

NATIONAL LABORATORY OF THE ROCKIES



State-Tribal Collaboration on Energy: Examples from Western States

January 15, 2026

Overview

- 1** **Introduction by National Lab of the Rockies (NLR)**
- 2** **Catherine Zingg (Ho Chunk Nation), Tribal Energy Alternatives**
- 3** **Sierra Graves and Davina Whitethorne (Diné Nation), CA Energy Commission**
- 4** **Heidi Moore-Guynup, Blue Lake Rancheria**
- 5** **Upcoming NLR Events**

Welcome



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*Project funded by the Department of Energy (DOE)'s Office of Policy,
in coordination with the DOE's Office of Indian Energy*

National Laboratory of the Rockies (NLR)

We want to express our gratitude and acknowledge that the land our main campus is on in Golden, CO is the traditional and ancestral homelands of the Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Ute peoples.

We recognize and pay respect to the Indigenous peoples from our past, present, and future, and we are grateful to those who have been and continue to be stewards of this land.



NLR at a Glance

3,717 Workforce, including:

- 2,906 regular/limited term
- 454 contingent workers
- 193 postdoctoral researchers
- 100 graduate student interns
- 64 undergraduate student interns

—as of 10/1/2025

World-class research expertise in:

- Energy Systems Integration
- Transportation and Fuels
- Buildings and Industry

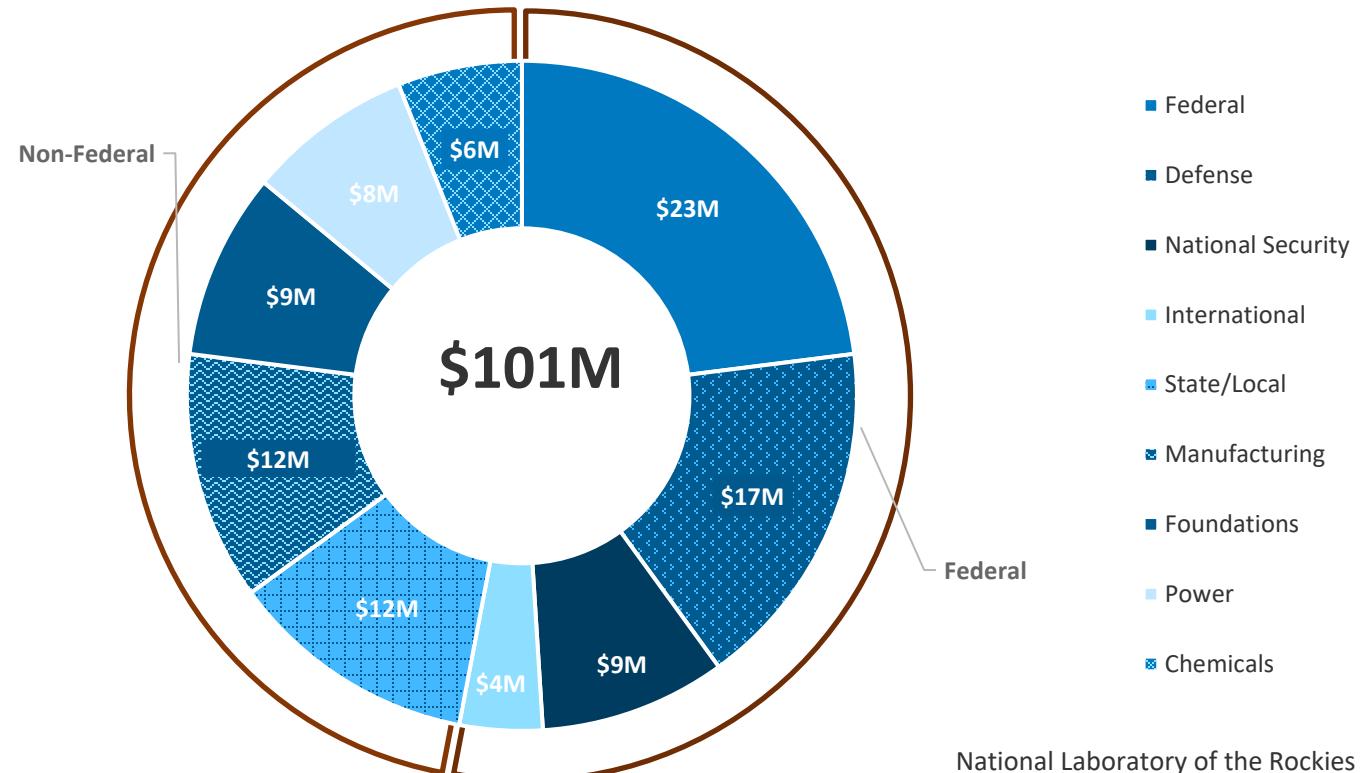
Partnerships with:

