

RESTORING NATIVE HOMELANDS

An Anniversary Project Gallery



THE TRIBAL & NATIVE LANDS PROGRAM OF THE TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND



Photographs by Nancy Kittle

ABOUT THE PHOTOGRAPHER



Nancy Kittle's lifelong interest in the lives of Native Americans began in the 1950s, when she studied the Chumash people of Southern California while earning a masters degree in anthropology from the University of Arizona. In the years since, she has focused her lens not only on Native leaders working with TPL's Tribal & Native Lands Program—of which she is a longtime supporter—but on powwow dancers and members of the Pomo and Miwok bands in California. Kittle trained as a photographer at the San Francisco Art Institute, where one of her teachers was the pioneering documentary photographer John Collier Jr. She has traveled and photographed widely in Asia and in Central and South America. Exhibits of her photographs have focused on communities as varied as San Francisco Bay Area artists, flea-market vendors, and residents of a public housing project. Kittle's 2006 book, *Legacy: Portraits of 50 Bay Area Environmental Elders* (Sierra Club Books, text by John Hart), features photographs of environmental heroes from the 1960s and 1970s, including Huey Johnson, Martin Rosen, and Douglas Ferguson, three founding leaders of The Trust for Public Land.



INTRODUCTION

In October 1996, The Trust for Public Land acquired a 10,000-acre former cattle ranch in the remote Wallowa Mountains of northeastern Oregon and conveyed it to the Nez Perce Tribe. During an emotional dedication ceremony, Nez Perce elder Horace Axtell stood in a gentle rain overlooking Joseph Canyon and named the newly acquired ranch Hetes’wits Wetes, or Precious Lands.

Precious indeed. Wallowa in the Nez Perce language means “land of the winding waters,” and Hetes’wits Wetes lies near three magnificent rivers, the Snake, the Salmon, and the Grande Ronde. When I first toured the land several years earlier with its then-owner, Hans Magden, in the fading light of a late September afternoon, we saw a dozen black bears, a herd of Roosevelt elk, and plentiful signs of mountain lion and bighorn sheep.

Even more remarkable than its beauty and value as wildlife habitat is the land’s Nez Perce history. This is Chief Joseph country, indelibly associated with a great Native American leader. Joseph’s father is buried south of the ranch, at the foot of Wallowa Lake, and Nez Perce elders say that Joseph was born nearby, perhaps on the property itself. Chief Joseph and his band lived peacefully in these river valleys and mountains until 1877, when they—with their horses and whatever possessions they could hurriedly gather—were forced by the United States Army across the freezing spring torrents of the Snake River, leaving behind Oregon and their Wallowa homeland.

The ensuing Nez Perce War was called “the most extraordinary of Indian wars” by no less an expert than General William Tecumseh Sherman. Seven hundred and fifty Nez Perce men, women, and children outfought 2,000 soldiers during a four-month, 1,200-mile retreat through some of the West’s roughest terrain. They crossed the Continental Divide three times, fighting eastward through Idaho and Yellowstone Park and north to Montana’s Bear Paw Mountains—just 40 miles from safety in Canada—where Joseph surrendered, giving his famous “I will fight no more forever” speech.

Precious indeed. The Trust for Public Land spent years negotiating and funding the acquisition of this property so that the Nez Perce could return to the Wallowas for the first time since 1877. Without the tribe’s leadership, credibility, and authority, and TPL’s creativity, patience, and willingness to undertake substantial financial risk, this land might never have been restored to its proper owners.

The project also gave rise to TPL’s Tribal & Native Lands Program. TPL had conserved lands with and for Native Americans prior to the project. But working closely with the Nez Perce on Hetes’wits Wetes, and gaining an understanding of Native history, helped us realize that there was much more TPL could contribute throughout Indian Country.

The history of Native lands in this country is a painful one. Native communities and Indian nations are land-based. By 1886, however, tribes had been forced to cede more than 2 billion acres to the United States, retaining 140 million acres by treaty, mostly as reservations. Less than 50 years later, despite treaty guarantees, tribes had lost two-thirds of their already reduced land base and were left with only 48 million acres, almost half of which were desert or semidesert. Non-Natives now own the majority of land within many Indian reservations in the West, including the Nez Perce Reservation.

