The Air-Funding Crunch: Making the Best of Hard Times

When EPA/Office of Air and Radiation Senior Program Manager, Darrel Harmon, introduced an ITEP training-course segment last spring, he began by quoting a Chinese proverb: “Be not afraid of growing slowly, be only afraid of standing still.” That’s a good rule of thumb for tribal air programs, especially in the face of static EPA funding. Tight funding is an obstacle for most tribes, but that obstacle is not insurmountable.

In the late 1990s, tribal air funding was more than adequate, and in fact there were excess “carry-over” funds each year. That excess funding, added to each successive year’s allocations, provided a cushion that lasted until 2005, even as tribes were all but stampeding into the air-management arena. As of 2005, the carry-over is gone. For the past several years, air-program funding for the 120 tribes with air programs has been essentially flat. With the costs of war, repeated tax cuts, an exploding federal deficit, and the prevailing philosophy in Washington that federal spending cuts are virtually always the right choice, tribal air funding will probably be tight for some time to come.

These days, virtually every tribal program is feeling the pinch. Harmon says roughly 30 tribes that haven’t yet launched air programs are turned down each year for Section 103 funding, which is meant to support “research assessments and investigations” of air quality as well as capacity-building (Section 105 funding supports ongoing programs). “That’s just the tribes that apply,” Harmon says. “We really don’t know how many more tribes just aren’t applying because they know there’s no funding.”

Start-up Challenges

The Snoqualmie Tribe, whose office is located 30 miles east of Seattle, Washington, in a rural but fast-growing area, has applied and been turned down several times for 103 funding. That hasn’t stopped the 600-member tribe from pushing ahead with their fledgling air program, which has been bolstered in recent years by their federal “re-recognition” in 1999 but also hindered by their lack of a formal land base (they’re arranging trust status for a 54-acre parcel of land, but that hasn’t yet been finalized).

However, Ian Kanair, Director of the Snoqualmie Environmental and Natural Resource Department, and his staff of four full-timers and two part-time, push on, operating mainly with GAP grants, which provide limited air-management support (including funds for staff to attend air-management training) but don’t allow for infrastructure such as air monitors.

Snoqualmie’s list of concerns include regional air quality conditions, air-related illnesses such as asthma, deposition of toxic pollutants such as PCBs and mercury into local waters, air-data gaps in the area, and compliance with the Federal Air Rules for Reservations (FARR), a program meant to address the jurisdictional gap on tribal lands. The original FARR rule for the region didn’t name Snoqualmie, but Kanair believes that as the land issue is settled, Snoqualmie will be included in the FARR’s requirements.

Building the Snoqualmie air program has been slow and has demanded creative solutions. Building “knowledge capacity” through training and regional seminars is one. Another, Kanair says, is to investigate low-cost air-management tools such as the Tribal Emissions Inventory Software Solution, which was developed by ITEP staff under contract with the Western Regional Air Partnership (WRAP).

An ITEP Summer Intern, Nasbah Ben, was hired to help with program efforts. In early July, Ben, a former ITEP employee and soon-to-be graduate student, began a ten-week internship with the Snoqualmie
No doubt about it, times are tight for tribal air programs. As this issue’s cover article notes, tribal funding is flat at best and will likely continue in that direction for some time. The situation hits especially hard on tribes who don’t yet have an air program. Despite the squeeze, however, tribes that want to enter the air-management arena still have a number of opportunities to at least begin the process of investigating their air-quality conditions.

Although ITEP’s overall mission—to assist tribes in building environmental-management capacity—hasn’t changed, we’re recently paying much more attention to the funding challenges that tribes face. ITEP, the TAMS Center, NTAA, WRAP, ITEC, CENRAP, AI-TC, ITCA and many other organizations offer numerous support services to investigate tribal air quality concerns—no 103 grant required. Any tribal air staffer can attend ITEP air-quality training courses, and many do so to learn the fundamentals of air management. Having a grasp of air basics can help tribal staff to determine whether they actually have a significant air-quality problem; it might also be the first step in the long process of building an air- quality management program.

