

TRUST LAND RESOURCES – RESOURCE STEWARDSHIP – RESULTS THAT MATTER

Message from the Deputy Director

Greetings,

Springtime is here and we are half-way through Fiscal Year 2024. We have published our Mid-Year Accomplishments Report on our main Office of Trust Services Website at <https://www.bia.gov/bia/ots>. This report highlights each Divisions activities for the period October 1, 2023, through March 30, 2024, and forecasts projects for the next six months.

Going forward we will be hosting a National Realty Conference, continue prioritizing work on fee-to-trust Land Description Reviews to restore Tribal homelands. Our Branch of Geospatial Services is reworking the Land Area Representation (LAR) dataset, BIA’s official geospatial representation of American Indian Land areas. This involves integrating LAR into Amazon Web Services (AWS) to allow users to interact with the dataset and propose changes. A working group is starting with the BIA Midwest Region to make the GIS dataset available to the public, other federal agencies, and most importantly Tribes.

Please take some time to review this compilation of OTS accomplishments, opportunities, challenges, best practices, and our forecast of projects scheduled for April 1 – September 30, 2024. We would appreciate your feedback by email at OTS@bia.gov.

Johnna Blackhair
Deputy Bureau Director-Trust Services

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Apache Tribe Wisdom

“It is better to have less thunder in the mouth and more lightning in the hand.”

Header photo credit: Fabian Kiern, BIA Alaska Region

TRUST SERVICES OVERVIEW



JOB OPENINGS AND STAFFING CHANGES

JOB OPENINGS SOON

Program	Position	Grade
Deputy Bureau Director	Administrative Specialist	GS-0301-12
Real Estate Services	Realty Specialist	GS-1170-12/13
Resource Integration & Services	Supervisory Data Management Analyst	GS-0301-13
Water & Power	Civil Engineer	GS-0810-13
Workforce & Youth Development	Program Manager	GS-0340-14

NEW STAFF MEMBERS

Program	Staff Member	Title	Duty Station
Deputy Director	Nathan Lillie	Special Assistant	Remote
Environment	Angela Waupochick	Regional Climate Resilience Coordinator	Remote
Forestry	Jennifer Kennedy	Forester (Inventory Analyst)	Remote
Indigenous Tech	Danae Wilson	Program Manager	Remote
Program Mgmt.	Colette Tafua	Budget Analyst	Remote
Real Estate	Iva Ollar	Realty Specialist	Remote
Water & Power	Jeffrey Good	Supervisory Civil Engineer	Remote
Wildland Fire	Robert Dodgen	Aviation Operations Specialist	Remote
Wildland Fire	Eric Ellison	Training Specialist	Remote
Wildland Fire	Zoila Forrest-Davis	Supervisory Budget Analyst	Remote
Wildland Fire	Mildred Garcia	Budget Analyst	Remote
Wildland Fire	Shelby Glass	Budget Analyst	Remote
Wildland Fire	Catherine Kaminski	National Mental Health & Wellbeing Program Manager	Remote
Wildland Fire	Narisa Ntappitake	Tribal Mental Health & Wellbeing Program Manager	Remote
Wildland Fire	Melanie Walsey	Financial Specialist	Remote

DEPARTED STAFF MEMBERS

Program	Staff Member	Title	Reason
Water & Power	Christina Mokhtarzadeh	Supervisory Hydrologist	Retirement
Wildland Fire	Joel Kerley	Aviation Program Manager	Retirement
Forestry	Thomas Lowell	Forester	Transfer
Geospatial	Steven Mesa	Program Analyst	Retirement
Trust Land Cons	Debra Scott	Supervisory Realty Specialist	Retirement
Energy	Conn Wethington	Natural Resource Specialist (Planner)	Resignation



Biden-Harris Administration Announces More than \$157 Million from Investing in America Agenda to Restore our Nations’s Lands and Waters



DOI Keystone Initiative Team celebrating the Ecosystem Restoration Phase 3 project announcement.

[Click here](#) to view full press release.

The Department of the Interior’s Ecosystem Restoration Program (ERP) seeks to invest Bipartisan Infrastructure Law Ecosystem Restoration (ER) funding strategically and efficiently across the different ER Activities, collaboratively across the DOI, and within the requirements of the law to increase ecosystems’ ability to adapt and respond to a changing climate while improving job opportunities and equitable access to healthy ecosystems for Americans.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Office of Trust Services (OTS) was authorized \$20,744,526 over three years through 2026 to support Ecosystem Restoration. In FY 2024, OTS will fund 13 projects totaling \$7,237,594. Some examples of the funded projects are:

The BIA will provide funds through a competitive process to various Tribes for the management/control of invasive species on Tribal trust lands, individual Indian allotment lands, or in areas managed by Tribes through treaties or agreements.

The BIA will provide funds to the Colville Tribe to restore the Mission Bay, located at the north end of Omak Lake on the Colville Reservation, which is a complex mix of forested, shrub, and emergent wetlands. The Mission Bay Restoration Project aims to improve wetland health through the removal of non-native fill, including the restoration of the channel of No Name Creek. The project will enhance recreational access and increase visitation with parking lot and picnic area improvements, and the development of a wetland boardwalk interpretive trail.

The BIA will provide funds to the Mescalero Apache Tribe to grow seedlings for both wildfire mitigation and reforestation of stands impacted by forest insects and diseases. In addition, the Tribal Greenhouse is used to grow cultural plants such as Agave and Osha, as well as to grow plants for watershed restoration and wildlife use, including Sumac, Winterfat, and 4-wing Saltbush.

The BIA will partner with the Oglala Sioux Tribe to increase support for the Buffalo herd to induce changes in vegetation composition and quality grazing intended to increase the abundance and diversity of birds and insects in tallgrass prairies.

The BIA in Alaska will collaborate with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Tribes and other Department of the Interior bureaus involved in the Gravel-to-Gravel Keystone Initiative to implement targeted invasive species prevention and public awareness outreach in the Yukon-Kuskokwim region. This includes support for installation of exhibits at the interagency visitor center in Tok, AK. This project is part of a coordinated, multi-bureau series of projects focused on preventing the introduction and spread of invasive species in Alaska.

CO-MANAGEMENT IN OTS

Secretarial Order No. 3403

The Secretary's Order describes how these departments will collaborate with Indian and Alaska Native Tribes, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians to ensure that Tribal governments, Alaska Native entities, and the Native Hawaiian Community play an integral role in decision making related to the management of Federal lands and waters through consultation, capacity building, and other means consistent with applicable authorities.

Departmental Manual 502

Departmental Manual 502 established the Committee on Collaborative and Cooperative Stewardships for the policy and charters for the Department of Interior's (Department) Committee on Collaborative and Cooperative Stewardship (Committee) and for the Office of the Solicitor's (SOL) Working Group on Collaborative and Cooperative Stewardship (Working Group) to ensure implementation of the policies and goals of 502 DM.

- Currently the committee is leading an effort across the Department to review its sources of authority to enter into the full range of co-stewardship agreements, inclusive of but not limited to formal co-management.
- In addition, Bureaus are assessing Tribal consultation processes to ensure that all DOI Bureaus have the necessary support and guidance to work with Tribal Nations on these agreements and to enhance Tribal member opportunities to work in and connect to sites that hold significant cultural and spiritual importance, consistent with President Biden and Secretary Haaland's direction on meaningful consultation.
- All members of this Committee will take one of several offerings on Indian Law and Co-Management by the end of this Spring.

Performance Metrics for DOI Senior Leadership

The Secretary has directed an SES Co-Stewardship performance requirement. Per guidance, this language is to be included by *certain* executives in their performance plans. This element was directed for and has been included in all of BIA's leadership annual performance plans for FY 2024.

National Policy Memo (NPM)

The NPM establishes the BIA's policy to support collaborative and cooperative stewardship of federal lands and waters between the DOI, its bureaus and offices, and federally recognized Tribes pursuant to Secretary's Order (SO) 3403, *Joint Secretarial Order on Fulfilling the Trust Responsibility to Indian Tribes in the Stewardship of Federal Lands and Waters*.

Through this policy, the BIA commits to supporting the cooperative and collaborative approaches to manage federal lands between relevant Federal Government agencies and federally recognized Tribes. In doing so, the BIA aligns its expertise in the Federal-Tribal relationship to protect Tribal treaty, religious, subsistence, and cultural interests related to federal lands and waters in keeping with the United States trust responsibility to federally recognized Indian Tribes and their members.

- Directs BIA staff to support the goals of SO 3403 and to support Tribes in a manner consistent with the goals of native nation building and Tribal self-determination.
- Establishes a national framework for BIA to support other bureaus and offices in their work to fulfill the Department's treaty and trust responsibilities to Tribes in the stewardship of federal lands and waters in such a way as to provide flexibility to respond to variations in Tribal histories, ways of knowing, as well as in applicable laws, reserved rights, and treaties.

- Affirms BIA's support for its sister bureaus and office as they develop and broaden nation-to-nation relationships with Tribes that also may further the United States trust responsibility to Tribes and individual Indians.
- Reaffirms the BIA's commitment and support for Tribal nations' pursuit of consolidating their homelands, pursuit of co-stewardships of federal lands and waters, and acknowledges the utility of Indigenous Knowledge as integral to the appropriate stewardship and management of Federal lands and waters.



Examples of Co-Stewardship Activities

The BIA participates as an active member of the DOI Bison Working Group. The Department of the Interior (DOI) established this Working Group as a commitment to shared stewardship of wild bison in cooperation with states, Tribes, and other stakeholders.

In 2023, the DOI assembled a group of staff to initiate a process to develop the Bison Shared Stewardship Strategy, a high-level strategy co-authored by bureau staff and tribal members. There are 6 Tribal members and a member representing the Intertribal Buffalo Council who will support the development this Shared Stewardship Strategy.

The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funded a \$1 million set aside within the non-competitive Habitat Restoration to meaningfully bridge existing priorities of co-stewardship and bison.

Funds will establish a bison co-management tool kit that includes the identification of all data and resources needed for tribal bison ecosystem success. Focused tribal investment can address identified challenges culminating in a bison co-stewardship grant award.

These of course are a few examples of what BIA is doing. BIA continues to identify ways to not only enhance the way we collaboratively and cooperatively work with Tribes now but to add opportunities for Shared Stewardship. BIA will continue to play a part in the Co-Stewardship Committee and provide knowledge and support to other bureaus and offices in engaging with Tribal communities and in understanding the role Tribal governments may play in collaborating and cooperating in the stewardship of federal lands and waters, including wildlife and its habitat.

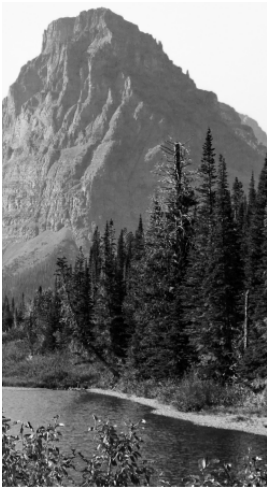
Next Steps

In FY 2024, BIA will develop and implement a formal process for Tribes to request assistance with establishing Co-Management/Stewardship Agreements. Once complete online training with an outreach plan will be developed to provide technical assistance and coordination to the Tribes on the new process. Information will be shared on our website and in as many publications as possible.

In addition to the implementation of the NPM BIA will continue to look for ways to enhance use of our current authorities and collect data useful to justifications for increases to support additional Co-Stewardship opportunities for Tribes. An unmet need recommendation for Co-Management/Co-Stewardship was submitted.

Additional Resources

The Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act requires each agency within Interior to identify potentially contractible non-BIA programs by activity and unit (location) and provide notice by publishing the list annually. The Office of Self Governance annually publishes the list of potentially contractible non-BIA programs.



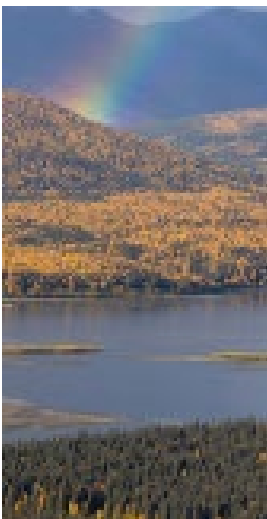
Interior to Take Action to Restore Lands and Waters, Advance Climate Change

Interior is putting people to work restoring our nation’s land and waters with a \$2 billion down payment that builds on existing Department programs and invests in locally led landscape, partner driven restoration. [Link here.](#)



Grasslands Keystone Initiative: Protecting an Integral Ecosystem

As part of the DOI’s Restoration and Resilience Framework bureaus and offices are working to protect, conserve and restore the Central Grasslands. The Department is utilizing funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act to support grasslands conservation, solve key conservation challenges, and advance climate resilience. Key initiatives include Restoring Bison Populations, Utilizing Indigenous Knowledge, and Protecting Birds, Bees and Butterflies. [Link here.](#)



Gravel-to-Gravel Keystone Initiative for People, Salmon, and the Land

Through the Gravel-to-Gravel initiative, federal agencies, Tribes, and others will work together to build a strong foundation for co-stewardship, where both Indigenous Knowledge and western science inform plans to support resilient ecosystems and communities. [Link here.](#)

OTS Welcomes Danae Wilson



Danae Wilson joined the [National Telecommunications and Information Administration](#) (NTIA) in September 2021 for a White House detail to the [Office of Science and Technology Policy](#) (OSTP) for a two-year term. Danae Wilson joined the OSTP Tech team as Assistant Director for Internet Access. Her portfolio includes rural and tribal high-speed internet connectivity.

