

Original Stakeholders of the Presidio: The Muwekma Ohlone Tribe

by Melissa Nelson, The Cultural Conservancy

"At least two Ohlone villages were located in the area claimed by Spain for the Presidio of San Francisco. One of these was occupied for thousands of years before the Spaniards arrived."

—The Archeology of the Presidio of San Francisco, produced by the Department of the Army, U.S. Army Forces Command, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Sacramento District, Fall 1997.

Muwekma Ohlone History

Over the past ten thousand years the ancestors of the Muwekma Ohlone Indians lived, gave birth, hunted, fished, harvested a great diversity of fruits and vegetables, managed large tracts of land through selected burning, married, grew old and died within the greater San Francisco Bay region. Many of the complex aspects of their social, cultural, religious and ceremonial institutions have been traced back through the archaeological record to approximately 4,500 years ago within the greater Sacramento/San Joaquin Delta and Bay Area regions.

The region comprising the City and County of San Francisco was controlled by the Yelamu tribal group of Ohlone Indians. Based upon genealogical information derived from the Mission Dolores records, the Yelamu Ohlone people of San Francisco were intermarried with Ohlone groups to the south and across the East Bay. As a result of disease, murder and other atrocities committed by the Spaniards, less than 2,000 of the approximately 20,000 Ohlone speaking people who inhabited the San Francisco/Monterey Bay regions in 1769 were left by 1810. Their numbers continually declined throughout the remaining Spanish/Mexican/California regimes and the surviving Muwekma people eventually sought refuge, especially after the American conquest of California (1846-1848), on six East Bay rancherias located within their ancestral homelands. During the mid-19th century, the rest of the central California Indians were displaced and, at times, hunted down and murdered.

During the early part of this century, the Muwekma Ohlone Indians (later known as the Verona Band) became Federally Recognized as a result of the Special Indian census conducted by Agent C. E. Kelsey in 1905-1906 and the ensuing Congressional appropriation bills of 1906 and 1908 addressing the purchase of homesites for landless California Indians. In 1927, although landless, the Muwekma were administratively dropped (along with approximately 135 other California Indian communities) from their Federally Recognized status by L.A. Dorrington, Superintendent of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Sacramento. This unilateral administrative termination was enacted contrary to BIA policy and without any notification or due process for the tribe.

Over the past 18 years, the Muwekma have politically, spiritually and culturally revitalized themselves and formed a formal tribal government in compliance with the Department of the Interior's criteria. Presently, the Muwekma Tribe is seeking reinstatement and reaffirmation as a Federally Acknowledged Indian Tribe. As of March 1998, the Muwekma Tribe has been put on "active ready-status" by the Department of the Interior, which means that restoration of their federal recognition is immanent.

Muwekmas and the Presidio

In a park that envisions being a center for environmental sustainability and cultural diversity, it is important to examine the lifeways and practices of the communities who were here before European colonization. The Muwekma

Ohlone Indians lived on this native land in an ecologically sustainable manner for millennia before European contact. Even after colonization, the Muwekmas continued to play a part in Presidio history. In 1918, Muwekma Ohlone men were enlisted in the U.S. Army through the Presidio and served in World War I without recognition as members of the Ohlone tribe or even as individual U.S. citizens. Native Americans were given citizenship in 1924 and continued to serve in the U.S. military. Many Muwekma Ohlone men went through the Presidio to serve in World War II.

The contemporary Muwekma Ohlone Tribe was involved in the early consultative meetings regarding the conversion of the Presidio Army base to a national park. In 1992, they submitted petitions regarding aboriginal land claims and outlined proposals for tribal re-use of the Presidio Public Health Hospital. The Muwekma Ohlone have made it clear that they are very interested in being a part of the decision-making process regarding their homelands at the Presidio. After nearly ten years of waiting, the tribe has just recently witnessed the National Park Service (NPS) beginning to implement their publicly stated plans to consult and collaborate with the local Muwekma Ohlone Tribe. A Memorandum of Understanding is being developed to address how the NPS will comply with necessary federal and state laws regarding the protection of Indian burials and other cultural resources at the Presidio. NPS has a moral obligation to recognize and honor the special rights and responsibilities of the Muwekma Ohlone tribe as co-stewards of their ancestral lands and ancestral dead. In other national parks around the country, in Canada and around the world, native lands are cooperatively managed with local tribes. The Presidio can be another positive model of cooperation and partnership between a national park and the local indigenous community.

