

**File Code:** 1560**Date:** December 1, 2023**Route To:****Subject:** Tribal Action Plan Rollout**To:** Forest Supervisors, Forest Manager, Area Supervisor, Directors

The USDA Forest Service has a unique government-to-government trust responsibility with federally recognized Tribal governments. The Federal trust responsibility is an obligation on the part of the United States to protect Tribal treaty rights, lands, assets, and resources, as well as a duty to carry out the mandates of Federal law with respect to all federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Native Tribes and villages. The Fiscal Year 2024 Regional Implementation Plan (Implementation Plan) has been provided by the Southern Region Tribal Relations Program to help forests navigate the implementation of the enclosed USDA Forest Service Tribal Action Plan, “Strengthening Tribal Consultations and Nation-to-Nation Relationships,” (Tribal Action Plan). At the end of each fiscal year, we will review and update the Implementation Plan as best practices are learned and progress is made.

I am writing this letter to direct all Units and Program Areas across the Southern Region to move forward with the steps outlined in the Implementation Plan by program area and begin to fulfill the commitments the agency has made to federally recognized Tribes. This will involve efforts at all levels of the agency so Forest Leadership Teams and Regional Program Units will need to coordinate specific steps for meeting the project goals identified across resource areas. It is my expectation that all make these efforts a priority and project updates should be regularly communicated via the tools provided by both Forest Leadership Teams and Regional Leadership Teams in the future.

It is important to remember that Tribal Nations, due to this unique government-to-government relationship, have a special status that is different than our other partners or the general public. This unique relationship must be recognized in our correspondence and how we respond to tribal feedback to achieve meaningful consultation as required by law and regulation. The Tribal Action Plan provides a framework for advancing existing laws, regulations, and policies in the Forest Service and is not intended to amend or establish new policy or directive. It does not contain specific standards, criteria, or guidelines pertaining to resource management programs and can be implemented through existing programs and processes.

You can expect a kickoff meeting and regular check ins for the deliverables in this Implementation Plan, including an outline of the process for reporting accomplishments and ongoing projects. For feedback or questions on how to use these tools, please contact Regional



Tribal Relations Specialist Lexie Rue-Harris, at 479-508-7553 or lexie.rue-harris@usda.gov, or Krista Langley, Acting Tribal Relations Specialist, at 936-229-0258 or krista.langley@usda.gov.

**KENDERICK
ARNEY**
KENDERICK ARNEY
Regional Forester

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Enclosure

cc: Lexi Rue-Harris; Krista Langley