



2025

ANNUAL REPORT



KARUK TRIBE
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

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A Letter from Bill Tripp, Director of KDNR

Thank you for your continued support of the Karuk Department of Natural Resources. We are in a time of significant uncertainty, which is why philanthropy like yours is so important. Your generosity helps our wide ranging programs ensure programmatic funding and allows us to continue utilizing grassroots gifts for sustainable, flexible funding over the long term.

From promoting better food security, to intergenerational learning and workforce development as we build upon our Indigenous knowledge, practice and belief systems in an era of dam removal, salmon recovery, and fire regime restoration, the Karuk Tribe remains steadfast in our commitment to cultural and natural resource management.

Despite the uncertain federal funding landscape, we've expanded our cultural fire work on a larger scale, calling for transformational change at the state and federal levels. Building on recent progress to implement beneficial fire as a wildfire risk reduction tool, Governor Gavin Newsom signed an executive order directing state agencies to expand beneficial fire. A new law passed last year, S.B. 310, authorizes the California Natural Resources Agency and local air districts to establish an agreement in lieu of permit process with federally recognized tribes in California who wish to burn freely. I'm honored to report that the Karuk people are the first tribe to enter into such agreement with California.

In July 2025, we had an extraordinary day of collaboration when, for the first time, US Forest Service, California fire officials, and Karuk cultural fire practitioners worked together to simultaneously manage a burn in the Butler Creek neighborhood. We implemented prescribed and cultural burns for three days to protect homes on the Salmon River. Never before has a wildfire Incident Management Team allowed for a cultural burn during a full suppression operation. Years of partnership and trust building resulted in this historic and successful fire event.

Only one year after the historic dam removal for four dams on the Klamath River, fall Chinook salmon have migrated into tributaries of Upper Klamath Lake. This is the longest spawning migration recorded in the drainage for over a 100 years, a demonstration of the regenerative power of eco-cultural revitalization.

These are just a few examples of how gifts like yours make a direct and lasting impact. As we look back on our progress in 2025, we recognize that your generous donations and support for our work have made a critical difference for our programming and community.

Yôotva - Bill Tripp



*Bill Tripp,
Karuk Director of
Natural Resources &
Environmental Policy*

ECO-CULTURAL REVITALIZATION FUND

Continuing Karuk Legacy from Time Immemorial into the Future

The Eco-Cultural Revitalization Fund was established to support the Karuk Tribe Department of Natural Resources' efforts to fix the world through community building, environmental stewardship, supporting Karuk people in need and more. This innovative, long term interest-bearing fund aims to provide sustainability of tribal programs, including cultural fire, food sovereignty, land back initiatives. The ambitious goals of expanding the fund are essential to our long term success. Thanks to donors - individual and institutional giving - we have shared belief in the sustainability of our work.



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REGENERATIVE HEALING

Eco-cultural revitalization is a core mission for the Karuk Tribe. It combines ecological restoration and cultural revitalization as two inextricably linked goals that argue that one cannot separate the health of the people (in this case, the Karuk) from the health of the place (Tishánik, the River, the Karuk Aboriginal Territory) where they belong. Ecocultural revitalization also includes the health of more-than-human animal and plant relations. Reintroduction and habitat enhancement of existing or potential species like cottonwood, deer and Indian potato, salmon, eel, beaver, and elk take equal precedence alongside human use.



AFTER THE DAMS

THE SALMON RETURN TO UPPER KLAMATH

We call ourselves “Fix the World People,” and the ecocultural revitalization of Tishániik embodies the idea of pikyáv (fix-it), centered on repairing relationships with more than human kin, including animals, plants, lands, and waters, and restoring a reciprocal relationality that has been disturbed by extractive colonial frameworks.

Settler resource extraction disrupted, but never ended, Karuk stewardship along the Klamath River, and Karuk people continue to live in Tishániik village. The Tishániik river bar is where people live every summer and perform pikyávish, the World Renewal Ceremony. Several large dams were placed on the Klamath River starting in the early 1900s to capture water for hydropower. These dams had devastating effects on the Karuk and other Nations, and severely impacted the health of the river and all the species that depend on it for life. The dams cut off 90% of salmon spawning habitat, while also reducing flows, increasing water temperatures, and causing algal buildup. Furthermore, dams reduced peak flows, preventing floodplains like Tishániik from receiving high flow inundations and from recharging groundwater. The dams blocked access to over 400 miles of historic spawning habitat, degraded water quality, hosted algae blooms, created habitat for fish diseases, and limited salmon run diversity, specifically the loss of spring chinook salmon.