Before joining NTIA, Danae dedicated her career to bridging technology gaps for Native American’s and residents who choose to live on their Reservation. She has thirty years’ experience deploying high speed networks in Indian Country and on Tribal Lands. She worked for the Nez Perce Tribe for twenty-seven years prior to the appointment with OSTP. She’s conducted technical training for the Internet Society and Philanthropy Northwest. Danae was a contract employee for Meta developing a Tribal connectivity plan that deployed community operated trial networks on Tribal Lands.

Danae served two terms on the FCC Intergovernmental Advisory Committee and the Native Nations Communication Task Force where she served as co-chair. She chaired the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians, Telecom & Technology Committee. She served on the Native Public Media Board of Directors. She served on the Idaho Broadband Task Force and the Western States Broadband Alliance. National Congress of American Indians appointed Danae to represent Indian Country on the FirstNet Board, Tribal Working Group where she served as the Chair and to SAFECOM.

Danae lives and works on the Nez Perce Reservation in Northern Idaho.

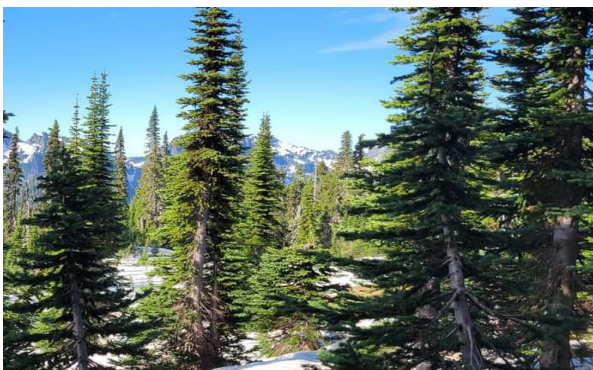


TAAMS informal training at Western Regional Office in Phoenix, AZ

Division of Forestry

Forests provide a key source of revenue and jobs for tribes and individual Indians and play an important role in sustaining tribal cultures and traditions. Management activities within forest lands are governed by forest management plans which outline ecologically, and biologically sustainable forest management practices formulated to meet tribal goals and objectives. Forest management activities include timber sales, timber stand improvement (thinning and pruning), and reforestation.

In 2023, 274 million board feet of timber volume was harvested generating \$50 million in tribal income. Reforestation (tree planting) was completed on 19,581 acres and 13,848 acres were pre-commercially thinned to improve the health, stocking, composition, and productivity of forest stands.



Trust Asset and Accounting Management System (TAAMS)

The TAAMS Forestry module now includes an improved document upload function to allow easy upload of images from the document toolbar. Informal training was provided at Yakama and at the Western Regional Office to update TAAMS forestry users about the new functionality that was introduced in FY 2023 and FY 2024. The intent of the training was to ensure that users are utilizing the improved functionality.

Three formal TAAMS Forestry courses have been offered to date this fiscal year. Introductory TAAMS Forestry was offered at the Northwest Regional Office in Portland in February 2024. Advanced TAAMS Forestry was offered at Northwest Regional Office in March 2024. A TAAMS Forestry Management Overview course was also offered in March 2024 using Microsoft Teams. All three courses were filled to maximum capacity.

Timber Team

The Timber Team hired an additional five foresters in FY2023, which provided additional aid and assistance to Tribes across the Nation. Accomplishments continue to grow, and the Team is staying very busy. A GIS storyboard was developed to show all the Timber Team accomplishments since the inception in 2020. Each location lists information of the specific accomplishments achieved and photographs.

<https://biamaps.geoplatform.gov/timber-team-projects/>.



Timber Team staff after a hard day's work measuring timber on the Narragansett Indian Tribe of Rhode Island

Portable Milling infrastructure

The Nez Perce Tribe has been operating a firewood program since 2017 and have continued to creatively manage their lands and provide jobs for their membership. Tribal staff researched and purchased a Cord King Model 60 Firewood Processor & 32' Offloading Conveyor in 2017. This model can process up to seven cords per hour. The ability to process this amount of firewood quickly has been beneficial to the tribe in delivering over 300 cords of firewood to tribal members annually. The tribal members that receive firewood are primarily elders and other members in need.

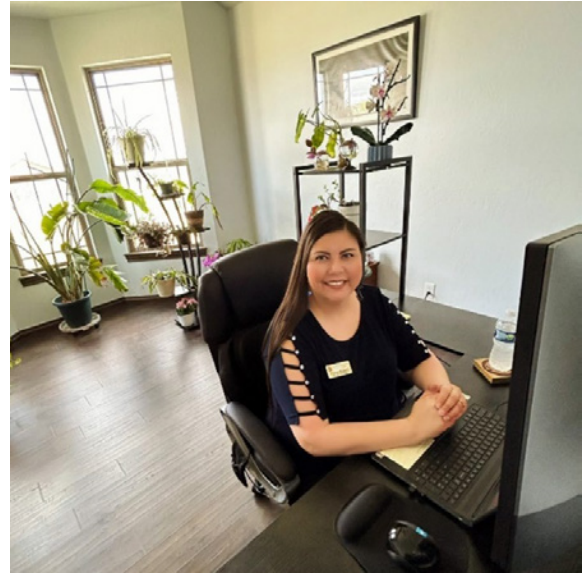
In 2018, BIA Forestry central office provided funding to the tribe to buy a self-loading log truck to further support their firewood program. Purchase of the truck has been enabled the tribe to haul and process approximately 40 loads of logs to meet their annual firewood needs.



Nez Perce self-loader hauling cedar logs.

Jennifer Kennedy – Remote Work in the Organization

In October 2023, I joined the BIA – Branch of Forest Inventory and Planning (FIP) team as a Forester. I worked for the branch previously for five years. I left to be closer to my family in Montana. As my children got older, I decided it was time to pick back up my career with the BIA. I was thankful to be offered a position again at FIP, and leadership approved my request to work remotely from my home in southwest Oklahoma.



Remote work has impacted the organization in positive ways. With the difference in locality pay, Lakewood, Colorado (Denver) being more significant than southwest Oklahoma (which falls into the “Rest of the United States” locality pay), it saves the organization on salary pay. It also reduces any in-office expenses and saves the Lakewood office space. Remote work is also a great strategy to help the organization have a more prosperous and productive workforce and employee retention.

Working remotely for FIP has benefited me with a great life and work balance thus far. I am very grateful to have such flexibility that I do not take lightly. It holds me to a higher standard in my daily responsibilities as a remote forester. But it also allows me to work comfortably without distractions in my own space, which is a positive mental boost.

Since the job is primarily computer-based, I can attend meetings and trainings directly from my computer. It allows me to network and collaborate using MS Teams with regions, agencies, and tribes. My work travel is beginning to pick up, so I'm looking forward to providing hands-on assistance to the tribes. I can still strive for professional growth and career development and tend to my family's dynamics.

Understanding Tree Risk Assessments

Have you ever driven down the road and noticed a dead tree or a detached tree limb that could potentially strike a vehicle? Congratulations, you've just completed a tree risk assessment! In simple terms, a tree risk assessment involves evaluating an entire tree or its parts to determine the likelihood of impact with a target (such as a vehicle) and the potential consequences if the tree or its parts were to strike that target.

Living around trees in the urban environment offers numerous benefits, but it also comes with inherent risks. If given the opportunity, all trees will eventually fail during their lifetime. While young, small trees typically pose minimal risk, large mature trees in frequently occupied developed areas present an increased risk. Property owners and managers have a responsibility to ensure regular monitoring and maintenance at reasonable intervals to mitigate tree related risks as they arise. Urban trees offer significant benefits that outweigh the inherent risks. Some benefits include improved well-being, temperature regulation, air quality improvement, stormwater management, noise reduction, and increased property values.

Before deciding to remove a live tree, it's essential to explore mitigation options to retain the trees positive impact. For any tree risk-related or urban & community forestry inquiries, contact Christopher Lacroix at christoper.lacroix@bia.gov.



Urban Forester using a LaCroix Resistograph tool on a tree to detect decay in the wood.

The United States Forest Service (USFS) Urban and Community Forestry program provides grants for technical and financial assistance to maintain urban forests. Their goal is to enhance and protect the urban forest by creating a valuable opportunity for tribes to apply for grants. These grants ensure that tribal urban forests continue to provide benefits for tribal members. Tribes can partner with the USFS to apply for funds. [Urban and Community Forestry Grants - 2023 Grant Awards | US Forest Service \(usda.gov\)](https://www.usda.gov/land-management/urban-and-community-forestry/grants)

What Is a Tree Risk Assessment?

A tree risk assessment is the systematic process of assigning a tree a risk rating. Tree risk assessments are performed by International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) Certified Arborists, particularly those with the Tree Risk Assessment Qualification (TRAQ) administered by the ISA. While anyone familiar with trees can assess a tree for risk, consulting a TRAQ-certified arborist is highly recommended. A TRAQ-certified arborist in your area can be found by visiting www.treesaregood.org/findanarborist/findanarborist.

Understanding Tree Risk Assessments: A Beginner’s Guide

Let’s take a deeper dive into the three levels of tree risk assessment as defined by ISA.

Limited Visual Assessment LEVEL 1 <i>“Drive-by” quick assessment</i>	Basic Assessment LEVEL 2 <i>Up-close on the ground 360-degree assessment</i>	Advanced Assessment LEVEL 3 <i>Diagnostic tools (i.e., sonic tomography) used to assess internal defects</i>
<p>Arborists performing this type of risk assessment have a goal of quickly identify hazardous trees or tree parts.</p> <p>Typically, only one side of the tree is assessed.</p> <p>Level 1 assessments are useful for identifying trees that require removal or pruning after a significant storm event or simply identifying trees that need care during a routine tree inventory.</p> <p>Due to its limited view, Level 1 assessments primarily identify trees with high to extreme risk ratings.</p>	<p>During a Level 2 risk assessment, arborists examine all tree parts, including roots, trunk, limbs, and branches. Basic tools like a rubber mallet (sound for cavities), a soil probe (locate missing or decaying roots), and binoculars (inspect the upper tree crown) are commonly used.</p> <p>Arborists often rely on the ISA Basic Tree Risk Assessment form to guide the assessment.</p> <p>During a Level 2 assessment, each tree part is carefully evaluated for its potential to impact a target (such as pedestrians, cars, or roofs).</p> <p>Consequences of failure range from negligible to severe (think complete destruction or loss of life). Based on the likelihood of failure, impact, and consequences, a risk rating is assigned to the whole tree or identified tree parts.</p> <p>Mitigation options—such as tree removal, limiting access, installing cabling systems, or pruning hazardous branches—are recommended to reduce the overall risk.</p>	<p>An arborist uses specialized tools or equipment to supplement the findings from the Level 2 risk assessment.</p> <p>For instance, an arborist may recommend that resistance drilling or sonic tomography be performed on trunk of the tree to further investigate a trunk that sounded hollow when initially sounded with a rubber mallet.</p>



Fallen Tree



Fallen Tree

The Process of Tree Risk Assessment

Now that there is an understanding of what a tree risk assessment is along with the varying levels, we'll delve further into Level 2 – Basic Risk Assessments, which form the core of tree risk assessments.

Arborists initiate a basic risk assessment by examining the entire tree and its surroundings. They start by identifying potential targets adjacent to the tree. These targets can be anything of value, such as pedestrians, buildings, vehicles, gates, or neighboring trees.

Next, the arborist examines the surrounding site for signs that may indicate potential tree failure. These include factors such as recent grading, saturated roots, previous incidents of tree failure. Key considerations include whether the tree is stressed, the presence of dead or yellowing foliage, any signs of pests affecting the tree, and whether the species is naturally prone to failure.

After evaluating the entire tree, the arborist examines each tree part individually. They start with the crown and branches, considering factors such as dead branches, broken branches hanging within the crown, cracks, weak attachments, cavities, conks, and signs of poor pruning practices. Next, the arborist closely inspects the trunk, looking for issues such as dead or missing bark, cracks, decay, major lean, and lightning damage. If feasible, the arborist also examines the root system for signs like cut or damaged roots, decayed roots, stem girdling, and root plate lifting.

During the visual inspection of the tree's crown, branches, trunk, and roots, the arborist might identify conditions of concern. For example, the arborist might observe a 10-foot-long dead limb in the crown of the tree or a large, rotted cavity at the base of the trunk. Based on their experience and other relevant factors, the arborist assigns a likelihood of failure rating to each concerning condition. The likelihood of failure ratings spans from improbable to imminent.



Clearing roots for assessment

Assigning a Risk Rating

Once the arborist assigns a likelihood of failure rating to the whole tree or identified tree parts, the arborist assesses the likelihood that the tree or tree parts will strike identified targets. Using the 'Likelihood matrix' from the ISA Basic Tree Risk Assessment form, the arborist combines the likelihood of failure and likelihood of impact, resulting in ratings from unlikely to very likely. The arborist then determines a risk rating by comparing the likelihood of failure and impact with the consequences of failure. Risk ratings range from low to extreme. Each tree part receives its own mitigation options, which typically lead to a new lower risk rating. Mitigation recommendations could be ongoing monitoring, crown cleaning and thinning, limiting access, or whole tree removal.