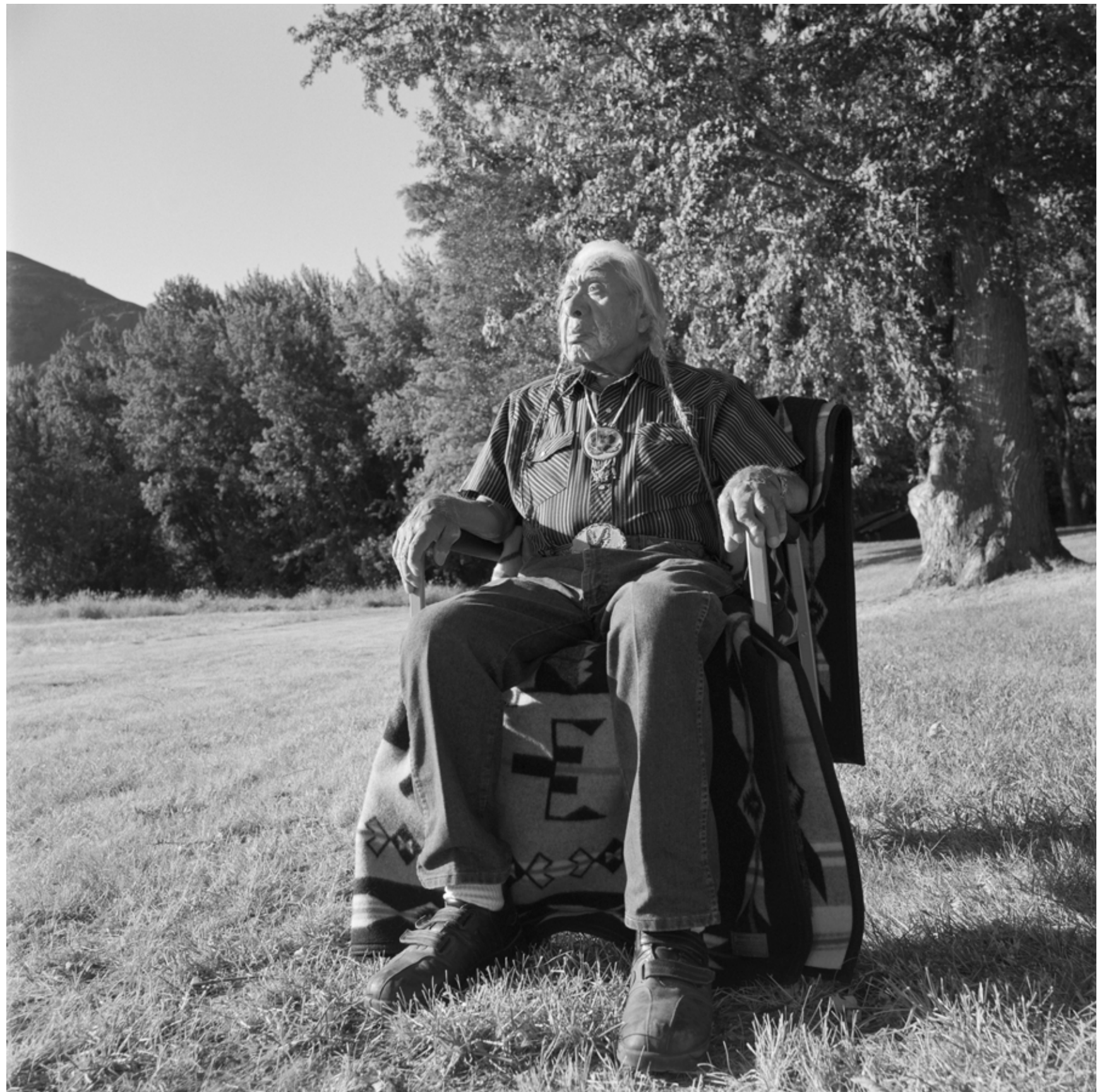
Losing their lands has had a profound impact on Native people. Many tribal leaders believe it is the most significant factor in the economic, cultural, health, social, and spiritual challenges facing Native Americans today.

How could TPL help? Conservation organizations have not always had the best relationships with tribes. What should be a natural alliance between these constituencies too often has deteriorated into acrimony and bitterness. When we created the Tribal & Native Lands Program in 1999, we also committed to being a true partner to Native people. This commitment was a natural extension of our “land and people” mission. TPL protects lands for communities, not from communities. Our mission differentiates TPL from other conservation organizations and resonates with tribes and Native people.

