NTF 2010 Addresses Wide Range of Tribal Air Issues

In mid-July 160 tribal air professionals, U.S. EPA staff and others gathered at the Pueblo of Isleta near Albuquerque, NM, for the 2010 National Tribal Forum. Co-sponsored by ITEP and the National Tribal Air Association, this year's NTF was held at Isleta's Hard Rock Casino and Hotel, a sprawling complex with modern, spacious meeting space. The tribe’s employees did a great job of tending to the needs of the participants and have our deep thanks.

The NTF has been a yearly event since 1998, each year bringing together the tribal air community to discuss air-quality issues, challenges, and solutions in a congenial atmosphere that forges lasting bonds while addressing a wide range of topics.

DAY ONE

The 2010 NTF event was launched with an invocation and greeting by Gov. J. Robert Benevidez of Isleta Pueblo. Presenters Bill Auberle, co-founder of ITEP, and Jerry Pardilla, director of the National Tribal Environmental Council, respectively described the history and spiritual significance of tribal efforts to improve and protect the quality of air.

A Brief History of Air Quality in the U.S.

One important benefit of the National Tribal Forum is its ability to reinforce "institutional memory" regarding tribal air management efforts over the years. In that spirit, Bill Auberle helped launch this year's National Tribal Forum with a sweeping survey that spanned the birth of U.S. environmental programs four decades ago to the present. Auberle, an engineering professor at Northern Arizona University, teamed with the late Virgil Masayesva to found ITEP and for many years has been active in air-management policy on the national level.

Thirty years ago saw the advent of tribal environmental programs, or at least that was when a Tribal Air Program was first formally identified. Tribal air-management programs remain young and developing. Thirty years is pretty young. State air quality programs are also young and developing. And U.S. EPA is very young and still developing.

I was practicing air-quality engineering before there was an EPA. When I began, air programs were fairly concentrated in cities: Los Angeles, Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, New York City. That’s where the pollution was. Then, a handful of forward-thinking leaders got together on the national level and decided the city efforts weren’t working. There came a blizzard of
By all accounts this year’s National Tribal Forum was another success, thanks to the spirited participation of so many in the tribal air community. Special thanks go out to the National Tribal Air Association, for once again partnering with us to organize the event; and to Gina McCarthy, EPA’s Assistant Administrator for Air and Radiation, who attended this year’s NTF and shared her thoughts on the existing and desired relationship between Native communities and the agency she helps to lead. And special thanks goes to the Pueblo of Isleta, Governor J. Robert Benevidez for welcoming us to Isleta, and to his staff, Roberta Montoya, and others for being such wonderful hosts.

Among the most pressing topics this year were climate change and indoor air quality. Living in intimate contact with our rapidly warming planet, as so many Native people do, tribal communities face threats to their health and traditional ways that most non-tribal Americans can scarcely comprehend—indeed, one point Asst. Administrator McCarthy made in her NTF keynote address was the pressing need to educate our many fellow citizens who sense something is amiss but can’t quite gauge the urgency of the problem. Many tribal members also live in relative poverty and/or occupy homes that are too often substandard in design and maintenance, a situation that aggravates exposure to indoor-air pollutants such as radon, mold, and carbon monoxide.

Addressing these twin threats to tribal communities is an urgent need. So it’s with great enthusiasm that we announce two new efforts at ITEP, focused on indoor air quality and climate change. We hope our efforts will benefit the tribes for years to come.

We recently signed a four-year cooperative agreement with EPA’s Office of Radiation and Indoor Air to provide tribes with training, resources, and technical support to address concerns associated with radon, asthma, and other indoor air quality issues in tribal communities. ITEP will work closely with tribes, the TAMS Center, and our tribal steering committee to ensure that the services and resources developed for this effort meet the needs and priorities of tribes first and foremost. Our partnership with the EPA Las Vegas Radiation & Indoor Environments National Lab—home to the TAMS Center—will allow us to leverage additional technical resources to support this new effort. ITEP’s Mansel Nelson, an instructor, educator, and long-time advocate for IAQ issues, will lead the development of our new program. This program will officially kick off in the fall of 2010 and continue for four years. If you have IAQ concerns, I encourage you to get in touch with us.

As many of you know, ITEP has also been gearing up its climate change education and outreach efforts. Those efforts, we’re happy to announce, will be bolstered by a new four-year cooperative agreement with EPA’s Office of Atmospheric Programs. The focus will be to develop training courses, technical assistance, and other resources to assist tribes in adapting to the impacts of climate change. In preparing our work plan and proposal, we contacted and sought support from tribes around the country as well as NAU and regional technical experts. In the process, we received support and commitment from
their airsheds. Discussions of regional tribal air issues followed, with a panel of tribal spokespeople who covered an array of air challenges in Indian Country.

