Climate, drought and early warning on Western Native Lands
9-11 June, 2009 Jackson Lodge Grand Teton National Park WY

Early warnings of climate events and threshold points that affect cultural, economic, and environmental resources are becoming increasingly important for preparedness and adaptation as climate changes. In this context the issues of severe sustained drought and increasing rates of environmental change are critical to the future of the Western U.S. in the near and longer terms. The multi-agency National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS, in partnership with…Sinte Gleska, Haskell, IWN etc) is therefore convening a workshop on assessing and responding to drought and climate impacts on western Native Lands. This workshop will be held at the Jackson Lodge in Grand Teton National Park on 9-11 June 2009. We propose to use a watershed approach with key participants from Native communities and organizations, from major river basins west of the Mississippi River, involved in developing and protecting water and energy resources, wildlife and the environment. Invited participants will also include people from internationally shared water systems such as the Columbia, the Great Lakes and the Rio Grande and from national level organizations such as the NCAI and CERT. Lodging and travel support will be provided to invitees.

Climate change impacts will be different from region to region. If, as predicted, climate change results in increased water scarcity in some areas, and stresses on other natural resources, tribal use and protection of resources could face significant challenges. For example projections show that tribes in the Pacific Northwest will face warming streams and changes to the hydrologic cycle that further threaten the survival of salmon populations; likewise higher temperatures and increasing aridity in the Southwest might exacerbate tensions between tribal and nontribal interests and rights over the region's limited water resources. A t the same time a number of tribal lessons are available to address climate change. Tribes have great physical and cultural resources that can help the US deal with climate risks through renewable energy development and wilderness protection in the face of climate change.

The NIDIS Act of 2006 (Public Law 109-430) mandates a multi-agency approach that focuses on, (i) communication and awareness of drought and drought impacts, (ii) improving and integrating information from monitoring and forecasting networks into drought planning, (iii) engaging communities to ensure that the needed indicators and triggers for proactive drought risk management are identified and addressed, and, (iv) the development of regionally-specific information sites that act as clearinghouses for information at different scales. The NIDIS provides a prototype for climate information services to support preparedness and adaptation climate varies and changes.

In this workshop we propose to identify and discuss:

- Past, present and future drought-related drivers and impacts on western tribal lands and waters including changes in the nature and quality of the aquatic environment (including the coasts)
- Existing lessons from tribal communities on adaptation to drought and climate change
- Drought information coordination and delivery needed to inform proactive and sustainable development of energy, water and other natural resources on tribal lands in the context of climate variability and change
- Capacity-building needs especially in relation to Tribal Colleges and schools
- Guidance on tribal priorities for feedback to national NIDIS partners with trust responsibilities on incorporating climate change information, especially regarding drought, into planning and practice
- Partnerships needed to achieve the above

A major focus of our discussions will be on ensuring that as climate changes, the drought information needed to help meet trust responsibilities and tribal development and environmental protection goals will be relevant, credible, timely and useful.

Program Committee (to date)

James Rattling Leaf Sinte Gleska University
Gary Collins Indigenous Waters Network
Michael Hayes NDMC
Margaret Hiza Redsteer USGS
Doug Kluck NOAA
Roger S. Pulwarty NOAA
Daniel Wildcat Haskell Indian University