



Oglala Lakota Nation: Oyate Omniciyé | Oglala Lakota Plan

Project Background

In August 2010, a Consortium of dedicated Oglala Lakota programs and organizations was convened by the Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation (www.thundervalley.org) of the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation of southwestern South Dakota to pursue a unique funding opportunity from the newly formed HUD Office of Sustainable Housing and Communities. By October 2010, this group was awarded nearly a million dollars in the form of a HUD Sustainable Communities Planning Grant to pursue a path towards creating a Regional Plan for Sustainable Development for the Oglala Lakota Nation. This was an impressive outcome considering that from across the United States, over 1000 letters of interest were submitted, over 360 actual proposals were turned in, only 45 grants were awarded and only three had any elements of tribal nations involved. Only one, the region proposed as the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, is taking on the challenge of defining what “sustainable” means for an entire Native Nation.

Once the grant was awarded, the project team sought to quickly give the process and the plan a culturally relevant and meaningful name. After engaging a small group of local Lakota elders about the process and concepts behind sustainable communities planning, many words were offered from the Lakota language itself. The term and philosophy Oyate Omniciyé (www.oglalalakotaplan.org) was chosen for many reasons. In English, this term is supplemented by the phrase “Oglala Lakota Plan” to support the idea of the task at hand. Oyate Omniciyé was used in the original treaties as a term for important gatherings of the people. Roughly translated to English, it means “Circle Meetings of the People” with the end purpose of achieving consensus on important decisions. Thus, the project was bestowed a name reflective of the intentions for the project to serve the people and strive for agreement in a more appropriate manner.

The project also involves a bold new approach by the federal agencies involved. The HUD-DOT-EPA Partnership for Sustainable Communities (www.sustainablecommunities.gov) is seeking to promote more streamlined collaboration and support amongst its partner programs. Developing more sustainable communities is important to strengthening economy, creating good



jobs now while providing a foundation for lasting prosperity, using energy more efficiently to secure energy independence, and protecting our natural environment and human health. These three federal agencies came together to create the Partnership for Sustainable Communities to help places around the country develop in more environmentally and economically sustainable ways. To guide its work, the Partnership developed six livability principles to guide the work undertaken by the Oyate Omniciyé planning team in collaboration with the Consortium and Steering Committee:

- Provide more transportation choices.
- Promote equitable, affordable housing.
- Enhance economic competitiveness.
- Support existing communities.
- Coordinate and leverage federal policies and investment.
- Value communities and neighborhoods.

This funding allowed the participants in the Oyate Omniciyé planning project a unique opportunity to develop a regional plan for sustainable development, which not only addresses these livability principles, but also includes climate change adaptation and mitigation planning. There is a very intentional effort to approach this in a holistic and systems based way. Thus, the overall plan looks at various ways to integrate and empower the entire community by addressing climate change issues and protecting cultural resources from the impacts of climate change on the plains of the upper Midwest.

Working Together

This important planning effort is being led by the Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation, a Native American 501(c)3 non-profit public charitable organization based out of the Thunder Valley community of the Porcupine District on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. Their mission is: “Empowering Lakota youth and families to improve the health, culture and environment of our communities through the healing and strengthening of cultural identity.”

For the purposes of the Oyate Omniciyé | Oglala Lakota planning project, Thunder Valley entered into partnership with one of the U.S. leading green architecture and planning firms, BNIM

(www.bnim.com). This brought together one of the Oglala’s most effective grassroots organizations with one of the most cutting-edge groups of architects and planners looking at “what’s next” in the areas of green design and transformative sustainable community



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development. Together this team has been facilitating the right kinds of dialogue and information exchange so critical to positive forward momentum.

The government and the people of the Region defined by the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation have also been involved in new ways. The Oyate Omniciyé project brought together various stakeholders from the region in the form of a Consortium Agreement and the convening of a Steering Committee.

The primary goal of the Consortium Agreement is to outline the roles and responsibilities of members of the Consortium tasked with supporting the development of a Regional Plan for Sustainable Development (RPSD) to help guide decisions and create comprehensive, coordinated opportunities for the Region serving the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation and portions of the counties (Shannon, Jackson and Bennett) primarily inhabited by Oglala Lakota People. Additionally, this Agreement is intended to help signees better understand the process being followed to develop and centralize information about the population, needs, concerns, and ultimately maximize potential for funding opportunities to provide help to any of Region's participants in furthering their own missions and aspirations. This Agreement also allows signees a forum to outline adequate safeguards to ensure sensitive information that should remain restricted is protected in a respectful and consistent manner.



Oyate Omniciyé Consortium meeting.

