



## CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES OFFICE OF TRIBAL AFFAIRS

# Summary of Key California Tribal Policies

## California Department of Water Resources - Office of Tribal Affairs

California Native American Tribes hold sovereign authority and have a deep connection to the natural landscapes, offering knowledge that strengthen ecosystem health and climate resilience. California's evolving engagement framework with Tribes—comprising legislation like Senate Bill (SB) 18 and Assembly Bill (AB) 52, alongside executive orders and recent statutes—mark a pivotal shift in how State agencies engage with Native American Tribes. Engagement has transitioned from historical neglect to proactive, respectful, and collaborative resource stewardship and addressing restorative justice.

The following list of key California Tribal Policies is intended to strengthen the California Water Plan Advisory Committee members' knowledge on State mandates for collaboration and coordination with Tribal governments and Tribal organizations. Building partnerships with Tribes is critical in State water management planning.

**Upholding Sovereignty & Genuine Government-to-Government Consultation:** SB 18 (2004) mandates early Tribal notice and consultation during planning processes. AB 52 (2014) integrates Tribal Cultural Resources into the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and requires consultation when requested. More recently, SB 923 (2022) enhances government-to-government consultations, and it requires state officials to undergo training on Tribal sovereignty, sacred sites, and consultation protocols. These policies ensure Tribes are treated as sovereign governments with authority over cultural and environmental matters.

**Preserving Cultural & Sacred Sites:** SB 18 and AB 52 help identify and protect sacred places and Tribal cultural landscapes early in project planning. An example includes jurisdictions revising General Plans to safeguard burial sites and culturally sensitive areas.

**Historical Accountability & Healing:** EO N-15-19 includes a formal apology to California Native American communities and establishes a Truth & Healing Council, initiating processes for addressing historical harms and supporting reconciliation.

**Enabling Co-Governance of Land & Water:** AB 1284 (2024) allows Tribes to develop co-governance and co-management agreements with departments and commissions under the California Natural Resources Agency. Tribes such as the Yurok Tribe and Tolowa Dee-nee' Nation now partner with state parks on habitat restoration and wildfire resilience. This policy strengthens Tribal partnerships in resource management, conservation, and stewardship of ancestral lands and water in California.



**Integrating Tribal Knowledge in Climate & Water Policy:** EO N-10-19 directs agencies to strengthen water resilience through multi-benefit approaches, including Tribal partnerships. EO N-82-20 (30x30) emphasizes Tribal ecological knowledge in biodiversity and climate strategies and support of Tribal Nature-Based Solutions programs.

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## Why This Matters

These policies:

- **Restore Respect:** Honoring Tribal sovereignty, history, and authority.
  - **Protect Heritage:** Strengthens state actions to protect cultural landscapes and sacred sites from inadvertent harm.
  - **Bridge Knowledge Systems:** Enhances environmental policy with ensuring Tribal Ecological Knowledge (TEK) and Indigenous Knowledge are considered as best management practice and best available science in water management planning.
  - **Build Resilience:** Incorporates Tribes as active partners in solving water scarcity, biodiversity loss, and climate adaptation.
  - **Promote Equity:** Moves toward restorative justice by formally involving Tribes in decision-making about their ancestral lands and waterways.
  - **Create Long-Term Partnerships:** Enables sustained collaboration and capacity-building from state agencies and local governments with Tribal governments, Tribal communities, and Tribally led organizations.
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## More Information

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