This year’s keynote address was delivered by a special guest to the NTF, U.S. EPA’s Assistant Administrator for Air and Radiation, Gina McCarthy. In her talk Ms. McCarthy displayed a notable grasp of tribal air issues, from climate change to specific pollution issues in Indian Country to broader topics of tribal sovereignty and the trust relationship between Native people and the U.S. government (see accompanying article). Panel discussions by EPA staff and others followed, giving tribal participants the opportunity to engage some of those directly involved with EPA-Tribal funding and program oversight.

After the first day’s lunch, tribal and other experts discussed impacts of climate change on tribal people and lands. Dr. Margaret Hiza-Redsteer of the U.S. Geological Survey described her research on the movement of sand dunes on the Navajo Nation, which reflect the impacts of drought and climate change on the northeastern Arizona region. Afternoon sessions addressed climate change, tribal air programs, and the harsh legacy of uranium mining on Native communities. At an evening gathering attendees were treated to a reception, a poster session, and a dance performed by Pueblo of Laguna youth and backed by traditional drummers.

**DAY TWO**

On Wednesday, the second day of this year’s Forum, health impacts of air pollution were a major topic. Annabelle Allison of the Centers for Disease Control, Prof. Manny Piño of Scottsdale (AZ) Community College discussed tribal public health efforts and concerns. Ms. Allison discussed the work she’s doing with the CDC; and Dr. Piño described uranium mining in and around the Pueblos of Laguna and Acoma. Later that morning, EPA Recognition Awards gathering (L to R): Rosalva Tapia of EPA OAQPS; Jason Mandly of the Morongo Band of Mission Indians; Brandy Toft of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe Indians; EPA Asst. Administrator Gina McCarthy; and Denise Wolf of the Sac and Fox Tribe of the Mississippi in Iowa.

Dr. Margaret Hiza-Redsteer of the U.S. Geological Survey described her research on sand dunes on the Navajo Nation and its application to global-warming science.

EPA Recognition Awards gathering (L to R): Rosalva Tapia of EPA OAQPS; Jason Mandly of the Morongo Band of Mission Indians; Brandy Toft of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe Indians; EPA Asst. Administrator Gina McCarthy; and Denise Wolf of the Sac and Fox Tribe of the Mississippi in Iowa.

The National Tribal Air Association’s Executive Committee shared information on air issues facing the tribes in their regions of the country.

Professor Manny Pino of the Pueblo of Acoma described the impacts of uranium mining on his people and land.

Traditional dancers and drummers from the Pueblo of Laguna entertained at an informal gathering of participants and presenters on the first evening of the Forum.

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environmental efforts, with the National Environmental Policy Act, the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, the formation of U.S. EPA and others, all within five years.

Those were tumultuous and exciting times. There was not yet any EPA staff. The air quality people reached out to the Dept. of Health, Education and Welfare to bring in scientists. Water people went to the Interior Dept., figuring they’d steal a few people from there. Radiation people were lifted from the then Atomic Energy Commission. So efforts were launched to clean up the environment, principally by scientists with limited experience in the daunting challenges of dealing with dirty air, water, and land.

The edicts of Congress were: “Go forth, make our air healthy, and keep it that way.” How? Congress said, “Make the states do it.” That’s the basis of our air quality laws. That’s the role of EPA, to make the states do it. How do we keep the pressure on the states, the feds asked? Well, we’ll give them money, let them hire and train people, and for continuing federal funding we’ll make them apply every year, and if they don’t do the job we’ll take the money away. The states responded by saying, “Okay, EPA, we like part of this deal. Give us bushels of money and leave us alone.” And EPA said, we’ll give you small buckets of money and make you accountable every year, but we’re going to make this sound pretty good. You’ll get small amounts, but we’ll give you funding with grand names like 103, 105, 106, 208….”

Is it any wonder that by 1990 (20 years later!), we still had many millions of people breathing unhealthy air? I should note that there are good people out there, and some were asking, “What about tribal lands? What about Indian Country?” The states had had all the authority for two decades or more. Finally, in 1990 Congress and EPA said, “We have an answer to Tribal air quality problems. You’re right. We’ve been ignoring the tribes. Our answer? We’ll treat them like states.” And the tribes said, “Wait, we’re sovereign nations.” And the feds said, “We’ll treat you like states, give you more autonomy, but you have to show capacity.” And the tribes asked, “Capacity to do what?” And EPA said, “The capacity to spell things, like NAAQS, NESHAPS, MACT, LAER….”

And the tribes worked on it and said, “Okay, we’ve got that figured out.” And EPA said, “Wait, there’s more. Try TAR, RACT, and PSD….” And the tribes said, “Okay, we’ve got that figured out.” And EPA said, “Wait, there’s some more: CARE, CAIR, CASTnet, and how about AQs and NADP and….”

