ROSA ENERGY CONFERENCE 2026

Energy Conversations Done Differently



Conference participants during the first-day tour at The University of Tulsa North Campus.

Dates	September 15-17, 2026
Location	Tulsa, Oklahoma

1. Executive Summary

ROSA Energy Conference 2026 brought together Tribal leaders and representatives, energy companies, utilities, academics, and technical experts to examine the changing energy landscape through a practical and collaborative lens. Across plenary discussions, tours, presentations, and engagement labs, the conference repeatedly returned to the same core challenge: how to expand reliable and economically viable energy systems while respecting Tribal sovereignty, cultural resources, community priorities, environmental responsibilities, and long-term economic development.

- Tribal participation was central. Representatives emphasized early consultation, stronger relationship-building, clearer follow-through on agreements, protection of culturally and historically significant land, and deeper community involvement.
- Energy reliability and infrastructure emerged as cross-cutting concerns. Participants discussed natural gas, oil, coal, renewables, transmission, nuclear technologies, data-center demand, and the need to evaluate the energy system as a portfolio rather than as isolated technologies.
- AI and data centers were viewed as both a major source of future electricity demand and a potential economic-development opportunity. Concerns included water, power, emissions, permitting, land use, workforce readiness, cultural resources, and the pace of development.
- Workforce development was repeatedly linked to economic development. Training alone is insufficient if Tribal communities do not have employers, projects, internships, trade pathways, and jobs that allow young people to build careers close to home.
- Orphaned wells remain a long-term liability. Discussion focused on plugging costs, bonding systems, well records, temporary abandonment, the cost of horizontal wells, and the difficulty of addressing legacy wells with tools designed mainly for future operators.
- Energy planning discussions stressed full life-cycle thinking: installation, operation, maintenance, repowering, retrofitting, repair, and decommissioning. Participants questioned what happens when assets cease to be economic and whether regulation is keeping pace with technology.

Overall takeaway

The conference was not primarily about choosing one energy source over another. It was about improving the quality of planning, relationships, information, and participation. The most consistent message was that successful energy development requires Tribes, industry, regulators, universities, and communities to engage earlier and more consistently.

2. Conference Overview and Participation

The ROSA Energy Conference was held September 15-17, 2026 in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The program combined featured remarks, industry and Tribal perspectives, student and technical presentations, tours, and engagement labs designed to encourage direct discussion. This structure helped move the conference beyond formal speeches toward practical questions involving energy development, infrastructure, technology, workforce, land, regulation, and Tribal participation. Nicole Mast (Albuquerque, NM) was one of the conference organizers.

North Campus Technical Tour

Conference participants toured The University of Tulsa North Campus, where the program connected technical facilities, research, and workforce development with the broader energy discussions. The tour provided a practical setting for Tribal, industry, academic, and government participants to exchange perspectives and highlighted how university facilities can support collaboration across public, private, and Tribal partners.



Conference participants during a technical tour at The University of Tulsa North Campus.

Tribal Nations Represented

Tribal Nation	State / Region
Pawnee Nation	Oklahoma
Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes	Oklahoma
Navajo Nation	Arizona, Utah, New Mexico
Northern Arapaho Tribe	Wyoming
Eastern Shoshone Tribe	Wyoming
White Mountain Apache Tribe	Arizona
Kiowa Tribe	Oklahoma
Muscogee (Creek) Nation	Oklahoma
Mescalero Apache Tribe	New Mexico
Kickapoo Tribe of Oklahoma	Oklahoma
Osage Nation	Oklahoma
Iowa Tribe of Oklahoma	Oklahoma
Tunica-Biloxi Tribe	Louisiana
Yakama Nation	Washington
Hualapai Tribe	Arizona

3. Opening and Featured Remarks

The University of Tulsa Welcome

The University of Tulsa welcomed participants as host of ROSA 2026, with Prof. Buford Pollett participating in the opening program and conference discussions.

Max Bear - Conference Blessing

Max Bear, Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THPO), offered a blessing for the conference.

