



United States Department of Agriculture



USDA FOREST SERVICE TRIBAL RELATIONS STRATEGIC PLAN FISCAL YEAR 2019–2022

FOREST SERVICE TRIBAL RELATIONS: SOVEREIGN PARTNERS IN SHARED STEWARDSHIP



Forest Service

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A young Native American girl using a loom to weave a traditional blanket. Photo courtesy of iStock.com/Katrina T.

The relationship between the Federal Government and Tribal Governments is unique and important. It is important to the Forest Service because Tribes have indelible ties to the Nation's forests and grasslands. Those ties not only reach to the millennia of the past but also include current knowledge, perspectives, and resources that will help the Forest Service as we focus on the future of our mission.

America's forests and grasslands are there for the benefit of all Americans, including Native Americans. Our commitment at the Forest Service is to work with tribal partners to achieve healthy and resilient landscapes both now and for generations to come. In doing so, we will move towards fulfilling our treaty obligations, meet our trust responsibilities, and find new opportunities to work together in shared stewardship.

We acknowledge that we cannot always meet the requests made by Tribes. When we can't, our commitment is to be honest, genuine, and transparent in working towards mutually satisfactory resolutions.

Although the plan covers only 4 years, we will strive to achieve these goals far beyond the planning period.

Each goal has several objectives. We expect to make progress toward reaching them during the next 4 years, and we will evaluate and report our performance each year.

Fred Clark
Director, Office of Tribal Relations
October 2018

USDA Forest Service Tribal Relations Strategic Plan: Fiscal Year 2019–2022

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A totem carved by Tlingit master carver Israel Shotridge located in a hall of the USDA Forest Service, Sidney R. Yates Federal Building, Washington DC. Photo by Tanya Flores, USDA Forest Service.

About This Strategic Plan



Workshop participants during the field trip to a Chumash sacred site on the Los Padres National Forest in California in 2016. Photo by Andrew Madsen, USDA Forest Service.

Tribal relations in the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Forest Service crosscuts all Forest Service deputy and mission areas. Every day, and in many ways, what we do in service to the Forest Service mission touches the peoples of American Indian and Alaska Native Tribal nations (Tribes) and the resources, natural and cultural, which are important to them. It is the responsibility of every Forest Service employee to deliver the Forest Service's trust responsibilities to Tribes. We strive to be good neighbors, and we provide excellent customer service.

The Tribal Relations Strategic Plan supports the Forest Service's national priorities and aligns with the USDA Secretary's Strategic Goals. Further, the Tribal Relations Strategic Plan's outcome-oriented goals match the goals in the USDA Forest Service Strategic Plan: FY 2015–2020 (Sustain Our Nation's Forests and Grasslands, Deliver Benefits to the Public, Apply Knowledge Globally, and Excel as a High-Performing Agency). Collectively, these priorities and goals will guide the essential work we must perform to respond to the needs and challenges faced by our forests and grasslands and demands from citizens. This strategic plan

also links to and supports the Forest Service Tribal Relations Manual (Forest Service Manual 1560) and Handbook (Forest Service Handbook 1509.13) directives and many legal authorities. Recognizing that Tribes and tribal communities help the Forest Service do a better job of accomplishing our mission, this plan outlines a means for all Forest Service employees to better work and communicate with tribal partners. It illustrates the balance the agency hopes to achieve between the many different—and at times mutually exclusive—requirements for serving a diverse American public and tribal communities. It focuses on developing the knowledge and skills that are vital to building and maintaining relationships with Tribes and other partners important to facilitating the work we do every day.

The Forest Service Tribal Relations Team, a group of diverse and talented employees from across the agency, reinforces and supports tribal relations work of Forest Service employees. That team developed this strategic plan to create beneficial outcomes for the entire agency and for Tribal Governments and communities.

