



NATIVE LAND CONSERVANCY



Welcome Winter 2024

NLC Happenings On the NLC Horizon

Living the Traditionalist Dream

Our trip to Alabama to visit our friends at the Maskoke intentional community called Ekvn-Yefolecv (ee-gun yee-full-lee-juh) was incredibly meaningful to me. Those words, intentional community sound funny because they do not impart the passion or commitment it takes to live in this manner. The endeavor to live in a harmonious natural way like their ancestors through Maskoke language, ceremony, and a sustainable economy is a powerful undertaking. Don't for a minute imagine that means living primitively because these folks certainly do not. They use cutting edge science and technologies that are eco-friendly and utilize on-site renewable resources for both food and building materials. They have hewn their own timber and built elegantly designed post and beam structures. These remarkable indigenous residents chose to recreate their society based on original Maskoke cultural values. Their social, political, ecological and ceremonial structure is grounded in the clan system. I found myself embraced by other members of my clan, the Bear Clan living there (pictured). Empowering the extended family structure to carry out specific roles, honors, and

duties within a community is socially sophisticated. In this way every person has a valued and welcomed contribution to the community's wellbeing. Many indigenous people feel the absence of important elements that once guided our cultures. We miss the ancient codes of how human beings should live harmoniously with each other and the Earth Mother. The people here enjoy an eco-friendly lifestyle, expressing ceremonial regard while impacting the earth in any manner. While our original languages are full of connections to all our relations, we live in American culture that promotes individualism and competition. The family breakdown has negatively impacted all communities and displaced social values with materialism. There's no need for comparisons except to say that living the way folks at Ekvn-Yefolecv do offers the body, mind, and spirit the opportunity to flourish in meaningful ways that are wholesome and holistic. Intentional communities have many challenges. For indigenous intentional communities the process of decolonizing one's mind, habits, and acquired disfunctions

takes time and determination. There's a spiritual quality in the atmosphere on those premises. One can feel the respectful connectedness of the people, land, and animals that live there. During big projects volunteers are welcome to stay with them yet very little English is spoken. We noticed that translation was not offered even though speeches were given in our direction. When you visit the website (Ekvn-Yefolecv.org), you'll learn how the Maskoke language inspired the creation of Ekvn-Yefolecv. Clearly, I have great admiration for our courageous friends. They seem to have achieved a Native American traditionalist dream while staying present. There is a future for their children to have all their human needs well nourished.

Ramona Peters, NLC President and Founder



NLC HAPPENINGS

Challenging Myths, Honoring Truth

On November 19, the NLC hosted a thought-provoking talk by NLC Communication and Programs Coordinator as well as a Mashpee Wampanoag Historian Paula Peters titled "Debunking the season: the truth about thanksgiving." In a spirited lecture, Paula corrected the rosy narrative we often associate with the Thanksgiving holiday, shedding light on its complex and troubling historical realities.

Paula meticulously chipped away at the false telling of a harmonious settlement wielding historical references like Pilgrim journals and Native oral traditions. The talk highlighted how the Pilgrims viewed Native people as primitive savages – a blatant distortion of reality. At the time, Ousamequin led a network of 69 villages, boasting sophisticated social structures, vibrant cultures, and a deep understanding of their homelands. The talk delved into how Europeans captured and sold Natives as slaves, such as Thomas Hunt who kidnapped 20 men, including Tisquantum from Patuxet village (later Plymouth colony). Paula described the grim shadow of the Great Dying, a European-borne disease that devastated Native populations from 1616 to 1619. Indeed, Pilgrims had to first clear a "literal boneyard" before settling the colony.

Beyond the historical inaccuracies, Paula also explored Native resistance, such as Epenow outsmarting his captors and escaping back to his homeland. Paula explained how centering European perspectives can silence uncomfortable truths, like the 1970 Mayflower anniversary where an Aquinnah Wampanoag elder was asked to censor his speech of any unpleasant remarks. Instead, Frank "Wamsutta" James delivered his powerful words overlooking the celebrations, birthing the National Day of Mourning – a day to remember Native ancestors and their sacrifices.

The talk inspired a thoughtful discussion among the 30-member audience, proving that the first step towards understanding the truth is open dialogue. All left with a renewed sense of responsibility to unpack historical narratives critically, not just at Thanksgiving, but every day.



NLC HAPPENINGS

Renovating for the Future

A rustic Cape Cod cottage that played a key role in accommodating summer fellows for NLC will undergo extensive renovations this winter to better host future guests.

