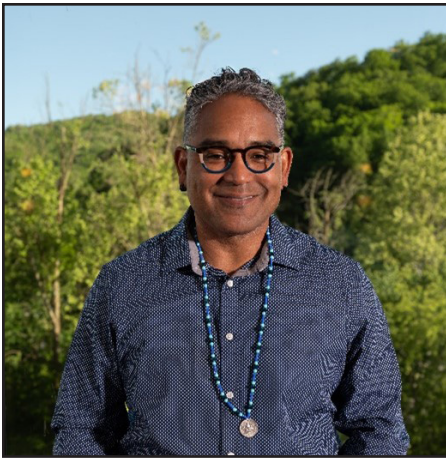




INTERTRIBAL TIMBER COUNCIL TIMBER NOTES

Spring ~ 2025



Howard Teasley, Jr.

REGISTER NOW FOR THE 2025 ITC SYMPOSIUM!

The Intertribal Timber Council (ITC) family would like to invite you to visit the Northern Rockies the land of beautiful scenery and outdoor activities. We are extremely excited to have the 48th Annual National Indian Timber Symposium to be held **June 2-5, 2025**, at University of Montana, hosted by ITC and Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) in Missoula, MT. The theme of this year's symposium is *"Managing Tribal and Multi-Agency Interest & Empowering Tomorrow's Stewards."*

Online registration closes **May 23**. Visit the event website for details: <https://www.eventsquid.com/event/27325>. Late prices begin on May 1. Register now to reserve your space! There is an option to pay later by May 23. Pur-



Photo of University of Montana Quad in Missoula, MT.

chase guest tickets for the Tuesday Luncheon and Thursday Awards Banquet online by May 23. No on-site sales will be available.

Please note there are no Pre-Symposium Workshops this year. ITC and CSKT have opted to cancel all previously advertised Pre-Symposium Workshops due to several factors that were out of our control. Thank you for your understanding. We will resume in the future if possible.

Monday, June 2: The Symposium officially BEGINS on Monday, June 2, at 4:00 pm. All attendees check in at the ITC registration desk located at the University of Montana: University Center 3rd Floor and pick up name tags and registration materials from 4:00 pm - 6:00 pm. Then head to the Host Icebreaker at the University

of Montana: Washington-Grizzly Stadium Club from 5:00 pm - 7:00 pm

Tuesday, June 3: Registration at the University of Montana: University Center 3rd Floor. Exhibits, and the Raffle begin at 7:00 am. The symposium officially starts at 8:00 am with the **Opening Ceremony**
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President's Message

by Cody Desautel



Cody Desautel

It has been an eventful start to 2025, and the new administration. I spent some time in Washington DC in mid-February meeting with congressional representatives and staff and testifying on the implementation of the Indian Trust Asset Reform Act and Appropriations. In the House Natural Resources subcommittee on Indian & Insular Affairs I testified regarding the use and challenges with Indian Trust Asset Management Plan's (ITAMP). In that testimony I shared the success with approved ITAMP's for Coquille and Cow Creek but also shared the challenges with utilization of the pilot authority and extension of the demonstration project timeline. ITC made recommendations consistent with the IFMAT report, which included a permanent extension of the authority, redirecting funding to tribes for inherent federal functions they were performing under ITAMP's, and additional education and outreach for both tribes and BIA staff to better utilize the authority.

That same week I testified before House Appropriations Subcommittee for Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies. Based on direction from the new administration and Executive Orders that have been issued to date we focused the

testimony on the efficiency that already exists in Indian Country, and treaty and trust responsibilities of the federal government. We shared funding comparisons from the IFMAT IV report to illustrate the discrepancy in funding between BIA and other federal forest management agencies. Recognizing that funding increases were unlikely we requested that tribal/BIA funding levels remain consistent with the FY 2023 funding levels. However, we did request that Congress includes report language on per acre spending across agencies for forest management and firefighter compensation. We also stressed the importance of retaining a BIA workforce that has the capacity to support tribes and uphold the federal trust responsibility.

A continuing resolution was passed on March 14, 2025, which will fund the federal government for the remainder of FY 2025. Within that bill language was approval of the firefighter pay table. This is something that ITC has worked on since the passage of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, and with the authority permanent will continue to work with the Office of Wildland Fire and BIA to ensure that same compensation is made available to tribal 638 programs. We hope to have more information on this in the next newsletter.

We have been accepting applications for the ITC Executive Director, with the first review of applications scheduled for March 31, 2025. We are optimistic we will have a number of qualified candidates and look forward to increasing our capacity at ITC. This will be a critical first step to building out a modest staff to ensure we have the ability to engage with our federal partners, Congress, and

others to advocate for tribal forest and fire management.

To end I would like to remind everyone that the annual symposium will be June 2-5, 2025, in Missoula, Montana. I want to thank the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes for hosting and look forward to seeing everyone there. We had a great turnout last year, and hope to see similar numbers in June. We will continue to monitor progress of the new administration and will have more trips to DC scheduled to brief the incoming cabinet soon. There are many fresh faces in Washington DC, and it will be important to share the success of tribal management the relationship tribes have with the federal government.



Symposium Committee

by Howard Teasley, Jr.

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mony – Invocation, Posting of the Colors, and Welcomes. **Keynote** by Director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs Bryan Mercier. **Featured Guest Speaker** by Chief of the USDA Forest Service Tom Schultz. The morning panel will present **Co-Management in Forestry**. Followed by ITC **Luncheon** and the second panel **Lumber and Log Market Indications & Influences**. Ending with the **CSKT Host Presentation**. This will conclude the afternoon sessions, and the evening events will start at 6:00 pm with the **Host Tribe Welcome Dinner** at the Fort Missoula Regional Park. Guest Welcome. Parking Available. No registration required.

Wednesday, June 4 CSKT Tribal

Tour: Bus loading from 7:30 am - 8:00 am. Attendees will be notified via email of bus loading locations prior to the event. Leaves promptly at 8:00 am. Please contact ITC in advance with any questions about the tour. If you require special accommodations let us know by May 21, 2025. Call 503-282-4296. Guests welcome. No registration required. The tour features the CSKT Bison Range and the CSKT Forestry North Greenhouse. Lunch (provided) at the River Honoring Site on the Flathead River in Moiese Valley. The weather may change, a jacket is recommended. There will be some light walking and the tour through the Bison Range will take place on the buses.

After the tour, there will be a **Gen-**

eral Membership Meeting at University of Montana, which will be an open forum with topics of discussion given later. This will also give member Tribes the opportunity to communicate with the ITC Board of Directors about their concerns.

Thursday, June 5: The day's activities will start at 8:00 am with the **ITC President's Report**, then we will hear from Department of Interior Office of Wildland Fire, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Legislative, and U.S. Forest Service Office of Tribal Relations. Immediately following the Updates our ITC Workshops will start simultaneously at 10:30 am and end at 4:15 pm. Attendees are welcome to select one workshop or spend time in all



Photo of a hiking trail in Missoula, MT.

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Symposium Committee

by Howard Teasley, Jr.

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three.

Workshop 1 Indigenous Youth and Partnership Success Stories.

This workshop will usher the audience through the arc of opportunities available for tribal students and youth with an interest in Natural Resource management. Highlighting successes in programs available from youth through their early career opportunities.

Workshop 2 Burning for a Resource Benefit.

This workshop will provide background and relevance to the importance of acknowledgment and practice of traditional burning. Participants will learn from firsthand practitioners and leadership about the importance, benefits, and methods to incorporate traditional burning into contemporary management programs.

Workshop 3 Federal Funding and Partnership Opportunities.

This workshop will provide information to participants about federal funding and other partnership opportunities available for tribes to create collaborative inter-agency partnerships. As tribes continue to face ongoing challenges the need to identify opportunities is increasing. These partnerships can support tribes with capacity, research, and information to better meet tribal land management needs.

Following the workshops there will be the **Annual ITC Business Meeting** at the University of Montana: University Center 3rd Floor.

