

Take Care of the Land and the Land Will Take Care of You

Traditional Ecology in Native California

FARRELL CUNNINGHAM

NATIVE CALIFORNIANS HAVE, since the very earliest times, enjoyed elemental interactions and relationships with their landscapes. All components of the landscape, including the birds, plants, animals, insects, waters, rocks, soils, winds, and spirits have formed the bases out of which Native Californian cultures were created.

Despite the fact that in some instances the details of relationships may have changed as a result of internal and external influences over time, the underlying patterns of thought remain rooted in the land and therefore in the most ancient of traditions. Throughout the state Native Californians continue to honor the landscape and its various components in a multitude of ways, from the simple act of acknowledging an outcropping of stone in passing, to gathering material resources such as acorns or willows in a way that enhances the resource, to performing individual and community-scale ceremonies that draw upon multiple and perhaps unknowable levels of existence and energy.

Contemporary Native Californians face many challenges and opportunities our ancient ancestors could not have imagined: greed, hopelessness, substance abuse, anger, rapid communication and transportation, technology from electricity to computers, family and community dispersion, and cultural disruption. The list goes on but the point is that these things exist within Native California in our time and we must, all of us, deal with them.

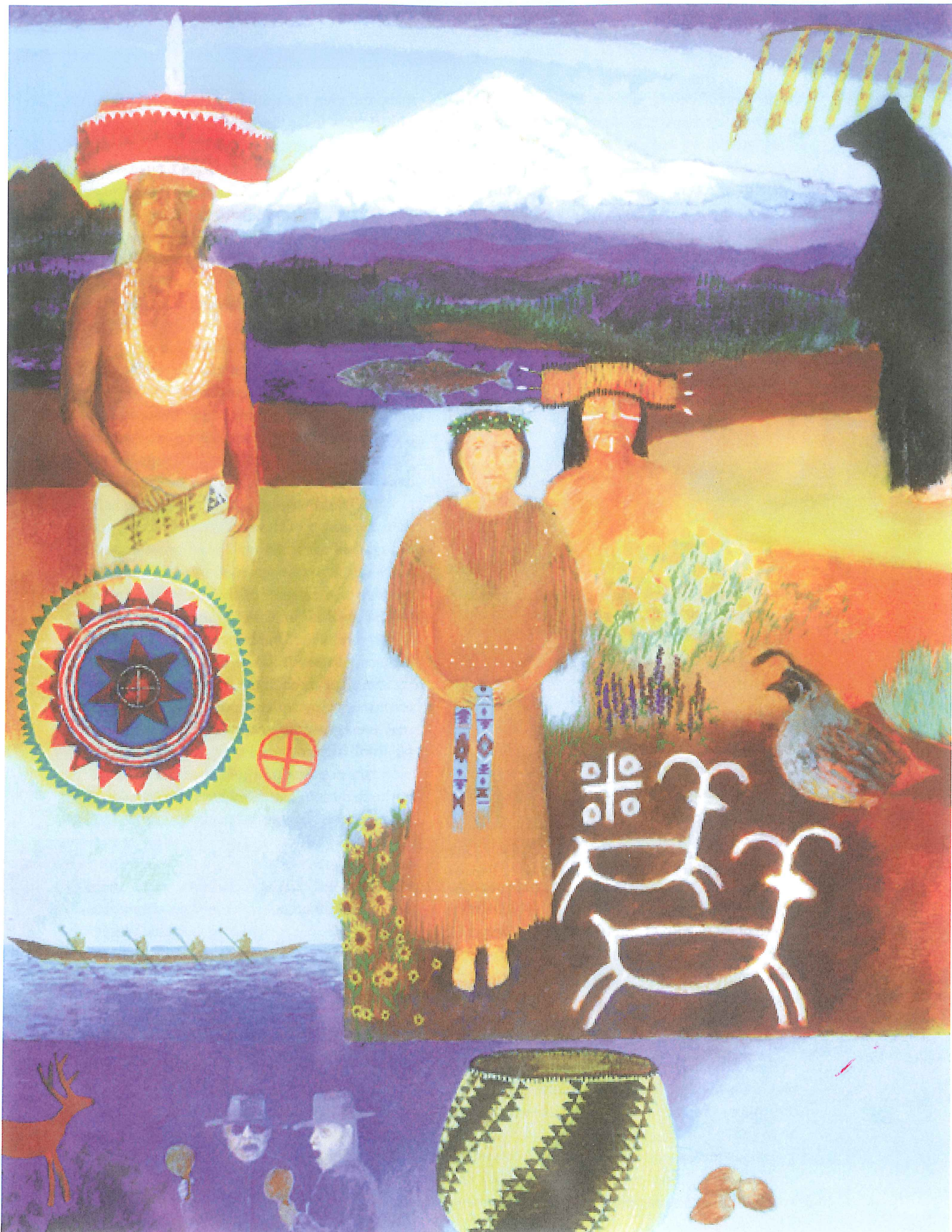
Increasingly, Native Californians are finding solutions in “getting back to the land and the culture.” This does not mean that Native Californians have ever entirely left the land, but that so much has changed that many of us were never able to learn the traditions of the ancestors; and yet we remain “the people.”