From an indigenous world view, to move forward with integrity means securing the blessings of the ancestors who are, in this case, the Ohlone families who went before and whose spirits continue to reside in the soil, plants, animals, birds, waters, and winds of this unique land base. Both a shellmound and a human burial were identified at Crissy Field, confirming the necessity of Ohlone stewardship of the Presidio. While historically these "shellmounds" have been misinterpreted by scholars as remnant villages and garbage dumps, archaeological evidence suggests to the contrary that these mounds are the final resting places for the elite and distinguished members of the many ancestral Muwekma Ohlone tribal societies living around the Bay.

The mission of the Presidio is to "pioneer a new role for a national park by creating a global center dedicated to addressing the world's most critical environmental, social, and cultural challenges" (General Management Plan Amendment, 1994). The Cultural Conservancy in the Thoreau Center and the California Indian Museum and Cultural Center located on the Presidio are committed to Native American "environmental, social, and cultural challenges." Among our many and diverse programs and projects, education about California Indian history and sustainable living practices are among our priorities. Currently, we are creating an indigenous alliance at the Presidio by forming a "Friends of the Muwekma Ohlone" group. This alliance of California Indian tribes and interested Bay Area groups and individuals hopes to:

- ° Ensure that the care and management of Ohlone ancestral remains and other California Indian cultural resources in the Presidio is done in consultation with the Muwekma Ohlone tribe and other relevant California Indian communities. Specifically, soil excavations at Crissy Field should cease until the NPS complies with the National Historic Preservation Act (1968), Archeological Resources Protection Act (1979), American Indian Religious Freedom Act (1979), and Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (1990) in an ethical manner and the Ohlone families are consulted.

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- ° Support an expedient restoration of the Muwekma Ohlone's federal recognition.
- ° Return at least some portion of the Presidio to the Muwekma Ohlone tribe for tribal affairs, i.e., research, education, conferences, cultural activities, and so on. This land will be under the jurisdiction of the Muwekma Ohlone Nation.
- ° Encourage that the restoration of natural resources on the Presidio incorporate traditional environmental knowledge and the principles and practices of California Indian basket weavers and native plants gatherers.
- ° Ensure that the design of park exhibits and public education and interpretation programs that pertain to California Indian history are developed in consultation with the local Ohlone community.

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Presidio Projects Presented at Scientific Conferences

The Army and its contractors have been presenting technical aspects of the restoration efforts here at the Presidio at a variety of conferences. These presentations have been given to share the innovative approaches and results of some of the projects the Army is conducting at the Presidio of San Francisco. Presentations made in 1997 and 1998 include the following.

Use of Innovative Technologies at the Sacramento Corps of Engineers. Presented to the Society of Military Engineers (April 1998) by Angela Varian (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers). A summary of innovative technologies used at the Presidio, including immunoassay and XRF analyses, oxygen release compound, and PowerPunch™ temporary microwells.

Use of Electronic Reporting for Environmental Programs. Presented at the 1998 Combined U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Military Programs, Environmental Technical Conference, and Biennial Safety and Occupation Health Conference (Albuquerque, NM; March 1998) by Pat Conant and Greg Little (Montgomery Watson). A live computer presentation of the interactive electronic reports currently being prepared on CDs for the Presidio groundwater monitoring program.

Evaluating Natural Attenuation of Petroleum Hydrocarbons in an Oxygen Deficient Environment. Presented at the Association for the Environmental Health of Soils (AEHS) 8th Annual West Coast Conference on Contaminated Soils and Groundwater (Oxnard, CA; March 1998) by Marla Miller (Montgomery Watson). A summary of the complexities of assessing biodegradation of contaminant plumes that straddle different hydrogeologic environments. The Building 231 site was used as a case study.