Another benefit is the exposure you will get to EPA, tribal, and state organizations, which can be valuable technical resources when you first enter the air quality arena. These people have a wealth of knowledge and at times resources ($$$) that can help you with your initial investigation. The present funding woes won’t last forever; tribal staff who possess air-related knowledge and skills will be that much further ahead when support opportunities expand again, something we’re all hoping and advocating for.

Having knowledgeable staff on hand is also a big advantage for anyone submitting grants, 103 or otherwise. EPA grant managers must set strict priorities in the face of limited tribal air funding. A grant application produced by someone knowledgeable in air quality issues, particularly if it contains hard data, will claim a higher spot on that priority list.

If your tribe doesn’t have any air quality data, a good and inexpensive place to begin your investigation is an emissions inventory (EI). Over the past couple of years, our Tribal Environmental Resource Center (TERC) staff have developed new tools to ease the process (and cost) of developing a tribal EI. The result has been a user-friendly software program specifically developed for tribes that we call the Tribal Emissions Inventory Software Solution (TEISS). It’s free to tribes, and training is available both online (with live support) and, in some cases, through direct one-on-one training with ITEP staff. Please see the article on page 7 for more on this great program.

Some of ITEP’s programmatic assistance takes the longer view of protecting tribal natural resources. I think it’s important to remember that environmental protection is a goal that really has no time frame; being well placed with knowledgeable, engaged tribal members ready to take on future environmental challenges represents an important long-term investment in the health and well being of your community and natural resources. To that end, ITEP’s Student Internship program offers college students the chance each summer to work alongside tribal and government environmental-management staff, identify possible career directions and gain an insider’s understanding of environmental management. With proper oversight from an experienced tribal professionals, these student interns can do meaningful research to advance the tribes understanding of their air shed. Three of our interns this summer are doing exactly that, benefiting both their education and professional futures and the needs of the tribes with which they work.

These and other opportunities can help any tribe enhance their air-management capacity. The ultimate answer to tribal capacity-building challenges is, of course, ensuring that appropriate resources are available to help tribes develop their air-management capacity. Rebuilding those resources will require a change in the political/ economic status quo. Such a change is more likely to favor tribal interests if tribal environmental professionals arm themselves with data supporting their air quality concerns and remain engaged in the local, regional, and national policy process.
tribal environmental office, located in its namesake town, where she has helped to identify air management priorities for the environmental staff.

Among potential tasks that the air staff will pursue are air monitoring, a tribal emissions inventory, the installation and use of indoor air quality monitoring equipment already in the tribe’s possession, and data analysis to help determine the relationship between regional/local air quality and the health of tribal members. "Ideally," Kanair says, "we’d like to get some dedicated funding for air quality so we can continue to staff that part of the program." He isn’t discouraged by the lack of reliable, ongoing program funding, but he does acknowledge some frustration with the slow pace of his program’s efforts.

Moving Beyond the Basics

The Nez Perce Tribe in north-central Idaho has had an air program since 1998. Presently four staff members utilize three grants to conduct a flurry of activities: an air toxics program with grant funding from EPA’s Community-Wide Assessment Program; implementation of FARR requirements, also with EPA support; and Section 103-funded activities that include ambient monitoring, participation in regional air-quality networks and groups such as the WRAP, and capacity-building and training.

The tribe’s air-program manager, Julie Simpson, believes that many tribes facing budget concerns “have to think beyond 103 and 105 funding.” For example, she says, the Nez Perce tribe has suspected for years that toxic emissions from a nearby Potlatch Industries pulp and paper mill are impacting the health of tribal members, but grants to investigate that impact were hard to come by until the final years of the Clinton Administration, when EPA air toxics funding for states and tribes was greatly increased.

The tribe found an innovative way to obtain some of that air toxics grant money. “Through 103 funding a number of years ago,” says Simpson, “we worked with a graduate student from Washington State University. She did a short sampling project—she provided the equipment, the sampling, and the data analysis. We couldn’t really use the data as scientific evidence, but it did provide some baseline data we used to go after different funding.” They’re now funded for a one-year program to further investigate the paper mill’s discharges.

