



Southwest Tribal Fire and Climate Resilience

IN BRIEF

Indigenous people were the first fire and natural resource managers in the Southwest. As forest managers work to bring health back to Southwestern ecosystems in a changing world, it is imperative that Indigenous perspectives are included and we collectively work to build tribal capacity to help lead these efforts. In Spring 2023, an Indigenous-led workshop series shared diverse tribal perspectives on fire and the group identified topics for future work together. This work is designed to support tribal and pueblo natural resource and fire programs in New Mexico and Arizona in their efforts both on reservations and off-reservation on ancestral homelands. This is part of an ongoing effort to respect tribal sovereignty and treaty rights by supporting tribal use of fire as part of cultural and ecological resilience, and seeks to increase capacities, ameliorate challenges, and share examples that can guide tribes across the Southwest.



ABOVE: View from the San Francisco Peaks near Flagstaff, Arizona, sacred to many Indigenous Nations. Tribes and pueblos each have unique relationships with neighboring land management agencies and the policies that authorize use of fire for climate and cultural resilience. Learn more about tribal forest management and policies at eri.nau.edu Credit: Molly McCormick, SWFSC

INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVES ON FIRE

- Both fire and connections to the land know no boundaries.
- Fire is the greatest gift given to native communities, and now we treat it like a liability.
- Fire is a tool to restore healthy forests and watersheds, which can combat climate change.
- Fire is a natural part of the ecosystem, and when not allowed to fill its role in the natural system, there are ecological and cultural consequences.
- For many tribes and pueblos, fire is an integral part of cultural and spiritual practices; it is also part of the healing process.
- Indigenous people hold the most knowledge of fire on their lands, and managing fire is an exercise of Tribal sovereignty.

WORKSHOP ORGANIZERS

This workshop series was co-convened by [Intertribal Council of Arizona](#), [Southwest Fire Science Consortium](#), [Institute for Tribal Environmental Professionals](#), and [Forest Stewards Guild](#) with workshop design and facilitation support provided by [Southwest Decision Resources](#) and funding provided by [Bureau of Indian Affairs](#). The Planning Committee represented tribal expertise and interests in AZ, NM and beyond.

KEY THEMES

The following themes were explored in the group's conversations.

- Indigenous perspectives on fire
- Cultural burning or the use of fire as a cultural practice
- Prescribed fire
- Fire and post-fire research and restoration
- Tribal capacity and workforce development
- Burn qualifications and requirements
- Collaboration and coordination
- Perception of fire
- Climate impacts
- Climate change adaptation planning

For more details on each of these topics, see the full workshop summary.

BELOW: Mosaic fire severity in the 2020 Medio Fire in New Mexico. The fire was beneficial to the ecosystem thanks to collaboration across boundaries with Pueblo of Tesuque, Santa Fe National Forest, and Greater Santa Fe Watershed Fireshed Coalition. The tribal fire and climate resilience workshop series highlights success stories in an effort to expand work that tribes are doing on all lands. Learn more about [Medio Fire](#) and [Reserved Treaty Rights Lands](#) [@swfirescience](#) on You Tube. Credit: Mark Dawson



WHO ATTENDED THE WORKSHOPS?

104 total participants

59 participants from **31** different tribal affiliations

30 participants affiliated with **7** state and federal agencies

1 participant affiliated with a county government

10 participants with **5** different university or other higher education affiliations

12 participants affiliated with **7** other non-governmental organizations and entities

NEXT STEPS

The next workshops to be held in 2024 will focus on

- 1) Building tribal capacity and training programs for using fire
- 2) Deciphering and empowering tribes on partnerships and agreements that authorize work on and off reservation lands
- 3) Continued sharing of stories, lessons-learned, research needs, examples and case studies. The exchange of professional and traditional knowledge along with creative solutions is necessary to improve and inform our collective approach to managing landscape resiliency in this changing environment

Read the entire workshop summary online at SWFireConsortium.org

The Southwest Fire Science Consortium (SWFSC) gets emerging science on the ground by connecting scientists, land managers, and the public. By facilitating these connections, the SWFSC helps to assure that scientists are addressing the most pressing questions and managers are applying cutting-edge science and diverse knowledge in their efforts to protect communities and natural resources. The SWFSC is funded by the Joint Fire Science Program.

