

# RNGR Program Tribal Emphasis

USDA Forest Service

National Reforestation, Nurseries, and Genetic Resources Team  
State and Private Forestry



**Background:** American Indian Tribes are working hard to preserve their traditional ecological knowledge and to develop and enhance native plant production for spiritual, medicinal, cultural, land restoration, and educational uses. Since 2001, the Reforestation, Nurseries, and Genetics Resources (RNGR) team of the USDA Forest Service has emphasized outreach to Tribes in order to foster long-term collaborations focusing on native plants, nurseries, and educational activities.

## Key Issues:

Tribes are concerned about:

- lack of availability of some native plants that have high cultural value;
- loss of traditional ecological knowledge;
- fragmentation and degradation of important habitats;
- unemployment and lack of new natural resource professionals to work on reservations; and
- poor government-to-government relationships.

**Program Description:** The RNGR Tribal Nursery Emphasis has three components. First, we offer American Indians ongoing technical assistance regarding collection, propagation, and deployment of native plants. This is done through telephone consultations with individual tribal members as they need case specific information. Second, we provide, through the Intertribal Nursery Council, an annual forum for tribal members to gather and discuss important topics relevant to native plants. Third, as requested by tribal members, we are producing a comprehensive guide (a two-volume Agriculture Handbook) detailing nursery development and native plant propagation methods.



*Intertribal Nursery Council meeting participants from the Hopi and Mescalero Apache Reservations tour the Santa Ana Pueblo Native Plant Nursery in Bernalillo, NM. Photo by R. Kasten Dumroese.*



*Dave Dreesen of the NRCS Los Lunas Plant Materials Center describes grass propagation to participants in the Intertribal Nursery Council field tour. Photo by R. Kasten Dumroese.*

### **Accomplishments:**

- Published the *Tribal Nursery Needs Assessment*—the first survey of American Indian native plant needs; it also serves as a national directory of tribal nurseries.
- Assisted nearly 70 tribes and more than 200 tribal members.
- Hired a Tribal Nursery Coordinator from the Navajo Nation to facilitate exchanges between the USDA Forest Service and American Indians.
- Launched the Intertribal Nursery Council and coordinated annual meetings for information sharing and networking. Integrated some sessions with the Western Forestry and Conservation Nursery Association.
- Provided five nursery training workshops at tribal facilities.
- Developed a Cultural Plant Propagation Center in partnership with the Moencopi School near Tuba City, AZ, to enhance conservation education, promote restoration, and provide opportunities for Hopi and Navajo elders to interact with children and share traditional ecological knowledge.
- Provided plants via a cooperative project among the USDA Forest Service, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Hopi Tribe to restore areas affected by invasive plants. Received an inaugural *Two Chiefs' Partnership Award* for this effort.
- Published *A Nursery Manual for Native Plants: A Guide for Tribal Nurseries* and produced Agricultural Handbook 730, Volume 1, Nursery Management that includes information on nursery start-up, development and management, growing plants, problem solving. Volume 2, Plant Propagation Protocols, is in preparation.

**Future Direction:** RNGR will continue to foster technology transfer through the annual Intertribal Nursery Council meeting, identify funding opportunities and seek innovative partnerships to enable Tribes to develop their own nurseries, provide organizational structure and expertise for Forest Service support of tribal nursery and ecosystem efforts, and continue collaborative and trusting government-to-government relationships.

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