communities downstream following flood damage that compromised the spillway and outlet works. The project will restore an important local water supply for the Pine Ridge community. The total cost of the Oglala Dam project is \$40 million.



Dam Safety staff sandbagging the Oglala Dam spillway during the 2019 flooding.



Early Warning System Training attendees gather around a mock Early Warning System site. An Early Warning System Training attendee puts their learning into practice on a mock Early Warning System site.

Early Warning System and Dam Tender Training

BIA SOD Branch has been collaborating with the Regional Offices to provide hands-on Early Warning System and Dam Tender Training at various locations. SOD conducted a 3-day training in Missoula, Montana October 2-4, 2023. The training agenda included the following topics:

- Familiarity with dam terminology and Early Warning System equipment
- Use of the Early Warning System website
- Hands-on practice with Early Warning System site maintenance, troubleshooting, and repairs
- Dam safety concerns
- Roles and responsibilities of dam tenders
- Dam inspections
- On-site mock dam inspection

There were 20 participants for the first half of the training, which focused on the Early Warning System, and 31 participants for the second half, focused on dam tender training. Participants included BIA Regional, BIA Agency, and Tribal staff from BIA's Northwest, Rocky Mountain, Western, and Eastern Regions.

The next similar training will be conducted in Gallup, NM April 2-4, 2024. Dam safety staff can contact their Regional SOD Officer if they are interested in attending.



Dam Tender Training attendees perform a mock inspection Crow Dam's concrete spillway on the Flathead Reservation in Montana.

SPOTLIGHT ON THE PACIFIC REGION



BIA Region

Delivery of programs services to the federally recognized tribes and individual Indians and Alaska Natives, whether directly or through contracts, grants, or compacts, is administered by the twelve regional offices and 83 agencies through the country that report the to the BIA Deputy Regional Director-Field Operations located in Albuquerque, NM.

106 Tribes Served by the Region & Agencies

We serve 106 tribes with 102 employees, and one BIE school, the Sherman Indian High School. Services are provided to Tribes by the Region and each of our 4 BIA agencies.

Service Locations

- Pacific Region
- Central California Agency
- Northern California Agency
- Southern California Agency
- Palm Springs Agency



California tribal dancers. Photo credit NPS.



Pacific Region service area encompasses Tribes throughout the State of California

Deputy Regional Director-Trust Services

The DRD-Trust Services oversees a staff of specialists responsible for natural resources (water resources, forestry and fire, irrigation, and safety of dams), agriculture, (farm, pasture, and range), fish, wildlife and parks and real estate services (land acquisition and disposal and land title records office, probate, rights-of-way, and lease/permit).

Pacific Region Trust Divisions

- Forestry
- Wildland Fire Management
- Water Rights/Water Resources
- Irrigation, Power, and Safety of Dams
- Operations of Non-Federal Dams
- Agriculture & Range Management
- Land, Titles & Records Office
- Natural Resources
- Real Estate Services

History

While the history of the Federal-Indian relationship in California shares some common characteristics with that of Native people elsewhere in the United States, it is different in many aspects. The history of California and California Tribes.

A lawless settlement of California after the Treaty included State sanctioned efforts to “exterminate” the indigenous population. Between the unratified treaties and the Land Claims Act of 1851, most California Indians became homeless.

1848 – Discovery of Gold

California underwent and unprecedented magnitude of non-native migration after the discovery of gold in 1848, nine days before the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (Treaty); the Senate refused to ratify the 18 treaties negotiated with California tribes during 1851-1852 and took the extraordinary steps to place the treaties under seal.

1887 - General Allotment Act of 1887

Major shifts in Federal Indian policy at the national level during the late 19th century exacerbated the Indian problems in California. Passage of the General Allotment Act of 1887 opened part of the limited lands in California to non-Indian settlement.

1905 - Rancheria System in California

In 1905 the public was finally advised of the 18 unratified treaties. Citizens sympathetic to the economic and physical distress of California Indians encouraged Congress to pass legislation to acquire isolated parcels of land for homeless California Indians. Between 1906 and 1910 a series of appropriations were passed that provided funds to purchase small tracts of land in central and northern California for landless Indians of those areas. The land acquisitions resulted in what has been referred to as the Rancheria System in California.