“The bones of the building are really good,” said board member Miles Bernadette Peters who is overseeing the renovations. “This work is a good investment in this property. This is a beautiful spot.”

Craig Simpson donated the two-bedroom cottage located in the woodlands of Cotuit to NLC on his birthday in April of 2022. It was his desire to restore the property to the original caretakers of the land. It is situated in a quiet neighborhood on land that is walking distance to Popponesset Bay and the Crocker Neck Conservation Area.

It turned out to be a timely gift as NLC struggled to find accommodations for incoming fellows in the competitive and expensive housing market on Cape Cod. Without the availability of the cottage, it is doubtful that NLC would have been able to accept the two out-of-state students who participated in the Land of the First Light Fellowship in the summer of 2023. AT, a citizen of the Navaho Nation and Michelle Motley a citizen of the Tohono O’odham tribe were grateful for the accommodations. Following the fellowship, AT is exploring his options for graduate school and Michelle has started a position with a local conservation nonprofit.

Built in the 1960s, the house was showing its age and scarcely equipped for the needs of contemporary students when it came to things like sufficient electrical outlets. That will be taken care of as well as improving energy efficiency. The NLC sees investing in the cottage as means to ensure it can continue to be put to its highest impact use.

So far, the roof was replaced and two sun tunnels were installed providing a flood of natural light in the kitchen and living room. The work is scheduled to be completed in time to welcome the 2024 Land of the First Light Fellows.

Website Relunched!

The NLC team is thrilled to unveil the redesigned website, packed with fresh content, engaging visuals, and a user-friendly experience that puts the NLC mission right at your fingertips. Visit the regularly updated blog, newsletters, and events page to stay informed and involved: nativelandconservancy.org.



NLC HAPPENINGS

NLC Annual Meeting Celebrated Culture

More than 60 friends, donors, staff, and board members were on hand to celebrate 11 years of conservation and preservation by the Native Land Conservancy during our annual meeting in October. The event held in Sandwich at the Camp Hayward dining hall featured displays of land rescue achievements in a cultural atmosphere of traditional crafts, traditional singing and dancing, and food prepared by award-winning Wampanoag Chef, Sherry Pocknett.

It was a special honor to have newly raised Mashpee Wampanoag Chief Earl Mills Jr. offer an opening prayer for the meeting that was a retrospective of relationships forged and work accomplished in the last year while gratefully acknowledging the many supporters.

A beautiful hand-coiled pot created and donated by Ramona Peters served as a door prize for the evening with each attendee hopeful their ticket was the winner. Congratulations to NLC friend Gaby Immerman, who was absolutely thrilled to have her number called and take the pot home.



Dune Shack Lottery Open to Native Artisans

A unique opportunity to spend a week of uninterrupted solitude and refuge in the dunes of the Cape Cod National Seashore is being offered to one Native American artist/writer to be chosen by lottery.

The Provincetown Community Compact is collaborating with NLC to offer the 2024 Native American Dune Shack Residency, October 26 to November 2nd. Interested applicants must apply by February 28 by using this link: bit.ly/DuneShackLottery.

The winner will be drawn by the NLC to stay in the C-Scape Dune Shack. The Dune Shacks are rustic and have no electricity or indoor plumbing but offer access to sandy shores, marshes, ponds and a diversity of plant and wildlife. Located in the ancestral homelands of the Wampanoag, they are considered rare architectural shelters deemed historically significant as a resource for the development of art, literature and recreation over the last century.

Learn more at bit.ly/P-TownCompact.



ON THE NLC HORIZON

Fellowship Applications Now Open

NLC is happy to announce year two of the Land of the First Light Fellowship. Three Native American fellows between the ages of 18 to 25 will have an opportunity to explore a career in conservation during the summer of 2024. The 2023 fellowship was life-changing for Olivia Maliszewski who said, “Not only did it give me the opportunity to explore the ecological field I was interested in, in more depth, but it also exposed me to so many other organizations doing critical ecological work.” A citizen of the Rappahannock tribe of Virginia Olivia also found it personally rewarding to work with other Indigenous fellows and staff.

This opportunity opens pathways to diverse careers in conservation for Native Americans who are interested in land conservation, or considering a career switch.

