Ten Suggestions for Tribes Consulting with Agency Land Managers

1. Consultation is not a one-time event but an ongoing process. Consult, don't debate. Believe in the spirit of consultation and be prepared to negotiate for what you want. If possible, request that the consultation happen in the local community so that all interested people may attend and participate. Understand that the "government-to-government relationship" does not mean that the head of each government will meet at the same table, only that the tribe should have more status than a federal agency or program when final decisions must be made (although the tribes rarely have such status in real situations).

2. It is okay for everyone to be reminded of the history that might exist between all groups involved, but it is important to remember that broad generalization, stereotyping, and name calling defeats the purpose of consultation. It is permissible to have an opinion about someone or some group of people, but do not let your personal opinions hinder meaningful consultation.

3. If at all possible, hire someone to handle the position responsible for the program in question. Volunteers are wonderful, but often overworked and definitely underpaid. Try to maintain a consistency among personnel assigned to specific duties. If the person responsible for a particular program changes, please try to notify anyone who would be affected by that person's position. Maintain sufficient records to that, if an individual in charge of a program leaves that position, the tribe does not have to rediscover or recreate information on the program.

4. Maintain contact with particular federal, state, or local agencies with whom you consult. If at all possible, send a letter to the consulting agency acknowledging the receipt of correspondence. If extra time is needed to review an action, request an extension. Failure to communicate might be viewed as non-objection to a project. Always ask for the name of the person with whom you are speaking during telephone conversations relating to consultation.

5. Put down on paper anything that you deem to be important enough to remember. It is important that the next person who is involved in the project understand what happened before. Ask for copies of any notes and or minutes taken at any meetings. Request copies of the original notes as well as any summaries, and get copies of any recordings made. Ask questions about any terms that you do not understand, or request additional information as the need arises.

6. Be aware of the differences between tribal decision-making processes and western decision-making processes. Western processes are usually hierarchical, where "decision makers" are generally higher ranking and only "consider" lower ranking individuals' comments, whereas American Indian decision-making processes are more consensus oriented, where all members may be consulted and contribute to the final decision.

7. Do not commit to anything you cannot follow through with; conversely, do not hesitate to commit to those things that you can (and will) follow through with. Speak honestly about what you can and cannot do, and what you will or will not do.
8. Do your homework, and try to learn about the people with whom you will be trying to establish a relationship. Be aware of the limitations placed on the person with whom you work, as well as the hierarchy within their program.

9. During tribally initiated consultation, try to develop supporting documentation for your proposal. Federal managers and program officials need to be able to see the ways such proposals might affect their programs. Try to understand and present the areas where a tribal program will benefit or negatively impact a program.

10. Make it as easy as possible for federal agencies to consult with you, but expect delays in tribal projects. Provide them with suggestions of your own regarding contact personnel, procedures of initiating contact, parties to be invited to the meetings, and suitable locations for such meetings to be held, but also understand that, although bureaucracy moves slowly and grinds up everything in its path, its thoroughness is not aimed at your project alone. If you can make it easy for the agencies to contact and work with you, they will make it easier for you to cut through the "white tape" of governmental bureaucracy.