Be Tree Aware

Property owners and tree managers must be aware of the risks associated with trees on their property. Regularly monitoring of trees allows for early detection of hazardous conditions. If any new suspicious hazardous signs are observed during routine monitoring, such as a new lean, property or tree managers should seek assistance from an ISA certified arborist with a TRAQ qualification to assess the tree(s) in question. It's essential to recognize that while holding the TRAQ qualification is valuable, assessing tree risk often comes with experience.

Every tree is unique, and a more experienced arborist may identify conditions of concern that a newer arborist may not observe. Ultimately, property owners and tree managers must decide the level of risk they are willing to accept on their property. Proof of inspection and maintenance can favor them legally if tree-related damage occurs. It's essential to note that tree failure due to an 'act of God' (such as a natural disaster) is beyond anyone's control and generally not considered the tree owner's fault.

About the Author: Christopher LaCroix has been an ISA Certified Arborist for over 10 years and has held the ISA Tree Risk Assessment Qualification since 2015. Before joining the BIA Division of Forestry, Forest Inventory Planning team in September 2022, Christopher worked in various roles in Urban & Community Forestry in Southern California. His diverse portfolio includes extensive experience in performing tree risk assessments on urban trees using advanced diagnostics to detect internal decay, wildland and community fuels reduction identification and mitigation, protected tree species inventory and mapping, pre-development analysis and construction monitoring, invasive insect trapping and monitoring, utility forestry, and state/municipal vegetation code enforcement.

For any tree risk-related or urban & community forestry inquiries, feel free to reach out to Christopher at christoper.lacroix@bia.gov.



TRIBAL CLIMATE RESILIENCE

Biden-Harris Administration Announces \$120 Million from President's Investing in America Agenda to Enhance Climate Resilience in Tribal Communities

The Department of the Interior unveiled a \$120 million initiative from the President Biden's Investing in America agenda, aimed at aiding 146 projects to address climate-related threats to Tribal lands. This marks the largest annual funding in the Bureau of Indian Affairs' Tribal Climate Annual Awards Program, benefitting 102 Tribes and 9 Tribal organizations. The initiative supports planning and implementation of climate resilience measures, including relocation of critical infrastructure, with an emphasis on incorporating Indigenous Knowledge. The funding aligns with the Biden-Harris administration's commitment to Justice40 Initiative, ensuring benefits flow to marginalized communities. For further details, you can access the full press release [here](#)

A summary of awards by Tribe, title, funded amount, and project description can be found on the [Bureau of Indian Affairs website](#).

Young Tribal Leaders Art Contest Gallery

The BIA Division of Environmental Services and Cultural Resource Management is excited to announce the winners of the Young Tribal Leaders Art Contest! The contest received over 100 submissions from Tribal citizens aged 14-30 expressing the contest's themes of culture, environment, and climate.

Three winners were selected with travel sponsorship to share their work at the 2024 National Tribal and Indigenous Climate Conference (NTICC) in Anchorage, Alaska this September. These 3 winners and an additional 20 pieces are featured in an online gallery as well as in the Stewart Lee Udall Department of the Interior Building in Washington D.C. for public viewing.



Learn more and visit the online gallery at <https://www.bia.gov/announcing-2024-young-tribal-leaders-art-contest-winners>



Artwork by Kaylie Wanatee entitled "Sister Spirits."

The development of the [STACC Report](#) is coordinated by the Institute for Tribal Environmental Professionals ([ITEP Tribes and Climate Program](#)) through a cooperative agreement with the Branch of Tribal Climate Resilience. The second volume will be released by the end of FY24 to further develop the topics of the first report, highlight new Tribal narratives, and share relevant climate events and adaptation strategies of Tribes and Indigenous communities.

Success Stories Highlight the TCR Liaison Network

The Tribal Climate Resilience Liaison Network assembles a team of Liaisons located throughout the United States who support Tribal Nations and Alaska Native communities in their region to advance adaptation planning and implementation in the face of climate change. To further connect Tribes to the network, TCR will soon stand up a new Liaison webpage with a News section to highlight Liaison Success Stories throughout the year. Additionally, a new Regional Tribal Liaison Directory Dashboard offers a map with both BIA and USGS Climate Adaptation Science Center (CASC) regions to clearly visualize which technical assistance staff is most appropriate to contact to further Tribal climate efforts. Learn more about the Network and connect at <https://www.bia.gov/bia/ots/tcr/our-work-partnerships>.

Northwest – Building Relationships for Tribal Adaptation Planning: A Needs Assessment for Washington and Oregon Coastal Tribes

The Liaisons in the Pacific Northwest, Amelia March, and Kylie Avery, partnered with the University of Washington Climate Impacts Group (UW CIG) and Washington Sea Grant to identify unmet climate adaptation needs and priorities of Coastal Tribes in Washington and Oregon. Designing Listening Sessions which integrated and centered principles of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent and ensuring the confidentiality of participants were of high priority. Agreeing upon observation protocols for the sessions helped the team be mindful of emotional burdens and vulnerabilities which may be released during participant discussion.

Implementing the principle of reciprocity, the project team intentionally secured honoraria in the project budget to compensate the participants for their time, experience, and perspectives shared during the sessions. Incorporating input and guidance from the team's Tribal Advisory Group, which was composed of the Tribal Nations within the project area, was valuable to implementing successful Listening Session strategies. Holding in-person sessions at significant and trusted intertribal events, like the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians' Conventions and National Tribal Leaders Climate Summit, helped leverage the time and availability of participants, while the opportunity for virtual sessions proved a convenient way to integrate comments from participants with pressed schedules.



Photo by Kylie Avery

Listening Sessions

The team was also successful in holding an in-person 1:1 Tribal Listening Session, which resulted with significant participation and input from Tribal staff and community members. A total of six Listening Sessions (in-person and virtual) were held during 2023, with over 22 Tribes participating in the process. As of this writing, the team is currently composing the draft assessment, which will be fact-checked by participants and reviewed by Tribal Nations within the project area prior to release. The final assessment reflecting the needs and priorities of Washington and Oregon Coastal Tribes will be made publicly available in early 2024.

Project website: <https://cig.uw.edu/our-programs/the-northwest-climate-resilience-collaborative/the-tribal-coastal-portfolio/>

Welcome NEW Eastern Regional Climate Resilience Coordinator!

Angela Waupochick joins us from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Center for Climatic Research where she been dedicated to forest/climate education and outreach development. In recent years, Angela has been focused on building flux tower networks, youth forestry programming and pest management strategies in tribal communities of northeastern Wisconsin.

Angela has a mixed forest and water resources management background, prefers being in the field rather than in front of a computer screen and loves wetlands.



Angela Waupochick, Regional Climate Resilience Coordinator

Her formal education includes a Bachelor of Science in Biology from Mount Mary University and Master of Science in Forestry from University of Wisconsin-Madison. Currently, Angela is pursuing her Ph.D. at the Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies, concentrating on forest/atmosphere interactions in tribal forests.

Angela is from Keshena, Wisconsin. She is excited to relocate to Tennessee and start gardening in a different hardiness zone.

Welcome to the DESCIRM team, Angela!



Staff Curator Lee, work in progress establishing BIA Museum space in Albuquerque.

BIA MUSEUM PROGRAM

Staff Curator Albuquerque, Rechanda Lee – *Dine*
Staff Curator Washington DC, Justin Giles – *Muscogee (Creek) Nation*

Springtime for the BIA Museum Program is underway, and our mission is to maintain and upgrade museum storage and housing spaces in Washington DC, and Albuquerque, NM. The way we handle cultural material and art belonging to Tribal Nations reflects our respect and accountability towards them. We must be responsible stewards of mesological collections, and for this reason, we strive to keep all aspects of our museum program up to date with national museum standards. Furthermore, we are pleased to announce that our National Museum Inventory is nearing completion, which further demonstrates our commitment to accountability towards Tribal Nations.

In the Albuquerque office, Staff Curator Lee has established an appropriate museum space for collections and supplies. While space is always limited in the museum world, creating museum space in the Albuquerque Office provides a workspace for curators, a place to receive and ship art, as well as a place to house and store supplies.

In tandem, the same effort is in progress at DOI Headquarters in the Udall Building in Washington DC. We have selected a contractor to renovate the outdated equipment and storage space.

Work will begin soon to install brand-new shelving, art racks, and workspace tabletops early this summer. Currently, the museum housing space in DC is packed full of art and newly purchased museum supplies that eagerly await the updated renovation and much-needed space.



Staff Curator Giles, work in progress updating DOI/MIB museum space to national museum standards.



From the BIA Museum Program

Collections exhibited here represent indigenous communities and cultures from Alaska, Northwest Coast, Southwest, Plains Regions, to Northeastern and Southeastern Regions of the United States.

This exhibit represents a remarkable place in U.S. -Tribal and Interior Department history:

The 200th anniversary of the creation of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Originally established on March 11, 1824, then transferred to the Department of the Interior when it was re-established on March 3, 1849.

The BIA remains the oldest bureau within Interior.

“Today, the Bureau’s mission is to make things right. Today, we work together with Tribes to protect the right of Indian people to exist as Indian people and to govern ourselves. We are supporting language revitalization efforts across Indian Country, protecting access to clean water, bringing electricity to homes that have never been electrified, investing in public safety, restoring vital ecosystems for bison and salmon, and much, much more.

Indian Affairs is like the trunk of an ancient tree – one that has its roots deeply entwined in the Constitution and Congress and going back to the early years of the United States. BIA agencies, regional offices, as well as the Bureau of Indian Education and Bureau of Trust Funds Administration are its strongest branches. Today, BIA employees remain at the forefront of carrying our mission of service to 574 federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Native Tribes and thousands of Tribal and individual trust beneficiaries.”

Bryan Newland, Bay Mills Community (Ojibwe)
Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs

BIA Art in Office Program

The BIA Art-in-Office program continues across the country. From anticipated art moves in Portland, Oregon, to curating the Albuquerque Deputy Bureau Director spaces, to Madame Secretary Haaland’s Office in DC, the BIA Curators are keeping busy indeed. A highlight to note is the BIA 200th Commemorative Exhibit in Secretary Haaland’s Office which recognizes the founding of the BIA on March 11, 1824. This exhibit will remain on display through the rest of the fiscal year displaying objects from the BIA Museum Collections.

Lastly, the BIA Museum Program has assisted with the DESCRM Student Art Contest, and we are proud to have selected 23 finalists. The works of art cover all mediums from photography to paint and pen that further reflect our communities and constituents from NDN Country. The finalists will have their art displayed in Washington DC at the Main Interior Building beginning in May.

The BIA Museum Program continues to grow and establish museum national standards across the country. We certainly appreciate all the Indian Affairs and BIA Staff that have assisted us as we traversed the country from Alaska to Cherokee, North Carolina the past year. More to come and much more to update as the summer approaches.



Mission

The mission of the Division of Trust Land Consolidation (DTLC) is to facilitate sound land management and administration, support Tribal sovereignty and self-determination, and promote economic opportunity in Indian Country by reducing Indian land fractionation.

The DTLC provides opportunities for individual Indian landowners to voluntarily sell fractional land interests in trust or restricted status, and at fair market value, for consolidation under Tribal trust ownership. By increasing the amount of Tribal trust land for conservation, stewardship, economic development, or other uses deemed beneficial by Tribes. DTLC has entered into an interagency agreement with the Appraisal and Valuation Services Office to provide appraisals for additional highly fractionated locations.

Summary of Work Accomplished for Trust Land Consolidation

Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation – In FY 2023, the initial implementation began at the CTUIR using appraisals obtained by the Tribe, the third location for the land consolidation efforts. The success of the implementation was accomplished by DTLC working jointly with the Bureau of Trust Funds Administration (BTFA) in updating names and addresses, and finding Where-Abouts-Unknown, and the CTUIRs coordination and outreach with their local community. To promote positive interactions, DTLC held weekly meetings in FY 2023, and then bi-weekly meetings in FY 2024. The CTUIR recently informed the DTLC that Tribally Funded Offers were postponed for the remainder of FY 2024 and forecast to continue in Fiscal year 2025. The Umatilla TLC Sales Closeout was on March 6, 2024.

Accomplishments to date

- 528 Purchase Offers includes Where-Abouts-Unknown
- 38 Approved Offers
- 71 Fractionated interests acquired.
- 148 Equivalent acres restored to Tribal ownership.
- 40 Tracts with Interests Acquired
- \$388,316.19 Total Land Sales

Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho Tribes of Wind River – Beginning of November 2023, DTLC initiated consultation with tribal leaders and local BTFA regarding implementation in establishing Tribal Priorities; the fourth location. The Wind River appraisals were available to initiate implementation plans. DTLC has facilitated multiple meetings, and presented the Tribe with a pre-offer tract list, and several sample offer estimates for eligible tracts that show a variation of eligible purchasable interests. The Tribe will decide and identify which sample offer estimates by April 1, 2024.

In addition, DTLC provided maps, such as a tract map that exhibits tracts purchased in the 2020 Land Buy-Back Implementation, and current joint and surface ownership maps. A key Phase is Outreach, and DTLC created a sample flyer and post card to aid Tribes with local community outreach. Thus far, willing sellers are contacting DTLC and Wind River Intertribal Council to register as willing sellers.

