

June 29, 2015

Native American Conservation Officer Training, - Training Tribal Conservation Wildlife Law Enforcement Officers for over 20 Years.

During the week of June 8-12, 2015, 47 Tribal conservation officers, 5 archeologists, and other conservation professionals attended this instruction in Billings, Montana. Represented at the training were 19 Tribes: Oglala Sioux Tribe, Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate, Crow Tribe, Spirit Lake Nation, Lower Brule Sioux Tribe, Three Affiliated Tribes, Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, Mescalero Apache Tribe, Southern Ute Indian Tribe, Fort Peck Assiniboine and Sioux Tribe, Ute Tribe, Sac and Fox Tribe of the Mississippi in Iowa, Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, Northern Cheyenne Tribe, the Eastern Shoshone Tribe, and the Northern Arapahoe Tribe. Participants ranged from recently hired officers to those with several years of experience and represented approximately 500 years of combined law enforcement “boots on-the ground” experience.

The week opened with a welcome statement from Montana, U.S. Senator, Jon Tester, delivered by Carla Lott, aide and Native American Liaison for Senator Tester. Training throughout the week consisted of classroom and outdoor applied learning sessions. New this year was the paleontological resource protection and a 2-day the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA) training. Law enforcement officers and archeologists investigated dig sites that recreated the possible looting of artifacts from Federally protected lands. The two disciplines of law enforcement and archeology were able to learn each other’s perspective and expertise.

For over 20 years, Native American Conservation Officer Training, has been provided to Tribal conservation wildlife law enforcement officers mostly as a 40-hour in-service training. The program was led by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), with the assistance of the Native American Fish and Wildlife Society (NAFWS).

“This training strengthens our working relationship with Tribal game wardens and supports our efforts in the fight against the illegal take of wildlife and the trade associated with this crime,” said William C. Woody, Service Assistant Director of the Office of Law Enforcement. “The rapport and professional working relationships developed during these sessions is invaluable and has resulted in many Federal and Tribal investigations and prosecutions protecting species important to both agencies.”

Emerson Bullchief, Historic Preservation Officer for the Crow Tribe and the President of the NAFWS Board also welcomed the officers, saying, “The society is pleased to be supporting this training and will offer additional courses across the country to meet the needs of our officers.”

For many, this was their first time attending the training. Amara Roberts and Babe Lansing, of the Southern Ute Indian Tribe, said, “This training has been a great experience not only for the topics and field exercises covered, but also the opportunity to work with other tribal conservation officers. These trainings allow us to sharpen our skills and learn new and different techniques to

use while working in the field. We also thank the instructors who shared their knowledge and time with us.”

Eleven instructors from Federal agencies and Tribes provided expertise in Federal laws for conservation law enforcement, ethics, unarmed self-defense, paleontological and archeological resource protection, firearm proficiency, and certification in baton, oleoresin capsicum spray, and firearms. Agencies, the instructors work for, include the Service (Special Agents and Refuge Federal Wildlife Officers), Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, Department of Justice, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and members of the Three Affiliated Tribe and the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe.

In today’s high-tech world, conservation law enforcement must stay current on the dynamic changes in wildlife crime and law, the available tools and resources that may and may not be used to fight and investigate these crimes, and how to keep themselves safe while on duty. Criminals can research laws and regulations on-line and can quickly travel from faraway places to hunt trophy animals on Tribal lands. This has opened Tribal reservations to trespassers, poachers, and looters thus damaging and stealing valuable cultural and natural resources. For many of the officers, the environment of their work has changed dramatically since they graduated from their academies, thus requiring constant education and yearly refreshers.

This rigorous training was designed to meet the needs of Tribal conservation law enforcement officers responsible for protecting trust resources and people in Indian Country. All who attended the training expressed their thanks, said it was highly beneficial, and the skills they learned will be used daily at work. They also expressed that in addition to the instruction and exercises, the event provided a valuable opportunity to network with other Tribal officers and within the Federal family of agencies.