Roger Fragua - Tribal Energy Consortium | Jemez Pueblo, NM

Roger Fragua opened the conference by acknowledging the Tribal Nations represented and recognizing the sponsors and partners supporting the event. His opening established the conference as a meeting place for Tribal, industry, academic, government, and technical perspectives.

Trisha Curtis - Keynote Speaker (Virtual)

Trisha Curtis discussed the broader oil, gas, electricity, and industrial landscape. Her remarks addressed shifting oil-market conditions, China's rapid wind-energy development and refining capacity, and rising electricity prices that predated the current data-center buildout. She emphasized the importance of maintaining an industrial base, highlighted small modular reactors (SMRs), noted China's prominent position in critical-mineral mining and processing, and argued for sustained attention to natural gas, coal, and oil alongside emerging technologies. A key

point raised was the need for an improved Tribal-Federal relationship to facilitate and expedite energy development on Tribal land.

Kristie Ferguson

Kristie Ferguson used oil-market and field examples to illustrate how geology, refining constraints, technology, and price conditions shape development. Notes from her remarks referenced oil leaks in Azerbaijan and California, the Pikka project in Alaska, the relationship between high oil prices and horizontal drilling, the 2015 oil glut, and the difficulty of refining very heavy Venezuelan crude from the Orinoco Belt.



Cem Sarica, Ph.D., speaking during the conference with Prof. Buford Pollett and Dr. Mohan Kelkar present.



Kristie Ferguson presenting at ROSA 2026.

Marshall Pierite - Tunica-Biloxi Tribe of Louisiana

Marshall Pierite encouraged continued discussion around data centers and Tribal sovereignty and emphasized the importance of Tribes working constructively with government. His comments reinforced a broader conference theme: Tribal Nations should be involved in major energy and infrastructure conversations before decisions arefinal. .

Tribal Perspectives

Tribal representatives raised concerns that agreements do not always deliver everything communities expected or believed had been promised. They emphasized community involvement, support for the education of Tribal youth, and the value of technical learning opportunities such as the conference tour. They also encouraged industry to approach Tribal communities directly and earlier in order to create stronger conversations and more durable working relationships.

Utility and Industry Perspectives

Rodrigo Rojas of Public Service Company of Oklahoma (PSO) referenced PSO's work with the Choctaw Nation, illustrating the importance of utility-Tribal collaboration. Industry participants - including Wes Pebsworth of ONEOK, Ronnie Stephens of Williams, John Kuba of Grid United, and Jeremy Westphal of Fervo Energy - discussed the practical difficulty of getting multiple stakeholders aligned when structuring projects and agreements. The challenge of getting people "on the same page" resurfaced in discussions of transmission, Tribal consultation, data centers, and

infrastructure development. Ray Wiseman of Yakama Power also highlighted difficulties Tribes can face when negotiating and implementing energy-related agreements, reinforcing the broader discussion around alignment, expectations, and long-term relationship-building between Tribal entities and industry partners. Supplemental post-conference feedback from an attending energy company reinforced this relationship theme, emphasizing that trust can be weakened when engagement begins only after a project need has already been defined. The feedback also stressed candid discussion of expected value, project flexibility, community priorities, and the responsibilities of both sides.

4. Engagement Labs: Detailed Summary

The labs were designed to trigger discussion rather than force a single conclusion. The summaries below capture the principal questions, concerns, and opportunities that surfaced.

4.1 Oilfield Facts vs. Fiction

The Oilfield Facts vs. Fiction discussion broadened the earlier oil-market remarks into a conversation about how market cycles, crude quality, refining capacity, geology, drilling technology, and infrastructure shape production decisions. The session emphasized the value of examining operational facts in context rather than relying on simplified narratives or headline commodity prices.

4.2 AI and Data Centers

The AI/Data Centers lab generated one of the broadest conversations of the conference because it connected electricity demand, natural gas, renewables, water, permitting, land, emissions, workforce, and Tribal sovereignty.