The tribe’s participation in the WRAP, she says, has provided “tremendous payback in terms of technical capacity-building, exposure to management work in the region, legislative efforts, modeling work they do, and things like the TEISS emissions inventory, which was developed through the WRAP.” Nez Perce considers the group’s mandate important, says Simpson, in large part because the tribe’s traditional land-base extends far beyond the present reservation borders.

She says as budgets have tightened, staff travel has been one of the first casualties. “We rarely travel when we have to foot the whole bill,” she says. “We no longer attend . . . conferences—we just can’t do it. We also say ‘no’ a lot more to involvement in EPA working groups doing this and that. We just can’t, we have to concentrate on issues at home.” Much of the staff’s limited travel these days is supported by WRAP funding.

Though Simpson believes that to some extent available funding drives program activities, her program’s aim is to keep the tribe’s primary air-management priorities front and center, be patient, and grab for support that addresses those priorities when it becomes available. That requires, for example, staying abreast of funding opportunities through close involvement with the EPA Region, and maintaining an active relationship with regional organizations such as NW AIRQUEST, a Pacific Northwest regional air group (http://nwairquest.wsu.edu), and the listserv TribalAir, which regularly lists funding opportunities (http://groups.yahoo.com/group/tribalair).

Simpson points out one drawback of this multi-source approach to air funding. “The administrative burden is very high,” she says with a rueful laugh. “It’s a tradeoff to chase all these funding sources. We have four staff, but only three people are doing most of the work on the grants. I have to do all the paperwork.”

Resourceful Natural-Resource Protection

Ondrea Barber, Air Quality Program Manager for the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community near Phoenix, Arizona, says that despite funding stresses, the tribe’s ambitious air program continues to grow. SRPMIC’s air activities include a comprehensive ambient monitoring program; development of their regulatory infrastructure; basic Title 5 work; extensive community outreach; and involvement in the Joint Air Toxics Assessment Project (JATAP), a regional multi-jurisdictional group that seeks to measure and manage toxic pollutants in and around the Phoenix metro area.

Barber says the air staff’s motivation to continue growing the program in the face of funding challenges is simple: “The community is increasingly concerned about air-related health impacts as well as visibility. We just don’t have enough EPA funding to address those concerns, so we try to keep expanding and also leverage additional resources from the community, targeted directly to the air program.”

Among the tribe’s air-related concerns are significant particulate-matter pollution, mainly from regional farm dust as well as wind that tears at the barren, open land in and around the reservation. Ozone is a serious concern; Phoenix is in non-compliance and air alerts are frequent, at times advising residents to stay indoors or decrease outdoor activities. Toxins from urban and industrial sources have prompted the coordinated JATAP effort. Closer to home, pollution from residential and solid-waste burning is targeted in the tribe’s ordinance-development process.

To continue growing and responding to this welter of challenges, the program grabs support wherever it’s available. The staff is now working with the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality to install a Differential Optical Absorption Spectrometer on the reservation, a monitor
ITEP–AIAQTP Training Courses for FY2006

Aug. 29–Sep. 1, 2006    Clean Air Act/Permitting    Colorado Springs, CO
Aug. 29–Se. 1, 2006    Air Quality in Alaska (Reg. 10)    Anchorage, AK
Sep. 11–15, 2006    Intro to AQ/Computations    Flagstaff, AZ
Sep. 26–29, 2006    Basic Source Assess./AQ Comp.    Juneau, AK
Oct. 2–6, 2006    Air Pollution Technology    Las Vegas, NV
Oct. 31–Nov. 3, 2006    AQ and Community Health    Umatilla Res., OR

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Anyone over the age of 30 has watched a group of elementary school kids and wondered at their seemingly boundless energy. The EEOP staff have found the secret to harnessing this energy: get them excited about science, specifically the science behind renewable forms of energy.

For three consecutive Tuesdays in May, EEOP staff teamed up with the NACA (Native Americans for Community Action) Pathways program, located in Flagstaff, to teach elementary school students about alternative energy such as solar power and wind power.

