

# Workforce Development Strategic Plan '23-'28



Intertribal  
Timber  
Council

February 2024



## ITC Workforce Development Workgroup

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## Introduction

This strategic plan provides a roadmap for tribal, intertribal, state, federal, and ITC organizational efforts to develop a sustainable tribal natural resource workforce. The purpose for the plan is reinforced by ITC's dedication to protecting our people and their well-being through inclusivity and intolerance towards discrimination and sexual harassment. The strategic plan outlines specific outcomes and action steps for implementation over the next 5 years. These are the initial actions of an ongoing process that will extend far beyond the 5-year scope specified in this document.

The Workgroup's approach to workforce development is led by the following vision:

The ITC workforce development initiative envisions future generations of natural resource stewards grounded in culture and tradition to protect tribal lands and waters guided by innovative programs, inclusive leadership, and advancing technology supported by ITC and its partners.

Strategies outlined in the plan are organized according to three core themes::

Reach and Recruit

Educate and Prepare

Train and Retain

## Background

The National Indian Forest Resources Management Act (NIFRMA) directed the Secretary of the Interior, in consultation with the affected Indian tribes, to obtain an independent assessment of the status of Indian forest resources and their management. ITC was contracted to conduct assessments of NIFRMA by selecting ten nationally recognized forestry experts to serve as an Indian Forest Management Assessment Team (IFMAT). IFMAT investigates the 8 tasks outlined in the NIFRMA: funding; forest conditions; staffing and education; timber sales; procedures rules and policies; forest plans; minimum standards; and recommendations. IFMAT produces a natural resource assessment, addressing NIFRMA every 10 years. Based on the staggering workforce deficits and challenges, IFMAT III recommended that a strategic plan be developed to recruit, train, and retain tribal forestry professionals and technicians to address current and anticipated shortfalls for Indian forestry (Table 3 in the IFMAT report lists all recommendations).

ITC responded by creating a workforce development workgroup committed to developing a strategic plan that will respond to the natural resource workforce gaps. The ITC, with headquarters in Portland, OR, is a national consortium of Indian tribes, Alaska Native corporations, and individuals dedicated to improving the management of natural resources important to Native American communities. The ITC convened the Workgroup during a board meeting in Chandler, AZ, on February 26, 2018. The original strategic plan was created from the discussion and insights shared during that meeting. In 2023, the Salish Kootenai College Center for Tribal Research and Education in Ecosystem Sciences, at ITC's request, began the process of updating the plan and suggested edits and revisions to a newly re-convened workgroup. This plan represents the second iteration of the work begun by the 2018 workgroup.

## The Importance of Partnership

The goals and objectives outlined in this plan are informed by the prior achievements made by the community of tribal forestry professionals. As an inter-tribal coalition, ITC is represented by roughly 60-member organization whose efforts are further supported by Federal agencies and non-profit organizations, all of whom cooperate to meet common ends. There are too many organizations and programs to recognize them individually, but the importance of their collective contributions is mentioned to underscore the highly collaborative nature of this work. Funding for these efforts has been provided by the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs and the U.S.D.A. Forest Service Office of State, Private and Tribal Forestry and the Department of Interior Office of Wildland Fire.



## Natural Resource Workforce Assessment

This section provides an overview of findings from the IFMAT IV with regard to staffing and education guidelines of NIFRMA . The workgroup has relied on the information provided by IFMAT in order to gain a clear understanding of the workforce and its challenges. The fourth Indian Forest Management Assessment Team report, released in 2023, continues to show the unique challenges faced by tribal forestry and natural resource organizations. Many of these challenges have been reported in past IFMAT reports, but in some ways have become even more taxing. For the second consecutive decade, the number of forestry staff has declined, and the total number of professional foresters has dropped for the first time since 1993.

The Workgroup identified that tribal natural resource programs risk declines without consistent funding and resources to support daily operations, education, recruitment, and training or competitive salaries and benefits. Further, the Workgroup identified the following consequences from the IFMAT III report findings. BIA operates within a complex system of land tenure, jurisdictional uncertainties, and administrative burdens intended to reduce liability and respect tribal sovereignty and self-determination. The Workgroup recognizes that currently the BIA is experiencing a \$100 million annual budget shortfall required to meet fiduciary trust obligations to tribes. This shortfall has resulted in tribes seeking short-term, piecemeal funding to meet immediate operational needs. There is a need to develop a strategy that will address and overcome administrative barriers and support operational capacity, including workforce development.