Summary of Goals and Objectives

Strategic Goal: Sustain Sovereignty Through Shared Stewardship

Goal	Objective
Sustain Our Nation's Forests and Grasslands	<p>1.A Build, strengthen, and uphold nation-to-nation relationships that sustain tribal sovereignty and help meet the Agency's trust responsibility and treaty obligations.</p> <p>1.B Engage in shared stewardship of our Nation's lands, including tribal and Forest Service lands and resources, to support healthy and resilient forests and grasslands that benefit tribal communities and help the Forest Service better accomplish its mission.</p>

Strategic Goal: Deliver Benefits to Tribal Communities and the Public

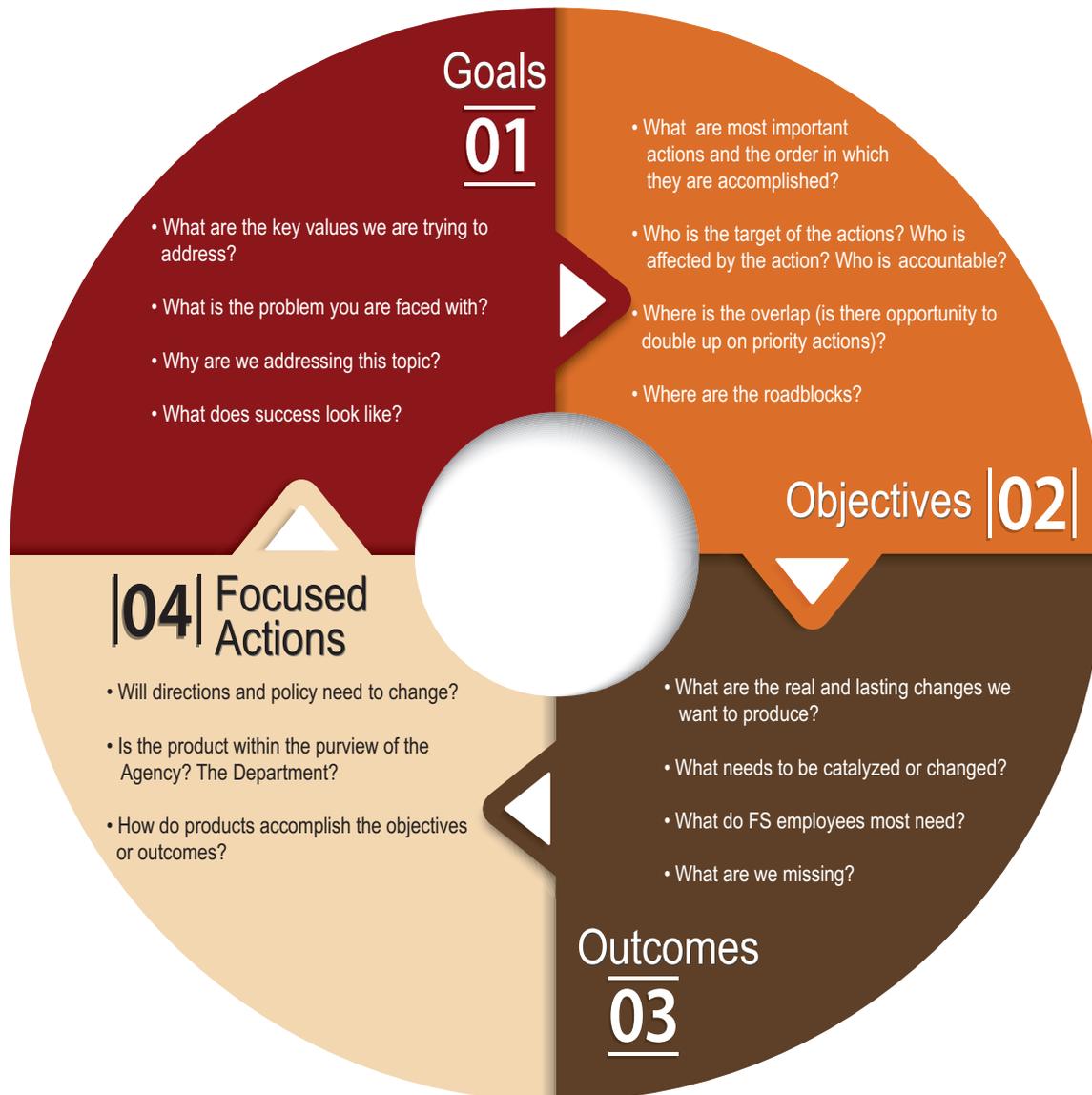
Deliver Benefits to the Public	<p>2.A Facilitate delivery of benefits to tribal communities and the public.</p> <p>2.B Strengthen availability, access, use, and resilience of tribally important resources and places.</p> <p>2.C Leverage partners' capabilities.</p>
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Strategic Goal: Apply Knowledge Inclusively

