

THE CULTURAL CONSERVANCY

Spring 1995

PRESERVING LAND FOR TRADITIONAL CULTURES

THE CULTURAL CONSERVANCY is a land conservation organization dedicated to the preservation of traditional cultures. The Conservancy conducts research and educational programs on traditional ways of life and for the protection of indigenous "intellectual property rights", advocates religious freedom and human rights for land-based spiritual practices and beliefs, and provides technical and legal assistance to native groups. Where appropriate, THE CULTURAL CONSERVANCY will also assist local native groups to form their own land trusts, acquire land, property rights, and cultural conservation easements in order to protect the natural habitat of their traditional cultures.

We will work with existing public and private organizations, tribes, and native preservation groups to ensure that the lands and property rights we help to protect or acquire are maintained, restored and protected as traditional cultural reserves. The Conservancy works with native groups in the United States, Canada, Hawai'i, and South America. Our goal is to return "native lands to native hands."

Our Board of Directors, advisors and staff are a diverse group of native leaders, traditional practitioners, and experts in historic preservation, law, natural and cultural resource conservation, land rights, intellectual property rights, religious freedom and philanthropy. We welcome your interest and invite you to join THE CULTURAL CONSERVANCY.

The Cultural Conservancy Board of Directors:

Alejandro Argumedo (Kechuan)

Mary Cardoza (Lummi)

Kimla McDonald

Mililani Trask (Hawai'i)

Patricia J. Cummings, General Counsel

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Executive Director: *Melissa Nelson (Ojibwe)*

Program Director: *Ismana Carney*

P.O. Box 72086, Davis, CA 95617

THE EXPANDING ROLE OF LAND TRUSTS

Every land trust in America is saving native land, places once cared for by diverse indigenous populations. Today there are almost one thousand independent land conservation organizations operating throughout the United States, some of which are native land trusts. Altogether, they have saved approximately two million acres. Land trusts are beginning to recognize the rich cultural resources present on these lands and work with native groups to preserve these resources and allow local natives access to their ancestral places. Native groups are seeing the benefits of land trust conservation techniques and need technical assistance and support. The Cultural Conservancy was formed to assist individual native people and tribal organizations to use land trust tools to own, protect, or use land for conservation and cultural purposes.

NATIVE LANDS & CULTURE RESTORATION

In January 1995 THE CULTURAL CONSERVANCY was generously supported by a grant from the San Francisco Foundation to implement the planning phase of our *Native Lands & Culture Restoration Project*. The goals of this project are to support a process of coalition building among San Francisco Bay Area native groups and other organizations involved in cultural and environmental restoration. This will be accomplished by providing public education about cultural traditions, native land restoration opportunities, and the living traditions of today's California native people.

The Cultural Conservancy's role is to organize this opportunity for dialogue and to provide the educational framework within which native elders and teachers can lead discussions and determine the outcome and direction of land and cultural restoration work.

Because this project will focus on the restoration of the land-based traditions and the actual plants and animals of the Bay area, we will align ourselves with and coordinate public education and restoration projects at locations in the Four Sacred Directions, the Presidio to the West, Mt. Tamalpais to the North, Mt. Diablo to the East, and Indian Canyon to the South. We invite you to become a part of this network of restorationists working to preserve native lands and culture. Please contact us with your ideas and experiences.

PLEASE JOIN!

I want to support The Cultural Conservancy in its efforts to protect traditional cultures and their land.

Please send me additional information about THE CULTURAL CONSERVANCY.

Native or low-income membership: ____\$1

Enclosed is my tax-deductible donation: ____\$25 (regular membership) ____\$50 ____\$100 ____Other

(See Reverse Page for Mailing Instructions)

THE COMMODIFICATION OF THE SACRED

by Patricia J. Cummings

The commodification of the sacred is that which tends to sever complex interrelationships, for purposes of control and economic advantage. Commodification ignores the fragile and intricate bonds between people and the biotic communities in which they live. It requires a mentality that renames what it seeks to acquire, rather than respects what is already understood and cared for by others. It encloses and attempts to assert ownership over living beings, people and places. It reduces complex natural systems into economic models, cultures into concepts, favoring uniformity over diversity. All this destructive activity is justified in the name of science, art, religion, and commerce. To be most effective, commodification depends upon a lack of recognition and resistance by the vulnerable targets of its misappropriation.