Members of the Consortium are committed to seeking new ways to utilize existing information and inherent strengths in a more interconnected manner. They seek to set metrics, bring in new opportunities and define measurable and attainable goals as a means to combat the rampant effects of persistent poverty, disease, violence, drug and alcohol addiction, suicide, drop-outs, historical trauma, loss of language, housing shortages, economic distress and the other devastating effects of oppression that have plagued the Lakota People of this Region for far too long.

With a focus on strengthening the Nation's sovereignty, the Consortium reserves the right to consider the appropriateness of collaboration with state government or an entity established by a state government, a Council of Governments, rural planning organizations, regional transportation agencies, special districts (e.g. utility districts), unified school districts, other Indian Tribes, or a multi-tribal organization that has been delegated authority by member Indian Tribes, additional nonprofit organizations, foundations, and educational institutions, or any other public authorities, districts, business leadership groups, or regional governmental organizations. Private and for-profit entities may also become participants in the Consortium.

Additionally, a Steering Committee was brought together to help guide the planning process. The respected members of this committee represent interests of Oglala Lakota people including elders, youth, teachers, health care professionals, business owners, and people of varying

educational backgrounds. The Steering Committee is intended to provide a community balance as the majority of Consortium members are comprised of tribal programs and governmental entities. This group assists in facilitating discussions in public meetings, gives its input to planning recommendations and acts as extensions of the grassroots public outreach effort.

Support of the Government

In order to effect change, it is important to receive support from the government of the Oglala Sioux Tribe. Thus, the planning team has worked diligently to engage and involve the various branches and programs of the Oglala Sioux Tribe (www.oglalalakotanation.org).

On March 21, 2011, OST President John Yellow Bird Steele signed a heartfelt Letter of Support for the Oyate Omniciyé | Oglala Lakota planning project. He stated, “We have faced many challenges as a people, and some new ones are yet to come – we face an increase in population, housing shortfalls, rising fuel costs and witness the increasingly unpredictable and often times costly impacts of climate change. More and more, if we are to survive and thrive, we must look at what sustainability means to us and plan accordingly. I know we can do this together, because the Oyate have always been naturals at adapting, striving to plan ahead and preparing for whatever is next in a good way.”

On March 31, 2011, the Oglala Sioux Tribal Council passed a resolution placing the health and culture of their people first and foremost by supporting the Oyate Omniciyé | Oglala Lakota planning project. This signaled the desire to move forward full force to put together a comprehensive regional plan for sustainable development that helps the Oglala Lakota identify and streamline solutions to identify and develop mitigation and adaptation strategies for the climate change issues facing the communities of the Region now and in the future.

In April 2011, the planning team spearheaded the effort to work with OST Tribal Council and OST program directors to outline the steps needed to roll out a Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Inventory Initiative to identify and streamline what is needed to have a robust climate change program for the Tribe.

Climate Change



Climate changes and impacts that are already being observed anecdotally and in other research on the Great Plains affecting the Oglala Lakota Nation are increasing drought and resulting water scarcity; stresses to agriculture, ranching, and natural lands; and changes in wildlife habitats. Other concerns being reviewed are observed changing precipitation and temperature patterns, with increases by as much as 20 percent in some parts of the state where Tribal members reside. In Pine Ridge and other parts of Indian County in South Dakota, the region has become wetter

in the winter with greater changes in the area of the Pine Ridge Reservation.

Some climate change issues the Oglala Lakota Plan may eventually address include impacts on the Nations day-to-day life, ecosystems, and economy, such as:

- Less snow cover in winter, resulting in less surface water from runoff during the remainder of the year. This is of concern west of the Missouri River, where most of the reservation population lives and most people use surface water.
- Ecosystems and wildlife used for subsistence living may become more stressed, and wildlife ranges may move north.
- Some plants, including plants used for ceremonial purposes, may be so vulnerable changes in the climate that disappear in certain areas.
- Traditional food crops, such as berries and timsila, may no longer be available in adequate quantities on native-held lands.
- Temperature and water impacts will change which crops can be grown in an area.
- Increasing heat in the summer might increase the number of severe storms. In addition to general destruction, these storms will throw off the timing of crop and forage production. Communities with fewer resources such as Oglala Lakota communities may be less able to recover from the impacts of the severe storms. In the winter, more precipitation will fall as rain and less as snow.
- There may be more heat-related deaths. Older members of the tribal population are more susceptible to heat and will be disproportionately affected. Inadequately insulated buildings, which make up most housing on reservations, will provide little protection from the heat. Important ceremonial practices such as the Sundance may be adversely affected by temperature extremes.

