

Carving a Legacy: Tribal Traditions, Woodworking, and Workforce Development



Lead Organization: The Blue Lake Rancheria

Key Collaborators: WoodLab Designs

More Information: bit.ly/Blue-Lake

Sector: Working Lands and Blue Economy

Project Description

Led by the Blue Lake Rancheria in collaboration with WoodLab Designs, this initiative drives economic diversification, climate resilience, and cultural preservation across Humboldt County. Indigenous communities routinely face severe barriers to accessing traditional woods (redwood, madrone, oak, cedar, willow) while culturally significant, non-commercial timber species lack viable markets (tan oak, pepperwood). Carving a Legacy addresses these issues through Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK). Utilizing the Tribe's nearly 700 acres of sustainably managed timberland, the project establishes carbon-neutral practices, expands access to raw materials, and opens thriving-wage training pathways in forestry and manufacturing for Tribal citizens and disadvantaged residents.

Intended Outcomes

- Scale kiln, sawmill, and 4-sided planer molder operations to produce value-added lumber, flooring, and firewood.
- Train and employ Tribal members in specialized forestry, tree felling, skid steer operation, and timber manufacturing techniques.
- Finalize native timber product designs and supply contracts for the Great Redwood Trail.
- Advance carbon neutrality by repurposing wood waste for local community garden projects.

Progress Update: Challenges & Achievements to Date

The Blue Lake Rancheria launched its wood products program, employs three core staff, trained 6 individuals across specialized machinery operations (sawmill/kiln, skid steer/hauling, and large tree felling), and initiated forest thinning. Teams are actively processing fir, tanoak, madrone, and redwood into value-added products. While securing long-term high-volume markets remains an ongoing challenge, exploratory contract discussions with the Great Redwood Trail mark a major structural milestone.

Ways to Engage and Support the Project

- Visit the Blue Lake Rancheria Website: bit.ly/Blue-Lake
- Purchase local firewood, bulk logs, and native wood products generated by the Tribe by emailing TEPA@bluelakerancheria-nsn.gov.
- Schedule a site visit with the project team to view the sawmill operations, kiln testing, or community timber stewardship in action by emailing TEPA@bluelakerancheria-nsn.gov