In addition, TPL is able to offer at low or no cost the precise skills in real estate, planning, finance, and fundraising that tribes need to regain their lands—skills they might otherwise be unable to afford. Since it was established, TPL’s Tribal & Native Lands Program has worked with more than 70 tribes to protect 200,000 acres valued at \$150 million.

But this work has led to more important changes that cannot be expressed in dollars and acres. The return of the Nez Perce to Hetes’wits Wetes and Oregon for the first time in more than a century struck a deep chord in Americans—Natives and non-Natives alike—and in people throughout the world. Front-page articles about the event appeared in dozens of major U.S. newspapers and in media from as far away as the Philippines, Thailand, and Russia. People were reminded of Chief Joseph’s leadership and eloquence and of the injustices suffered by Native people when their lands were taken from them. Many perhaps saw the reuniting of the Nez Perce with their land as a small but symbolic step towards healing relationships—whether between people or between humans and the earth.

Such healing does not occur overnight. In celebration of the Nez Perce return from exile, the school board in Enterprise, Oregon, a community close to the project site, voted to banish the offensive name “the Savages,” from their high-school teams, and to change the team mascot, an ugly caricature of a Native American. A public backlash ensued,



angry town meetings were held under police supervision, school board members were recalled, and eventually the student body voted to retain the Savages name but change the mascot. But twelve years later, in 2005, the school's students voted again, this time to change their team name to the Outlaws.

Returning ancestral lands to Native people has power. Power to educate about historical injustices that still affect us all, whether Native or non-Native. Power to inform non-Natives about how Native people live today, on or off reservation. Power to understand why a landscape is important—not just for its beauty but also for its history, culture, and ability to sustain and transform lives.

TPL's Tribal & Native Lands Program is pleased to present this tenth-anniversary review of highlighted projects from the program's first decade. The booklet is designed to provide insights and information about the program, along with inspiring portraits of 15 Native leaders who made these projects happen.

We are very grateful that Nancy Kittle—an accomplished and celebrated photographer and longtime friend and supporter of The Trust for Public Land—has allowed us to use her wonderful images of Native leaders. I first met Nancy when she traveled to Preston, Utah—at my request and with the support and encouragement of TPL's then-president Marty Rosen and former Tribal & Native Lands staffer Laura Baxter—to photograph Native leaders who were critical to TPL's purchase of the Bear River Massacre site for the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation. The sensitivity and passion demonstrated by Nancy on that beautiful spring day more than six years ago illuminates every picture in this book.

Bowen Blair
Senior Vice President, The Trust for Public Land
Founder, Tribal & Native Lands Program

Left: Horace Axtell



INTERTRIBAL SINKYONE WILDERNESS, CALIFORNIA



The nation's first intertribal wilderness was established August 18, 1997, on 3,845 acres of redwood forestland along California's Lost Coast. This land holds great cultural significance for local tribes, which in the mid-1980s helped stop clear-cut logging of coastal old-growth redwood forests in the region and formed the InterTribal Sinkyone Wilderness Council, a nonprofit land conservation organization comprising ten federally recognized tribes with direct ties to the Sinkyone region.

From the mid-1800s through the early 1900s, Sinkyone people were massacred and driven from their land, with some survivors joining neighboring tribes. The InterTribal Sinkyone Wilderness preserves a small portion of the original Sinkyone Indian territory. TPL, along with the Pacific Forest Trust, the California Coastal Conservancy, and others, assisted the council in reestablishing Indian control of the land and in executing easements that ensure permanent conservation of its sensitive cultural and ecological resources.

Priscilla Hunter—a member of the Coyote Valley Band of Pomo Indians—spearheaded efforts to create the nation's first intertribal council that is incorporated as a nonprofit. She has served as chairperson of the council since its inception, and rallied local tribes to acquire and protect the land. "The council is really focused on developing and implementing very positive initiatives that benefit the land and our communities," she says.

Hawk Rosales (pictured on the cover) has worked for the council since 1990 and is responsible for designing and implementing projects that enhance the cultural and ecological values of the intertribal wilderness.



BEAR CREEK MASSACRE SITE, IDAHO

On January 29, 1863, U.S. Army Colonel Patrick E. Connor, leading a group of volunteers, attacked the Northwest Band of the Shoshone Nation at Bear River in southern Idaho, killing an estimated 350 Indians. For years, this event was called the Great Battle at Bear River, yet only recently have historians identified it as one of the largest massacres of Indians in U.S. history. The massacre site is considered sacred ground because the bodies of the Shoshone were never buried but left for the wolves and coyotes to devour.

