



Native Voices



NAU NORTHERN ARIZONA UNIVERSITY

Office of Native American Initiatives

One Tribe, One Earth

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Welcome to the Native Voices newsletter!

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Let us know what you think:

[Submit your comments or suggestions.](#)

Recap: 2021 Virtual National Tribal Forum on Air Quality (NTFAQ)



“The way that this was organized and presented, with so many being included, made this event very welcoming to all.” – Attendee (via feedback form)

The National Tribal Forum on Air Quality, or NTFAQ, is an annual gathering of professionals from tribes, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), governmental and non-governmental organizations, researchers and others seeking to share experiences in the field of air quality management. The Institute for Tribal Environmental Professionals (ITEP), the National Tribal Air Association (NTAA), and the Tribal Air Monitoring Support (TAMS) Center partner together to host this once-a-year gathering with the goal of increasing collaboration, connection, and idea-sharing among attendees.

However, the starting point of the pandemic last year presented one of many changes: the cancellation of in-person events and large gatherings. Although this resulted in postponing the 2020 NTFAQ, the planning committee took on the challenge to host the event online in 2021. The [2021 National Tribal Forum on Air Quality](#) was held virtually from May 17th to May 21st.

Over six hundred (600) individuals registered and an average of one hundred (100) individuals attended the thirty-two (32) sessions. Breakout sessions and pre/post-trainings centered

“I felt everyone had a positive attitude despite not being able to meet in person; I still feel like I got a lot out of this conference.” – Attendee (via feedback form)

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For more information:
[ITEP Training](#)

“I enjoyed how interactive the entire experience was. The chats were a nice touch to communicate as if we were all talking in person, very fun!”
– Attendee (via feedback form)

around various air topics. Other noteworthy sessions included [recognition of the Virgil Masayesva Award recipients](#), [a fond farewell to colleague and friend, Laura McKelvey](#), beading for beginners, a meet-n-greet with the [Moms Clean Air Force](#), and a cultural exhibition of blow-dart making from a Muscogee Nation tribal member.

If you missed the event and are interested in viewing the session recordings, you can still [create an account on the 2021 NTFAQ online platform](#) to access the presentations. Thank you to all who attended and contributed to the event. We look forward to seeing you next year!

Save the Date: 2022 NTFAQ

May 2 – 6, 2022

Muscogee Nation, Oklahoma

Recipients of the 2020 and 2021 Virgil Masayesva Tribal Air Programs Excellence Awards

2020 Award for Air Policy Excellence – Bill Thompson (Air Quality Program Manager /Data Analyst /Field Technician /Air Head | Penobscot Nation)

Bill has worked for the Penobscot Nation since 2003 and has participated in various tribal and federal organizations over the years, including being the Vice Chair for his Tribe. Bill is the recipient of the *2020 Virgil Masayesva Tribal Air Programs Excellence Award* in the category of *Air Policy Excellence*. We took a moment to get a brief look into the work and world of Bill.



How did you get your start in tribal air quality?

I was hired as the Air Quality Field Technician for my Tribe in 2003 and attended ITEP’s “Intro to Air Quality” at Haskell University, taught by Dr. Patricia Ellsworth [ITEP]. During this training, I got a phone call from the Penobscot Department of Natural Resources Director, John Banks, saying that my supervisor’s position was vacated, and he asked if I would be able to run the air program. I told him to let me have some time to consider. Dr. Ellsworth told me, “You should do this. You’ll be surprised what you can do when you put yourself up to the task.”

“Look for those who know what they are doing and will encourage you to go forth into uncharted waters.”
– Bill Thompson

What lesson have you learned is most important in working with tribes and tribal air?

I asked Lydia Scheer [ITEP] and Melinda Ronca-Battista [ITEP/TAMS] if they would help me keep my Tribe’s air program running, and if they would answer questions via phone calls and ITEP Trainings, and they said, “Yes.” The lesson is this: Look for those who know what they are doing and it will encourage you to go forth into uncharted waters.

What keeps you focused during your day-to-day role with your program?

As a Tribal Citizen, I am deeply invested in the health of my people, and I will do whatever I can to protect them.

What projects or activities are you looking forward to implementing or getting started?

I am looking to make as much progress as possible in the air quality arena before the political tide turns again. I personally think that Tribal allocation funding must not be vulnerable to the continuously varying politics of any government power/regime/attempt at dictatorship.

