

RETHINKING RESILIENCE: TOWARD HOLISTIC APPROACHES TO DROUGHT MANAGEMENT ON TRIBAL LANDS IN THE UPPER COLUMBIA AND MISSOURI RIVER BASINS



The Workshop for Building Drought Resilience in a Changing Climate with Upper Columbia and Missouri Basin Tribes was convened in September 2023 with an overarching goal of strengthening relationships between Tribal Nations, Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), and their partners across the region. This two-and-a-half-day workshop was co-organized and sponsored by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA's) National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS) and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT), with support from several workshop committees. In total, over 100 people attended the workshop and engaged in rich discussion about the successes and challenges of building and maintaining resilience to drought on tribal lands.

For those interested in learning more, a comprehensive workshop synthesis document is under development. As a preview, this synthesis is divided into two parts: (1) Workshop Process and Best Practices and (2) Workshop Outcomes and Opportunities.

Workshop Process and Best Practices focuses on what the organizers learned while forming the workshop committees, managing complex logistics, designing and executing the workshop, and sustaining the engagement to reinforce trusted relationships. It is being written for partners who wish to engage with Tribal Nations more meaningfully and effectively. Because planning the workshop required a great deal of coordination, thoughtful collaboration, and intentional communication in order to ensure its success, the organizers felt it would be valuable to share what worked well and what could be improved upon when planning future workshops.

Workshop Outcomes and Opportunities aims to provide an overview of key messages and opportunities for addressing those messages that were heard at the workshop. This part of the synthesis is being written for both tribal and non-tribal audiences who would like to learn more from Tribal Nations and their partners on what they think are the most pressing issues regarding tribal drought resilience in a changing climate and how to best move forward.

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At the workshop, five solution- and topic-oriented sessions were convened. Themes and key messages that emerged from these discussions included:

Build Mutual Respect and Understanding

Building trusted relationships is foundational to any engagement with Tribal Nations and TCUs. Relationships can be built and maintained internally among tribal citizens, as well as externally between individual Tribal Nations or between Tribal Nations, TCUs, and tribal and non-tribal agencies/organizations. Increasing cultural intelligence and awareness must happen concurrently with, or prior to, any drought-related work to help build mutual respect and understanding. All Tribal Nations are unique in that they have different histories, customs, and protocols.

Adjust Federal Funding Procedures

Tribal Nations and TCUs are often understaffed and overwhelmed by the number of funding opportunities available, and encounter barriers such as unique, complicated grant application processes and lack of capacity and technical assistance for developing proposals. Greater coordination across federal agencies to avoid duplicative requests and streamline information would be helpful in alleviating this stress. Future funding mechanisms must be flexible, with a focus on funding that is stable, action-oriented, and supports self-determination.

Invest in Tribal Workforce

Many Tribal Nations and TCUs are overburdened and have limited capacity to develop and implement climate and drought resilience proposals. Furthermore, existing resources are often allocated to address other, higher-priority socio-economic issues. Investing in the tribal workforce at multiple levels can help build long-term resilience to climate change and extremes.

Enhance Drought Monitoring

Drought monitoring must be explored through a holistic lens that encompasses culture, landscapes, and ecosystems. Individual Tribal Nations should determine what is important to monitor and how these monitoring data are used and distributed.

Share Drought Resilience Stories

Indigenous practices for reducing drought impacts have been highly successful. Several Tribal Nations have developed climate and drought plans to increase resilience. Greater communication and cooperation between Tribal Nations, TCUs, and federal and state agencies about these practices and planning efforts could build trust and ensure reciprocity.

Opportunities to address each of these identified themes are outlined in the forthcoming synthesis, which is expected to be released in July 2024.



Workshop participants at the Kwataqnuq Resort & Casino in Polson, Montana. Credit: Jessica Martinez

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