

Oregon Tribal Preparedness Coalition: Strengthening Emergency Preparedness Through Partnership | *Stuart C Vaughters**

The Oregon Tribal Preparedness Coalition (OTPC) is a collaborative network of representatives from [Oregon's nine federally recognized Tribal Nations](#), who support Tribal preparedness, emergency management and public health. Membership and participation also include state agency Tribal liaisons and preparedness partners. Representatives from FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Association), BIA (Bureau of Indian Affairs) and other agencies participate as needed. Brandy Bishop, Emergency Preparedness Coordinator for The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde stated, “The mix of emergency management, public health, state partners, and other Tribal-serving organizations gives us an opportunity to look at preparedness from several different perspectives.”

The Coalition’s Beginning and What Prompted Its Formation

Paul Crase, Emergency Manager for Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians, Cow Creek Fire Management shared, “I started attending the Coalition in November of 2022. But my understanding is that it has been going strong since 2014.”

Although her involvement with the Coalition began in 2016 when she started working for the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, Brandy concurred. The group came together informally around 2014 as Tribal preparedness and emergency management professionals recognized the need for stronger coordination among Oregon's nine federally recognized Tribes and state partners. Brandy further explained, “In 2016, we came together more formally to establish the direction of the Coalition and develop its mission and vision. I was fortunate to be part of that meeting.” One of the important decisions made at that meeting was that the Coalition would not have a chairperson or hierarchy. Instead, the nine Tribes would jointly guide the Coalition, with support from the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) Tribal Preparedness Liaison, Carey Palm, and later additional support from the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) Office of Resilience and Emergency Management (OREM) Tribal Liaison, Eli Grove. In 2024-2025, the mission and goals were revisited and updated, maintaining the collaborative structure without one Tribe or individual holding a position of power over the others.

The Coalition’s Overarching Goal

Paul described it simply: “I have always felt that the Coalition’s overall simplest goal is to ensure that Tribes within the state are well informed of opportunities that bolster emergency preparedness, while also being a space to increase the networking capabilities between not only our Tribes but our preparedness partners.”

Amanda Rasdal, Health Project Manager/Emergency Preparedness Coordinator for Klamath Tribal Health & Family Service, defined the Coalition’s broader purpose in terms of practice and coordination. “The Coalition brings the Tribes together to support one another with emergency preparedness, response, recovery, and resilience. It also gives us a regular place to coordinate with state and federal partners, share resources and training opportunities, and make sure Tribal needs and sovereignty are understood during planning and response.”



Thank you to these four individuals for providing information and their insights about the OTPC: **Susan Becker** of the Yakama Nation from the Fishing Site Maintenance Department of the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (CRITFC); **Brandy Bishop**, Emergency Preparedness Coordinator for The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde; **Paul Crase**, Emergency Manager for Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians, Cow Creek Fire Management; **Amanda Rasdal**, Health Project Manager/Emergency Preparedness Coordinator for Klamath Tribal Health & Family Service.



Amanda Rasdal, Health Project Manager/Emergency Preparedness Coordinator for Klamath Tribal Health & Family Service, speaking with a Red Cross volunteer.



Members of the Oregon Tribal Preparedness Coalition in 2017 at Coquille Tribe Community Plankhouse.

For Brandy, the emphasis is clear, “Emergency management works best when relationships already exist before something happens. Through this group, we have created pathways that allow us to reach out to one another during an emergency or disaster and ask, ‘What do you need?’ or ‘How can we help?’”

How Often the Coalition Meets

To stay connected and responsive, Amanda said, “We meet virtually once a month and get together in person at least twice a year.” About the in-person meetings, Brandy said, “Those meetings are especially valuable because they give us more time for deeper discussions, training, planning, relationship building, and learning about the different Tribal Nations and the challenges each community faces.”

Susan Becker of the Yakama Nation has attended the monthly meetings for two years representing the Fishing Site Maintenance Department of the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (CRITFC). She had this to say, “CRITFC is governed by 4 tribes, 2 from Oregon, and our goal is to assist those Tribes in the Columbia River Zone 6 region where the Tribes practice treaty fishing rights, but we love to help wherever we can. I appreciate meeting with other Tribes and state agencies to share opportunities, emergencies, successes, and challenges and making and maintaining connections with all who participate.”

Where the Coalition has been Successful

From Paul’s perspective, “For me the biggest success has been the relationships that have come from my participation in the Coalition that has given me the ability to know who to reach out to when I have had a need.”

Amanda highlighted how relationship-building extends to public partners, “One success has been creating relationships with state and federal officials and Tribal representatives.”

For Brandy one of the Coalition's greatest successes is, “the relationships and trust we have built.” She went to say, “I know that if my Tribe were facing an emergency or disaster and I called another member of this Coalition for assistance, they would do everything within their capability to help. I also know that we would do the same for them. Over the years, we have shared information, resources, training opportunities, lessons learned, and support during real incidents. We have built pathways between Tribal Nations and with our state and regional partners that did not always exist before. That trust is important. We don't have to start exchanging business cards when a disaster happens—we already know one another. We know who to call, what capabilities may be available, and how to begin working together. I consider that one of the Coalition's biggest successes.”

Are There Challenges?

Paul noted a familiar constraint, “I feel like the Coalition suffers from the same challenges that most groups like ours face as far as, if Government funding will be available for different opportunities or travel.”

Brandy described the challenge she sees this way, “Each Tribe is unique. We have different communities, governments, geographic areas, hazards, resources, capabilities, priorities, and events happening throughout the year. At any given time, one Tribe may be responding to an emergency while another is working on mitigation, preparedness planning, public health, training, or recovery.”

Additionally, members also have full-time jobs outside of the Coalition, which can make coordinating meetings and scheduling difficult sometimes. Emergencies, exercises, conferences, community events, or other responsibilities can cause adjustments to meetings or lower participation. Brandy concluded, “At the same time, I think that challenge reinforces why the Coalition is important. We continue to come back together because we recognize the value of maintaining these relationships.”

In Closing

The OTPC was formed to improve coordination and strengthen preparedness across the nine federally recognized Tribal Nations in Oregon. Drawing on shared learning, relationship-building, and practical coordination, the group brings members together to exchange resources, training opportunities, and information with state and federal partners. As members shared, its success is rooted in trust—so that when an emergency happens, they already know who to reach out to and how to work together.

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