After the tragic mass killing, the Shoshone dispersed through northern Utah and southern Idaho. Although treaties were signed that deeded Utah's Cache Valley to the Northwest Band of the Shoshone, the federal government nonetheless ceded the valley to white settlers, leaving tribal members homeless.

TPL's Tribal & Native Lands Program worked with the Shoshone to acquire the massacre site—to tell the truth of its history, but more important, to provide a physical setting where tribal members could mourn relatives lost in the massacre.

At the dedication ceremony in 2003, tribal members spoke of being unable to mourn their ancestors properly because they had not been allowed on the land, and of their relief in finally having access to the site. Pictured are Gwen Davis, then chairperson of the tribal council, former council member Helen Timbimboo; and Patty Timbimboo-Madsen, the tribe's cultural and natural resource manager.



QUINAULT INDIAN NATION ANCIENT FOREST, WASHINGTON

Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, white settlers commonly stole land from Indians through so-called “surveyor errors.” In the northwest corner of Washington State, an 1873 survey deprived the Quinault Indians of 12,000 acres that ended up in the surveyor’s family. Forested in massive old-growth cedars, this remote property was finally repatriated to the Quinault Indian Nation in 1988. Strapped for cash and needing to harvest timber on parts of the property, the Quinault sought federal logging permits, which were denied due to the presence of endangered species.

Quinault leader Pearl Capoeman-Baller had heard about the Tribal & Native Lands Program and called to see if TPL could help. TPL’s Bowen Blair and Alan Front helped craft a solution under which the federal government would purchase a conservation easement over a portion of the property, protecting habitat for marbled murrelets and northern spotted owls. Proceeds from the purchase would go to the Quinault Nation, which would retain its land. Thanks to Capoeman-Baller’s leadership, the nation agreed to the plan, and federal funds for the easement were secured.

Later in its partnership with the Tribal & Native Lands Program, the Quinault Nation engaged TPL to create a “greenprint” of its lands, mapping them for conservation, cultural values, fisheries, timber, and other uses. This unique tool allows the nation to prioritize and facilitate land acquisition for a range of purposes, from economic development to salmon restoration to preserving cedars for traditional canoe construction. At the nation’s request, TPL also offered a real estate training course for Quinault staff. The Tribal & Native Lands Program continues to offer these services to tribes nationwide.



WANAKET WILDLIFE AREA, OREGON

The Wanaket Wildlife Area, formerly the privately owned Broken Arrow Ranch, is located 25 miles northwest of Pendleton in eastern Oregon. Wanaket (the name means “beginning of water” in the Umatilla language) is a prime example of Columbia Plateau habitat, important for many plant and animal species in the Columbia River basin. Golden eagles, burrowing owls, and long-billed curlews frequent the ranch’s diverse landscape of pothole wetlands and shrub steppe. Upland game species and edible plants have made the area an important hunting and gathering site for generations of Native people.

Always crucial for wildlife, this habitat became even more important after the 1930s, when thousands of acres of similar habitat were inundated behind dams on the Columbia River. The creation of the Umatilla-managed wildlife area was an early example of conserving land with federal funds designated to mitigate that habitat loss—a model that has proved very successful in the years since.

TPL acquired the property for the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation at the urging of Antone Minthorn—the long-time chair of the tribes’ board of trustees, who also championed funding for the project. The difficult and protracted transaction included multiple land exchanges with several entities, including the state of Oregon and the nearby Port of Morrow.



WAO KELE O PUNA, HAWAI‘I

In 1893, when American and foreign businessmen aided by the U.S. military illegally overthrew the Hawaiian Kingdom, all government and crown lands were seized by the new provisional government. Their ownership was transferred to the United States in the controversial annexation of 1898, and in 1959 to the newly formed state of Hawai‘i. In this process, Native tenants lost their claim to those lands. Until 2006, no Native Hawaiian entity held title to these “ceded” lands, which Native Hawaiians rightfully own.

Included in this massive transfer of land and wealth was a 26,000-acre rainforest called Wao Kele o Puna, which today is the last large intact lowland rainforest in the state. Even after the forest was traded into private ownership, generations of Native Hawaiians continued to practice traditional hunting, gathering, and religious customs there.