- Electricity supply, water availability, air emissions, land readiness, proximity to natural-gas infrastructure, and permitting were identified as core site-development considerations.
- Participants considered the use of solar, wind, natural gas, and other resources together rather than assuming one source can satisfy very large data-center loads on its own.
- Water use was a major concern. The group discussed cooling demand, water planning, water rights, possible reservoir impacts, and the need to evaluate water needs beyond the cooling system itself.
- Participants discussed reusing heat, reducing water use, and moving toward more efficient configurations. The discussion referenced movement away from less-efficient single-cycle approaches toward multi-cycle systems that can reduce waste heat and emissions while improving efficiency.
- The lab considered whether rapid data-center construction could affect environmental, cultural, and historical resources if development moves faster than consultation and site review.
- High-paying data-center jobs were viewed as a potential benefit, but participants asked whether Tribal communities would capture enough of the employment and economic value.
- Participants asked why AI/data centers have grown so quickly. One answer was the sharp increase in power demand created by AI workloads; another was that data centers have existed for years but are now being built at a much larger scale.
- The group questioned whether data-center investment could move elsewhere if power, water, regulation, labor, or costs become unfavorable and what that would mean for U.S. and Tribal workforce development.
- A recurring planning theme was the need to balance the full set of resources available in Oklahoma rather than build around a single technology.
- Tribal attendees raised questions about how data-center companies establish relationships with Tribes and whether consultation occurs early enough.
- One practical suggestion was to consult universities, industry partners, and other knowledgeable institutions before Tribes sign major agreements where the technical and financial issues are complex.
- The lab also raised the value of stronger governmental representation or advisory support to help Tribes evaluate proposals and present their interests in negotiations.
- Public and client education remains important. Participants stressed the value of ongoing communication as AI infrastructure develops.

4.3 Workforce Development

The workforce lab focused on the link between education, economic development, industry presence, and the ability of Tribal communities to retain talent. The central point was that workforce development cannot be separated from the availability of real jobs.

- Participants noted the importance of industry funding and internships in building practical workforce pipelines; an international example referenced students from Kazakhstan being sent abroad for training.
- Universities were encouraged to structure programs around employer needs, while trade schools and skilled trades were recognized as equally important parts of workforce development.
- A STEM-only framing can leave out young people whose strengths and interests are better suited to technical trades or other applied occupations.
- Historically, unions played a larger role in developing skilled workers; participants considered what modern institutions could fill that training function in Tribal communities.
- A recurring concern was that Tribal students may earn degrees but have few jobs to return to at home. Educational success can therefore contribute to talent leaving the community if economic development does not keep pace.
- Supplemental attendee feedback added an important employment distinction: large energy projects can create a burst of construction activity without necessarily producing the same level of permanent operating employment. The feedback emphasized looking beyond construction headcount to internships, local hiring, long-term jobs, vendor opportunities, and other durable community benefits.
- The question "How do we get businesses to come to our reservations?" was treated as a workforce question as much as an economic-development question.
- Participants discussed lingering stigma from past failed or harmful development projects and how historical experiences can make communities skeptical of new industrial proposals decades later.
- Partnership ideas included working with trade schools, universities, and selected companies; packaging infrastructure, workforce, incentives, and community assets into a clearer proposition for employers; and creating energy education programs in schools without making them feel like indoctrination.
- A practical sequence emerged: identify businesses that realistically fit the community, determine the occupations they require, then train young people for those trades and professions.
- The long-term objective is for young people to see employment within the Tribal community as a credible path to a good future rather than viewing economic opportunity and Tribal life as mutually exclusive.



Engineering students presenting a project related to oil-drilling techniques.



Engineering student research presentation during ROSA 2026.

4.4 Transmission Infrastructure

Transmission discussions highlighted the tension among reliability, economics, feasibility, environmental protection, and Tribal cultural concerns. Participants emphasized that transmission planning in rural and Tribal areas cannot treat land as an empty map.