Projected Locations for Implementation

To maximize the number of consolidated fractional interests within the Division's optimal mission by obtaining appraisals for cost-effective acquisitions at the following projected locations are:

- Oglala Sioux Tribe (Pine Ridge)
- Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe of the Cheyenne River Reservation, South Dakota
- Rosebud Sioux Tribe of the Rosebud Indian Reservation, South Dakota
- Standing Rock Sioux Tribe of North & South Dakota

Updates on New Processes

Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) are in the process of being updated from Land Buy-Back to Trust Land Consolidation and will be shared with the TLC management for review. Upon approval SOPs will be utilized by TLC Staff to carry out routine procedures for efficiency and consistency for the BIA and the Division.



The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Branch of Irrigation and Power (BIP) principally supports two multi-project programs: 1) the BIA Irrigation Program and 2) the BIA Power Program. The BIP provides administration, policy, oversight, and technical assistance to BIA Regional offices and local agencies. BIP projects are operated and maintained under the direction of the BIA, Office of Field Operations by:

- Tribes under P.L. 93-638 contracts
- Tribes under self-governance compacts
- Water user groups under specific contracts or agreements.

BRANCH OF IRRIGATION AND POWER

BIA Irrigation Program

The BIA owns or has interests in irrigation projects throughout the United States located on or associated with various Indian reservations.

*The BIA owns and operates irrigation projects that **Supply water to 25,000 users and irrigate over 780,000 acres of land.***

The [BIA Irrigation Program](#) delivers irrigation water to tribes and non-Indian water customers. The Irrigation Program strives to improve the management of land and natural resource assets through the delivery of water consistent with applicable state and federal law, in an environmentally responsible and cost-efficient manner.

National Irrigation Information Management System (NIIMS)

As part of the BIA Irrigation Program, the DWP also operates the National Irrigation Information Management System (NIIMS). NIIMS is a billing, collection, debt management and rate-setting system. Supporting the BIA's irrigation operation and maintenance (O&M) assessments across 16 irrigation projects in Indian Country. NIIMS processes approximately \$35M in annual receivables, which is the primary revenue source for the operation and maintenance of each irrigation project.



Transmission breaker at Coolidge Substation, AZ; Power Generation Facility at Headgate Rock Dam, AZ/CA border; Kerr Substation, MT

BIA Power Program

The [BIA Power Program](#) reliably and efficiently delivers electrical power to Tribes and non-Indian power customers. The Power program operates, maintains, and rehabilitates power system infrastructure on each project, including:

- *Power-generating facilities* – facilities designed to produce electric energy from another form of energy.
- *Power substations* – part of an electrical generation, transmission, and distribution system transforming voltage from high to low, or the reverse.
- *Electrical switching stations* – substations without transformers and operating at a single voltage level.
- *Transmission lines* – specialized cables or other structures designed to conduct electromagnetic waves in a contained manner.
- *Distribution lines* and related infrastructure – lines or systems for distributing power from a transmission system to a consumer that operates at less than 69,000 volts.

*The BIA power projects provide electrical service to **over 38,000 customers and generate \$73 million in annual revenue.***

Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL)

The BIL allocates \$10-million-per-year funding over a five-year period to address long-overdue improvements and antiquated infrastructure in major need of repair.

2023 Critical BIL-Funded Projects

Project	State
Colorado River Indian Irrigation Project	AZ
Colorado River Indian Irrigation Project (Power Utility)	AZ
Wapato Irrigation Project	WA
Fort Peck Irrigation Project	MT
San Carlos Irrigation Project (Power Division)	AZ
Mission Valley Power	MT
Fort Belknap Irrigation Project	MT
Fort Hall Indian Irrigation Project	ID

2024 Critical BIL-Funded Projects

Project	State
Colorado River Indian Irrigation Project (Power Utility)	AZ
San Carlos Irrigation Project (Power Division)	AZ
Mission Valley Power	MT
Fort Hall Indian Irrigation Project	ID

Wapato Diversion Dam Scour Hole Emergency Repair, Wapato Irrigation Project, Washington



The Wapato Diversion Dam and Headworks is the main irrigation facility for the Wapato Irrigation Project that serves approximately 132,000 acres on the Yakama Nation located in central Washington. This is a critical diversion for the project and the protected steelhead and salmon fisheries. The BIA is currently working on a major modernization and rehabilitation effort to the headworks, which includes the construction project at the Wapato Main Canal Diversion Dam in the Yakima River. The construction project has two main objectives: partially rehabilitate the Wapato Main Canal Headworks infrastructure and assess the existing conditions around the east and west diversion dams to inform future rehabilitation design efforts.



Wapato Diversion at Wapato Irrigation Project – scour hole

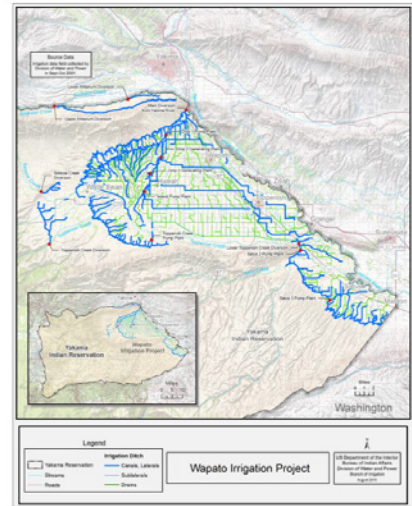


Wapato Diversion at Wapato Irrigation Project, Washington – scour hole

On November 6, 2023, after the removal of water downstream of the West Diversion Dam and Fish Ladder, a major scour hole at the toe of the dam and underneath the Fish Ladder structure was exposed. The scour hole created an emergency hazard for both the BIA Diversion Dam and the Fish Ladder, owned by Bureau of Reclamation. A rapid response was mandatory to avert a catastrophic failure of these facilities. The remediation plan needed to be developed and implemented quickly so the prescribed work would be completed by BIA's contractor in advance of the higher river flows expected to occur at the end of November 2023.



Pictured to the left: Wapato Diversion at Wapato Irrigation Project, Washington – scour hole emergency repair.



The time it took from discovery, evaluation of alternatives, design, contract modification, environmental permitting, and implementing the final repair, which included approximately 1,600 cubic yards of concrete, was a short 15 days.



The BIA Division of Water & Power led the multi-team effort between BIA, Yakama Nation, and Bureau of Reclamation. The design team worked together to evaluate the damage and alternatives. The Yakama Nation worked quickly on the environmental permitting and all consultation aspects of the scour hole emergency remediation were expedited to facilitate timely completion of the project.

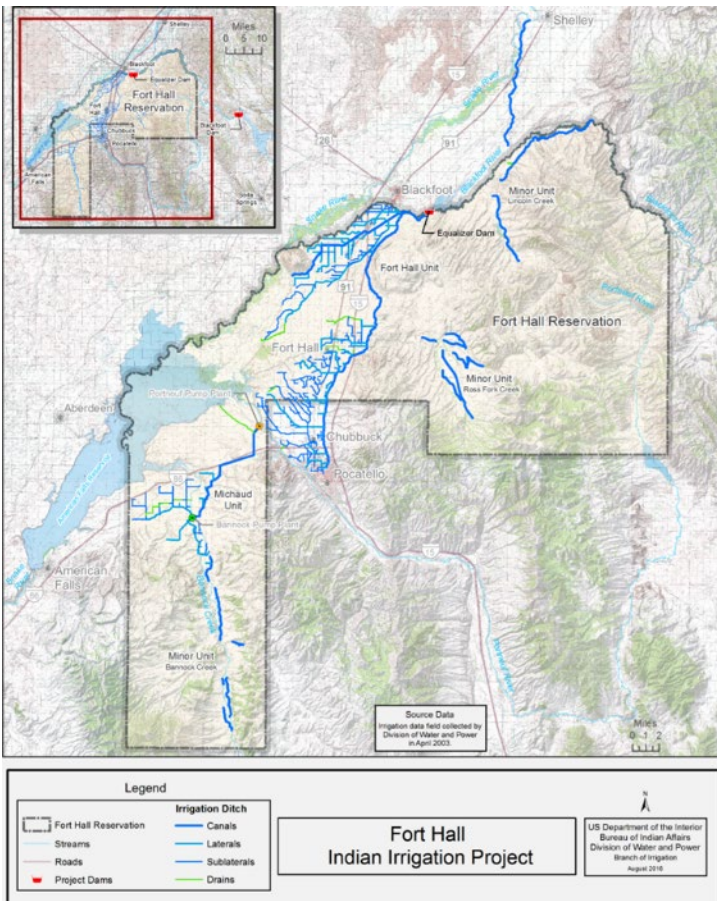
The BIA provided majority funding of the \$2.1 million total cost, with BOR contributed to \$1 million after completion of the project.

Portneuf Pumping Plan – Unit No. 2 Replacement, Fort Hall Indian Irrigation Project, Idaho



Portneuf Pumping Plant at Fort Hall Indian Irrigation Project, Idaho – prefabricated bifurcation wye.

Unit 2 at the Portneuf pumping plant failed in 2017. The single pump was replaced with two mixed flow pumps, one with variable frequency drive motor controller and one soft start. A custom prefabricated bifurcation wye was designed to connect to the existing structure. The BIA provided \$5.1 million in funding for this project.



Portneuf Pumping Plant at Fort Hall Indian Irrigation Project, Idaho – rehabilitation work in progress.



Portneuf Pumping Plant at Fort Hall Indian Irrigation Project, Idaho – new pumps ready to install.



Portneuf Pumping Plant at Fort Hall Indian Irrigation Project, Idaho – new pumps installed.

Wiota Pumping Plant, Fort Peck Indian Irrigation Project, Montana



Wiota Pumping Plant at Fort Peck Indian Project, Montana – divers implementing pumps and impellers.

In 2022, a dive team was hired to inspect the pumps at both the Wiota and Frazer Pumping Stations. With the recent drought, the Missouri River has shifted and moved back and forth in the last year or two. This has caused siltation and debris (including rocks) to pass through the pumping stations. To compound the pumping issue at the Frazer Pumping Station, a rubber belt that was attached to the trash rack conveyor system detached and wrapped itself around one of the impellers.



Wiota Pumping Plant at Fort Peck Indian Project, Montana – belt wrapped around impellar.

A large crane was used to pull out each of the pumps, which were then sent off for refurbishment and reinstalled. In addition, pulling the pumps and impellers allowed a large vacuum truck to suck out debris (silt and rocks) from the pit.



Wiota Pumping Plant at Fort Peck Indian Project, Montana – removal of old pump set for refurbishment.



Viota Pumping Plant at Fort Peck Indian Project, Montana – reinstalling refurbished pump and housing.

Uintah River Bifurcation Replacement, Uintah Indian Irrigation Project, Utah

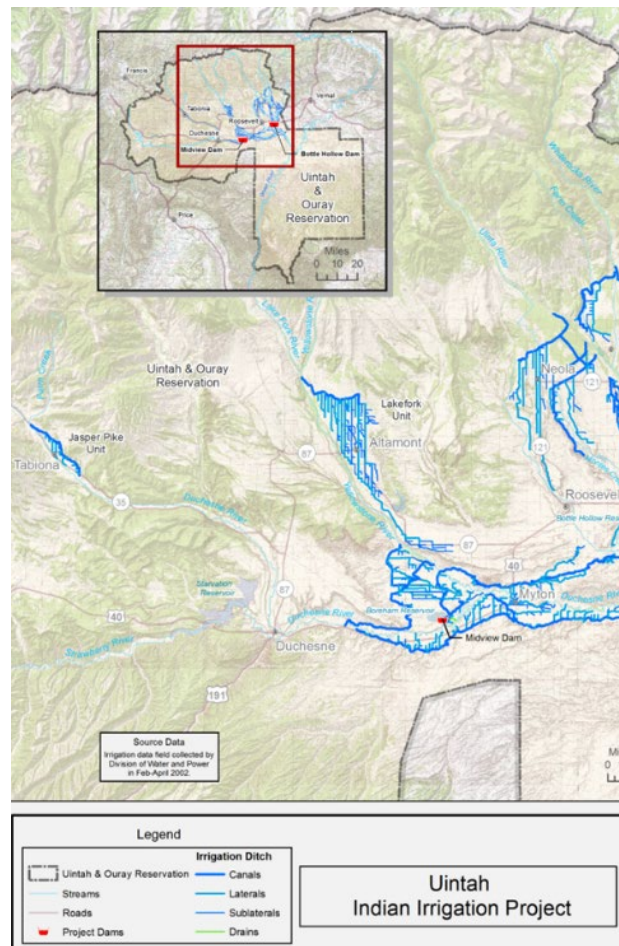


Uintah River bifurcation replacement, Uintah Indian Irrigation Project, Utah – before

The Uintah River Bifurcation replacement, put into use in January 2024, provides reliable summer flow control from the east channel to the west channel of the Uintah River. The new structure allows for greater control of the river to help mitigate flooding and provide more consistent irrigation deliveries. This reduces the amount of water wasted at the Bench Canal Heading. Water saved will stay in the Uintah River channel.



The improvements include reduced maintenance, increased safety, improved efficiency with less physical access needed due to automation and remote monitoring, and an estimated water savings of 3,500 acre-feet.





Uintah River bifurcation replacement, Uintah Indian Irrigation Project, Utah – under construction



Uintah River bifurcation replacement, Uintah Indian Irrigation Project, Utah – under construction



Uintah River bifurcation replacement, Uintah Indian Irrigation Project, Utah – construction complete – radial gates shown are about 4 feet tall.



Uintah River bifurcation replacement, Uintah Indian Irrigation Project, Utah – construction complete

2024 National Irrigation Meeting

The BIP hosted the National Irrigation Meeting in February 2024 at Cal Poly's Irrigation Training and Research Center (ITRC). The meeting brought BIA staff across the irrigation program together, in person and remotely, to discuss program policy, accomplishments, challenges and key issues affecting the program. In-person attendees also received a tour of ITRC's facilities and a short-course in water measurement.

