

The Yurok Tribe Environmental Program: Climate Change Impacts Assessment and Prioritization Project

An Environmental Justice Grant Success Story

Project Overview

The purpose of the Climate Change Impact Assessment and Prioritization Project is to understand the technical issues associated with climate change research and develop partnerships, so that the Tribe may begin climate adaptation planning.

The Community

The target community for the Climate Change Impacts Assessment and Prioritization Project is the Yurok Tribe of northwestern California. The Yurok People have inhabited the lands of the Lower Klamath Sub-Basin since time immemorial. Their ancestral lands encompass an area of 56,062 acres, which include lower parts of the Klamath River and portions of the Pacific Coast.

While the natural resources of the Klamath River and its surrounding lands have been a central component in the subsistence lives of the Yurok People, the reservations location has also made it extremely vulnerable to climate change impacts. Changes to river hydrology, rising sea levels, increased frequency of storm events, and a loss of culturally significant species have all altered the manner in which Yurok people are able to maintain cultural, economic, and spiritual ties to their sacred lands.

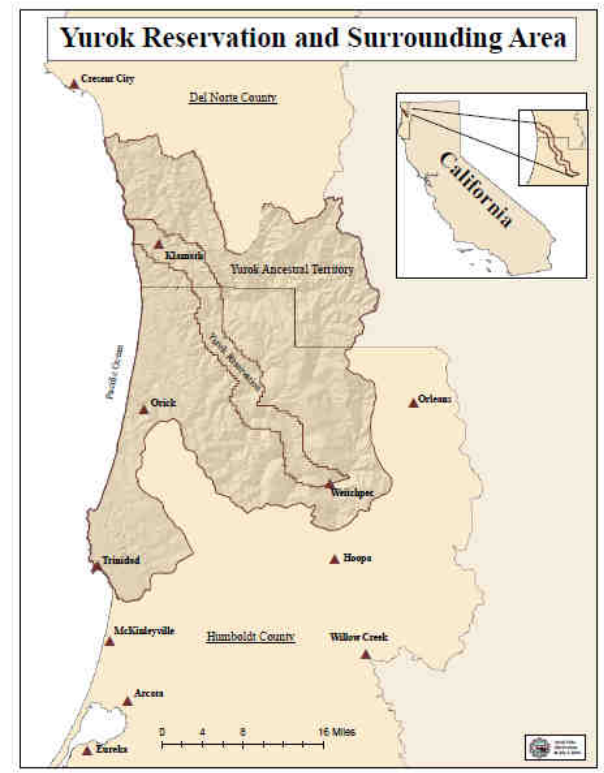


Figure 1: Yurok Tribal Lands.
(Map courtesy of Joe Hostler, Yurok Tribe Environmental Program)

In addition to dealing with the harsh realities of climate change impacts, The Yurok Tribe has difficulty engaging federal, state, and local planning agencies in discussions regarding climate change planning. Because of financial constraints, tribal staff is often unable to participate in regional and local climate change planning workshops. This inability to travel has drastically affected the tribe's capability to develop technical capacity to address potential climate change impacts.

Despite these setbacks, the Yurok Tribe has worked hard to develop partnerships with neighboring organizations to identify tribal needs and protect the reservation community from the environmental hazards that threaten the subsistence needs of the Yurok people.

Project Description

In 2010, EPA awarded the Yurok Tribe a \$25,000 [Environmental Justice Small Grant](#) to begin work on the Tribe's Climate Change Impacts Assessments and Prioritization Project. The project: 1) builds tribal government and community capacity via technical training for Yurok Tribe Environmental Program (YTEP) staff, 2) engages the larger reservation community, other tribes and neighboring communities in discussions about regional and local climate change planning efforts, and 3) develops a community precedence that identifies top Tribal areas for future mitigation and planning efforts.

Through the grant, YTEP staff will attend national and regional meetings to attain extensive knowledge on climate change science and assessment. It is the hope of the Yurok Tribe to use this newly found knowledge as a means to conduct community planning initiatives for an uncertain and potentially different environment along the Klamath River.

The Results

The Yurok Tribe was able to build tribal environmental staff capacity through attending several webinars and trainings on climate change research, impacts and planning.

Attending such events as the Societal Indicators Workshop in Washington D.C., provided YTEP staff the opportunity to travel long distances to advocate for the consideration of Tribes being unique communities who have considerable vulnerabilities because of environmental justice issues.

Furthermore, deepened outreach through community engagement activities on climate change impacts has made it possible for YTEP staff to share information gleaned from engagement activities with a body of Tribal Elders who have lifelong experience in observing the changes that have taken place in the Klamath River Basin environment.

Reflection

While YETP staff did not encounter any significant problems, they did find that their limited travel budget put a strain on their long distance travel needs. YTEP's solution for dealing with limited travel funds entailed participating in online webinars, teleconferences, and other online means that lowered their travel cost but still allowed them to obtain technical and scientific training on climate change. YETP staff has also leveraged offers for travel assistance from other governmental entities.



Figure 2: Chinook salmon, an important tribal resource, has seen great declines in their populations due to the impacts of climate change on river flow and temperatures. (Photo courtesy of Joe Hostler, Yurok Tribe Environmental Program.)

The Opening of New Doors

On May 26, 2011, the Director of YTEP attended the initial meetings of the U.S. Department of the Interior's Pacific Northwest Landscape Conservation Cooperative (PNWLCC) in Seattle, WA. The PNLCC is a multi- departmental partnership that links science and conservation delivery. This symposium was a great opportunity for the YTEP Director to network with representatives of state, local, and tribal governments, and other federal agencies.

Attending this event has not only helped the Yurok Tribe to expand their network of government agencies working on climate change from a tribal perspective, it has also enabled them to join the Pacific North West Landscape Conservation Cooperative's steering committee.

Since joining the committee, the Yurok Tribe has been able to increase their presence and participation in the regional development of climate change mitigation and land conservation plans.

What is Up Next for The Yurok Tribe

The Yurok Tribal Council plans to use their Climate Change Prioritization Plan as the definitive tool that guides and informs future mitigation efforts. This document will present and summarize current technical findings from climate change workshops.



Figure 3: A depleted salmon population has affected the manner in which the Yurok tribe is able to maintain the traditional salmon barbeque. (Photo courtesy of Joe Hostler, Yurok Tribe Environmental Program)

YUOK TRIBE ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAM KEY RESULTS

- The Yurok Tribe Environmental Program (YTEP) has used their EJ Small Grant funds to increase their understanding and awareness of federal, state, and local climate change issues and legislation so that the Tribe can more fully participate in the development of mitigation plans and solutions regarding climate change
- YTEP staff participated in 1) the American Indian/Alaskan Native climate Change working Group at the Northwest Indian College; and 2) The Pacific Northwest Tribal Climate Change Committee workshops to engage Tribes and indigenous populations in climate change efforts
- YTEP staff prepared and submitted a formal letter signed by their Tribal Chair to the Secretary of the Department of Interior regarding DOI's Climate Change Initiative calling for a tribal set-aside in their budget and requesting government-to-government consultation
- YTEP staff presented information gathered from community outreach meetings to Council and Tribal Departments on climate change research, needs, and potential impacts
- YTEP staff coordinated an inter-tribal workshop on climate change planning for tribes in the Klamath River watershed

To learn more about the Yurok Tribe's Climate Change Impacts Assessments and Prioritization Project, please visit the [Yurok Tribe](#) or contact Kathleen Sloan, Project Leader, at (707) 482-1822 x 1009 or ksloan@yuroktribe.nsn.us.