- The transmission discussion also placed infrastructure development in the context of employment, electrification, and the importance of reliable service for Tribal and rural communities.
- Participants discussed the persistent balancing act between environmental concerns and reliability requirements.
- A major recommendation was to integrate Tribal maps and information on culturally and historically significant sites into transmission planning and routing.
- Participants noted that reporting requirements and regulatory structures can differ across jurisdictions, complicating project development.
- The role of public-service commissions and other regulators was discussed in relation to transmission approvals and oversight.
- Examples involving renewable energy and Tribal lands were used to illustrate how delays, cultural concerns, technical feasibility, and community acceptance can all influence project timelines.
- Reliable transmission was treated as essential for rural and Tribal communities, but participants stressed that the historical and cultural importance of land must be considered alongside technical feasibility.
- Supplemental attendee feedback highlighted that project infrastructure can sometimes create benefits beyond the project itself. One example discussed a road developed for oil-and-gas access that later served residential development, suggesting that roads, substations, transmission upgrades, and similar investments should also be evaluated for wider community value.

4.5 Orphan Wells

The orphan-well lab focused on why legacy wells remain difficult to manage even when states strengthen bonding requirements for future operators. The discussion distinguished between preventing future liabilities and paying for wells that are already abandoned.

- Common pathways to orphan status include operator bankruptcy, depleted or uneconomic wells, and long-term abandonment.
- Participants discussed plugging techniques and the financial-assurance tools used to support plugging obligations.
- Different forms of bonding were discussed, including regulatory bonds, performance bonds that can finance required work, and penalty mechanisms that can restrict operators in poor standing.
- An example from Indiana/Illinois was noted in which higher penalties or bonding requirements were paired with annual fees to help fund orphan-well plugging.
- The group asked how long a well should be allowed to remain temporarily abandoned before stronger action is required.
- A key concern was that many current financial mechanisms are better at reducing future orphan-well risk than at funding the large backlog of wells that are already abandoned.
- Horizontal wells were identified as more expensive to plug, raising questions about whether historical financial-assurance models are adequate for newer well designs.
- Oklahoma's approach was discussed in relation to bonds, cash, and other operator assets.
- Participants expressed concern about incomplete well records and the absence of a fully reliable database covering well status, abandonment, and plugging history.
- The long-term integrity of well plugs and the importance of reporting plugging failures were also raised.
- The Oklahoma Corporation Commission and interstate oil-and-gas regulatory organizations were referenced as important parts of the regulatory and information environment.

4.6 Energy Planning

The energy-planning lab emphasized the full life cycle of energy infrastructure. Participants emphasized that planning should not stop at construction and operation; it should include maintenance, repowering, retrofitting, and decommissioning from the beginning.

- Discussion touched on municipal power, efficiency programs, rebates, and solar development in Oklahoma.
- Participants noted that solar assets can face performance challenges under extreme heat and that legal and regulatory systems can lag behind technological change.
- The absence of local ordinances or inspectors in some areas was identified as a planning and implementation challenge.
- A roughly 50-year infrastructure life-cycle perspective was discussed, together with the need to understand what happens at the end of an asset's useful life.
- Participants criticized development that fails to plan for decommissioning, warning against assets being effectively left in place once they are no longer operating economically.
- Grid overconsumption and the incentives faced by companies were discussed, including whether customers prioritize reducing overall energy spending over maximizing sell-back revenue.
- The group compared the efficiency decline of solar and wind assets with the depletion characteristics of oil and gas resources.
- Energy transportation was framed as a broad domestic system requiring installation, repair, upgrading, permitting, processing, and logistics capabilities.
- Participants discussed acquiring or adapting technology from other companies, repowering existing assets, retrofitting facilities, and completing repairs before moving to decommissioning.
- A recurring theme was that owners and operators should carry an ongoing obligation to maintain assets throughout their life cycle.



ROSA 2026 conference registration and attendee badges at The University of Tulsa.

