

## P R E S S R E L E A S E

### **Karuk Tribe**

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#### **KARUK TRIBE SCORES LEGISLATIVE WINS TO AID PRESCRIBED FIRE PROJECTS**

*Karuk and partner organizations helped advance a number of state legislative efforts that will enable more prescribed burns, help CA manage wildfire*

*Happy Camp, California* – Several pieces of legislation that will help communities across the state use prescribed fire more effectively now sit on Governor Newsom’s desk awaiting signature. The Karuk Tribe supported these efforts through the legislative process.

**AB 642** was introduced by Assembly Member Laura Friedman (D, Glendale) and co-sponsored by Assembly Member Jim Wood (D, Santa Rosa). This bill makes multiple changes to state law to enhance wildland fire prevention efforts, including among other things, incorporating and facilitating cultural burning practices. This bill covers a wide variety of topics including prescribed fire, tribal relations and sovereignty, CAL FIRE permitting, and much more.

“With this legislation California legally recognizes and defines *cultural burning* and *cultural fire practitioner* in state law for the first time. This is another step towards recognizing California Tribes’ right to heal our landscapes with cultural burns,” explained Karuk Chairman Russell ‘Buster’ Attebery.

**SB 332** was introduced by Senator Bill Dodd (D, Napa). This bill changes the law to require a showing of gross negligence on the part of controlled burn bosses and cultural fire practitioners before they can be found liable for paying fire suppression costs as opposed to the current simple negligence standard. Currently, private burn bosses can be held personally responsible for any damages caused by a prescribed fire the no matter how rare they may be. This bill further exempts cultural fire practitioners from certain requirements needed to meet baseline liability standard when they have written permission from a land owner or the approval of a native american tribe to burn.

“This is a great step towards revising California’s liability laws to make it easier to put prescribed fire and cultural burning on the ground. In the past, it was nearly impossible to get insurance for burn bosses which means fewer prescribed fires and more catastrophic wildfire,” says Attebery.

There were also significant gains in funding fire programs. In particular, the Karuk Tribe successfully advocated to add \$20 million in the California budget for tribal engagement in forest health activities and another \$20 million for the Prescribed Fire Liability Pilot Program.

“If we want to spend less money fighting catastrophic fires like the Slater Fire that burned down many homes here in Happy Camp last year, we have to spend more on prescribed fire and forest health projects,” explains Attebery. “We look forward to seeing these bills and the budget signed into law in coming days by Governor Newsom who has been a great supporter of our efforts.”

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### **Editor’s Notes**

To learn more about the Karuk Tribe’s fire policy reform efforts see our publication [Good Fire: Current Barriers to the Expansion of Cultural Burning and Prescribed Fire in California and Recommended Solutions](#)