Apply Knowledge Globally	<p>3.A Facilitate the appropriate and ethical gathering and exchange of knowledge and perspectives that lead to beneficial actions on forests and grasslands across boundaries.</p> <p>3.B Promote diversity and inclusion within the agency in support of the Forest Service Strategic Plan Management Objective "Recruit a diverse workforce."</p>
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Strategic Goal: Excel in Tribal Relations Leadership

Excel As A High-performing Agency	<p>4.A Showcase outstanding examples of collaboration with Tribes, promoting positive agency engagement to enhance tribal relations.</p> <p>4.B Continuously improve how the Forest Service creates, maintains, and improves tribal relations.</p> <p>4.C Enhance the Forest Service's ability to maintain an accountable process for its consultation and other interactions with Tribes.</p>
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This strategic plan is organized by goals, objectives, outcomes, and focused actions. The high-level goals that shape the plan are derived from the Forest Service mission and fiduciary responsibility to Tribes. The objectives are actionable statements that focus on what must actually be accomplished to achieve these goals. Outcomes provide the quantitative or qualitative, often measurable, effects the program will accomplish. Focused actions are targeted actions to achieve the outcomes.

Vision for Tribal Relations in the Forest Service



The Kaibab National Forest in Arizona and Alamo Navajo School Board Inc. (ANSBI) began a new partnership to conduct restoration work on the forest, while providing employment and training for Navajo tribal members. Photo by Dyan Bone, USDA Forest Service.

The Forest Service recognizes and supports the sovereignty of American Indian and Alaska Native tribal nations and the self-determination of tribal peoples through building, maintaining, and enhancing government-to-government relationships with Tribal Governments. We engage inclusively with people in mutual respect, active collaboration, and shared stewardship. We promote meaningful nation-to-nation consultation with tribal nations and communities in ways that foster free, prior, and informed consent.

The Forest Service is recognized as a leader among Federal land management agencies in partnering appropriately and collaboratively with American Indian and Alaska Native Corporations and communities for mutually beneficial outcomes. We implement agency programs and activities in a manner that honors Indian Tribes' treaty rights, fulfills the agency's trust responsibilities, and respects each independent tribal nation and their cultures.

Tribal Relations: Requirements, Obligations, and Opportunities



Jeff Savage, Chippewa artist, harvesting birch bark, which has many uses such as making canoes and baskets for winnowing rice. Photo by USDA Forest Service.



Kenaitze Indian youth and Chugach National Forest employees at Kenai Lake Work Center, Alaska. Photo by USDA Forest Service.

Working with Tribes helps the Forest Service fulfill our mission of “providing leadership in the management, protection, use, research, and stewardship of natural and cultural resources on our country’s vast forests and grasslands.” This work also encompasses the extensive legal requirements through treaty obligations and trust responsibilities that establish the foundations for this work and our relationships with Tribes. This work allows the Forest Service and Tribes to better “sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation’s forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations.”

