

Land Acknowledgement and Relationship-Building Protocols with Indigenous Peoples at Ecosystem Restoration Communities California

This document was developed by the Cultural Competence Circle of Ecosystem Restoration Communities California, a group of volunteers engaged in self-education and community development. The Cultural Competence Circle met every two weeks from April 2020 - March 2021. We met as part of an international network of ecosystem restoration communities.

<https://www.ecosystemrestorationcommunities.org/>

Introduction

by Gregg Castro*

Shaamo'sh Ake'sh/ Mishshix tuux / Hersha Tuhe--Greetings, 'Relatives'. As we are all 'two footers' (as my Elder-Mentor named us 'human beings'), we are related through that common humanity. We are then connected through the common landscape that we walk, breathe, think, love and pray on. This connection is not a static strap, it is a dynamic, living umbilical cord that binds us together in a weaved basket of life. One that is constantly inhaling and exhaling, writhing and changing. If one opens not just their eyes, but their minds, hearts and spirits to this seething sea of life around us, we learn that we are an inexorable part of it all, inseparable but not indomitable in its hierarchy. As my Elder-Mentor said often, most of the origin narratives of California Indigenous Peoples say that we came last in the creation of the world, and this gift--that we need to accept humbly and gratefully--is to be taken care of in deep respect and humility as all gifts should be.

What you are about to read is our 'gift' to you and to all that are striving for connection in this world, whether to one another or the earth itself. It is an offering of our collective thoughts and experiences in our journeys through life and how we might best forge deep and lasting bonds with each other and the land we are healing. Just as 'life' itself, it is a living and breathing guide of how to walk with each other, and so can continue to grow over time. The creation and continual renewal of relationships between 'two footers' is a fundamental element in our path to heal our land. Because, above all,

before we can heal the land, we must heal each other and ourselves. The ends are not justified by the means, the ends are defined by the means. Whatever we wish to create will be determined by every step along the way, feeding into the whole at the end. Many beloved basketweavers of our communities have taught me that one must be of good heart and spirit when weaving a basket, as all your thoughts and feelings will go into that basket. So one must make sure that all that one does to prepare and begin 'the making' be done with love. So too will our work to heal the many wounds with which we have assailed our earth--and each other. We must fashion this work in deep love and respect so that the world we nurse back to health is one that will return that love to us as it did at the Beginning Times.

Place Based Land Acknowledgement - unique to each ecosystem, land base, history

Land Acknowledgements at Ecosystem Restoration Communities California can be Place Based and inspired by the local ecology and history of the land being restored. The intention behind this is to link the event to the place and people participating so that it can remain a true and organic experience rather than becoming dogmatic or scripted. ***It is important to engage with local Indigenous Peoples for mutual participation in creating a Land Acknowledgement whenever possible.*** The goal is to create a long-term relationship with local Indigenous Peoples if they desire it (see below Building Relationship with Indigenous Peoples).

Here is a format of open ended questions. These can serve as guidance when creating Land Acknowledgements for each community.

Part 1 - Grounding

These questions are intended to ground us in a deeper sense of who we are, where we are, and what has happened on the land.

Who are we?

Start with Introductions - have each person introduce themselves with their:

- Name
- Preferred Pronoun
- Region where you live

- Original Indigenous Peoples who inhabited that region
- Social Identity - as much as folks feel comfortable sharing. . . This exercise can help ground us into the place from which we are doing this work, the unique intersection of our privileges and lack of privilege.
 - Race
 - Ethnicity
 - Gender
 - Sexual identity
 - Class
 - Age
 - Ability
 - Education
 - Nationality and Ancestry

Where are we?

Attunement -

- Guided Attunement to connect to the land using all our senses, grounding us in Place and creating a deeper sense of awareness of what is happening around us. Begin with a felt sense of respect and love for the land. Take time to focus on each of our senses: seeing (from standing, sitting, laying on the ground), hearing (the wind, water, birds, animals), touching (greeting plants with touch, noticing textures of leaves and bark, soil and roots), smelling (the air around you, fingers in the soil, plant leaves, bark), tasting (the air you're breathing, perhaps a known herb or tree leaf). Take time to explore and connect on your own. Come back together and share our experience.

