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****Press Release: Tribal Forest and Fire Summit Sparks Future of Forest Restoration & Stewardship in the Southwest ****

Santa Ana - In a groundbreaking gathering from January 29th - February 1st, 2024, the inaugural Tribal Forest and Fire Summit convened at Santa Ana Pueblo, NM uniting over 175 participants from 22 pueblos, tribes, and native nations. This catalyzing event also welcomed a broad spectrum of agencies and nonprofits from across the state, fostering a vibrant forum for exchanging ideas on land management, conservation, and forest fire mitigation.

Hosted in the heart of New Mexico, the Summit emerged as a vital platform for Tribal voices to spearhead discussions and forge collaborative pathways throughout the southwest and beyond. John Waconda, Indigenous Partnerships Director with The Nature Conservancy, highlighted the event's significance, stating, "As in history, collaboration among tribes in the southwest has been paramount. This kind of collaboration can strengthen cultural and traditional movements needed to not only support the communities but also the land we live on."

The three-day summit, opened by Santa Ana Governor Myron Armijo with a solemn invocation and prayer, delved into workshops, presentations, and knowledge exchange, all aimed at addressing shared challenges in Tribal forestry management. The focus was on leveraging collective knowledge and resources to tackle these challenges together.

James Calabaza of Trees, Water and People reflected on the summit's inception, emphasizing the importance of unity: "Listening and hearing from Tribal members and other entities provided the first spark for putting this kind of summit together. It can often be tough to get everyone in the same room, and I think what this conference taught us is that collaboration isn't just possible, it's necessary."

The summit drew participation from leaders in Tribal forestry and fire programs across numerous pueblos and tribes, all eager to enhance their own programs. Discussions spanned Tribal forest methodologies, the integration of natural burning practices, and the engagement of youth in stewardship activities, highlighting the urgency of proactive forest management in the face of changing climate conditions.

Lindsey Quam, New Mexico Forestry Division Deputy State Forester & Tribal Liaison, underscored the pressing nature of these challenges: "The climate isn't waiting around for us to catch up." The summit stood as a testament to the power of shared wisdom and collective action.

Field tours added a practical dimension to the summit, showcasing effective management practices and offering insights into sustainable land stewardship. The successful event has set the stage for the next annual summit, with plans to incorporate more Tribal leadership and political figures into the future dialogues.

As we look forward to the next summit, the foundations laid by this inaugural event promise to foster stronger collaborations, enhanced stewardship practices, and a brighter future for forest management and fire mitigation in the American Southwest.

Organized by Trees, Water & People - Indigenous Lands Program (ILP), the summit marks a significant step forward in empowering Native American Tribes to manage their natural resources through a blend of western science and Indigenous stewardship values. The ILP is dedicated to improving climate resilience and preserving the cultural lifeways of Native Peoples in the Southwest, promoting a united effort to protect and preserve landscapes and cultural values.

More information about the summit and Trees, Water, People [can be found here](#).