The Forest Service shares approximately 4,000 miles of coterminous boundaries with tribal lands, and much of the National Forest System includes lands on which Tribes retain legal rights and interests. These conditions require extensive cross-jurisdictional coordination with State, tribal, public, and private partners. In addition, Forest Service Research and Development and State and Private Forestry provide unique opportunities for tribal partnerships. We use grants, research, technology,

and knowledge transfer, and engage in collaborative partnerships in ways that leverage all jurisdictions. In this way, we maximize effectiveness to address shared threats and to create value for Indian Country and all American people. Consistent with the Forest Service mission, these actions are intended to achieve positive results and outcomes for ecosystem health, economic stability, social and cultural values, and community well-being. These actions also help create jobs in rural and tribal communities through economic development support and engagement.

“*We want to maintain ourselves as we are so we can contribute our differences, our particular understanding to both the national community and global society.*”

—*LaDonna Harris, American Indian Activist, Founder, American for Indian Opportunity (AIO)*



Leslie Weldon

Senior Executive for Workforce Environment,
former Deputy Chief, National Forest System

“All or part of every national forest and grassland is carved out of the ancestral lands of American Indian and Alaska Native peoples. Indigenous communities across the country still maintain strong historical and spiritual connections to the land, connections that have not been extinguished despite changes in land ownership.”

The nation-to-nation aspect of the Forest Service’s mission hinges on constitutional, legal, and practical aspects of the agency’s treaty obligations and trust responsibilities. The Forest Service has further responsibilities in the legal and social realms of civil rights and environmental justice since agency activities affect underserved or underrepresented communities. Whether on reservations, in rural or urban areas, Native American communities and individuals are underserved. There is no bright line between Forest Service employees’ responsibilities in tribal relations and civil rights. These two aspects

complement each other. The Forest Service engages with governments of Tribal Nations in ways that produce mutual benefits. These benefits assist Tribes in accessing goods, services, and opportunities provided by forest cultural and natural resources important to Native American communities and individuals. Aside from resource opportunities on the land, Forest Service personnel conduct outreach to advance American Indians and Alaska Natives in the workforce, engage youth and elders for cultural preservation, and promote many other activities. Many of these activities may originate



*Recognition of the signing of the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty Event, Fort Laramie, WY, on April 28, 2018.
Photo by Susan Johnson, USDA Forest Service.*

from outside tribal government structures and yet enhance the understanding that agency employees have of traditional knowledge and wisdom.

Relations between the Forest Service and Tribes develop from more than a single program. All Forest Service staff make daily decisions that can impact

treaty and reserved rights, as well as impacting natural, cultural, and spiritual resources that are important to Tribes and their citizens. This strategic plan, along with guidance of Tribal Relations Program personnel, is available to help employees fulfill their tribal relations responsibilities successfully.



Tribal Relations Program Personnel

This beading piece is a part of a handmade lanyard by a Sioux woman in South Dakota. Photo by Angela Pittman, USDA Forest Service.

Tribal relations is everyone's business. Employees in Forest Service units across the country fulfill important roles in accomplishing Agency goals in tribal relations. These goals include respecting tribal self-government, supporting tribal sovereignty, and honoring reserved rights. Tribal Relations Program personnel assist employees to successfully accomplish these goals through advice and assistance. In the Washington Office and in the field, Tribal Relations Program personnel work to advise unit leadership and staff about tribal relations issues across program areas. Tribal Relations Program staff help the agency advance and support tribal consultations,

partnerships, and collaborations to benefit both the agency and tribal nations. Tribal Relations Program personnel provide the legal and resource context in which the Agency operates and help tribal leaders and their citizens better understand how the Forest Service works.

Together, Forest Service employees help the Forest Service enhance its standing as a world-class agency in sustaining forests and grasslands, delivering multiple benefits, applying knowledge inclusively, and excelling in nation-to-nation relations with Indian Tribes.

Mission of the Forest Service for Tribal Relations

Consistent with the Forest Service mission, the Forest Service expresses a culture that:



Wade McMaster, Regional Tribal Relations Program Manager for Region 5, playing his native flute at the Grand Canyon. The flute was made by his father Steve McMaster. Photo courtesy of Wade McMaster.

