

PRESS RELEASE For Immediate Release

Karuk Tribe • Western Klamath Restoration Partnership
Mid Klamath Watershed Council • Six Rivers National Forest

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Tribes, Policy Makers, Funders, Resource Managers Converge on Klamath Watershed for Field Tour and Restoration Conversations

Somes Bar, CA – Dozens of dignitaries converged on the Wild and Scenic Salmon River in far Northwest California July 11-13 to witness how restoration practitioners are rethinking land management practices and moving towards those grounded in the traditional ecological knowledge of the Karuk People.

Participants of the Klamath Restoration Gathering represented federal, tribal and state agencies, as well as diverse non-governmental organizations from both sides of the California-Oregon border that bisects the Klamath River basin.

The event aimed to not only highlight local projects, such as fish habitat enhancement, forest thinning, and prescribed burning, but also to hear indigenous voices, spur network thinking and build a greater understanding of what “upper watershed” meant to each participant.

Activities began with a raft trip, stopping at several Klamath tributaries that provide critical cold water for beleaguered salmon and steelhead fisheries during the hottest months of the summer. These stops offered participants a hands-on opportunity to move rocks in creek mouths with guidance from local fish passage crews, slowing and deepening the channel so both juvenile and adult salmon could have easier access to habitat upstream. Dinner on the river bar included salmon cooked traditionally on redwood sticks over a pit of coals, courtesy of Yurok youth leading the group Ancestral Guard, as well as acorn soup prepared by a local Karuk woman.

“I do this to help and teach others,” said Stormie Polmateer, the lead preparer of the acorn soup, assisted by several Karuk youth.

The second day, participants visited a cultural burn that was part of the *Roots and Shoots Project*, showcasing a relatively new collaboration between the Karuk Tribe and the Six Rivers National Forest. Representatives of the US Forest Service and Tribal crews that conducted the burn—many of tribal descent—described how the burn had increased productivity of cultural resources including huckleberries and tan oak acorns; both traditional food sources for the Karuk Tribe. Participants also

viewed the Orleans Valley from a vista to learn the value of bringing good fire back to a place where fire has been excluded for a century. With temperatures exceeding 106° in the shade, participants moved indoors to watch a series of short films about the cultural importance of fire in the Klamath Mountains and how its use can protect ecosystems and communities. Helge Eng, Deputy Director for CALFIRE, provided inspiration to participants, telling the story of his organization's rapidly growing support for both prescribed and cultural fire.

On the final day, attendees convened for a discussion of lessons learned, additional needs and next steps. In the afternoon, the group traveled to the site of the Western Klamath Restoration Partnership's *Somes Bar Integrated Fire Management Project*, where a Karuk tribal member explained how his marking crew decided which trees would be cut on the project by marking them with blue paint. The project is intended to demonstrate how fuels reduction through mechanical and manual thinning, as well as prescribed burning, can provide landscape level benefits to water, fish, wildlife, plants and human communities.

"The *Somes Bar Project* is an unprecedented collaborative effort on a US Forest Service project where the community was fully engaged at every stage," said Liz Berger, acting forest supervisor for the Six Rivers National Forest.

Shortly after returning home from the Gathering, Ford Family Foundation officer Crystal Aston had this to say about the event: "Thank you so much for the wonderful hospitality during the Klamath Gathering. It was such a special opportunity to connect more deeply with my neighbors here in Siskiyou... There are so many great lessons you all have to teach around networking, collaboration and visioning!"

Support from the Karuk Tribe, the US Forest Service, the Mid Klamath Watershed Council via the Yellow Chair Foundation, the Nature Conservancy, and the California Governor's Office of Planning and Research made the event possible—from funding, in-kind contributions of staff time and volunteers, to the use of an entire campground for a week. Organizers and participants agreed all the effort put into making the Gathering happen was well worth it for the information exchanged and relationships forged.

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