Some other observations and challenges of note include:

- ✦ **Half of the tribal workforce was 50 years old or older.**
- ✦ **The proportion of women in the workforce increased from 15% in 2013 to 21% in 2023. Interestingly, 76% of women working for the BIA or tribes are enrolled members of federally recognized tribes, compared to 46% of males.**
- ✦ **The percentage of Native Americans in the workforce overall remains unchanged for the second consecutive decade at 48%**
- ✦ **Indian forest programs needed a 120% increase in staff, compared to a 72% need recorded in IFMAT III.**
- ✦ **Indian forest programs were understaffed compared to public and private forest programs. In 2013, there was one professional forester for every 30,000 acres of trust land. Based on 2019 data, IFMAT IV found that this has increased by 10,000 acres.**
- ✦ **Many tribes struggle to recruit and retain forestry personnel. This is due to remote locations, limited housing and in some cases, inadequate funding has led to uncompetitive salary and benefits packages.**

- ✦ **Tribal forest program staff spent a disproportionately high amount of time pursuing, managing and reporting outside grant opportunities to compensate for inadequate funding, putting further stress on staff time.**
- ✦ **K-12 outreach, supporting post-secondary forestry education programs, continuing education, and training and workshops as critical to the success of ushering in the next generation of natural resource managers.**
- ✦ **Outreach needed to capture increasing number of tribal forestry professionals and students in natural resource programs at colleges and universities.**

Identified additional staffing needs for BIA and Tribal forestry and fire in 2019

	<b>Category</b>	<b>1991</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2019</b>
<b>Forestry</b>	Professional	223	286	315	412	373	294
	Support	64	52	80	63	56	56
	Technical	284	223	254	245	329	210
	Temporary	N/A	104	292	49	159	440
	<b>All</b>	<b>571</b>	<b>666</b>	<b>940</b>	<b>769</b>	<b>917</b>	<b>1,000</b>
<b>Fire</b>	Professional	–	–	46	49	59	59
	Support	–	–	24	16	38	18
	Technical	–	–	102	117	157	126
	Temporary	–	–	57	114	208	854
	<b>All</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>229</b>	<b>297</b>	<b>462</b>	<b>1,057</b>
<b>Total</b>	Professional	223	286	362	461	431	352
	Support	64	52	104	80	94	74
	Technical	284	223	356	362	486	336
	Temporary	N/A	104	348	163	367	1,294
	<b>All</b>	<b>571</b>	<b>666</b>	<b>1,170</b>	<b>1,066</b>	<b>1,379</b>	<b>2,057</b>

Additional staffing needs by category and job type in 2019

<b>Discipline</b>	<b>Professional</b>	<b>Support</b>	<b>Technical</b>	<b>Temp/ seasonal</b>	<b>Total</b>
Admin support	6	25	1	0	32
Forest development	35	4	51	177	265
Forest education	5	2	6	18	31
Forest planning	79	4	54	5	142
Forest product sales	65	3	62	6	135
Forest protection (including fire)	63	19	127	854	1,062
Forest research	1	0	1	2	4
Multi-use management	43	6	21	156	225
Other	5	1	1	0	7
Program administration	37	11	5	3	55
Roads	12	2	9	9	31
Technical assistance	3	0	0	65	68
<b>Total</b>	<b>352</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>336</b>	<b>1,294</b>	<b>2,057</b>

## Education



Regarding educational efforts essential to develop a workforce, the IFMAT III reported that Native American enrollment at large colleges and universities increased 19% across natural resource fields between 2004 and 2011 and that tribal college natural resource programs saw an increase in enrollment. IFMAT IV did not focus specifically on education, but recent data drawn from the USDA Food and Agriculture Education Information System (FAEIS) for the years 2018-2021 shows that enrollment of Native students in forestry programs has dropped slightly, with about 75 undergraduates and 15 graduate students attending at any given time. A significant drop in 2022 should be monitored to see if it is a trend. This drop could be a data entry error or related to national factors such as the pandemic or increased housing costs.