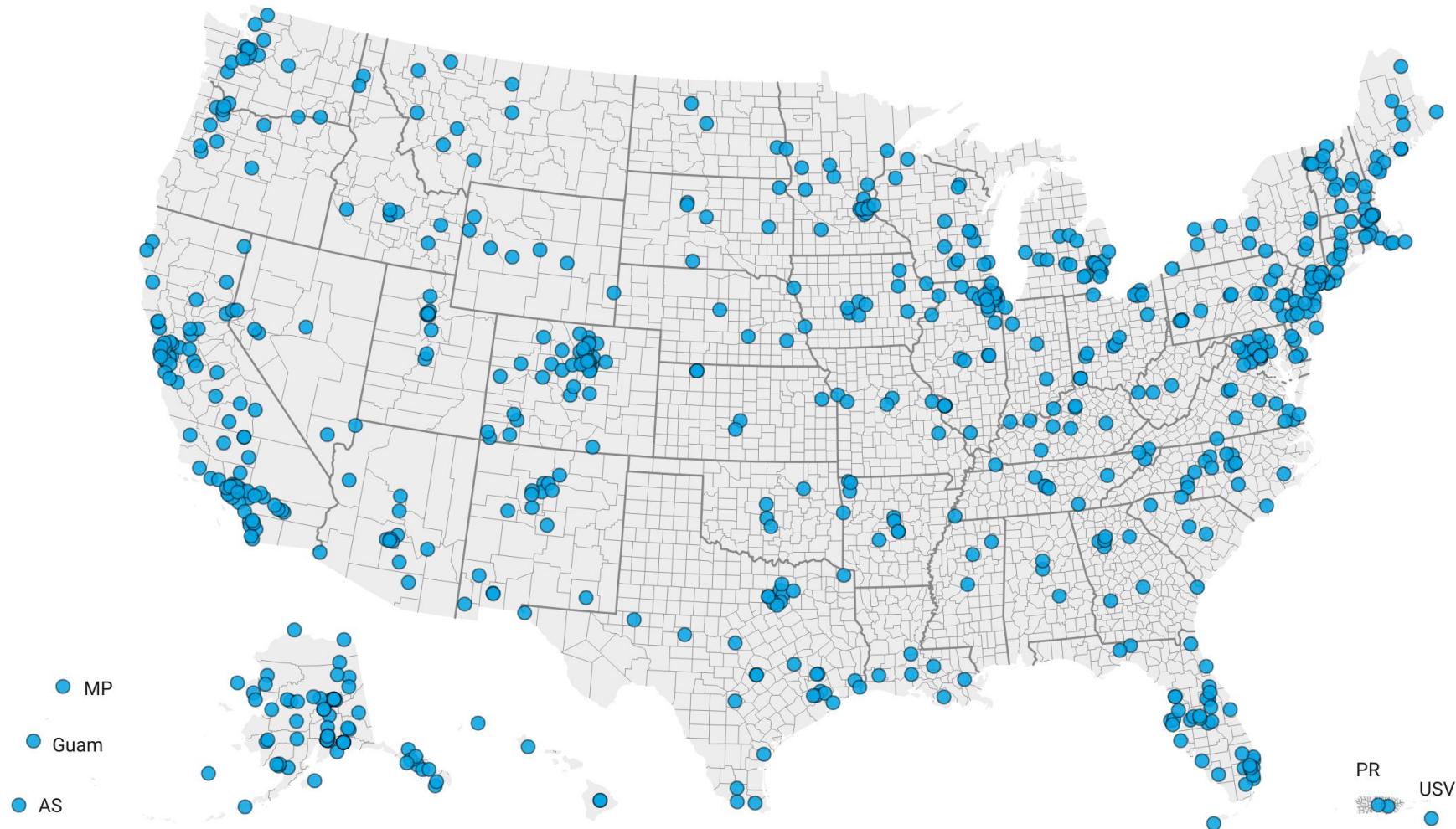
- Industry
- Academia
- Government

4 Campuses operate as living laboratories



FY 2025 Partner Bookings by Sector





NLR has partnered/supported **more than 3,000** communities, tribes, jurisdictions, utilities, and businesses to achieve their **energy goals** through planning, technical assistance, capacity building, workforce development, and more.



State-Tribal Energy Collaboration Project Goals

- Identify and answer key state questions about Tribes, Tribal energy support, and Tribal energy issues.
- Identify ways for state governments and Tribes to successfully collaborate on Tribal self-determined energy goals
- Publish 6 fact sheets, hold 5 webinars, and conduct 2 in-person trainings

Speakers



Catherine Zingg
(Ho-Chunk Nation)
Tribal Policy Director
Tribal Energy Alternatives



Sierra Graves
Director of Tribal Affairs
and Tribal Liaison for CA
Energy Commission



Davina Whitethorne (Diné Nation)
Tribal Engagement Specialist for CA
Energy Commission



Heidi Moore-Guynup
(Blue Lake Rancheria)
Director of Tribal and
Government Affairs



**TRIBAL ENERGY
ALTERNATIVES**
— A GRID AFFILIATE —

*From Equity to Sovereignty: What State Energy Agencies Can
Learn From Tribal-State Collaboration*

*Presented by Catherine Zingg (Ho-Chunk Nation)
January 15, 2026*

GRID Alternatives Mission



GRID Alternatives envisions a rapid, equitable transition to a world powered by renewable energy that benefits everyone.