The 45th Annual National Intertribal Timber Symposium will conclude with our **Annual Awards Banquet** to honor and recognize the recipients of any regional or national Earle Wilcox Awards, and the recipients of the Truman D.

Picard Scholarship. And finally, the winners of the various Education Committee Raffle prizes will be presented at this time.

Airports and Car Rentals: Missoula International Airport (MSO) is in Missoula, MT and is 7 miles west of the University of Montana. You can now plan to make the necessary reservations for your stay, vehicles, and activities. Visit the event website for closest airports and lodging information. These special rates are available until May 1, or until the room blocks are filled. Three hotels have negotiated group rates for the Symposium. The Holiday Inn Missoula Downtown exceeds the per diem. There is also limited availability of hotels within the per diem rate in June 2025. Download the Symposium Lodging Per Diem Waiver 2025 from the “Documents” menu of the event website.

Parking at the University of Montana: Visitors may pay to park by the hour using the Passport app. Hourly rate is \$1.00/hr. or \$8.00/day. Download the Passport Parking app from the [Apple App Store](#) or [Google Play Store](#). Multiple days can be purchased on the [Parking Portal](#).

Public Bus to the University of Montana: [How to Use UDASH](#): No ID or payment required: You do not need to show an ID to use UDASH. The service is funded through student fees, so no payment is required. 5 Bus Routes: All routes run Monday - Friday and connect to the Transit Hub located outside of the Music Building/ Business Building. Download the [Transit App](#). Track your bus in real-time. Receive timely alerts about route changes and other vital information. Simplifies your public transit experience.

Symposium Shuttle to the University of Montana: ITC will provide limited shuttles from the three host hotels. A schedule will be provided prior to the event.

Visit Montana! ITC and CSKT will see you in May.

Help: Intertribal Timber council is a nonprofit organization and is always looking for donations and/or sponsorships during the Annual Timber Symposium. ITC will accept banquet sponsorships that can be of any amount. If a Tribe or business is interested in donating, please contact ITC directly.

Here are the future Symposium dates for planning purposes:

2026 – 49th Annual National Indian Timber Symposium hosted by the **Menominee Indian Tribe**, Kesheena, WI.

2027 – 50th Annual National Indian Timber Symposium hosted by the **San Carlos Apache Tribe**, San Carlos, AZ.

2028 – 51st Annual National Indian Timber Symposium hosted by the **Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation**, (unconfirmed).

Searching for a Host Tribe: Each year, the member tribes of Intertribal Timber Council vote by ballot and choose a future site for a tribe wanting to host the event. This occurs during the Annual Business Meeting on Thursday, June 5 2025, after the Symposium workshops. During the meeting, there is an **Election of Board Members** and a decision on the next location.

2029 – 52nd Annual National Indian Timber Symposium is open for a tribe wanting to highlight their reservation area, tribal organiza-

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Symposium Committee

by Howard Teasley, Jr.

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tion, natural resources, and resort casino. ITC has developed a plan-

ning document, which outlines every aspect of hosting, both in the forefront and behind the scenes.

This will answer any questions and help weigh in on a tribe's decision. Is your Tribe interested in hosting. Please contact us.



BIA Division of Wildland Fire Management

by Aaron Baldwin



Aaron Baldwin

BIA MAKES STRIDES TO MODERNIZE FIRE FLEET ACROSS INDIAN COUNTRY

New and modernized fire engines are in process for the BIA Division of Wildland Fire Management (DWFM). Recently, four Model 662, Type 6 engines were received to replace aging and outdated engines within Indian Country. The process to update the Model 52,

Type 6, engines that have been historically used by the Bureau has been a long time coming and is cause for celebration for the DWFM.

In 2024, the DWFM joined forces with the Bureau of Land Management National Fire Equipment Program (BLM-NFEP) to support the effort to standardize and modernize all wildland fire fleet including command vehicles, utility vehicles, hotshot crew carriers, water tenders and more. Working



Picture of BIA operations staff members, Bradford LeCompte, Joshua Simmons and Shane Santos, p in front of a newly inspected Model 662, Type 6 engine in Weatherford, TX.

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BIA Division of Wildland Fire Management

by Aaron Baldwin

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Picture of fire engine designs from BIA's fire fleet centers.

with the BLM-NFEP enables the DWFM to collaborate with other National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) agencies in the procurement of a more modernized fleet, collaborating on issues associated with maintenance and safety recalls, and keeping up with advancements with technology such as the implementation of telematic devices.

“By ordering this equipment through BLM-NFEP, it gives the BIA Division of Wildland Fire Management the ability to standardize engines utilized in wildland fire suppression with the other DOI agencies,” stated Steven Chumley, BIA national fleet manager. “BLM-NFEP collaboration benefits overall fire fleet management for the BIA to keep equipment safe and up to date for our wildland firefighters to do their jobs safely and adequately.”

The need to replace the Model 52,



6 makes it difficult to keep pace with advancements in technology. As vehicles age and depreciate, operating costs associated with maintenance increase.

The Model 662, Type 6 engines that are being purchased by the BIA are being built by a contractor who has been building and manufacturing quality and reliable products, including engines built and designed for wildland fire suppression, since the 1980s. The new engines standardize BIA equipment with other federal agencies with active roles in wildland fire suppression who have also had equipment built by the same contractor. The newer, modernized engines provide BIA and tribal wildland firefighters the means to respond to and suppress fires in a better and safer manner, reducing the threat of wildland fire for communities throughout the United States. The modern-



Pictured: BIA staff receiving fire engine training and engine acceptance at the contractor location in Weatherford, TX.

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BIA Division of Wildland Fire Management

by Aaron Baldwin

(Continued from page 6)

ized equipment boosts firefighter morale, knowing they have equipment that can be relied on and is safe, compared to equipment that has surpassed its lifecycle for use. Additionally, the Model 662, Type

6 engines are modernized, and allows the DWFM to keep pace with current advancements in technology related to wildland fire suppression.

The DWFM currently has a total of 42 class 662, Type 6 engines on

order with the intent to continue purchasing new engines and fire apparatus annually to replace all outdated equipment that have surpassed their recommended lifecycles.



Education Committee

by Shawn de France



Shawn de France

Indigenous Voices Guide: The Education Committee met virtually on February 11, 2025. The meeting was well attended, and we had four guests from the Sustainable Forestry Initiative. They are interested in teaming with ITC to create a Project Learning Tree guide that will inform native students about natural resource management in Indian country. This would be beneficial for educators, the youth and adults interested in Native American natural resource management.

SAF Convention: Elizabeth Buhl with the Society of American Foresters also joined our last meeting. SAF is offering a complimentary space at the Annual SAF Convention in October in Hartford, Connecticut for hosting an ITC meet and greet with

Northeast and Eastern Tribes, share ITC work and priorities, and have a listening session with attending tribes.

Truman D. Picard Scholarship:

The deadline was March 21, 2025. We will be reviewing applications at our next board meeting in April. There were many applicants! The Education Committee is dedicated to assisting students to reach their academic goals.

Symposium Scholarship Fundraiser: A quick reminder; we will be holding the raffle during the Symposium in June. Attendees are encouraged to participate in the fundraiser. Ticket prices are \$1 each or \$5 for 6 tickets. Staff will be onsite selling tickets. Cash payment is accepted. ATM located in the University Center.

The Intertribal Timber Council's Truman D. Picard Scholarship is dedicated to Native students pursuing an education in Natural Resources. Since 1988, ITC has awarded 585 scholarships totaling \$1,228,000! ITC members donate raffle items for the Scholarship Fundraiser. Many of the donated items are hand-made by tribal members. Attendees are welcome to donate. The 2024 raffle fundraiser raised \$10,000.