Recruitment and retention of Native Americans into forestry education programs is an essential component of workforce development. Much can be done to develop programs at tribal colleges and support Native students at Universities with strong forestry programs. In 2021, for example, of the 79 Native American forestry undergraduates, 45 attended SKC, 11 were at NAU and the next largest cohort was Humboldt University with 4. There were only four other programs that had a cohort of 2 or more students. There were 14 institutions where only one Native American student was enrolled.

## Training

Lack of capacity to attend trainings and low investment from the BIA in these efforts have resulted in a shortage of professional development and technical training opportunities. IFMAT III found that the BIA invested approximately 33% of what the US Forest Service spent on personnel training. Although new data was unavailable during IFMAT IV, evidence suggests that this has not changed significantly and that access to quality trainings that meet tribal needs is still an issue. A workforce survey conducted during both IFMAT III & IV asked respondents to identify training opportunities that would most benefit them.

These major themes have been consistent across both surveys:

- ✦ **Leadership/upper level management skills,**
- ✦ **GIS and GPS,**
- ✦ **Laws and authorities (especially P.L. 638 and trust administration),**
- ✦ **Wildland fire/fire science and ecology,**
- ✦ **Inventory and cruising software and growth and yield modeling**
- ✦ **Silviculture.**

The IFMAT IV report findings and recommendations reveal an urgent need to address the dramatic shift in natural resource workforces across BIA and tribal programs. Bureaucratic limitations often impact the ability for tribal programs to operate at full capacity, effectively diminishing federal trust responsibilities and tribal self-determination. Tribal programs face challenges specific to their regions and programs, including a lack of interest from youth in natural resources, remote locations and access to housing.

## Supporting Wellness Efforts



ITC recognizes the deterioration of the environment and how this affects tribal communities and lifeways, including loss of ties to the land and resources, loss of access to traditional foods and medicines, increased problems with health and dependence on social welfare systems. The ITC further acknowledges risks to the forestry and wildland firefighter workforce, including stress from emergency incidents that may lead to suicides, which have been documented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Respecting these risks, this plan intends to include the communication of appropriate resources, services and programs equipped to meet the mental health needs of tribal natural resource professionals.

## Obstacles and Challenges



The challenges to workforce development affect each tribal natural resource program and community. The workgroup identified the following root challenges toward developing a workforce:

- ✦ **The need for vibrant, cohesive outreach, recruitment, and retention strategies;**
- ✦ **Limited economic opportunity and upward mobility within tribal natural resource programs;**
- ✦ **Competing job opportunities with outside agencies and entities that further stress a limited workforce;**
- ✦ **Need to develop workforce leadership skills;**
- ✦ **Access to natural resource management education and technology;**
- ✦ **Need for cultural approaches to natural resource management; and**
- ✦ **Investment in youth engagement.**

To grow and sustain a workforce, ITC will need to surpass these root challenges. ITC acknowledges the impact of a declining workforce and program shortfalls from delayed technology integration. It also recognizes that Native youth face competing job opportunities that may conflict with a place-based tribal lifestyle. Workforce development efforts must be supported by establishing a strong coalition of intertribal, regional, state, and national partners reaching youth, young professionals, mid-career adults, and retirees. To achieve this level of integrated organization and address these challenges, ITC must leverage existing relationships and create new ones.

## Workforce Development Insights

The initial workgroup shared insights to support a sustainable workforce. These key considerations inspired this plan's vision and set the foundation for establishing actions to tackle workforce development challenges. This section summarizes the Workgroup's discussion and its observations on how to approach overcoming the identified challenges to workforce development. The following is a list of the summarized insights expressed during discussion, highlighting the key aspects of the Workgroup's workforce development initiative.

- ◆ **Leadership** - Increasing the proportion of tribal members involved with their tribal natural resource programs will lead to more members filling management and leadership positions.
- ◆ **Community stewardship** - Involving community members leads to long-term stewardship of natural resources.
- ◆ **Succession training** - Succession planning within tribal natural resource programs helps prepare staff for leadership roles.
- ◆ **Youth engagement** - An outreach gap exists with K-12 students and their awareness of natural resource fields, like forestry.
- ◆ **Student Recruitment** - College students completing 4-year natural resource degrees are an important source to fill position vacancies, and this number needs to increase.

