

September 8, 2021

Dear Reader,

The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management has a longstanding and maturing Tribal engagement program, which Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland, the first Native American to lead the Department, recognized at the first BOEM Tribal Ocean Summit earlier this year. BOEM's Tribal program incorporates traditional knowledge from environmental studies, assessments, and formal government-to-government consultations. But that is not all. The bureau has increased its informal dialogue to inform and strengthen relationships with Tribal communities. We are also respectful of



our responsibilities for consultation with Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) Corporations. Through this Science Note I want to share with you our goals for Tribal engagement and the steps we are taking to reach them.

BOEM has defined three goals for its relationships with Tribal and Indigenous communities: (1) improving BOEM's understanding of their connections to physical and biological resources and society; (2) being mindful of the historically long time horizon of Tribal communities -- encompassing past, present, and future generations; and (3) reaffirming BOEM's commitment to understand, foresee and minimize the impact of BOEM decisions on Tribal communities.

Many Native Americans, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians live near and use areas where BOEM activities are proposed, approved, and conducted. Their ancestors occupied vast areas of land and depended on nearby ocean resources, both prior to sea level rise at the end of the last ice age and before encountering European colonists and, eventually, the U.S. government. It is important to note the impact that the history of Federal law and policy have had on Tribal access to ancestral lands. Policies such as the Indian Removal Act of 1830 enabled mass removal of Native Americans from their lands; these types of actions continue to have long-lasting impacts on Tribes and their relationship with the Federal government. BOEM is working to improve trust, respect, and shared responsibility with Indigenous peoples to enable effective collaboration and informed decision-making.

The BOEM Tribal Ocean Summit

BOEM convened the first Tribal Ocean **Summit** in March, with substantive input from Tribal representatives. The summit was

open to all 574 federally-recognized Tribal nations and Alaska Native Corporations. The meeting, held virtually, attracted more than 80 Tribal and native representatives from Alaska, Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, and Pacific coastal states. The intent of the summit was to exchange information, establish and strengthen Tribal-BOEM relationships, and ensure Tribal voices are considered during future consultations and BOEM decision-making.



Tribal participants spoke directly with BOEM staff and expressed their strong appreciation for BOEM's leadership in convening the summit and for Secretary Haaland's and BOEM Director Amanda Lefton's participation. BOEM officials expressed their appreciation for Tribal representatives taking so much of their own time to participate in the six-day summit, held during two separate weeks.

Secretary Haaland emphasized her personal commitment and that of the Biden-Harris Administration to establishing federal Indian policies that respect Tribal sovereignty and Tribal self-governance to fulfill the federal trust and treaty responsibilities to Tribal nations, and to conduct regular, meaningful, and robust consultations with Tribal nations. She emphasized that President Biden's **memorandum on Tribal Consultation and Strengthening Nation-to-Nation Relationships** requires federal agencies to involve Tribal officials in developing federal policies that have Tribal implications, building on Executive Orders dating back to 2000

Director Lefton stressed BOEM's belief that understanding and listening to Tribal governments' views and recommendations are essential to doing our work well. She noted that Tribal input helps the bureau incorporate traditional knowledge into its policy and decision-making processes whenever possible. She highlighted the importance of trust, respect, and shared responsibility for effective collaboration, and reaffirmed BOEM's commitment to maintaining open and transparent communications with Tribal governments, Alaska Native Corporations, Native Hawaiian Organizations, and other indigenous communities.

Connecting Our Work with Traditional Knowledge

BOEM's predecessor agency, the Minerals Management Service, started discussing traditional knowledge (also referred to as indigenous knowledge) in 1995. Alaska native peoples expressed concern that their knowledge about the environment was not incorporated into agency decisions, and that agencies were not utilizing traditional knowledge because it was not validated by scientific studies.



Californian Indians often roast salmon over an open pit fire. Photo: BOEM, OEP

BOEM has taken steps to access, understand, and incorporate traditional knowledge to improve environmental analyses, scientific research, and decisions. In 2012 BOEM published a special issue of Ocean Science **Journal** highlighting the role of traditional knowledge in research conducted by the agency's Environmental Studies Program. BOEM strives to treat traditional and scientific knowledge as complementary knowledge systems. Using both perspectives can provide a more complete understanding of the environment and result in better management decisions. Today, BOEM applies traditional knowledge from four primary sources: collaborations with indigenous communities; Tribal consultations; public comments; and ongoing or proposed joint physical, biological, and social science research.

The following examples, funded in whole or in part by BOEM, illustrate the connections:

Alaska

- **Evaluating Novel Assessment Approaches for Coastal Ice-Seal Haulout Areas and Behavior in the Alaskan Beaufort Sea:** This BOEM study explicitly involves Tribes, the State of Alaska, the North Slope Borough, the Northwest Arctic Borough, and the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission, with additional resources from the Office of Naval Research and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The project will help build technical capacity for Indigenous hunters to undertake scientific operations. Understanding the environmental conditions and human disturbances (anthropogenic factors) affecting the distribution, abundance, and behavior of ice-seals are important to understanding the health of the marine ecosystem, coastal communities, and management of coastal environments.
- **Traditional Knowledge Implementation: Accessing Arctic Community Panels of Subject Matter Experts:** This pilot study involves the North Slope Borough's Department of Wildlife Management and traditional knowledge experts from North Slope communities. Establishing and maintaining these expert panels allows traditional knowledge holders to become more accessible to research scientists and to function authoritatively on research projects. The objective is to formalize the application of traditional knowledge by developing and testing an approach that consistently matches appropriate knowledge holders with scientists who are

TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE:

A body of evolving practical knowledge based on observations and personal experience of Indigenous residents over an extensive time period. It can be described as information based on the experiences of a people passed down from generation to generation. It includes extensive understanding of environmental interrelationships and can provide a framework for determining how resources are used and shared.

