FOCUS AREA

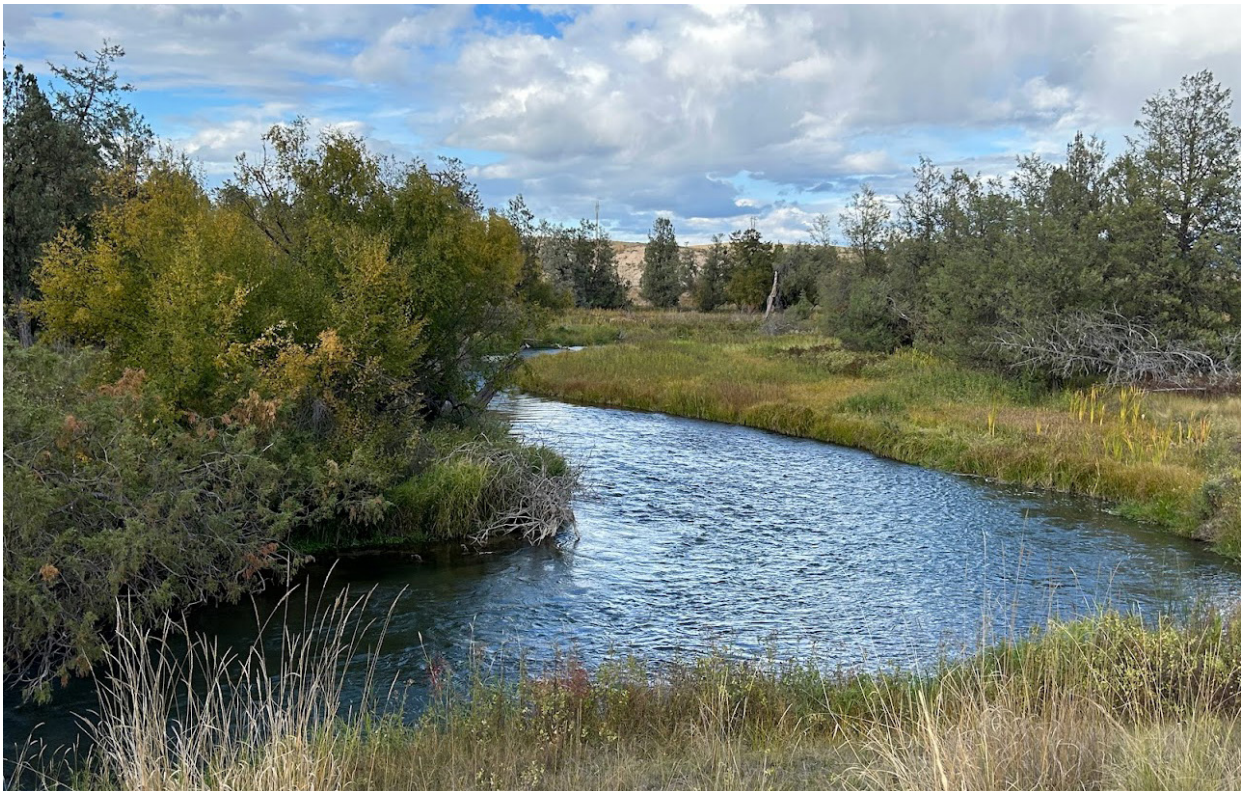
LEARNING WITH INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge (ITEK) informs our understanding of climate change and environmental sustainability over time (Jantarasami et al., 2018). ITEK consists of the body of knowledge, beliefs, traditions, practices, institutions, and worldviews developed and sustained by indigenous communities in interaction with the biophysical environment (Toledo, 2002; Berkes, 1993). Integration of ITEK and western knowledge systems can be key to understanding and adapting to drought in a changing climate (e.g., Confederated Salish and Kootenai Climate Change Strategic Plan StoryMaps, 2023). Taking this a step further, actually co-creating knowledge creates an opportunity to look at questions differently, providing a historical context of change and adaptation learned throughout a long history of stewardship and an understanding of the interconnectivity and complexity of natural systems (Redsteer et al., 2015). This collaboration between western and traditional knowledge requires respect for tribal sovereignty, self-determination, and considerations of reciprocity when working with tribal nations and communities to build trusted relationships and partnerships (Bamford et al., 2020). Dialogue is also needed to consider and understand how to implement Free, Prior and Informed Consent as identified in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (FAO et al., 2016). Learning with indigenous communities requires multidisciplinary approaches incorporating indigenous research methods, embracing different world views, and hybrid knowledge frameworks (Hoagland, 2016; Rai & Dhyani, 2023). Continued engagement with tribal nations and indigenous communities is imperative to improve drought assessment and build resilience in a changing climate, while fully reflecting the contribution of these partners (e.g., Dinan et al., 2022).

Bison Range on the Flathead Reservation, Western Montana. Photo by Crystal Stiles

Priority Actions:

1. Explore how ITEK can inform an understanding of risks and responses to drought, variability, forecasting onset and recovery of drought, and the likelihood, consequences, and impacts of drought.
2. Improve how drought risk is communicated and translated for people and places, and how risk is linked to their primary concerns and needs.
3. Build sustained relationships with entities such as Tribal Colleges and Universities to support things like maintenance of observation and monitoring networks while retaining technical knowledge within these communities and building capacity.
4. Ensure engagement is nested in reciprocity. Reciprocity is a native social norm that encourages a positive action to be rewarded with another positive action, motivating kind, respectful, and generous behavior (Bamford et al., 2020). Consider engagements that also honor indigenous customs and traditions (e.g., prayers, ceremony, offerings, gift exchanges).
5. Respecting data sovereignty requires that, as data such as oral histories are considered and integrated into assessments of drought, Memorandums of Understanding or other agreements are in place to ensure ownership and attribution of the information is acknowledged.



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