



Inter-Tribal Conversations on the Colorado Plateau

Gathering II

Hosted by the Hualapai Nation

Peach Springs, AZ

May 18-20, 2010

The summary of the second Gathering is comprehensive to give you a feel for the cultural richness and unique Tribal ceremonial activities that flow throughout the meetings, and infuse the Gatherings and all of the participants with focus, good energy, deep meaning and a positive, productive spirit.

The second Gathering of the Inter-Tribal Conversations on the Colorado Plateau took place at the Hualapai Lodge Hotel and new Cultural Center in Peach Springs, Arizona. Upon arrival, participants were greeted with a traditional agave roast and interpretation of its meaning by Hualapai traditionalist Drake Havatone. This practice has been passed on by the Hualapai elders as a way of welcoming their visiting brother and sister tribes.

“When we have a gathering of family/friends we invite them with a traditional agave roast, this demonstrates good hospitality, and offers others the essential nutrients needed from the sacred plant”- Drake Havatone

The evening began with a grand reception at the cultural center including welcome presentations by Tony Skrelunas, Hualapai Council Representative Candida Hunter, and Loretta Jackson, Director of the Hualapai Cultural Resources Program. This was followed by dinner, songs by local bird singers and dance by the local youth group. After the dinner ended, members of several tribes joined in a circle to share songs. The drumming and singing flowed throughout the community into the night.



The next morning, each tribal representative indulged in a trip to Diamond Creek, sponsored by the Cultural Center and the Hualapai Grand Canyon West touring company. The company provided a bus and driver to take participants to several key cultural landmarks and sacred springs that were identified by Drake Havatone. The trip route was a twenty-mile stretch from Peach Springs to the Colorado River at Diamond Creek. The journey provided each tribe the opportunity to share their culture, stories, and interpretations of the surrounding landscape with one another. Various tribal elders offered songs, teachings, stories, and prayers to the sacred Colorado River at Diamond Creek. In one act, Hopi Tribal member Leonard Talaswaima ignited white

sage and the fragrance and plume of smoke was directed toward the river as a way of blessing the river, and an offering to the river for us being near its existence. We felt the happiness of the great river as young and old greeted her in their traditional ways.

The business portion of the meeting, designed to adhere to several ideals set at the fall Gathering, resumed at the cultural center that afternoon.. Most importantly, the Gatherings are intended to be traditional, with ample time for prayer and free-flowing discussion. The first order of business was to select someone to guide the proceedings. Drake Havatone was selected to serve as the first official "Honorable Meeting Host." He proved to be a dynamic and quite deft host.

A modest, focused agenda facilitated the free flowing discussion.

Old business:

- Acceptance of the fall proceedings and discussion about what to do with them
- A progress update on the work of the sacred sites subcommittee
- An update on options related to the St. George/Lake Powell pipeline
- An update on the progress of TCP designation of Red Butte

New business:

- Formation of a subcommittee to assist in the search for conservation opportunities on tribal lands that will demonstrate the potential to leverage funds and resources
- Discussion about how to engage youth

Participants agreed that the fall proceedings should be sent to tribal councils, so that governments may be privy to the concerns of non-governmental tribal members.

"The proceedings document is for the people, it's their presentation and their support document" (Dale Phillips, Cocopah Nation)

In at least one example, a wider awareness of the shared concerns about sacred sites could have helped head off development of a fish hatchery that destroyed a sacred site special to one of the members (Lloyd Arrive of the Northern Ute tribe). Many participants expressed gratitude for the proceedings and planned to take them back to their tribes and distribute them.

In general, members were gratified to learn that threats to sacred sites, water, health and cultural preservation are common to multiple tribes, and that they were not alone in their struggles. It seemed that less than half of the members were aware that there are national and international indigenous rights groups already addressing some of their concerns in a broader context. We have already begun to research those types of resources in order to provide more information to participants.



The Sacred Sites Workshop Subcommittee presented plans for an October workshop that will be part of the Fall 2010 Gathering. The basics of the workshop will include: 1)

Current, effective tools to protect sacred sites, 2) Status of key efforts on the Plateau to protect sacred areas, and 3) Pending developments and necessary next steps. The workshop will be conducted by several of the gathering participants who are already experts in the subject. At least one national level speaker is expected.



Red Butte took center stage in the discussion about sacred sites and Traditional Cultural Properties (TCPs), a designation that falls under the National Register of Historic Places. Red Butte illustrated a philosophical divide that was displayed in several contexts. One side, often the younger members, feels strongly that we should lean toward openness to protect sacred sites. Sunny Dooley, Navajo, would like to see the concept of TCPs brought out of the fall proceedings and popularized through slogans on bumper stickers or radio spots, so that all tribal members – particularly the youth – become more aware of threats to their own sacred places. Other members of the group are just as adamant that drawing boundaries around sacred sites is antithetical to Native views on connectivity and non-ownership, and further exposes them to desecration.