BOEM strives to treat traditional and scientific knowledge as complementary knowledge systems.



*Inverted frame of an Alaska Natives whaling boat.
Photo: BOEM*

proposing research on the North Slope.

Atlantic

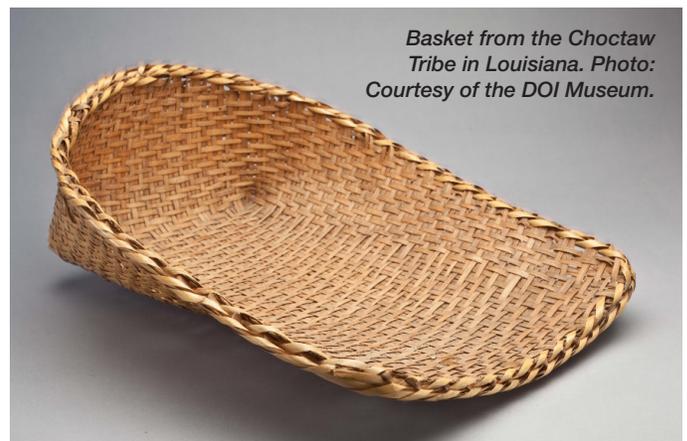
- **Developing Protocols for Reconstructing Submerged Paleocultural Landscapes and Identifying Ancient Native American Archaeological Sites in Submerged Environments.**

This study developed best practices to improve the effectiveness of Tribal engagement and geoarchaeological site characterization associated with permitting offshore energy development. BOEM worked with the University of Rhode Island, the Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council, and the Narragansett Indian Tribal Historic Preservation Office. The study helped to establish a methodology to better locate, identify and understand ancient sites where indigenous people may have been present on the Outer Continental Shelf. It is an example of how collaborative projects can foster meaningful interaction between different parties and develop best practices to address cultural, scientific, and archaeological aspects of offshore energy development. Deliverables included six reports and a [video](#).



A Tribal projectile point found at Greenwich Bay, RI, during the Atlantic submerged paleocultural landscape project. Photo: Study video.

- Tribal Consultations for the **Vineyard Wind 1 Offshore Wind Energy Project Construction and Operations Plan May 10, 2021.** Throughout the environmental analysis and consultations process, BOEM conducted Government-to-Government consultation with federally-recognized Tribes, including the Delaware Tribe of Indians, Mashantucket Pequot Indian Tribe, Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe, Mohegan Tribe of Indians of Connecticut, Narragansett Indian Tribe, Shinnecock Indian Nation, and the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head-Aquinnah. Consultations addressed several concerns, including fishing and shell-fishing; environmental justice and equity; marine mammals; and submerged ancient landscapes of historic, religious, and cultural significance to the Tribes.



Basket from the Choctaw Tribe in Louisiana. Photo: Courtesy of the DOI Museum.

Gulf of Mexico

- Tribal Engagement in Planning for Gulf of Mexico Renewable Energy Development: In June 2021, BOEM hosted an information exchange meeting with representatives of Tribes with ancestral connections to the Gulf of Mexico, including the Chitimacha Tribe of Louisiana, Muscogee (Creek) Nation, and Jena Band of Choctaw Indians. The meeting served as an initial opportunity to present an overview of the technical analysis and planning process for Gulf of Mexico renewable energy development, and to address Tribal questions and concerns. That event was followed by the first **Gulf of Mexico Intergovernmental Renewable Energy Task Force Meeting** which included further participation from Tribal leadership.

Pacific

- **Characterizing Tribal Cultural Landscapes (TCL):** This study produced a **Tribal consultation guidance document** that presents a holistic method for agencies to consult with Tribes more effectively and appropriately before the bureau takes any proposed actions. It also suggests a means for Tribes and other indigenous communities to relate their interests and concepts of landscape to federal agencies and other land and water management entities. Using the guidance document, each of the three partner Tribes (Makah Tribe, Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde Community, and Yurok Tribe) developed **independent case studies** to demonstrate how a TCL approach might be implemented.



Replica of a performance-accurate Hokule'a, a two-masted open deck Hawaiian voyaging canoe offshore of Honolulu. Photo: H Van Tilburg

- **Maritime Cultural Resources Site Assessment in the Main Hawaiian Islands:** This project partnered with Native Hawaiian representatives from each of the eight main Hawaiian islands to produce a **Native Hawaiian consultation guidance document** that describes three independent case studies. This study was part of a larger effort to better understand Hawaii's rich maritime heritage. It also produced reports about the **underwater cultural heritage surrounding the islands** and **an assessment of seaward viewsheds**, which incorporated Hawaiian language resources to better understand "akua viewsheds" (viewsheds historically associated with spiritual figures or deities) and "ali'i viewsheds" (viewsheds historically associated with Hawaiian chiefs).



Healthy Pacific Coast ecosystems are important to Tribal communities. Photo: BOEM, OEP

Since BOEM expanded its engagement with Tribal communities in 2014, I sense true momentum in blossoming relationships. I welcome your feedback and suggestions on ways we can continue to nurture meaningful engagement. To learn more, please visit our **Tribal Engagement page**, which provides contact information for BOEM's Tribal Liaison Coordinator, **Hillary Renick**, and regional Tribal liaisons. On the Environmental Studies Program Information System (**ESPIS**), you will find new studies and reports as they are posted. As always, we welcome your feedback, so please send your comments to **BOEMPublicAffairs@boem.gov**.

Sincerely,

William Y. Brown
BOEM Chief Environmental Officer and
BOEM Tribal Liaison Officer