Our Mission is to build community-powered solutions to advance economic and environmental justice through renewable energy.



Systems Installed

25,025

 kW Installed
106,232

 Lifetime Savings
\$853,011,800

 Tons of Greenhouse Gas Emissions Prevented
2,343,493

 Participants Trained
53,627



Tribal Energy Alternatives

Our Vision and Mission

Our vision is a balanced transition to energy sovereignty for Tribal Nations grounded in traditional values for future generations.

Our mission is to support Tribal Nations build community-powered solutions to advance economic and environmental justice through sustainable energy



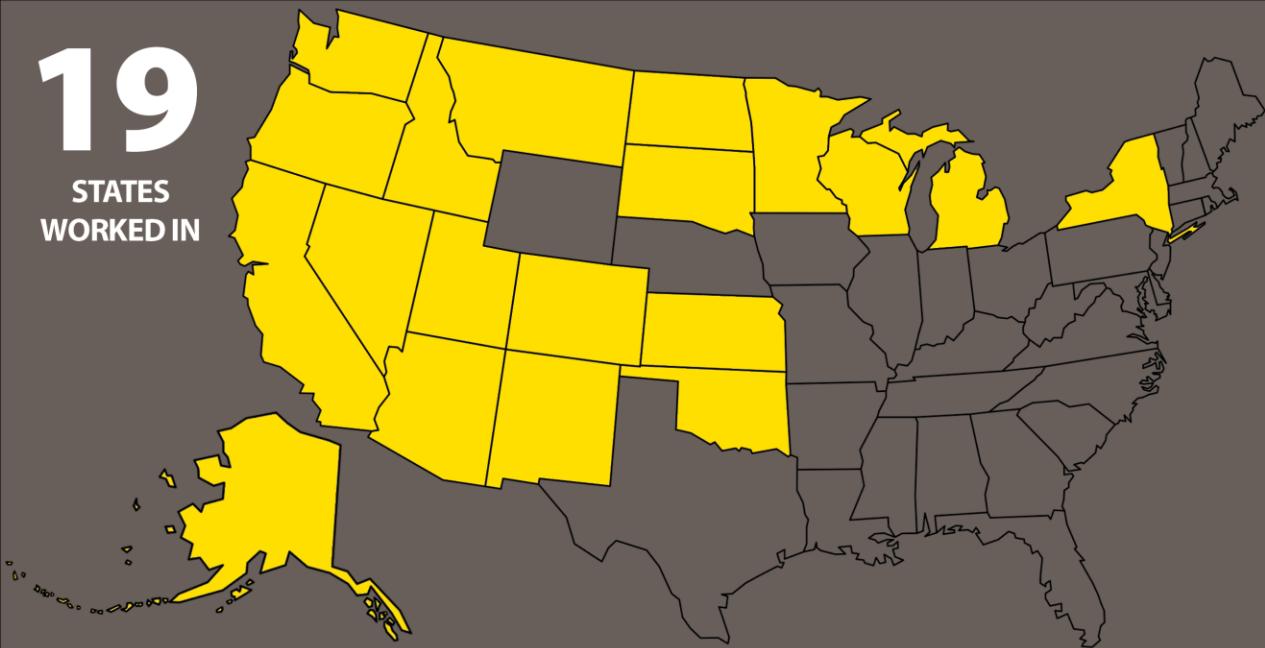
Tribal Energy Alternatives IMPACTS (TO DATE)

\$19 million

FUNDING
AWARDED
TO TRIBAL
PARTNERS

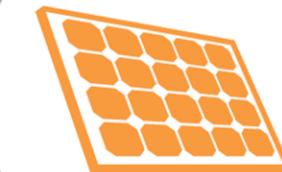
19

STATES
WORKED IN



8+

MEGAWATTS
SOLAR FOR
TRIBAL NATIONS



\$44 million
LIFETIME ENERGY SAVINGS



75+
TRIBAL PARTNERS

Our Policy Priorities

2025-2026

Expand Tribal access to distributed clean energy solutions.



Support policies that enable Tribes to deploy solar and storage projects that reduce electricity costs, improve grid resilience, and advance long-term energy self-determination for Tribal members.

Establish Tribal-specific set-asides in state clean energy programs and appropriations.



Create dedicated, flexible funding streams within state programs to ensure Tribes can fully participate in climate and renewable energy initiatives without competing against non-Tribal entities for limited resources.

Strengthen Tribal participation in regulatory and rulemaking processes.



Ensure Tribes have a formal role in proceedings related to resource protection, utility regulation, and distributed energy resources. This includes consultation requirements, access to technical support, and mechanisms that incorporate Tribal priorities into final decisions.



A Trend Toward Equity

What we are seeing across states:

- State energy offices (SEOs) increasingly rely on equity frameworks to engage Tribal Nations in energy policy and shape program design
- Equity dockets, justice metrics, and disadvantaged community definitions are becoming default engagement tools.
- While equity frameworks are powerful— they are not designed for sovereign governments.
- And when applied without adaptation, they can flatten Tribal governments into “communities” or “disadvantaged communities.”