What has happened here?

Acknowledgment of Land History - engage with Indigenous Peoples for participation in this whenever possible

- Local tribal names, Land Tending Methods
- Effects of Colonization on Land and Indigenous Peoples
- Treatment of Land - clear cut, grazed, non-native plants, etc
- What other peoples have lived here or live here now? (Missions, settlers, 49ers, Chinese railroad workers, Southern blacks moving north and west as slaves or for jobs, Latinx migrant farm workers, etc.)

Part 2 - Exploratory

These questions are intended to help us explore what should happen next. They can be simply asked to the group or symbolically enacted through story, song, performance, ritual, etc

How do we create Relationship?

How do we regain Balance?

How do we Restore? And what standard are we restoring to?

Building Relationships with Indigenous Peoples

The Importance of Building Relationship

The Cultural Competency Circle includes as an advisor Gregg Castro t'rowt'raahl Salinan / rumsien & ramaytush Ohlone. Gregg tells us of the importance of prioritizing Relationship over Business when engaging with Indigenous Peoples. If an ecosystem restoration community wants to engage with local Indigenous Peoples around Ecosystem Restoration work or Land Acknowledgements, then it is important to work to establish a Relationship with them first. It may be appropriate for one person or a small group from the community to take on the role of creating and maintaining this relationship. In this way we can create continuity of communication and it can be seen as a community approaching a community which is a more formal and complex process than connecting as individuals. This can allow the Indigenous Peoples to respond by choosing representatives from their community who are most suited to create and maintain this relationship.

Many Indigenous Peoples are being asked to participate in Land Acknowledgements, but if they believe the relationship is not meant to continue past this, then the impact is one of an empty gesture. So not only creating but also maintaining the Relationship is of utmost importance.

Maintaining the relationship can be achieved by getting together on the land, attending events hosted by local Indigenous Peoples that are open to the public, creating personal friendships, strengthening and renewing bonds on an ongoing basis.

Be mindful that Indigenous Peoples today are dealing with many of their own issues. Diabetes, Domestic Violence Awareness, and Suicide Prevention are issues often common to Indigenous Peoples due to the fallout of Colonialism. Also many Indigenous Peoples are in the midst of a generational shift with elders stepping back from the roles of responsibility they have traditionally taken and a younger generation stepping up. How can ecosystem restoration communities build relationship by assisting with these issues?

If you are trying to build relationship but don't get a call back right away, there may be an underlying reason that does not relate to you; don't take it personally. Yet again, there may be an underlying reason that does relate to you; please educate yourself about microaggressions and implicit bias in order to be more effective at this work.

Steps to Building Relationship

- Initial Introduction - Introduce yourself, your group, and your intentions/values/vision
- Acknowledge that you are approaching each other Community to Community and you will send representatives
- Request a more formal coming together - Approach in a humble respectful manner. Realize that the Indigenous Peoples may say no.
- Coming Together - If you know certain Indigenous elders will be there then prepare a gift for each of them. It can be as simple as a pouch of tobacco, but even better would be something handmade from the heart
- Start small, build on your success - do a first quick, easily achievable project collaboration to get a sense of what it means to work together
- Maintain the bond by putting Relationship before Business and cultivating Trust.
- Try a larger or more long lasting project including Indigenous input from the very beginning.

Background on Indigenous Peoples World View

Although there are similarities in world view, each group (often known as tribes) has a unique origin story and cosmology. Learning about local Indigenous perspectives, the way the world is experienced, can help building relationships. However, it is important to confer with the elders where you are working for permission to share their world view. You can ask "Is there something I can share on your behalf to explain your world view?" Gregg Castro tells us they may have a statement on their website.

Background on Indigenous Protocols in California

In Pre-colonial times, Indigenous Peoples, living in the land now known as California, had Protocols that they followed within their tribe, and Protocols that were known and followed between tribes, for example when entering another tribe's area.