During the first session, the students worked together to construct solar cars, striving to reduce friction and increase efficiency. Then it was time for the races. The first graders made the connection between shadows cast by clouds, trees, or themselves and the efficiency of their car. One first grader realized that all she needed to do to win the race was to cast her shadow on the other cars, leaving her car to run on full power to the finish. The students made several such connections to science while having fun.

During the second and third sessions of this program, the students constructed wind generators or “pico-turbines.” They started by constructing a simple pinwheel to understand the physics of harnessing the wind, then they learned about electrical generation by constructing a simple rotor-stator wind generator in which Faraday's law is applied. (Faraday's law: A wire in a changing magnetic field will have a current induced in it.)

EEOP’s Program Coordinator and instructor, Matthew Zierenberg, said of the event, “The more interesting and exciting science experiences a student has at a young age, the greater their capacity and interest will be to learn later in life.” He added, “We need to bring science to their level now, so that they can take us to a new level in science later on. This program is fueling excitement in these students and hopefully generating renewable energy for a lifetime of learning.”

If you would like more information about EEOP renewable energy programs, please contact Matthew Zierenburg at 928-523-8864 or matthew.zierenburg@nau.edu.

ITEP Seeking Director, TAMS Technician

ITEP is seeking a Director, to be located in its office in Flagstaff, AZ. Applicants should have extensive management and Native American-program experience; ability to work effectively with tribal, federal, state and other government entities; excellent leadership skills; and ability to work with people from a variety of culturally diverse backgrounds. Extensive travel is required. Full details of this position are available online at http://hr.nau.edu/m/content/view/620/476/ (job notice posted on 6/14/06).

ITEP’s Tribal Air Monitoring Support (TAMS) Center in Las Vegas, NV, is seeking a Technical Specialist to provide air-quality technical training and direct support to tribal air program staff across the country. Requires a degree in engineering, natural science or related fields; and strong knowledge of air-quality tools, including ambient monitors, dataloggers, meteorological stations, and other technology. Extensive travel is required. For details on this position, visit http://hr.nau.edu/m/content/view/446/390/ (job notice posted on 5-3-06).

For more information about ITEP and its many programs, visit our website at www4.nau.edu/itep/, or call Associate Director Mehrdad Khatibi at 928-523-0946, e-mail mehrdad.khatibi@nau.edu.
Reorganization at EPA Office Should Benefit Tribal Air Programs

The bureaucratic structure of a distant EPA office might not seem all that relevant to tribal air staffers out in the trenches, but the recent reorganization of U.S. EPA’s Office of Air Quality Planning and Standards (OAQPS) could actually have a significant impact on tribes involved in air quality management.

“The last time OAQPS reorganized was back in the early 90s,” says Greg Green, who serves as both director of the new Outreach and Information Division and acting deputy office director at OAQPS, located at Research Triangle Park in North Carolina. “That was based on the 1991 amendments to the Clean Air Act. Basically, we were told then to focus on ozone, particulate matter and toxic air pollutants—essentially different processes. We’ve done that, and I think pretty successfully. But we didn’t think we could operate under the same structure these days and get the same bang for the buck.”

The change in OAQPS administrative structure resulted from a variety of factors, among them federal-budget constraints resulting from the Iraq war, serial tax cuts, and other big-ticket political policies, as well as Washington’s bent right now to cut back on government spending across the board.

The reorganization is also the result of an evolving mindset at EPA. Annabelle Allison, an ITEP Technical Manager working with EPA’s Community and Tribal Program Division, says the organization reshaped itself to address several programmatic issues. “They really wanted to shift toward more public involvement,” says Allison.

“They also wanted to look at multi-pollutants as opposed to looking at sources (what they call the ‘stovepipe approach’), which often resulted in sources having inconsistent or redundant requirements. Two things they’re strongly focused on now are climate change and ecosystems.”

Tribal involvement in the reorganization was integral to OAQPS’s ultimate restructuring. “This was a real proactive effort on EPA’s part to get tribal input,” Allison says. At three major meetings over the past year, tribal environmental professionals expressed their desires and concerns to agency representatives (according to Green, the advancements that tribes have made in their environmental programs in recent years lent considerable weight to their input.)