Once the final dam was removed in 2024, salmon restoration began almost immediately. Even in the beginning stages of migration, sonar detected 2,250 salmon moving upstream at the former Iron Gate Dam site. Only one year after the historic dam removal for four dams on the Klamath River, fall Chinook salmon have migrated into tributaries of Upper Klamath Lake. This is the longest spawning migration recorded in the drainage for over a 100 years, a demonstration of the regenerative power of eco-cultural revitalization.



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TISHÁNIK VILLAGE & THE MEADOWS

PROJECTS IN REGENERATION

Grounded in pikyávish, the responsibility to fix the world through continual, seasonal management for the benefit of multiple species, our plan for river restoration centers inter-generational learning and care for Karuk people, who in turn care for plants, animals, soil, fire, and water. Through a multi-faceted approach that tacked between western and Karuk scientific methods, we analyzed historical sources including stories, place names, maps, mining records, images, film and video. This analysis revealed specific spatial details, such as locations of hard points created by mining, groundwater flow and persistent pond features. In 2025, we held four workshops with engineers, Karuk cultural practitioners, residents, NGO and agency partners. The goal of restoration is to allow flood flows to access the high water channel multiple times per year. We will also continue community engagement through quarterly willow-tending workdays, work with cultural fire practitioners and the Karuk Fire and native plant programs.

The Karuk people have stewarded the Stanshaw and Haypress meadows surrounding McCash and Ti Creek Watersheds for time immemorial. These meadows are the headwaters of creeks providing crucial coldwater refugia for threatened and endangered salmon species within the Salmon River and Klamath River Watersheds. Cold water is especially vital for spring-run Chinook salmon, who swim upriver just before the river reaches its warmest temperatures and hold through the summer months before spawning. As peatlands, these meadows are important for carbon sequestration. They are also home to Cascades frog, newts, and other amphibians, small mammals, elk, deer, birds of prey and migratory birds, and pollinators, all of which utilize these meadows for foraging and nesting, and as a refugia during wildfire. Although most of the project area is within lands designated as wilderness, the cascading direct and indirect effects of climate change and 175 years of colonist land management practices, involving fire suppression, water diversion for agriculture, historical mining, and the introduction of eastern Brook Trout has resulted in various observable impacts. Decades of fire suppression and the restriction of cultural burning has resulted in the encroachment of mountain hemlock, red fir, and white fir both in the uplands and within the wet meadow footprint. Conifer encroachment reduces the overall contribution of water to the meadow.

Tishnamnahich, or meadows, represent ecologically and culturally significant habitat features within the Karuk Tribe's ancestral territory. For example, Elk (íshyuux, *Cervus canadensis*) rely heavily on meadow habitats for forage, browsing, and herding activities, as well as for parturition and the rearing of young within adjacent edge habitats. With the return of wolves (ikxâavnamich, *Canis lupus*) to Karuk territory, meadow systems will become increasingly important refugia where elk can forage safely while maintaining vigilance and defending themselves. Similarly, black-tailed deer (púufich, *Odocoileus hemionus columbianus*), porcupine (kaschiip, *Erethizon dorsatum*), and Mountain beaver (aspishúnvaan, *Aplodontia rufa*), play a valuable ecological role in maintaining open meadow and grassland systems. Our ongoing wildlife, hydrologic and geomorphic monitoring efforts support habitat restoration, populations of culturally significant species, and help us understand relative water level change across seasons and years.

TISHÁNIK WILDLIFE

Throughout 2025, the Karuk Wildlife Program advanced self-determined wildlife stewardship while building the technical and cultural foundation for future generations. The program secured funding through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's America's Ecosystem Restoration Initiative, which will provide critical support to advance Karuk ecocultural revitalization and wildlife stewardship. The project- "Achviivsa, Pirishsa karu Axichas Imfipish: Birds, Plants and Children Come Together In Karuk Ancestral Territory" - will promote Indigenous-led landscape-scale ecosystem restoration and habitat enhancement for culturally-significant species and biodiversity in Karuk Aboriginal Territory (KAT) in the Klamath Basin.