- ✦ **Mentorship and leadership training programs** - Mentorship and leadership training programs will connect youth, professionals, retirees, and elders.
- ✦ **Diversity and inclusion** - Women are inadequately represented in leadership roles. However, the recent increase in the proportion of tribal women in the workforce is encouraging.
- ✦ **Training programs** - To prevent silos, training programs need to cross multiple natural resource areas and be intertribal.
- ✦ **Technology** - New technology will bring changes to practices and skills which the current workforce may not already possess.
- ✦ **Responsiveness to change** - Program operating models need to be responsive to changing work environments, including an aging workforce, advancing technology, funding mechanisms, shifting demographics/values, and new tribal natural resource partners.
- ✦ **Tradition and culture** - Tradition and culture are foundational to tribal natural resource management and need to be integrated into all aspects of training, development and mentoring.



## Core Themes

The Workgroup plans to initiate regional and national strategies that support a disproportionately aging workforce and attract a new workforce generation by using innovative practices for national, regional, and local impact. ITC already has a network of tribal, state and federal partners that are willing to support the workforce development initiative. However, ITC needs to coordinate internal and external capacities to implement strategies and action steps.

### Core theme 1: Reach and Recruit



- ◆ Create communications initiatives.
- ◆ Create a communication plan that includes Tribal liaisons within Indian education i.e., tribal community colleges and university networks
- ◆ Maintain consistent community engagement regarding tribal natural resource opportunities.
- ◆ Implement recruitment strategies that include regular engagement with Native students and employees at career fairs, job sites and meetings by tribes, BIA, and ITC.
- ◆ Create an online presence that is a source for information on tribal forestry and available work opportunities.
- ◆ Increase access for Native American and employees to post secondary education programs
- ◆ Support efforts to increase K-12 engagement with natural resources including youth camps and internships

## Core theme 2: Educate and Prepare



- ◆ Support students preparing to enter the workforce by including vocational training, associate degrees, bachelors degrees, certificate and credentialing programs.
- ◆ Increase the number and variety of educational opportunities and support for Native Americans interested in Forestry education.
- ◆ Provide improved opportunities for working Aides and Technicians to obtain additional education.
- ◆ Evaluate the potential effectiveness of online education to train working technicians and support students in remote locations.

## Core theme 3: Train and Retain



- ◆ Explore and list successful mentorship, leadership, and other professional development programs that include cultural components.
- ◆ Increase and highlight continuing educational opportunities for all tribal natural resource staff.
- ◆ Conduct evaluation of current tribal natural resources workforce skills.
- ◆ Explore funding mechanisms to support natural resource workforce development.
- ◆ Create strategies to ensure sustainable funding to support tribal natural resource programs and personnel.



## Strategic Action Steps

Table 7 through Table 10 (next page) discuss each strategic pillar and its intended goals. Under each pillar, action steps are listed with brief descriptions, key players, and completion timelines required for each step. These markers will help determine how ITC will execute each action step.

### Reach and Recruit

<b>1.1 Coordinate communications on workforce</b>	Coordinate with IFMAT 4 Communications/Media contracts to highlight workforce findings.	TREES Wood and Co. Eco-Trust	Ongoing, to be completed by Jan 2024
<b>1.2 Develop online resources</b>	Develop a new website focused on Tribal Forestry Workforce, jobs and related resources.	TREES  TREES	Online launch Spring 2024
<b>1.3. Improve recruitment by better understanding personal motivations.</b>	Motivational analysis based on existing application letters submitted to Truman Picard and SKC College to Career program.  Develop a workforce gaps and opportunities assessment that addresses engagement strategies.	TREES/ITC Education Committee  TREES	December 2024  January 2025
<b>1.4. Design a program that engages retirees?</b>	Evaluate feasibility of a “Warhorse Brigade” as an ITC program that engages retirees to continue contributing to the advancement of tribal environmental and natural resource management.	TREES and workgroup	Workgroup input
<b>1.5. Collect information on resources available to youth</b>	Identify, leverage and expand on resources available to support youth interested in pursuing careers in natural resources, including programs, scholarships, and internships.	TREES	November, 2025
<b>1.6. Expand access to emerging tech and skills</b>	Explore desirability and feasibility of an on-the-job training/ apprenticeship program for tribal forestry and fire	TREES and workgroup/BIA	Initial assessment Spring 2025

