Presented to Ed Committee Meeting February 24, 2021 by Wendy Zacuto

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Proposal: Honoring our native relatives, the Tongva/Gabrielinos, and the land

Proposed by Wendy Zacuto

When Playa Vista took over some of the wetlands, they created a small outdoor museum documenting and honoring the indigenous Tongva/Gabrielino population and the animals and plants that live in the wetlands area.

This was a good beginning.

As an educator who values authentic learning, I suggest that we:

* **expand this small acknowledgment**
* **expand our appreciation for the land, animals and indigenous people who lived and still flourish in the La Ballona Wetlands**
* **celebrate a valuable resource for our community.** Tongva people need access to this land to continue their cultural foods and materials fo**r** crafts and worship. Our community would benefit from identification with this valuable historical/natural resource

Suggested actions:

1. Create an acknowledgement of indigenous origin for our education committee and offer this to all of the schools in the area.
2. Acknowledge that the land and animals are valuable resources for children, adults, and the continuation of our safe world as we study and learn about the rich environment within an area that has been largely taken over by homes and businesses.
3. Take a stance on the preservation of our local habitat, the La Ballona Wetlands.

A gentle restoration option honors the need for restoration, maintains the natural environment, and includes Tongva leadership as part of the protection for the area.

1. Provide educational experiences/curriculum/access to the wetlands and other natural local sites as an authentic and important science, anthropological, and cultural legacy.
2. Scrutinize historical curriculum for misrepresentation of native peoples and colonization perspectives.

(See supplemental materials below)

**Why is Indigenous land acknowledgment important?**

“It is important to understand the longstanding history that has brought you to reside on the land, and to seek to understand your place within that history. Land acknowledgements do not exist in a past tense, or historical context: colonialism is a current ongoing process, and we need to build our mindfulness of our present participation.” [Northwestern University](about:blank)

Simply stated, a land and territorial acknowledgment is a statement that recognizes the ongoing presence and relationship of the First Peoples whose land an institution occupies.

For First Peoples, this recognition is protocol for visitors and guests travelling, working, or living in a community that is not their original homeland.

The statement expresses an awareness about the dispossession of the indigenous peoples of the land to make visible ongoing forms of settler-colonial privilege and dominance.

A mere repetition of words should inaugurate actions that build or maintain relationships with First Peoples.

The Tongva/Gabrieleno/Acjachemen people are the First Peoples of this region, their lands were unceded, they did not negotiate a treaty with Mexico or the US government. Today, the five Tongva/Gabrieleno tribes struggle every day for their sovereignty.

In 2008, more than 1,700 people identified as **Tongva** or claimed partial ancestry. **In** 2013, it was reported that the four **Tongva** groups that have applied for federal recognition had over 3,900 members collectively.

The **Tribe** has been indigenous to the Los Angeles Basin for 7,000 years. This history is well- documented through 2,800 archaeological sites, in State historical records and federal archives, and Catholic church records at San Gabriel Mission and San Fernando Mission.

According to Julia Bogeny, Tongva Culture Officer:

* There is no Tongva word for nature as all are including in nature.
* Land was not stolen as it was never owned.
* The Tongva were entrusted to preserve knowledge and take care of the land.
* La Ballona Wetlands, in our community, is part of this land and is facing an option for restoration project that will limit the access to the community for 10+ years, will destroy animals, their habitats, create dangerous coastal degradation, and prevent Tongva from access to the land.
* Chief Lady

**Key components of a land acknowledgment**

**Start with self-reflection.** Before starting work on your land acknowledgment statement, reflect on the process:

* Why am I doing this land acknowledgment? (If you’re hoping to inspire others to take action to support Indigenous communities, you’re on the right track. If you’re delivering a land acknowledgment out of guilt or because *everyone else* is doing it, more self-reflection is in order.)
* What is my end goal? (What do you hope listeners will do after hearing the acknowledgment?)
* Who are the Indigenous people to whom the land belongs?
* What is the history of the land and any related treaties?
* You might include the names of living Indigenous people from these communities. If you’re presenting on behalf of your work in a certain field, highlight Indigenous people who currently work in that field.
* You might use Indigenous place names and language.
* Reflect correct pronunciation for the names of the Tribes, places, and individuals that you’re including.

**We might begin with:**

* We acknowledge the Tongva (Pronounced: Tong- Vah) or Tongva/Gabrieleno/Acjachemen peoples as the traditional land caretakers of the Los Angeles basin and Southern Channel Islands.

**Use past, present, and future tenses.** Indigenous people are still here, and they’re thriving.

**Land acknowledgments shouldn’t be grim.** They should function as living celebrations of Indigenous communities. Ask yourself, “How am I leaving Indigenous people in a stronger, more empowered place because of this land acknowledgment?” Focus on the positivity of who Indigenous people are today.

**Consider:**

* **Build real, authentic relationships with Indigenous people.** In addition to normal employment and family obligations, Indigenous people are working to heal their traumas, learn their languages, and support their nations. If you reach out for help, lead the conversation by asking an Indigenous person what you can do for them. Chances are, they’re likely overworked and could use *your* help.
* **Compensate Indigenous people for their emotional labor.** If you do plan to reach out to an Indigenous person or community for help, compensate them fairly. Too often, Indigenous people are asked to perform emotional labor for free.
* **There are many types of land acknowledgments.** Don’t expect to find a specific formula or template. Land acknowledgments that come from Indigenous people vs. non-Indigenous people look different, too.
* **Take Action**

**Land acknowledgment alone is not enough.** It’s merely a starting point. Ask yourself: how do I plan to take action to support Indigenous communities? Some examples of ways to take action:

**Support Indigenous organizations by donating your time and/or money.**

**Protect natural environments and animals**

**Ensure that educational programs are reflective of native people’s points of view and not the perspective of colonialization.**

**At the end of the day, remember:**

**Starting somewhere is better than not trying at all.** We need to share in Indigenous peoples’ discomfort. They’ve been uncomfortable for a long time.

Dr. Kate Beane (Flandreau Santee Dakota and Muskogee Creek) says, “We have to try. Starting out with good intentions and a good heart is what matters most.”

Resources:

[https://nativegov.org/a-guide-to-indigenous-land-acknowledgment/](about:blank)

[www.tobevisible.org](about:blank)

[https://gabrielinotribe.org/history/](about:blank)

[https://www.kcrw.com/culture/shows/curious-coast/las-tongva-descendants-we-originated-here](about:blank)