Why Tribal Frameworks Matter

Tribal Nations are sovereign governments, and only the federal government sets rules for

Tribes that even Tribes can accept or reject. **It is a separate layer of authority. In short,**

Tribes are not just equity populations.

- **Equity frameworks and mandates focus on need and outcomes**
- **Tribal frameworks focus on authority, governance, and jurisdiction.**
- **Equity dockets can advance resources but cannot replace government-to-government engagement.**
- **This is where the tension lies: equity mandates focus on need not authority.**
- **Tribal decision-making timelines and processes differ from state and community models.**
- **Equity dockets risk diluting Tribal decision-making authority.**



Equity Docket in Colorado: Opportunity & Risk

- Colorado PUC Proceeding No. 22M-0171ALL (2025) opened to solicit public comment on what the Commission should define and implement equity in its regulation of utilities.
- The opportunity is to shape how the PUC deals with energy justice, create space to address past inequities, and invest in communities that need it most.
- Within this docket, there is a potential platform to include Tribes loosely in equity definitions and statewide equity conversations.
- The Risk: Tribes have been grouped in the disproportionately impacted communities (“DICs”) definitions where heightened equity procedures should apply.
- Development of an Equity Advisory Structure where Tribal representatives can potentially be a part of if our recommendations are adopted.
- In respect to a previous rulemaking 24R-0306E regarding significant sites, there will be a promised future rulemaking to carefully design Tribal energy needs within the state.
- It is still unclear how this initial equity docket will meaningfully engage Tribal Nations.



Self-Generation Incentive Program (SGIP): Program Design Lessons from California

A brief history – a \$280M fund established at the California Public Utility Commission (CPUC) to support distributed energy resources + storage solutions, and over time, it has evolved to include resilience, equity, and critical facilities.

Where Tribal allocations changed the design

- Explicit Tribal eligibility and recognition of Tribal ownership
- Dedicated Tribal funding goals separate from general equity categories
- Acknowledgement that Tribes should not compete directly with other equity applicants
- An additional need for project extensions beyond the three authorized – emphasizing timeline tensions and potential for cost shifts for Tribes with NBT transition.
- Tribal projects require Tribal governance timelines.

Why SGIP Advocacy matters: The program demonstrates how ongoing design choices can expand access for Tribes, normalize Tribal-specific pathways, acknowledge that Tribes need consistency, and hopefully influence other state programs



Why These Trends Matter

There is a pattern emerging across dockets, programs, and legislation:

- Equity frameworks are becoming foundational policy tools
- And without adaptation, they can limit how Tribes are engaged within state energy systems.
- When equity is tied to outcomes, agencies have more flexibility to design programs that actually work. And the opposite is true.
- Tribes should never have to qualify as disadvantaged to be engaged as governments.
- Equity should not be the only doorway for Tribal participation.

“Equity and Tribal sovereignty must operate in parallel with each other; both are needed.”





TRIBAL ENERGY ALTERNATIVES

A GRID AFFILIATE

BY NATIVES FOR NATIVES



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California Energy Commission Tribal Program

January 15, 2026



California Native American Tribes

- There are currently 109 federally recognized tribes in California, and more than 60 non-federally recognized tribes on the list maintained by the Native American Heritage Commission (NAHC).
- There is no state recognition process. The NAHC list is for cultural resource and sacred site protection.
- There is a tremendous amount of diversity among California Native American Tribes.



California Tribal Affairs Today

- 2011: Former Governor Brown issues an executive order requiring Tribal Consultation.
 - [EXECUTIVE ORDER B-10-11 | Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr. \(ca.gov\)](#)
- 2014: The Californian Energy Commission establishes a Tribal Consultation Policy.
 - [Tribal Consultation Policy \(ca.gov\)](#)
- 2019: Governor Gavin Newsom issues an apology and announces the Truth and Healing Council
 - <https://www.gov.ca.gov/2019/06/18/governor-newsom-issues-apology-to-native-americans-for-states-historical-wrongdoings-establishes-truth-and-healing-council/>



CEC Resolution Committing to Support Tribal Energy Sovereignty

On March 2, 2023, CEC and CPUC Commissioners held a first ever Tribal En Banc with Tribal Leaders, to share perspectives and priorities on advancing clean energy.

- establish frameworks for greater collaboration
- develop capacity-building and technical assistance resources
- increase tribal set-asides and partner to pursue federal funding opportunities
- prioritize community benefits
- enhance land-use considerations in clean energy planning
- increase cultural awareness and knowledge of tribal priorities



[Item 09 Tribal Energy Sovereignty Resolution \(ca.gov\)](#)

CEC-CPUC En Banc Meeting at Cal Poly Humboldt.