Fellows spend 10 weeks in the ancestral homelands of the Wampanoag, designing projects related to ecological research, wetland restoration, or land protection. Fellows will be paired with a mentor from Mass Audubon to advise on their projects. Activities include wide-ranging excursions, such as guided preserve walks, community events, hands-on restoration, discussions with tribal elders, nonprofit board meetings, and weekly check-ins with peer fellows. With deep gratitude to the NorthLight Foundation and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration for sponsorship, each Fellow will receive a \$7,500 stipend with additional support for housing, travel and tech available. Apply by March 31st: bit.ly/firstlight24

Upcoming Events

First Day Hike - Monday, January 1, 1 to 3 PM

Join the Native Land Conservancy for a First Day Hike at the Mashpee River Woodlands. Use the southern parking lot on Mashpee Neck Road where you will be welcomed by Gail Melix, NLC Board Member, and member of the Herring Pond Wampanoag Tribe to share her indigenous perspective of the land, and NLC Executive Director Diana Ruiz, Ph.D, to share her knowledge as a conservation scientist.

Film Screening - Friday, February 2, 6 to 7 pm

NLC is excited to premier the third in a series of four videos on the Indigenous Teachings with the Elements, “Air” featuring the Earth Mother’s Four Winds will be held at the NLC headquarters at 2B Center Street in Mashpee.

This mini-documentary produced and directed by Leslie Jonas, is designed to enhance one’s connection to the natural world and provide guidance to living closer to the earth. The first two videos, “Earth” and “Water,” premiered last spring will be shown in advance of “Air.” The run time for all three videos is just under 35 minutes.

The final video, “Fire” will be completed later this year. Thanks to the Island Foundation for funding this series.

Light refreshments will be served. Seating is limited. Please RSVP to paula@nativelandconservancy.org.



**BRING IN THE
NEW YEAR
WITH NLC**

**In The
Mashpee River Woodlands**



NLC SPOTLIGHT BERTA WELCH NLC BOARD MEMBER



Born and raised on the island of Martha's Vineyard, Aquinnah Wampanoag Berta Giles Welch has always had a special connection with the rolling hills, sand dunes, and beaches of Aquinnah. With a goal toward playing a more significant role in protecting those lands and the rights of indigenous people to be sustained on them, Berta has become one of the Native Land Conservancy's most recent board members.

Berta, who also serves on the board of directors of the newly established Aquinnah Land Initiative says "My hope is that together we can protect more of our ancestral homelands."

Berta recognizes that overdevelopment has not only replaced pristine landscapes with lofty estates for the wealthy, but it has also made it nearly impossible for her fellow tribe members to afford the high cost of living in their ancestral homeland. Making it one of her priorities to balance the need for conserving land with tribal housing.

"We are people who have lived with the land in a good clean way for centuries," she said. "We can create a place where conservation and living properly coincide."

For more than 30 years Berta served on the Planning Board for the town of Aquinnah with the hope that she could play a significant role in protecting her ancestral homeland. When she retired from that position last year, she was disappointed in the body of work that the board was responsible for and has since turned her attention toward conservation.

"What I was finding is that there were these great 'conservationless' groups; people grabbing up prime property that is worthy of conservation, and to whose benefit? There was just no consideration for the Native people, no recognition of whose ancestral homelands this is." Berta, who is perhaps best known for her artistry as a wampum jeweler, spends many days in a shop atop of the Gay Head Cliffs that she and her sister Carla operate and that their mother started 87 years ago. From there she can breathe a deep sigh of relief overlooking the empty Aquinnah Shop restaurant and adjoining property that was

recently rescued by the joint effort of the NLC and the ALI. When the property went on the market last June it was feared that developers would take that land and squander another location sacred to the Aquinnah Wampanoag. Being able to purchase it with the help of the NLC was empowering said Berta.

Now it is a daily reminder of the kind of work she hopes to continue doing, raising awareness and raising money to protect land and preserve the environment that has been home to her people for more than 12,000 years.

"Not just preserving the land but preserving it with the intention that our people will continue to benefit from it," Berta said, "That's my inspiration."

Serving on both organizations is a lot of work but she says it is important.

"The connection is very important," said Berta who sees herself as a bridge, but also a sponge learning all she can from the well-established NLC to help fuel the fledgling ALI to be more productive and successful.

A married mother of two grown children, Berta is a proud grandmother of three and lives in her family home in Aquinnah. In addition to running the shop on the Cliffs, she is very active in the community serving on the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head/Aquinnah Health Committee and Membership Committee. She is also President of the Aquinnah Cultural Center board of directors and serves as a member of the Town of Aquinnah Arts District.