## Educate and Prepare

<b>2.1. Alternative education for workers</b>	Identify alternative educational programs to meet 0460 standards to support working technicians and acting Foresters who have alternate degree.  Create template for interested working technicians to navigate alternate pathway	TREES	June 2025
<b>2.2 Analyze existing educational opportunities</b>	Identify where current Native forestry students are and what support mechanisms currently exist.  Perform gap analysis to better understand obstacles and opportunities to increase number of Native students in forestry programs at both tribal and non-tribal universities	TREES	Initial assessment completed. Ongoing  January 2026
<b>2.3 Fire/Fuels education</b>	Identify current educational delivery for fire personnel, including possible 401 programs in fuels Identify other needs (“soft skills”) and provide access to education/training	TREES with BIA NIFC	May 2026
<b>2.4 Internship programs</b>	Support existing internship programs and work to increase their collaboration and overall success	TREES C2C, BIA Pathways, tribal programs, others	Ongoing
<b>2.5 Certificate programs</b>	Explore current options in “micro-credentialling” and workforce certificates in forestry related areas (e.g. GIS, UAS, etc.). Create list of opportunities and make recommendations about possibilities to enhance or improve access	TREES	June 2027
<b>2.6 Gathering Tribal Forestry Students</b>	Conduct bi-annual tribal forestry student summit	TREES with ITC, host institutions	Fall 2024, 2026, 2028

## Train and Retain

<b>3.1. Identify current mentoring programs</b>	Identify existing mentoring programs and create a “best practices” paper on effective, successful approaches and resources.	TREES	January 2027
	Succession planning discussion; role of 460 series & case studies highlighting need for professionals	ITC Symposium workshop	June 2025
<b>3.2 Support student access to ITC Leadership</b>	Identify funding support for student and early career travel to ITC Committee Meetings and Symposium	TREES	Ongoing, beginning in 2024
	Bi-annual student summit	TREES/ITC and host institution	Fall 2024, 2026, 2028
<b>3.3. Identify training needs and evaluate existing training opportunities for fire and forestry employees</b>	Identify training needs using IFMAT III and IV workforce surveys and targeted surveys as needed Compile a list of available regional and national trainings that meet these needs Explore tribal specific training options as needed	TREES	Spring 2027
<b>3.4. Establish a database of existing leadership education programs</b>	Develop an accessible database of programs, region/locations, timing, eligibility, costs, and curriculum. Periodically announce the availability of leadership development programs and encourage participation in them. Share information from the database and recruit for programs.	TREES with input from Operations and Education Committees	March 2024
<b>3.5. Develop a tribal leadership training curriculum</b>	Identify an existing leadership curriculum and explore the desirability and feasibility of modifying it to include tribal and cultural components.	TREES with Workgroup and ITC Committees	June 2025
	Develop curriculum modules as needed.		January 2026
<b>3.6. Support opportunities for tribal females</b>	Identify current support systems and provide recommendations for additional support  Identify future funding in an effort to codify workforce development initiatives and to develop sustainable, long-term support systems	TREES, Interested ITC members	Ongoing, Dec 2024

## Workforce assessment, reporting and follow-up

<p><b>Assess Progress</b></p>	<p><b>Progress Assessment</b></p> <p><b>Quarterly</b> – TREES will track overall progress and report at quarterly ITC Board meetings. Process to be determined but could include updates to both the Education Committee and update the Operations Committee</p> <p><b>Annually</b> –</p> <p>The Workgroup will convene annually to:review and assess the plan.</p> <p>TREES will develop a briefing report that examines achievements, areas for improvement, and next steps</p> <p>Communicate with ITC Board to discuss broader interaction with member tribes on workforce development progress</p>
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### Additional items of discussion:

Although, the tasks above come in response to the specific challenges detailed by there are several important challenges that lie outside the scope of this work group. These include:

- ◆ Identifying and communicating wellness efforts,
- ◆ Increasing access to affordable housing and childcare,
- ◆ Identifying pathways to increase the participation of qualified descendants and non-Indians who might enter the tribal workforce, and
- ◆ Conducting reform efforts to achieve parity with non-Indian/ Federal forestry professionals.

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