



Assembly Members Chris Rogers and Damon Connolly Visit Karuk Country



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Trip Focused on Fire, Fish, and Forest Health

ORLEANS, CA — Last week, the Karuk Tribe proudly welcomed California Assembly Members Chris Rogers and Damon Connolly for a tour of Karuk territory and in-depth discussions on the intersection of fire, fisheries, and Tribal stewardship. The visit included tours of cultural burning sites, Karuk traditional houses, Slater fire impacts, traditional fisheries, and key fish habitat along the Klamath River. They also visited the site for the future Karuk Fire Resiliency Center, which California is supporting with \$10 million in early budget action this year.

During their visit, Assembly Members met with Tribal leaders, basketweavers, cultural practitioners, and natural resource managers to learn how Karuk-led land stewardship and Indigenous fire practices restore ecosystem balance, provide wildlife habitat, and promote wildfire and climate resilience while protecting lives and homes.

The dialogue also highlighted that while Klamath dam removal has been a great success, there are continued threats to Klamath River salmon which face pressures from water diversions, climate change, and habitat loss. And there are also continued threats to Karuk communities due to the ongoing impacts of fire suppression policies, including the suppression of Indigenous burning. While there have been some key successes, there is more work to be done.

“Our relationship with fire and fish goes back thousands of years,” said Karuk Tribal Chairman Russell “Buster” Attebery. “We’re encouraged to see state leaders recognizing that Indigenous knowledge and Tribal partnerships are central to restoring these lands and waters.”

Assembly Members Rogers and Connolly are both members of the California State Assembly Budget Committee as well as the Select Committee on Wildfire Prevention, which Assembly Member Connolly chairs, and both have championed legislative efforts to increase forest resilience and address biodiversity loss. These legislative efforts include both the \$10 million budget ask for the Karuk Fire Resiliency Center as well as Assembly Member Rogers’ Karuk-sponsored bill, AB 263, of which Assembly Member Connolly is a coauthor.

This bill, if passed by the legislature and signed by the Governor, will ensure minimum flows in the Scott and Shasta Rivers while permanent flows are being negotiated through a multi-year process. The Scott and Shasta are two essential tributaries to the Klamath River, and critically important nurseries for coho and Chinook salmon. This visit marks an important step towards deeper collaboration between the State of California and Tribal governments on shared environmental goals.

“It was an incredible opportunity to tour the ancestral lands of the Karuk Tribe and meet with their leadership to discuss the intersectionality between tribal stewardship, fisheries and fire mitigation,” said Assembly Member Damon Connolly (D-San Rafael). “It was an honor to learn about the extensive benefits of practices like cultural burning in preventing future wildfires and to witness the ecological recovery happening since the removal of the Klamath Dam. It has been a privilege to work with the Karuk Tribe and my colleague, Assembly Member Rogers to secure funding for the Fire Resiliency Center and coauthor AB 263, which is crucial for the long-term health of salmon populations and the Scott and Shasta Rivers.”

“It was truly inspiring to witness firsthand how the Karuk Tribe is applying their invaluable expertise towards fire resiliency and ecological restoration,” said Assembly Member Chris Rogers. “I’m grateful for the partnership we’ve developed with the Karuk Tribe, and I look forward to working together to deliver results for our communities.”

Rooted in their Indigenous knowledge, practice, and belief systems, the Karuk Tribe is at the forefront of fire and fisheries policy and innovation. With dam removal complete, the Tribe continues to advocate for co-management of ancestral and aboriginal lands, the Tribal right to burn, and restoration of Klamath ecosystems, fisheries, and fire regimes. In 2024, the Tribe published their **Good Fire II report**, which lays out recommendations for enhancing beneficial fire. They also recently sponsored California Senator Bill Dodd’s SB 310, which for the first time in state law acknowledges Tribal sovereignty with respect to cultural burning. The Tribe also has long-standing partnerships with state and federal agencies as well as local watershed groups for the planning and implementation of restoration efforts throughout the mid-Klamath basin.

As the state faces escalating wildfire seasons and collapsing fisheries, the Karuk Tribe continues to lead with time-tested knowledge and a vision for renewal and revitalization.

Thank you to the Karuk Tribal Council and Humboldt Area Foundation for their support for the visit.

**Director of Public
Information**

Tyvin Whittaker

twittaker@karuk.us

**Chairman of Karuk
Tribe**

Russell “Buster” Attebery

battebery@karuk.us

**Director of Natural
Resources and
Environmental Policy**

Bill Tripp

btripp@karuk.us