Another example of this divide, which garnered quite a bit of discussion, is the Kaibab Paiute pipeline and Jackson Flat Reservoir project. Workers have begun the project and have unearthed about thirty bodies, according to Brittanni Wero, a Kaibab Paiute Tribe member. She wished to publicize the travesty, and at least one Hopi participant (Bucky Preston) was ready to get involved. Everyone agrees the project is an affront to a sacred site and to Native people, but not everyone agrees on the best way to proceed. As Dale Phillips from Cocopah contended, “*publicizing the bodies would be a further insult to them.*” He suggested Brittanni start by promoting awareness within her own tribe, then invite Hopi help, with wider publicity of the problem used only as a last resort.



Technology elicited a similarly diverse set of opinions, particularly in the context of education. Some participants felt strongly that in order to publicize the group’s work and engage the youth, we should reach out through a new group website and on existing social sites like Facebook and Twitter. Others felt more strongly that the children should be learning the traditional stories and songs, ideally from their grandparents and Tribal schools. These were not necessarily

divisive discussions, but they underscored a need for a comprehensive education and outreach strategy that will incorporate tradition and perpetuate it among the youth, even as it utilizes modern communication channels. Many participants are already working with the youth in their communities. The Hualapai, for example, have been conducting Pai language and ethnobotany camps for their kids. Dale Phillips, Cocopah, released a DVD on June 12 that teaches traditional, physically rigorous Cocopah games – the video is recorded in the Cocopah language with English subtitles. Many participants wish to

engage the youth by using hands-on activities like harvest rituals, subsistence activities (e.g., hunting and sheep butchering), dances, and the cultivation and use of traditional foods. Other ideas for engaging the youth revolved around technology, such as inviting teens to help with reporting and web outreach on a future meeting. While those types of ideas drew no opposition, they're unlikely to stand without an emphasis on traditional education for youth. One use of technology seemed to be fully embraced by everyone present, even the traditionalists: they want their stories digitally recorded. They see the value in that, as long as various Tribal rules are respected such as the telling of Havasupai creation stories only in winter months.

Other notable points:

- Arizona bill SB1070 came up for discussion. One member felt that the group should make a formal statement opposing the legislation. Though the idea didn't draw opposition, it didn't get traction either, and no statement emerged.
- The meeting was valuable as an exchange of resources, including various radio outlets where at least two participants run programs and could host public service announcements.
- Several members felt strongly that elders, including those attending the Gatherings, should model "green" or sustainable behaviors for the youth. This means, in part, bringing our own cups and water to future meetings, recycling and composting if possible, and generally being mindful of our waste.



Participants approved the path forward to identify several high-priority conservation projects around which the group can continue to build strength, organization and funding. Four subcommittees (Water, Health, Sacred Sites and Culture/Language Preservation) will select their top projects at meetings late this summer, and

final project selections will take place at the next meeting in October at Moenkopi. The process that will take place over the next five months includes visits, research, and interviews with each tribe to identify projects that embody challenges common to as many of the participating tribes as possible. With the assistance of the Gathering participants, we will meet with various tribal and community representatives and non-governmental organizations to research the issues and develop reports to be presented at subcommittee meetings. Each subcommittee will select their favorite projects. Discussion and any amendments to the subcommittee reports, as well as subcommittee project selections, will be combined into a final report to the Fall Gathering. Participants are excited about the approach but they also want it to be highly culturally sensitive. Many recommendations and ideas were already provided within the four categories. This work will be exciting and meaningful for guiding the future work of the Native America Program and Gathering process.

Of important note, the October gathering will include special presentations by the Coastal First Nations of British Columbia on their success with similar efforts on an inter-tribal association called the Turning Point Initiative. The Initiative has been tremendously successful at protecting land and creating major leverage with the Canadian

government, regional and local municipalities, and conservation organizations. Several Tribal chiefs will accompany Coastal First Nations Executive Director Art Sterritt. We will work on an itinerary of special side sessions with local tribes to maximize their visit.

The next Gathering will be held at Moenkopi Village on the Hopi Nation for three full days, and will include an educational tour of Second Mesa along with a hands-on harvest session with Hopi elder Leonard Talaswaima.

The Gathering process has gained much energy and focus since its inception. The tribes are excited about every session and about breathing life into the hard work they take on as individuals. They now recognize the value in sharing with the group and clearly see the benefits of future Gatherings.



Tony Skrelunas
Anne Minard