The following pages will outline peoples’ efforts throughout the state, north to south and east to west, to learn, re-learn, and teach the ancient steps of their respective traditions. Some of the steps will be immediately recognizable as connected to the past, and other steps will, upon first glance, appear new, but in the end all these steps must be recognized as inherently ancient in that they stem from the relationships between Native Californian communities and their lands.

Within recent years many people have struggled with what words, phrases, or terms accurately define the relationships and interactions that Native peoples throughout the world have had with their lands and resources. As we struggle to put into words the unique expressions and ideas of our time, a phrase or word will often appear that seems useful. The phrase that seems to have become most commonly used and understood lately is “traditional ecology.”

What is traditional ecology? Traditional ecology in Native California takes many forms because Native Californian cultures are so closely connected to the land. Traditional ecology describes

Frank LaPena, “The World Is a Gift,” 2002, acrylic on canvas, 40" x 30". Collection of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.



the lifeways of people who have been created with those lands, people whose stories, songs, foods, medicines, and even languages have shaped and continue to be shaped by their environment.

Some aspects of Native Californian cultures in which traditional ecology may be found are language, stories, song, prayer, and the general category of daily life. All of these aspects of traditional ecology are independent and yet interwoven.



Resting after gathering acorn in fall 2004. "The acorn were so plentiful this year," says Carol Hall, "We held out the buckets and the acorn just flew in." From left to right, Dena Cunningham, Marlene Mullen, Kristy Brown and her daughter Mackenzie Brown, Hallie Mullen, Charlie Hall, and Carol Hall. Photo by Reina Rogers.

LANGUAGE

Traditional ecology can be found in Native Californian languages through implicit and explicit word meanings and sounds. Among land-based cultures the cultural view of the land and of the language form each other, and much of the knowledge of Native Californian ancestors is carried in the languages. For instance, the locations where plant resources can be found may be buried in place names, or specific plant uses and even habitat needs can be found in the names of those plants. For example, *osokum* is the Mountain Maidu name for a spring or seep and *bukuikum* is used in reference to a plant that can be used for tea. So *osokum bukuikum* becomes the Mountain Maidu name for horse mint, a plant commonly used as tea that grows around springs or seeps.

Language is also believed by many Native Californians to be the voice of a given land. It is believed to be the language that the plants, ani-

mals, and even the spirits will best respond to. The power of this idea cannot be overestimated in terms of forming a foundation for elemental relationships between Native Californians and their lands.

STORIES

Through stories, the animals, plants, and even geographic features may teach us how to use and, perhaps more importantly, take care of them and ourselves. Stories can also build the path to a basic worldview that will develop into all subsequent forms of traditional ecology as thought and practical application. The beginning points for Native cultures are their creation stories. The world, according to different traditions, may have been created through thought or perhaps it was sung into being. If we take the idea that the world was created through thought, then the power of thought, and of having good thoughts in particular, will be of great importance to the people who believe in that idea. And the idea of the power of thought will then extend to all of the various land components. When thinking of natural resources and when gathering these resources, people will strive to think well of them in the belief that the resources will reciprocate the good thoughts and may even grow better. On the other hand, if people think of plants (and the other people of this world) as commodities to be bought and sold without meaning, it should not surprise us when we ourselves become meaningless commodities.