Youth and workforce development remained a program priority. A major highlight was a wildlife bird walk with students from a local elementary school, where youth learned to identify local bird species by sight and song while hearing cultural stories about select species. The activity incorporated Karuk language bird names and demonstrated how traditional ecological knowledge can deepen learning and connection to the seasonal ecological landscapes. This effort strengthened community engagement and introduced Tribal youth to potential careers in natural resources and wildlife stewardship.

Monitoring efforts expanded across culturally important species and habitats. Camera grids, telemetry, and field surveys supported long-term monitoring of carnivore and prey ungulate populations, including mountain lion, black bear, elk, and deer. Bird and bat acoustic monitoring continued as part of ecosystem recovery and forest health tracking.

This year marked major progress under the Wildlife Health and Monitoring Infrastructure Initiative. We expanded our wildlife health disease monitoring efforts for Púufich (Black tail deer) and Íshyuux (Roosevelt elk), with a focus on Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) and elk hoof disease (TAHD). These threats are getting closer to our lands and we are taking a proactive approach to surveillance and response planning. Wildlife health surveillance expanded through sampling of lymph nodes from hunter-harvested and roadkill deer to test for Chronic Wasting Disease. Field protocols were also strengthened to improve wildlife response and handling preparedness and build consistent wildlife health monitoring capacity within our program and networks of collaborators.



FIRES & THE LAND:

THREE HISTORIC BURNS & FALL TREX



Two significant fire events took place in 2025. First, in early July, lightning caused a wildfire on the Salmon River in Siskiyou County, California. The community was ready to respond. And for the first time, in one day, the Butler wildfire, a Forest Service prescribed fire, and a Karuk-led cultural fire burned simultaneously under cooperative approval and to the benefit of the community.

The day was historic in nature - never before had a cultural burn, led by indigenous fire practitioners, been allowed to create good fire to protect the land when wildfires descend. The community - across all generations, who are tied to the land since time immemorial - were able to participate, learn, and protect the community and celebrate fire as a way to make everyone safe. Three days after the cooperative burn, the Butler wildfire reached homes on the south side of Butler Creek. Every home survived.

Then in early October of 2025, the Western Klamath Restoration Partnership hosted over 100 students of fire from the community and nationwide to hone their skills at prescribed burning. This event increases the capacity of local communities to successfully use prescribed fire to restore fire dependent forests and protect communities from wildfires. This year's training was especially poignant as the training was held in and around the footprint of the catastrophic 2020 Slater Fire, which burned nearly half the homes in Happy Camp. Homes were re-built after the destruction of the 2020 wildfire and this fire training was the first prescribed training burn after the devastation. KDNR Director Bill Tripp spoke to the importance of returning to the footprint as a way to combat fire fear, saying:

"Events like the Slater Fire can perpetuate fear-driven motives in how we approach fire management. We cannot allow this. . .instead, focusing on the beneficial aspects of fire, we can set the stage for averting future catastrophes."