Donations can be dropped off onsite to raffle staff or shipped

in advance:

Address for U.S. Postal Service:

Attn: Shawn de France, Forestry Dept.
Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes
PO Box 278
Pablo, MT 59855

Physical Address for FedEx & UPS:

Attn: Shawn de France, Forestry Dept.
Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes
104 Main St. SE
Ronan, MT 59855

Be sure to include donor information: name, organization, address, description of item, and estimated value. Select a trackable service and make sure the item arrives no later than Friday, May 20, 2025.



Wildland Fire Technical Specialist

by Jim Durglo



Jim Durglo

The Intertribal Timber Council continues to engage in the Wildland Fire Leadership Council (WFLC) and the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG). Here are some topics being discussed in those circles.

Following the national election, new political appointees and priorities have emerged. The WFLC will soon welcome new Co-chairs. Kristin Sleeper, deputy undersecretary for the Natural Resources and Environment mission area at USDA, will represent USDA, while the DOI representative is yet to be named. A meeting in April at the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise, Idaho aims to unify wildfire leadership across government levels to tackle wildland fire management challenges and leverage new federal strategies.

Non-federal partners of WFLC continue to coordinate on a number of issues. In the most recent conference call, a few of the members discussed priority setting under the new leadership. Mike Zupko also reported convening WFLC members representing local communities (NACo, NLC, NEMA, and IAFC) to discuss joint strategies and real challenges following recent urban fires in Los Angeles, Hawaii, and

Colorado. Although “these types of fires” are not new, the approach and knowledge around the challenges is ever-increasing and the need to more directly address and provide leadership on this topic is prevalent.

The NWCG continues to invest in **Incident Position and Training Modernization (IPTM)** to update wildland fire incident position management with a performance-based training system. This includes developing Incident Position Standards, a Next Generation Position Task Book, essential training, and job aids. So far, 43 of 115 positions are either completed or in progress, thanks to over 110 field experts. The Executive Board appreciates the staffing and contracted resources supporting IPTM’s success. Check out the website for more information on IPTM at [Incident Performance and Training Modernization \(IPTM\) | NWCG](#).

WEATHER INFORMATION MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (WIMS) END OF LIFE AND TRANSITION TO THE FIRE ENVIRONMENT MAPPING SYSTEM (FEMS)

An issue of interest to the fire staff is that the Weather Information Management System (WIMS) end of life and transition to the Fire Environment Mapping System (FEMS). The WIMS is a comprehensive system that helps manage weather information. WIMS serves as the host for the National Fire Danger Rating System (NFDRS), incorporating both the 1978 and 1988 fuel models. FEMS is a wildland fire IT application which supports wildland fire preparedness and decision-making with better access to fire environment datasets and online analysis tools than the applications it is designed to

replace, including WIMS. The WIMS will reach end of life in September 2025.

The National Fire Danger Rating System (NFDRS) is a system used by wildland fire management agencies to assess current fire danger at local and national levels. It consists of a variety of indices that portray current potential fire danger conditions. The NFDRS uses weather, fuels, and fire occurrence data to calculate fire danger for a given area. The Fire Environment Mapping System (FEMS) will begin displaying NFDRS outputs by June 2025 and will replace WIMS as the authoritative database for NFDRS starting September 2025. A common output from the NFDRS is the pocket cards as seen below.

Lastly, I wanted to mention recent activity on Wildland Firefighter Supplemental Pay.



Photo courtesy of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, Division of Fire.

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Wildland Fire Technical Specialist

by Jim Durglo

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In a press release dated March 15, 2025, The Department of the Interior announced permanent pay increases for federal and tribal wildland firefighters across the United States.

The permanent pay increases were included in the Full-Year Continuing Appropriations and Extensions Act, 2025 (H.R. 1968), which Congress passed on March 14 and President Donald J. Trump signed into law.

The legislation establishes new special salary pay tables for federal wildland firefighters at all

levels, including temporary and seasonal employees. It also makes permanent Bureau of Indian Affairs funding for Tribal Nations to offer pay supplements to tribal wildland firefighters. This permanent increase replaces temporary pay supplements that firefighters have received over the last four years. In addition, the law creates wildland fire Incident Response Premium Pay, allowing all federal employees to earn extra pay for extended deployments to qualifying incidents. Allocations of funding to contracted tribal fire programs are expected to follow previous procedures. The incorporation of the new pay tables

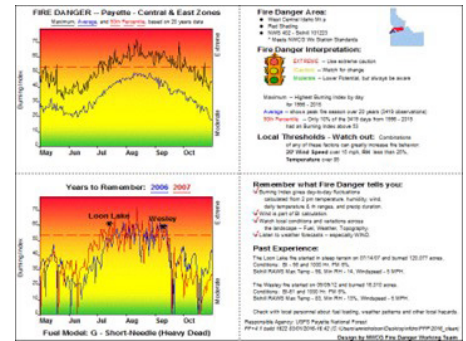


Photo of the Fire Danger Pocket Card - providing a format for interpreting and communicating key index values provided by the National Fire Danger Rating System.

by tribal programs is yet to be determined.



Awards Committee

by Robin Harkins



Robin Harkins

The ITC Awards Committee met virtually in March to review applications received for the 2025 Earle R. Wilcox Memorial Awards. Committee members were provided with the submitted nomination packages and were able to evaluate and score them independently before the committee meeting. Scores were tallied by me the Awards Committee Chairperson, and each nomination was discussed by the group. The accomplishments of your

peers in Indian Forestry continue to be impressive.

Thank you to the individuals who coordinated application packets for their peers and the committee members who took the time to review and provide input on award recipients. Award recipients will be announced and recognized during the 48th Annual National Indian Timber Symposium hosted by the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes in Missoula, MT June 2-5, 2025. Hope you can join ITC in-person to recognize the outstanding accomplishments of the award recipients.

It is never too early to start thinking about who you might want to nominate for future awards at both the regional and national levels. Do you know someone who has made an impact on Indian Forestry in their region or across regions and might be deserving of these awards? If so, reach out to me or the ITC office and we can assist you in getting

the process started.





Matt Hill

FEDERAL APPROPRIATIONS UPDATE

The status of federal appropriations for Fiscal Year 2025 (FY 2025), which runs from October 1, 2024, to September 30, 2025, is that full-year funding has been secured through the "Full-Year Continuing Appropriations and Extensions Act, 2025." This legislation was passed by Congress and signed into law by President Donald Trump on March 20, 2025, averting a government shutdown that would have occurred after the previous continuing resolution (CR) expired on March 14, 2025.

The bill extends federal funding through the end of FY 2025 (September 30, 2025) at levels largely consistent with FY 2024 appropriations, adjusted for certain anomalies. DOI's discretionary budget, which was approximately \$15.8 billion in FY 2024, continues at roughly the same level for FY 2025 under the CR.

No Major Cuts or Increases: Unlike earlier Trump administration proposals to shrink federal spending, the CR does not impose significant reductions on DOI pro-

grams. It avoids the FRA's stricter Section 102 caps (which would have cut nondefense spending further if no full-year bill passed by December 31, 2024), ensuring the DOI operates under the higher Section 101 cap levels.

The BIA, funded at roughly \$2.5 billion in FY 2024, maintains its support for tribal programs, education, and trust responsibilities. The CR's flat funding could strain efforts to address service cuts linked to earlier staff reductions (estimated 200-300 firings), though reinstatement costs may be covered under existing budgets. Tribal leaders have expressed concerns about stagnant funding amid rising needs, but no specific BIA adjustments were included.

Wildland Fire Management: The DOI's wildland fire budget, shared with the Forest Service (USDA) and totaling \$2.5 billion in FY 2024, sees a slight boost. The CR includes additional funding for wildland firefighters, though exact DOI allocations are not detailed. This helps sustain firefighting capacity after staff cuts raised readiness concerns, aligning with Trump's emphasis on fire prevention.

