

# California Upper Watershed Gathering 2018

## **ONE YEAR AGO...**

A gathering took place at Genesee Valley to bring together a wide variety of stakeholders to discuss upper watershed management in California. This convening culminated in the production of the Upper Watershed Management Guiding Principles. These guidelines promote the following:

- Recognition of the value of tribal leadership
- Importance of tribal ecological knowledge, based on thousands of years of experience, as a foundation for forest management
- Community engagement and collaboration in actively managing forests
- Recognition of fire as a key element for maintaining healthy ecosystems
- Statewide education is necessary to inform all Californians of the benefits of healthy watersheds

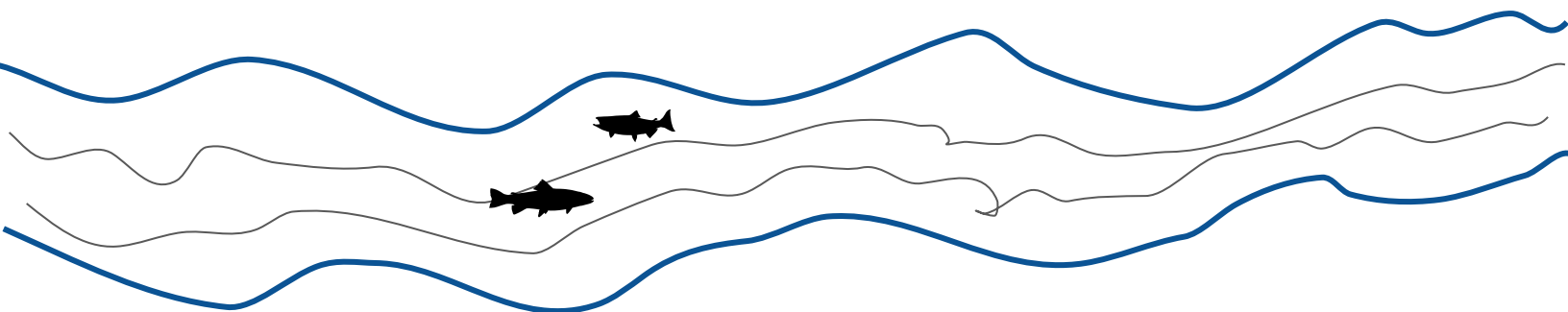
This year, the Klamath Gathering brought together a diverse group of people from federal, tribal and state agencies, as well as diverse non-governmental organizations to build upon this framework.

## **JULY 11, 2018 – KLAMATH GATHERING DAY 1:**

To kickoff the gathering, all attendees met by the Klamath River. They spent the next eight hours rafting downstream, conversing about the history and significance of the watershed. Along the way, the group stopped at two tributaries which provide critical cold water for beleaguered salmon and steelhead fisheries during the hottest months of the summer. These stops offered participants a hands-on opportunity to move rocks in creek mouths with guidance from local fish passage crews, slowing and deepening the channel so both juvenile and adult salmon could have easier access to



habitat upstream. Dinner on the river bar included salmon cooked traditionally on redwood sticks over a pit of coals, courtesy of Yurok youth leading the group Ancestral Guard (pictured left), as well as acorn soup prepared by a local Karuk woman. This day demonstrated the variety of ways in which Klamath community members actively engage in the protection and restoration of their local rivers. Moreover, it gave attendees ample opportunity to converse with indigenous locals.



