

**EPA Region 6 Regional Tribal Operations Committee  
Tribal Caucus Meeting  
July 7, 2026  
10:00 AM CDT  
Virtual**

**I. Opening** – Joseph Abeyta, Pueblo of Tesuque, Tribal Co-Chair

**II. Invocation** – Governor Mark Mitchell, Pueblo of Tesuque

**III. Roll Call/Declaration of Quorum** – Kathleen Welch, Wyandotte Nation, RTOC Vice-Chair

|                                  |   |                          |            |
|----------------------------------|---|--------------------------|------------|
| Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas | X | Ottawa Tribe of Oklahoma | X          |
| Jena Band of Choctaw Indians     |   | Wyandotte Nation         | X          |
| Cherokee Nation                  | X | Jemez Pueblo             |            |
| Chickasaw Nation                 | X | Santo Domingo Pueblo     | X          |
| Citizen Potawatomi Nation        |   | Pueblo of Tesuque        | X          |
| Eastern Shawnee Tribe            | X | Pueblo of San Felipe     | X          |
| Miami Tribe                      | X | Taos Pueblo              | 4X         |
| Muscogee (Creek) Nation          | X | Nambe Pueblo             | X          |
| Quapaw Nation                    | X | 17 Total                 | 14 Present |

Joseph Abeyta Led this meeting

**IV. Welcome/Introductions** – Tribal Leaders, Tribal Caucus and Meeting Participants

**V. Approval of July 7, 2026, Tribal Caucus Agenda**

Muscogee (Creek) Nation made the motion to approve the agenda, and San Felipe Pueblo seconded that motion.

**VI. Approval of Minutes – April 14, 2026, Tribal Caucus Meeting**

San Felipe Pueblo made a motion to approve the minutes, and Wyandotte Nation seconded that motion.

**VII. Review of Action Items- April 14, 2026, Tribal Caucus Meeting**

**VIII. New Business**

a. **RTOC Roles** - The Taos Pueblo has been voted in as an RTOC Tribe Member, in place of the San Ildefonso Pueblo. The RTOC Secretary Position will remain under the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, awaiting word from Tribal Leadership.

**b. Discussion on Fall RTOC meeting location** – The proposed dates and area for the Fall 2026 RTOC meeting are: November 17-18, in the Oklahoma region. The RTOC Elections will take place during this conference.

**c. AIEO Transition to Office of Tribal Affairs** – Pinu'u Stout, NTC Representative, discussed the systematic review of RTOC Charters, tribal partnership groups, and the NTC. This is a governance review to assure that AIEO is properly functioning and implementing what they are supposed to.

**d. Biological Sampling for PFAS in Surface Waters** – Joseph Abeyta discussed the importance of testing fish and other aquatic organisms for PFAS. Theo Nimson, EPA, and Pinu'u Stout are planning a water quality training and biological sampling focus for New Mexico in the fall of 2026.

**e. EPA's Transitions Plan for Region 6 Staff Director for Tribal and Border Affairs Division** – Randy Gee and Mark Allen, EPA Region 6 Tribal Affairs, will be completing their term at the beginning of 2027. RTOC Region 6 Tribes are interested in knowing how these positions will be filled and the considerations that will be taken. These new representatives should have an appropriate grasp on Tribal Issues. It was proposed that at the Fall 2026 RTOC Meeting, an appreciation ceremony to Randy Gee and Mark Allen be given.

**f. EPA's Strategic Plan 2026-2030** – NTC will send out a comment letter to help summarize the Strategic Plan and the Five Pillars, and how they can be implemented by Region 6 Tribes. Tara Weston and Cody Crumbo gave insight to the possible issues with this strategic plan, and the positive qualities as well.

## **IX. Old Business**

**a. QMP** – In the April 2026 RTOC Meeting, the proposition of having to update departments' QMP every five years occurred. Kara Allen, the Acting Quality Assurance Manager, has been the point of contact for any changes and questions.

**b. Reoccurring Meeting with State of Oklahoma DEQ and Oklahoma Tribes** – Since this meeting in April 2026, there has remained a semi-consistent contact with Oklahoma Tribes and ODEQ. There has been a consultation with the Muscogee Creek Nation, over a data center that was being considered in the Muscogee Region. There is another consultation occurring over a smelter plant later this Summer.

**c. Data Centers** – La Shell Thomas, Peoria Tribe, discussed underground pit cores to support energy for data centers being considered. The Peoria Tribe met with the governor and other representatives on the rights within Tribal Lands. Each Region 6 Tribe is concerned with natural resources and land health when discussing these data centers.