Colonization, the age of discovery and the creation of the world market are the global manifestations of the commodification process. A lack of respect for life and religious and cultural intolerance continues to support western economic systems. The exploitation of native lands and their natural wealth is continuing and even accelerating as limited resources dwindle and economic competition increases. Increasingly, the incessant taking of minerals, plants, water, and land now includes another even more pernicious form of exploitation - the appropriation of native knowledge and ways of life.

The cultural and intellectual heritage of indigenous people is being threatened by the growing demands of biotechnology, by the popularity of native arts and cultural artifacts, by tourism, the desecration of sacred sites, energy extraction, and by the forces of "economic development". Since the existing legal and monetary systems of the dominant western nations do not respect indigenous sovereignty or traditional subsistence economies, there are few, if any, remedies and very little legal protection available. Thus, those who are the most vulnerable are left in a position of being the least able to cope with the threat.

To address these issues, in June of 1993 THE CULTURAL CONSERVANCY organized a gathering to provide an opportunity for native leaders to become better informed about the issues involved, to identify efforts to expropriate native knowledge and ways of life, and to discuss and define the appropriate strategic responses. A briefing packet was compiled and it was observed that the few successful responses to desecration are those that involve a deep reaffirmation of the spiritual and cultural practices which promote a reverence for life and a sense of the sacred.

SACRED SITE PRESERVATION EFFORTS

Halawa Valley, Hawai'i. In the Halawa Valley on the island of Oahu a freeway (H3) that has been in litigation for 20 years is once again threatening some of the most significant sacred sites discovered to date on Oahu. This entire valley is a rich cultural complex for traditional Hawaiians. THE CULTURAL CONSERVANCY's board member Mililani Trask is part of a coalition which is working to relocate the freeway so that the entire valley can be protected and nominated to the National Register as a traditional cultural property.

Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Colombia.

The Kogi are the last surviving high civilization of pre-Columbian America. For centuries they have maintained their isolation high in the Sierra mountains, which they believe is a sacred world in the heart of the larger world. THE CULTURAL CONSERVANCY, with the help of the CS Fund and the Tairona Heritage Trust, have purchased back some of the Kogi's original territory. Besides educating "younger brother" (modern civilization) about our sacred responsibility to our mother earth, one of the Kogi's goals is to re-establish their ancestral territory from the mountain top to the sea.

Mt. Shasta, California. With the help of THE CULTURAL CONSERVANCY, the traditional Wintu and other Northern California natives convinced the U.S. Forest Service to reconsider plans for a ski resort and to study and nominate Panther Meadows, a stunning mountain meadow and springs that is a sacred Wintu medicine site, as well as Mt. Shasta itself, for listing on the National Register.

BIODIVERSITY AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY

by Melissa Nelson

For native peoples, natural resources *are* cultural resources. They are one and the same because the land is where ancestors are buried and particular plants, animals, and landforms are religious symbols, sources of healing materials, and characters in myths and stories. There is also a long tradition of using specific places, at certain times of the year, to harvest foods for sustenance, to gather together to celebrate harvests, and to perform religious ceremonies.

Biodiversity (the natural abundance and variety of plant and animal species) gives rise to cultural diversity (the varied expressions by human communities) and diverse indigenous cultures are the keepers and stewards of the distinct landscapes they inhabit. Worldwide, the preservation of biological diversity is inextricably related to the preservation of cultural diversity. If we save places we must also save the rich cultures and their knowledge (as *their* intellectual property rights) that provide us with a deeper understanding of our relationship to the land and with time-honored traditional conservation techniques. If we wish to preserve biodiversity, we must also preserve cultural diversity.

For further information contact: Melissa Nelson, (415) 455-5957, (916) 759-2285, fax: (916) 759-2268

Please fill out the coupon on the front, and print your name and address below. Thank you.

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Mail to: The Cultural Conservancy, P.O. Box 72086, Davis, CA 95617.