

**DRAFT**  
**MEETING SUMMARY**  
**TRIBAL INFRASTRUCTURE TASK FORCE (ITF) PRINCIPALS MEETING**  
**MAY 12, 2021**

The meeting was facilitated by CDR Samuel Russell of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Office of Ground Water and Drinking Water (OGWDW). It began with a welcome by Jennifer McClain, OGWDW Director, followed by introductions of the meeting attendees from each participating federal agency (see attached attendance list). The meeting discussion then followed the topics listed in the attached agenda. A summary of the key issues and action items for each agenda item are provided below.

**1. DISCUSSION OF AGENCY TRIBAL INFRASTRUCTURE PRIORITIES UNDER THE NEW ADMINISTRATION.**

Overall, the ITF agency representatives said their existing priorities are still important and will continue under the new administration. Specific priorities raised during the discussion include:

- Indian Health Service (IHS)
  - Improving mechanisms to provide funding to Tribes to support the ongoing operation and maintenance of their utilities.
  - Increased discussion and coordination on emergency funding for extreme events, such as funding for the response to the recent fires in California.
  - Helping tribes understand federal emergency response processes and providing updates on contacts in each agency that can help coordinate a response in an emergency.
- Housing and Urban Development (HUD)
  - Allocating Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and American Rescue Plan (ARP) funding to tribes. HUD will begin to award ARP block grants to tribes.
  - Continuing to provide technical assistance funding to support the relocation of Alaskan Native Villages impacted by climate change as well as similar support for other tribes.
  - Increasing collaboration between the ITF and the Tribal Housing and Related Infrastructure Interagency Task Force (THRIITF).
- Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation (BOR)
  - Increasing tribal work related to projected droughts in the western part of the country.
  - Improving coordination with IHS related to technical assistance project requests from tribes

- Continuing to collaborate with the other ITF agencies as well as connecting ITF agency staff at the regional or area level. This regional coordination was useful in responding to emergencies related to the COVID 19 pandemic.
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
  - Improving environmental justice for Tribes and to help Tribes become more climate resilient.
  - Promoting the availability of additional funding this year for Tribal infrastructure improvements through the Drinking Water Infrastructure Grant-Tribal Set Aside and the Clean Water Indian Set Aside grant programs.
  - Continuing ongoing EPA programs supporting Tribes, including:
    - 2021 needs assessment for Tribal utilities (currently underway).
    - Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation (WIIN) Act funding to tribes.
    - Solid waste management support through the Office of Land and Emergency Management.
    - Ongoing technical assistance and training to help Tribes properly manage their utilities, including the Tribal Public Water System Supervision program.
    - Infrastructure funding through the American Rescue Plan, coordinated with IHS.
    - Revisions to the lead and copper rule with Tribal consultations (expected Summer 2021).
    - Cybersecurity training for Tribal utilities.
    - Workforce retention information and outreach to Tribes.

## **2. TRIBAL ITF MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (MOU) RENEWAL AND EXPANSION – FEEDBACK ON DRAFT MOU**

The existing MOU between the federal ITF partners expired in March 2021 and some feedback has been received by EPA on the proposed language for a new MOU. The discussion on the new MOU language focused on the potential addition of other federal agencies to the ITF and on adding language regarding how the ITF will work with Tribes on planning for climate change impacts. Specific discussion points included:

- Overall, the participating agencies stated they were comfortable with the proposed text in the new MOU.
- There was consensus among the participating agencies that a primary focus of the renewed/expanded MOU should be in assisting Tribes to ensure the long-term resiliency of their water and wastewater infrastructure.
- Participating agencies agreed with the value of inviting additional agencies to join the ITF in the future.
- Several of the potential additional agencies have a history of successful collaboration with current ITF agencies. In particular, IHS and other ITF partners worked successfully

with CDC in the effort to help the Navajo Nation improve access to safe drinking water during the COVID 19 pandemic.

- The Bureau of Reclamation has been participating in the ITF and there was a discussion about clarifying its ITF role in the new MOU.
- The current ITF agencies are exploring how to better assist Tribes in planning for and responding to emergencies related to climate change. Climate change was not explicitly mentioned in the recently expired MOU and participating agencies expressed an interest in further consideration as to how this priority should be addressed in the new MOU.

### **3. ITF GOALS FOR 2021**

Goals identified in the discussion by the participating agencies included:

- Further coordination between agencies at the regional or area level to help Tribes respond to emergencies or extreme events. The 2020 coordination between IHS, EPA, FEMA, and CDC to support the Navajo Nation during the COVID pandemic was provided as an example.
- Collaboration on providing CARES Act and other new infrastructure funds to Tribes.
- Completion of the Tribal workforce resource document under development by EPA.
- Ongoing solid waste management support for Tribes.
- Completion of the MOU renewal process including the final decisions on adding new federal agencies to the ITF.
- Coordination regarding the disbursements of funds under the CARES Act and the ARP including further discussion on how best to coordinate between ITF agencies was identified as a priority.
- Coordination between the ITF and THRIITF was identified as a priority to help provide Tribes consistent information on the federal permitting requirements for utility infrastructure improvement projects.
- Identifying ways to improve communication to the public regarding the work of the ITF in coordinating support for Tribal utilities in part to respond to a review of the ITF activities by the General Accounting Office.

### **4. NEXT MEETING**

The group agreed to meet quarterly for 2021 to facilitate the completion of the new MOU language, with the next meeting to be scheduled for a date in August 2021. The participation of tribal representatives in ITF meetings was discussed and it was agreed to discuss this further at the next meeting in August 2021.

**Meeting Participants:**

**Indian Health Service (IHS)**

- RADM Mark Calkins, Director, Division of Sanitation Facilities Construction (DSFC)
- CAPT David Harvey, Deputy Director, DSFC
- Ben Shuman

**Housing and Urban Development (HUD)**

- Gary Nemec, Director, Grants Evaluation, Office of Native American Programs (ONAP)
- Danielle Schopp, Program Environmental Clearance Officer (ONAP)

**United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)**

- Steven Polacek, Policy Coordinator, Rural Utility Service (RUS), Rural Development Agency (RD)

**Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and Bureau of Reclamation (BOR)**

- Judith Wilson, Director, Office of Facilities, Property and Safety Management, BOR
- Kelly Titensor, Native American Affairs Adviser, BOR
- Jeffrey Morris

**U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)**

- Office of Water (OW)
  - Office of Ground Water and Drinking Water (OGWDW)
    - Jennifer McLain, Director; Yu-Ting Guilaran, Deputy Director; Heather Shoven; CDR Samuel Russell; Laura Montoya; Deborah Vacs Renwick; Keyyana Blount.
  - Office of Wastewater Management (OWM)
    - Wynne Miller, Deputy Director; Francis Sylvester; Amelia Nguyen; Catherine Allen; Matt Richardson.
- Office of Land and Emergency Management (OLEM)
  - Office of Resource Conservation & Recovery (ORCR)
    - Carolyn Hoskinson, Director; Caroline Klos; Charles Reddoor.
- Office of International and Tribal Affairs (OITA)
  - American Indian Environmental Office (AIEO)
    - Felicia Wright, Deputy Director; Lisa Berrios; William Post
- Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance (OECA)
  - Office of Civil Enforcement (OCE)
    - Jonathan Binder
- Office of Mission Support (OMS)
  - Office of Enterprise Information Programs (OEIP)
    - Teddy Bruce