

White House Commits to Elevating Indigenous Knowledge in Federal Policy Decisions

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White House Office of Science & Technology Policy and Council on Environmental Quality release first-of-its kind memorandum to initiate new federal guidance on Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge

Today, the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) and the White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) jointly released a new memorandum that commits to elevating Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge (ITEK) in federal scientific and policy processes. ITEK is a body of observations, oral and written knowledge, practices, and beliefs that promotes environmental sustainability and the responsible stewardship of natural resources through relationships between humans and environmental systems. It is applied to phenomena across biological, physical, cultural and spiritual systems. This announcement coincides with the Biden-Harris Administration's inaugural Tribal Nations Summit and comes as the Administration continues to expand its efforts to highlight Native voices across the Federal Government.

This new memorandum formally recognizes ITEK as one of the many important bodies of knowledge that contributes to the scientific, technical, social, and economic advancements of the United States and our collective understanding of the natural world.

“Indigenous Knowledge should inform Federal decision making,” **said the President’s Science Advisor and OSTP Director Dr. Eric Lander.** “This effort will give Federal agencies the tools they need to ensure Indigenous knowledge is appropriately considered and elevated.”

“Tribal and Native communities have stewarded these lands since time immemorial,” **said CEQ Chair Brenda Mallory.** “Their voices and their expertise are critical to finding solutions to address the climate crisis, an issue that disproportionately affects Tribal and Native communities. Today’s commitment will help ensure that Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge is a part of decision making across the Federal Government for the betterment of people and the planet.”

“The Federal Government has never embraced Indigenous knowledge in such a broad, comprehensive way before,” **said Libby Washburn, Special Assistant to the President for Native American Affairs and citizen of the Chickasaw Nation of Oklahoma.** “This new guidance is a reflection of President Biden’s commitment to a strong Nation-to-Nation relationship that is built on respect and cooperation.”

Specifically, the OSTP-CEQ memorandum:

- Recognizes ITEK as a form of knowledge that can and should inform Federal Government decision making where appropriate and commits to improving Federal engagement with Tribal Nations and Native communities around ITEK.
- Creates an Interagency Working Group on Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge, which will initiate a process to develop government-wide guidance for Federal agencies on elevating ITEK, with Tribal consultation, Native community engagement, as well as agency, expert, and public input.
- Highlights ongoing examples of ITEK collaboration between Tribal Nations, Native communities, and the Federal Government.

More on the Biden-Harris Administration’s commitments to Indigenous Peoples:

Earlier this year, the Biden-Harris Administration committed to strengthening the relationship between the Federal Government and Tribal Nations and to advancing equity for Indigenous people, including Native Americans, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, and Indigenous people of the U.S. territories. An executive order on Tribal consultation directed federal agencies to develop robust plans for ensuring meaningful Tribal consultation on agency work that may affect Tribal Nations and the people they represent.

Guidance on Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge for Federal agencies is expected to be released in 2022.

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