OIIP on Tribal Affairs and Tribal Energy Sovereignty



- Tribal consultation
- Tribal energy sovereignty
- Tribal cultural resource considerations
- Best practices for tribal energy grants, tribal energy equity indicators, and more
- Tribal energy economy



Partnerships and Collaboration



- Tribal Working Groups to Inform Policy and Planning
- Early, Often, and Meaningful Consultation, including under CEQA
- Leader to Leader Discussions



Engagement, Outreach, and Consultation

Engagement and Outreach:

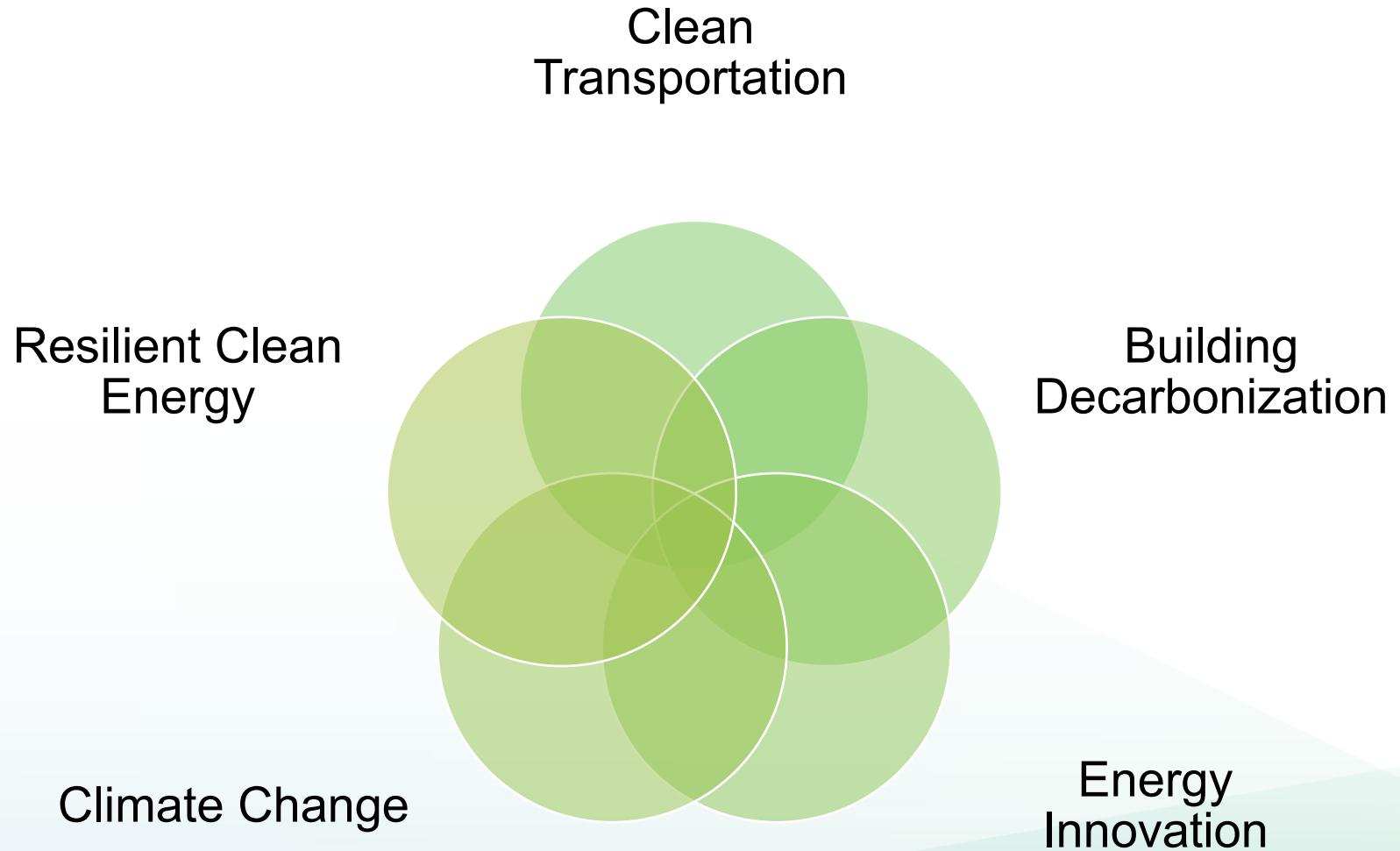
- DACAG
- Tribal Newsletters
- Relationship Building
- Site Visits

Consultation:

- Executive Orders
 - B-10-11
 - N-15-19
- Tribal Consultation Policies
- Invitations to Consult
 - Opt-In Permitting