The CR establishes new special salary pay tables for federal wildland firefighters at all levels, including temporary and seasonal employees. It also makes permanent Bureau of Indian Affairs funding for Tribal Nations to offer pay supplements to tribal wildland firefighters. This permanent increase replaces temporary pay supplements that firefighters had received over the last four years. In addition, the law creates wildland fire Incident Response Premium Pay, allowing all federal employees to earn extra pay for

extended deployments to qualifying incidents.

Trump Executive Order On Timber Production: On March 1, 2025, President Trump signed an Executive Order titled "Immediate Expansion of American Timber Production" aimed at increasing domestic timber production and reducing reliance on imported lumber. The order seeks to streamline federal policies to enhance forest management, lower construction, and energy costs, create jobs, and bolster economic and national security. Key directives include:

Boosting Production: It mandates the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture to issue updated guidance within 60 days to facilitate increased timber production, reduce delivery times, and decrease supply uncertainty, while cutting regulatory red tape to boost timber sales from public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and U.S. Forest Service (USFS).

Streamlining Approvals: Within 60 days, the Secretaries of the Interior and Commerce must develop a strategy to speed up forestry project approvals under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), including exploring emergency exemptions to bypass lengthy reviews. The Interior Secretary is also tasked with proposing legislative changes if needed to further streamline ESA consultations.

Setting Targets: Within 90 days, the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture must submit a plan to the President setting annual timber sale targets (in millions of board feet) for the next four years from BLM and USFS lands.

A companion Executive Order on
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the same day initiated a Section 232 investigation under the Trade Expansion Act to assess if timber and lumber imports threaten national security, potentially leading to tariffs or quotas.

On March 21, 2025, the ITC sent a letter to DOI with specific recommendations to align the order's goals—increasing timber production and streamlining federal processes—with tribal interests and forest management on trust lands. Key points include:

Recommendations for DOI Actions: The ITC suggests maintaining the DOI-USDA Secretarial Order No. 3403 for tribal co-stewardship, using Good Neighbor Authority on tribal lands to retain timber revenue, providing legal guidance on the EXPLORE Act, and coordinating with USDA and the Army Corps of Engineers on tribal forest management and wood export infrastructure.

Legislative Proposals: The ITC proposes amending the Good Neighbor Authority for tribal parity with states, making the Tribal Forest Protection Act 638 pilot permanent and expanding it across USDA, codifying tribal co-management with federal agencies, passing the "Fix Our Forests Act," and authorizing land transfers and tribal management under trust forest laws.

Annual Allowable Cut (AAC): The ITC urges BIA trust forests in the EO's 90-day plan for timber sale targets, requesting the BIA Director maximize AAC on tribal lands using tools like "timber strike teams," consistent with tribal values.

Categorical Exclusions: The ITC

supports new categorical exclusions for timber thinning and salvage to expedite stewardship and fuels reduction, benefiting tribal collaboration with agencies like BLM and USFS.

Federal Workforce Reduction: Around February 14, the DOI terminated at least 2,300 employees, while the Forest Service fired approximately 3,400 probationary staff by mid-February. These cuts, affecting about 10% of the Forest Service (and an unknown percentage of BIA), were justified by the administration as efficiency measures, often citing inferior performance in termination letters, despite many employees having strong reviews.

The mass firings sparked immediate backlash and legal challenges. Affected employees, unions, and Democratic-led states argued that the terminations violated federal laws, particularly by bypassing "Reduction in Force" procedures requiring 60-day notices for mass layoffs. On March 5, the Merit Systems Protection Board ordered the USDA to temporarily reinstate nearly 6,000 fired probationary employees, including over 3,400 Forest Service staff, for 45 days pending further investigation, citing potential illegalities.

A federal judge in San Francisco followed on March 13, issuing a broader ruling to reinstate probationary employees across six agencies, including the DOI, effective immediately. Additionally, a multistate lawsuit led by 20 Democratic attorneys general, filed in Maryland around March 7-8, sought to halt the firings and restore jobs, claiming economic harm to states and procedural violations.

Rehiring efforts began unevenly.

By mid-March, the USDA reinstated its affected workers with back pay, placing them on paid leave as legal proceedings continued. The DOI also started restoring some positions. The Forest Service identified small groups for rehiring, such as timber management teams, after realizing the cuts disrupted critical operations.

Trump Political Appointments: Below is a list of confirmed and yet-to-be confirmed political appointments of interest to ITC:

Department of the Interior:

- Secretary Doug Burgum (confirmed)
- Deputy Secretary: Kate MacGregor (nominated)
- Solicitor: William Doffermyre (nominated)
- Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs: Billy Kirkland (nominated)
- Principle Deputy Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs: Scott David (does not require Senate confirmation)
- Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy/Economic Development: Ken Belmmard (does not require Senate confirmation)
- Special Advisor to AS-IA: Kelly Rael (does not require Senate confirmation)

Department of Agriculture:

- Secretary: Brooke Rollins (confirmed)
- Undersecretary for Natural Resources and Environment: Michael Boren (nominated)
- Deputy Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment: Kristin Sleeper

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Legislative Update

by Matt Hill

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- Chief, U.S. Forest Service: Tom Schultz (no Senate confirmation required)

BLM Suspends BLM Conservation Panel: The Trump administration is indefinitely suspending a newly formed advisory panel designed to help oversee implementation of the public lands conservation rule finalized by the Bureau of Land Management under former President Joe Biden.

Nada Wolff Culver, BLM's former principal deputy director and one of the architects of the signature Biden administration regulation, said she fears this signals the new administration is moving to dismantle the rule that seeks to balance conservation with energy development, livestock grazing, recreation and other uses of BLM rangelands.

Farm Bill Update: The Farm Bill has been extended until September 30, 2025. This extension was part of the American Relief Act, which was signed into law in December 2024 to avert a government shutdown. This act included:

- Disaster Aid: \$31 billion in natural and economic disaster aid for farmers and ranchers.
- Economic Relief: An additional \$10 billion in one-time economic payments to offset income losses for farmers.

The extension provides a temporary continuation of the 2018 Farm Bill's provisions but does not address long-term policy changes or funding for all agricultural programs. Discussions and negotiations for a new Farm Bill are expected to continue, with the goal of passing a comprehen-

sive bill before the new deadline. However, significant challenges remain, including partisan disagreements on funding levels for SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), conservation funding, and other agricultural priorities.

House Passes "Fix Our Forests Act": In January, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the "Fix Our Forests Act" (sponsored by Rep. Bruce Westerman (R-AR) with a vote of 279-141.

The Fix Our Forests Act is a historic and comprehensive package that encourages active forest management and community resiliency to wildfires by expediting environmental analyses, reducing lawsuits, and increasing the pace and scale of forest restoration projects.

The bill (according to its sponsor) would:

- Simplify and expedite environmental reviews for forest management projects
- Make communities more resilient to wildfires by better coordinating existing grant programs and promoting new research
- Promote federal, state, tribal and local collaboration
- Deter frivolous litigation that delays essential projects
- Create a framework for prioritizing treatments in the forests at the highest risk of wildfire and near vulnerable communities
- Encourage the adoption of state-of-the-art science and techniques for federal land managers
- Encourage active management to improve the safety of powerlines and other infrastructure

- Strengthening tools like Good Neighbor Authority and Stewardship Contracting

- Support wildland firefighters and their families by ensuring continuity in casualty assistance programs

Northwest Forest Plan Update: On March 17, the public comment period ended for the Draft EIS for the Northwest Forest Plan Amendment. Several tribes from the Pacific Northwest provided specific comments, including Cow Creek, Coquille, Warm Springs, Karuk, and Siletz.

The ITC submitted its own comment letter, offering constructive criticism of the amendment process and its implications for tribal interests, offering recommendations to align it with tribal priorities and President Trump's Executive Order on timber production (March 1, 2025). Key points include:

Tribal Inclusion: The ITC appreciates USFS efforts to include tribal perspectives in the DEIS, unlike the original 1994 NWFP, but notes the Federal Advisory Committee (FAC) scope was too narrow, excluding broader tribal input on land use allocations.