**X. Progress Reports-See Written Reports**

**a. National Tribal Caucus (NTC)**

Pinu'u Stout had no more comments; she will send out any new information. Tabitha Langston, NTC Chair, is currently working on the NTC Budget Document.

**b. National Tribal Air Association (NTAA)**

Tara Weston announced that NTAA will be having monthly meetings sent out on Teams. They are working on a revision to the guidance for federal financial assistance from OMB.

**c. Tribal Environmental Coalition of Oklahoma (TECO)**

James Williams, Muscogee Creek Nation, announced they cancelled their July meeting. They will have a meeting in September and prepare for November RTOC elections.

**d. Inter-Tribal Resource Advisory Committee (IRAC)**

Tammy Belone gave an update on the June IRAC meeting, which was held in Santa Fe, NM, and consisted of a thorough presentation from the Santa Fe Indigenous Center. At this meeting, they discussed Brownfields Programs, GAP, Pesticides, Tribal Water Quality, and UST. Their next meeting is August 11 and the Jemez Pueblo has offered to host.

**e. Texas and Louisiana Tribes**

Barbara Valdivieso announced that on June 30<sup>th</sup> in El Paso, TX, there was a 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary Joint Advisory Meeting (JAC). This is a group which focuses on ambient air quality within the Paso Norte Region, including Texas, New Mexico, and Chihuahua.

**f. Tribal Exchange Network Group (TXG)**

No updates.

**g. E-Enterprise Leadership Council (EELC)**

Christina Cooper announced that May 20-21<sup>st</sup> in Greenville, SC, there was an E-Enterprise Leadership Council Meeting. This included representatives from Louisiana and other Region 6 members. They focused on AI Policies, environmental reporting, and grant administration.

#### **h. National Tribal Water Council (NTWC)**

Deborah Dotson, Eastern Shawnee Tribe and Region 6 Representative for Water Council, announced a July 8<sup>th</sup> meeting for NTWC with EPA on what has been worked on since the Washington D.C. Meeting in May. There is a Fall meeting in Cherokee, N.C. in late September. There has been a draft guidance update from EPA on reducing PFOAS and PFAS with Biosolids, released July 1<sup>st</sup>. Comments are due by September 4<sup>th</sup>. There is a sixth version of the Unregulated Contaminant Monitoring Rule soon to be out.

#### **i. Tribal Waste and Response Steering Committee**

No updates.

#### **j. Tribal Science Council (TSC)**

Heather Webb, Miami Nation and Region 6 Tribal Representative for the Science Council, announced that the council has been going over many priority topics, primarily data centers and underground nuclear reactors. They aim to keep the EPA updated on main priorities and concerns. There has been more research and presentation conducted on testing for lead in baby food and making lead testing kits more available. The next meeting is July 20<sup>th</sup>.

#### **k. Tribal Pesticide Program Council (TPPC)**

Curry Blankenship, Muscogee (Creek) Nation, announced a training July 14-17 for agricultural individual training on pesticide use in Willamette Valley, OR. Then there is a structural pest control class August 3-6 in Fort Collins, CO. October 6-9 is an inspector basics training in Twin Cities, Minnesota. A Fall meeting will be held at the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe November 3-5, and the next call will be July 15<sup>th</sup> at 1:00 PM CDT.

#### **a. Workshop, Training & General Announcements – RTOC**

- The 31<sup>st</sup> Annual ITEC Conference will be held July 28-30 in Tulsa, OK.
- Tribal Lands Environmental Forum will be held in Oklahoma City on August 17-20.
- A Grant Writing Workshop will be held August 26-27 in Tahlequah, OK.

### **XI. Review of Action Items**

Joseph Abeyta Reviewed these action items:

- Advise Potawatomi Nation new staff on responsibilities and roles for the RTOC Secretary position. An election for the secretary position for the remainder of 2026 will be held.
- Seek out the regulation process of LANL and DOE facilities.

- Ask EPA if RTOC representatives can review the interviews of the individuals which will fill the roles of Randy Gee and Mark Allen.

### **XIII. Dates of FY 2027 Meetings**

These dates will be discussed in the next in-person meeting in November.