In 1982, after the landowner received state approval for a geothermal development on the site, the Pele Defense Fund, led by its president, Palikapu Dedman, organized intense community and Native Hawaiian opposition that eventually halted the project. In 2001, Palikapu Dedman contacted TPL for assistance in acquiring the property for cultural and conservation purposes. After five years of work, TPL conveyed the land to the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, marking the first large reacquisition of ceded land by an organization representing Native Hawaiians.



WAIMEA VALLEY, HAWAI‘I

For many, O‘ahu’s North Shore conjures images of sandy beaches and surfers on giant waves. But Native Hawaiians know it as home to one of the last fully intact watersheds on the island, a sacred place associated with *kabuna nui* (priests) for thousands of years. That place is the Waimea Valley, and in 2002, development threatened to despoil its 1,800 acres.

Into the breach stepped the Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA), an autonomous government agency. Formed after Hawai‘i’s 1978 Constitutional Convention, OHA functions as a public trust to improve the lives of Native Hawaiians.

Under the leadership of its chair, Haunani Apoliona, and its administrator, Clyde Nāmu‘o, OHA rallied support for Native Hawaiian ownership of the Waimea Valley—both to preserve this sacred site and to create a land base for Native Hawaiians who had been stripped of their lands during the illegal overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom.

OHA, the City of Honolulu, the U.S. Army, and the Hawai‘i Department of Land and Natural Resources all contributed funds to secure the \$14 million property, with title to the valley vested in OHA. The Trust for Public Land used its relationship with the U.S. Army to secure additional funds designated for land conservation around military bases and training areas.



TAOS VALLEY OVERLOOK, NEW MEXICO

The 2,581-acre property at Taos Valley Overlook, outside Taos, is noted for its sweeping vistas of the Rio Grande Gorge and the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. It is a prime spot for hiking and rafting, and offers critical habitat for peregrine falcon, native brown trout, and the federally endangered southwestern willow flycatcher. Working with several New Mexico pueblos, TPL acquired and conveyed 1,774 acres of the property directly to the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) for protection within the Orilla Valley Recreation Area, while returning thousands of acres of culturally significant land to Pueblo people.

In 2001, San Felipe Pueblo approached TPL, seeking land to acquire and exchange for approximately 9,460 acres of BLM-owned land that contained sites sacred to the pueblo. TPL identified 270 acres within the overlook property, which it acquired and traded to the BLM in exchange for the land the pueblo sought to acquire. Later that year, Santo Domingo Pueblo sought TPL's assistance in acquiring approximately 7,376 acres of BLM land. Once again, TPL constructed a land exchange that conveyed a portion of the overlook to the BLM in exchange for the acreage sought by the pueblo. Santo Domingo Pueblo voluntarily placed a conservation easement on all but 980 acres of this culturally rich land.

Altogether, TPL has arranged the exchange of 430 acres of the Taos Overlook property for 16,836 acres of BLM land that, in turn, was conveyed to the San Felipe and Santo Domingo Pueblos. Much of the acreage gained by the pueblos is subject to conservation easements.

Everett Chavez, the former governor of Santo Domingo Pueblo, led the successful four-year partnership with TPL to conclude that land exchange. "It's great that there are groups out there, like TPL, that can help us do this. Creative partnering can be challenging, and we appreciate the expertise that others provide."



LYLE POINT, WASHINGTON

At the confluence of the Columbia and Klickitat Rivers in the eastern Columbia Gorge is a point of land known by the Native Columbia River people as Nanainmi Waki 'Uulktt: "the place where the wind blows in two directions." Native people have lived and fished here for thousands of years. They also buried their dead here—a smallpox outbreak brought by European settlers decimated the Indian village on the point—and the land is considered sacred.

In 1992, a 33-lot subdivision was approved for Lyle Point, and it seemed likely that the land would end up as a gated community, cutting off access to the tribal fishing site. Under the leadership of tribal elders Johnny Jackson and Wilbur Slockish, the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Indian Nation and Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation sued to stop the subdivision, and environmental groups held a series of protests that included a nine-month encampment on the site.

Protecting the site was crucial to the well-being of the tribes' ancestors and living members. Throughout the litigation and protests, TPL negotiated with the landowners while discussing with tribal members how to protect and steward the site. As part of a legal settlement, two of the 33 lots were purchased by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for fishing access—but plans for housing moved forward, and TPL elected to acquire the property to save it from development. Finally in 2007, 15 years after development was first approved for Lyle Point, TPL transferred the remainder of the land to the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Indian Nation.

