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The Jean Charles Choctaw Nation: Tribal-guided and led, whole community resettlement and cultural preservation

Our on-going efforts continue to see our Tribal resettlement and reunification vision through, for our people and cultural survival for generations to come.

This week, after years of delays, confusion, and stress caused by Louisiana's Office of Community Development and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, some residents of Isle de Jean Charles and Tribal Citizens of the Jean Charles Choctaw Nation will begin moving into new houses in Schreiver, Louisiana. Funding for the move was allocated in 2016 by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in response to our Tribal community's experiences of increasing risk to disaster and displacement and our Tribal leadership's long-standing resettlement planning efforts.

While we support our citizens' individual choice to move to higher ground, the state of Louisiana's approach to this resettlement has moved forward without meaningful consultation with, or the explicit consent from, our Tribal leadership. This is concerning not only for our community, but, as indicated in [a recent complaint to the UN on the Rights of Indigenous People in Addressing Climate-Forced Displacement](#), for many other nations and communities around the country who also face environmental injustices and climate change impacts.

"If you believe that the resettlement of Isle de Jean Charles was successful, you're headed in the wrong direction," Elder Chief Albert Naquin shared with an audience at a [recent convening by the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine](#). Moving people while trampling upon our Tribe's inherent sovereignty and rights to self-determination and cultural survival must not be viewed as a "success" for future public climate adaptation investments.

The Isle de Jean Charles in southern Louisiana was once a thriving [22,400-acre homeland of the Isle de Jean Charles Tribe](#)¹, but our home has been diminished to a 320-acre skeleton of what it was due to the environmental impacts of regional development and fossil fuel resource extraction activities. Tribal leadership has long-pursued mitigation efforts and avenues from the local to state

¹ In 2022, officially renamed the Jean Charles Choctaw Nation.



to federal to international governance levels to protect our Tribe in-place and save our ancestral homelands.

However, after being cut out of federal [hurricane protection infrastructure two-decades ago](#), our Tribal Council had to make the difficult decision that to sustain our community and culture, the only choice left was to pursue Tribal resettlement, to restore our whole community, [preserve our culture and place](#), and provide a safe and viable place for our Tribal citizens to continue to thrive for generations to come.

In 2016, in large part as a result of our contributions to Louisiana's application to the National Disaster Resilience Competition, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development awarded the state of Louisiana \$48.3 million to assist with our Tribe's resettlement. After three-years of negotiations between the Tribal Council and the state of Louisiana's Office of Community Development, our Tribe's plans - for which the state received funding - were no longer honored, and our rights to sovereignty and self-determination ignored.

The Louisiana Office of Community Development (OCD) overtook and destroyed [our submitted and successfully funded proposal](#), which was focused on reunifying our Tribe and bringing our community members who were still living on the Isle, and those who had already been forced to move from perpetual hurricane and flood events, back together. Our proposal included preserving the Isle under our Tribe's stewardship and honoring our cultural traditions. One example of the shift away from our proposal to the state-driven decisions was when the OCD changed the design of our proposed Tribal community center and pow-wow grounds to a public recreation center, as well as appointing a 'new council' to make decisions while disregarding the Tribal Council and the Traditional Chief's leadership.

[Our Tribal resettlement](#) was intended to serve as a living and active bridge from our ancestral Island to a sustainable future for our Tribe. At the moment, it does not accomplish these essential aims and without further support for our Tribe as a whole community, this is more cultural genocide.

We have worked towards our Tribal Reunification for over 20-years. While the opening of the state's resettlement - the New Isle - is underway, we continue our on-going efforts to see our Tribal resettlement and reunification vision through, for our people and cultural survival for generations to come.

For more information regarding our Tribe's Resettlement and struggle for Cultural Survival, visit our website, <http://www.isledejeancharles.com/our-resettlement>.