Full Plan Revision: The ITC reiterates its call for a complete NWFP revision, arguing the current amendment limits tribal coordination and input, exacerbated by lack of capacity support for tribes to analyze proposals technically.

Tribal Recommendations: The ITC is disappointed that tribal-specific management suggestions (e.g., stewardship opportunities, cultural plant restoration, post-disturbance input) were relegated to

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Legislative Update

by Matt Hill

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Alternative D, not the Preferred Alternative (B), and urges their inclusion.

Food Sources: All action alternatives impose age-based and salvage harvest restrictions, reducing early seral habitat in Late Successional Reserves (LSRs), potentially harming tribal food sources like deer and elk due to poor post-fire reforestation.

Fire Regime Modeling: The DEIS relies on flawed fire regime assumptions, ignoring Indigenous cultural fire practices, leading to misaligned management in moist forests.

Land Use Allocations: East-west and dry-moist distinctions are based on incorrect fire history assumptions, with restrictive management misaligned with Indigenous Knowledge and modern science.

Economic Impact: New harvest limits threaten tribal timber markets, with Alternative B's thinning gains short-lived and reducing sustainable harvest acres from 20% to 4% of NWFP lands, conflicting with Trump's timber production goals.

Tribal-Specific Provisions

Positive Steps: The ITC supports Alternative B's provisions for tribal access, co-stewardship, Indigenous fire use, knowledge privacy, treaty rights, and workforce development, but notes limited tribal capacity and USFS staffing cuts hinder implementation.

Limitations: These provisions operate within a flawed NWFP framework and lack funding clarity, while wildfire and forest conversion increasingly threaten cul-

tural practices.

Wildfire Risks: DEIS fails to address wildfire threats adequately, impacting cultural resources, water quality, and tribal communities via smoke and forest conversion.

Trump's Executive Order: The ITC argues the DEIS contradicts the EO's aims (increased timber production, reduced barriers, supply certainty) by adding regulatory burdens and limiting harvest, urging alignment through legislative proposals (e.g., tribal co-management) and Categorical Exclusions.

Recommendations:

- **Revise DEIS:** Incorporate tribal sovereignty, treaty rights, and co-stewardship; adopt Alternative D's tribal provisions; relax age-based restrictions in dry and moist LSRs; remove new management limits on salvage and older stands.
- **Broader Revision:** Advocate for a full NWFP revision to integrate tribal forest management objectives.

Introduced Legislation Of Interest: **New Wildfire Agency:** Montana Sen. Tim Sheehy and California Sen. Alex Padilla introduced a bill to organize wildfire response under a new National Wildland Firefighting Service within the Interior Department. The bill would require the Agriculture and Interior secretaries to combine their wildfire operations under the new agency, with a specific budget and plans for a Senate-confirmable director.

Timber Targets: U.S. Senator Mike Rounds (R-S.D.) reintroduced the Timber Harvesting Restoration Act, which would require the United States Forest Service to

improve timber sales by:

- Requiring superintendents of National Forest System units to submit harvesting improvement reports to the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture (Secretary) if they have historically fallen well below annual Allowable Sale Quantity numbers laid out in forest plans.
- Require superintendent reports to identify any of the following actions: 1) forest areas that could be used to help meet harvesting targets 2) any actionable steps that may help meet harvesting targets, including expediting environmental review processes, and increasing the use of Good Neighbor Authority when applicable.
- Require superintendents to consult with private industry, advisory committees, local, tribal, and state governments, and relevant stakeholder groups when drafting improvement reports.
- Require superintendents to demonstrate actionable steps towards improving timber sale numbers within one year of enactment. If a forest supervisor does not increase timber sales from the preceding year, they will be required to submit another improvement report within 180 days after the actionable step deadline.
- If a superintendent does not demonstrate harvesting improvements one year after submitting a harvesting improvement report, the Secretary is directed to take any reasonable steps to improve harvesting outputs. This may include providing additional personnel, expanding the use of Good Neighbor Authority, and finding any feasible actions to expedite environmental review processes.





Stacie Holmes

PLANNING AND PRIORITIES

Budget: The remaining FY2025 budget will be distributed once the funding is available. Division of Forestry staff will work with the Regions to ensure that the funds are allocated to field units promptly.

Executive Order 14225: [Immediate Expansion of American Timber Production](#) The production of timber, lumber, paper, bioenergy, and other wood products (timber production) is critical to our Nation's well-being. Timber production is essential for crucial human activities like construction and energy production. Furthermore, as recent disasters demonstrate, forest management and wildfire risk reduction projects can save American lives and communities. This Executive Order will help streamline permitting on forest management activities.

BIA Forestry has been actively investigating ways to enhance forest product harvest levels and forestry revenue for tribes, and considering various strategies to maximize the economic benefits derived from

forest management practices. One specific focus is increasing the volume of the allowable annual cut that is prepared and offered for sale

Tribal Youth Camps Funding: For 2025, BIA Forestry provided \$511,835 to support 16 Tribal Forestry Summer Youth Camps. Youth engagement is an effective way to educate tribal youth and generate interest in the management of Indian forests. Indian forestry has witnessed a decline in students completing college forestry programs and pursuing forestry careers and we are excited to hear feedback on their success. Several tribes reported successful camps with positive youth engagement in Forestry and Natural Resource Management activities in 2024.

Office of Trust Services Quarterly Newsletter: The Office of Trust Services (OTS) Newsletter is a quarterly publication that highlights key developments and activities within forestry and various trust services programs. Each edition features concise narratives that provide insights into ongoing projects, initiatives, and achievements in these areas.

If you would like to contribute an article to the newsletter and showcase your work or the efforts of your team, please reach out to Orvie Danzuka at orvie.danzuka@bia.gov. Your contributions are valuable in promoting awareness and sharing best practices across the community.

Additionally, you can access the archive of past editions of the BIA Trust Quarterly newsletter through the following link: www.bia.gov/service/trust-newsletter. This archive serves as a resource

for anyone interested in exploring previous topics and updates related to trust services and forestry initiatives.

Forest Health: In October 2024, a total of fifteen projects from the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) spanning four distinct regions were carefully ranked and submitted to the U.S. Forest Service for consideration. These projects aim to address critical forest health issues and promote sustainable management practices across the various landscapes involved.

At this time, we are awaiting confirmation from the U.S. Forest Service regarding which of these submitted projects will receive funding. This decision is crucial as it will determine the next steps in implementing these important initiatives.

If you have any questions or require further information regarding forest health or the status of these projects, please do not hesitate to reach out to Orvie Danzuka at orvie.danzuka@bia.gov. Your inquiries are welcome, and we appreciate your interest in supporting forest health efforts.

TAAMS Training Updates: Unfortunately, the four planned Introductory and Advanced TAAMS training sessions planned for February through May of this year had to be postponed. We will wait until we have sufficient assurance that travel will be allowed before rescheduling these classes.

We are pleased, however, to announce a one-day TAAMS Forestry Pre-Sale Course that will be offered via Microsoft Teams. This course will cover material previously presented on the first day of the Introductory and Advanced

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Forestry courses, including:

- TAAMS access and system navigation
- Basic system overview
- Title Status Reports
- Leasing and Title Codes
- Forestry Power of Attorney for Harvest of Forest Products reports
- Tract Owner Address Interest Reports
- Label management
- Realty Forestry Proposal func-

tionality

This new course will now serve as a prerequisite for the Introductory and Advanced TAAMS Forestry courses, which will be shortened from 3.5 days to 3 days in duration.

Two sessions will initially be offered at this time in April, if there is demand more sessions will be added:

- April 10, 2025, starting at 8:00 AM Pacific Time
- April 30, 2025, starting at 6:00 AM Pacific Time

These times have been selected to

accommodate participants across four time zones. The course sessions are available at DOI Talent.

