

**The Department of Interior (DOI) Listening Session on Tribal Relocation, Managed Retreat Protect-in-place Issues
in the Lower 48**

October 28, 2021, 3:00 pm- 4:00 pm ET ¹

Rocky Mountain, Southwest, Western, Navajo, Pacific, and Northwest Regions

Background

[Executive Order 13985: Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government](#) (EO 13985) directs agencies to conduct equity assessments of select programs to determine whether underserved communities face systemic barriers in accessing benefits and opportunities. Per EO 13985, underserved communities are defined as, “populations sharing a particular characteristic, as well as geographic communities, that have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life...such as Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons; persons with disabilities; persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality.” As part of implementing [EO 13985](#), the Department of the Interior (DOI) is assessing the equity of its programs related to three initial focus areas that support the agency's mission and have high potential for equity impact: (1) contracting, (2) recreational visitation, and (3) tribal discretionary grants. This session on Tribal Relocation, Managed Retreat, and Protect-in-place Issues in the Lower 48 is part of the Bureau of Indian Affairs Tribal Resilience Program Funding, and this session's goal was to take a deeper dive to understand Tribes' needs regarding climate and how grant programs could support Tribes. DOI contracted with Kearns and West to conduct 15 virtual listening sessions where the public were invited to provide comments and feedback on the barriers that limit access, diversity, and equity as well as recommendations of actions the Department should take to reduce barriers.

On behalf of DOI, Kearns and West facilitated a listening session on Tribal Relocation, Managed Retreat Protect-in-place Issues in the Lower 48 on October 28, 2021, from 3:00 pm- 4:00 pm ET.

Participant Data

Ahead of this virtual session, registration totaled 150 registrants. The listening session saw a maximum number of participants in the session with totals around 41.

Participants were invited to voluntarily use Poll Everywhere to understand who was participating and as a tool for building community in a virtual space. Participants were asked where they were participating from, what their Tribal affiliation is, what impacts have they experienced that may lead to relocation, managed retreat or protect-in-place activities, types of infrastructure at risk, and a scale of responses regarding action needed to be taken., training that may be required, if they have used or are aware of training, and finally, have they begun to develop or outline a plan for relocation, managed retreat, or protect-in-place planning.

Participants were located across a variety of geographies with large populations in the states of New Mexico, Washington, Washington DC, Colorado, California, and Arizona. In terms of Tribal affiliations, participants were affiliated with Ysleta del Sur Pueblo, Southern Tiwa Pueblo Lands, and Lakota Tribes.

¹ This meeting summary was prepared for the U.S. Department of the Interior by Kearns & West, Inc. (K&W) pursuant to an existing IDIQ contract.

Impacts experienced leading to relocation, managed retreat, or protection-in-place activities include drought, access to cultural resources, wildfire, and access to rivers.

Types of sites and infrastructure at risk impact everything including homes, cultural sites, wells, buildings, and natural resources.

The scale of response that will need to be taken due to these impacts will impact protecting cultural sites, government buildings, housing, and riparian vegetation sites.

Tribal expertise or training needed to plan for community relocation managed retreat or protect-in-place activities include technical land-based training, engineering expertise, community development experience, planning expertise, data sovereignty, governance experience, hazard mitigation, and climate adaptation expertise.

When asked about awareness or using existing training participants did not answer this question. When asked if participants have begun to develop or outline a plan for relocation, managed retreat, or protect-in-place planning, results were split between yes and no.

Agenda Overview

The purpose of this listening session was to begin a conversation with Tribal nations around the administrations' priorities of climate change, equity, accessibility, and environmental justice. This listening session hoped to provide an opportunity for sharing information, discussing climate adaptation and mitigation priorities, and learning about perceived barriers to action. Based on the goals of the session, Kearns & West with the assistance of Bureau of Indian Affairs developed two one-hour agendas to address the following questions.

- Is your Tribe dealing with more frequent and severe climate change impacts (e.g., flooding, erosion, sea level rise, etc.) that are likely to require partial or complete infrastructure relocation?
- If so, what are the resources (financial, technical, etc.) needed to assist the process? What are the barriers?

Miro, an interactive, collaborate virtual whiteboard was used to capture participants' responses to developed facilitation questions. Prior to the session, participants were sent a session reminder email with instructions on how to use Miro, which included a PDF of Miro Tips and a YouTube video tutorial. Sara Omar, Kearns & West, provided an additional demonstration of the Miro board, with instructions for those uncomfortable with the technology to express their ideas verbally or by using the chat function.

