



## **Welcome to the Full Circle Newsletter**

### **The Thirteenth TLEF Is in the Books – And Recordings Are Available**

Thank you to everyone who came together and made the 13<sup>th</sup> annual Tribal Lands and Environment Forum such an informative and fun event. We had nearly 400 people in person and over 150 virtual attendees. We want to especially thank our wonderful colleagues at the Onondaga Nation and the Haudenosaunee Environmental Task Force, our sponsors (Environmental Resources Group and KSU's Technical Assistance to Brownfields program), our many exhibitors, presenters, and moderators, and all the attendees who donated such amazing gifts from their Nations, Tribes, and Villages for our raffle. And the TLEF would not have been possible without our amazing Tribal Waste & Response Steering Committee members and all our terrific friends at EPA's Office of Land and Emergency Management (especially Erika Wilson)!

You can now access recordings of the TLEF sessions by visiting our [TLEF website](#). You can also access recordings from the past three TLEF's from this same site.

### **Some Personal Reflections On the 2023 TLEF** *by Todd Barnell*

Last year at the TLEF, a long time attendee told me her favorite part of the forum is that “it always feels like a homecoming”. That really stuck with me because my team and I want the TLEF to not *only* be an informative and educational event. We also want it to be something that sparks connection, a feeling of community, and creates a space that feels safe and supportive for everyone. So the use of the word homecoming obviously made me quite happy!

But I'll be honest here. Organizing something like the TLEF, and handling all the “fiddly bits” during the event itself, can mean my team and I often get caught up in the minutiae and miss the really important parts. And doing a hybrid event can mean you are actually doing two events at the same time! But, keeping the TLEF fully hybrid is really important to me, and so I'm happy to take on the extra work. Many have asked me why I take that extra work on. The answer is directly related to the fact that the TLEF is a homecoming.

Back in 2021, as we were planning the 2022 TLEF, I was talking to my oldest and dearest friend. She also organizes a conference, and she emphasizes making STEM subjects accessible to people often left out of the conversation. She talked about hybrid events being *inclusive* events. Not everyone can travel – funding, family obligations, health issues, various barriers – there are a myriad of reasons. Inclusion and accessibility...these were the reasons I wanted people to be able to come to the TLEF, whether in person or virtually. I wanted the TLEF to remain a homecoming – a safe and supportive place for everyone, no matter what issues they might be facing that would make travel challenging.

Still, it certainly adds an additional layer of complexity (on top of the “normal” complexities!). And while keeping the TLEF a homecoming is very important to me, there are few things *more* important to me than my team. Could I retain this inclusivity and access without over burdening people who are so dear to me? Well, it turns out we could. But the only reason was because of the community we try and create for everyone at the TLEF.

### **Meet Our Team**

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Those of you who have attended past TLEFs, or been involved in any of the many other projects my team and I do, will know Julie has been my rock and “number one” for many years. She is truly one of the most caring and dedicated people I’ve ever met. And she was – as usual – indispensable in making the TLEF a success. She put her innovative and insightful mind to bear on all the challenges we faced this year. But we also had a new member of the team this year. Hopefully many of you at the TLEF had the chance to meet Amanda. She dove right into the “hybrid problems”, finding ways to make things simpler than last year and troubleshooting a huge number of issues. And truly, that is only *part* of what she did to make the TLEF a success. She brought her many talents to bear in all aspects of the TLEF. I don’t know what I did to have the good fortune to have **two** amazing “number ones”, but I do.

It wasn’t just my amazing team though that made it possible to keep the TLEF a true homecoming. The Tribal Waste & Response Steering Committee has always been central to the TLEF. But this year was something extra special to me. This group does so much amazing work during the year, not for themselves or just for the Tribes and Nations they work for. They work incredibly hard for *all* Native and Tribal Nations and Villages. But they have also become a family – to each other and to me and my team. They asked me “how can we help you more?” And before I knew it, they were *managing* all the technical things in several of the session rooms, as well as moderating sessions, giving presentations, serving as ambassadors to the attendees, creating special posters about their annual Priority Document, engaging with people at their table in the Multi Media Meetup, and more. They were truly amazing, and I hope those of you at the TLEF had the chance to meet and chat with one or more of them.

Every year at the TLEF there is one 90 minute period when I have to stop dealing with tech issues, or talking to banquet staff, or loading a revised presentation onto a laptop at the last minute: When I lead the annual Tribal Superfund Working Group Talking Circle. This is always a special part of the TLEF for me. Sometimes I throw out a topic, sometimes I just let people share what they want. This year I asked everyone in the circle to share something positive they had done this past year. We shared a few tears, lots of laughter, and I think new understanding. But what made me choke up was how many people came up to me afterward to say, “This has been a hard year. I just didn’t have the energy to stop and realize I DID do this thing that helped. Thanks for letting me remember and share.”

As we wrapped up, and my team and I started tearing things down and boxing them up for shipment, many of you stopped and said “Thank you. I feel better.” And I had two first time attendees actually say to me, “Gosh, this felt more like a homecoming than a conference!”

I found myself thinking about all these things as my plane landed in Flagstaff, a place I love with all my heart. I stepped out into the cool mountain air and familiar birdsong, and I found myself pausing. Community is what made this TLEF, as well as the previous twelve, special. That sense of community was created by my team, by my TWAR SC family, and by all of you who participated, whether virtually or in person. I might have been “coming home”, but I had truly just left a “homecoming”.

Thank you all for what you do to make the world a cleaner, safer, and fairer place. I’m grateful for the opportunity to work alongside you.

## Events, Webinars and, Opportunities

The National Tribal Caucus and the US EPA are starting a new series of quarterly virtual townhalls to encourage informal conversations about the **climate crisis and challenges Tribal communities and Native Nations are facing**. The first townhall will be on Thursday, September 7, 3:30 - 5pm EDT. Registration on Eventbrite will provide the Zoom link: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/caution-disaster-ahead-tickets-681111281177?aff=oddtcreator>

This might be a conference not normally on your radar, but for those involved in emergency preparedness and response, check out the 13<sup>th</sup> International Decontamination and Research and Development Conference, which is taking place in South Carolina, December 5-7. There is no registration fee, and virtual attendance is possible. To learn more about this event visit [EPA’s 2023 Decon Conference webpage](#).

Last month, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine published a special report many of you may be interested in. The title is *Recycled Plastics in Infrastructure: Current Practices, Understanding, and Opportunities*, and it does a deep dive into ways we might be able to spark increased recycling of plastics through its increased use in a variety of infrastructure projects. It also points out we need a lot more research on this. [Read the study](#).

The Urban Waters Learning Network is starting a new monthly series of webinars that might interest some of you. The focus of this series is on sharing strategies community organizations are using across the country to create equitable responses to the many threats posed by the climate crisis. [Click on this link](#) to learn more about the series and the different subjects they will be addressing.

And don't forget to visit our [Tribal Lands Assistance Center's](#) page, as well as our [Waste & Response media](#) page, which has 28 distinct channels on all the media we focus on (click on the "28 channels" tab). You can also visit the [ITEP website](#) to access our recording. You'll find recordings from the past three TLEF's (including [Robin Wall Kimmerer's opening plenary](#) from 2020), special webinars and online discussions we've coordinated, and some new resources for online tools, like the [UST Finder](#).