At the dedication, Jackson spoke movingly of how the proposed housing development's impermeable surfaces would have kept the spirits of his ancestors from going to heaven. The protection of Lyle Point is a testament to TPL's commitment to protecting places of ecological and spiritual importance to tribes. For 15 years, TPL stayed the course to safeguard this extraordinary piece of land despite considerable economic and political pressures favoring development.



DESERT CAHUILLA LANDS, CALIFORNIA

Around 700 A.D., the Colorado River changed course and inundated portions of the Imperial and Coachella valleys in Southern California, creating Lake Cahuilla. Until the river again changed course and the lake dried up sometime after 1500 A.D., the Desert Cahuilla Indians adapted to this ecological change by crafting V-shaped fish traps from granite rocks and working in teams to herd schools of mullet, humpback chub, and bonytail into the traps.

These fish traps are among the many cultural sites and artifacts of the Desert Cahuilla people found today in their ancestral homeland west of the Salton Sea—land now threatened by encroaching development, including off-road vehicle use. The property is also of significant ecological importance, home to bighorn sheep and a number of rare plant species.

In 2006, TPL's Tribal & Native Lands Program assisted twelve tribes, the Native American Land Conservancy, California State Parks, and many other partners in protecting 4,360 acres containing the fish traps, ceremony and habitation sites, geoglyphs, and other features of cultural and spiritual importance to the Cahuilla people. A \$50,000 TPL grant to the Native American Land Conservancy facilitates tribal involvement in the management of the cultural resources.

Shown are William Madrigal, a site monitor, and tribal secretary Dineen Mike Tom.

THE TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND

Projects Benefiting Tribal and Native People, 1989-2009



1989

- Miller Island, Oregon
Yakama, Umatilla, Nez Perce,
Warm Springs

1992

- Snake Warrior's Island, Florida
Seminole Tribe of Florida

1993

- Wocus (Windmill) Point, Oregon
Klamath Tribes
- Wanaket Wildlife Area, Oregon
Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla
Indian Reservation

1994

- Sabo Farm, Minnesota
Red Lake Band of Chippewa

1995

- Miami Circle, Florida
Ancestral Tequesta People
- Mashpee National Wildlife
Refuge, Massachusetts
Wampanoag Tribe
- Sinkyone InterTribal Wilderness
Park, California
10 Northern California tribes

1996

- Eagle Creek, Minnesota
Shakopee Mdewakanton
Sioux Community
- Hetes'wits Wetes (Chief
Joseph Preserve), Oregon
Nez Perce Tribe

1998

- Halawa Valley, Hawai'i
Native Hawaiians

- Deadman's Pass Overlook, Oregon
Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla
Indian Reservation
- Joseph Canyon Forest, Oregon
Nez Perce Tribe
- Burgdorf Meadows, Idaho
Nez Perce Tribe

1999

- Formal Founding of TPL's Tribal &
Native Lands Program
- Grande Ronde Overlook, Oregon
Nez Perce Tribe

2000

- Commencement Bay, Washington
Puallup Tribe
- Joseph Canyon Overlook, Oregon
Nez Perce Tribe

2001

- Taos Valley Overlook, New Mexico
San Felipe Pueblo

2002

- Kilchis Point, Oregon
Tillamook Indians/Grand
Ronde Tribes
- Osage Rail Trail, Oklahoma
Osage Nation
- Betty's Neck, Massachusetts
Wampanoag Tribes
- Taos Valley Overlook, New Mexico
Santo Domingo Pueblo
- Mashpee Indian Burial Ground,
Massachusetts, Mashpee
Wampanoag Tribe

2003

- Pu 'uhonua o Hōnaunau, Hawai'i
Native Hawaiians

- Ka 'ala Farms, Hawai'i
Native Hawaiians
- Trail of Tears—Moccasin Bend,
Tennessee, Cherokee Nation
- Bear River Massacre Site, Idaho
Northwestern Shoshone Tribe
- Crest of Montezuma, New Mexico
Santo Domingo Pueblo
- Trail of Tears—Chief Vann House,
Georgia, Cherokee Nation
- Cougar Bar, Idaho
Nez Perce Tribe
- Trail of Tears—Chieftains Museum,
Georgia, Cherokee Nation