1934 - Indian Reorganization Act

In 1934, with the passage of the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA), the reconstituting of tribal governments included the BIA’s supervision of elections among California tribes, including most of the Rancheria groups. Although many tribes accepted the provisions of the IRA, few California tribes benefited economically from the IRA because of continuing inequities in funding of Federal Indian programs.

1944 - Liquidation of the Rancheria System

Beginning in 1944, forces within the BIA began to propose partial liquidation of the Rancheria system. Even the limited efforts to address the needs of California Indians at the turn of the century and again through the passage of the IRA were halted by the federal government when it adopted the policy of termination. California became a primary target of this policy when Congress slated forty-one (41), California Rancherias for termination pursuant to the Rancheria Act of 1958.

During the past quarter century, judicial decisions and settlements have restored 27 of the 38 Rancherias that were terminated under the original Rancheria Act. Additional tribes have since then been restored as a result of Acts of Congress.

This brief history only begins to explain why the Pacific Region is unique. California tribes today continue to develop their tribal infrastructure as a result of not having the same opportunities that have been provided to other native groups throughout the country.

Contact Us

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SPOTLIGHT ON THE DEPUTY REGIONAL DIRECTOR – TRUST SERVICES



Ryan Hunter, Deputy Regional Director

Biography

Yá'át'ééh (hello)! I am Diné and am an enroll member of the Navajo Nation. I am from the Waterflow Together People clan (mother), and I am born for Coyote Pass clan (father). My maternal grandfather is from the Many Goats clan and my paternal grandfather is from the Bitterwater clan.

I possess a bachelor's degree in liberal studies with an emphasis in Enterprise in Society, master's degree in business administration and held an Arizona Real Estate License for over 10-years. Prior to joining the BIA, I worked for Prudential Real Estate for 10-years managing real estate portfolios, minimizing risk, and providing the best financial return for our clients. I briefly worked under the Navajo Nation Economic Development Office formulating economic development solutions for the Tribe.

I had the privilege of joining the BIA-Real Estate Services, Pima Agency in 2010 and proudly served the Gila River Indian Community and Ak-Chin Indian Community. Soon after, I joined the Navajo-BIA Regional Office as the Regional Realty Officer in providing real estate oversight of approximately 17 million acres of land with approximately 300,000 tribal members. The Navajo Nation's large land base encompassed 2 large power plants, coal mines, oil and gas, rights-of-ways, and thousands of leases (businesses and homesites). Furthermore, I joined the BIA Central Office-Trust Services, Real Estate Division and experienced serving Indian Country on a national scale and assisting BIA real estate offices at the regional and agency level across the country. Lastly, for a few years, I was Board of Director for a small housing non-profit corporation in Albuquerque, NM that serves housing needs to residents on the Navajo Nation.

One of the main reasons I joined the BIA was because of our mission statement and to this day, I continue to be a believer in the BIAs' mission, which "is to enhance the quality of life, to promote economic opportunity, and to carry out the responsibility to protect and improve the trust assets of American Indians, Indian tribes and Alaska Natives." I promote teamwork, communication, customer service to Tribes and Indian landowners, seek solutions, and placing the Tribes and Indian landowners' interest before our own.

The Interview

What was your first government job?

After working in the real estate-private sector for over 10 years, I decided to join the Federal Government and become a public servant with the Bureau of Indian (BIA) and serve tribes and Indian landowners. I began my federal career with the BIA, Western Region, Pima Agency, in Sacaton, Arizona as a Realty Specialist. Working at the Agency was great experience in learning various realty disciplines such as leasing in agriculture; commercial and business; homesite; fee-to-trust; Acquisition and Disposal; and Rights-of-way.

What is your favorite Trust program?

All the Trust Programs I oversee are my favorite since they all have an important role and function for the Tribes and Tribal communities we serve. Currently, I am deeply involved with the natural resources and fire program since they deal with protecting ecosystems and natural assets on trust lands. Additionally, I enjoy learning the natural resources and fire programs, because of the connection between the “scientific approach to indigenous practices.”

Which of your Trust duties were an unexpected surprise?

