

Protecting Our Lands

By Melodie A. Lopez, M.S.W., Vice President, Arizona Indian Education Association / Photos by IngriQue Salt



Who's that? Page 27

Our Arizona Indian youth have something important they would like to share, for those who wish to listen. The 2017 Protecting Our Lands summer campers developed the following environmental policy statement within four days to be shared with their tribes, urban Indian communities, and the public at large. It encompassed their words of strength, prayer, and hope for the generations to come.

We, as Indigenous youth, know that our ancestral and current lands and everything that congregates within it that sustains life; including the water, air, culturally significant plants, and animals are sacred. We will use our voice to act upon protecting our home to ensure our future generations' health, safety, and surrounding ecosystems. We will work towards informing tribal members, as well as the public, about these environmental issues. By communicating and collaborating with other global indigenous nations, we can create harmony to develop solutions for ourselves and future generations and those yet to be born. In conclusion, as spiritual people, we voice awareness about our concerns to protect our indigenous lands so that we can preserve our natural resources.

- AIEA Youth 2017, Protecting Our Land Declaration

The Arizona Indian Education Association (AIEA) was listening carefully at our 2016 AIEA Youth Conference. In various workshops, the young people voiced concerns about the environment and their rights as indigenous youth. We were asked, "How can we protect our land when our sovereignty and our treaties are not being respected?" AIEA felt the need to act upon what we heard and decided that we would address their concerns



Melodie Lopez handing off the talking gourd to youth. Sharing stories of camp experience and connections made.

via a summer camp model that emphasized a cultural understanding of stewardship, grounded in the concept of tribal sovereignty. In the summer of 2017, AIEA held our first summer camp, Protecting Our Land / Nya mad-ta-vicha mi-vwayjii. The Yavapai-Prescott Tribe, original owners of the land, agreed to the camp concept and gave us the Yavapai translation for the camp theme - NYA MADTA-VICHA MI-VWAYJII, meaning "watch over our Land." We gathered in the Mingus Mountains at the University of Arizona's 4-H Camp to listen to 28 youth from eight different tribes throughout Arizona.



Dr. Sello Villegas sharing feedback on sustainable living with the youth for the activity, "Creating Your Own Community"

To assist our campers' ability to truly understand and connect with the concepts of Land, Sovereignty and Leadership, we had Elders-in-Residence as well as college students facilitate an exchange of ideas from many perspectives. After engaging with Native environmental lawyers, Native environmental scientists and Prescott Yavapai tribal leadership, our youth gathered in small groups to discuss what they heard and how their communities could benefit from the different ideas. After each small group experience, youth presented to the Elders. Our Elders

provided traditional ecological knowledge, encouraged policy development and related environmental science into real ongoing tribal needs. This intergenerational exchange effectively changed the nature of all presentations as serious and respectful.

Respect was a driving factor behind all of the camp activities and outcomes. AIEA youth demonstrated the utmost respect for each other's opinions and ideas. Every morning at daybreak and after a prayer, the students ran up a small mountain. Many animals watched us run, laugh and talk at camp including water birds, deer, mice, fish, cows, coyotes, and a bear cub. These shared experiences, among all the participants, created an inter-tribal family of brothers, sisters, uncles, aunties, and grandparents. With every activity, each student listened, gained knowledge and was able to put their thoughts into action. At all times, respect was shown for the Land.

Tribes Represented:

Havasupai, Hopi, Navajo, Quechan, San Carlos Apache, Tohono O'odham, Yaqui, Yavapai Prescott



Protecting Our Lands youth campers closing circle with family talk. Sharing camp highlights and take a ways

American Indian Education Association

Developing educational strategies and activities to provide research and resources for American Indian students through culturally responsive education

For more information or to apply for the 2018 Youth Camp visit: http://itcaonline.com/?page_id=21315



The AIEA Indigenous youth have a profound declaration that has been recognized and **supported by the Native American Fish & Wildlife Society Southwest Region Resolution**, seen on the next page.



NATIVE AMERICAN FISH & WILDLIFE SOCIETY

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NATIVE AMERICAN FISH AND WILDLIFE SOCIETY SOUTHWEST REGION RESOLUTION

SUPPORT OF NATIVE YOUTH IN THE SOUTHWEST REGION

RESOLUTION NO. SW-17-002

WHEREAS, the Native American Fish and Wildlife Society ("NAFWS") was established in recognition of the importance and respect accorded to fish and wildlife by Native American people; and

WHEREAS, the NAFWS is composed of Indian Tribes, organizations and people as well as federal and state agency representatives forming "a national Native organization to aid in the development and protection of Indian fish and wildlife resources"; and

WHEREAS, the NAFWS is dedicated "to the earth that began with our own beginning, and pledge to our fellow creatures that cannot be broken"; and

WHEREAS, Tribal youth in the Southwest Region are involved in natural resource activities and they as Indigenous youth know that our ancestral and current lands and everything that congregates within it that sustains life; including the water, air, culturally significant plants and animals, all of which are sacred. They use their voices to act upon protecting their homes to ensure future generations' health, safety, and surrounding ecosystems, and

WHEREAS, they work towards informing tribal members, as well as the public about these environmental issues. By communicating and collaborating with other global indigenous nations, they can create harmony to develop solutions for themselves and future generations and those yet to be born. As spiritual young people, they voice awareness about their concerns to protect our indigenous lands so that we can preserve our natural resources, and

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Southwest Region of the NAFWS hereby supports all Native Indigenous youth in their efforts to blend Traditional Native Knowledge and their education to protect our natural resources, the water, and Mother Earth, and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that the NAFWS Southwest Region will continue to support and appreciate the efforts and voices of our future leaders.