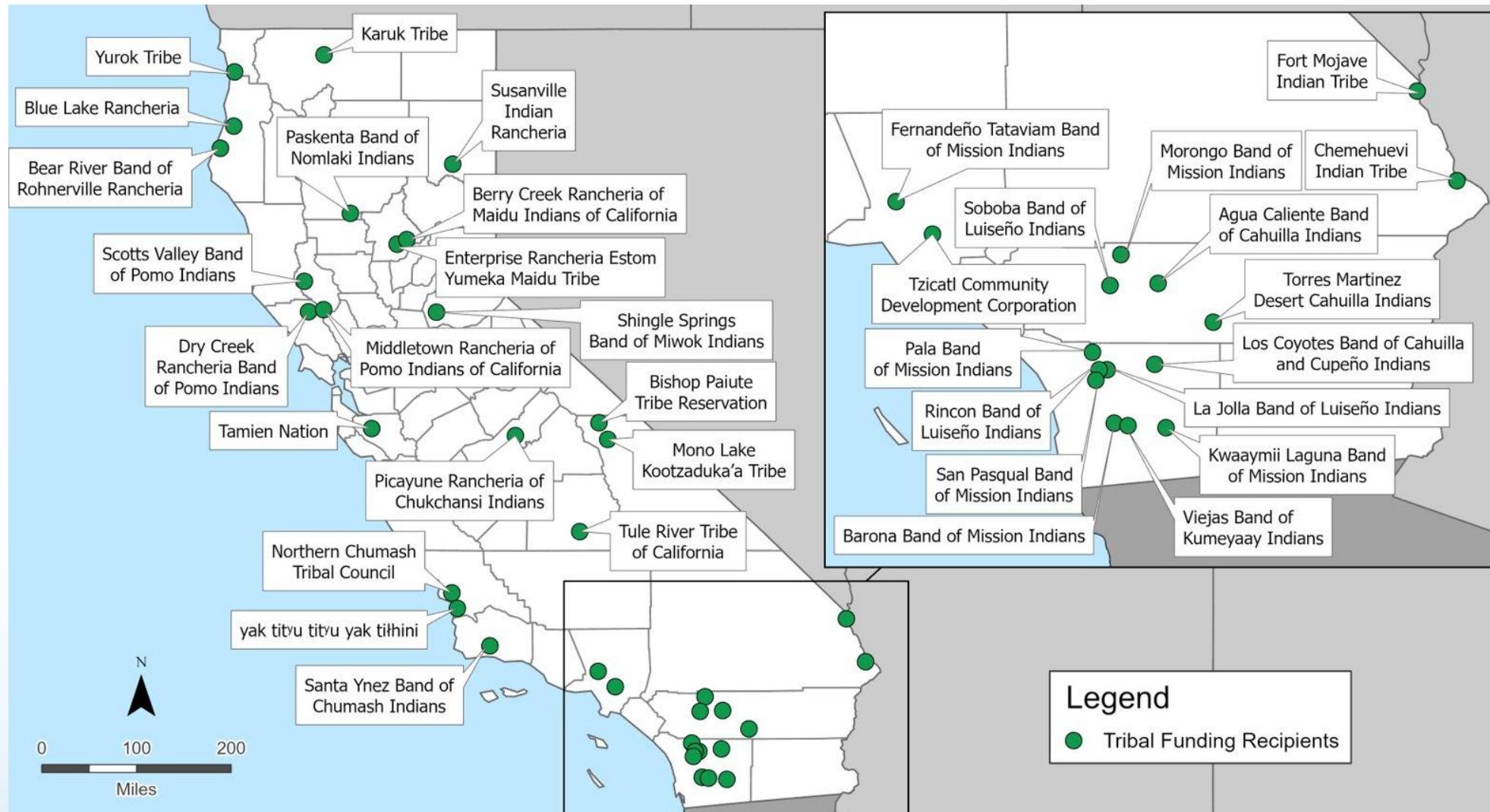


CEC Funding Opportunities





CEC and California Native American Tribes: Energy and Climate Collaborations





Tribal Microgrids

- Over 135 Million Dollars in Funding
- Projects Throughout the State
- 2 of the Largest Energy Grants to a California Native American tribe
- Seeding Further Energy Sovereignty Projects
 - Viejas and TERAS





Resilience for Fire and Emergency Facilities with the Soboba Band of Luiseño Indians

Solar charged, long-duration energy storage project:

- 50 kW/ 500 kWh of energy storage (vanadium redox flow) and 50 kW of solar PV.
- Alleviate the detrimental effects of PSPS events and grid outages
- Serve the surrounding community for at least 10 hours, and for over 24 hours with the inclusion of additional solar PV.
- Economic and workforce development
- Environmental benefits through a reduction in the use of diesel generators
- Public health benefits through the availability of Tribal ancillary emergency services
- Energy security by allowing the Tribe to generate electricity on site





Thank You!

Sierra Graves
tribalaffairs@energy.ca.gov



Blue Lake Rancheria Clean Energy Innovators



6 Hours North of San Francisco-13 miles East of Humboldt Bay



Blue Lake Rancheria is located in rural Northern California



Well known as a clean energy innovator and leader. Commissioned first-of-its-kind behind the meter microgrid.

Provides resilient energy resources when access to the grid is compromised.

