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The California Indian Basketweavers Association and Its Organizationally Based Land Stewardship and Management Initiatives

BEVERLY R. ORTIZ

ABSTRACT

This article will detail the wide-ranging and effective land stewardship and management initiatives by a Native California organization, the California Indian Basketweavers Association (CIBA). Founded in 1992 to “preserve, promote and perpetuate California Indian basketry traditions,” CIBA has a proud history of working with public land-holding agencies to initiate policy changes around the management and gathering of basketry plants on those lands, including the reduction and sometimes outright elimination of pesticide spraying, the encouragement of cultural burning, and an unprecedented, joint US Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management gathering policy for ethnobotanical materials. Currently, CIBA spearheads training programs in land stewardship and cultural burning through its Following the Smoke II and Rekindling Culture and Fire projects. It has also inspired the establishment of other Native basketweavers associations in various regions of the US.

BEGINNINGS

The establishment in 1992 of the California Indian Basketweavers Association (CIBA), the first-ever statewide organization dedicated to the preservation and perpetuation of Indigenous basketry in the United States, resulted from an opportune intersection of history, intention, chance, and timing, including the on-going efforts at the time of a relatively small number of Native California basketweavers, most of them Elders, to continue practicing and teaching their skill in both private and public settings; pre-existing relationships between some of these basketweavers and public agency, museum, and parkland staff; and a desire in 1986 by Sara Greensfelder, CIBA’s future founding executive director, to find a way to support traditional Native culture, a goal consistent with activities that Sara had pursued in other locales since the late 1960s. Reading an American Federation of Arts traveling exhibition catalogue, *Lost and Found Traditions: Native American Art 1965–1985*, and, in particular, the story in it about basketweaver Susan Billy (Hopland Band of Pomo Indians), led Sara over the next two years to conduct research into the varied problems that Native California weavers faced in the continued practice of this important and vital art.¹

The realization by Sara that a tangible first step in seeking solutions to these problems would be to bring together basketweavers with agency managers and staff to share their concerns led her to spend the next four and a half years laying the extensive groundwork for a Northern and Central California Indian Basketweavers Gathering, which took place June 29–30, 1991, at Ya-Ka-Ama Indian Education and Development, Inc., in Forestville, California. As part of that groundwork, Sara conducted an interview in December 1986 with Susan Billy and the renowned basketweaver Elsie Allen, Susan’s grand-aunt and mentor, an interview that led Sara to realize the specific difficulties faced by

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR **Beverly R. Ortiz**, PhD, chair of the Native California Research Institute, first learned about Native California basketry in the summer of 1976, when she served as an oral historian in the Plumas National Forest. In the decades since, she has had the privilege, honor, and joy to variously meet, learn from, and work on a variety of projects with hundreds of Native California basketweavers and other cultural practitioners from every region of the place now known as California, including participation in every CIBA Gathering and the organization’s 1991 initiating event. beverly.ortiz@nacri.institute

► Julie Dick-Tex (Western Mono) displaying the back of a cradleboard at the first-ever California Indian Basketweavers Gathering at Ya-Ka-Ama Indian Education and Development, Inc., June 1991. ANITA BUSSELL

weavers in accessing materials, including the risk of being run off gathering sites at gunpoint and of having to sneak into an ancestral gathering area on state park lands.²

At the 1991 Gathering, an “Access to Gathering Sites” panel focused on the “experiences, problems, and needs” of the weavers in accessing public lands and provided them with the unprecedented opportunity to collectively convey their concerns to US Forest Service (USFS), California Department of Parks and Recreation, and Redwood National Park staff, one of several discussions aptly characterized by *News from Native California* Editor Jeannine Gendar as “intense and informative, often leavened with humor, sometimes spiced with anger.”³

Those fortunate enough to attend the 1991 Gathering left it with renewed determination to solve shared problems, such as the crucial need to access basketry materials in an uncontaminated and safe environment.⁴ By August, a Basketweavers Council had been established “to talk about future Gatherings, forming an association, and to follow up on issues raised.”⁵

Not long afterward, on February 24, 1992, members of the Basketweavers Council participated in another ground-breaking event, a meeting in San Francisco with the Forest Service’s Pacific Southwest Regional Management Team, marking the beginning of a strategy by statewide basketweavers to make their issues known to public land agency management staff and policy-makers.

STEWARDSHIP ISSUES RELATED TO FOREST SERVICE MANAGEMENT TEAM⁶

Weavers Susan Burdick (Yurok) and Josephine Lewis (Karuk) began by explaining the need for cultural burns, using some burned and unburned examples of bear-grass (*Xerophyllum tenax*) blades as a show-and-tell example about the role that cultural fires serve in ensuring soft, flexible bear-grass for overlay weaving material. They then described the years-long negotiations that they and other Northwest California weavers undertook to



achieve an ineffective December 1991–January 1992 burn that, while satisfying local Air Quality Board standards, left the bear-grass unusable for basketry.