- Uses sound advice and appropriate assistance to enhance and maintain important relationships with Tribes and indigenous communities.
- Recognizes and supports the inherent sovereign status and reserved rights of Tribes.
- Honors the Federal trust responsibility to Tribes.
- Excels at conducting substantive and meaningful consultative processes with Tribes.
- Supports Tribal Governments' and indigenous communities' rights to pursue and enhance the vitality of their cultures, economies, and lands.
- Promotes collaborative natural and cultural resource management, including protecting and providing access to tribal sacred places.
- Encourages use of traditional knowledge in combination with the best Western science and technology.
- Advances American Indians and Alaska Natives in the workforce.
- Respects and helps maintain tribal connections to traditional landscapes.
- Facilitates information exchange between Tribes and Forest Service researchers.

“*The relationship between Native nations and their environment is sacred. It is the foundation of their cultures and worldview.*”

—U.S. Sen. Daniel K. Alaska

Sustain Our Nation's Forests and Grasslands

Strategic Goal: Sustain Sovereignty Through Shared Stewardship

OBJECTIVES	OUTCOMES
<p>1.A Build, strengthen, and uphold nation-to-nation relationships that sustain tribal sovereignty and help meet the agency's trust responsibility and treaty obligations.</p>	<p>Tribal nations and the Forest Service engage in relationships that reinforce mutual interests and shared decision making.</p>
<p>1.B Engage in shared stewardship of our Nation's lands, including tribal and Forest Service lands and resources, to support healthy and resilient forests and grasslands that benefit tribal communities and help the Forest Service better accomplish its mission.</p>	<p>Tribal Governments and tribal communities sustainably receive cultural, social, economic, and ecological benefits from actions taken in partnership with the Forest Service. The Forest Service receives tribal expertise, capacity, and resources through partnerships that help the agency sustain the Nation's forests and grasslands, and fulfill the agency's objective to strengthen communities</p>



View of Mount Graham, a sacred place, from the San Carlos Apache Indian Reservation in southeastern Arizona. Photo by Fred Clark, USDA Forest Service.

Recognizing and supporting the sovereignty of tribal nations and the expertise of tribal peoples, the Forest Service can enhance shared stewardship to help better sustain the Nation's forests and grasslands. Shared stewardship provides a way for Tribes to be involved in Forest Service programs and activities that create benefits within the agency's mission responsive to local and affiliated community needs and interests.

FOCUSED ACTIONS

- Apply the Forest Service mission in ways that fulfill the agency's trust responsibilities and treaty obligations.
 - Help protect tribal reserved rights as they pertain to Forest Service lands and resources, as applied through policies, programs, and projects.
 - Consult early and often to ensure all topics are on the table and relationships are maintained.
 - Convene regularly scheduled interactions between tribal and Forest Service unit leadership to maintain productive relationships and collaborative opportunities.
 - Develop personal relationships with tribal partners that help build mutual understanding as well as social and political capital.
 - Support the aspirations of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, especially the call for free, prior, and informed consent.
 - Develop and enhance bilateral agreements.
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- Foster projects and partnerships that result in completion of mutually desired outcomes.
 - Expand use of Forest Service general authorities, as well as tribally specific authorities such as the Tribal Forest Protection Act and the Cultural and Heritage Cooperation Authority, in support of mutual benefits.
 - Develop and implement Forest Service activities that highlight, engage, and promote traditional ecological knowledge, preserve traditional cultures, and contribute to community well-being.
 - Develop and distribute case studies of successes resulting from agency and tribal partnerships, with the consent of Tribes.



Deliver Benefits to the Public

Strategic Goal: Deliver Benefits to Tribal Communities and the Public

The Forest Service provides goods and services locally, nationally, and internationally. Because of our trust responsibilities and treaty obligations to Tribes, we have a particular focus on the benefits we provide to Tribal communities. We enhance this focus by connecting the agency's mission to traditional tribal lifeways and values in a changing world. USDA agencies, other Federal agencies, Tribes, and non-profit organizations have financial and technical assistance programs and personnel to engage in partnerships that can make a difference in promoting supporting rural prosperity jobs and growing businesses in tribal communities with forest resources. Our various programs serve to improve intra-agency coordination, increase program delivery efficiency, maximize scarce program resources, and solve problems through cooperation with partners.