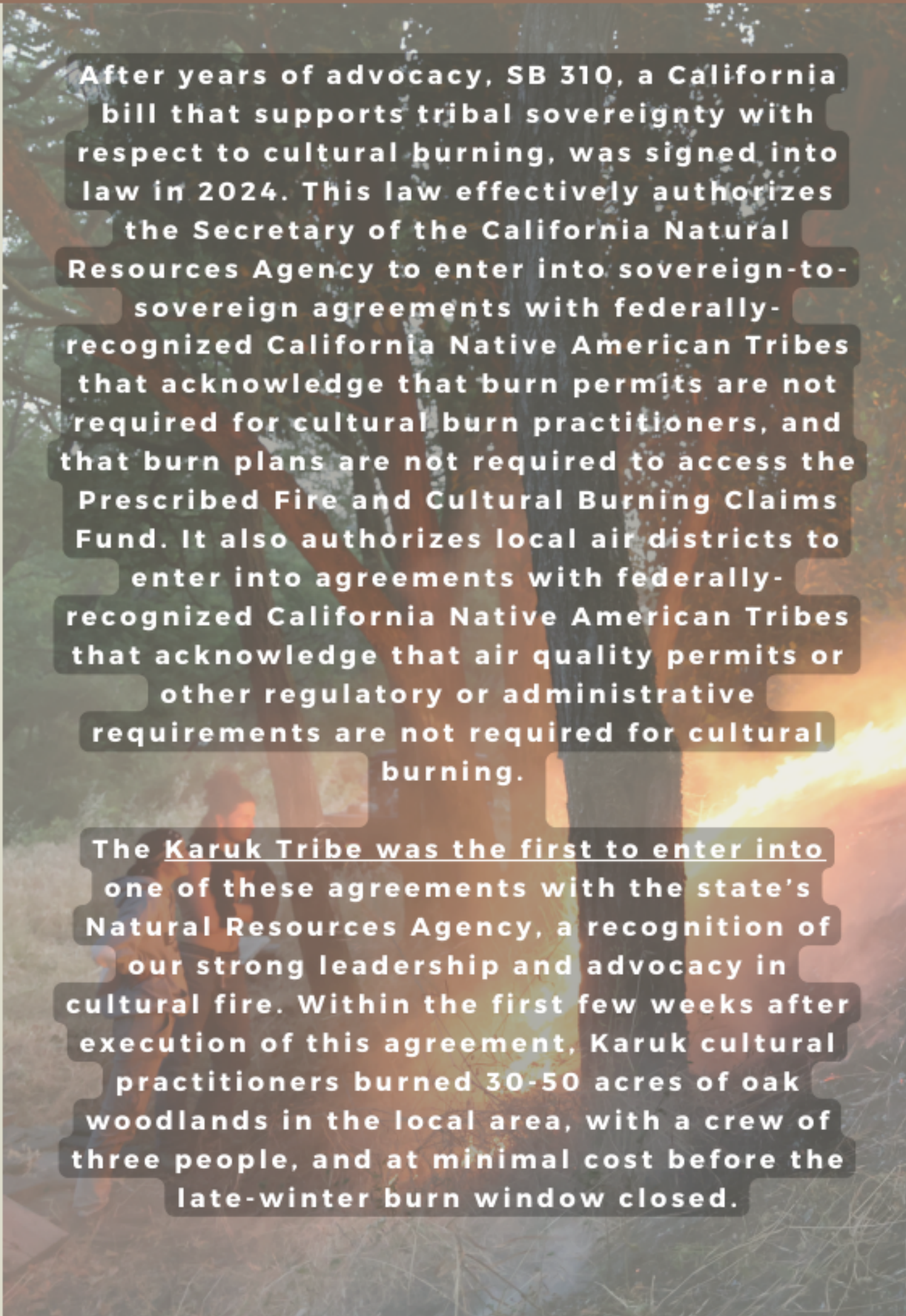
Local communities along the Klamath River understand that working with fire on our terms is our best hope for reducing the impacts of wildfires during critical fire weather. All the lessons learned from the past are used to engage and inform TREX participants.



FIRE POLICY FOR PROGRESS

“Karuk has been a national thought leader on cultural fire. So, it makes sense that they would be a natural first partner in this space because they have a really clear mission and core commitment to get this work done.”

*- Geneva E.B. Thompson, California Natural Resources
Deputy Secretary for Tribal Affairs*



After years of advocacy, SB 310, a California bill that supports tribal sovereignty with respect to cultural burning, was signed into law in 2024. This law effectively authorizes the Secretary of the California Natural Resources Agency to enter into sovereign-to-sovereign agreements with federally-recognized California Native American Tribes that acknowledge that burn permits are not required for cultural burn practitioners, and that burn plans are not required to access the Prescribed Fire and Cultural Burning Claims Fund. It also authorizes local air districts to enter into agreements with federally-recognized California Native American Tribes that acknowledge that air quality permits or other regulatory or administrative requirements are not required for cultural burning.

The Karuk Tribe was the first to enter into one of these agreements with the state's Natural Resources Agency, a recognition of our strong leadership and advocacy in cultural fire. Within the first few weeks after execution of this agreement, Karuk cultural practitioners burned 30-50 acres of oak woodlands in the local area, with a crew of three people, and at minimal cost before the late-winter burn window closed.