Gregg Castro has shared that when members of one tribe were travelling they would stop at the boundary of another tribe and wait. They would be greeted there by members of the tribe whose area they wanted to enter. The two tribes would build relationship with a bonding ceremony. The visiting tribe would be informed of the local tribes Protocols and be expected to respect and follow these Protocols while in that area. The visiting tribe would be welcomed.

Tribal Protocols could include boundaries around how and when to harvest certain plants, how to interact with elders, how to show respect, how to share songs, and many other things. Many of these Tribal Protocols are still in place today, within Tribes and between Tribes.

Please learn what the Protocols of your local Indigenous Peoples are. The ecosystem restoration communities may be able to be good guests on their land by following the local Protocols. It is important to humbly observe and listen at first, until you more fully understand what the Protocols are. It is important to respect the Protocols given by the locals as they have a sacred responsibility to caretake the land which has been developed and passed down for generations.

Background on Indigenous Ceremonies

Ceremonies are held by Indigenous Peoples for many reasons. Tribes differ locally in how and what they celebrate, although there may also be many similarities.

One of the most important types of ceremony is the World Renewal Ceremony where people give back, in reciprocity, to the land that gives so much to them, and create the world anew. Gregg Castro says “Ceremonies arose organically from the ground that gave birth to us, in order to give back.”

Other types of ceremonies include honoring certain aspects of the natural world that are particularly sustaining to the people, such as the Salmon Ceremony and Acorn Ceremony, done at a particular time of year that is relevant to the life cycle of these sustainers.

Another type of ceremony is a Coming of Age Ceremony. Coming of Age Ceremonies for women and, often men as well, were often lost during Colonization. Check out Cutcha Risling Baldy's book [We Are Dancing For You: Native Feminisms and the Revitalization of Women's Coming-of-Age Ceremonies](#) for many more details.

Many Indigenous Peoples honor the Four Directions, often in a different order, with different associations.

For us at the communities to use the word Ceremony may be triggering when engaging with Indigenous Peoples. Ceremony may have a different connotation to Indigenous Peoples, as often their ceremonies are days or weeks long, not just a few hours. Ceremonies have been practiced generationally for many thousands of years and are often held by Culture Bearers who pass the responsibility on to the next generations making sure they keep the guidelines and intent of the ceremony intact.

There has been a history of appropriation of elements of ceremonies by people with privilege that is offensive and damaging ***because it does not acknowledge the sacrifices that have been made to maintain this knowledge***, it is taken out of context and often without permission. Using the word Ceremony may remind Indigenous Peoples of this history of appropriation and set the wrong tone for building relationships.

Red Flags of Appropriation

Sharing is not the same as Giving

If you see a ceremony performed, this does not give you permission to replicate it.

- It is important to ascertain whether you have been given **permission** or an initiation to share a certain ceremony, especially if that ceremony originates in a culture you did not grow up in.
- It is wise to always **accurately source** the information you are sharing, especially in the form of a ceremony. You need permission to share it from the culture bearer, who is responsible to take care of the ceremony and has permission to do so from their community.
- It is important to know the **full context** of the ceremony in its culture of origin and to know what sacrifices have been made in order to maintain this knowledge in the context of colonization. Do not mimic, cut and paste, or piece together a ceremony taken from various sources.

Here is an example of phrases that indicate the above protocol has not been followed:

- "I heard someone say. . ." -- needs to be more specific, who is this person, did they give you permission to share?

- “I read in a book about Native Americans. . .” - was the author of the book Native? Did they give explicit permission to share their wisdom?

Honoring Intense Emotions

Sometimes hearing about things that took place on the land such as clearcutting or genocide can trigger intense emotions. In order to honor these emotions collectively, an event can be created. The Work That Reconnects has a great wealth of suggested ritual formats for [Honoring Our Pain for the World](#) including the [Truth Mandala](#).

However, when collaborating with Indigenous Peoples, please be mindful that they may not want to participate in grieving rituals. They may have done their own grieving. But if they do choose to participate, communicate and collaborate clearly throughout the design and preparation of the ceremony and please let them be heard in full, without time limits or tone policing. Please consider how to appropriately honor their emotions.