OBJECTIVES

OUTCOMES

2.A Facilitate delivery of benefits to tribal communities and the public.

Tribal nations and their constituent communities receive the benefits of Forest Service land management actions, expertise, and knowledge. These benefits span jurisdictions to accomplish desired protections, conservation, and uses.

2.B Strengthen availability, access, use, and resilience of tribally important resources and places.

Tribal citizens have appropriate access to important resources and sacred places on National Forest System lands. Projects and partnerships promote connections between the agency's mission and traditional native lifeways.

2.C Leverage partners' capabilities.

Improve intra-agency and inter-agency coordination, and expanded partnerships with third parties, to create efficiencies in program delivery in support of the Forest Service mission to promote and develop markets for forest products.



Tlingit carver Wayne Price, of Haines, AK, removes the beak from a raven at the top of the pole to restore the iconic Big Dipper totem. Photo by USDA Forest Service.

FOCUSED ACTIONS

- Review and revise policies to better reflect tribal engagement and participation in Forest Service decision making, programs, and projects.
 - Seek opportunities to partner with Tribes in work across boundaries and leverage resources to accomplish together what we could not each do on our own.
 - Work with Tribes to identify barriers to effective partnerships and consultation.
 - Develop and distribute useful information about Forest Service actions and opportunities.
 - Identify and work with partners who can help create benefits for the Forest Service and Tribes.
 - When the Forest Service is unable to meet a Tribe's requests, be clear and transparent in explaining to the Tribe why this is not possible.
 - Use appropriate conflict resolution processes when disagreements between a Tribe and the Forest Service occur.
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- Continue implementation of the 2012 Sacred Sites Report recommendations.
 - Expand use of Forest Service general authorities, as well as tribally specific authorities such as the Tribal Forest Protection Act and the Cultural and Heritage Cooperation Authority, in support of connecting Tribes to traditional places and resources.
 - Implement Forest Service programs, including Federal financial assistance and technical assistance programs that apply to Tribal Governments and tribal communities.
 - Explore new ways, including research and management, to provide appropriate tribal access and use of Forest Service resources.
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- Expand partnership agreements.
 - Develop and nurture new partnerships.
 - Develop strong personal and organizational relationships with tribally supporting organizations.