5. Tribal Relations, Sovereignty, and Consultation

Tribal relations emerged as a cross-cutting theme throughout the conference, surfacing in discussions of data centers, transmission, energy development, workforce, and economic development. Participants identified a persistent gap between formal project processes and the relationship-building Tribal communities expect. Supplemental attendee feedback also framed this as a resource-awareness issue: Tribes should have clear information about the energy and infrastructure potential within their communities and be positioned to define their own economic priorities before a developer arrives with a fully formed project concept.

- One discussion point was that Tribal relations are not yet deeply ingrained in standard U.S. governmental or corporate processes.
- Participants observed that companies can be uncomfortable reaching out to Tribes before there is a defined project or near-term profit opportunity, even though early relationship-building can prevent later conflict.
- Universities and state governments were described as frequent intermediaries in Tribal relationships, suggesting that trusted conveners can play an important role.
- A central principle was that Tribes and cultures should be consulted broadly, not only when a project physically occupies Tribal land.
- Tribal consultation should include cultural, historical, environmental, infrastructure, and economic implications, not only legal land status.
- Participants also emphasized that Tribal energy projects can involve governance, taxation, sovereignty, and leasing frameworks that differ from conventional state-led development, underscoring the value of specialized Tribal legal and regulatory expertise.
- The conference repeatedly returned to the need for earlier communication, clearer expectations, better follow-through, and the inclusion of Tribal knowledge in project planning.

Relationship-building principle
The strongest Tribal-engagement message was simple: do not wait until a route, site, permit, or commercial structure is nearly final before beginning the relationship. Early engagement gives Tribal communities an opportunity to shape a project rather than merely react to it.

6. Cross-Cutting Findings

Early engagement matters more than late consultation

Across data centers, transmission, industry agreements, and land-use questions, participants favored relationship-building before project structures are fixed. Supplemental attendee feedback similarly captured the value of listening before proposing: relationship-building is more credible when a company engages a Tribal community before it needs an approval, concession, or immediate commercial outcome.

Reliability, economics, environment, and culture must be evaluated together

The conference did not treat energy decisions as purely technical. Reliability and affordability appeared alongside water, emissions, land, cultural resources, sovereignty, and community development.

Infrastructure growth requires life-cycle responsibility

Data centers, renewables, transmission, oil and gas wells, and other assets create obligations that extend beyond construction. Maintenance, plugging, repowering, retrofitting, and decommissioning should be planned and financed in advance.

Information quality is a strategic issue

Several discussions exposed information gaps: incomplete well records, difficulty accessing field files, uncertainty around data-center impacts, differing reporting systems, and the need for Tribal cultural information to be integrated into infrastructure planning.

Workforce development follows economic opportunity

Participants challenged the idea that training programs alone create prosperity. Sustainable workforce development requires employers, projects, internships, trade pathways, and jobs that allow Tribal members to build careers at home.

Tribes are potential owners, partners, and system builders - not only stakeholders

Discussions about utilities, data centers, energy development, transmission, and local business recruitment point toward broader opportunities for Tribal entities to participate in ownership, infrastructure, service delivery, and long-term economic value creation.

7. Conclusion

ROSA Energy Conference 2026 demonstrated that the most difficult energy questions are rarely about technology alone. The central challenges are coordination, trust, data, infrastructure, long-term responsibility, workforce, and the ability to align economic development with Tribal sovereignty and community priorities.

The engagement labs were especially valuable because they surfaced practical concerns that can disappear in high-level policy discussions: where water will come from for data centers, whether communities have the workforce for new projects, who pays to plug wells decades later, how transmission routes intersect with culturally significant land, whether agreements deliver what communities expect, and whether Tribes have access to the information needed to manage their own energy resources.

Taken together, the discussions showed the value of bringing Tribal Nations, industry, utilities, academia, and technical experts into the same room. ROSA 2026 provided a forum in which participants could compare perspectives, clarify assumptions, and examine how energy development affects communities from multiple angles. The conference highlighted that durable energy partnerships are shaped not only by technology and economics, but also by trust, information, local opportunity, cultural considerations, and long-term responsibility.



ROSA Energy Conference 2026 organizers and facilitators at the close of the conference.