

The Climate Registry

We can't manage what we can't measure," said Ann McCabe, The Climate Registry's Midwest Regional Director, at a National Tribal Forum presentation in Milwaukee in early June. She was referring to emissions of greenhouse gases (GHGs), which are largely responsible for the rapid warming of the planet.

Tracking GHG emissions data across the U.S. would be all but impossible without a centralized, coordinated approach to gathering what is a hodgepodge of voluntary and mandatory reporting data—an approach that was neglected over the past eight years. The nonprofit, 243-member (as of January 2009) Climate Registry was founded by U.S. and Mexican states, tribes, and Canadian provinces, and territories. The Registry offers a system whereby emitters can "calculate, verify, and publicly report their carbon footprints in a single, unified registry."

The benefits of participating in the Climate Registry might seem less than obvious, especially to private enterprises, which are often loathe to reveal proprietary data. However, many such organizations have already signed on, for one or more reasons listed on the Registry website. That list includes demonstrating environmental leadership, managing GHG risks and opportunities, gaining competitive advantage by increasing operational efficiency, and managing carbon-related risks.

At the National Tribal Forum, McCabe described the Climate Registry as an entity that not only tracks emissions but helps members identify energy-efficiency modes and practices, provides third-party verification of consistency and quality, and offers members an important jump on mandatory reporting that will begin in 2010. Other membership advantages include access to online reporting software and information, and the status of being perceived as a proactive, responsible actor in the climate-change struggle.

Lisa Gover, Director of the Campo Kumeayaay Nation Environmental Protection Agency, represents one of four Climate Registry-affiliated tribes (others are the Gila River Indian Community, Southern Ute Tribe, and Acoma Pueblo). She says Campo was involved with The Climate Registry "before its inception" and helped get the effort going with both expertise and funding assistance. Gover currently serves on the Protocol Development committee, which oversees the creation of reporting protocols for different economic sectors and an Ad Hoc Committee that will provide recommendations on merging-in carbon credit issuance.

The Protocol committee just released a protocol (a blueprint for gathering and reporting data) for the electric-power generating sector as well as a "local government operations" protocol. Gover is paying close attention to the latter, as it could provide the template for reporting by tribal governments. Gover explains, "Tribal governments are often different from state and local governments. For one thing, tribes often own the industries on the reservation, so it isn't a case of separating out the private sector from government functions. We're looking to modify that protocol specifically for tribal government operations."

Gover also works constantly to ensure "the word 'tribe' is present in all Registry discourse and documents." To emphasize the need for attention to that issue, she quotes a popular dictum: "If tribes aren't at the table, they're usually on the menu."

She says Campo's leadership at the time the tribe joined the Registry "was taking a broad look at future environmental-development planning and saw The Climate Registry as one of the cutting-edge groups. They were also looking to take a leadership role in climate change and GHG emissions controls and measurement."

Gover hopes other tribes will choose to sign on with The Climate Registry (there are no mandatory dues for membership, though contributions are encouraged). Her association with the Registry, she says, is educational and personally fulfilling. One reason she's pleased to participate is because membership in The Climate Registry facilitates contacts with some of the nation's leading environmental experts. For example, she says fellow board member Eileen Tutt, Deputy Secretary for California EPA's Climate Change and Environmental Justice department, has become a valuable colleague and friend.

For more information on The Climate Registry, visit its website at www.theclimateregistry.org/. Gover can be reached at 619-478-9369, or by e-mail at lgover@campo-nsn.gov.

This article was written by Dennis Wall, Editor, Institute for Tribal Environmental Professionals, and originally appeared in the Native Voices newsletter, Fall 2009 issue.