Apply Knowledge Globally

Strategic Goal: Apply Knowledge Inclusively

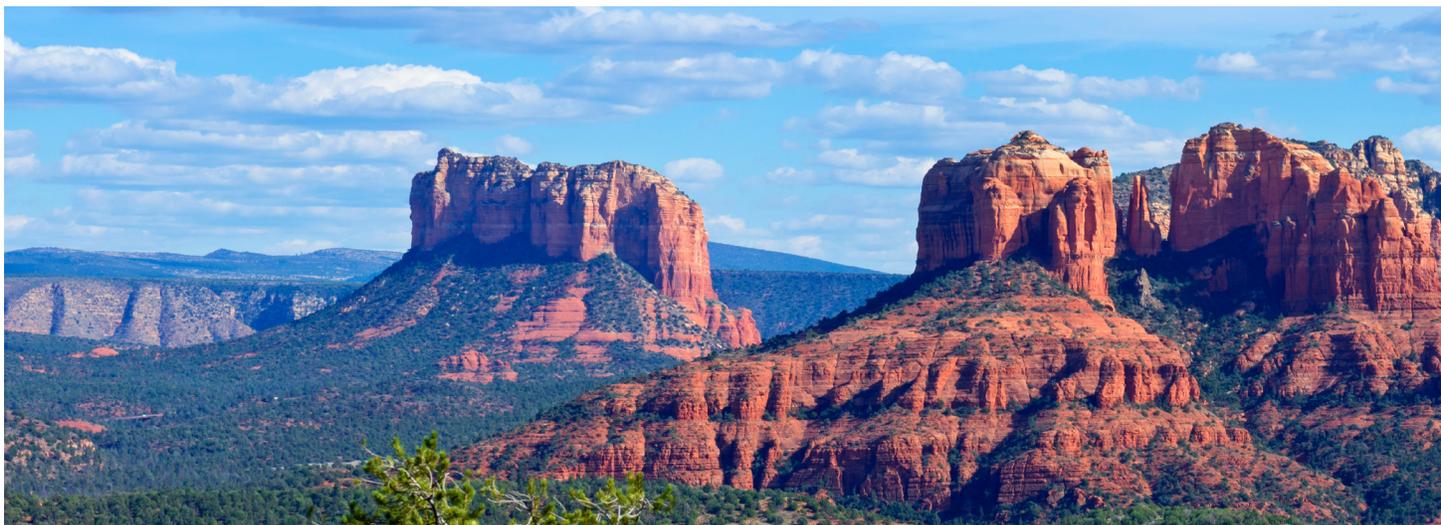
OBJECTIVES

- 3.A** The appropriate and ethical gathering and exchange of knowledge and perspectives from tribal citizens that lead to beneficial actions.
- 3.B** Promote diversity and inclusion within the agency, in support of the Forest Service Strategic Plan Management Objective “Recruit a diverse workforce.”

OUTCOMES

Tribal knowledge and wisdom are respected, protected, encouraged, and appropriately used in Forest Service activities. Tribal communities, Forest Service personnel, and our partners engage in productive and positive relationships that lead to mutual understanding, respect, and participation in activities that are mutually beneficial.

Creativity and effectiveness in Forest Service decision making are enhanced through including and sharing of diverse experiences, knowledge, and perspectives of indigenous peoples.



Panoramic view of red rocks near Sedona and the Village of Oak Creek, in Arizona. The rocks are named Cathedral Rock and Castle Rock. Photo courtesy of iStock.com/Jacob H.

The Forest Service is a provider and consumer of knowledge about management, leadership, and resources from many diverse sources. These sources include Western science, citizen science, native science, and traditional knowledge. We conduct our business in ways that constantly improve our ability to be inclusive. Incorporating tribal knowledge can improve the agency's resources management decisions and outcomes by using the best available information. The Forest Service, as a multiple use agency, must balance our legal obligation to support tribal nations, whose citizens comprise some of the most economically and socially challenged communities in the United States, with the needs of other users while at the same time delivering our mission.

FOCUSED ACTIONS

- Facilitate transfer of knowledge between the Forest Service and Tribes, sharing Western science and traditional ecological knowledge to leverage the benefits of both.
- Engage Tribes early in forest plan revisions and research plans, as well as in initial planning of programs and projects.
- Engage Tribes in Forest Service research and technical assistance activities that meet tribal interests and requests.
- Coordinate with Human Resources and Civil Rights staffs to outreach and recruit American Indian and Alaska Natives.
- Facilitate and support Forest Service employees' direct interactions with Tribal Government staffs and tribal culture bearers.
- Create and distribute appropriate training materials and relevant publications that increase Forest Service personnel's knowledge, understanding, and competencies in tribal relations.



Excel as a High-Performing Agency

Strategic Goal: Excel in Tribal Relations Leadership



Tim Mentz, Sr., a cultural resource specialist of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, engaging with Forest Service sacred sites executive and core team members. Photo by Fred Clark, USDA Forest Service.