### **XIV. Closing- Pueblo of Tesuque, Tribal Co-Chair**

**EPA Region 6 Tribal Operations Committee**

**(RTOC) Meeting**

**Wednesday July 8, 2026**

**9:00 a.m. – 2:30 p.m. MDT / 10:00 a.m. – 3:30 p.m. CDT**

**I. Opening** – Pueblo of Tesuque, Tribal Co-Chair Joseph Abeyta

**II. Invocation-** Pueblo of Tesuque, Governor Mark Mitchell

**III. Roll Call/Declaration of Quorum** – Kathy Welch, Wyandotte Nation, RTOC Vice Chair

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| Chickasaw Nation                 | X | Santo Domingo Pueblo     | X          |
| Citizen Potawatomi Nation        | X | Pueblo of Tesuque        | X          |
| Eastern Shawnee Tribe            | X | Pueblo of San Felipe     | X          |
| Miami Tribe                      | X | Taos Pueblo              | X          |
| Muscogee (Creek) Nation          | X | Nambe Pueblo             | X          |
| Quapaw Nation                    |   | 17 Total                 | 13 Present |

**IV. Welcome/Introductions** –Tribal Leaders, Tribal Caucus and Meeting Participants

**V. Approval of Agenda**

Agenda approved.

**VI. Approval of Minutes** – April 15, 2026, RTOC Meeting

Minutes approved.

**VII. Review of Action Items-** April 15, 2026, RTOC Meeting

Action items approved.

**VIII. New Business**

**a. Pueblo/Tribal Nation Leadership Remarks**

**b. New Mexico Environment Department-Data Center Air Permitting Process**

Michelle Miano- New Mexico Environmental Department presented over this topic and answered questions from RTOC members.

**c. Tribal Reserved Rights Update-EPA Office of Water**

Jenifer Brundage provided an update on the Tribal Reserve Right rule. She summarized comments, mentioning that tribal commenters were unanimous in requesting the EPA uphold the 2024 water quality standards regulatory revisions. A proposed rule is suspected to be posted this year.

## **IX. New Business**

### **a. Southwest Environmental Finance Center Update**

Matt Ziegler gave an overview of the organization's work, including technical assistance and training to water utilities nationwide, including tribal nations. A workshop will be held July 28<sup>th</sup> in partnership with Southwest Indian Polytechnic Institute. Slides were shared with RTOC via email for reference.

### **b. EPA Region 6 Division Updates**

#### **Mission Support**

Mary Stanton

- EPA is in the process of awarding FY26 grant funds.
- EPA expects to receive roughly 20% less funding in FY27 than in FY26, although numbers are not final.
- Comments on EPA FY26-30 strategic plan are under review.

#### **Water Division**

Claudia Hosch

- Grant applications are being processed.

#### **Air & Radiation**

James McDonald

- After a question regarding government-to-government consultation, EPA is working to ensure tribes are consulted in issues that impact them.

#### **Land, Chemical & Redevelopment**

- Region 6 has three tentative tribal selections under the EPA solid waste infrastructure for recycling grants program. Selection letters are expected the week of July 28<sup>th</sup>.
- Registration is open for EPA region 6 brownfields conference, August 25<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> in Dallas, TX.
- Region 6 has created a new pollinator protection coloring book that will be available for download on the EPA website soon.

#### **Enforcement & Compliance**

- EPA is working with the Pueblo of Laguna to resolve wastewater issues.

#### **Superfund and Emergency Management**

Susan Webster

- Susan named various superfund projects across region 6.

### **Laboratory & Applied Science**

No updates.

### **Regional Council**

No updates.

### **External Affairs**

No updates.

### **Environmental Communities Engagement**

No updates.

### **Tribal Office and Border Update**

Randy Gee

- GAP grants and PPGs are in progress.

## **X. Other Business**

### **a. State of New Mexico Office of Natural Resource Trustee Overview**

Rebecca Roose provided an overview of her role. Slides were shared with RTOC via email for reference.

### **b. EPA Office of International and Tribal Affairs Update**

Daniel Bott

- Introduced EPA Tribal Partnership Network Review. A virtual listening session is planned for July 29<sup>th</sup>, 2:30-4:00 ET. More information to come.

Lisa Barrios

- Provided information on recent GAP allocation changes that limit RTOC to two in-person meetings in FY27.

### **c. Workshop, Training & General Announcements – RTOC**

- TLF will be held in Oklahoma City, OK August 17<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup>.
- Cherokee Nation will hold a grant writing training August 26<sup>th</sup>-27<sup>th</sup>.
- Tribal liaison for New Mexico, Chelsey BeGay, will be hosting a tribal adaptation menu workshop in Albuquerque, NM August 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup>.

## **XI. Review of Action Items – RTOC Secretary**

XII. Closing Remarks- EPA Region 6 Administrator and Pueblo of Tesuque, Co-Chairs

XIII. Adjournment – Co-Chair Pueblo of Tesuque