



National
Congress of
American
Indians

CLIMATE CHANGE

American Indians and Alaska Natives are often more impacted by the effects on global warming and climate change due to the geographical areas in which they reside and their direct connection to their surrounding environment. These changes pose threats not only to their health and food supply, but also to their traditional ways of life. Climate change and global warming are reducing the natural ecosystems and biodiversity on which Native peoples have come to rely. The traditional time to gather plants is changing, and animals are confused as to their migration patterns. Some villages in Alaska that are located near rivers or streams now find the water at their front door. In the southwest, tribes are experiencing prolonged drought.

The needs and resources required to combat this weather phenomenon are vast, and Native peoples must:

1. Engage in a direct partnerships with government and industry;
2. Access project funding related to climate change & global warming;
3. Form working groups within their communities; and
4. Empower tribal communities and members to make positive changes on their own.

As part of this process, the federal government should take the following steps to help tribes address climate change and its disproportionate effects on Native peoples.

Recommendations

1. **Increase funding for tribal climate adaptation efforts.** Given that tribal natural resources have been historically underfunded and no federal programs or funding streams specifically support tribal climate adaptation efforts, the BIA should increase its funding for such efforts to a minimum of \$8.75 million, or 5% of the Department of the Interior's Climate Change Adaptation Initiative.
2. **Abide by established treaties.** Tribes signed treaties with the understanding that the federal government has the trust obligation to ensure that tribal reserved resources would persist forever. The impetus for the federal government's active engagement with tribes on climate change adaptation is thus compelled by the tribes' status as sovereign nations with certain rights established under treaties.
3. **Honor the trust relationship.** The federal government must honor its fiduciary trust responsibility to tribes and protect tribal land and resources. As a matter of policy, the United States also has the obligation to consult and interact with tribes on a government-to government basis under Executive Order 13175, Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments. Federal agencies must fully implement this EO. The federal government must also ensure that Secretarial Order 3289 is fulfilled in a manner that protects the nation's natural resources, cultural heritage, and tribal lands and resources from the effects of climate change, and in a manner that facilitates coordination between federal, state, local, and tribal government agencies.

For additional information, please contact Dean Polchies, NCAI Legislative Associate, at dpolchies@ncai.org or 202.466.7767.