Timber Team: The Timber Team has experienced a significant increase in demand for geospatial analysis expertise, as numerous Tribes seek to revise their forest management plans to reflect more accurate annual allowable cutting figures. In response to this growing need, the Timber Team is continuously enhancing its formal training and showcasing its capabilities through the development of dashboards, timber sale and cruise maps, and updates to forest cover type mapping. The Timber

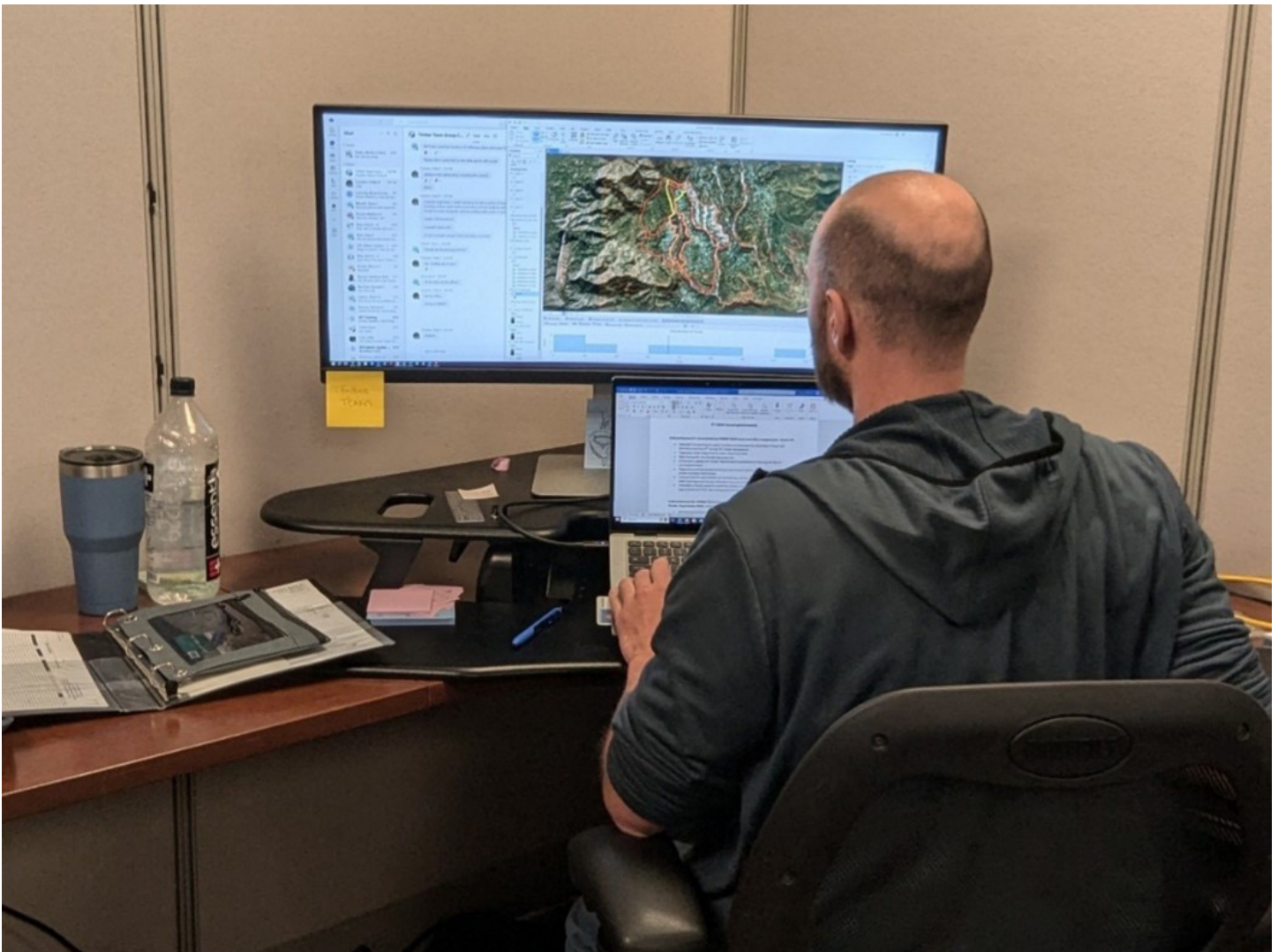


Photo of Timber Team forester using ArcGIS Pro to update the forest cover type mapping for the Colville Reservation's Tribal Forestry Program.

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Team Accomplishments Dashboard is regularly updated on a monthly basis and can be accessed through the Timber Team Projects at <https://biamaps.geoplatform.gov/timber-team-projects/>

Throughout the winter months, the Timber Team dedicated considerable efforts to assist the Colville Reservation's Tribal Forestry Program by updating forest cover

type polygons to align with aerial imagery of timber harvest units across the reservation's timberlands. This initiative resulted in the addition of 648 harvest units and adjustments to adjacent polygons covering an area of 54,800 acres. Currently, the Timber Team is collaborating with the Kewa Pueblo of New Mexico to initiate their forest cover type mapping from the ground up. This comprehensive forest cover typing ana-

lysis will categorize stands into more manageable compartments, specifically delineating ponderosa pine and pinyon/juniper stands.

Having updated forest cover typing GIS databases is essential for tribes as it provides accurate information for effective forest management, enabling informed decisions regarding land use and resource allocation. These databases support sustainable practices by facilitating planning processes, compliance with regulations such as with A-123 reviews, and strengthening funding applications for forestry projects. Ultimately, updated GIS data enhances collaboration with various stakeholders, promotes cultural and ecological stewardship, and empowers tribes to manage their resources in a way that benefits their communities and future generations.

Following is the Timber Team's tentative schedule and openings for FY 2025:

April 14 - April 25, 2025: Nisqually & Lower Elwha Sale Prep, WA; **NWR**

May 5 - May 16, 2025: Hood Bay Allotment Sale Prep, AK; **AKR**

May 5 - May 16, 2025: Crow Reservation Sale Prep, MT; **RMR**

May 27 - June 6, 2025: CSKT Sale Prep, MT; **NWR**

June 16 - June 27, 2025: Uintah and Ouray Reservation Sale Prep, UT; **WR**

July 14 - July 25, 2025: Metlakatla Indian Community Sale Prep, AK; **NWR**

July 14 - July 25, 2025: Wind River Reservation White Bark Pine Surveys, WY; **RMR**



Figure 1. Attendees practicing fire shelter deployment during the 2025 RT-130 Fire Refresher Course.

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Figure 2. Attendees participating in the work capacity test at the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge.

August 11 - August 22, 2025:
Yakama Reservation Sale Prep,
WA; NWR

September 8 - September 19,
2025: Navajo Nation CFI, NM/
AZ, NR

We are seeking proposals starting in October 2025 and beyond and any federal/tribal staff that would like to work with the Timber Team on any upcoming assignment.

To find the project request form and more information about the Timber Team please go to [https://www.bia.gov/service/tim-](https://www.bia.gov/service/timber-team)

[ber-team](#).

Portable Milling Infrastructure: Portable Milling Infrastructure projects are funded through the Timber Harvest Initiative and are intended to assist tribes in meeting a portion of their annual allowable cut. Funding for these projects is limited. When funding is available for these initiatives, the regions and tribes will be notified.

BRANCH OF FOREST INVENTORY AND PLANNING (FIP)

Inventory Projects: The Forest Inventory and Planning staff are nearing completion of two reini-

tiation projects, which are being updated with new standard materials to enable field units to resume data collection. Additionally, five projects are currently in the cleaning and processing phase, awaiting further consultation with the tribes to ensure the accuracy of the inventory data before proceeding to analysis. The staff are also validating the results of the national analysis, utilizing two projects to evaluate the accuracy of the national analysis program

FIP Application Suite Status: Successfully completed the trans-
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Figure 3. BIA BAER Foresters collaborated with the Mescalero Natural Resources Department to identify concerns from the 2024 Salt & South Fork Fire in Mescalero, NM.

lation of the legacy program from FORTRAN to the modern programming language CSharp. The FIP staff conducted a thorough review of research papers related to forest mensuration equations to ensure that the calculated values from the legacy program were accurate. They performed an initial verification of the analysis program, documenting the result computations and confirming the use of standard field names and codes. After identifying and fixing numerous errors through multiple reviews, the national analysis is now near completion, with only a minor fix remaining, expected to be resolved soon. A final review will be conducted to officially announce the national analysis program complete and ready for use.