The tribes are still new at this stuff, as are the states, as is U.S. EPA. Meanwhile, the climate gets hotter, toxins contaminate our food and water, and 100 million Americans are breathing unhealthy air. There’s bad indoor air, and all the problems with fossil fuels. We still have a lot to do, a lot to learn. We have to grow up. Quickly.
Despite the federal government’s lackluster response to the pressing issue of climate change, EPA has managed to create and fund a small number of programs to support tribal adaptation efforts. One such program, Climate Showcase Communities, enhances tribal efforts to respond to the climate issue. Julie Rosenberg, who heads EPA’s State and Local Clean Energy Programs, told NTF attendees that the two-year-long grant program will select its second round of grantees this winter.

The program was designed to “assist local and tribal governments in establishing and implementing climate change initiatives.” In addition, as the name suggests, the awards help support community efforts to respond to climate change efforts that other communities can emulate. Rosenberg said that although the program was originally designed to include two tribal grantees, the quality of tribal submissions during the 2009 grant-selection process led them to change the policy and award grants to two tribes and also a tribal consortium. Tribes who won last year’s round of “Showcase Community” grants were:

- The Northern Cheyenne Tribe Reservation in Montana, who received a grant to update a previous energy audit of tribal building and plan energy-efficiency retrofits and green-power projects.
- The Galena Greenhouse Project, managed by an intertribal consortium in Alaska (The Tanana Chiefs Conference), which gained support from the program to construct an energy-efficient greenhouse in Galena that will use recovered heat from the city’s diesel-fired power plant to extend the growing season, teach local students about food economics, and improve overall efficiency of their diesel system through heat recovery techniques.
- The Gila River Indian Community near Phoenix, Arizona, who won their grant based on a proposal to establish a Climate Change Specialist position in their environmental program, complete a community-wide GHG inventory, implement curbside recycling and a compact fluorescent lighting and Green Building program, and develop options for reducing GHG emissions from industrial facilities on the reservation.

The program was initially funded for two years; as yet there are no indications of an extension. For more information on the Climate Showcase Communities, visit the program’s website at http://www.epa.gov/statelocalclimate/local/showcase/.

The Swinomish tribe, Salt River Pima Maricopa Indian Community, Passamaquoddy tribe of Pleasant Point, Pechanga Band of Luiseño Indians, and the Orutsararmuit Native Council in Bethel, Alaska. Representatives from these tribes will be part of an initial planning committee, which will also include Dr. Darrel Kaufman of Northern Arizona University and Dr. Maragret Hiza-Redsteer of the USGS in Flagstaff. This planning committee will work with ITEP’s climate change program manager, Sue Wotkyns, and our EPA project officer to guide our efforts and ensure the courses and other support we develop will meet the varying needs that tribes have in dealing with climate change.

As in all our efforts, we rely heavily on input from the tribes to help set our course. If you want to contribute to these new efforts, we would love to hear from you.
EPA Asst. Administrator Discusses the Tribal-Federal Relationship

Laura McKelvey offered attendees a comprehensive look at the complex issue of regulatory rule changes involving the NAAQS and Air Toxics.

On Wednesday afternoon attendees filtered into their choice of over a dozen breakout sessions. Topics included climate change and sustainable energy; indoor air quality, a pressing issue for many tribes; EPA rules; ambient air outreach projects; environmental projects that individual tribes are pursuing; and many others.

On Wednesday evening, attendees shared a dinner and joined in honoring Dr. Toni Richards, this year’s recipient of the Virgil Masayesva Environmental Excellence Award. Dr. Richards, Air Quality Specialist for the 2000-member Bishop Paiute Tribe in California, was selected for the award in recognition of her outstanding use of technology in such efforts as helping to form the Tribal Exchange Network, which generates real-time air pollution and meteorological data; and for demonstrating leadership on policy and strategy efforts such as PM and Ozone modeling, indoor air quality, and a study of the impacts of PM on tribal health clinic patients. She also assists other tribal programs in the Owens Valley, helping with audits, troubleshooting, and educational efforts.

The following are excerpts from a keynote address to NTF participants by Gina McCarthy, U.S. EPA’s Assistant Administrator for the Office of Air and Radiation.

I frankly never thought I’d come to work for EPA. I thought they were overbearing, I thought they were insensitive to individual needs of communities. I thought they didn’t give us enough money... or credit or respect. But here I am, and I actually find EPA to be a neat place, filled with some of the most dedicated, qualified individuals I’ve ever met in my life. I’m working for an administrator for whom I couldn’t have more respect. And I’m working for EPA because President Obama got to be president. That’s the only reason I decided I would ever work for EPA, and I am really glad I did.

