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Tribes Preparing for Climate Change Impact on First Foods

George Plaven
East Oregonian

ELGIN, Ore. (AP) — Against the backdrop of a region-wide drought, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation are bracing for the potentially harmful long-term effects of climate change.

The tribes have secured hundreds of thousands of

hunt and gather.

Data suggests the problem is getting worse, said Patrick Mills with the tribes' Department of Science & Engineering. Forecasts show the Northwest will be getting hotter in the decades to come.

"Seasons are going to change," Mills said. "Generally speaking, we'll be hotter and wetter."

Mills is project manag-

assessment are tribal First Foods, Mills said.

As weather becomes warmer overall, more precipitation will fall in the form of rain as opposed to snow, Mills said. Snowpack acts as a natural reservoir for streams and rivers, melting gradually over spring and keeping flows at a healthy rate for fish.

"That's one of the biggest impacts, just when the water

been concerned about climate change for more than 70 years, Sams said, after the first federal dams were built on the Columbia River. And, since the U.S. has not ratified the Kyoto Protocol to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, he said it's up to them to adapt to climate change.

"Regardless of what the U.S. does, the tribal government still has a responsibility to its own citizenry," Sams said. "Of course, the primary responsibility is cool, clean water and everything that flows from that."

With climate change, the Northwest is also starting to see bigger, more intense wildfires, Sams said. Those fires burn hot enough to scorch away the tribes' roots and berries, and disrupt the migrating patterns of elk, deer and other big game.

The vulnerability assessment, led by Mills, is just the first step of the tribes' response to climate change. By 2017, the tribes will also develop an action plan and implementation strategy for dealing with issues identified on the reservation.

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dollars from the Bureau of Indian Affairs to study climate change in the Pacific Northwest and come up with an action plan to protect the reservation's natural resources, including traditional First Foods.

Native salmon and steelhead are having an especially tough summer, as intense heat and record-low snowpack have lowered most rivers to a fraction of their normal flows. Wildfires, such as the Blue Creek fire east of Walla Walla, also threaten tribal lands where members

er for the tribes' climate change vulnerability assessment, examining the risks imposed by climate change on the Umatilla Indian Reservation. The report, which will be released publicly before the end of the year, was paid for through a \$150,000 grant from the BIA.

On Jan. 8, the tribes held a public hearing on climate change at Wildhorse Resort & Casino, where presenters discussed impacts to local weather, water, food and human health. Among the key items of concern in the

flows," Mills said. "Without (snow), your rainfall comes down and you lose it when you need it most."

The tribes have already worked for decades to restore salmon runs that were previously wiped out in the Umatilla and Walla Walla basins. Tribal spokesman Chuck Sams said the climate change assessment is a continuation of that work, using the latest in modern science.

Northwest tribes have

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7-29-15



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