

COASTAL PEOPLES ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE

FIRST STEWARDS

THE FIRST STEWARDS RESOLUTION calls on the United States government to strengthen America's resiliency and ability to adapt to climate change by

- Formally recognizing the First Stewards and their expertise;
- Consulting with tribal governments and indigenous communities for guidance in all policies that affect their way of life; and
- Supporting indigenous management efforts.

NATIVE PEOPLES have lived on the lands and waters of North America, Alaska and the Pacific Islands for millennia prior to the establishment of the United States. They are the First Stewards. Their cultures are inextricably linked to the natural environment. Native people rely on the sea for food, material and economic sustenance and derive songs and dances from that relationship. Their knowledge reflects the relationship and interconnectedness of the clouds, forests, valleys, canyons, lakes, streams, sea, fish, wildlife and people. Their experts have the methodologies to assure responsible stewardship of the elements of the natural and spiritual world.

DURING THE PAST FEW CENTURIES, native communities survived and learned to adapt to deteriorating impacts on their culture, language, values and land tenure systems, which have resulted in overdevelopment of coastlines, alteration of freshwater streams and lakes, destruction of life-giving watersheds, decimation of reefs, and the decline of marine and terrestrial species. These changes to the natural world have been exacerbated by climate change, which threaten the very fabric of indigenous societies.

On July 17 to 20, 2012, the First Stewards Symposium: Coastal Peoples Address Climate Change brought the native voice on climate change to the nation's capital. The gathering was designed to create a mechanism for the indigenous people of the United States to engage with governments, non-governmental organizations and others to help mitigate and adapt to climate change. Three hundred indigenous and non-indigenous experts participated in the event at the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, DC. Discussions were organized into four regional panels and a Looking Forward panel, captured in a Witness report and a resulting in a First Stewards resolution. Videotapes of the panel presentations may be viewed online at www.firststewards.org.

SAVE THE DATE

2nd Annual First Stewards Symposium
October 29 to 31, 2013

National Museum of the American Indian,
Washington DC
United Indigenous Voices Address Sustainability:
Climate Change and Traditional Places

The First Stewards initiative continues with discussions on cultural and food security; recognizing rights and responsibilities; traditional natural resource management practices; and cultural resource damage assessments. For more information and to get involved, go to www.firststewards.org.



EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON NATIVE COMMUNITIES

The lives of island and coastal native peoples are intricately intertwined with the sea. Native people rely on the sea for food, material and economic sustenance and derive songs and dances from that relationship.

The Lands and Water Are Life: The Impact of Climate Change on Infrastructure, Food Security and Community in Alaska



Robbie Brown

The very land on which Alaska Native communities are built is increasingly compromised and eroding. Their animals and fish are increasingly diseased and displaced. Their northern waters are facing expanded resource development and vessel traffic. These changes to air, lands, waters and ice are endangering their subsistence way of life and, consequently, their cultures, languages and health.

Left: Vernita Nay, Inupiaq, prepares salmon in Kotzebue, Alaska. Climate change is altering migration patterns of important foods such as salmon for tribal cultures that rely on the natural bounty of the sea for subsistence as well as cultural uses.

Little Changes Have Big Impacts on Little Islands: Relying on Tradition to Sustain Resources

Indigenous US Pacific Islanders are facing invasive species, erosion, changing rainfall, intensified typhoons/hurricanes, tsunamis/tidal waves, and warming of the ocean, air and land. Current regulations do not reflect indigenous expertise and consequently have unforeseen impacts on the environment and indigenous cultures of the Kanaka Maoli, Samoan, Chamorro and Refaluwasch of Hawai'i, American Samoa, Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.



The Refaluwasch who settled in Saipan thousands of years ago from Yap are known for their skills in traditional navigation. Utilizing the stars, ocean currents and winds, they voyaged through the Pacific Ocean to settle on Saipan after a changing climate and typhoons nearly destroyed their island. They have lived in peace and unity with the indigenous Chamorro people of Saipan and hope those from other tiny islands who may be forced to migrate may also live socially with other cultures in unity and in peace.

Habitat of Culture: Maintaining Identity in the Face of Climate Change



Debbie Preston WSPC

West Coast tribes have witnessed that the glaciers nourishing their rivers and spirits have retreated and disappeared; that changes in ocean acidity and hypoxia jeopardize the marine ecosystems, which support their culture, health and economies; and that weather events are more frequently severe and unpredictable. Their treaties, inherent rights and resilience to climate change are at risk due to the inability of regulatory agencies to meet their trust responsibilities to sustainably manage resources, in consultation with Native Americans.

Above: A Quinault Indian Nation tribal member harvests razor clams, a culturally important food that is threatened by changing ocean conditions. The commercial and recreational clam season is economically important to coastal communities in Washington state.

Right: Thousands of marine fish were killed by an area of low oxygen in waters off the shores of the Quinault Indian Nation on the Washington coast in 2006. Dead zones off the coast of Oregon and Washington appear to be increasing in size and frequency, affecting the availability of important marine resources for tribal cultures.



Debbie Preston WSPC

Co-Management as an Adaptation to Climate Change



International Bird Rescue Research Center

Native Americans from the Great Lakes, East Coast and Gulf of Mexico face environmental concerns regarding the disastrous oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico and cultural concerns regarding the disappearance of sacred plants. Their climate change adaptation plans including restoration efforts, such as dam removal, and traditional management methods, such as prescribed burning, are being obstructed by local, state and federal attempts to define them and limit their native rights.

Left: International Bird Rescue Research Center. An oiled brown pelican awaits cleaning in a treatment center in Ft. Jackson, La. following the massive Deepwater Horizon spill in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010 that endangered species important to coastal tribes like the Atakapa-Ishak Indians of Louisiana. Sea level changes due to climate change only exacerbate damage from oil spills.