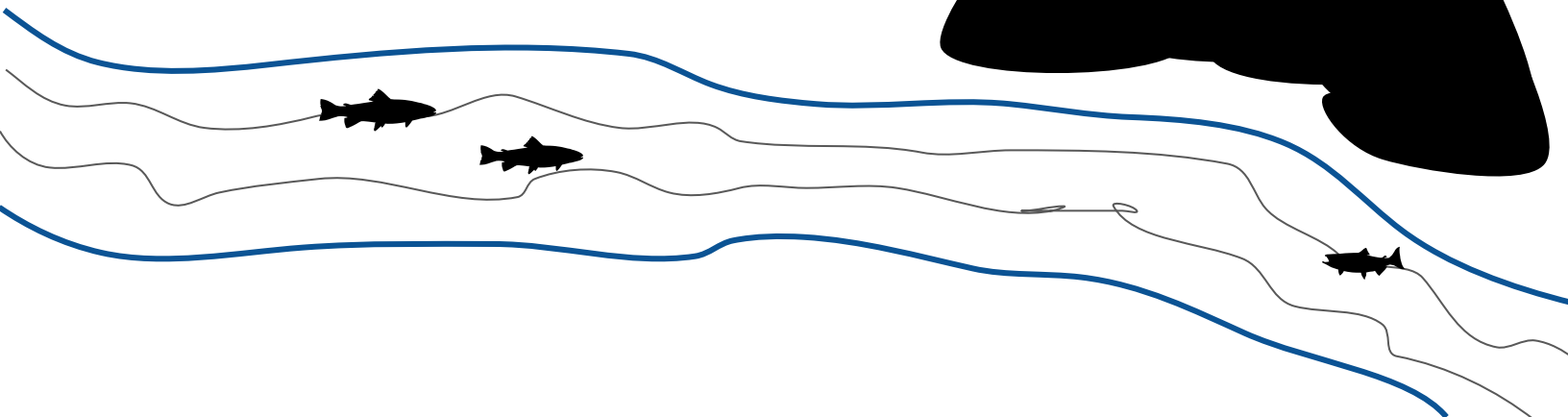
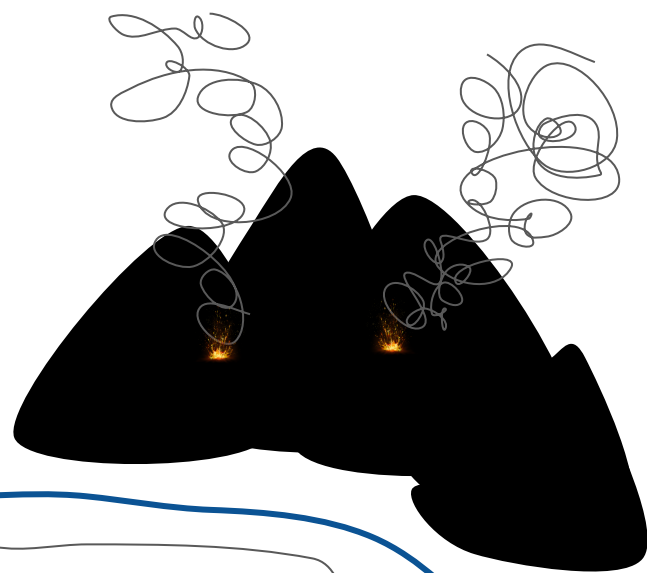
## JULY 12, 2018 - KLAMATH GATHERING DAY 2:

The second day began with the participants in the Gathering visiting a cultural burn that was a part of the Roots and Shoots Project. The burn demonstrated the new and unique collaboration between the Karuk Tribe and the Six Rivers National Forest in managing the forest. Tribal members and representatives of the U.S. Forest Service explained the importance of prescribed burning for reinvigorating the productivity of cultural resources, such as oak acorns and huckleberries. The group overlooked the Orleans Valley and discussed the importance of reintroducing cultural burns to a landscape where fire has been excluded for over a century (pictured below).



Escaping the heat, the group moved indoors for the afternoon to watch a series of short documentaries from tribal youth and tribal members, in order to learn more about the cultural importance of fire in the Klamath Mountains. Deputy Director of CALFIRE, Helge Enge, then led a conversation on CALFIRE's growing support for prescribed and cultural burns throughout the state.

The day ended with a refreshing swim in the Klamath River, followed by a series of presentations back at camp. Karuk Tribal Members emphasized the role that the health of the forest plays in providing material for food, tools, and traditional ceremony (pictured below). Mavis, an elder of the Karuk Tribe, also spoke of her lived history. She described how the forest had changed over her lifetime. Overall, this day highlighted the importance of traditional ecological knowledge in addressing forest health and longevity, as well as future opportunities to build upon collaboration among stakeholders.



## JULY 13, 2018 – KLAMATH GATHERING DAY 3:

On the third morning, the group built upon the previous year's discussion about watersheds. The Genessee Valley Gathering focused on how we talk about "upper watersheds". The Klamath group started by generating definitions of "watershed" more generally. It seemed obvious until everyone started talking. The group generated many definitions, but most agreed that watersheds are a relational concept designed to connect people and places. This is important because it makes watersheds an organizing principle.