SONG

Within Native California cultures, many songs deal with human interactions with the natural world. There are songs for geographic places, songs for and inspired by birds, squirrels, deer, and nearly every other aspect of the land and natural resources. Indeed, among many Native Californian groups one way to acquire songs is to go away from the human world and "listen to the land." Songs acquired in this manner can be used for a variety of purposes: gambling luck, the acquisition of knowledge, hunting, and even love. Songs are often used as a sort of offering when gathering or managing plant resources. A song sung in this manner and at this time is believed to benefit the plant and the land.

PRAYER

As a basic point of beginning and continuing interaction with the land, prayer is for all things and everyone. Native Californians pray both on personal levels (sunrise and sunset prayers) and on community levels (ceremonies). These prayers are integral to the culture and affect the ways in which Native Californians view and interact with natural resources. For example, in the standard sunrise prayer among the Mountain Maidu during the Bear Dance, the speaker seeks to name as many of the things in this world as possible, all in the Mountain Maidu language. The speaker will begin with the stars and end with the worms. This naming of all things of this world is done in order that these things might know that the Maidu are still in this world and that therefore all things of this world will do well for the human people and for themselves.

DAILY LIFE

The individual and community patterns that make up daily life reflect our environment and the way we interact with it. Food, shelter, and all that we are and all that we need, including the specific tools that we use and the ways in which we speak to each other, are the physical patterns enacted from specific cultural thought patterns. The tools we use when interacting with natural resources reflect the particular traditional ecology of a given people: digging stick types, basketry styles, thought, and need form the unique aspects of each group of Native people. The world will reflect, for each of us, the energies that we put into it, and if we conduct ourselves in our daily lives in a manner consistent with that of our Native ancestors, then that world will survive, but if we choose to find new paths before knowing the old, we may never understand the paths that we have missed.

Undoubtedly there are many other ways to look at and understand traditional ecology. This article is an attempt to bring together all of the various elements of cultural perpetuation as real examples of Native people living today. To that end, in the following pages the reader will have the opportunity to see a variety of ways in which communities and individuals are taking care of the land and perpetuating their cultures.

POTAWOT HEALTH VILLAGE AND KU' WAH-DAH-WILTH RESTORATION AREA Potawot Health Village and Ku' wah-dah-wilth Restoration Area, a United Indian Health Services (UIHS) facility, is located in Arcata on land that is also part of the Wiyot homeland. Potawot is the Wiyot name for the Mad River, which flows just to the north of this exemplary health facility. Potawot is the result of twenty years of hard work, planning, and celebration on the part of nine different tribal groups located in northwestern California. It serves some 15,000 Native people and their families, who are primarily of Wiyot, Yurok, Tolowa, and Mattole descent and who live in Humboldt and Del Norte counties.



From left to right, Meko Henry, Farrell Cunningham, Brent Washoe, Franklin Mullen, Anthony Washoe, and Lorena Gorbet look for a song by talking to the elderberry stems. Photo by Reina Rogers.

Potawot is a true example of a modern health facility integrated with Native life spanning different generations; the thought patterns of generations are even represented by art exhibits of traditional basketry and carving juxtaposed with contemporary paintings inspired by these same forms and patterns.

“To me the facility and Ku' wah-dah-wilth Restoration Area are bringing back the land to the way it was, with native plants and people, and that is important to our spirituality and health,” said Marian Seidner, administration

receptionist at Potawot Health Village and a Wiyot tribal member. In this case the land is a forty-acre parcel. The parcel is divided into two twenty-acre sections, one of which is dedicated to integrated development and restoration, while the other has been set aside as a conservation easement where native plants and wildlife are being restored. The restoration area is known as Ku' wah-dah-wilth, which means "comes back to life" in the Wiyot language, and indeed the use of native language as a way of connecting with the landscape is evident throughout the facility.

Ku' wah-dah-wilth has come into existence under the direction of a traditional resources advisory committee made up of representatives from the various local tribes.

For more information on the Potawot facility, please contact Paula Allen at (707) 825-5000, paula.allen@mail.ihs.gov, or visit www.uih.org.



The Potawot Health Village's administration office. Photo by Farrell Cunningham.