OBJECTIVES	OUTCOMES
<p>4.A Showcase outstanding examples of collaborations with Tribes, promoting positive agency engagement to enhance tribal relations.</p>	<p>Forest Service leadership and staff, tribal leaders, tribal staff, and other partners are excited about and active in enhancing existing partnerships and creating new ones. These partnership will produce more resilient ecosystems, more productive ecosystem services, enhanced cultural resilience, and better economies, benefiting Indian Country and all components of the Forest Service.</p>
<p>4.B Continuously improve how the Forest Service creates, maintains, and improves tribal relations.</p>	<p>Forest Service employees function as a highly developed, world class team that supports the Forest Service mission and the agency's contributions to the well-being of tribal communities as well as the general American public.</p>
<p>4.C Enhance the Forest Service's ability to maintain an accountable process for its consultation and other interactions with Tribes.</p>	<p>The Forest Service is able to confidently report to Tribes and the USDA our level of activity in tribal relations, how we are allocating our resources, and whether the conditions of relationships and activities with Tribes are improving. The Forest Service is in compliance with Executive Order 13175: Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments, which requires agencies to have an accountable process for tribal consultation.</p>

Tribal relations is the responsibility of every Forest Service employee. The foundation for excellence in tribal relations is in place through the Forest Service Manual and Handbook direction, top-level leadership orientation, and the skill and positive attitude of line officers and other personnel throughout the agency. The Forest Service now is challenged to expand its level of excellence, to be recognized by Tribes, other Federal agencies, Members of Congress, and the Courts as the best among our Federal peers in fostering and enhancing Federal/tribal relationships in the spirit of helpfulness and partnership. Tribal relations personnel are available to provide advice and assistance in this endeavor. Striving for outstanding public service is part of our organizational culture, and by increasing the diversity in our workforce, we are better meeting the needs of the people we serve.

FOCUSED ACTIONS

- Highlight successes in tribal relations through all media platforms.
 - Engage intertribal organizations and other partners in initiatives to identify opportunities for partnerships and to leverage resources.
 - Provide national, regional, or local information sharing events (such as webinars) on Forest Service programs and procedures for potential tribal partners.
 - Provide updates to Tribes and tribally supporting organizations on Forest Service actions that create and foster a coordinated approach for collaborative efforts between Research and Development personnel and Tribes.
 - Increase Forest Service outreach and engagement with tribal youth and elders.
 - Work with Heritage Program and Tribal Historic Preservation Officers to promote tribal youth participation in preserving sacred places on National Forest System lands.
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- Provide training to line and staff officers, staff directors, and decision makers on Federal Indian law, policies, and perspectives, including sacred sites protection.
 - Enhance relationships and effective program delivery by holding periodic strategic meetings of tribal relations personnel from across the agency.
 - Encourage mutually beneficial research projects that address tribally identified research needs.
 - Increase Tribal Relations Program integration with key staffs in all Deputy Areas.
 - Foster curiosity and continuous learning by Forest Service employees across the agency about Tribal Governments and indigenous communities.
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- Use the Forest Service section of the USDA Tribal Consultation Database for recording consultation, collaboration, and coordination with Tribes.
 - Improve and enhance available tools and resources for Forest Service staff, such as a tribal grants and agreements library and a linked set of regional and national Forest Service Tribal relations web pages.
 - Effectively use all media platforms to tell stories about successes and challenges in the Forest Service's relations with Tribes.



Sage in abalone used in traditional tribal ceremonies. Photo by Angela Pittman, USDA Forest Service.

PRECURSOR DOCUMENTS

The *USDA Forest Service Tribal Relations Strategic Plan: Fiscal Years 2018–2020* is the latest bead in a long string of beads—written policies, published documents, and unpublished reports—that make up the written legacy of how the Forest Service accomplishes tribal relations. Still young, the Tribal Relations Program is evolving from earlier identities and direction, becoming more general in some areas and more specific in others. This strategic plan reflects that movement and continuous evolution. Earlier documents that form the foundation on which this strategic plan is built are available on the Forest Service Tribal Relations website: <https://www.fs.fed.us/spf/tribalrelations>.

Canoes at the Stillaguamish Tribe of Indians community center in Arlington, WA. Photo by Angela Pittman, USDA Forest Service.



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