In addition to guided facilitation of Miro activities and reflection, the listening session opened with remarks from Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy, Management, and Budget Rachael Taylor and Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Bryan Newland. Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Taylor recognized Tribal nations and their relationship to climate change impacts, as well as thanked those who joined the session. Assistant Secretary Newland stressed that Tribal nations are at the forefront of the climate crisis, and adaptation and mitigation strategies are of great importance to the Department, and to the federal government. Both Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Taylor and Assistant Secretary Newland stressed that this session would provide information on how to prioritize resources to strengthen Tribal sovereignty around issues of climate change.

Climate Change Impacts

This section looked for participants to begin brainstorming answers to the following questions:

- What climate change impacts have you experienced that may lead to relocation, managed retreat, or protect-in-place activities?
- What sectors do your relocation activities affect? (e.g., water quality and water resources, subsistence, wildfire/flooding/ sea-level rise (SLR) reduction risk, outdated at-risk infrastructure, nature-based solutions, renewable, "build-back-better" resilience updates/re-models, etc.)

Participants were encouraged to reflect on current climate change impacts. **Participants were asked these questions through the Miro board Activity lending itself to the collective themes of cultural resources disappearing, ravine and coastal erosion, wildfires, storm surges, flooding, and drought.** One participant expanded on the commodification of resources for agricultural resources. These collective themes are illustrated in *Figure 1: Climate Change Impacts Miro Board Screenshot* in Appendix A.

Additionally, a Tribal member shared how they were unable to harvest resources, practice ceremonies due to border fencing. The participant noted the change and difficulty of finding and utilizing the resources needed for border fencing. Another participant expressed that income inequality and access to land is another barrier Tribal nations are facing. Access to land and the process of acquiring new Tribal land continues to be a difficult process.

Community Relocation Access

This section looked for participants to begin brainstorming answers to the following questions:

- What parts of the relocation/managed retreat, etc. process is easily funded through available sources, and what parts of the process are more difficult to access funding for?
 - What programs or funded sources have helped you in this work?
- Though a relocation plan or strategy will be different for each Tribal community, what types of guidelines or frameworks might be helpful to Tribal planners working on this issue? (e.g., Emergency Mgmt., Hazard Mitigation, Managed Retreat Plan, etc.)

Participants were encouraged to reflect on their experiences with community relocation access. **Participants through their participation on the Miro board stressed the need for indigenous knowledge to be encouraged and accepted into planning theory, frameworks, and examples. Participants expanded on this point to stress that planning efforts need to be in line with Tribal culture and community approaches.** Participants identified the Institute for Tribal Environmental Professionals Tribal Hazard Mitigation Planning Program (ITEP THMP) helping Tribes to develop hazard mitigation plans and related projects that can qualify for funding through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). These collective themes are illustrated in *Figure 2: Tribal Community Relocation Access Miro Board Screenshot* in Appendix A.

Additionally, participants shared the importance of having Indigenous Planning be at the forefront in respect to land and the [Seven Generations model](#). Participants advocated for the integration of holistic approaches to create opportunities and plans for housing for all stages of current and future life. One participant continued to expand on how culturally, Native Americans have multigenerational housing and people will stay in one home throughout their lifetime, stressing the cultural importance of housing. Another participant also stressed that in some cases, participants do not have the option to relocate, nor do they want to relocate due to spiritual and cultural connections.

Overarching Recommendations:

Participants throughout the session provided input and feedback to inform the Department. Participants were encouraged to use the Miro Board, and these recommendations can be seen in *Figure 3: Recommendations Miro Board Screenshot* in Appendix A. The key recommendations the Kearns and West Facilitation Team heard and would like to emphasize include:

- Sharing of available resources to help Tribal populations access opportunities, including (but not limited to): technical assistance, grant funding, and infrastructure.
- Creating trainings for both Tribes and Federal government agencies to allow the incorporation of holistic approaches into Federal programming, while increasing Tribe's technical data capabilities through data governance training.
- Supporting co-management of ancestral lands, while also expanding the return of ancestral lands to Tribal nations.
- Incorporating holistic strategies into Federal funding opportunities.
- Streamlining accessible routes for land-to-trust processes.
- Developing within DOI and BIA an expedited process for tribes impacted by climate change (i.e., mandatory trust acquisition of free lands).