FIP FORESTERS: PREPARING FOR BAER ASSIGNMENTS

Written by Christopher LaCroix

On February 26th, 2025, Branch of Forestry Inventory and Planning (FIP) Forester Chris LaCroix attended the RT-130 Wildland Fire

Safety Training Annual Refresher, a key requirement for maintaining qualifications for the Department of the Interior's National Burn Area Emergency Response (IBA-ER) team. Hosted by the Fish & Wildlife Service at the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge just outside Denver, Colorado, the course aims to enhance fireline safety by addressing operations and decision-making to recognize and mitigate risks, maintain safe practices, and reduce accidents. This session primarily focused on incident reviews and lessons learned from both local and national incidents during previous fire seasons, with several attendees sharing their insights. The training concluded with a review of fire shelters, covering topics such as shelter use, deployment site selection, inspections, and a field exercise for practicing shelter deployment (Figure 1). This practice helps create muscle memory for deploying a fire shelter in life-threatening situations on the fire line. Additionally, several attendees completed a work capa-

city test (Figure 2) to remain eligible for fire assignments during the 2025 fire season, as both the RT-130 course and the work capacity test are required annually for maintaining qualifications.

For the 2025 fire season, FIP foresters Chris LaCroix and Jesse Wooten are on the DOI IBAER team roster, marking their second year as team members, with the 2024 fire season being their first. Chris will serve as a Forester trainee on BAER assignments, while Jesse will be eligible to assist either as a GIS Specialist Trainee or a Forester Trainee. BAER team members are expected to be available for at least two 14-day assignments. DOI BAER teams are interdisciplinary, typically consisting of members specializing in forestry, soil science, hydrology, GIS, archaeology, media communication, recreation, and documentation/report writing. The team may also include members from various agencies within the DOI or USDA, such as the BIA, BLM, NPS, FWS, USFS,

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and USGS, along with administratively determined staff members. Since the DOI BAER team operates nationally, its members may be assigned to incidents occurring on any land managed by the DOI.

While on a BAER assignment, foresters collaborate with local staff, such as the tribal natural resources department (Figure 4), to address forestry-related concerns arising from the fire. Common issues assessed by BAER foresters include reforestation needs on burned commercial timberland that cannot regenerate naturally, the removal of hazardous trees damaged by fire near high-occupancy areas (homes, roads, campgrounds, water tanks, etc.), damage to property boundary fencing and range infrastructure, damage to small infrastructure (such as campground tables, signage, and guard rails), the threat of noxious or invasive weeds introduced by firefighting operations, and damage to permanent inventory plots. After all BAER team specialists complete their individual assessments, these reports are compiled into a single BAER report for the incident, which includes a funding request for Emergency Stabilization (ES) and Burn Area Rehabilitation (BAR) funds to address the identified issues. ES funds must be used in the current fiscal year of the fire, while BAR funds can be utilized over a three-year period and are competitive with other BAR funding requests. Examples of ES funds include hazard tree removal, drainage stabilization, and aerial mulching and seeding, while BAR funds may cover invasive species monitoring, small infrastructure repair, and permanent inventory plot restoration.

The BAER program is crucial for tribes as it provides essential support for post-fire recovery on tribal lands affected by wildfires. By assessing damage and developing rehabilitation strategies, BAER helps tribes quickly restore their land, which often contains significant natural resources vital for cultural practices, subsistence, and economic activities. Additionally, the program plays a critical role in preserving cultural heritage

by safeguarding sacred sites and traditional practices that depend on healthy ecosystems. BAER measures also enhance community safety by addressing hazards such as flooding and erosion that can arise after wildfires, ensuring the resilience of tribal communities. Furthermore, the federal funding associated with BAER alleviates the financial burden on tribes during recovery efforts while pro-



Figure 4. Assessing commercial timberland for natural reforestation potential after the 2024 South Fork Fire in Mescalero, NM.

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BIA Forestry

by Stacie Holmes

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moting collaboration with federal agencies and enhancing capacity building for future emergency responses. Ultimately, BAER sup-

ports both immediate recovery efforts and the long-term health of ecosystems, which are essential for maintaining biodiversity and sustaining the cultural and natural

resources of tribal lands.



Operations Committee

by Jason Robison



Jason Robison

Wow—can you believe the first quarter of 2025 has already come and gone? I hope everyone had a great winter season and is looking forward to the renewal and energy that spring brings. On February 12, the ITC Operations Committee held a productive three-hour virtual meeting, diving into a wide range of priorities vital to the future of Tribal forestry. What follows is a detailed summary of the key discussions, decisions, and updates from that session, along with highlights from related subcommittee and workgroup efforts.

BC First Nations Forestry Council: Speakers Lennard Joe, Andrea Lyall, and Isa White provided an overview of the BC First Nations Forestry Council’s work on behalf of 204 First Nations in British Columbia. The Council currently manages 20% of the province’s Annual Allowable Cut

and is leading important initiatives in fiber utilization, workforce development, policy modernization, and circular economy projects. They also play a key role in ongoing Softwood Lumber Agreement negotiations and discussions surrounding U.S. tariffs. Much of their work aligns closely with the ITC’s mission and goals, creating a natural opportunity for collaboration. In response, the committee has asked the BC First Nations Council to develop a proposal to explore specific areas for partnership. This item will be added to the April meeting agenda for further discussion.

Legislative & Policy Update: Matt Hill briefed the Operations Committee on several key federal legislative developments impacting Tribal forestry. He noted that workforce reductions within the Bureau of Indian Affairs and fire programs remain a pressing concern. One major piece of legislation—the Indian Forestry Bill introduced by Congressman Westerman—proposes transferring Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service lands to Tribal management under NIFRMA, a move that could significantly expand Tribal authority over forestry operations. Hill also highlighted that the “Fix Our Forests” Act has passed the House, while the EXPLORE Act has made partial improvements to the Good Neighbor Authority; however, addition-

al work is expected as part of the upcoming Farm Bill rewrite. Encouragingly, the rewrite process has gained bipartisan support, particularly around codifying Tribal co-management roles. The ITC will continue to track these developments closely and engage in upcoming Congressional hearings to ensure Tribal voices remain central in policy decisions. A transition document is being drafted to capture these updates, and a policy and legislative workgroup will be established to support next steps, including preparation for ITC’s testimony before the House Natural Resources Committee on February 26.

Looking Ahead: 9th American Forest Congress: ITC President Cody Desautel shared that the 9th American Forest Congress is tentatively scheduled to take place in Washington, DC, during June or July of 2025. As the federal administration continues to transition, there may be a need to adjust the event’s agenda to reflect evolving policy priorities. Despite these potential shifts, ITC remains committed to ensuring that its core priorities are front and center in the discussions. The committee will continue to monitor developments and provide updates as planning progresses, with a focus on maintaining alignment between the Congress’s agenda and the in-

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Operations Committee

by Jason Robison

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terests of Tribal forestry. Cody will be checking on potential invitations for ITC Board members.

Keystone Agreement Delayed Amid Federal Funding Freeze: ITC President Cody Desautel reported that the USDA Forest Service Keystone Agreement remains on hold due to a federal funding freeze tied to Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funds. Unfortunately, the agreement was not signed or obligated before the freeze took effect, leaving its future uncertain. In response, ITC is actively collaborating with legislative partners to advocate for the release of these critical funds. The U.S. Forest Service is currently awaiting further direction, and efforts are underway to draft a letter to Congress urging action. Matt Hill will prepare the initial language for the letter, with support from the policy and legislative workgroup expected as the issue continues to unfold.