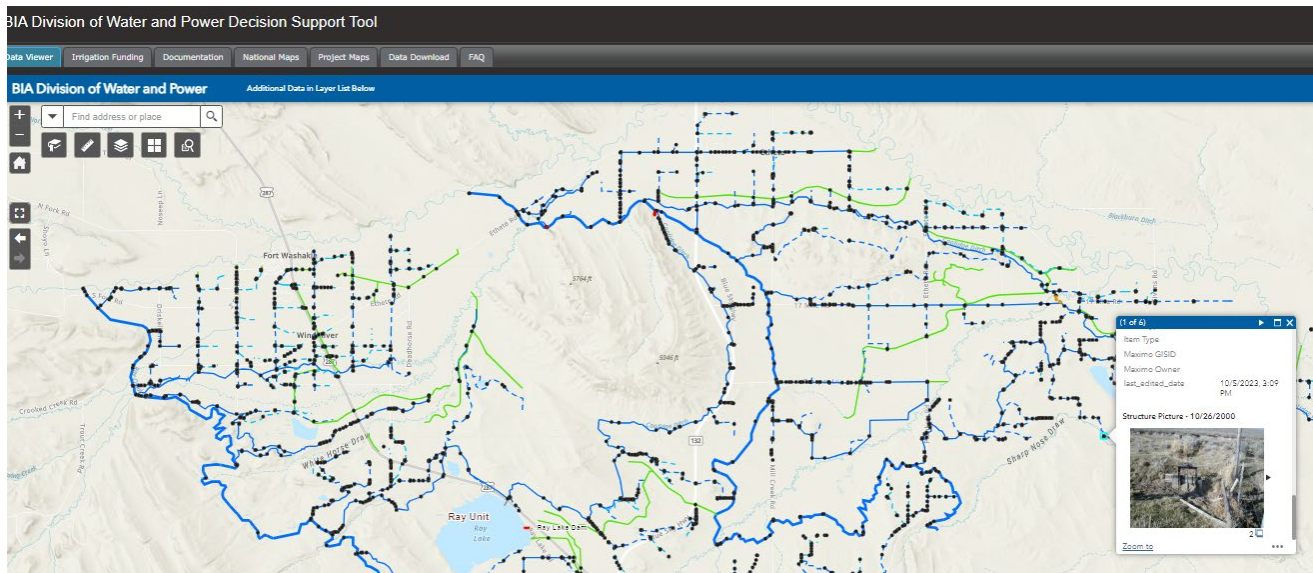


Photo 1 ITRC at Cal Poly, California – water measurement method, photo 2 Irrigation Training and Research Center (ITRC) at Cal Poly, California – pump operation



ITRC at Cal Poly, California – emerging water measurement technology

Decision Support Tool



The Decision Support Tool (DST) is an interactive program management computer application that integrates GIS-based financial, construction, asset, and location data from multiple sources into a single location. This allows BIA staff to simultaneously visualize and analyze financial information, contract status, construction progress, asset condition information and other project documents. The DST is a very powerful application to assist BIA staff in their mission to provide irrigation water to project stakeholders, including Tribes, individual Tribal members, and non-Indian customers.

Current development efforts are focused on providing:

- **Division-Level Funding Dashboard:** This enhancement will provide a single, reliable, and current source to easily access financial data for the DWP and the three Branches.
- **Network Tracing:** This functionality will relate structures to canals/laterals and NIIMS Parcels. Users will be able to automatically view affected infrastructure upstream and downstream from a selected location. Having this ability will support future development of digital water tickets and increase efficiency for several manual data and reporting processes.

National Irrigation Information Management System (NIIMS)

Activities for the modernization of NIIMS continue and the replacement system is expected to go live in the fall of 2024. In Phase 1, a modernized replica of NIIMS will be built so existing features are equivalent to the new system. Phase 2 will provide optional enhancements beyond the initial contract and are contingent on funding. Funding for Phase 1 includes congressional appropriations of \$1 million in the 2023 Omnibus budget and remaining funds are provided by Office of Trust Services.

This is the second year of utilizing U.S. Department of the Treasury's Lockbox for processing irrigation Operations & Maintenance (O&M) paper payments for all 16 revenue-generating irrigation projects. BIA NIIMS partnered with the U.S. Department of the Treasury on a pilot project for scanning all referred delinquent O&M debts for bankruptcy filings. The pilot project began July 2022, and did not find any verifiable bankruptcies for irrigation customers; the program ended September 30, 2023.



Welcome New Division of Wildland Fire Management Employees!

Name	Position	Start Date	Duty Station
Lamarita Vicenti	Administrative Assistant	03/24/24	Albuquerque, NM
Edith Castillo	Fleet Center Secretary	03/24/24	Albuquerque, NM
Narisa Tappetake	Tribal Mental Health/Wellbeing Program Manager	01/16/24	Colorado Springs, CO
Catherine Kaminski, LCDR	National Mental Health/Wellbeing Program Manager	01/01/24	Raleigh, NC
Eric Ellison	Training Specialist	12/04/23	Henderson, NV
Zoila Forrest Davis	Deputy Budget Director	11/06/23	Boise, ID
Shelby Glass	Budget Analyst	11/06/23	Stillwell, OK
Millie Garcia	Budget Analyst	10/23/23	Yerington, NV
Mel Walsey	Financial Specialist	10/23/23	Boise, ID
Robert Dodgen	Aviation Operations Specialist	09/25/23	Boise, ID

Wildland Fire’s Federal Workforce Development Program Kicks Off with Virtual Workshop

February 26 – March 1, the new interagency Federal Workforce Development Program (FWDP) kicked off its first online development training, *Establishing a Coaching Habit Workshop*, with 40 participants. The workshop included a week of development sessions focusing on teaching both new wildland firefighters and seasoned managerial firefighters about micro-learning opportunities.

Micro-learning opportunities are day-to-day opportunities that managerial wildland fire staff can provide to staff during for day job/personal growth than fire line qualifications. The intention of this training is to better prepare field employees to move up within the ranks of federal, state, and local government fire programs.

Currently, the training is offered as a personal growth course, allowing anyone to sign up to participate in the learning opportunity.

The mission of the FWDP is to provide a defined workforce development program centered on learning, experiences, leadership, tangible, and intangible growth tied to job roles throughout an individual’s wildfire career in land management. The FWDP will establish comprehensive training and workforce development programs from identified competencies for fire personnel throughout their career development. With a greater emphasis placed on the appropriate timing of skill building and career development, agencies can ensure employees gain the knowledge and abilities required to perform current and future job duties.

DWFM Workforce Development Training Specialist, Michael Black, Receives First NWCG Award for Excellence



Pictured above: Michael Black on a 2023 fire assignment.

February 22, Michael Black, BIA DWFM workforce development training specialist, received the first National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) Award for Excellence among other Incident and Position Standards Committee (IPSC) members that focused on 0456 fire job series position standardization in 2023 and development of position standards and training for the implementation of complex incident management teams. The award was presented at the NWCG annual executive board meeting that took place in Boise, ID, this past month.

“At the NWCG Executive Board meeting this week we issued the IPSC, and all its individual members, the NWCG Award for Excellence,” said Garth Fisher, DWFM training program manager. “Mike Black is our BIA representative to that committee, and I would like to recognize his consistent hard work on the committee and for attaining that award. Thank you, Mike, for all the work, time, and effort, and for ensuring BIA and Tribal concerns have an excellent and thoughtful representative amongst this very influential NWCG committee.”

The IPSC provides national leadership in the development of wildland fire incident management standards and incident position standards that all NWCG agencies utilize for national mobilization while maintaining a long-term strategic perspective. As part of this committee, Mr. Black has been instrumental in moving forward very time sensitive and critical solutions to complex problems, ultimately benefitting not only the BIA and Tribes, but also playing a crucial role in interagency interoperability and increased collaboration within fire operations.

The Division recognizes Mr. Black for his many achievements within BIA operations and training, and primarily for being issued this prestigious award by the NWCG Executive Board, which was prompted by the committee’s unwavering commitment to the monumental task issued to move the DOI Office of Wildland Fire forward in issuing the standardized 0456 job series, which broke ground this year.



The NWCG Executive Board is comprised of a large Federal, State, Tribal and Department of Defense cohort, recently including NASA as a new member. The board decision to dedicate this new award to IPSC, and Michael Black as a member, was a unanimous decision amongst all member agencies.



Pictured above: Society of Range Management “Women in Range” panel, Jennifer Hickman pictured on the far right.

BIA Division of Wildland Fire Management Connects with Society of Range Management on Indian Country Range Management Support

January 28 – February 1, 2024, the Division’s Post Wildfire Recovery watershed specialist, Jennifer Hickman, took part in the Society of Range Management’s, “Change on the Range” conference in Sparks, Nevada. During the conference, the society contributed a full day to a three-part “Women Changing Range Symposium” hosted by the Society’s Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion committee. The symposium focused on highlighting the important ways that women perceive and interact with land, break barriers within range management, promote sustainability, and create change on rangelands in the United States.

During this highlight in the conference, Jennifer Hickman presented on the Division’s Post Wildfire Recovery Program (PWR) and how part the Division’s program plays a part in range management within Indian Country. PWR’s primary objectives include repairing impacts due to firefighting actions, minimizing post-fire threats to life or property, non-emergency repair/restoration of damage caused by fire and returning fire-affected land to a resilient landscape.

In 2023, 13 fires impacted six Tribes on federal trust lands. PWR staff supported emergency stabilization and burned area rehabilitation response to the lands, resulting in \$3.1 million in emergency stabilization and rehabilitation funding for Tribes to restore land.

Jennifer Hickman was also invited to and participated on a panel at the end of the symposium day where she responded to anonymous questions and responses from symposium attendees.

During this discussion, moderators shared anonymous stories submitted by society members, held space for attendees to voice their ideas and perspectives, and then hear from panelists. From this discussion, the society aimed to synthesize both challenges and opportunities for building engagement and inclusion in range management.

“The symposium was a great opportunity to learn, exchange knowledge and share ideas on how we can work together to empower women who work in natural resources and fire,” said Jennifer Hickman.

SPOTLIGHT ON THE EASTERN OKLAHOMA REGION



Overview

The Eastern Oklahoma Regional Office is in Muskogee, Oklahoma. The Region serves 20 federally recognized Tribes across the eastern part of Oklahoma, having a total tribal enrollment population of approximately 985,000 citizens, and encompassing approximately 386,000 surface acres and nearly 2,000,000 mineral acres of restricted and trust lands. Direct Services are provided through the Regional Office and six agencies including the:

- Regional Office – 2 Direct Service Tribes
- Chickasaw Agency - 1 Tribe
- Miami Agency – 10 Tribes
- Okmulgee Agency – 4 Tribes
- Osage Agency – 1 Tribe
- Talihina Agency – 1 Tribe
- Wewoka Agency – 1 Tribe

Deputy Regional Director

The Eastern Oklahoma Deputy Regional Director (DRD) oversees staff for the Trust Services and some Indian Services Divisions, including Tribal Government Services, Human Services and Transportation.



Red Earth Pow wow

The Region's Trust Services Divisions include the following:

- Division of Environmental, Safety & Cultural Resources Management (DESCRM)
- Division of Natural Resources (DNR) includes Wildland Fire, Fuels & Forestry)
- Division of Trust, Title & Income (Probate, Lockbox & LTRO)
- Division of Real Estate Services (Realty & Subsurface Leasing)

