

CLIMATE ADAPTATION BARRIERS AND NEEDS EXPERIENCED BY NORTHWEST COASTAL TRIBES: ADDENDUM

In August 2024, the [Tribal Coastal Resilience Portfolio](#) of the Northwest Climate Resilience Collaborative released the report, [Climate Adaptation Barriers and Needs Experienced by Northwest Coastal Tribes](#). Tribal governments were invited to review a draft of the report before its release and provide comment, with the option of making these comments public in an addendum to the report. Comments received through this process are provided below.

If your Tribe would like to provide additional comment to include in this addendum, please contact Meade Krosby: mkrosby@uw.edu

SAMISH INDIAN NATION (comments received July 24, 2024):

The information below summarizes the core feedback from listening sessions conducted by ATNI and the UW Climate impacts group regarding the needs of Tribes throughout the northwest coast. Sections in [blue](#) are directly relevant to the climate adaptation program at Samish.

Key Barriers & Needs

Workforce Capacity: Tribes throughout the NW are experiencing capacity challenges due to funding disruptions or instability of funding opportunities.

- Need: Consistent funding to meet capacity goals.
- Need: Dedicated climate resilience staff to provide expertise and prevent other tribal staff from being pulled away from vital government function.
- Need: Funding to develop affordable housing near Tribal administrative centers to support staff recruitment and retention.

Samish Relevance: Certain climate change specific, or climate change adjacent, challenges have been constrained by capacity limitations. I.e. The employment of an emergency management specialist and a conservation law enforcement officer within Samish's government required funding from a limited duration funding program, the Washington State Climate Commitment Act. Potential changes to funding availability represent an insecurity in the stability of the role within the organization.

Funding

- Need: Increased funding to meet the scale of necessary adaptation needs.
- Need: Flexibility of funding. Allows tribes to respond to climate impacts without burdensome administrative demands.
- Need: Fewer qualification requirements. Less burdensome match or personnel requirements to make funding more accessible.
- Need: Long term funding. Makes hiring staff worth the effort and minimizes funding continuity disruption to the adaptation efforts.
- Need: Funding alignment. Funding that's better aligned with Tribal priorities, rather than the priorities of funding entities would better allow for the incorporation of Indigenous Knowledges.

Samish Relevance: Providing Samish with the flexibility to allocate funding resources as we see fit allows us to more effectively address climate adaptation needs that are specific to Samish Traditional Territory. Climate impacts, and the adaptation/mitigation strategies to address them, are localized and thus strategies to manage them are most effective when they're developed and implemented at a local level.

Partnerships & Collaboration

- Need: Coordination among states and federal agencies to engage with many different entities and address adaptation needs.
- Transparent, government-to-government consultations that respect tribal sovereignty while upholding federal trust responsibility, federal reserved rights, treaty rights, and Tribal adaptation interests.
- Develop protocols between tribal and non-tribal entities to reduce risks to tribal information and community members.
- Partner with tribes prior to projects to ensure tribal values and priorities are incorporated in projects from the outset.

Technical Assistance and Climate Services

- Localized data and associated technical assistance to support Tribal climate adaptation decisions making.
- Technical expertise to support Tribes' adaptation planning and implementation.
- Opportunities to build technical expertise and staff capacity to ensure continuity of institutional knowledge.

Samish Relevance: The assistance of ITEP, the EPA's climate pollution reduction program, UW, and the Climate Toolbox have been integral to the development of any climate preparedness policy. Any increase in the availability of technical assistance to

increase Samish's long term staff technical capability is enormously valuable to the development and implementation of successful climate adaptation projects.

Communication, Education, and Outreach

- Enhanced communication, on an individual tribal basis, on climate impacts and adaptation information to engage and build support for adaptation within tribal jurisdictions.
- Communication and education that provide a common climate adaptation language. Reduce confusion and misinterpretation between Tribes and external partners.