EPA has come a long way, but let me tell you, we’re not near anybody’s finish line. Air quality has been woefully underfunded, and we don’t have the kind of regulatory key on the indoor air issues as with the outdoor air and toxic issues. We have a long way to go on indoor air.

We need to spend what we get wisely, but we also need to talk about what we achieve with those funds that make the tribal air quality programs stick out as deserving of more money. We have to use [tribal] set-asides. We’ll continue to... make sure the tribes have better access to those funds, so they can continue to make a difference. [We can only make] this happen because you put this in front of us, and we’ve seen that you have unique challenges and that you need to be treated uniquely.

[Capacity building] is an issue where I want to congratulate ITEP for all your good work, the training and education work you do is tremendously important. Your work to train people in tribal communities, and then raise them up to the level where they can train others, is the type of capacity building we need to continue. Same with

see MCCARTHY on p. 7
Each year ITEP provides internship opportunities to college students pursuing environmentally related degrees. At this year’s NTF we spoke with two interns whose placements not only provided them with new learning opportunities but offered them the chance to visit the National Tribal Forum with their hosts and dive headlong into the vigorous tribal air community.

Intern Virginia Blue, pursuing a Master’s in Public Health at New Mexico State University in Las Cruces, submitted an application for an ITEP internship that led her to the top levels of U.S. EPA’s Indian Program. Working with EPA staffers Laura McKelvey and Angel McCormack, Virginia spent ten weeks at EPA-OAQPS in North Carolina, assisting her hosts with research and document production related to the Tribal New Source Review program. “I’ve been compiling documents and creating an outline of information on TIPs, TAPs, delegation, and other issues,” she said. “I’ve helped create a notebook full of documentation that will help to generate tribal feedback on how they can do all the different tasks.”

Blue learned much about how EPA collaborates with the tribes in rulemaking efforts, but she still said, “I wish I could stay longer to learn more.” Her internship has helped her decide she’d like to work in government on public health issues, preferably at EPA or the Centers for Disease Control. She advises potential interns to “know what you want, but also consider other options. Keep an open mind.”

Another of ITEP’s 2010 interns who attended the Forum is Shannon Deasy, a University of Michigan student pursuing a twin major of Spanish and Environment, with a focus on Environmental Justice. Her internship with the Intertribal Council of Michigan, she said, offered her a fascinating mix of the technical and policy sides of air quality work. Her early tasks in the ten-week program involved working with air monitors at two sites on the Sault Ste. Marie reservation in Michigan, including filter handling and writing monitor SOPs under the direction of Air Quality Technician Travis Maki. Later she moved to the tribe’s offices, where she helped Environmental Specialist Robin Clark to review operating permits and prepare for a public meeting on a proposed ethanol plant in the region—a project she said could impact regional tribes both in terms of air quality and the harvesting of timber in ceded land near five Michigan reservations, a resource crucial to their cultural identity.

The balance between field and office work the host site offered, she said, made for an ideal internship mix. The experience helped reaffirm her interest in environmental justice as a career path. “That’s the direction I want to go in,” she said, “community organizing, working with people, fighting for things.” She advises future interns to “pay attention to where you’re going, learn what their issues are, educate yourself on their concerns.”
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DAY 3

On the final day of this year’s NTF, attendees and presenters focused on climate change. Bob Gruening of the National Tribal Environmental Council offered a sobering look at recent global-warming politics in Congress and their impacts on the tribes. Garrit Voggesser of the National Wildlife Foundation followed up with a look at tribal resource-management funding trends. Climate change on the front lines in Alaska was the subject of a talk by Rosalie Kalistook of the Orutsarmuit Native Council and Violet Yeaton of the Native Village of Port Graham. Steve Crawford, director of the Pleasant Point Passamaquoddy Tribe’s environmental programs, described his work to turn algae into usable diesel fuel. Wrapping up the morning, Pueblo of Jemez Governor Joshua Madalena described his tribe’s long-running efforts to bring a major solar power facility to his reservation.

A new event, the “Eco-Cafe,” helped bring this year’s Forum to a close. Meeting with NTF participants in more than a dozen booths set up in a sprawling conference room, tribal air staff, federal and state agency officials and others discussed sustainable-energy strategies, ambient air quality, indoor air, air policy, tribal programs and outreach, and many other topics. The event, which we hope to continue at future Forums, provide an engaging “one-stop shopping” space for tribal-air information.

This year’s NTF was a great success, once again helping to cement the bonds that link the tribal air community, while introducing newcomers to tribal air issues and the people whose hard work and dedication keep the tribes progressing steadily toward cleaner air for their communities.

We thank all those who participated in this year’s NTF and hope to see you next June at the 2011 National Tribal Forum in the Pacific Northwest.

Nuclear scientist and Navajo Nation activist Perry Charley spoke to the NTF crowd about the ongoing impacts of uranium mining on his tribe’s communities and environment.