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SB 310:

Tribal Sovereignty with respect to Cultural Burning

SCALE Summer Meeting 2025
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Introduction

- Karuk People have inhabited the mid-Klamath region since Time Immemorial
- Karuk people have never ceded their land, nor hunting, gathering, fishing, or stewardship rights, including cultural burning
- Karuk Constitution (recognized by BIA, DOI) defines Karuk Aboriginal Territory & Karuk Tribal Lands.
- Manage from the mountain top to the ocean: fish & fire

Beneficial Fire

- Prescribed Fire
- Prescribed Fire with Cultural Objectives
- Cultural Fire
- Wildland Fire Managed for Resource Benefit

The Karuk Tribe & SB 310

- **SB 310** (Dodd) was passed Fall of 2024, and went into effect January 1, 2025
  - It recognizes **Tribal sovereignty with respect to cultural burning**
  - Established an **agreements in lieu of permits** process with the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) and local air districts

- **Karuk Tribe** & the **California Natural Resources Agency** created the **first-ever SB 310 cultural burning agreement in March, 2025**
  - Key section focuses on notifications process

- Karuk Tribe established an SB 310 cultural fire practitioner designation process **Spring 2025**

- Karuk cultural fire practitioners burned ~ 50 ac in March 2025 with three people, and many more in June/early July, including during/in coordination with wildfire response in the Butler Fire to protect homes

Photo by Alex Watts-Tobin

One Step toward Righting Historical Wrongs

- **Indigenous people have been burning in intricate, sophisticated ways for millennia** to both manage fuels and wildfire risk, protect homes, AND also to promote food, fiber, medicine, wildlife habitat, manage pests/disease, and so much more.

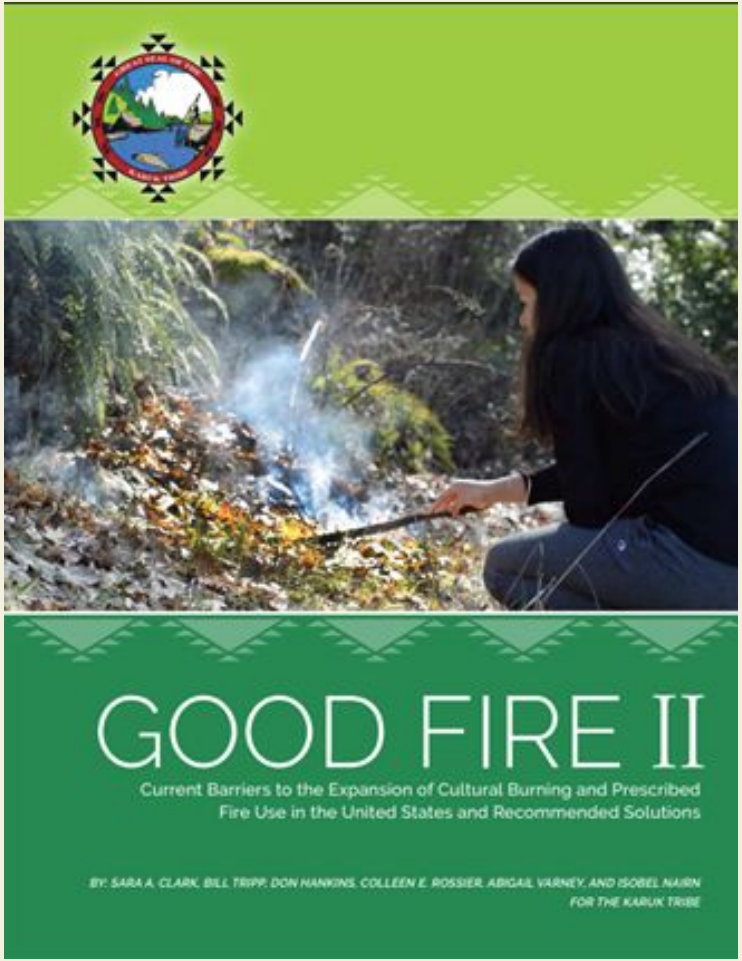
- **The scale of beneficial fire that will be needed now and into the future is going to require much more action than agencies can provide.**
  - Historically, ~4.5-6 million acres were burned in California annually
  - Currently, ~100,000 acres are proactively, beneficially burned
  - We need a 45-60x increase

- **Indigenous Peoples need to be given the space to revitalize their relationships with fire to the greatest extent possible.**

Challenges Remain…

- How can we better support & accommodate cultural burning on lands administered by federal agencies (e.g. USFS)?

- Cultural burning & air quality
  - Cultural burning should be exempt from Title 17 regs and/or treated like fireworks in the exceptional events process, due to their “traditional national, ethnic, or other cultural” significance



- Karuk Tribe's Good Fire II Report (2024) provides 85 recommendations to address barriers to beneficial fire (including prescribed fire and cultural burning)
- Includes both Federal and State (CA) Recommendations
- Federal recommendations align with and build upon Wildland Fire Mitigation & Management Commission's tribal recommendations
- Report available here: https://karuktribeclimatechangeprojects.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/good-fire-ii-march-2024.pdf

CULTURAL
BURN