My core experience and knowledge was in real estate, so I figured I could easily execute the duties and responsibilities of a Deputy Regional Director. To my surprise, learning natural resources, Land Titles and Records, fire, and other P.L. 93-638 /Office of Self- Governance contracting were challenging concepts to learn. I am convinced that learning is everlasting in the trust world, and it not easily understood instantly. The core skills I developed as a realty officer helped me adjust to my DRD role.

What do you do for fun?

My family makes the world turn, so spending time with family is fun, especially during vacations and sharing new experiences. Additionally, my son is in jazz band with his school, so watching and listening to him compete and grow as a skilled musician is also fun...plus listening to live jazz is the key to capturing its unique sounds (never thought I'd like jazz).

What do you see as your greatest challenge in FY 2024?

The biggest challenge is being able to meet the needs of all 104 tribes we serve, especially with the historic amount of funding and co-partnerships being developed in the last 3-years. The other challenge are implementing new initiatives under Secretary Haaland leadership as the first DOI Native American Secretary. She has raised awareness of the BIA's important mission to the world and helped to elevate the recognition of Tribes and their important role in the nation and introduced endless opportunities for partnerships in the future. There is too much at stake since we have the ability to change and effect the Native communities we serve. Although, we as an organization have changed for the better, there is still much more to do to meet the tribal needs of tomorrow and generations to come.

What is your greatest BIA success?

My greatest BIA success is taking on tribal challenges head on by fulfilling our trust responsibilities to Tribes and Indian landowners and serving them with customer service and respect. I was able to help recoup millions of dollars in years of past due funds owed to Tribes and Indian landowners, which took months or in some cases years to amend. Trying was a “right a wrong” success for Tribes and Indian Landowners. I think my greatest BIA success is in the making and still to come.

What advice would you give to others who would like to be a Deputy?

You can't be everything to everybody, thus not everything falls on your shoulders, because many of the issues we face are historically deep rooted and cannot change immediately. Transformational change in the BIA programs' seems to happen in 3-year increments, so patience is key. Additionally, respect, listen, appreciate, and trust your team in helping guide you with your decision-making.

How would you like others to remember you time as a Deputy for Trust?

Throughout my career and as a Deputy for Trust, I would like to believe I was able to make some positive changes that involved rebranding the BIA in a positive light and trying to always meet our mission. The Tribes being able to experience a newer and better BIA versus the old BIA, (this also applies to reshaping the BIA culture). You win some and lose some, but being remembered for more wins than losses is good.

Who is the person(s) you most admire in BIA?

I admire everyone in the BIA who truly understand our unique mission of this organization and give it a 110%. There are so many team members in the BIA I have worked with that meet this criteria, like my staff in trust, they give it their all and demonstrate relentless desire to serve our tribes day in and day out. I also admire my Regional Director, who has historically been a champion of change using a commonsense approach, telling it like it is, and contributed to helping shape today's Native America in California, which took approximately 50 years of service commitment and grit (amazing to see Indigenous California now versus 50-years ago). She was able to achieve her success starting as a GS-1 and working up to a Regional Director.

Additionally, I admire Secretary Haaland from afar, with all the decisions she has instilled and creating a great leadership team in the BIA. This is a pivotal point and paradigm shift for the BIA and a legacy being built for the next generation of the BIA. I look forward to seeing what BIA will look like in succeeding years.



Fee to Trust Acquisitions

California Tribes had their lands taken from them as well as them being forcibly removed from their homelands throughout American history (e.g., Spanish Colonization, Mexican Colonization, America's Manifest Destiny, and Gold Rush Era). It is a priority at the Pacific Region and the California Tribes we serve is accepting land into trust.

Last fiscal year we have accepted over 2600 acres into trust for Tribes. We issued 44 Notice of Applications, 36 Notice of Decisions and completed 42 Acceptance of Conveyances.

The Hawkins Valley application was initially submitted to the Pacific Region in 2009. There were challenges in the process that required the return of the application for further consideration and clean up. The Tribe resubmitted the application in 2020 and we were able to have the Acceptance of Conveyance completed this fiscal year.

The Hawkins Valley property consists of 368.52 acres and is a valued historical property for the Tribe. There are two known primary village sites of the Chukchansi people, and one exists on the Hawkins Valley property.

