

Tribal Connections Aid Revegetation Efforts

For help revegetating the complex terrain of the Mojave Desert, the Environmental Management Program at the NNSS reached out to the people who know the land the best.

Representatives from the Consolidated Group of Tribes and Organizations (CGTO) were asked by the NNSS to develop recommendations on how to revegetate 92 acres of land at the Area 5 Radioactive Waste Management Complex. Area 5 is a facility dedicated to the permanent disposal of low-level radioactive, mixed low-level radioactive, and classified waste generated primarily by environmental cleanup activities at DOE facilities across the United States.

NNSS attempted to revegetate portions of the acreage three times between 2011 and 2015, but despite varying methods of irrigation and seeding, and no contaminants present in the topsoil, native plants failed to flourish. In 2016, NNSS turned to the CGTO to incorporate the knowledge and wisdom gained from traditions and practical skills passed down for generations.

Two CGTO members from each of three broad ethnic groups worked on the project along with CGTO spokesperson Richard Arnold and ethnoecologist Dr. Jeremy Spoon of Portland State University Department of Anthropology.

Arnold agreed they were the right group for the job, stating, "The land is out of

balance, and the only way that can be corrected is with tribal intervention. We have a cultural responsibility, and serve as the voice of the land."

Representatives from the CGTO met with the NNSS staff in March of 2016, when NNSS presented on past revegetation attempts, as well as details of disposal cell construction and conditions. Another meeting took place in June and included a visit to the NNSS, where the CGTO representatives examined the revegetation site at Area 5 and a past successful revegetation site at Area 3.

The site visit was integral to the CGTO's recommendations, said Arnold. "It's important for tribal people to see, feel, communicate, and interact with the land," he explained. Between meetings, the CGTO representatives considered the information presented by the NNSS,

conducted research, and reviewed existing ethnographical literature.

After intense research and study, CGTO representatives submitted their recommendations to NNSS. The recommendations included greater involvement of tribal groups in the revegetation process and the use of test plots to determine the best approach to ongoing revegetation.

According to Scott Wade, Assistant Manager for NFO, the project represented a commitment to provide for greater involvement from the tribal groups. Arnold believes this commitment goes both ways, stating that the tribal groups and NNSS can't be divided on issues concerning the land. "We need to be all on the same page, singing the same song," Arnold says. "Only then will the land hear our message and begin to heal."



CGTO representatives with staff from DOE/NFO, DRI, and Portland State University at the NNSS.