Oyate Omniciyé | Oglala Lakota Plan

The path towards creating a Regional Plan for Sustainable Development began with leaders of the Oglala Sioux Tribe in March 2011 passing Resolution 11-26XB, to promote and protect the health, welfare and culture of the Tribe. They affirmed all participants in the Oyate Omniciyé | Oglala Lakota planning process will be working toward cultural preservation, sustainable development, enhancement of environmental programs, etc., including climate change adaptation to maintain Tribal lifeways. This journey continues as the planning team hosts community meetings and interviews with program directors and other stakeholders. Out of this process, a vision has been developed:

“It is the vision of the Oglala Lakota to heal from historical injustices and courageously build healthy, prosperous communities with wisdom, kindness, generosity and respect for all life, land, water and air. The Oyate (People), especially our Youth, are empowered to lead the way to this sustainable future while honoring our culture and history through the regeneration of our Lakota language.”

Leaders from the Tribal government, non-profits and communities make clear that this vision represents the true intentions of the Oglala Lakota and not of the U.S. federal government. The creation of the Oglala Lakota Plan will be developed to work for the 9 districts and associated 52 communities of the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation as well as the ecosystems and wildlife in this

pristine region. In the implementation phases of the project, needs and concerns will critically inform policy reform and new projects prioritized in a manner most appropriate to support the overall vision. Oyate Omniciyé represents in essence a Tribal partnership program with federal agencies promoting synergy not just between agencies but also between traditions, tribal ecological knowledge and modern awareness of being Lakota.

The leaders and stakeholders involved with Oyate Omniciyé believe the level of crisis on the reservation is staggering with daily issues unimaginable to individuals living off the reservation. In the communities there is often minimal access to safe water and fresh food, which is made even more difficult with climate change affecting subsistence and traditional foods. The goal of the Oyate Omniciyé | Oglala Lakota planning project is to embody the voice of the people and to define the Oyate's vision for a future of the Oglala Lakota Nation that is regenerative, sustainable and more prosperous.

Oglala Plan Implementation and Strategies

In 2010, the Oglala Sioux Tribe became the first official Tribal member of ICLEI USA–Local Governments for Sustainability. ICLEI is an association of over 1220 local government members from over 70 countries who are committed to sustainable development and addressing climate change impacts worldwide. ICLEI represents more than 569,885,000 people throughout the world, and it provides tools such as assistance with greenhouse gas emission inventories and a climate change toolkit.

By joining, the Oglala Sioux Tribe made a voluntary pledge to mitigate climate change, seek adaptation measures, and promote sustainability. The Thunder Valley CDC and Oglala Sioux Tribe then furthered their collaboration for the Lakota Oyate with the help of ICLEI when the Oyate Omniciyé planning project came online.

Another joint effort started in the spring of 2011 between several Tribal offices and the Thunder Valley CDC is the Oglala Sioux Tribal GHG Inventory Initiative. This initiative has a 10-step process, and begins with a preliminary inventory of energy consumption data that is entered into the ICLEI GHG tool. Next, a preliminary report will be produced to share with Tribal Council and Tribal agency partners. Finally, the information will be analyzed and used in outreach to the appropriate agencies such as DOE, NREL, EPA, NOAA and others to establish funding and technological assistance in implementing the project. Ultimately, a Climate Action Plan for the Tribe will be developed and included in the overall Oyate Omniciyé | Oglala Lakota Plan.

As a further extension of the implementation process, the Oyate Omniciyé planning team organized and co-hosted with NOAA the first ever Oglala Lakota Nation Climate Change Summit at the National Weather Service Center in Kansas City, MO. Representatives from NOAA, UCAR, the High Plains Climate Research Center, and the National Drought Mitigation Center, as well as the South Dakota State Climatologist, attended along with Tribal



Visioning and listening session.

leadership, program directors, and key experts from other Tribes. This event provided the basis and dialogue needed to identify climate change impacts on the Oglala Lakota Nation that need to be addressed. A larger event will be held on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in early 2012 to involve more stakeholders and Tribal leadership and to identify the human, governmental, and physical infrastructure needed to support the Tribe's efforts to face climate change in an informed and responsive manner.

Lastly, the Oglala Sioux Tribe will look to the National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS) to strengthen its climate change response in the future. NOAA convened a workshop in June 2001 to initiate a long-term commitment to providing tribes with the drought information and resources needed to better monitor and respond to inter-annual drought conditions and long-term climate changes. These efforts by NIDIS are grounded in the commitment to help facilitate and establish long-term partnerships between tribal constituents and federal agencies, universities, and other entities in order to meet the federal trust responsibility. In the expanded Oglala Lakota Nation Climate Change Summit planned for early 2012, the Tribe will take the steps needed to begin developing a Drought Management Plan.