HOOPA VALLEY IRRIGATION SYSTEM PROJECT
Contemporary Native communities have many needs, and as populations continue to grow, tribal lands seldom increase in size. Thus, tribal governing bodies face the challenge of meeting needs for communities with less and less available space. Maximum utilization of resources while maintaining and even enhancing the health of those resources is a modern reality in Native California. The Hoopa Valley Public Utilities District (HVPUD) and the Hoopa Valley Tribal Council

are doing their parts to ensure land and resource health for present and future generations. One part of their effort has been to push toward creating an efficient and environmentally sound irrigation system.

Although there is currently little agricultural production in the Hoopa Valley, the land has the potential to support an agrarian community that would provide healthy fruits and vegetables while also helping the local economy. Many people in the Hoopa Valley use the land for a variety of purposes including the gathering of various traditional natural resources such as willows, acorns, and various herbs. Equally important are the fruits of the Trinity River, which runs through the Hoopa Valley, such as salmon and eel. A well-designed irrigation system will help to meet all contemporary community resource needs while preserving land and stream health.

Current irrigation systems rely entirely on surface water diversions from seven creeks, some of which run completely dry during late summer. The conflicting needs of the irrigation systems, domestic water systems, and in-stream fisheries have led to the need for a more efficient irrigation system. In 2002 the Hoopa Valley Public Utilities District (HVPUD) and the Hoopa Valley Tribal Council asked the Natural Resources Conservation Service to develop a conceptual irrigation water supply design for the eight major fields in Hoopa Valley. After extensive study the Natural Resources Conservation Service provided HVPUD with a cost analysis and plan for a system that can provide the valley's foreseeable irrigation needs in the most efficient manner. For more information, please contact Barbara Ferris of the HVPUD at (530) 625-4543.

THE ROUNDHOUSE COUNCIL INDIAN EDUCATION CENTER, INC.

The Roundhouse Council Indian Education Center, located in Greenville (Plumas County), has been working tirelessly over the past two years to preserve and perpetuate ancient Maidu knowledge of the landscape, plant resources, language, song, and dance. The main focus of the council is the youth. Youth, however, come from families and communities, and therefore, adults and elders are encouraged to participate both by teaching and learning.

Averaging about two projects per month, the Roundhouse Council staff, contractors, and volunteers have visited local museums to view basketry and photographs; gone to sacred sites where knowledgeable people have been able to teach participants about the areas; gone to the woods, meadows, and streams to gather willows, herbs, and other resources; and have through all activities incorporated appropriate Maidu language, prayers, and songs.

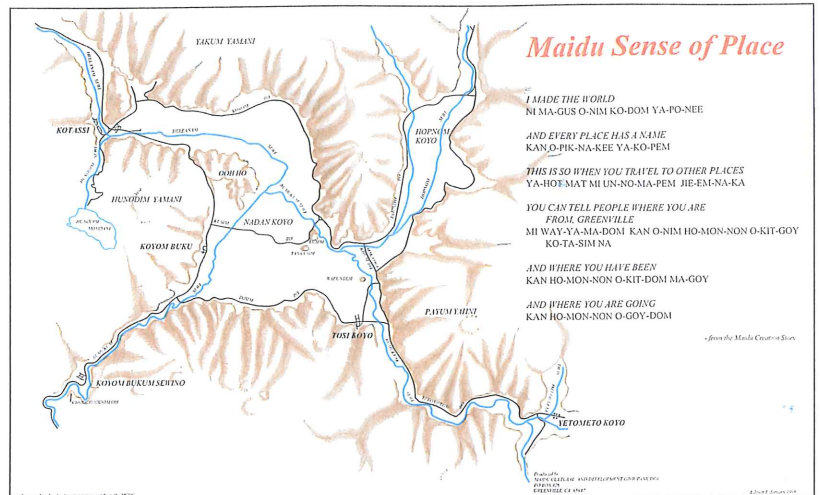
A community member who often takes part in Roundhouse Council programs said, "Each youth who takes this knowledge into his heart is like our community bank account. Invest in culture now and we will have a secure future. Without investing in culture we will, no matter what else we have, be poor." Through their participation in council programs young people are learning songs and language. "It makes my heart glad to hear young people saying even simple things in our language. It has been such a long time since I have heard our language spoken by young voices," said one elderly woman.

At the same time they are learning language, the young people are learning about plants and animals too. At one point, while out gathering elderberry wood to make clappersticks, one teacher told the students, "You have to talk to the plants and watch them to see which ones have the best songs in them."