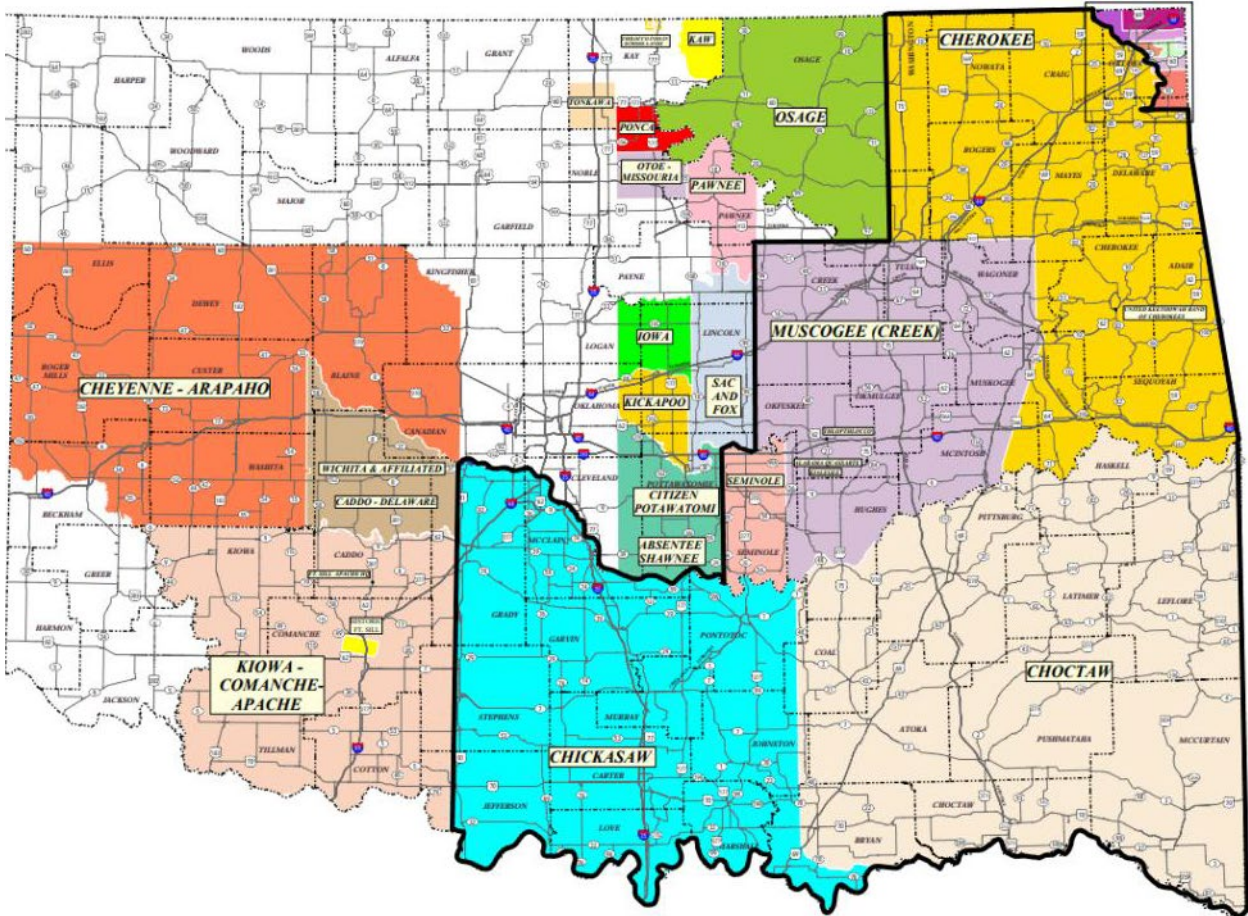
The DRD also oversees two regional coordinators who support the Trust Services Divisions including the:

- Regional Geospatial Coordinator (RGC)
- Trust Reform Coordinator (TRC)

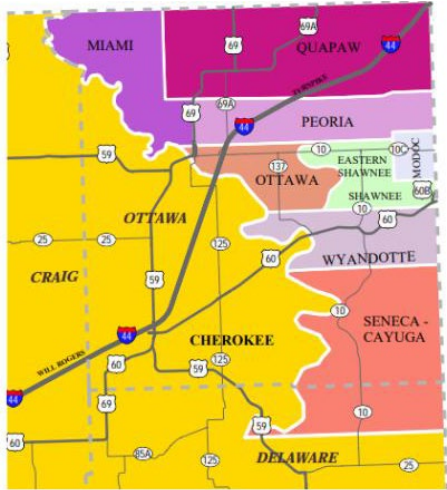
Contact Us

Eastern Oklahoma Regional Office
Bureau of Indian Affairs
1300 W. Peak Boulevard
Muskogee, OK 74401
(918) 781-4600

Tribal Jurisdictions in Eastern Oklahoma



Tribes in the Northeast Corner of Oklahoma





Biography: Tracie Williamson

Tracie Williamson is a native of Tulsa, Oklahoma, and a citizen of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation. Ms. Williamson possesses a Juris Doctorate from the American University, Washington College of Law, and a Master of Law (L.L.M) Degree from the University of Denver. While pursuing her L.L.M., she worked as a research attorney for the Native America Rights Fund in Boulder, Colorado. Upon graduation from the University of Denver, Ms. Williamson returned to Tulsa, Oklahoma, where she served as an Attorney-Advisor in the Office of the Tulsa Field Solicitor for approximately twelve years, from 2001 to 2012, during which time she advised and represented the Eastern Oklahoma and Southern Plains Regions and their Agencies.



Tracie Williamson, Deputy Regional Director-Trust

Ms. Williamson routinely represented the Secretary of the Interior in state District Court proceedings pursuant to the Act of August 4, 1947 (“Steigler Act”) as well as the federal District Courts of Oklahoma. She also represented the Regional Directors for both Regions in administrative appeals before the Interior Board of Indian Appeals and Interior Board of Land Appeals.

Beginning in 2013, Ms. Williamson served as an Attorney-Advisor in the Rocky Mountain Regional Solicitor’s Office for approximately one and a half years, where she primarily handled administrative appeals before the Interior Board of Land Appeals involving decisions of Bureau of Land Management State Directors and Field Managers.

Thereafter, Ms. Williamson took a break from federal service to focus on raising her two children and in 2021, joined the Eastern Oklahoma Regional Office as the Regional Trust Reform Coordinator for approximately ten months. After serving as the Acting Deputy Regional Director for approximately seven months, Ms. Williamson officially assumed her role as the Deputy Regional Director in January 2023.

While not working, Ms. Williamson enjoys spending time with family and friends, visiting her daughter in college, watching her son play high school varsity basketball and attending performing arts events. She also keeps busy as a barista and usher at church, as well as serving as an officer in her neighborhood homeowner’s association and, on occasion, helping in a local foodbank.

Interview: Tracie Williamson

What was your first government job?

My first government job was a student internship in 1997 with the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs in the U.S. Senate, during which time I was first exposed to Indian Affairs issues and watched federal Indian policy in the making. During the internship I developed a profound respect for federal employees and tribal leaders working together and committed to upholding the federal trust responsibility and improving Tribal Nations and Indian country.

What is your favorite Trust program, and why?

All Trust programs serve very meaningful purposes and are important to our Tribes and individual trust beneficiaries. I have favorite things I love about each of our Trust programs, but no one favorite program over another. Having said that, I would say that during my first year or so as the Deputy Regional Director, I have prioritized much of my time and interest in our Subsurface Leasing program. The Region administers a robust oil and gas program for the Five Tribes covering approximately 500,000 mineral acres, in which we work collaboratively with the Bureau of Land Management and the Office of Natural Resources Revenue to oversee. The Region supervises approximately 436 Departmental oil and gas leases, holds quarterly oil and gas lease sales, approves leases and other associated documents, as well as Oklahoma Corporation Commission orders affecting the inherited allotted lands of the Five Tribes.

Which Trust duties were a surprise?

I didn't think I'd be signing deeds to take land into trust or signing e-fed documents to facilitate the transfer of millions of dollars to Tribes. I perform those activities on a regular basis now, but the seeing the first deed and e-fed for signature was certainly a surprise to me.

INTER-TRIBAL COUNCIL OF THE
FIVE CIVILIZED TRIBES
CHEROKEE - CHICKASAW - CHOCTAW - CREEK - SEMINOLE



Logos of the Five Civilized Tribes pictured above.

Share a positive work memory.

After having been in Colorado for several years and returning to Oklahoma, I fondly recall the first time I attended the general session of the Five Tribes Inter-Tribal Council in 2021. It was exciting to observe all the tribal employees in attendance who were involved in running tribal programs that were previously run by the BIA. I loved hearing the Tribal leaders share the tremendous accomplishments their Nations had attained and how they had responded to the COVID-19 Pandemic and served their citizens through a difficult year. It was humbling and encouraging to be reminded of how our daily work at the Region impacts our Tribal and individual trust beneficiaries.

What advice would you give others who would like to be a Deputy Regional Director?

Think outside the box and step outside your comfort zone. As a Deputy Regional Director my days are often spent addressing the more unique, and sometimes challenging, situations any one of the Trust Divisions is handling. In fact, many days feel like a "first" day. As such, to prepare to be a Deputy Regional Director, one needs to be capable of problem solving and either making or advising the Regional Director on decisions that will sometimes be met with disagreement or for which there is no clear or single right or wrong answer. I would encourage staff to find ways to think more critically, ask questions and practice thinking outside the box and being willing to tackle challenging situations alongside your supervisor, rather than handing things off or overlooking challenges. Practicing this will help you to learn to approach each new situation as an opportunity to learn and discover why we do things a certain way and ways we can improve.

What do you see as your greatest challenge in FY2024?

I'd say my greatest challenge has been and will continue to be time management. There often never seems to be enough time to complete tasks and resolve issues as quickly as I would like or as may be expected. With the help of our staff, and hopefully as I become more accustomed to my duties and gain more knowledge and confidence, I'll become more efficient and will be able to complete things with less time.

How would you like others to remember your time as Deputy Regional Director?

As for our staff, I would like to be remembered as a DRD who treated staff fairly and respectfully and served as a leader who could be trusted. I have an open-door policy and welcome the opinions and input of our staff and value teamwork.

I truly appreciate every one of our Trust Division Chiefs and understand that they are integral to the success of our Region and our ability to do our very best in serving our tribes and trust beneficiaries daily. I rely upon their subject matter expertise and know I could not do my job well without them and their staff.

As for our trust beneficiaries, I would like for Tribal leaders, tribal staff, and individual trust beneficiaries to remember me as a DRD who approached trust-related matters with a fair and respectful perspective, sought creative solutions to achieve results that are in their best interests and legally sound, as well as someone who continually strived to improve our procedures and service to them.

What is your greatest BIA success story?

I've surveyed our Division Chiefs and the successes they outline in the following pages are all our Region's greatest successes in the last year – I am very proud of them all.



Eastern Region, Division of Environmental, Safety & Cultural Resources Management Staff

Division Chief, Environmental, Safety & Cultural Resources Management

Mosby Halterman is the Supervisory Environmental Protection Specialist and Division Chief of the Division of Environmental, Safety, and Cultural Resources Management (DESCRM) in the Eastern Oklahoma Region. He earned a Bachelor of Engineering in Mechanical Engineering from Vanderbilt University. He has served in the Region for 15 years in a variety of roles, including the Regional Water Coordinator, the Regional NEPA Coordinator, and the Regional Environmental Scientist.



Mosby Halterman

As part of his duties, Mosby maintains an active Asbestos Management Planner license as well as a Lead-Based Paint Risk Assessor certificate in the State of Oklahoma. He enjoys reading and playing video games in his spare time.

National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA)



Northern long-eared bat

The Division of Environmental, Safety, and Cultural Resources Management (DESCRM) is responsible for the preparation or review of National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) documents for all projects within the Region that require NEPA analysis.

DESCRM’s NEPA reviews are conducted by the Regional NEPA Coordinator and a second Environmental Protection Specialist. In addition, the Osage Agency retains an Environmental Protection Specialist who splits all NEPA reviews for the Osage Nation’s Mineral Estate with DESCRM’s NEPA reviewers. Reviews include ensuring compliance with numerous environmental regulations, such as the Endangered Species Act.

In 2023, DESCRM, in coordination with the Osage Agency, reviewed or prepared 842 NEPA documents. Of those, 615 were Categorical Exclusions (CatEx), 19 were Environmental Assessments (EA), and 208 Determinations of NEPA Adequacy (DNA) tiering from the Osage County Oil & Gas Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

The documents were spread across various programs as shown below:

Program	CatEx	EA	DNA
Minerals	185	17	208
Agricultural	171	NA	NA
Residential	99	NA	NA
Business	72	NA	NA
Fire/Forestry	40	NA	NA
Fee-to-Trust	28	NA	NA
Transportation	28	NA	NA

Water Management and Water Rights Programs

DESCRM oversees the BIA's Water Program for Eastern Oklahoma. This includes the Water Rights Negotiation and Litigation Program; the Water Management, Planning, and Pre-Development Program; and the Water Technician Training Program. DESCRM provides technical assistance in the preparation of proposals for the various programs and reviews all proposal prior to submitting the Region's proposal packet each year to central office. In addition, DESCRM serves as the BIA's representative to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission regarding projects involving Tribes within the Region, such as the Pensacola Hydroelectric Project which has garnered a fair amount of local interest due to concerns over flooding which have been alleged to have some tie to the associated dam.



Pensacola Dam, Grand Lake O' the Cherokees

Three Tribes within the Region received funding in 2023 for three Water Management, Planning, and Pre-Development Program projects for a total of \$241,333. In addition, one Tribe received funding under the Water Rights Negotiation and Litigation Program in the amount of \$80,000.

Cultural

There are currently two Archaeologists within the Region, the Regional Archaeologist, and the Fire/Forestry Archaeologist; the Region is currently advertising for a Special Projects Archaeologist. Together they are responsible for reviewing all NEPA documents with regards to impacts to cultural resources as well as the preparation or review of cultural reports. They are also responsible for conducting Section 106 consultation under the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) whenever required.



Severs Hotel in Muskogee, OK, National Register of Historic Places ID# 82003691

Phase I ESA Preparation or Review

Every Fee-to-Trust and Fee-to-Restricted acquisition, barring mandatory acquisitions, require a Phase I Environmental Site Assessment to be completed as part of the process. DESCRM is responsible for the preparation or review of all such documents within the Region. In addition, when necessary, DESCRM is responsible for the review of Phase II Environmental Site Assessments when Recognized Environmental Conditions (REC) are found to be present on tracts being assessed for acquisition. When conducting reviews of Phase I ESA's, DESCRM also conducts site inspections for all acquisitions.

In 2023, DESCRM reviewed 72 Phase I ESA's, 1 Phase II ESA, and conducted 51 site inspections across 11 tribal reservations or jurisdictional areas.

For 2023, DESCRM completed 40 Section 106 consultations. In addition, 14 class III Cultural Surveys were completed, reviewed, and had successful consultations.

