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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**CALIFORNIA HONORS TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY AND ADVANCES RESILIENCE TO WILDFIRE  
WITH NEW CULTURAL BURNING LAW AND FIRST-EVER CULTURAL BURNING AGREEMENT  
WITH THE KARUK TRIBE**

Senate Bill 310 acknowledges federally recognized tribes' sovereignty to conduct cultural burns, restoring ancestral practices to steward California's lands.

**SACRAMENTO, Calif.** – The Karuk Tribe and the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) have entered into a historic agreement as part of CNRA's and California Environmental Protection Agency's (CalEPA) announcement that [SB 310 \(Dodd 2024\)](#) is now in effect. This landmark legislation and agreement acknowledge tribal sovereignty and addresses historical injustices while contributing to the mitigation of catastrophic wildfire by enabling CNRA and local air districts to enter into agreements with federally recognized California Native American tribes to support them in conducting cultural burns in their ancestral territories.

Historically, California's laws intended to outlaw various forms of Indigenous burning, penalizing tribal communities for using fire as a ceremonial and natural resource management tool. These restrictions disrupted Traditional Ecological Knowledge, practice, and belief systems and disrespected tribal sovereignty. Senate Bill 310 amends the California Public Resources Code Section 4505 to authorize CNRA and local air districts to enter into agreements that respect tribes' inherent authority to regulate their traditional practices and manage their lands.

"Our ancestors' relationship with fire is sacred intergenerational knowledge passed down since time immemorial. Our people have been hurting for over a century by fire suppression laws that have drastically impacted our resources and communities by preventing us from feeling safe to conduct cultural burns to manage our forests and steward our lands, as is our inherent responsibility," Russell "Buster" Attebery, Chairman of the Karuk Tribe. "This victory acknowledges our true sovereignty and supports us in protecting our lands, just as our ancestors did. We are grateful and hopeful that this legislation (SB 310), and our implementing

agreement - as the first of its kind, represents an opportunity to continue our vision of combining Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) and modern science, in support of our sovereign Indigenous fire practices. Clearly, there is much to be learned about how our ancestors managed these lands and provided meaningful stewardship. We stand proud of our efforts alongside those who fought with us in reclaiming this sovereign practice. “

The law acknowledges federally recognized tribes’ ability to conduct cultural burns without state permits and establishes a process for sovereign-to-sovereign agreements with CNRA or local air resources control boards specifying geographic scope, interactions between tribal and state law, safety procedures, notifications, documentation, and collaboration for successful cultural burns. These agreements honor Traditional Ecological Knowledge, contribute to wildfire resilience, and align with California’s broader climate goals.

"Cultural burning is a proven practice that restores balance to our landscapes and builds wildfire resilience," said Wade Crowfoot, Secretary of the California Natural Resources Agency. "Expanding cultural fire practices reduces catastrophic wildfire risks and restores traditional practices that have benefited natural systems for thousands of years. This landmark agreement with the Karuk Tribe supports their leadership in this essential work and serves as a model to build tribal sovereignty while restoring nature".

CNRA and CalEPA are committed to working closely with tribes to advance tribal burning practices. For example, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) has established the first-ever Deputy Director for Tribal Affairs to ensure consistent and thoughtful implementation of tribal policies. Similarly, the California Air Resources Control Board (CARB) has developed collaborative approaches to address tribal needs in cultural fire practices.

"Indigenous peoples have stewarded natural resources since time immemorial, and their deep connection to land is invaluable in our collective work to build climate resiliency," said California Environmental Protection Secretary Yana Garcia. "We look forward to coordinating support to ensure the continuation of Indigenous stewardship on tribal ancestral lands."

The Karuk Tribal Council and CNRA have established a groundbreaking agreement that empowers Karuk cultural fire practitioners to conduct burns under Traditional Ecological Knowledge, practice, and belief systems. This landmark partnership also enables practitioners’ access to the Prescribed Fire and Cultural Burning Claims fund without mandating formal burn plans. The agreement supports the Karuk Tribe's traditional use of fire to enhance food sources, fiber resources, and medicinal plants, while preserving their Traditional Ecological Knowledge and belief systems. Additionally, these cultural burning practices help establish and maintain wildfire resilience while promoting essential ecocultural conditions.

The Karuk Tribe has been at the forefront of SB 310, working closely with state agencies and policymakers to develop effective frameworks for cultural burning. Building upon existing fire management programs and millennia of experience, the Tribe has demonstrated how these practices enhance forest health and reduce catastrophic wildfire risk. Centered around strong rural family values that prioritize collective land stewardship and intergenerational knowledge preservation, the Tribe views fire management not only as an ecological strategy but also a sacred responsibility to their ancestors and their future generations. This SB 310 cultural burning agreement is the first of its kind and creates a template that other tribes will be able to model similar agreements on, if they so choose.

“CAL FIRE has been working to build positive relationships with California’s Native American tribes and better understand and educate our agency on traditional ecological knowledge and practices. Moving into the future, we will see cultural burning as the norm, not an exception. It is our intention to continuously educate our staff and public in the overarching benefits of cultural burning and prescribed fire to better support California’s Native American tribes in this effort,” said Joe Tyler, Chief and Department Director for CAL FIRE.

The State is committed to [meaningful collaboration with tribes](#), both federally and non-federally recognized tribes, to [advance beneficial cultural fire practices](#) as part of our wildfire resiliency work. As part of this work, the State has developed a FAQ document providing additional details on cultural burn agreements under SB 310. This FAQ document and more information can be found on our website at <https://resources.ca.gov/Cultural-Burn-Agreements> or please contact Gita Chandra at [gita.chandra@resources.ca.gov](mailto:gita.chandra@resources.ca.gov) for a copy of the FAQ document.

Join the Karuk Tribe and the State of California for a public webinar for more information on “Advancing Tribal Stewardship Through Cultural Fire,” scheduled for April 1, 2025 at 1:00 PM. To register, visit [https://ca-water-gov.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_nUlfqcgTaWucOOV7a2QXw#/registration](https://ca-water-gov.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_nUlfqcgTaWucOOV7a2QXw#/registration).



) Analisa Tripp of the Karuk Tribe conducting a cultural burn with a pitch stick. Photo Credit: Alex Watts-Tobin.



Prescribed fire with cultural objectives conducted by the Karuk Tribe. Photo Credit: Colleen Rossier

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