An Innovative Application of Decision Analysis to Risk-Based Corrective Action: A Case Study. Presented at the Association for the Environmental Health of Soils (AEHS) 8th Annual West Coast Conference on Contaminated Soils and Groundwater (Oxnard, CA;

March 1998) by John Porcella (Montgomery Watson). A presentation of the decision model being used for the 231/207 Corrective Action Plan.

An Innovative Approach to Managing Fuel Contaminated Soil During Remediation and Construction. Presented at the Superfund XVIII Hazardous Waste World (Washington, D. C.; December 1997) by John Porcella (Montgomery Watson). A presentation of the innovative elements of the Presidio Fuel Program, including the development of risk-based action levels; use of immunoassay testing, development of the Basewide Corrective Action Plan, and the onsite treatment of soils using low temperature thermal desorption (LTTD).

A Cost-Effective, Streamlined Approach to Closure of Multiple Fuel-Impacted Sites. A Poster Session presented at the 12th Annual Conference on Contaminated Soil (Amherst, MA; October 1997) by John Porcella and Greg Little (Montgomery Watson). A presentation of the approach taken to streamline the closure of fuel sites at the Presidio. Included the development of risk-based action levels, use of immunoassay testing, development of the Basewide Corrective Action Plan, and the onsite treatment of soils using low temperature thermal desorption (LTTD).

Field Immunoassay Analysis for TPH and PAHs: A Cost-Effective Approach to Confirmation Sampling and Analysis. Presented at the 12th Annual Conference on Contaminated Soils (Amherst, MA; October 1997) by Eliana Makhoulf (Montgomery Watson). A summary of the cost-effective use of immunoassay testing to confirm contamination has been removed at fuel impacted sites at the Presidio.

Streamlined Investigation of Former Firing Ranges Using Field XRF Analysis. Presented at the 12th Annual Conference on Contaminated Soils (Amherst, MA; October 1997) by Roger Henderson (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers) and Greg Little (Montgomery Watson). A presentation of the combined use of field X-ray fluorescence (XRF) analyses and a global positioning system (GPS) to rapidly characterize firing ranges at the Presidio.

Field Immunoassay Analysis for TPH and PAHs: A Cost-Effective Approach to Confirmation Sampling and Analysis. Presented at the American Chemical Society Immunochemistry Summit (Las Vegas, NV; September 1997) by Eliana Makhoulf (Montgomery Watson). A summary of the cost-effective use of immunoassay testing to confirm contamination has been removed at fuel impacted sites at the Presidio.

Hydrogeology and Environmental Restoration at the Presidio of San Francisco. 1997 Association of Engineering Geologists, San Francisco Section Spring Field Trip (April 1997) lead by Nancy Barnes, Martin Steinpress and Greg Little (Montgomery Watson), and Karl Pierce and Leo Barker (National Park Service). An overview of the hydrogeology and environmental restoration activities at the Presidio, including the use of innovative technologies and investigative approaches being used.

FPALDR: An Innovative Approach to Cost-Effective, Risk-Based Cleanup at Fuel Sites, Presidio of San Francisco, California. Presented at the Association for the Environmental Health of Soils (AEHS) Seventh Annual West Coast Conference on Contaminated Soils and Groundwater (Oxnard, CA; March 1997) by Eliana Makhoulf (Montgomery Watson). A summary of the approach used to develop risk-based corrective action levels for fuel sites throughout the Presidio.

An Innovative Approach to Cost-Effective, Risk-Based Cleanup at Fuel Sites, Presidio of San Francisco, California. Presented at the Seventh Combined U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Innovative Technology Transfer and Chemists' Workshop (Las Vegas, NV; March 1997) by Eliana Makhoulf (Montgomery Watson). A summary of the approach used to develop risk-based corrective action levels for fuel sites throughout the Presidio. ■