2016 Obama Clean Energy Champion Award

Current Microgrids

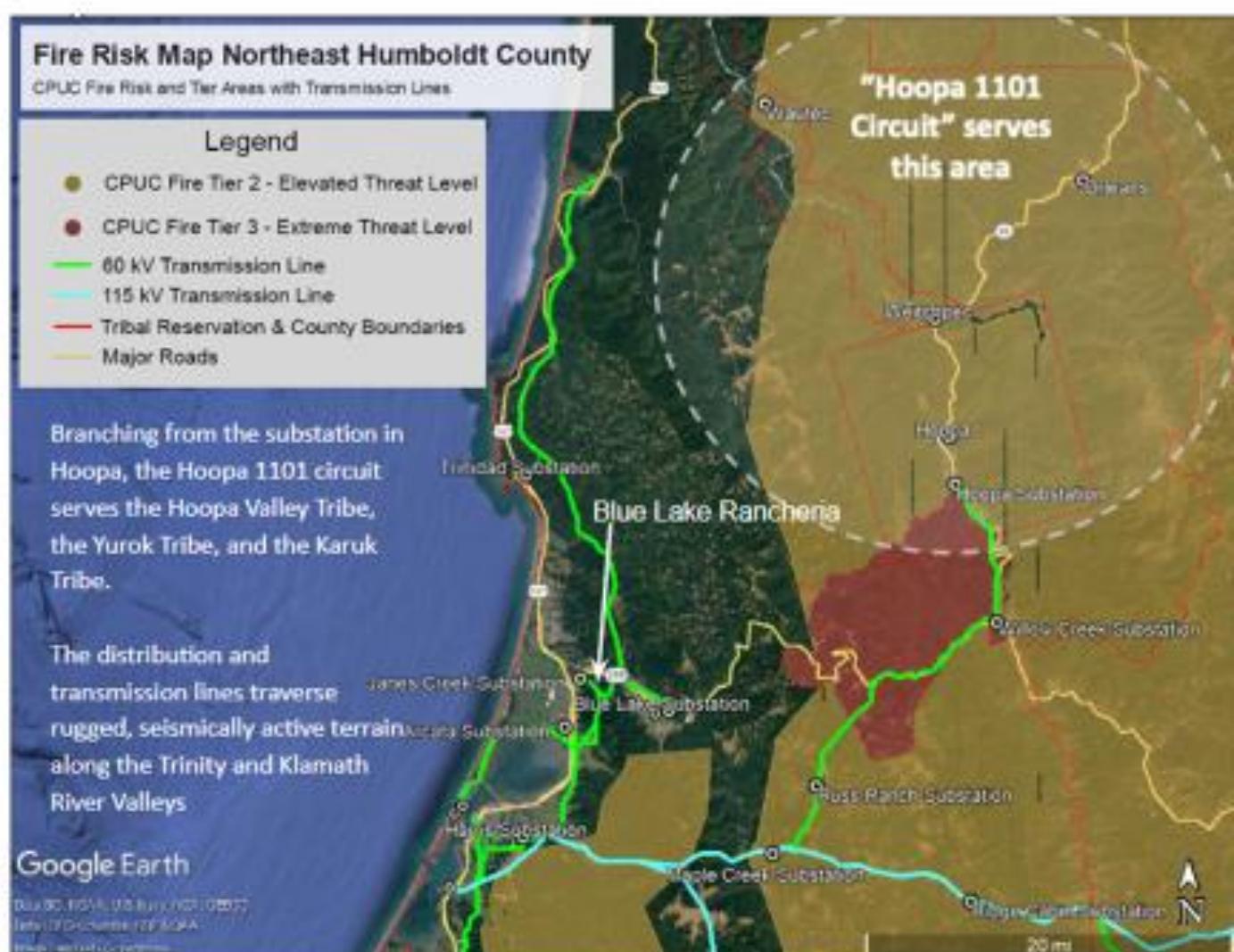
Each has:

- Solar Array
- Battery storage
- Diesel Generator
- Control system



Tribal Energy Resilience and Sovereignty (TERAS) Project

- Addresses one of the least reliable sections of the CA grid
- Three nested, community-scale, front of the meter microgrids
- Technology development and testing at Blue Lake Rancheria



Why Does this Matter?

The Blue Lake Rancheria has a microgrid system that allows the Tribe to become an "island of electrical activity" during power outages, including public safety power shutoffs. This has enabled the Tribe to provide critical support to the community during these events, such as providing power for medical devices and acting as a command center for emergency responders.

December 20, 2022.

PPS Events

Office of Emergency Services.

MOU's with multi-county agencies.