Building on SB 310 becoming law and our SB310 agreement being executed, Karuk cultural fire practitioners successfully coordinated with a federal wildfire suppression incident response in order to protect homes and lives during the active Butler Wildfire in July of 2025. This is the first time that a cultural fire led by Karuk practitioners, a community-led all-hands-all-lands prescribed fire, and a suppression effort led by the U.S. Forest Service were able to occur concurrently and in coordination, with the shared objective of protecting the local community. This historic and successful event helped protect homes in the Butler Creek neighborhood and reflects an important precedent for partnership, renewed trust, and community impact.

Karuk DNR Director Bill Tripp testified in Congress in June 2025 before the House Natural Resources Committee on the Tribal Self Determination and Co-Management Forestry Act, HR 3444, sponsored by Congressman Jared Huffman. Bill provided important context for this legislation that seeks a stronger co-management relationship between Tribes and the federal government for ancestral land stewardship. Among other things, the legislation would extend statutory authority to the Forest Service to enter into co-management agreements with Tribes to carry out and share, defer, or transfer decision-making authority programs, functions, services, and activities of the Forest Service including forest planning, ecological restoration, recreation, and research. It also importantly recognizes that the Forest Service already has authority to enter into agreements to enable or accommodate Tribal activities on lands administered by the Forest Service, including the exercise of Tribal rights.

Another important bill is the Fix Our Forest Act, S. 1462, which has been moving through Congress this year in response to growing concern over the wildfire crisis and overly dense forests. It attempts to address this through a number of provisions intended to create a less restrictive regulatory environment as well as a host of additional forestry-related provisions. It has passed through the House in a bipartisan manner, and recently passed out of Committee in the Senate. As of this October, it includes the Smith amendment that the Karuk DNR and Intertribal Timber council advocated for to make the bill more tribally-friendly, including through clarifying that prescribed fire and cultural fire are separate and distinct, and adding a Tribal representative to the Wildland Fire Intelligence Board, among other things.

In another win, Governor Newsom signed an executive order in October 2025 to facilitate beneficial fire. This emerged from Newsom's Emergency Proclamation in March, and a couple Roundtables hosted by the California Natural Resources Agency in April, which leaders from the Karuk DNR and other local leaders participated in and contributed to. Notably, it includes direction to California agencies to "continue prioritizing tribal consultation, access, collaboration, and co-management to expand and support cultural burning and other forms of tribal stewardship."

CLIMATE RESILIENCY CENTER

An investment in community, workforce, and the future of fire.

The Karuk Tribe secured \$10 million in state funding to construct a first-of-its-kind Regional Fire Resiliency Center in northeastern Humboldt County. This vital investment, which is phase 1 of a projected \$25M climate resiliency workspace, marks a major milestone in the Tribe's long-standing mission to restore cultural fire practices, enhance wildfire resilience, and protect the ecosystems and communities of the Klamath Basin.

The new Karuk Fire Training Center will be located in the heart of Orleans, on Tribal property adjacent to an RV park. The facility will serve as a permanent hub for year-round cultural and prescribed fire training, emergency response coordination, and climate

resilience education. Once completed, it will be one of the most advanced Indigenous-led fire training centers in the United States. The \$10 million allocation builds on a previous \$1.2 million planning grant awarded by the State in 2023 for design and engineering. The funds also include about \$600,000 from the BIA for planning and coordination as well as engineering and design through the Tribal Climate Resilience Program.

The training center is poised to host nationally and internationally recognized programs such as the Klamath River Prescribed Fire Training Exchange (KTREX) and Karuk Indigenous Women-in-Fire TREX (KWTREX). These collaborative training events bring together firefighters, Tribal members, land managers, and scientists to practice fire safety and ecological burning across jurisdictional boundaries.

In addition to prescribed fire training, the Karuk Fire Training Center will provide:

- Cultural Fire Practitioner Trainings
- Workforce Development in Fire Management and Emergency Response
- Climate Resilience and Environmental Education
- Workforce housing for visiting Fire Leadership, researchers and other partners as well as evacuation space
- Emergency Staging and Response Infrastructure
- A Clean Air Center during fire events
- Hosting Food Sovereignty workshops

In recent years, the Tribe has partnered with agencies like CAL FIRE, The Nature Conservancy, and the U.S. Forest Service to carry out joint burns and training events. The new Fire Resiliency Center will expand capacity for this kind of collaborative work while prioritizing Indigenous values and protocols. By investing in Indigenous fire knowledge, the state is taking a meaningful step toward environmental justice and land restoration.



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