

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT

EPA is dedicated to supporting Tribal efforts to maintain and restore the physical, chemical, and biological integrity of aquatic ecosystems throughout Indian country. As government-to-government relations have evolved, EPA and Tribes are improving their abilities to work together to solve complex environmental and public health issues. The EPA Wetland Development Grant Program provides support for development of Tribal wetland programs that achieve wetland-specific goals along with supporting a Tribe's broader strategy of protecting and enhancing environmental quality and public health. Steady financial support for Tribal programs will help to ensure future monitoring, research, and protection for Tribal wetlands.

EPA serves as a catalyst to bring interested parties and experts together to discuss wetland-related issues. EPA's Wetlands Division has sponsored two Tribal, wetland-focused meetings in different regions of the country. In July 1997, the Oneida Nation hosted *Building Native American Partnerships—Wetlands Conservation Planning for the Protection and Restoration of Wetland, Floodplain, Riparian and River Systems* in Green Bay, Wisconsin. In September 1998, the Skokomish Tribe hosted *p3tu'las, A Time for Hearing—A Tribal Forum for Natural and Aquatic Resources* in Olympia, Washington. These two meetings were planned in response to discussions at EPA's National Wetlands Meeting in Boulder, Colorado, in September 1996. Tribal representatives attending that meeting pointed out the need for improved communication and coordination between EPA and Tribes to work more effectively toward meeting natural resource protection and restoration goals. The two regional meetings were very successful in providing a forum for frank discussion of past and current problems and in generating ideas for developing solutions to these problems.

As this report demonstrates, there is a growing recognition by both Tribes and EPA that much can be learned from one another in protecting wetland resources. The single most daunting challenge facing Indian and non-Indian natural resource managers today is development of strategies to protect and restore ecosystems without negatively affecting local and national economies. This challenge is particularly acute for Tribes because in many cases their economies have not developed to the extent necessary to provide the desired standard of living for their members. Their natural resources may be severely degraded by activities from which they did not gain monetarily. This type of situation puts many Indians at a disadvantage not necessarily understood by non-Indians. Additionally, the cultural and spiritual significance of Tribal natural resources and the associated traditional knowledge of these resources are poorly understood by non-Indians, making even more difficult the process of overcoming cultural differences to work together to protect the environment and public health.



EPA will continue to work with Indians, other native peoples, and non-Indians to tackle environmental protection and public health issues. EPA sponsors applied wetlands research that may be applicable to Tribal wetland protection efforts. EPA will continue to share this information with Tribes and work with them to develop strategies that meet their programmatic and technical needs and interests. The EPA Wetlands Division hopes that these case studies will serve as a resource for Tribal governments and other governments as they develop and refine their wetland protection programs. The Division invites all interested Tribes to share their experiences in wetlands protection and planning so this valuable information resource can be updated and expanded in the future.