

**Committee on Natural Resources**  
**Subcommittee for Indigenous Peoples of the United States**  
**Remote Oversight Hearing - Cisco WebEx**  
**October 26, 2021**  
**12:00 p.m.**

**Oversight Hearing on “Strengthening Indigenous Communities  
Through Cultural and Environmental Preservation”**

**Questions from Rep. Grijalva** for Ms. Elizabeth Azzuz, Secretary, Cultural Fire Management Council

1. Can you speak more on the history of California’s Indigenous Peoples utilizing cultural burns to maintain and protect their local ecosystems?
  - a. For the Yurok Tribe, how has engaging in cultural burns supported other cultural practices, like basket weaving?

**Answer:**

California Tribes have burned their ecosystems since time immemorial to maintain hunting grounds, fishing holes, and gathering places for food and medicine.

We burn to maintain basket weaving materials such as Hazel for the frames of baskets, bear grass for the white that is part of the design, these are serotinous plants which require fire to be usable.

We burn near riparian areas to help the Woodwardia ferns that we use to create red for baskets, which we dye with Alder bark. We use Maiden Hair Ferns for the color Black.

These burns enable our community to continue our traditional way of living with the land, allowing us to hunt, gather, and fish as our ancestors did.

2. Today, your organization facilitates the practice of cultural burning in partnership with other entities like Cal Fire, the Yurok Tribe, and the Nature Conservancy.
  - a. Can you speak a little more on how your organization was established?

**Answer:**

Our organization was created from a local organizing group called building healthy communities, they came to the Yurok Reservation to see how they could help our community, the entire community wanted fire back on the land, our basket weavers couldn’t find the materials to weave with, the brush was so thick our men couldn’t hunt, and our food

and medicine gathers couldn't find any resources due to the dense understory. Cultural Fire Management was formed to facilitate these burns.

3. In your experience, how has your organization's family-led burn program impacted tribal youth?

**Answer:**

Our family based burning program was created by the Indigenous Peoples Burning Network, which was created in our relationship with the Nature Conservancy, to facilitate family based burning with tribes across the country.

We teach our children from pre head start to High school about our traditional uses of fire, and how to use fire as a tool, and not a toy. The younger generation sees fire used in ceremony, and our daily lives. Children attend our training exchanges which we put on twice a year Spring, and Fall, and we teach our children and grandchildren how to burn safely.

4. The State of California, as well as the conservation community more broadly, has a long history of disparaging Indigenous practices of cultural burning.
  - a. Since your organization was established, what has worked to change this way of thinking?

**Answer:**

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**Questions from Rep. Leger Fernández** for Ms. Elizabeth Azzuz, Secretary, Cultural Fire Management Council

1. Given the Cultural Fire Management Council's partnership with the Yurok Tribe, can you elaborate on how tribal members are involved in your organization's traditional burns?

**Answer:**

Cultural Fire Management Council's partnership with the Yurok Tribe consists of us working together to facilitate Cultural Burns on ancestral territory, we work with the

Yurok Fire Department to share personnel, and equipment during cooperative burns. We work with the Yurok Tribes GIS Department to create maps for our units, which include plant studies, water ways, roads, houses, and our eight-year history of burns. We work with the Yurok Tribes Forestry Department to ensure that the carbon credit program is cleared around, with low intensity burns to protect the project sites. We also work with the Yurok Tribes Environmental program to acquire our smoke permits which we get from the Yurok Tribe as well as the County of Humboldt.

2. Can you elaborate more on the Cultural Fire Management Council's Cultural Burn Training Exchanges (TRES)?
  - a. What organizations and entities typically attend these exchanges?

**Answer:**

Cultural Fire Management Council holds two training exchanges a year, one in Spring and one in Fall TRES! Cal Fire, Bureau of Land Management, The Nature Conservancy, Fire Learning Network, Indigenous Peoples Burning Network, USFS, Yurok Tribe, Hoopa Tribe, Karuk Tribe, Lomakatsi Restoration Project, Klamath Tribes, Grande Ronde Tribe, Pomo Tribe, Humboldt area Foundation, UC Sacramento, UC Davis, UC Berkely, Stanford University, Humboldt State University, and the California Parks Service, Oregon Woods Inc. These are just a few of our participants and partners. These trainings are usually 7-10 days long, and require a basic 32 to participate and have qualifications increased by NWCG Qualified trainer's.