Appendix A: Miro Board Screenshots

This Appendix features participant responses to a DOI Listening Session on Tribal Relocation, Managed Retreat Protect-in-place Issues in the Lower 48. The sticky notes included on the boards reflect participants' own words, experiences, reflections, and recommendations.

What climate change impacts have you experienced that may lead to relocation, managed retreat, or protect-in-place activities?

What sectors do your relocation activities affect? (e.g. water quality and water resources, subsistence, wildfire/flooding/slr reduction risk, outdated at-risk infrastructure, nature-based solutions, renewable, "build-back-better" resilience updates/re-models, etc.)

Anything else we should know?

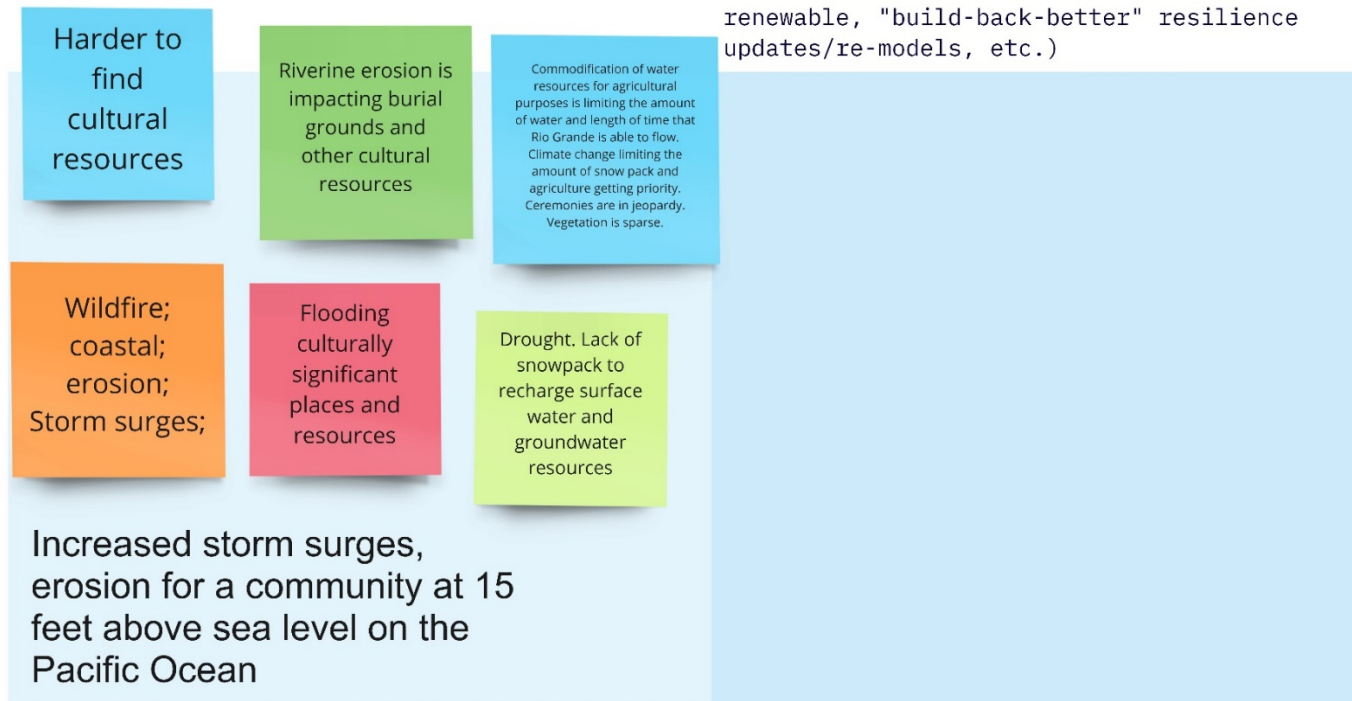


Figure 1: Climate Change Impacts Miro Board Screenshot

What parts of the relocation/managed retreat, etc. process is easily funded through available sources, and what parts of the process are more difficult to access funding for?

What programs or funded sources have helped you in this work?

Though a relocation plan or strategy will be different for each Tribal community, what types of guidelines or frameworks might be helpful to Tribal planners working on this issue? (e.g., Emergency Mgmt., Hazard Mitigation, Managed Retreat Plan, etc.)



Figure 2: Community Relocation Access Miro Board Screenshot

Add anything else you'd like DOI to know about?
Add your recommendations here!



Figure 3: Recommendations Miro Board Screenshot