ITC Joins Native Conservation Network Effort: I presented the position description and Request for Proposals included in the Board Book, leading to the committee's approval of ITC's participation in the Native Conservation Network. The initiative aims to strengthen conservation partnerships and Tribal engagement nationwide. Kathy Ferge, former NRCS Tribal Liaison in Oregon, has expressed interest in serving in the role. The next steps include finalizing the recommendation, moving it through the Finance Committee, and ultimately bringing it to the full Board for approval. While enthusiasm is high, it was noted that funding for the position may be on hold, and Laura Alvidrez is actively working to



Figure 5. Assessing hazardous trees and damage to campground amenities from the 2024 Salt Fire in Mescalero, NM.

resolve this issue.

Federal Agency Updates & Strategic Initiatives: Reed Robinson delivered a comprehensive update from the USDA Office of Tribal Relations, highlighting key administrative and policy shifts. On January 23, the Senate held the confirmation hearing for President Trump's nominee for Secretary of Agriculture, Brooke Rollins. Additional leadership appointments

included Michael Boren as Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment, Kristin Sleeper as Deputy Under Secretary, and Tom Schultz as Chief of Staff (now Chief of the Forest Service). A significant legislative milestone was the January 4 signing of the EXPLORE Act (H.R. 6492), which expands the Good Neighbor Authority to include recreation projects and allows federal forest

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Operations Committee

by Jason Robison

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product sales to benefit Tribes and counties. The Forest Service is currently seeking early adopters to implement these provisions.

Other updates included a regulatory freeze by the new administration, withdrawal of the National Old-Growth Amendment's Notice of Intent, and the rollout of a Landscape Scale Restoration Directive, which could create new funding opportunities for Tribes and Alaska Native Corporations. Several executive orders—particularly those focused on climate action, Tribal education, and old-growth forest protections—were rescinded. The USDA Forest Service R&D's Roadmap for Improved Engagement with Tribal Peoples was published in December 2024, emphasizing stronger Tribal consultation and research partnerships as part of a broader agency initiative to enhance nation-to-nation relationships and uphold Tribal sovereignty in science.

Wildland Fire Strategy and Capacity Building: Jim Durglo provided a detailed report on wildland fire activities and ITC's role on the Wildfire Leadership Council (WFLC). Current efforts are focused on integrated wildfire planning, improving federal grants and agreements, and post-fire response strategies. The WFLC is refining risk reduction best practices and evaluating community engagement effectiveness, with non-federal partners urging FEMA and other agencies to play stronger roles in wildfire safety and home hardening.

Within the National Wildland Fire Coordinating Group (NWCG), ITC continues to support wildfire

training modernization through the Incident Position and Training Modernization (IPTM) initiative. Progress includes new performance support packages, updated position standards, and the launch of the Next Generation Position Task Book. NWCG also released over 80 publications in 2024 covering safety and incident response.

Looking at 2025, priorities include firefighter health and wellness, IPTM success, and refining fire position qualifications. Of note, the Haines Index and Lightning Activity Level will be phased out by the National Weather Service due to reliability concerns. Fireshed Risk Mapping is advancing through the use of LIDAR data, with Tribal leadership playing a key role in refining fire-prone area assessments. The Wildland Fire Learning Portal (WFLP) is also growing rapidly, now serving over 143,000 users. Although staffing and funding remain a concern due to hiring freezes, a new initiative to engage BIA high school students in firefighter qualification training may serve as a scalable national model.

SFI Green Spaces and Youth Engagement: ITC Vice President, Phil Rigdon updated the committee on the SFI Green Spaces initiative, which continues to build momentum through education and youth engagement. A recent presentation to the education committee emphasized green careers from a Tribal perspective. SFI has partnered with the Yakama Nation to support their forest youth camp, reinforcing the Nation's commitment to sustainability through SFI certification. The initiative aims to elevate Indigenous voices and connect youth with job placement and mentorship opportunities.

The committee reflected on past

outreach efforts, including a focus on Black American foresters, and discussed strategies to improve Indigenous engagement. Funding remains a critical issue, with SFI managing the bulk of fundraising and outreach for the estimated \$200,000 initiative cost. Additional sources may be explored to help expand the program's reach.

Fire Subcommittee Update: Bill Tripp reported that a hiring freeze exemption has been granted for 900 positions, with 600 designated for Interior Fire. Several fire-related bills are currently under review, including the Fix Our Forest Act and the Wildfire Emergency Act. A \$1 billion private fund is also in development to support Tribal fire stewardship.

The subcommittee discussed the urgent need to support firefighter mental health through improved policy and interventions. WFLC briefings continue, though clear direction from the new administration is pending. The group also reviewed emerging fire risk mapping technologies, emphasizing the importance of data sovereignty protections for Tribal lands. Westerman Bill includes important clarifications regarding parity between Tribal and federal firefighter compensation.

Advancing IFMAT IV Implementation: I updated the committee on IFMAT IV implementation, including work by the Self-Governance and CFR Workgroups. With the departure of Stephanie Lucero, additional responsibilities will shift to ITC Operations. A dedicated meeting to review self-governance and regulation priorities will be held before the April Board meeting. Vinnie Corrao, with Northwest Management,

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Operations Committee

by Jason Robison

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provided updates on CFR findings, and George Smith worked to revise work plans to better align with self-governance recommendations. The committee is also preparing for a focused Law Symposium in April, which will include invited experts such as Monte Mills.

Strengthening National Partnerships: I also led a review of ITC's collaboration with the National Alliance of Forest Owners (NAFO). The committee agreed that continuing engagement makes a strategic sense, particularly for advancing shared advocacy goals. A small workgroup will be formed to evaluate potential collaboration opportunities on a case-by-case basis, using NAFO documents as a reference for the next steps.

General Membership Meeting Planning: The committee began outlining potential agenda items for the upcoming General Membership Meeting. Topics under consideration include NRCS programming, updates on IFMAT IV implementation, transition strategies, staffing and contracting updates, and an overview of general costs and expected participation. The finalized agenda will be confirmed at the next meeting.

Marketing & Branding Study: Steve Rigdon provided an update on the ongoing marketing and branding study in partnership with Sustainable Northwest. While federal funding is currently frozen, foundation funding remains available to support continued work. Additional time is needed to complete key surveys. Steve expressed interest in joining the advisory committee to help guide the project through its next phase.

Research Subcommittee Update: While a formal report was not presented during the meeting, I provided a summary of the February 7 Research Subcommittee session based on email correspondence with Serra Hoagland. Highlights included preparations for the 2025 ITC Symposium (June 2–5 in Missoula, MT), the March Data Sovereignty Conference, and ongoing IFMAT IV-related efforts. The USFS R&D Tribal Engagement Roadmap is being revised and reissued with improved visuals. Early career scholars shared promising research on cultural burning and adaptive silviculture, while concerns were raised about how federal funding freezes might impact university partnerships and Tribal sovereignty in research.

The session also featured updates from USFS researchers Michelle Baumflek and Steph Chizmar on revegetation challenges faced by Tribes, as well as ongoing carbon offset work and international insights from REDD/REDD+ programs. The FRAC letter to the Secretary of Agriculture was reviewed, calling for greater investment in forestry research, economic development, and partnerships.

A round robin discussion offered valuable input from ITC members and partners on a variety of issues, including forest product tariffs, oil and gas development, and biome-wide conservation in pinyon-juniper ecosystems. Key upcoming events include the University of Victoria's Post-Fire Restoration Workshop on Feb 20-21, 2025, the New Mexico Forestry Meeting on March 3-6, 2025, at Mescalero, and the July Forest Congress, where ITC will play a vital role.

The next ITC Operations Committee meeting is scheduled for April 9, 2025. The meeting will be in-person in Durant Oklahoma. Looking forward to seeing some of you there.





INTERTRIBAL TIMBER COUNCIL

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