Common themes for the successes and challenges of climate adaptation planning

Staff and Workforce Capacity

Common themes for successful climate adaptation strategies by other NW tribes, almost ubiquitously, identify the building of partnerships, long term staff technical expertise, and the mainstreaming of climate action as a core framework within the operational and programmatic goals of the tribes as key pieces to the success of their climate adaptation programs.

Common themes for the largest challenges to the success of various Tribe's climate adaptation programs often included staff turnover. Due to the annual nature of grant funding, many Tribes note that without dedicated grant writing staff to pursue funding, tribal staff are burdened with the writing and administration of grants, taking away from their key capacity role within their Tribal organization. This causes even more of a limitation on the ability of existing staff to create significant climate action. Tribes are requesting more reliable, long-term funding to support existing staff and hire any new staff to meet capacity needs.

Samish Relevance: This is a standard experience for Samish DNR. Reporting and grant writing to secure ongoing funding for existing projects is a standard part of any organization funded partially or entirely through grants. The climate adaptation projects Samish staff have worked on in the last five years have almost entirely received funding for one to two years, apart from projects being undertaken during Covid-19, during which no cost extensions were requested and approved.

Funding

Many tribes note that, due to the generally short-term, narrow focus of funding opportunities, Tribes will often be required to piece together multiple funding sources to complete a climate adaptation project. The narrow focus of these projects often exists as

an unintentional barrier to implementing a holistic adaptation plan and can often leave fiscal gaps that need even more funding to complete. The piecemeal nature of this issue can place a large burden on Tribes in terms of grant writing, administration, and reporting.

Tribes note that there seems to be a surplus of funding to create plans, and significantly less funding for the implementation portion of climate adaptation projects. It was noted that implementation costs, especially in the case of relocation, are often prohibitively high due to the financial, legal, and jurisdictional challenges of moving at-risk, critical, Tribal infrastructure or protecting culturally significant sites in Tribal territory.

One significant point of friction for the development of climate adaptation projects is the competitive nature of securing grant funding for implementation. “Barriers associated with applying for, receiving, and administering funding are intricately tied to Tribal government staff capacity, which varies widely across Northwest coastal Tribes and can lead to barriers when competing for funds with non-Tribal organizations. Some funding requirements – such as matching funds or other forms of in-kind match, such as staff time and technical personnel – can systematically leave out Tribal Nations with less access to financial resources or credit” (NW Coastal Tribes Adaptation Barriers and Needs, pg 20. 2024)

Samish Relevance: This is specifically relevant to the upcoming Climate Commitment Act funding pools that will be used to install solar power and energy storage on Samish infrastructure. The funding to install solar power and the funding to install energy storage capacity, both from the Climate Commitment Act, are categorized under separate funding pools with separate grant applications. Both grants were required to be piecemealed together to meet climate adaptation objectives. A less competitive and longer termed funding strategy would provide for greater flexibility in the development of effective climate change adaptation strategies.

Technical Assistance

Many tribes have a need for technical assistance, climate data, analysis and interpretation tools to better understand how to best convert the information they receive into effective adaptation strategies. Many Tribes have requested support identifying climate impacts that are localized geographically to their Tribal lands.

Technical assistance in the form of policy and regulatory guidance is often requested to help overcome barriers to adaptation actions, often in the form of engineering or community planning guidance.

A primary objective for many of the attending Tribes was to develop internal expertise to provide long-term, consistent support for adaptation projects.

Samish Relevance: Samish is no exception to this challenge. Samish staff attend a variety of different training courses and webinars to better build internal expertise. Webinars and trainings put on through ITEP, ATNI, UW, or any other partner organization is a valuable method to provide Samish staff with up-to-date training to better prepare for upcoming projects and build expertise regarding a multitude of climate impacts and how best to mitigate them. Requesting our partners to provide tools to access more climate adaptation and mitigation training is a valuable step towards building greater resiliency.

Communication and Outreach

Involved Tribes identified greater communication with their communities as an integral part of the implementation process for climate adaptation projects. Building community awareness and community guided unity behind certain adaptation priorities is a primary objective for the adaptation planning process.