The Hawkins Valley property is considered the heart of the Chukchansi people. Historically the property was essential because it provided plentiful food source from the black oak trees, small game and berries, numerous springs are also naturally occurring on the property. Evidence of the Tribe's historical presence on the land remains today in the form of several grinding rocks containing multiple grinding holes used to mash acorns. This property is considered a powerfully spiritual place where the Tribe holds its annual Spirit Camp, including a sweat lodge. It is through placing the land into trust that the Tribe hopes to preserve its spiritual home for generations to come.

Whether we are taking one acre or a hundred acres of land into trust, restoring lands to the Tribes we serve is crucial in fulfilling our mission and trust commitments to our Tribes and Native American Communities we serve.



Fee to Trust Signing Ceremony – Picayune Rancheria



First Basic Wildland Fire Academy

In 2023 the BIA Wildland Fire Management officially dedicated Sherman Indian High School as a Training Facility, with the first Basic Wildland Fire Academy. This is the only BIE school providing this type of workforce development for high school students.

We are using this platform to introduce fire employment opportunities to our Native American youth and utilize it as a recruitment mechanism.

We are also expanding the BIA-Fire curriculum to introduce other components related to fire (e.g. operations, fuels, prevention, leadership, etc.). The students have shown commitment and want to learn more about choosing a fire profession as a career, so the possibilities of this program are unlimited.



First Basic Wildland Fire Academy Graduation



Basic Wildland Fire Academy



Sherman High School Students in the Basic Wildland Fire Academy

The Pacific Region is expanding the BIA-Fire curriculum to introduce other components related to fire (e.g. operations, fuels, prevention, leadership, etc.).

The students have shown commitment and want to learn more about choosing a fire profession as a career, so the possibilities of this program are unlimited.

Camp Smokey team at the California State Fair



Every year at the California State Fair, our interagency team of state and federal fire agencies host Camp Smokey, a fire prevention and education event over two-and-a-half weeks. BIA's additional role is to educate the public about whose land they are standing on, the Indigenous people who are still here, and the traditional ecological knowledge which could have prevented (and can still help save us from) the current wildfire situation.

California Governor's Office of Emergency Services signing ceremony



Since 1950, tribal fire departments have been denied the opportunity to participate in California's state Master Mutual Aid Agreement with other fire departments. With the passage of a state bill which now authorizes California's Office of Emergency Services to contract with Tribal fire departments, the Pala Band of Mission Indians have set the stage for others by becoming the first to sign on. This opens the door for other tribes to follow which provide protection to their communities and natural assets.

PACIFIC REGION: WATER & POWER PROGRAM



SAFETY OF DAMS

Klamath Dam Removal

Finally, we are proud of our participation in the largest dam removal in history in California with the planned removal of four dams on the Klamath River. Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding for Lower Klamath and Trinity River Restoration projects has been obligated through tribal self-governance funding agreements.

The Klamath River was once the third largest salmon-producing river on the West Coast. The historical range of salmon abundance for the Klamath-Trinity River system at 650,000–1 million fish but today, according to federal statistics, populations have fallen by more than 90%. Native Americans relied on the Klamath River system for its generous abundance of salmon and trout and depended heavily upon these fishes for subsistence, ceremonial, and trade purposes. 1864 Treaty reserved Tribal rights to hunt, fish, trap and gather, all of which require enough water to maintain a healthy and productive habitat for our treaty resources.

Working together, parties signed the Klamath Basin Restoration Agreement (KBRA) in conjunction with the Klamath Hydroelectric Settlement Agreement (KHSA) in 2010. The KBRA was designed to balance water use between environment and agriculture, fund fisheries restoration, improve irrigation infrastructure, and provide economic development programs for local communities.

Tribal advocacy created the opportunity for the collective effort to remove the Klamath dams. Tribal leadership and perspective have profoundly shaped the course of events on the Klamath over the past two decades. A series of court cases and a 1993 legal opinion from the Department of the Interior affirmed Yurok and Hoopa fishing rights. Tribes have legal priority, both upriver and downriver. Removing the dams is expected to reopen more than 400 miles of habitat for steelhead and other threatened and iconic fish.



Down comes Copco No. 2. Destruction of Hydroelectric Facility on the Klamath River is underway.