USING TRAIL RUNNING TO DEVELOP THE NEXT GENERATION OF LAND STEWARDS IN CHEROKEE NATION

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For time immemorial, we have used our bodies to navigate the landscapes and terrain. Whether for hunting and gathering, delivering messages or simply recreation, we are always in a state of forward motion. As a trail runner, I personally connect with the earth while running, and I believe that the more time we spend in the outdoors, the greater our connection to our past and future on this earth are.

*My vision is to empower the next generation to not only connect with our bodies through wellness and movement, but to work towards a more balanced and sustainable future for our planet through a youth trail running camp in the Cherokee Nation. This would be a day camp lasting 3-5 days for a small group of youth who want to learn more about running and how they can be stewards of the earth.*

I am a Cherokee Nation citizen living in Siloam Springs, Arkansas who spends any free time I have out on the trails running through spiderwebs, greeting the deer, relocating turtles and usually remembering to drink enough water! I'm currently learning the Cherokee language and am passionate about gardening - using seeds from our seed bank and turning as much of what was my lawn into a pollinator garden. I believe that combating climate change is a huge issue that will require a massive movement, and if we educate and empower our youth we can help mobilize that movement.
We find our strength in community, so a big part of this running camp would focus on connecting with the community and resources we have here in the Cherokee Nation. Some of the proposed partnerships would be:

- Cherokee Nation Seedbank and biologists - learn about our ancestral food and cultural plants, and how the tribe continues to preserve and promote this biodiversity.

- Volunteer opportunities within the Nation focusing on trail and river cleanup; possibly with the Illinois River Watershed Partnership

- Connecting with a traditional Cherokee potter to learn about gathering clay and connecting the art we create to the natural world

- Connecting with Cherokee language speakers

Throughout the camp, students would develop an idea of how they can take what they’ve learned about caring for the earth and apply it to their lives or a project that works to benefit the next generations. I am keeping this project proposal as simple as possible to ensure that we can get it off the ground in year one, and build in future years as we solidify our partnerships.