Laura McKelvey, Group Leader of OAQPS’s Community and Tribal Program, says tribal air programs should see real benefits from the restructuring, even in these challenging economic times. “We have two full-time employees working on tribal issues now,” she says, “and there are other people in this group that I can draw on, which brings a lot more energy and staff time to the effort. Also, you’ve got senior management weighing in now. Greg [Green] is very proactive on tribal issues.”

McKelvey points out, “It’s important to remember that it isn’t just one group working on tribal issues. We’ve established a senior-management team, and each deputy division director meets with me monthly, so they can make sure [the Tribal Program] is engaging in the organization’s activities early on.”

Same Goals, New Focus

The reorganization has already yielded important advantages for federal-tribal air-management efforts. One major new policy, says Green, is the decoupling of tribal-program money from the previous competitive free-for-all that included programs such as New Source Review and mitigation of mercury in the environment.

“Now we’ve taken the tribal-program budget out of that competition; it’s a completely separate line item,” Green says. “So when the budget for the tribal program goes out, there are specific things included for the tribes.”

Among new tribally oriented efforts that OAQPS plans to pursue are the creation of databases that list tribal-program activities and accomplishments, track tribal contacts, and delineate tribal-land boundaries; the addition of dedicated tribal codes in the national air-pollution databases; and the formalization of a system to help ensure that tribes can be actively engaged in the policy-making process. Allison says another tribal-oriented effort she hopes to pursue under the new structure is a cross-agency exploration of funding and support available to the tribes.

A “holistic approach” to air management is now a dominant paradigm at OAQPS—a shift that will impact both tribal and non-tribal programs. Green says a pilot State Implementation Plan (SIP) project in Michigan is exploring the creation of a SIP that integrates several classes of pollutants. Allison notes that many tribes have long held the view that everything is connected. She believes tribal input has had no small part in moving EPA in that conceptual direction.

EPA Group Leader, Laura McKelvey (L) and ITEP Technical Manager, Annabelle Allison.

see OAQPS on back page
New ITEP Software Tools Reduce the Effort and Cost of Managing Data

Since its release two years ago, ITEP’s Tribal Emissions Inventory Software Solution (TEISS) has been well received by tribal air pros. The software, which originated as an idea proposed by the Tribal Data Development Working Group of the WRAP and was developed by ITEP’s Tribal Environmental Resource Center Program Manager, Sarah Kelly, simplifies the task of cataloging emissions sources on tribal lands, freeing air staff from time-intensive hand calculations. Numerous tribes have used the software for their emissions inventories (EIs), and several have completed their EIs using the TEISS—a big step in the development of an air program. “Those completed EIs look good,” says Kelly.

ITEP staff have conducted seven TEISS training courses in various locations around the country since the release of the software, as well as two additional advanced TEISS courses. To continue providing TEISS training in the face of a tightening federal air-management budget, Kelly has created an online version of the course. The first two-week-long TEISS course was held in June. The second course this year will begin in early September.

The course covers essentially the same information as its classroom counterpart. Through a logically organized, step-by-step process, users learn how to look at existing National Emissions Inventory (NEI) data, enter data and calculate on-road and non-road source estimates, produce reports, and submit the completed EI data (which the software saves in the proper format) to U.S. EPA’s NEI database.

Aware of the advantages of direct learning support, Kelly has devised a method for providing student-instructor communication during the online course. “We’ll have someone available for four hours each day the course runs,” she explains. “We’ll have a bulletin board where people can pose questions and everyone can read the answers, or they can call or e-mail the instructor.”

To be eligible for the certificate course, participants must have some knowledge of the emissions inventory process. In the FY06-07 training cycle, ITEP won’t be offering a classroom EI course, but Kelly points out that U.S. EPA is presently offering such a course (visit http://www.epa.gov/ttn/chief/eidos/training.html on the web).

Course participants will complete exercises throughout the course and submit them to ITEP staff for review and feedback. Kelly estimates the total time required to complete the course work will be 24 hours. Along with the “for-certificate” course, the online material will also be available for open browsing before and after the formal course, allowing users already familiar with the TEISS to review the training material.