Denise Davis (Maidu) followed, emphasizing access to quality basketry materials as a shared issue, using sedge (*Carex* spp.) as her example:

There used to be sedge in Marysville and Yuba City. The rice farmers killed it. All the weavers in this area used sedge, yet there are no plans to grow or plant sedge in these areas. I have to go all the way to Santa Rosa for my sedge.

The late Kathleen Rose Smith (Bodega Miwok/Mihila-kawna [Dry Creek] and Jenner Pomo), who had served as the second coordinator of the Native American

Advisory Committee of the 1974–1984 Warm Springs Cultural Resources Study (the Study), described the transplantation of two acres of basketry sedge outside an area slated for inundation with water once the US Army Corps of Engineers completed its building of the Warm Springs Dam. She suggested the Study as a possible model for the Forest Service. “It doesn’t take a lot of land,” Kathleen emphasized, stating that those two acres had served the needs of Pomo weavers for years.

Jennifer Bates (Northern Mewuk) noted that some basketry materials were more accessible than others, describing how the California Department of Transportation inadvertently helped redbud (*Cercis occidentalis*) bushes, which require winter coppicing to grow long, straight, flexible shoots for baskets, by cutting those growing on the side of the road with their equipment. She then informed the group of an unexpected, but much-appreciated, planned walk with Stanislaus National Forest staff to identify gathering areas.

*“You look on it as a natural resource.
We see it as a cultural resource.”*

Florence Dick (Dunlap Mono) spoke about the support her people had received from Sequoia National Forest Hume Lake District Ranger Bruce Waldron, not just in obtaining basketry plants, but also black oak (*Quercus kelloggii*) acorns for food, a welcome development for her federally unrecognized tribe, noting:

Although the federal government doesn’t recognize us as a tribe, the state does. Bruce does. You do. So that’s good. We’re making headway.

Florence’s sister Gladys McKinney mentioned the food, medicine, and basketry materials gathered in their area. “You look on it as a natural resource. We see it as a cultural resource,” she explained to the management team, going on to describe several other culturally important plants, noting deer-grass (*Muhlenbergia rigens*) as the most difficult one to obtain in her area:

We have to ask private landowners if we can gather it. It helps us to go to the Forest Service now, but the older women have the stigma of how the Forest Service treated them in the past.

Linda Yamane (Rumsien Ohlone) emphasized the unique perspective Native people bring to an understanding of plants:

I’ve pointed out plants to many people who have been surprised to learn they’re not just “stuff.” For me seeing the plants is like seeing a friend, because I know the plant, and I think about how many generations of people have used these materials. It’s such a different perspective....

For me, when I make my first basket from my cultural area, I want the materials to come from the Carmel Valley area.... Los Padres National Forest is close by.

In so saying, Linda highlighted a shared desire to gather cultural plant materials in one’s ancestral places, summarizing the historical and environmental reasons that this was an impossibility for some.

Linda was followed by Susan Burdick (Yurok), who described regional variation in the materials gathered by weavers in Northwest California:

In our area, where you lived determined which materials you would gather. It’s natural you would gather from the place you lived.... On the coast people gather more spruce than sugar pine. When I lived in Hoopa, I gathered more sugar pine.

Susan went on from there to describe efforts by herself and other basketweavers to end the Forest Service practice of poisoning and shooting porcupines out of a misplaced concern that they eat young saplings. In the past, Susan explained, weavers obtained porcupine quills, an element of ceremonial regalia and an overlay material in area baskets, by throwing a hide over these slow-moving animals, who reacted by releasing their quills.

Although the Forest Service has since discontinued its porcupine annihilation policy, in 1992, when this meeting took place, porcupines were no longer seen in Yurok country. As Susan sadly relayed to the management team:

I’m not just thinking of myself and my people, but when you break that cycle, our cycle we live in, something else will go. You’re not just hurting the porcupines. It angers me to know the cause is nothing but greed. Fifty years ago there wasn’t clear cutting. You wouldn’t have to eliminate a little animal if there was better management.

Pleaded Florence Dick in support, “They saved the condor. Why not save the porcupines before they’re wiped out?”

From there the weavers shared the cultural uses of elk antlers. They also described their extensive use of specific plants for non-basketry purposes, like food,

medicine, dance regalia, skirts, and other purposes, ending with passionate appeals for understanding and expressions of hopefulness for the future.

As the late Kathy Wallace (Yurok-Karuk, Hoopa) put it:

Basketmaking is more to us than a craft. It's a tie to our ancestors and to the earth and the future. We want to be able to pass it down in our circle. We have a lot of responsibility to pass it on. As weavers, we gather and take care of the plants.

