



# Environmental Justice Fact Sheet

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## *Interagency Working Group* **Native American Task Force**

### **BACKGROUND**

Executive Order 12898, entitled "Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations," issued February 11, 1994, focuses federal attention on the environmental and human health conditions of minority populations, low-income populations, and tribal populations with the goal of achieving environmental protection for all communities. One provision of Executive Order 12898 established an Interagency Working Group (IWG) on Environmental Justice  
<http://www.epa.gov/compliance/environmentaljustice/interagency/index.html>

### **NATIVE AMERICAN TASK FORCE**

The Native American Task Force (Task Force) of the Interagency Working Group on Environmental Justice (IWG) was established in November 1999, due to the unique political status of tribes as sovereigns and the existence of the "federal trust responsibility." The Task Force works to address environmental justice issues (e.g. environmental, health and economic) of concern to federally-recognized tribes, non-federally recognized tribes, tribal organizations, and tribal members. The Task Force is comprised of representatives from many federal agencies (DOJ, DOE, DOD, USDA, HUD, HHS, DOI, Commerce, and EPA). The membership is open to all federal agencies.

One of the first activities of the Task Force was the sponsoring and coordination of the "American Indian and Alaskan Native Environmental Justice Roundtable" meeting, held August 2000. This meeting brought together, for the first time, tribal leaders, tribal community and national organizations, federal, state and local government agency representatives, academia, and business/industry to discuss environmental justice in Indian country and among Alaska Natives. A wide range of recommendations were developed during this meeting and submitted to the IWG for consideration (Final Report, January 31, 2001).  
<http://pico.library.musc.edu/np/nativeroundtable.html>

The Task Force is currently focusing on the following set of issues:

- Enhancing the protection of tribal cultural resources and sacred places.

The protection of sacred places and cultural resources is a significant concern for many tribes. The difficulties in protecting these places and resources and the lack of understanding of the legal requirements to protect them have been identified by some tribes as environmental justice issues. The Task Force is supporting the efforts of tribes and tribal organizations to bring attention to these concerns. The Task Force coordinated the showing of a film, "In the Light of Reverence" at various federal agencies, which effectively discusses the challenges in protecting sacred and cultural sites. The film was shown in conjunction with the "DC

Sacred Lands Forum” held March 18-22, 2002. The Task Force also co-sponsored an interagency meeting, held August 14, 2002 titled, “Informational Meeting for Federal Agencies with Functions Regarding American Indian Sacred Places and Traditional Cultural Properties,” to discuss current federal roles and responsibilities. In preparation for this meeting, the Task Force created a compendium of existing federal policies/documents on Native American sacred places and cultural properties ([http://www.codetalk.fed.us/SacredSites\\_guides\\_EO\\_Policy\\_Memranda.htm](http://www.codetalk.fed.us/SacredSites_guides_EO_Policy_Memranda.htm)). The Task Force held a subsequent federal interagency meeting to discuss these issues on September 22, 2003. To further the understanding of the importance of this issue to tribes, and identify ways these resources can be better protected, the Task Force is working with a variety of tribal organizations and other interested groups to develop a training module on cultural resources and environmental justice.

- **IWG Revitalization Demonstration Projects**

The Task Force has the primary responsibility to work with tribes to identify potential interagency EJ demonstration projects. The Task Force members are working with their regional counterparts to encourage greater interagency coordination to address the environmental, public health and economic concerns of tribes. Four tribal projects were selected in the latest round of IWG projects.

- Rosebud Wind Power Development Project
- Cheyenne River Tribal Park
- Native Village of Selawik Waste Management
- Enhancing Consultation to Protect Tribal Sacred Places and Cultural Resources

**Contacts:**

Quentin Pair, DOJ/ENRD, Task Force Co-Chair  
([Quentin.Pair@usdoj.gov](mailto:Quentin.Pair@usdoj.gov))  
Daniel Gogal, EPA/OEJ, Task Force Co-Chair  
([Gogal.Danny@epa.gov](mailto:Gogal.Danny@epa.gov))  
Charles Lee, EPA/OEJ, Chair Interagency Working Group EJ Liaison ([Lee.Charles@epa.gov](mailto:Lee.Charles@epa.gov))