A shared language around climate adaptation is also seen as an invaluable tool for building shared understandings of the impacts of climate change on Tribal communities. Providing a common adaptation language for interested parties, who may or may not be in a technical role within the adaptation planning process, is an important component of building a shared understanding of how to best adapt to the impacts of climate change.

Samish Relevance: Receiving input from Samish citizens on their key climate issues and needs to guide the planning process is integral to the development of community driven planning. Outreach and community input is a cornerstone of developing adaptation strategies that meet the needs of the community. As an example, during the development of the Vulnerability Assessment, the climate change working group was integral to identifying the plant species that needed to be included in that document.

HOH INDIAN TRIBE (comments received November 20, 2024):

The Climate Adaptation Barriers and Needs Experienced by Northwest Coastal Tribes report captures many of the difficulties that the Hoh Indian Tribe faces. Leadership from the Tribe participated in the listening sessions and three relevant documents were included in the literature review. The information they offered is woven into the report with the concerns of other coastal Tribes. We wanted to take the opportunity of adding an addendum to focus back in on the Hoh specifically, offering examples within the key areas.

Funding: Like many issues, funding is both a strength and a barrier. Climate mitigation work is extensive and expensive. Securing outside funding has been crucial to the massive Highlands relocation project, the effort to move Tribal infrastructure to a safe location

outside of the tsunami zone and floodplain. However, much of the climate funding is dependent on federal and state political priorities that don't always align with the Tribe's goals. Additionally, the timelines for spending funding are on state and federal government schedules, not those of Tribal government.

Staff and workforce capacity: The Hoh Natural Resources Department has a small staff that, in addition to other projects, manages a hatchery, fishing seasons, water quality, algal bloom, and habitat monitoring, as well as cultural programs. Expanding climate adaptation work along with supporting ongoing projects is challenging. Piecing together enough reliable funding for additional staff positions is difficult.

Partnerships and collaboration: Hallmarks of supportive partnerships that Hoh Tribal staff have cultivated include mutual respect, meaningful engagement, follow through, and community involvement. Requests for feedback give the Tribe an appropriate amount of time to respond and their feedback, when offered, is incorporated. Successful partnerships can engage on many levels, as NOAA staff have. They have joined community dinners and provided educational programs for youth. They have answered Tribal members' requests, from questions at events to facilitating a trip to Destruction Island for elders. If there isn't a readily available answer, staff follow up with what they learned.

Poor attempts at collaboration have included symbolic involvement of the Tribe. The speed with which climate change needs to be addressed does not justify inadequate consultation, insufficient time periods for feedback, and abdication of the federal trust responsibility or comanagement requirements.

Technical assistance and climate services: Technical assistance and downscaled information from UW Climate Impacts Group, ITEP, ATNI, and the Oregon Climate Change Research Institute has been incredibly helpful in writing a climate change vulnerability assessment. Many research efforts are focused on more urban areas and leave out the WA coast, like the current NOAA sea level rise viewer or the research on smelt within the Puget Sound. Because of this, it would be valuable to have assistance in expanding Tribal staff's capacity for internal data collection that aligns with their priorities.

Communication, education, and outreach: Annette Bryan's statement about communication barriers resonates. Outside partners must have respect for Indigenous knowledge and be willing to share without their standard jargon to get Tribal member participation. Successful presenters on scientific topics have come to events with respect and an awareness of different types of knowledge. They are also committed to getting to know community members.

Rising greenhouse gas emissions: Although this was not a key area in the report, we'd be remiss in not mentioning another barrier to effective climate adaptation – the global nature of this problem and rising greenhouse gas levels. Climate adaptation is currently chasing a moving target. As greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise, the impacts on Hoh natural and cultural resources will continue to intensify. This is an environmental justice issue. The Hoh Tribe contributes very few greenhouse gas emissions, yet their way of life and Treaty protected resources are being disproportionately affected. Continuing to neglect the root cause of the problem makes climate adaptation more difficult.