Examples where Organizations have successfully collaborated with Indigenous Peoples

Pepperwood Preserve - Pomo and Coast Miwok were there at the ground level work of acquiring the land. About 8 acres near Sebastopol. Eastside of Santa Rosa. Check out the website. <https://www.pepperwoodpreserve.org>

The BirdHouse - <https://atthebirdhouse.org>

Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) www.openspacetrust.org

California State Parks and Pinnacles National Park with the Amah Mutsun Land Trust in the central coast region of California <https://www.amahmutsunlandtrust.org/>

Examples of Groups who are working to reclaim land in an environmental trust

The Cultural Conservancy <http://www.nativeland.org>

Esselen Tribal Lands Conservation Project <https://www.esselentribe.org/our-land>

Amah Mutsun Land Trust <https://www.amahmutsunlandtrust.org/our-mission>

Intertribal Sinkyone Wilderness Council <https://sinkyone.org/about>

Lytton Band of Pomo Indians <https://www.homelandforlytton.com>

Sogorea Te' Land Trust <https://sogoreate-landtrust.org>

Kashia Pomo

<https://www.yesmagazine.org/issue/decolonize/2018/04/02/how-this-tribe-got-their-coastal-california-lands-returned/>

Notes about the development of this document:

This document was developed in 2020 by the Cultural Competence Circle of Ecosystem Restoration Communities California.

We are part of an international network of ecosystem restoration communities. <https://www.ecosystemrestorationcommunities.org/> There are currently 4 approved ecosystem restoration communities in California (Hotlum in Shasta County, Paradise in Butte County, EcoCamp Coyote in South San Jose, and The BirdHouse in Los Angeles) with at least 2 more on the verge of establishment.

The Cultural Competence Circle met every two weeks from April 2020 - March 2021 to deepen each individual's relationship to the indigenous world and work at decolonizing our lives. Ellen Farmer of Santa Cruz County and Anna Hope of Mendocino County facilitated this group of 24 people who helped develop the document. Members who deserve recognition for their participation include Gregg Castro, Coleen Douglas, Kerry Hughes, Joanna Nelson, Jessica Perez, and Janeva Sorenson.

Working through a self-introduction exercise offered by Anna Hope, we decided to create a document for use by all our potential communities as they navigate establishment of communities on unceded occupied California land. We have been guided by Gregg Castro, t'rowt'raahi Salinan / rumsien & ramaytush Ohlone, and Kanyon Sayers-Roods, Costanoan Ohlone-Mutsun & Chumash.*

This document was shared with neighboring indigenous elders and representatives throughout California and beyond. So far this document has been shared for review with:

Lazaro Arvizu Jr., Tongva-Gabrielino cultural advisor for The BirdHouse ecosystem restoration community in Los Angeles, CA

Kim Pate, Eastern Band Cherokee and Mississippi Choctaw descendant, living on the Nez Perce Reservation in Idaho, and serving as Vice President of the NDN Collective, Rapid City, South Dakota

*Stan Rushworth, Chiricahua Apache (and English/Irish), professor of Native American literature and critical thinking surrounding Indigenous issues at Cabrillo College, author *Diaspora's Children*, *Going to Water*, and *Sam Woods**

And several others who contributed feedback and asked not to be named.

** Gregg Castro [t'rowt'raahl Salinan/rumsien-ramaytush Ohlone], has worked to preserve his Ohlone and Salinan heritage for three decades. Gregg is the Society for California Archaeology's Native American Programs Committee Chairperson. Gregg is a Facilitator for the annual California Indian Conference, a 30+ year annual gathering about California Indigenous culture. He is a Founder/Advisor to the California Indian History Curriculum Coalition, based at CSU-Sacramento, promoting accurate school curriculum. He is 'Principal Cultural Consultant' to the Association of Ramaytush Ohlone, advising within their San Francisco Peninsula homelands. Gregg is a writer-activist within the California indigenous community.*