2004

- Mu 'olea Point, Hawai'i
Native Hawaiians
- South Fork Walla Walla
River, Oregon

- Confederated Tribes of the
Umatilla Indian Reservation
- Canyon of the Ancients, Colorado
Ancestral Pueblo People
- Grafton Hassanamesit Woods,
Massachusetts, Nipmuc Tribe
- San Bruno Mountain Overview,
California, Pajaro Valley Ohlone

2005

- Pilot Knob, Minnesota
Mendota Mdewakenton Sioux Tribe
- Moonshine Island, Wisconsin
Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Lake
Superior Chippewa

2006

- Queen's Bath, Hawai'i
Native Hawaiians
- Honu'apo Fishpond, Hawai'i
Native Hawaiians

- Zarling Lake, Wisconsin
Menominee Tribe
- Waimea Valley, Hawai'i
Native Hawaiians
- Eld Inlet, Washington
Squaxin Island Tribe
- Desert Cahuilla Prehistoric Area,
California, Cahuilla, Agua Caliente,
Morongo, Cabazon Tribes
- Wao Kele o Puna, Hawai'i
Native Hawaiians
- Swan Valley—Elk Creek, Montana
Confederated Tribes of Salish
Kootenai
- Trail of Tears—Fort Armistead,
Tennessee, Cherokee Nation/East-
ern Band of Cherokee Indians
- Quinault Northern Boundary,
Washington, Quinault Indian Nation

2007

- Wolf Island, Minnesota
Bois Forte Band of Chippewa
- Pipestone National Monument,
Minnesota, Sisseton Wahpeton
and Lower Brule Tribes
- Lyle Point, Washington
Yakama Nation
- Indian Farms, Wisconsin
Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake
Superior Chippewa

2008

- Cedar Springs, Arizona
Ancestral Pueblo People

FROM THE DIRECTOR



When God first put us on this land he gave us only one law to follow, and now you are going to change this law today and take a different course ... [I]t is hard for me to part with any of my land. How is it that you want me to do so?

—GIBSON JACK, SHOSHONE

The struggle between Native American and European American ideas about land ownership and stewardship has been deep and damaging in many respects. The persistent notion that Native Americans did not understand land ownership is preposterous at best. Having traveled throughout the United States and visited many Native nations, I have learned that in most creation stories there is a deep and abiding understanding that Native people are to be the stewards of the land, air, and water. This stewardship is a covenant that must be kept in order to sustain our lifeways and our lives. During the Walla Walla Treaty Council of 1855, the Cayuse delegation said it best: “Why should we want a few goods in exchange for our lands?... We love our country – it is composed of the bones of our people, and we will not part with it.”

In 1992, after serving in the Navy and in the 1991 Gulf War, I joined my grandfather, the late Charles F. Sams Sr., a World War II veteran, on the Columbia River (N'Chi Wana) to fish for salmon, as our people have done for thousands of years. I expressed to him my desire to return to university, get a degree, and live a simple life. Late one night, while sitting on a scaffold over the river, he said to me, “Grandson, it is our duty, our responsibility, to be the protectors of this land, our homeland. This duty is never-ending. You must protect and preserve our foods, water, and our land.”

This sentiment can be felt throughout the United States. I have seen a great desire among Native people for the return of our sacred, traditional, ceded, and treaty lands, from which we were dispossessed either peacefully or by force. The Trust for Public Land made a commitment ten years ago to help Native people, Native communities, and Native governments regain their lands. This commitment demonstrates a willingness to learn and to understand the deep and abiding love Natives have for this land, our homeland.

Over those past ten years, the skilled project staff of The Trust for Public Land have worked with more than 70 tribal nations to reacquire lands where they can continue to practice their cultural values of being good stewards. In the process, we at TPL have built a better understanding of our commitment to “land for people.” In this mutual education process, we are sharing our knowledge and experience with Natives and non-Natives alike. This is the homeland of the first people and all American people. And while our ideas are sometimes still in conflict, we can all learn how to better preserve, protect, and conserve what we love, the land. Together, we can address the sad part of our history and help preserve the lifeways of Native peoples.

Charles F. Sams III, National Director of TPL's Tribal & Native Lands Program

The Trust for Public Land conserves lands for people to enjoy as parks, gardens, and other natural places, ensuring livable communities for generations to come.



THE TRUST *for* PUBLIC LAND

CONSERVING LAND FOR PEOPLE

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