



THE STEWARDSHIP PROJECT

 SUPPORTED BY THE
CLIMATE & WILDFIRE INSTITUTE

The Stewardship Project is a collaboration of leading academics and tribal cultural practitioners supported by the Climate & Wildfire Institute. This new initiative is intended to promote greater use of active stewardship in the Western United States to address the wildfire crisis. It is critical to realign federal policies in a non-partisan way to prioritize scientifically sound restoration, including Traditional Indigenous Knowledge, and enable greater use of Indigenous practices. Below are our recommendations that address the Tribal right to steward, workforce and capacity development, regulatory realignment, and public management areas.

Tribal Right to Steward

- 👤 Codify a rebuttable presumption that Tribal entities can conduct proposed stewardship activities on federal lands, which federal agencies may attach reasonable conditions to but not significantly alter or unilaterally deny.
- 👤 Expand the authority of the Forest Service and other USDA agencies to enter into co-management with Tribal entities. Ensure tribal entities can hold final decision-making power, with the support and consultation of federal agencies.
- 👤 Requires that tribal entities are included in the decision making structures for all Farm Bill programs.

Regulatory Realignment

- 👤 Direct the USDA to determine that reintroduction of beneficial fire is not a federal action for NEPA, as fire activity aligned with Indigenous fire regimes are part of baseline conditions. Require the USDA to include in its NEPA analysis for forest management projects the risks posed by fire suppression and uncharacteristically severe wildfires and the ability of alternatives to reduce potential wildfire impacts.
- 👤 Direct that reintroduction and maintenance of beneficial fire as a mechanism to steward the fire-dependent ecosystems upon which endangered and threatened species depend is not an “agency action” pursuant to the Endangered Species Act.



Workforce & Capacity Development

- 👤 Authorize funding for regional beneficial fire training centers in the Western United States that are available to tribal, state, private, and federal fire managers, with both a common core curriculum, regional specialization, and cultural frameworks where appropriate. Centers should be run by a collaborative body, including members from Tribes and academia, versus a federal or state agency.
- 👤 Prioritize Forest Service crews to support stewardship activities, and ensure they are not deployed only for wildfire suppression. Encourage the agency shift to permanent, year-round stewardship positions, retaining recent salary increases.
- 👤 Authorize the Forest Service to create Stewardship Incident Command Teams (SICTs) with specific responsibility and focus on complex prescribed fires and wildfires managed for resource benefit. Organize SICTs to provide key roles for Tribal and local partners to prioritize Indigenous and local knowledge into proactive stewardship planning and implementation.

Public Land Management Areas

- 👤 Develop Strategic Fire Zones. Require Forest Service land management districts or field offices to evaluate areas for potential designation as a “Strategic Fire Zone,” in consultation with local tribal entities and communities, where ignitions can be managed for forest resilience.