As in so many Native California cultures, the present generation of the Maidu represents the last that will have had elders who spoke their language on a community-wide level and who also knew a natural-foods and subsistence lifestyle. "Our generation is critical toward continued cultural survival. We're it. What we make is what we will get," said another Maidu community member. Because of programs like the Roundhouse Council Indian Education Center, the future, while still not secure, already looks brighter than the recent past. For more information about the council, please contact Janine at (530) 284-6866 or janine@roundhousecouncil.com.

THE MAIDU CULTURAL AND DEVELOPMENT GROUP'S FOREST SERVICE NATIONAL PILOT STEWARDSHIP PROJECT

The Maidu Cultural and Development Group (MCDG), a nonprofit organization, has been



This map was developed in 1998 by the Maidu Cultural and Development Group as a tool for connecting community members to the landscape. The description of the landscape was provided by the late Maidu elder Tommy Merino.

working for ten years on a Forest Service National Pilot Collaborative Stewardship Project near the town of Greenville (Plumas County). This project, located on 1,500 acres of the Plumas National Forest and 600 acres of the Lassen National Forest, is the only project of its type in the nation. It is designed to demonstrate the integration of Maidu traditional ecology into contemporary landscape management methodologies in meeting forest resource needs. The traditional ecology focuses on understory vegetation (various medicinal plants, brush, and bulbs) as well as overstory management, in part through oak enhancement, while the contemporary landscape management focuses on catastrophic wildfire fuels reduction.

Through the past ten years much has been accomplished by way of planning, developing communication protocols, and completing National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documents as well as a truly unique Landscape Analysis (LA) document. The LA is unique because the MCDG collaborated with Forest Service personnel to develop and answer questions not usually considered, such as "What is the relationship between the Forest Service and the Maidu community?" and "What are historic uses of this particular landscape in terms of traditional ecology?"

Public education about traditional ecology, including a strong youth component, is ongoing. For more information, please contact Lorena Gorbet at (530) 284-1601 or MCDG@frontiernet.net.

INDIVIDUALS MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

In the Washoe tribe of California and Nevada individuals like Lynda Shoshone make respect and culture natural. "I've done a lot of things in my life and I'm over them. Now I grow by giving back to the community," Shoshone said. She gives plenty, is plenty busy, and seems to enjoy it all very much, judging by her laugh. Shoshone is the program coordinator of the Washiw Wagayay Ma'al Washoe Language School located in the Dresslerville Washoe community, five miles south of Gardnerville. She is also president of the Inter-tribal Council of California and a member of the Washoe Cultural Committee.

The language school is a wonderful example of a tribe perpetuating its language and traditional ecology and a people responding. Shoshone speaks a few words of the language—animals, plants, places, and various phrases—and, "I can understand and know if somebody's talking about me," she says with a laugh.

Shoshone is an activist, coming to the role quite naturally because she cared. "It started in the mid-eighties. A site I knew about was threatened and so I wrote letters. Next thing I knew someone must have said, 'We got a live one here!' The mail poured in announcing potential ground- and site-disturbing projects where tribal input was needed. Shoshone responded and then had to start learning. "I came from a background in accounting so, over time, I learned from Forest Service archaeologists and others." She learned well and is now

responsible for Native American archaeological site monitor training in various places, preserving the history of the Washoe that has been written upon the landscape and within the earth. "When I hold an artifact in my hand I think, 'My great-great-great-grandfather might've made this.'" That is a real connection.

