

**Elin Miller, United States Environmental Protection Agency
Region 10 Regional Administrator**

Indigenous People's Conference Remarks:

My name is Elin Miller. I am the Regional Administrator for Region 10 of the Environmental Protection Agency. I am here today on behalf of EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson who sends his regrets at not being able to attend this important gathering. The region I administer includes the states of Alaska, Idaho, Oregon and Washington. Located within Region 10 are 270 of the nation's 561 federally recognized Tribes, almost half the U.S. total.

I want to share with you that I love my job. As you might imagine, I spend a great deal of my time working on tribal matters, which in addition to being among my most important responsibilities, is also a privilege. For it is through my position and its responsibilities that I have had the enriching opportunity to learn about the environmental challenges in Indian Country as well as the pleasure of working with distinguished and capable tribal leaders such as Terry Williams of the Tulalip Tribe.

In 1984, EPA became the first U.S. federal agency to adopt a formal Indian Policy and it has been reaffirmed by every EPA Administrator since its adoption. Administrator Johnson reaffirmed the policy on September 26, 2005. As reflected by our tribal policy, we respect the government-to-government relationship we have with each of the 561 federally recognized Tribes. We acknowledge the supreme importance of tribal sovereignty, and we support tribal self-government. In fact, as much as possible, we seek to encourage and assist having tribal governments take the primary role in implementing federal environmental laws that protecting the land, air, and water in Indian Country.

Since 1984, we have achieved a great deal to build a solid tribal program to implement our Indian Policy. Some of the significant milestones in the development of the EPA Tribal Program include:

- Establishing the American Indian Environmental Office—where Carol Jorgensen is the Director--to manage EPA's national tribal programs.
- Working with tribes and congress to amend EPA core programs including the Clean Water Act, the Safe Drinking Water Act and the Clean Air Act to allow tribal assumption of program authority.
- Establishing the Tribal Operations Committee which includes elected tribal officials and senior EPA leadership --including the Administrator himself. This committee provides a great opportunity to enhance partnerships with tribes to improve human health and the environment in Indian Country.
- Staffing EPA regional offices around the country with Indian Coordinators and departments that focus on issues of concern to Indian Tribes.
- Developing committees to inform policies and programs such as the National Tribal Water Council, the Tribal Pesticides Program Council, the National

Environmental Justice Indigenous Peoples Subcommittee, and others. This work has enhanced EPA's effectiveness.

Many Tribes also participate on strategic planning committees with other stakeholders in order to provide key input into the work EPA does, such as rule, guidance and regulatory development.

Our investment in sound policy and strong programs has laid the foundation for successful collaborations between EPA and Tribes. These collaborations have achieved meaningful results, as I think is demonstrated by the following examples from Region 10.

- Just a couple of week ago, EPA put the finishing touches to finally resolve a difficult matter pertaining to Water Quality Standards in Washington state. Tribes in western Washington were the first to highlight critical errors the state of Washington had made in updating their standards. Data gathered by tribal environmental staff was so compelling that the state of Washington, rather than argue the point, agreed to work with Tribes and EPA to correct the errors.
- A second example is our collaboration with the Nez Perce Tribe to develop a regulatory program to manage agricultural burning. Non-tribal growers operating on non-tribal lands located within the Tribe's reservation boundaries had for years burned the agricultural stubble as way of regenerating their soil--at the expense of air quality for all affected including tribal members. EPA and tribal technical staff worked together to develop tribal regulations that allow burning to take place when the weather conditions are such that it can to take place without adverse impact--and which prohibit it when conditions are such that the public would be harmed. The program has proven to be fair and effective--so much so that the state of Idaho is now in the process of creating its own program based on the Nez Perce model.
- Finally, I want to highlight the Yukon River Intertribal Watershed Council, a council composed of 64 U.S. Tribes and Canadian First Nations. The Yukon Council has ongoing projects related to water quality monitoring in the Yukon River and its major tributaries, conducts mapping on contaminated sites, facilitates environmental education in the communities where its member Tribes and 1st Nations are located. It implements a solid waste removal program, in partnership with the state of Alaska railroad, barge, air cargo and recycling companies. Since 2005, The Yukon Council has transported more that 3.5 million pounds of waste being out of Alaska. This waste has either been recycled or disposed of properly in regulated landfills. In the past, such waste would have simply been piled in unsightly, inadequately maintained, and potentially hazardous open dumps.

As this example illustrates especially well, Tribes in Region 10 are not simply working with EPA; they are building partnership with each other, even across international boundaries. And they are collaborating with state government and private companies. In doing so, Tribes not only are improving the quality of the environment, they are building tribal capacity and sovereignty.

I said at the outset that I love my job. Leading Region 10, an organization that is working effectively to achieve tangible environmental benefits while enhancing tribal sovereignty, is a big part of the reason why I do.

While there is much to be proud of, there is so much more to be done. The natural resources on which indigenous people--and all people--depend have been degraded, and, too often still are being degraded. As we stand here in the shadows of Palenque, I am mindful that some scholars have suggested that environmental stressors contributed to the decline of the great Mayan civilization. The planet-wide stress on the environment today means that the collaborative efforts like those I have described are not simply good things--they may well be essential to our survival. Likewise--that indigenous leaders have come together here to consider how to protect the environment also is both good--and essential. On behalf of Administrator Johnson and all of us at EPA, I wish you well.