Obama Administration dedicates nearly $10 million to help tribes prepare for climate change

Media Contact: Jessica Kershaw, Interior_Press@ios.doi.gov
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WASHINGTON, D.C. – As part of President Obama's Climate Action Plan and continued commitment to support Native American leaders in building strong, resilient communities, Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell and Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs Kevin Washburn today announced the Administration has dedicated nearly $10 million this year to help tribes prepare for climate change through adaptation and mitigation. The Tribal Climate Resilience Program, which will be announced today at the fourth and final meeting of the White House State, Local, and Tribal Leaders Task Force on Climate Preparedness and Resilience, is part of a new initiative to work toward addressing the impacts of climate change already affecting tribal communities.

"From the Everglades to the Great Lakes to Alaska and everywhere in between, climate change is a leading threat to natural and cultural resources across America, and tribal communities are often the hardest hit by severe weather events such as droughts, floods and wildfires," said Secretary Jewell, chair of the White House Council on Native American Affairs. "Building on the President's commitment to tribal leaders, the partnership announced today will help tribal nations prepare for and adapt to the impacts of climate change on their land and natural resources."

"Impacts of climate change are increasingly evident for American Indian and Alaska Native communities and, in some cases, threaten the ability of tribal nations to carry on their cultural traditions and beliefs," said Assistant Secretary Washburn. "We have heard directly from Tribes about climate change and how it dramatically affects their communities, many of which face extreme poverty as well as economic development and infrastructure challenges. These impacts test their ability to protect and preserve their land and water for future generations. We are committed to providing the means and measures to help tribes in their efforts to protect and mitigate the effects of climate change on their land and natural resources."

The Program will offer funding for tribes and tribal consortia and organizations to develop science-based information and tools to enable adaptive resource management, as well as the ability to plan for climate resilience. The program will offer nationwide climate adaptation planning sessions and provide funding for tribal engagement and outreach within regional and national climate communities.

Support will also be provided to empower and educate youth to become leaders in tribal climate change adaptation and planning, and enable them to participate in leadership and climate conferences, as well as independent research projects.

The Program will provide direct support through climate adaptation grants that will be awarded in four categories: development and delivery of climate adaptation training; adaptation planning, vulnerability assessments and monitoring; capacity building through travel support for climate change training,

technical sessions, and cooperative management forums; and travel support for participation in ocean and coastal planning.

To further the President's commitment, as part of an Administration-wide Tribal Climate Resilience Initiative, Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Gina McCarthy will establish an interagency subgroup on climate change under the White House Council on Native American Affairs. The subgroup will work with tribes to collect and share data and information, including traditional ecological knowledge, about climate change effects that are relevant to American Indian Tribes and Alaska Natives. The subgroup will also identify opportunities for the federal government to improve collaboration and assist with climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts.

"Tribes are at the forefront of many climate issues, so we are excited to work in a more crosscutting way to help address tribal climate needs," said EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy. "We've heard from tribal leaders loud and clear: when the federal family combines its efforts, we get better results - and nowhere are these results needed more than in the fight against climate change."

The Interior Department will also establish a tribal climate liaison to coordinate with tribes across the federal government and help ensure tribal engagement in climate conversations at the federal level. In addition, five tribal Climate Extension Support Liaisons will be placed in the Department of the Interior's Climate Science Centers, while building tribal capacity by contracting the positions to tribal organizations to ensure strong ties to tribal practitioners. These liaisons will work at the regional level with tribes to identify basic climate information and knowledge needs of tribes and work with other federal partners to address those needs. Tactics will include forming national tribal climate-focused practitioner working groups, supporting tribal workshops, and addressing regional training needs for specific impacts.