Safety

The Regional Safety Manager fulfills several roles within the Region such as providing technical assistance for, and implementation of, the Occupational Safety and Health Program (OSHP); Employee Injury Compensation; Motor Vehicle Safety; and Radiation Safety Programs within the EOR. They are also responsible for the Safety & Condition Assessment Portal (S&CAP) inspections on facilities owned and/or operated by the Region.

There are 15 sites within the Eastern Oklahoma Region, spread amongst the Regional Office and the six Agency locations. In 2023, the Regional Safety Manager conducted 3 independent inspections for each location to ensure the health and safety of all Regional permanent and temporary staff, as well as all visitors, whether Tribal or the public.

Climate

DESCRM serves as the Region's Point of Contact for the Regional Climate Coordinator who serves both the Eastern Oklahoma and the Southern Plains Regions. The BIA Tribal Climate Resilience Program covers nine different categories of projects ranging from Adaptation Planning to Ocean and Coastal Management Planning, to Youth Engagement.

Under the 2023 funding cycle, 6 projects were funded within the Region between 5 Tribes. Of the 6, most were Adaptation Planning projects ranging between \$106,250 and \$250,000. The last was a restoration project of the Blue River through collaboration with other Federal, State, Tribal entities at \$4,184,611.

In total, Tribes within the Region received \$8,204,459 for Climate Resilience projects in 2023.



National Resources Damage Assessment and Restoration (NRDAR)

The Region is involved in several NRDAR cases due to Tribal interest in the cases and associated Superfund site. In coordination with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, the BIA participates in the cases' Trustee Councils as part of the Department of Interior. DESCRM serves as the Region's representative on the cases. Currently, DESCRM is involved in the Tar Creek, National Zinc, and Tulsa County Smelter Complex cases which are tied to the Tar Creek, National Zinc Corporation, and the Tulsa Fuel and Manufacturing Superfund sites. The Region is anticipating the opening of another case in the coming years due to recent listing of the Fansteel Metals site in Muskogee, OK as a Superfund site.



Photo credit. EPA Tar Creek Superfund site

In 2023, the Tar Creek Trustee Council began funding for six projects as part of the first phase of restoration projects. The projects range from streambank restoration to wildlife refuge restoration, to an ecological and cultural apprenticeship program designed to restore natural resources and tribal services. The six projects represent an investment of approximately \$8M in NRDAR funds with an additional \$17M in-kind and/or matching funds. Another round of project solicitation is expected in late 2024 or early 2025.



Rangeland Inventory (Osage Nation)

BRANCH OF FISHERIES, WILDLIFE, AND RECREATION PROGRAMS FUNDING

Coordinates annual non-recurring/competitive program funding opportunities for Eastern Oklahoma Region Tribes in:

Agriculture & Rangeland Management



Noxious Weed Eradication (Cherokee Nation)



Bison Herd Management (Osage Nation – new in 2024)

BRANCH OF FISHERIES, WILDLIFE & RECREATION



Fish Hatcheries Maintenance (Peoria Tribe)



Freshwater mussel propagation, collection, and care. Grow out of juvenile Bleufer, Fatmucket, and Neosho Mucket mussels. (Peoria Tribe)



Invasive Species (Eastern Shawnee Tribe)



Tribal Youth Initiative



Conservation Law Enforcement Officers (Native American Fish & Wildlife Society)



Eastern Oklahoma Region Forestry Program

The Eastern Oklahoma Regional Forestry program serves 14 different tribes on approximately 205,416 forested acres. This is comprised of woodlands and commercially forested lands. The Region provides services for forest development, inventory and planning, woodlands management, and the timber harvest initiative. The Forestry Program conducts management on Indian forest land in accordance with sustained yield principles to develop, maintain, and enhance forest resources.



Foresters measuring DBH on a comparison cruise plot.

Cover Type Mapping

In the Fall of 2023, the Region completed the Cover Type Mapping of the entirety of the Region. The Cover Type Mapping is part of a multi-step process to completing a Forest Inventory. The Inventory will be used for the Management planning and Trust Monitoring for the Tribes and Agencies in the Region. The Mapping of the Regions Cover Type will provide useful information that will aid the Forestry program in their efforts to manage trust lands.

Timber Strike Team

In February 2024, the Timber Strike Team was requested by the Eastern Oklahoma Region to assist in preparing several timber sale areas and conducting stand exam data collection for the Seneca Cayuga Nation and Eastern Shawnee Tribe. The Timber Strike Team is comprised of 6 members and began by collecting stand exam data for 47 plots across 227 acres for the Razorback Timber Management Area located on Seneca Cayuga Nation. Following the stand exams, the Team began reconnaissance of the northern Razorback stands for timber sale area potential and this resulted in a 74-acre logging unit lay out.

The Team then began layout and marking in the ES1 Timber Sale Area located on Eastern Shawnee Tribe Trust Lands. The Timber Team laid out three different logging units totaling 94-acres.

Overall, the Timber Team completed 47 stand exam plots, identified 168 acres proposed for timber sales and internally leave tree marked the proposed units.

Forestry Outreach

In February of 2024, the Regional Forestry Staff in conjunction with Central Office Division of Forestry visited multiple high schools and colleges in the region to educate students about the careers in Natural Resources. Connecting with students is a great opportunity to share the different job opportunities from someone who's living it. Several students are unaware of the job opportunities in the different Natural Resource fields. Connecting with students early in high school introduces them to careers they might not have known about.



Muscogee Creek Nation Timber Trespass

Timber Trespass

The Region has responded to two new timber trespass cases in FY24 located on Osage Nation lands. The Region has two ongoing cases from FY21 and FY23. The four active cases are on approximately 565 acres with an estimated total combined volume of 831,000 Board Feet (or 831 MBF) with a value including damages of approximately \$900,000.

The Trespass can include any damage to forest resources on Indian forest land resulting from activities under contracts, permits or from fire. A timber trespass is the removal of forest products from, or damaging forest products on, Indian forest land, except when authorized by law and applicable federal or tribal regulations. The Region works with the Tribes, Agencies and Solicitors office to recover damages on tribal lands.



Muscogee Creek Nation Timber Trespass

Tribal Forestry Summer Youth Camp

Cherokee Nation enjoys a rich heritage of land stewardship and unique ecology in Northeast Oklahoma. Cherokee Nation Camp Wild is a pilot program to test the efficacy of instilling a deeper understanding of environmentally focused careers. By targeting 25 youth aged 16 to 18, we hope to demonstrate different options in natural resources and create space for them to reflect on what they can offer personally, culturally to society. These careers are often overlooked by young people but offer some of the most rewarding experiences. The need for workers in natural resources and forestry is great in Oklahoma, just as it is nationwide.

A focus on these industries shows the earning potentials are often well above the state average salary of \$50,940 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022). In addition to the demonstrated need for these workers through sheer job growth and demand as shown above, there are intangible benefits to supporting tribal citizens in entering these careers. These benefits include a continuation of our cultural history and traditions, which are intrinsically tied to the lands and natural resources located on our reservation.



Regional Geospatial Coordinator

As Regional Geospatial Coordinator (RGC), Rebecca Coleman facilitates collaboration and resource-sharing among BIA and Tribal programs. In the Eastern Oklahoma Region, geospatial technology is transforming how programs manage resources and collaborate. Currently, our region reports 109 Portal users, 58 Regional GIS Users, and 212 Tribal GIS Users, underscoring the growing importance of geospatial technology.



Rebecca's Group

The RGC, in collaboration with the Branch of Geospatial Support, has scheduled four ESRI instructor-led training sessions for 2024. An in-person instructor-led training is to be scheduled in the spring/summer. These sessions cover a spectrum of essential skills including Essential Workflows, Mapping and Visualizing Data in ArcGIS, Spatial Analysis with ArcGIS Pro, and Field Data Collection and Management.

The region is actively engaged in collaborative projects aimed at enhancing data accessibility and usability. Notably, the RGC is partnering with the Division of Real Estate Services and Bureau of Land Management (Oklahoma Field Office) to map district court lease data and prior approved orders. This initiative involves creating a shared database with an internal Web Application, enabling easy access to spatial data linked with photos and documents. Furthermore, in conjunction with Natural Resource Division, Forestry, the region is designing a new process to facilitate contribution to versioned/editable Trespass Log feature layers on the BIA AWS Portal, streamlining regional operations.

Our GIS efforts extend beyond these projects, encompassing Web and Field Maps for DESCRM and Forestry, as well as McGirt Ruling tribal data and Agency Web Maps, demonstrating our commitment to leveraging geospatial technology for diverse applications.

Additionally, the RGC's involvement on the National Geospatial Committee (NGC) ensures regional efforts align with national priorities. By focusing on governance, data sharing, and technology infrastructure, the NGC optimizes geospatial capabilities across the entire organization.

With a focus on training, collaboration, and data accessibility, Eastern Oklahoma Region continues to empower users and drive innovation. Upcoming training sessions and ongoing projects designed for both BIA and Tribal staff underscore the region's commitment to leveraging geospatial technology for a more efficient and collaborative future.

EASTERN OKLAHOMA REGION, FIRE MANAGEMENT (FUELS)



Duncan Lake prescribed fire completed at the request of the Chickasaw Nation in collaboration with the city of Duncan, OK.

The Division of Natural Resources Fire Management Program utilizes prescribed fire and mechanical treatments to provide hazard mitigation and ecological uplift on tribal and allotted trust lands throughout the Eastern Oklahoma Region.

Over the past four years, the Fuels program has averaged 60 completed treatments, totaling over 16,250 acres annually. These completed treatments have occurred in Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) areas with the intent of protecting life and property. Also, as requested by our tribal partners and citizens, treatments have been completed to support culturally significant native plant and wildlife communities.



Brent Craig prescribed fire conducted at the request of the Peoria Tribe to support tribal youth cultural education.

These treatments have been conducted within 15 tribal jurisdictions. Collaboration with well over 50 local, state, federal, private, and non-governmental organization cooperators has allowed these accomplishments to be successfully realized.



Field 14 and 15 prescribed fires completed at the request of the Thlopthlocco Tribal Town to support cultural native plant and animal communities.



Large wildfire in Kenwood, OK on the Cherokee Nation Indian Reservation, 2024.

Preparedness

During the past fiscal year, the Division hosted 12 wildland fire trainings in the Region. Many of the courses were interagency and attended by personnel from other BIA regions. Through our recruitment efforts, we also increased our pool of emergency firefighters by roughly 25 personnel. The emergency firefighter program is vital to the success of our suppression and fuels programs in the Region.

Suppression

The Eastern Oklahoma Regional suppression resources have responded to a total of 655 wildfires that burned 41,498.6 acres for this Fiscal Year. Here is a breakdown by Tribe or Agency:

Tribe or Agency	Number of Fires	Number of Acres
Cherokee Nation	241	4,781.6
Chickasaw Agency	144	1,272.1
Choctaw Nation	1	4.0
Miami Agency	42	556.3
Okmulgee Agency	72	5,244.4
Osage Nation	112	29,327.6
Wewoka Agency	43	312.6
Total	655	41,498.6

There have been three reportable injuries to firefighters this year, all minor and resulting in only a short period of lost workdays for the individual firefighters. Three structures have been lost, and all were secondary structures or unoccupied residential structures. Although fire vehicles are heavily used, there has also been minimal damage to government equipment outside of common mechanical failures.

Aviation

To support the ground firefighting resources this fiscal year, the Region ordered up seven Single-Engine Air Tankers (SEATS) and two Air Attack Platforms in February 2024. The resources were split between the Okmulgee Agency (Okmulgee Airport) and Osage Nation (Bartlesville Airport). The seven SEATS have flown (so far) 160 sorties with a flight time of 175 hours delivering 109,000 gallons of retardant to numerous fires in the Region. There have been no aviation mishaps or injuries to aircraft support personnel.

Prevention

The regional prevention program has successfully raised awareness about unwanted fires. Through public outreach, regional prevention programs have helped the overall BIA fire program be more successful by contacting civilians and the emergency response agencies that protect the public. BIA and Tribal programs are well recognized in the communities and have earned a great reputation amongst their cooperators.



Large wildfire in Kenwood, OK on the Cherokee Nation Indian Reservation, 2024.



Squad of Cherokee Nation firefighters on the Lost Arrow fire near Teresita, OK, 2024.



Bartlesville Tanker Base – Single-Engine Air Tanker reloading with retardant. Large fire near the airport.



Ethan Mock, Trust Reform Coordinator

Trust Reform

The Eastern Oklahoma Region is home to unique circumstances where certain Indian oil and gas leases must be approved in Oklahoma state district courts. Further, these oil and gas leases are subject to state conservation laws established by the Oklahoma Corporation Commission, with orders affecting Indian leases subject to the approval of the Secretary of the Interior. In practice, it has been the role of the Lessee to supply the Region with copies of these orders for approval, which is not always fulfilled.

The Eastern Oklahoma Region established the position of Trust Reform Coordinator in 2020 to strengthen the oil and gas leasing process between the Tribes and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Currently holding this position is Mr. Ethan Mock.

Ethan is a member of the Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma and the Cherokee Nation. Ethan is not only new to the Trust Reform Coordinator, having started in January 2024, he is also new to the public sector, having previously been a partner at a Tulsa, Oklahoma, based law firm where he practiced for over six years. Ethan brings with him extensive oil and gas experience and will utilize this experience to execute the Region's trust responsibilities while assisting with the modernization of the oil and gas leasing processes of the Five Civilized Tribes. Ethan is focused on developing a better approach to improved communications between stakeholders and the Region, regarding state oil and gas conservation orders.