Successes and Challenges

Since the Oyate Omniciyé planning project formally kicked off in January of 2011, it has been an amazing journey for the Tribe and its members. Obtaining the funding to begin work on the project and having the Tribal leaders pass resolutions and write letters of support are successes, as is the development of the diverse public-private collaborative in the form of the Consortium with the voices of the Steering Committee committed to providing the people access to the project. Becoming the first Tribal nation to join ICLEI and to partner with several federal agencies under the mantle of the Sustainable Communities Planning Program to develop their climate change and sustainability program is clearly another early success.

However, in a region often forced to operate in "crisis mode", it has been a challenge for the planning team to access information and get feedback from the tribal programs and the citizens themselves. There has been some early success with public engagement methods that promote openness and more dialogue rather than "talking at" people. Regarding climate change, there are challenges in clearly identifying specific issues. These challenges are being addressed by the planning team and the Tribe during the meetings with NOAA, UCAR, HPRCC and others, as they develop the Regional Plan for Sustainable Development and associated Oglala Lakota Climate Action Plan.

Key Partners

Currently, the Oyate Omniciyé | Oglala Lakota Consortium and the Oglala Lakota Nation are partnering with numerous stakeholders on this project. Tribal programs, organizations and groups involved in the project include:

- Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation and BNIM
- Oglala Sioux Tribe (OST) Office of the President
- Pine Ridge Bureau of Indian Affairs
- OST Land Office

- OST Rural Water Supply System
- OST Health Administration
- OST Office of Economic Development
- OST Environmental Protection Program
- OST Natural Resources Regulatory Agency
- Oglala Nation Education Consortium
- Oglala Sioux Parks & Recreation Authority
- Oglala (Sioux) Lakota Housing Authority
- OST Partnership for Housing
- Mazaska Owecaso Otipi Financial
- Lakota Funds
- Pine Ridge Area Chamber of Commerce
- Tusweca Tiospaye
- Native American Natural Foods
- Oglala Cultural and Environmental Revitalization Initiative (OLCERI)
- The Village of Pine Ridge

Additionally, there are a wide variety of public and private partners from outside the boundaries of the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. Some of the key players to date have been HUD, DOT, EPA, USDA and NOAA, along with the High Plains Regional Climate Center in Lincoln, Nebraska, Enterprise Community Partners, Supportive Housing Coalition and ICLEI-USA. These organizations are providing guidance, technical assistance, resources and tools to continue development of the regional plan. As the Oyate Omniciyé | Oglala Lakota planning project continues, more beneficial partnerships and collaborations are being made.

These partners have encouraged open communications to continue development of this ongoing project for the sustainability, regeneration and climate change preparedness for the current and future generations of the Oglala Lakota Nation.

About the Oglala Lakota

The Oglala Lakota are one of the seven bands of the Tetowan (Teton) Lakota and one of the Federally Recognized Tribes that make up the Great Sioux Nation. Many Oglala Sioux Tribal Members live on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation located in South Dakota with trust lands off reservation in Nebraska. Most Tribal land is located in Shannon County and Jackson County, South Dakota and an estimated 40,000 people live on roughly 2,700,000 acres. A smaller segment of tribally enrolled membership lives off the reservation in surrounding cities such as Chadron, Rapid City, and others.

The Oglala entered into a treaty of peace with the United States on July 5, 1825, and another treaty on October 28, 1865, prescribing relations with the United State and with other tribes. An important treaty with the Oglala and other tribes made on April 29, 1868, defined the limits of their tribal lands. An agreement, confirming the treaty of 1868, was concluded at Red Cloud Agency, Nebraska, September 26, 1876, and was signed on behalf of the Oglala by Red Cloud and other principal men of the tribe, although many still contend this treaty was illegal. In 1906 the Oglala were officially reported to number 6,727, all at Pine Ridge Agency, South Dakota. The current form of government was handed down to the Oglala during the Indian Reorganization Act in 1934. This includes a Tribal Constitution that outlines 2-year term limits for elected officials.



References and Resources

Oyate Omniciyé | Oglala Lakota Plan: www.oglalalakotaplan.org

Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation: www.thundervalley.org

Oglala Sioux Tribe: www.oglalalakotanation.org

Berkebile Nelson Immenschuh McDowell, Inc. (BNIM) green architects & planners: www.bnim.com

ICLEI-USA Local Governments for Sustainability USA: www.icleiusa.org

Smith, Shelton & Ragona LCC (Legal Counsel to the Project): www.ssr-lawyers.com/

InNative (Performance Measurement & GHG Consulting): www.innative.net/

High Plains Climate Research Center, Lincoln, Nebraska: www.hprcc.unl.edu/index.php

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Photos in this profile are courtesy of Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation.

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The profile is available on the Tribes & Climate Change website: www4.nau.edu/tribalclimatechange/. The tribal climate change profiles featured on the website are intended to be a pathway to increasing knowledge among tribal and non-tribal organizations interested in learning about climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts.

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