[Indoor Air Quality in Tribal Communities](#)

[ITEP Climate Change Program](#)

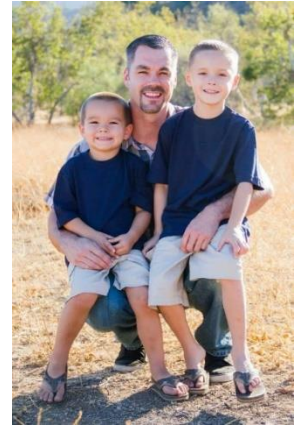
[National Tribal Air Association](#)

[ITEP Videos & Media](#)

[EPA Tribal Air and Climate Resources](#)

2021 Award for Tribal Program Development – Frank Spurgeon (Air Program/Environmental Manager | La Jolla Band of Luiseño Indians)

Frank has worked in air quality since 2005. He is also a member of the Southern California Tribal Air Monitoring Collaborative and former member of the [TAMS Steering Committee](#). His commitment to his work is evidenced by his knowledge and willingness to help other tribal professionals. Frank is the recipient of the *2021 Virgil Masayesva Tribal Air Programs Excellence Award* in the category of *Tribal Program Development*. We asked Frank about his professional and personal experiences that have shaped his work.



How did you get your start in tribal air quality?

I honestly kind of fell into this work. I was born and raised in Northern California and moved to Southern California in 2002 when the company I was working for went out of business. I tried to find work in my field (semiconductor) with no luck. While waiting for a better opportunity, I took a job with a pest control company until I was able to find a job in the semiconductor field. My wife, who was working for the Pala Band of Mission Indians at the time, told me about an opening for an air monitoring technician with the Pala Environmental Department. I hated pest control and was looking to get out of that quick, so I decided to apply for the tech position in Pala. With my background in the semiconductor field and being mechanically inclined, I was hired in 2005 and haven't looked back since.

“Working with others is the key to success in this field...We strive for the one common goal of protecting air quality on tribal land.” – Frank Spurgeon

What lesson have you learned is most important in working with tribes and tribal air?

Working with others is the key to success in this field. Never in my working career have I experienced a community of people who genuinely care about the success of others. In most other fields of work there is a lot of competition and I have not experienced that in Tribal Air Quality. We strive for the one common goal of protecting air quality on tribal land.

What keeps you focused during your day-to-day role with your program?

The fact that I have a small part in making a difference protecting the health and well-being of an entire community keeps me focused and driven.

What is your program currently working on?

We are currently monitoring for PM2.5, ozone, and weather parameters at our air station. We also have numerous Purple Air sensors installed in different locations on the Reservation to analyze the differences in air quality and to report the Air Quality Index (AQI) to the community in real-time. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2022, we will set up our air station monitoring system to report to the community in real-time. We are also implementing a citizen science program to get the community more involved in the work we do. For example, in FY 2021 we are developing an environmental reporting app that tribal members can use to report environmental issues or concerns (hazardous waste spills, open burning, water pollution, etc.) that the program may miss due to not being out in the community regularly. This will not only get the community more involved in the work we do but will help us do a better job in protecting the environment.

Congratulations to Bill Thompson and Frank Spurgeon! Thank you for all your hard work advancing and supporting Tribal Air Programs throughout Indian Country.

EPA's Laura McKelvey Leaves a Legacy of Stewardship and Friendship



Laura at the 2015 NTFAQ

In a fitting departure for someone who has attended every single National Tribal Forum on Air Quality since the first one in 1998, Laura McKelvey, was honored for her dedication, action, and leadership at the conclusion of the 2021 NTFAQ. Laura is retiring from the US EPA's Office of Air Quality Planning and Standards, after working for nearly 30 years as a public servant supporting tribes and other communities as a champion of environmental justice and tribal sovereignty.

In particular, guest speakers and audience members acknowledged her down-to-earth perspectives, respectful approach to community engagement, and steadfast support of tribal self-determination. Colleagues spoke of developing long-lasting friendships, bonding over common histories and uncommon circumstances, and most often, of Laura's infectious laugh and trademark use of *y'all!* At the conclusion of the celebration, it was clear that both Laura's hard work and genuine personality have made a lasting impact across Indian Country and the Nation.

Thank you to Laura McKelvey for the years of commitment and service – your energy and enthusiasm will be missed! If you weren't able to attend the live session, you can access the recording at the [NTFAQ conference website](#).

2021 Status of Tribal Air Report (STAR)

The National Tribal Air Association (NTAA) hosted a national webinar and release party for the 2021 Status of Tribal Air Report (STAR) on June 14th. You can [view the recorded webinar and download the STAR on NTAA's website](#).

To help readers navigate the 130-page report, the webinar provided an overview of the STAR, shared the stories within the STAR, and provided the specific recommendations for national leadership to advance air quality on and around Tribal lands. The NTAA's STAR is an annual publication intended to provide an understanding of the importance and impact of Tribal air programs. Nationally vetted Tribal needs, priorities, and recommendations are all outlined, and the successes and challenges experienced by the environmental professionals are highlighted by way of personal narratives submitted by the Tribes themselves.

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