For more information, contact Sarah Kelly at 928-523-6377 or by e-mail at sarah.kelly@nau.edu.

Data-Management Software

ITEP staff are also developing and testing a user-friendly database software program to help assist tribes in managing, analyzing, and reporting air-monitoring data. The software will handle data from both continuous and filter-based monitors.

ITEP Research Specialist Angielique Luedeke, co-creator of the database program with Research Associate Melinda Ronca-Battista, says the tribes have expressed a need for this kind of data-management software. “Lots of tribes are collecting monitoring data,” she says, “but some are not storing or analyzing it. With this software, they’ll have all their data in one place and they can analyze it, look at their quality control samples. We also hope to develop the capacity to submit to EPA’s Air Quality System (AQS) through the software.”

When the forms-based database program is fully developed (the target date for its release is December 2006), tribal air managers will be able to enter NAAQS air-monitoring and meteorological data into the program and render it graphically to examine pollution trends over time. The software will also provide quality-control via its ability to render out-of-range data points. The initial version of the program will manage NAAQS data; an air toxics function will likely be added after the initial release.

CRUNCH (cont. from page 3)

that provides near-real-time data on both toxics concentrations and criteria pollutants. Other JATAP-related activities in which the tribe is involved draw additional funding and staff support. SRPMIC has also organized technical trade-offs with neighboring tribes, such as trading technicians to perform independent audits of monitoring equipment. “It saves a lot of money,” she says. “We certainly don’t have the money to pay a contractor.”

Community outreach, both to tribal residents and Council, has yielded reliable support for the air program. For example, the air program was recently able to solicit funding from tribal government to hire a formerly non-air member of the environmental staff into a trainee technical position. “The visibility has helped,” Barber says. “They knew who we were and saw the program providing real services to the community. So we were able to get tribal money for a tribal person.”

A philosophy of thrift is engrained in the staff. “There are a lot of ways to economize,” Barber says. “We’ve purchased used equipment, then done some minor repairs—repaint something and it looks as
In addition, Luedeker says, the software can help support newly developing air programs through its ability to store site addresses, latitude-longitude information, and information on whether a site is open for monitoring. The program includes a comprehensive Help function; ITEP will also provide staff-conducted training on its use.

Earlier versions of the software have already been evaluated by tribal users. As its features are expanded, ITEP developers will continue to submit the software to tribal air pros for review and feedback. For more information on the new software, contact Angelique Luedeker (928-523-5037, e-mail angelique.luedeker@nau.edu) or Melinda Ronca-Battista (480-759-1544, e-mail melinda.ronca-battista@nau.edu).

**NEI Data Available for Download**

2002 National Emissions Inventory data becoming available for download. The final version of the 2002 NEI was released earlier this year, but in a format inaccessible to tribes using the TEISS software to develop their emission inventories. ITEP staff has been working on the data set and have created state files for Point and NonPoint (Area) sources that can be input into TEISS projects. These datasets will soon be available for download in zipped Microsoft® Access format from the ITEP website. **NOTE: ITEP makes no guarantee as to the accuracy or completeness of this data!!** Contact Sarah Kelly or Angelique Luedeker for more information.

**TOOLS (cont. from page 7)**

McKelvey points to the recent PM NAAQS rule now under consideration as an example of tribal benefits of the new organizational structure. “Tribal comments [on the proposed PM NAAQS rule] have been instrumental in raising issues that we’ll be addressing,” she says. “So we’ve been able to take those comments, highlight them, do analysis with them, and raise those issues with upper management. Before the reorganization, that kind of thing didn’t happen very well.”

Allison emphasizes the importance of tribes understanding what OAQPS has to offer. “It’s so important to make the most of what we have available now,” she says. “When I came to OAQPS, one of the things I noticed right away is how complicated it is here and how much people really don’t know about it. We have some very good individuals here who are happy to help the tribes; OAQPS can be a great resource, and I would hope to serve as the liaison for that, to steer people in the right direction.”

For more information on the reorganization or OAQPS tribal support, contact Annabelle Allison at Annabelle.Allison@nau.edu, or by phone at 919-541-0708.