Ethan plans to establish a better line of communication between the Oklahoma Corporation Commission, the Lessees, and the Region as it relates to the state administrative orders. His hope is to establish

understanding between all parties that would allow the Region to receive more consistent notice, as well as better access, to information on the orders affecting these unique Indian leases.

Additionally, Ethan is hopeful better information sharing will ensure Lessees are aware and understand their obligation, as a Lessee, to provide the Region with copies of Oklahoma Corporation Commission Orders, for the approval process.

As part of the Executive Order 14008, *Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad*, the Department of Interior is ingrained in the goal to conserve, connect, and restore 30 percent of our lands and waters by 2030 for the sake of our economy, health, and well-being. The Eastern Oklahoma Region understands the importance of this mission as well as the importance of working with the tribes in achieving this goal within Indian Country.

Ethan's goal is to work with the Division of Environmental Services and Cultural Resources Management (DESCRM) and the Superintendents within the Region to help develop ideas and plans that can accomplish this goal. The current goal is to understand where there are needs for conservation and/or restoration, and then develop plans to tackle these challenges that can be presented to the Region and the tribes. These challenges could include locating and plugging orphan wells, additional remedial work on superfund sites, and taking advantage of the developing field of carbon sequestration. In line with the current administration's goal of conserving and preserving the lands and waters of this amazing country, Ethan is hopeful to help the Region and the tribes work together to develop procedures to further this worthy call to action.



Probate and Estate Services

The Eastern Oklahoma branch of Probate and Estate Services provides probate support to six agencies, and three compact tribes within the region. Eastern Oklahoma is unique in that the region assists in the processing of four types of Probate distributions, Office of Hearing and Appeals Probates (OHA), District Court Probates, Osage Inter Vivos Revocable Trust Distributions, and Life Estate Distributions.



Leslie Chambers, Regional Legal Administrative Specialist

Leslie Chambers is the Regional Legal Administrative Specialist for Probate and Estate Services (Probate), for the Eastern Oklahoma Region and a proud Cherokee Nation citizen. Leslie's journey with the Bureau of Indian Affairs began in 2007, as the Contact Representative for the Division of Probate and Estate Services. Prior to coming to the Bureau, Leslie obtained a bachelor's degree in business management, from Northeastern State University, in Tahlequah, Oklahoma

In her seventeen years with the BIA, Leslie has held multiple positions within Trust Services, including Legal Instruments Examiner for the Regional Land Titles and Records Office and Regional Realty Specialist for the Division of Subsurface Leasing, before transferring to the Okmulgee Agency as the Realty Specialist for Surface Contracts.

After years in Leasing, Leslie eventually made her way back to the Division of Probate and Estate Services, accepting the position as the Regional Legal Administrative Specialist for Probate Services, in 2018. In addition to her current probate duties, Leslie is also the Lockbox Coordinator for the region and has served in this position since 2014.

Throughout the years, Leslie taken part in various special projects, as well as participating in multiple TAAMS user groups within the Bureau. Outside of work, she is relaxing at home with her husband, Aaron, and their three children, Bradley, Brooklyn, and Nicholas. But, when she isn't relaxing at home, Leslie enjoys putting on her boxing gloves and training with her boxing coach at the gym. Leslie and Aaron also serve as the youth leaders at Oldham Memorial Baptist Church, where she has been a member most of her life.

Leslie considers herself fortunate to have the life and a job she loves and hopes to spend many years working for the Eastern Oklahoma Region, Serving the Tribes, and Tribal Community.

OHA Probates

The probates are completed by the Office of Hearing and Appeals and distribute land and income from assets held in trust. Cases are completed according to 25 CFR Part 15. The BIA is responsible for preparing and entering the probate package into the TAAMS probate module. The cases are then submitted through the module to OHA for hearing and for the final Order to be issued. When the 45-day appeal period has expired for the final Order, the distribution of the trust assets is completed by the Bureau.

District Court Probates

These probates are completed by Oklahoma State Courts and distribute land and income from Restricted assets. The Act of August 4, 1947 (61 Stat. 732) placed most land transactions dealing with inherited restricted land under the jurisdiction of the Oklahoma state courts including heirship and probate determinations for the Five Civilized Tribes of Oklahoma. The Act of April 18, 1912, chap. 83, § 3, 37 Stat. 86, as amended (the "1912 Act"), vested the Oklahoma courts with jurisdiction over the probates of estates of "deceased and of orphan minor, insane, or other incompetent allottees of the Osage Tribe.



District Court probates distribute the land and assets derived from restricted land owned by the Five Civilized Tribes of Oklahoma and Osage tribal members. These probates can also distribute any fee land the decedent may have owned outside of the bureau's supervision. District Court probates are completed outside of the BIA by private attorneys and are initiated by the administrator of the Estate.

The Regional Director is served notice as an interested party to the Probate proceeding. The Solicitor's Office reviews the probate proceeding prior to the Final and provides the Final Order to the Regional Probate Office for distribution of the restricted assets.



Osage Inter Vivos Revocable Trusts

Only applicable to Osage assets owned by Osage Indians. Section 6(a) of the Act of October 21, 1978, as amended by the Osage Tribe of Indians Technical Corrections Act of 1984, Pub. L. 98-605, 98 Stat. 3163, authorizes any adult Osage, with approval of the Secretary of the Interior, to establish an inter vivos trust covering his or her headright or mineral interest and other restricted or trust property, naming the Secretary of Interior as trustee. The Osage Nation assists with the creation of such trusts which are then reviewed and approved by the Osage Agency Superintendent.

Life Estate Distributions

Life estate distributions occur when a deceased owner has only life use in a parcel of Restricted /Trust land or in an Osage Headright. The death notification into our system of record to initiate the process for termination of life estate to distribute the asset to the remainderman.

The Eastern Oklahoma Probate program plays an integral part of carrying out the mission, goals, and objectives, of the Federal government while ensuring we fulfill our obligatory trust responsibly, processes and mandates for protecting Indian owned trust assets, while providing quality service to our agencies, tribes, and Indian owners.



**Land Titles & Records, Probate and Lockbox
Division Chief**



Cristy McSpadden

Cristy McSpadden is the Division Chief for Trust, Title & Income in the Eastern Oklahoma Region. The Division of Trust title and Income includes the branch of Land Titles and Records (“LTRO”), Probate Services, and Lockbox. Cristy is a member of the Muskogee (Creek) Nation and came to the Bureau in 2004 as a Legal Instruments Examiner for LTRO. Cristy received her Oklahoma Real Estate License in 1993 and her Oklahoma Real Estate Brokers License in 1995. Her background in Real estate made her a great addition to the Eastern Oklahoma LTRO Division.

Throughout her twenty-year tenure, Cristy has excelled in several capacities within the Eastern Oklahoma Region. Currently, Cristy continues to play a vital role in the implementation of TAAMS as the system of Record, and because of her innate expertise, in 2006, she quickly rose to the Lead Examiner position.

Cristy became the Deputy LTRO manager in 2009 and in 2013 accepted a detail to the Osage Agency, in Eastern Oklahoma, as the Acting Deputy Superintendent. The success of this detail paved the way for Cristy to accept the Choctaw Liaison position for the Talihina Agency in Eastern Oklahoma. However, in 2018, Cristy’s love for and experience in LTRO led her back to accept the position of Regional Division Chief for Trust, Title, & Income in Eastern Oklahoma.

Over the course of her time with the Bureau, Cristy has become an expert in her craft and is viewed as a mentor among her peers. LTRO has always been her niche, and the challenge of Indian Land Titles is something she enjoys.

Cristy was born in Muskogee, and is the proud mother of three boys, Blake, Lane, and Hunter, who are now young adults. In her personal life, Cristy has always viewed herself as a country girl at heart, and she continues to reside in the rural area south of Muskogee with her husband Michael, their two dogs, Zoey and Tippy, two cats, Wilbur and Leroy, and various other farm animals.

Land Titles & Records Office

The Eastern Oklahoma LTRO was established in 1989. The purpose of the office is to examine, record, and maintain title information on trust and restricted lands of the Five Civilized Tribes (“FCT”) and the Osage Tribe. Three of the FCT, Muscogee (Creek) Nation, Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma and The Cherokee Nation have compacted the LTRO functions. In 2007, the Eastern Oklahoma LTRO also became the primary LTRO for the Miami Agency, also within the Eastern Oklahoma Region. The Miami Agency oversees ten Tribes in the far northeastern corner of Oklahoma.

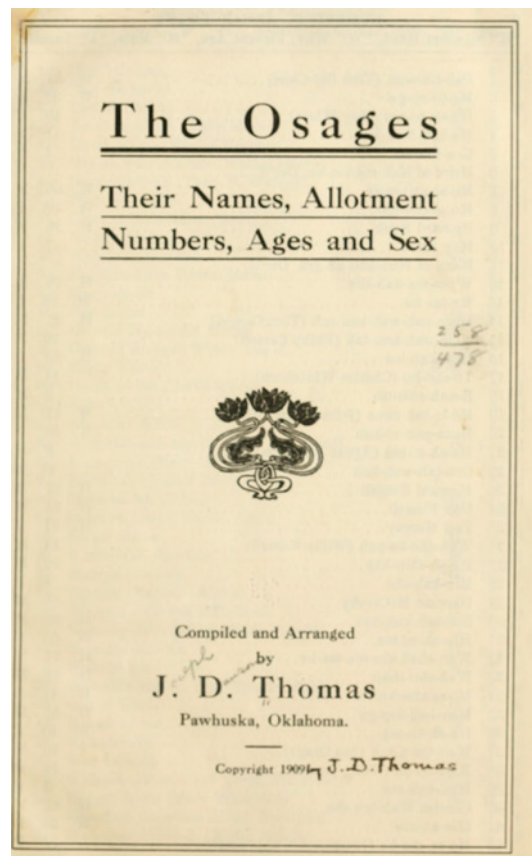
Due to unique laws affection, within Eastern Oklahoma, and most particularly within the jurisdictions of the FCT, many land transactions are conducted outside of the direct administration of the BIA.



Act of 1947 placed most Indian land transactions under the jurisdiction of the Oklahoma State Courts

The Act of August 4, 1947 (61 Stat. 732) placed most land transactions, particular to inherited restricted lands, under the jurisdiction of the Oklahoma State Courts. Actions such as oil and gas leases, deeds, and heirship determinations, are approved through the state courts for inherited restricted lands and not all actions of this type are filed with the Bureau.

In 2006, when the data key entry of title ownership into the Trust Asset and Accounting Management System (“TAAMS”) began for the FCT and Osage, the original allotments were tracked from time of allotment to current ownership within the County Clerk’s office wherein the land was located.



Osage Allotments in Library of Congress

This research included 14 Counties in Eastern Oklahoma and a fair amount of blood, sweat, tears and overtime. Title records specific to the Miami Agency were maintained in an LRIS system, which is the historical system of record for title information.

Once TAAMS was established, the records had to be converted from paper to digital. The gathering of records to determine if any restricted ownership remained was a long and grueling process. Once records had been gathered Chickasaw Nation Industries (CNI) assisted with the encoding of title documents into TAAMS.



Division of Real Estate Services

While most of the Tribes within our Region have compacted Realty programs, the Division of Real Estate Services (RES) provides direct services to most of our Tribes for Subsurface leasing and performs oversight and review of tribal and agency realty programs including the following:

- Surface & Mineral Leases
- Fee-to-Trust
- Rights-of-Way
- Mortgages
- Acquisitions and Disposals
- Removals of Restrictions

The RES Division is supported by the Regional Realty Officer, eight Realty Specialists, a Program Analyst, and an Office Automation Specialist.



Meet Our Regional Realty Officer: Justin Vann

Justin Vann is the Eastern Oklahoma Regional Realty Officer. He is from Tahlequah, Oklahoma and is a proud member of the Cherokee Nation. Justin began his career at the Region as a Regional Realty Specialist in 2010 and in November 2023, Justin accepted the Regional Realty Officer. Justin's primary goal is to provide exceptional service to the Region's twenty Tribal Nations. In his time away from work, Justin enjoys his family and shares daughters Ellie and Tessa with his wife Holly.

BIA–BLM Collaboration: Fluid Minerals Leasing

In 2023, RES initiated a renewed effort to collaborate with the Bureau of Land Management, Oklahoma Field Office (OFO) to facilitate improved services as they relate to fluid minerals leasing, operations, and compliance. As a marker of success from the efforts, RES and OFO have each conducted on-site trainings and technical discussions which have resulted in strengthening the fluid minerals leasing procedures and establishing clearer understandings of each agency's respective roles.

Fee To Trust Region Wide

The Eastern Oklahoma Region has processed 95 Fee to Trust Acquisitions in the past 2 years for 10 Tribes totaling 10,450.89 acres.

FTT Acquisition for the Muscogee (Creek) Nation

The Muscogee (Creek) Nation ("Nation") submitted the largest application accepted in the history of the Eastern Oklahoma Region for On-Reservation Fee-To-Trust (FTT) for a 5,453.39-acre tract known as "Stephens Ranch" on January 24, 2023. They purchased the working ranch in 2021 for use in their cattle operation. Currently, the land maintains 1,400 head of cattle, with some of those cattle raised for processing by the Loop Square Processing Plant owned by the Nation. The Nation will also utilize the Stephens Ranch to study wild turkey and other native species to strengthen the animal population in the area. The deed was approved and accepted on December 12, 2023. The Nation is currently using tract for grazing and cattle herd preservation.