Hotel, Restaurant, Gas Station, Ta'm, Health Clinic



Demonstration Site

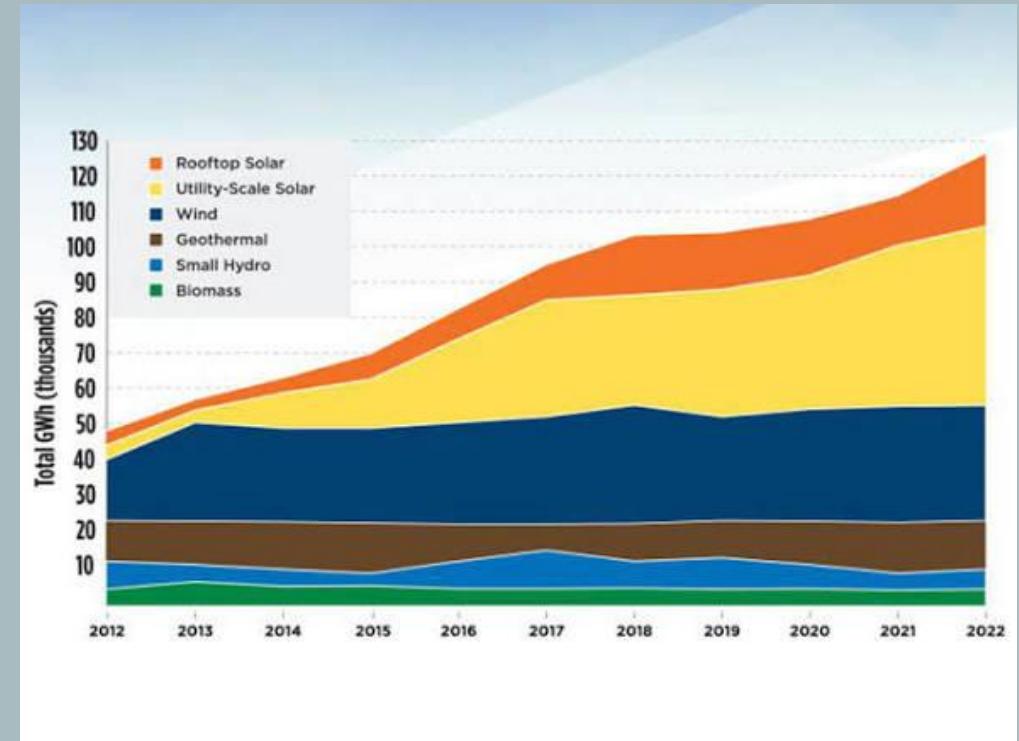
- California Energy Commission
- California Public Utilities Commission
- Japanese Public Utilities
- Informed 9 Tribal microgrids
- Europe
- Tribes across America
- Political Leaders
- Scholars
- Cal Poly Humboldt Engineering students
- CR students
- TK-12 students
- Workshops/Conferences
- Etc...



BLR's relationship with the California Energy Commission

- Funding to support initial microgrid
- Support with negotiating agreement with Pacific Gas & Electric
- Visibility to other funders
- Offshore Wind Tribal Working Group
- Tribal Capacity support to engage in clean energy
- EPIC follow-on funding for TERAS
- California Port Support

Together... Building a Resilient and Reliable Future!



What People in the Energy Space Need to Know?

- History and values of community
- Concerns of the community
- Tribes are Sovereign Nations/Federal Trust Obligations
- History of Extractive industries/Harms
- Forced Terminations/Internments/Education
- Masacres/Disease
- Distrust rooted in experiences
- Importance of Cultural Traditions and Resources
- Environmental Stewardship
- Murdered Missing Indigenous People MMIP
- Tribal/Community Capacity Limitations
- Tribal interests may extend beyond reservation lands to ceded and unceded territories
- Importance of Tribal data sovereignty (protecting sensitive info)





Pathways to Trust: A Learning Journey Towards Equitable Tribal PartnershipsSM

Pathways to Trust: A Learning Journey Towards Equitable Tribal PartnershipsSM is a Native cultural awareness training program developed and solely owned by the Alliance for Tribal Clean Energy. It is delivered in partnership with the Solar Energy Industries Association (SEIA).

A scenic landscape featuring a river in the foreground with rocky banks and patches of green grass. In the middle ground, a white bird, possibly a gull or tern, is captured in flight over a grassy area. The background is a dense forest of green trees.

Questions?



NLR Upcoming State-Tribal Webinar

Please
register in
advance!

State-Tribal Collaboration on Energy: Government-to-Government Best Practices

Feb. 24, 11 a.m.–12:30 p.m. MT

Join us to learn more about best practices for government-to-government relations and hear from states implementing Tribal consultation policies, featuring Tribal Energy Consultant Pilar Thomas, Minnesota Public Utility Commissioner Katie Sieben, Minnesota Public Utility Commission Tribal Liaison Angie McKinley, and California Public Utilities Commissioner Darcie Houck.

<https://www.nrel.gov/state-local-tribal/tribal-energy-collaboration>

NLR Upcoming State-Tribal In-Person Workshops

Free to Register!

NLR's Golden, Colorado Campus

Jan 21 – all day

Jan 22 – morning

There will be a free, optional NLR campus tour from 2-3:30 pm MT on January 22nd

Washington, DC Area

Feb 2nd 1-5 pm ET NASEO offices (Arlington, VA)

Feb 3rd 9 am – 1 pm ET at the Fairmont Hotel (DC)

The 2nd day is co-located with the NASEO Energy Policy Outlook Conference

**Honorariums available for State Staff, to either workshop!
Both workshops will cover the same materials**

<https://www.nrel.gov/state-local-tribal/tribal-energy-collaboration-workshop>



Q & A

If you have additional questions, please reach out to:
Karlynn.cory@nrel.gov
Allison.smith@nrel.gov

Photo from Getty-181828180

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