

Running and Stewardship

By: Lydia Jennings

As I was running yesterday, I was thinking a lot about what it means to be a land steward. A land steward is someone who looks after and cares for the land. Indigenous Nations have continued this practice since time immemorial, as evidenced in our languages, ceremonies, and cultural practices. We know that we belong to the land, not that the land belongs to us.

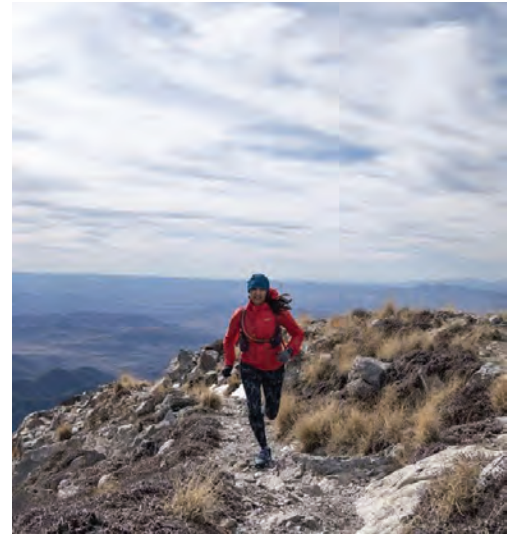
Some people, such as myself, have chosen a career dedicated towards land stewardship. That is, environmental scientists, hydrologists, outdoor educators, and environmental advocates amongst others. It's how we live and practice our land stewardship in our professional endeavors every day.

Then there are land stewards who acknowledge this responsibility by their presence in outdoor spaces on a regular basis. They notice the difference in these landscapes through regular visitation of specific trails, help with trail clean up days, and monitor them through such recreation. I'm thinking of the trail runners, climbers, hikers, mountain bikers, etc. These outdoor users have developed important relationships with the land and feel a vital kinship with landscapes.

Why do I bring this up? Since the government shutdown, many of the trails we visit at national, state, and regional parks are being heavily impacted. The professional land stewards aren't able to perform their duty. Now it's up to every other land steward and land user to share the responsibility of taking care of our lands.

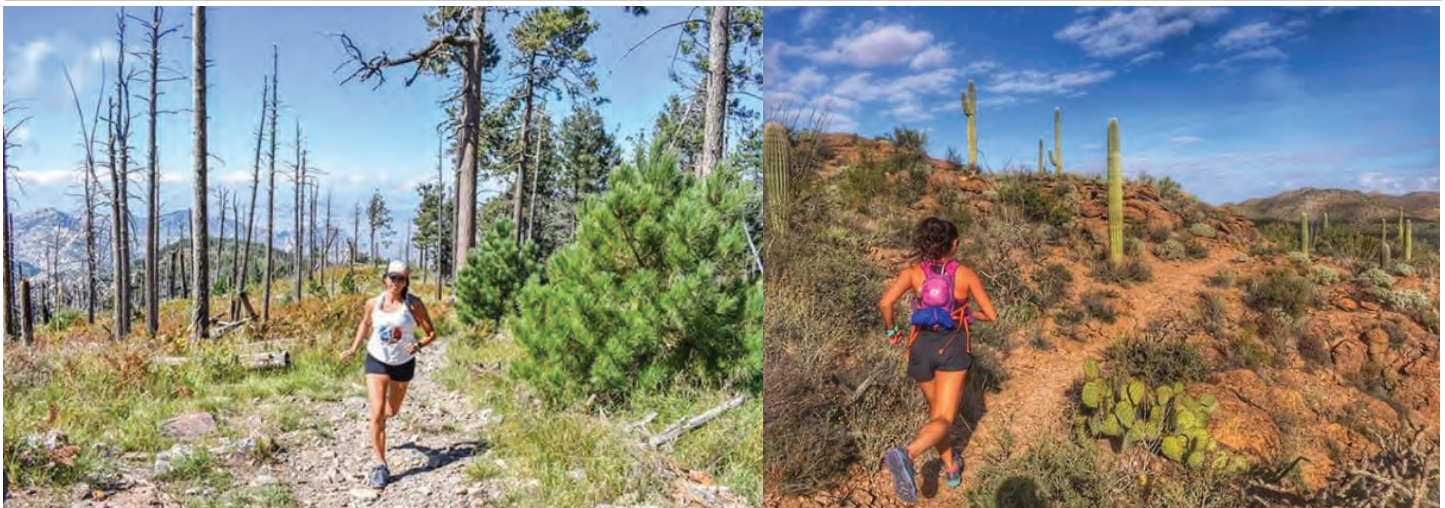
I saw so many people speeding through my local National Park over the weekend (since they didn't have to pay). I saw trash piled up high, I saw bathrooms backed up, and more litter than I've seen before out there. While many might not see themselves as land stewards, if you are using these spaces you have a responsibility to leave no trace of your presence there. This is how we collectively maintain these beautiful places for our future.

- Lydia Jennings (Huichol and Yoeme)



Lydia Jennings

While pursuing a Ph.D. in Soil Microbiology, Lydia is also an avid runner and an ambassador of Natives Outdoors. You can follow her Instagram at: [ilcooljennings](https://www.instagram.com/ilcooljennings) to keep up to date on her outdoor recreation while also getting educated on soil sciences!



Follow Lydia's Instagram for more awesome running photos