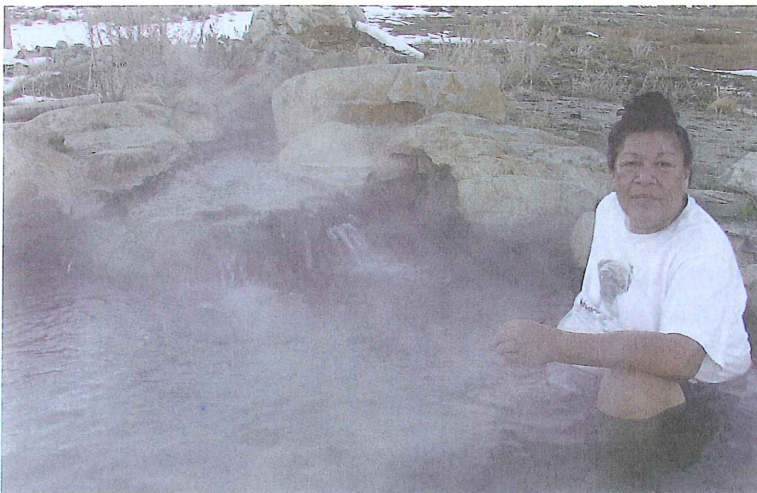
Preserving archaeological sites is an important component of preserving traditional ecology. Through analysis of such sites researchers can learn what foods were eaten and what resources were used by the Native peoples of the past. Further, site locations and frequency can help define population numbers and lead to accurate reconstructions of the impact Native peoples must have had on the landscape.

Shoshone dreams to create or see created a library or archive where all materials related to the Washoe—including writings, notes, recordings, and photographs—can be housed. Shoshone is a dreamer and a realist with a fair amount of tribal pride mixed in. "I would like to have such a place for Washoe people. A place where my grandchildren and even great-grandchildren can go to learn about what it means to be Washoe." And who better to care for a history and a homeland than its own people? For more information, please contact the language school at washoschool@aol.com or call (775) 265-7274.

NATIVE AMERICAN TRADITIONAL PLANT USE COALITION

An exciting and interesting effort is being made toward reconnecting Native Californian people of the central Sierra and foothill regions with their ancestral lands and resources. Representatives of several Native governments—including the Tuolumne Miwok, El Dorado Miwok, and Washoe Tribe of California and Nevada—are working together with local civic and environmental organizations, federal and state agencies, city governments, and numerous individuals to create a group called the Native American Traditional Plant Use Coalition. This group, facilitated by the Central Sierra Resource Conservation and Development Council, will represent a united voice where traditional resources are concerned.

The groups are well into the process of creating a simple yet comprehensive document called an Operational Working Agreement. According to



Lynda Shoshone at a hot spring near Minden, Nevada. Photo by Reina Rogers.

the document, "The purpose of this agreement is to establish terms and conditions under which the members of the Native American Traditional Plant Use Coalition will plan and accomplish coordinated activities to establish local centers utilizing traditional native plant use and management and/or the preservation of sacred sites." The idea is that local tribal people will identify resource areas (particularly areas threatened by development and by maintenance of existing infrastructure) and the coalition will collaborate with users of the resources to protect the areas, develop mitigation measures as necessary, gain access rights, and create management plans.

Although the Operational Working Agreement is still in draft form, the existence of the coalition is already bearing results. A current road expansion project that will eliminate nearly forty acres of oak habitat is required by state law to create a compensatory set-aside mitigation area for the oaks. Members of the coalition mentioned to the road project manager that there were also valuable bulb resources (such as brodiaea) in the area. As a result, although the road project will proceed, the topsoil—including the important bulbs—will likely be removed and set aside to allow the brodiaea to be replanted in an area determined by the coalition.

WHEN A LANGUAGE HAS ONLY ONE SPEAKER LEFT, ONE MORE MAKES TWICE AS MANY Robert Geary (Elem Pomo) is making a difference in the future of his people and the perpetuation of Pomo traditional ecology. Working with his aunt, Loretta Kelsey, the last speaker of the Elem Xaytsunoo dialect of the Pomo language, and linguist Jocelyn Ahlers, Robert is learning the language and teaching his family. Through learning the language Geary and his family are also finding a voice within the landscape. The voice speaks of such everyday poetry as the fog around the mountains, grasses, trees, birds, and dance regalia. Geary has learned well the idea that the land and its resources will respond better when spoken to in the language of the place. He has also learned that while it may be possible to say something in English it doesn't necessarily carry all of the meaning; "Our language is deep. What we say in English only scratches the surface of meaning." A full understanding of meanings is

important when dealing with the sacred aspects of culture, such as songs, dances, and regalia making. "Without the language we wouldn't know what we're singing about," said Geary. Language is also important in creating objects for use in ceremonies that can fully reverberate with the connections to the ancestors. "It's good to know how to make these things but we need to know what to call them, by their right names," he continued.



From left to right, Robert Geary, Loretta Kelsey, and Jocelyn Ahlers. Photo by Reina Rogers.

