



Summary of the April 2025 Western States Caucus Roundtable

On April 8, 2025, the Western States Caucus (WSC) convened its annual roundtable, addressing the challenges and opportunities in supporting renewable energy exploration while ensuring the protection of wildlife populations. The event featured presentations from three distinguished experts, followed by in-depth discussions in breakout rooms among attendees.

Key Takeaways:

- **Complex Interactions:** The intersection of renewable energy support and wildlife/resource conservation is intricate and requires nuanced understanding.
- **Collaborative Solutions:** Bringing together diverse stakeholders was recognized as essential for fostering mutual understanding and identifying pathways forward.
- **Early Inclusion of Tribal Interests:** It is vital to incorporate tribal knowledge and interests early in discussions related to energy exploration and resource management.
- **Emphasis on Data Sovereignty:** Respect for tribal data sovereignty is crucial in collaborative projects.
- **Need for Robust Data:** High-quality data and Geographic Information System (GIS) tools are necessary to inform effective strategies and policies.
- **GIS for Transparency:** GIS serves as a powerful tool for tracking the outcomes of initiatives, thereby enhancing transparency and fostering stakeholder trust.
- **Public Engagement:** There is a need for platforms that simplify complex data for public understanding, including options for downloading relevant datasets.
- **Challenges in Data Management:** Key challenges identified include selecting appropriate data scales, incorporating data early in planning processes, ensuring public access and comprehension of data, and maintaining current data sources.

Presentation Highlights:

Dr. Eric Schaubert - Director of Research, Renewable Energy Wildlife Institute

Dr. Schaubert discussed the value of a Common Operating Picture as a strategic framework to resolve conflicts between wind energy and wildlife conservation. His presentation detailed the Renewable Energy Wildlife Institute's endeavors in facilitating collaboration among stakeholders and highlighted the necessity of aligning the goals of renewable energy and wildlife preservation through data synthesis and shared understanding.

Geneva Thompson - Deputy Secretary of Tribal Affairs, California

Deputy Secretary Thompson emphasized California's efforts to integrate tribal knowledge into natural resource management. She shared insights on the longstanding stewardship of Native American tribes and the importance of respecting tribal sovereignty and data rights. Thompson

noted collaborative efforts with institutions like the University of Arizona's Native Nations Institute to ensure that tribal ecological knowledge informs energy planning and conservation efforts.

Megan Hertel - Deputy Secretary of Biodiversity and Habitat, California

Deputy Secretary Hertel highlighted state programs aimed at protecting biodiversity while accommodating renewable energy interests. She provided examples of successful collaborations, including efforts driven by tribal communities to expand national monuments. Her presentation underscored the critical role of GIS in these initiatives and the ongoing challenges related to data accessibility and public awareness.

Breakout Room Discussions:

impacts of data sharing and security

Karen Rogers (Wyoming BLM) led discussions on the need for cumulative impact analysis, emphasizing the complexities surrounding data sharing and integrity, particularly within the private sector.

Tribal Awareness and Engagement

Katilin Belk (Missouri) reported on the group's discussion regarding increasing awareness of tribal activities and how other states are effectively managing these relationships.

Early Data Integration in Planning

Leland Pierce (New Mexico) highlighted the importance of integrating GIS data early in the planning process, identifying potential pathways for establishing a Common Operating Picture through collaborations with organizations like the Renewable Energy Wildlife Institute.

This roundtable showcased the commitment of the Western States Caucus to navigate the intricate relationship between renewable energy development and wildlife conservation, leveraging collaboration, data integrity, and tribal involvement to pave the way for sustainable solutions.