

PRESS RELEASE

Karuk Tribe

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KARUK TRIBE COLLABORATES FOR ECOSYSTEM RESILIENCE

USDA awards the Karuk Tribe and UC Berkeley \$1.2 Million for collaborative research and education to increase Tribal Ecosystem Resilience in a Changing Climate

Orleans, CA – As Californians face an expanded wildfire season, continuing drought, and other harbingers of climate change, cultural practitioners and researchers at the [Karuk Tribe](#) are building on a decade-long partnership with UC Berkeley’s College of Natural Resources and USFS Pacific Southwest Research Station to learn more about stewarding native food plants in fluctuating environmental conditions. The Karuk Tribe and UC Berkeley have been awarded a \$1.2 million USDA grant for field research, new digital data analysis tools, and community skill-building aimed to increase resilience of the abundant cultural food and other plant resources – and the Tribal people whose food security and health depend on them.

Lisa Hillman, Program Manager of the Karuk Tribe’s *Píkyav Field Institute* and [Jennifer Sowerwine](#), UC Cooperative Extension specialist at UC Berkeley and co-founder of the [Karuk-UC Berkeley Collaborative](#), will co-lead the *xúus nu'éethi* – *we are caring for it* research project.

“We are delighted to continue our connection with UC Berkeley through this new project,” said Lisa Hillman. “Through our past collaboration on Tribal food security, we strengthened a network of Tribal folks knowledgeable in identifying, monitoring, harvesting, managing for and preparing the traditional foods that sustain us physically and culturally. With this new project, we aim to integrate variables such as climate change, plant pathogens and invasive species into our research and management equations, learning new skills and knowledge along the way and sharing those STEM skills with the next generation.”

UC Berkeley’s College of Natural Resources, UC Agriculture and Natural Resources, and the Karuk Department of Natural Resources will support the project with postdoctoral

researchers, botany, mapping and GIS specialists, and Tribal cultural practitioners and resource technicians. Dr. Frank Lake, Research Ecologist and Tribal Climate Change liaison at the US Forest Service, [Pacific Southwest Research Station](#), will contribute to research and local outreach activities. The San Rafael-based [Center for Digital Archaeology](#) will help develop a new offline field recording system and online monitoring portal. “This project underscores the enormous successes we have had with these long-standing collaborative partners,” said Hillman.

Project activities include expanding the Tribe’s herbarium (a research archive of preserved cultural plants launched in 2016 with UC Berkeley support), developing digital tools to collect and store agroecological field data, and helping Tribal community members and youth learn how to analyze the results.

The research team will assess the condition of cultural agroecosystems including foods and fibers to understand how land use, land management, and climate variables have affected ecosystem resilience. Through planning designed to maximize community input, they will develop new tools to inform land management choices at the federal, state, tribal and community levels.

All project activities will take place in the Karuk Tribe’s Aboriginal Territory located in the mid Klamath River Basin, but results from the project will be useful to other Tribes and entities working toward sustainable management of cultural natural resources in an era of increasing climate variability. Findings will be shared nationwide through cooperative extension outreach services and publications.

The new project’s name, *xúus nu’éethi – we are caring for it*, reflects the Karuk Tribe’s continuing commitment to restore and enhance the co-inhabitants of its aboriginal territory whom they know to be their relations – plants, animals, fish, water, rocks and land. At the core of Karuk identity is the principle of reciprocity: one must first care for these relations in order to receive their gifts for future generations.

This work will be supported by the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative Resilient Agroecosystems in a Changing Climate Challenge Area, grant no. 2018-68002-27916 from the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

For more information, visit the Karuk – UC Berkeley Collaborative website at <https://nature.berkeley.edu/karuk-collaborative>.

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