Place names are also important. Through learning the names of the places in the landscape Geary has been able to access knowledge going back to the beginnings of the world. Some of this knowledge has allowed Geary to gain a greater understanding of the connections between Native place names and traditional resources found in those places.

Like many other Native Californians Geary is learning his language in a variety of ways, including directly from his aunt and also through recordings made in the 1980s by Abraham Halpern of his aunt's father, who taught him stories of the time when animals spoke. "I use the recordings; my aunt guides me," he said.

Through his increased knowledge, Geary is then able to teach his family. As other language learners have discovered, the kids excel. "It's amazing to watch my kids pick this up. They learn faster than me. We use certain phrases such

as ‘hungry,’ ‘thirsty,’ and even ‘I love you,’ and if they say it in English my wife and I won’t respond.” In this way, the children must learn the language, and as they learn, the future of the Xaytsunoo dialect of the Pomo language becomes ever more secure. For more information, please contact Robert Geary at rgearyus@yahoo.com or P.O. Box 7311, Clearlake, CA 95422.

INDIGENOUS YOUTH FOUNDATION

Led by Monique Sonoquie (Chumash), Native youth and their families have been gathering traditional plants and herbs such as mugwort (wormwood to many of us), elder, sage, tules, and acorns. The plants and other resources are not always easily accessible because most of the Chumash have no tribal landbase. “We often use Forest Service land or whatever other lands we can,” said Sonoquie. One unique area of resource access that is available is what Sonoquie describes as a small lake located on the Vandenburg Airforce Base. An agreement allows specific people access for traditional plant gathering, and Sonoquie and her students are able to gather tule and juncus, among other things. The list of items Sonoquie and her students make out of tule alone is admirable: “We make baskets, miniature tule boats, decoys, and dolls. One day we’re going to make a full-size tule boat,” she said. Information regarding plants and uses comes from elders and Sonoquie’s own lifetime of learning.



Camas bulbs (*pulutem*) waiting to be transplanted to a stewardship site near Kotassim (Greenville).
Photo by Reina Rogers.



Brodiaea is one of the plants the Native American Traditional Plant Use Coalition is trying to protect.
Photo by Reina Rogers.

On a typical day of gathering plants, Sonoquie and her students pack tobacco as an offering. They also bring the necessary tools, such as clippers, knives, saws, and finally bags for trash, “so we can make it a trash clean-up activity also. We need to understand the importance of taking care of the land, of not polluting,” she said. Once they arrive at the place, she continued, “we take a look around. We look at the whole environment: plants, landforms, water systems, birds, and animals. Then we think about our ancestors and their ways of life. We ask ourselves, ‘Is this a likely village spot or maybe a spot just for gathering?’” In these ways Sonoquie is able to connect plant and community health while also bringing past, present, and future into the moment. Their most recent project is an organic garden where they are planting traditional Native foods and a medicine garden. For more information, please contact Monique Sonoquie at sonoquie@hotmail.com.

BISHOP PAIUTE TRIBAL IRRIGATION PROGRAM

The Bishop Paiute Tribe, located on the eastern slope of the Sierra Nevada in Owens Valley (Inyo County), has a long history of managing native plant resources using flood irrigation methods. As to when this flood irrigation methodology began, no one seems quite clear. Yet the simple fact remains that it existed, exists, and is a part of the Bishop Paiute cultural perspective. In the past

the flood irrigation system was specifically designed to benefit taboose, a type of nut grass that the people ate. Currently the flood irrigation system also meets contemporary community needs by supplying water for such things as pastures, orchards, and gardens.

Carrying this tradition of irrigation forward and taking care of the land and resources in the modern era, the tribe's irrigation requirements are met by an underground, gravity-fed flood irrigation distribution system. The tribe employs a full-time irrigator responsible for delivering water to each assignment holder on a predetermined schedule throughout the irrigation season. The tribe's employment of an irrigator could be understood as an extension of an ancient custom. In a paper written in 1930 titled "Irrigation without Agriculture," anthropologist Julian Steward mentions an honorary head irrigator position that was elected each spring by popular assembly in the Bishop area. According to tribal members, the head irrigator determined irrigation schedules and was also a leader for the people.