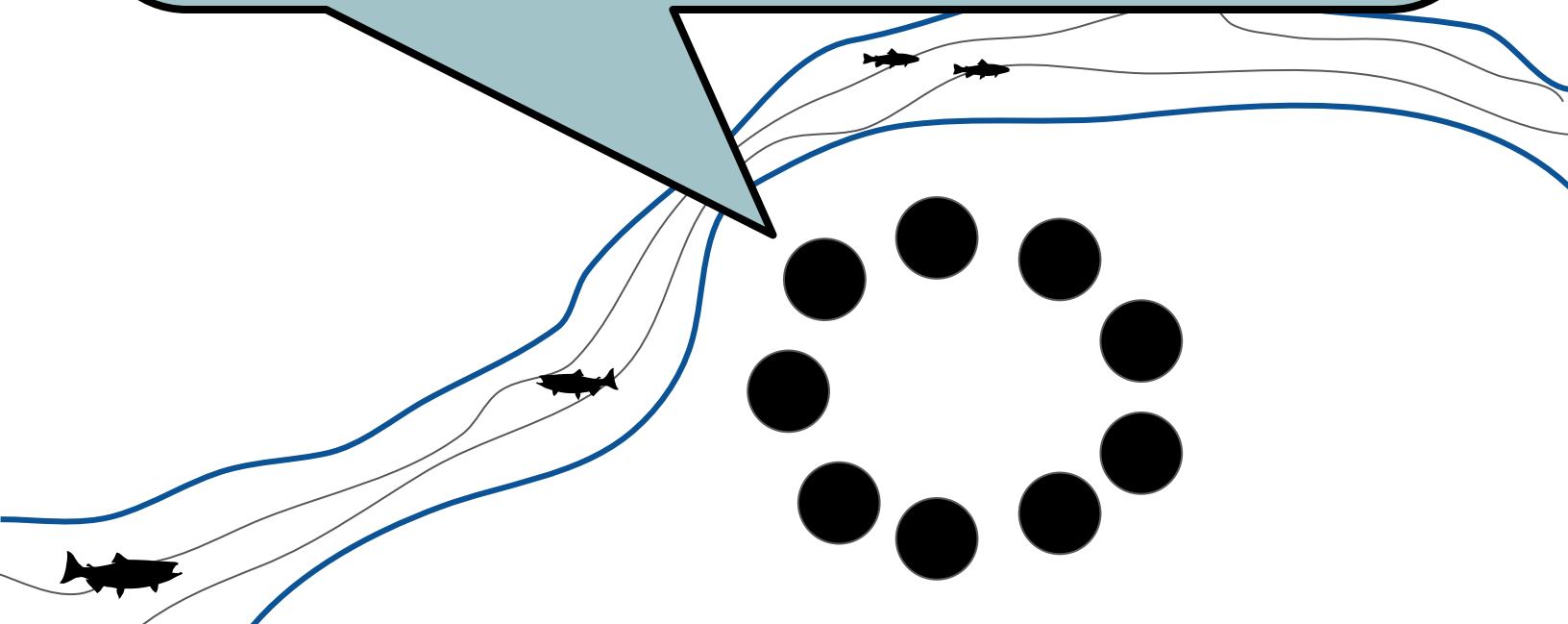
The larger group then broke into smaller groups focused on turning what we'd learned into action. Many technical issues were raised related to air quality impacts, funding, and liability. These discussions were enriched by the diversity of local, tribal, state, and federal participants sharing their expertise and perspectives.

In the afternoon the group returned to the forest to the site of the Western Klamath Restoration Partnership's Somes Bar Integrated Fire Management Project, where a Karuk tribal member explained how his marking crew decided which trees would be cut on the project. While standing in the forest, he explained how the crew varied from the prescription and then helped stakeholders to understand why. The Somes Bar project is part of a Master Stewardship agreement between the Karuk Tribe and Six Rivers National Forest.



Watersheds are a place-based identifier, defined by scalable geographic boundaries that are intrinsically tied to fire-sheds and flood-sheds. They also represent a cultural identifier, connecting people across boundaries. Unfortunately, many Californians have lost their cultural ties with water. How can we strengthen this identity and spread the "Watershed of the People" movement?

Many Californians are dependent on their upper watersheds in terms of water quality, visibility, health, etc....As a result, in order to manifest change, work should span across multiple watersheds. A particular focus should also be placed on supporting upper watersheds. Perhaps we can use watersheds as an organizational tool to bolster support across regions and increase watershed reciprocity.



## LOOKING AHEAD:

As stakeholders left the Klamath Gathering, all felt certain that this was only a beginning; work must continue well into the future to advance watershed management practices in California. The following chart summarizes “What’s Next?”:



Increased efforts are needed to educate legislators as well as the general public about tribal ecological knowledge (such as prescribed burning and watershed management and watershed health). Youth must also be engaged in these efforts as this is a multi-generational effort to restore forest health.

Stakeholders must consolidate their efforts and partner together, local to state scale and locals connected across the state, to strengthen the message.. Moreover, statewide tribal engagement must continue to increase. As policies evolve, the state should seek more avenues to incorporate tribal ecological knowledge.

Tribal leadership is needed when conducting prescribed fires. Additionally, tribes should participate in the governor’s Forest Management Task Force. Support is needed on the state level to streamline policies in order to increase tribal capacity and promote on-the-ground projects.

## SURVEY RESPONSES:

Following the Klamath Gathering, a survey was sent out to participants in order to gauge the effectiveness of the event. Respondents provided positive feedback; they particularly enjoyed how the activities enabled them to initiate discussions with others. As one participant stated “When we work together wondrous things can emerge”. With that said, improvements could be made in the future to account for seasonal conditions, as it was very hot during the gathering and mosquitos were active in the campground. As a whole, however, attendees left the event feeling knowledgeable and satisfied.

## MANY THANKS:

This gathering could not have taken place without help from all of our supporters. Support from the Karuk Tribe, the US Forest Service, the Mid Klamath Watershed Council via the Yellow Chair Foundation, the Nature Conservancy, and the California Governor’s Office of Planning and Research made the event possible—from funding, in-kind contributions of staff time and volunteers, to the use of an entire campground for a week.



The Nature Conservancy