While the current system has fallen into disrepair, it still supplies low-cost irrigation water to many people. The Bishop Paiute Tribe is in the process of updating the system by making repairs on some of the most problematic sections. Taking care of the land and using available resources is making the difference for a community and tribe, allowing both to survive and even flourish in contemporary times. For more information about the Bishop Paiute Tribe irrigation water project, contact the tribe's Environmental Management Office at (760) 873-3665 or 50 Tu Su Lane, Bishop, CA 93514.

YEAH, AND IT DOES TAKE TIME

For the past thirty years Richard Bugbee (Luiseño), chairman of the Advocates for Indigenous California Language Survival, has been working to learn the cultures of the Native peoples of the San Diego County area. "Well, really the past thirty-two years, but for the first two years my teacher, Jane Dumas, wouldn't talk to me," Bugbee explained. The two years of waiting would seem to have been worth the effort. Dumas, currently in her early eighties, is a Kumeyaay of southern San Diego County and

she speaks her native language and has extensive knowledge of native plants.

Bugbee did not start out seeking knowledge of food and medicinal plants. "I'm an ex-construction worker, so I wanted to know utilitarian stuff like how to build the houses, nets, and those sorts of things." While Dumas helped him to learn those things, she was also able to teach him a far more specialized form of knowledge; "Jane's mom was a healer. Her knowledge is medicinal."



Sage. Photo by Monique Sonique.

Bugbee has had the rare opportunity of spending time with a knowledgeable elder and he has learned well. Not only has he learned plant usage but he has also learned how to take care of the plants in a traditional manner. One area of traditional land management that he does not hesitate to comment upon is the importance of fire in the ecosystem. "In the past we used to burn a lot and now we can't. The plants don't know what to do," he said.

In fact, Bugbee has learned the traditional ecology of the San Diego County area so well that he is now able to teach others. Along with Dumas, he is teaching an ethnobotany class at Kumeyaay Community College near San Diego. Class demographics show that there is a large and growing interest in native plants, uses, and management among both Native and non-Native people. "The class is going great. Usually it seems like in a college class the class starts and



From left to right, John P. Bathke, Jane Dumas, and Richard Bugbee. Photo by Reina Rogers.

then people drop out, but this class keeps growing,” he said. The class is made up of people from a variety of backgrounds, including general college students, botanists, basketweavers, herbalists, medical doctors, and even some local tribal leaders who drop in now and then.

And what does Richard want people to take away from this class? “One major thing I hope people will learn is how the people interacted with the plants. Another thing would be the proper ways to gather plants, such as asking their permission, saying a prayer—preferably in the Native language—and telling them what they will be used for.” For more information, please contact Richard Bugbee at (619) 459-9086 or hunwut@aol.com, or visit www.kumeyaay.com or www.kumeyaaycommunitycollege.com.

A BEGINNING

We hope you have enjoyed reading about the various aspects of traditional ecology throughout the state. We also hope you will view this information not as an end but as a beginning. As we move into the twenty-first century it is important that we remember that as Native people it is we who will define our futures in terms of the personal relationships we have with our communities and the land.

♦ In presenting the idea of traditional ecology, it is our aim that readers understand that with land-

based cultures there need be no limit to what constitutes traditional ecology. In fact, all thoughts that remain consistent with the culture are inherently land-based, and thus part of a traditional ecology.

Don’t hesitate to get involved. Sing a song to the willows and one day your grandchildren may find that song, as long as they know how. Contact your tribal group or the tribal group in your area and ask how you can do your part. And you can always help by continuing to learn. Even learning a few words of your native language will be of benefit.

Further, support the people mentioned in this article and anyone else who is doing this important work. Support all aspects of Native cultures so that no part of the picture will be lost. Each of us holds the key to the future. ▼

Farrell Cunningham (Mountain Maidu) is a member of the Tsiakim Maidu of Taylorsville Rancheria. He is indebted to his ancestors and those elders who carry down the traditions of the Maidu homeland for teaching him about language, plants, and ceremonies.

This special supplement has been funded in part by the California Association of Resource Conservation Districts and the United States Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The conservation service is fortunate to be able to participate in some of these projects and to support Native communities throughout the state. For more information about the NRCS and conservation technical assistance, contact Reina Rogers, American Indian Liaison for NRCS in California, at (530) **283-7513** www.ca.nrcs.usda.gov.