Now a lot of the responsibility has been turned over to the Forest Service. You're a part of our circle, because we cannot [legally] do the burning. You are a part of our continuing our culture. We're expecting you to be a part of taking responsibility. We would take it back, but we haven't been given that option....

Denise Davis:

You don't just do basketry. You live it. Not many are that dedicated.

Baskets are our stories, prayers, and poems. They're not a craft to put on the shelf. These ladies are special, and so are you. We are all reaching out, and it feels good.

CIBA AND PESTICIDES

On June 26–28, 1992, a second Basketweavers Gathering took place, culminating in a discussion facilitated by Kathy Wallace where the weavers present ratified a plan to form CIBA, with the members of the council becoming the organization's first board. While the founding board members subsequently set about their work to establish CIBA as a tax-exempt non-profit,⁷ something they achieved in October of 1993, they continued their advocacy work, with their next milestone a January 25, 1993, meeting with the director and staff of the California Department of Pesticide Regulation (CDPR).

Following is a summary of the content and outcome of that likewise unprecedented meeting, beginning with an excerpt of a letter written to CDPR by Jennifer Bates on January 23, 1993:

▼ The late Mary Eslick (Yurok), at the June 1992 California Indian Basketweavers Gathering at Ya-Ka-Ama Indian Education and Development, Inc. VIRGINIA "GINNIE" LARSON (KARUK/YUROK)





▲ CIBA's founding board. SEATED, LEFT TO RIGHT: Linda Yamane (Rumsien Ohlone), Kimberly Stevenot (Northern Mewuk), Susan Burdick (Yurok), and Kathy Wallace (Yurok-Karuk, Hoopa); STANDING, LEFT TO RIGHT: Sara Greensfelder, Josie Lewis (Karuk/Wiyot), Denise Davis (Maidu), Gladys McKinney (Dunlap Mono), CIBA board vice-chair, Jennifer Bates (Northern Mewuk), CIBA board chair, and Linda Aguilar (Chumash), photographed in front of the Tuolumne Rancheria roundhouse during a CIBA board meeting at the Rancheria's adjacent community center, October 1992. JANN GARITTY

We assert that it is our inherent right to practice basketweaving in the tradition that has been handed down to us and that we are passing on to our children. It is our right to do so without being poisoned by pesticides....

Both hand and mouth contact are made with many plant materials by basketweavers. Weavers have suffered the loss of teeth and numbness of the mouth after processing materials which have been sprayed. What other illness or deaths may have been caused by such contact cannot be known.

If a plant is dying or dead as a result of spraying, it will not be harvested. But how is a weaver to know if a plant has been recently sprayed?

At that time, CIBA's concerns centered on the use of Garlon-4, Glyphosate, 2,4-D, and Atrazine to eliminate plant species that "compete" with commercially valuable timber, with the eliminated species including many culturally important food and basketry plants. In the relatively small, rural areas where many basketweavers live, reports of unusually high rates of cancers, birth defects, and miscarriages had begun to surface, as well as of strange growths on fish, raising multiple questions about the relationship between pesticide spraying and these reports, as well as the impact of that spraying on whole ecosystems and the resulting endangerment of ancient and enduring traditions.

Although by 1992 spraying had been curtailed or eliminated in many California forests, thousands of acres still got sprayed. Drift from the spraying and chemical runoff into streams outside of the spray areas was cited as a

major concern, as were the unknown impacts of the unidentified "inert" ingredients contained in the sprays and the cumulative effects of combining different sprays.

In about 1978, in response to such concerns, the Hoopa Valley Tribe had banned pesticide spraying on its forest lands. In the early 1990s, the Karuk Tribe of California began working with the Trees Foundation and USFS to develop an ecosystem management strategy for the Bluff Creek watershed. Now CIBA's board was ready to weigh in on the issue, including Jennifer Bates:

We want to find out what you can do to help us preserve what we have here. And in order to do that, we have to understand these poisons. We have to understand what's in them.... We need to know what this poison is doing.... I have a son who goes out and gathers with me. I want to know that he's going to be able to survive in another fifty years.

Susan Burdick:

We're not only basketweavers.... We gather pretty much 50% of our food out in the forest land.... There are no jobs in our area, so we depend on our forest land. We depend on the animal life. We depend on the fish....

87% of the Yurok reservation right now is owned by Simpson Timber Company. They sprayed about 3,000 acres last year in our area. When you gather you don't know whether you've been affected by what's been sprayed around you. When we have helicopters flying around and spraying herbicides we don't know what these things are doing. We have a high rate of cancer in our area. We asked Simpson Timber Company not to spray but to put people to work [to clear unwanted plants]. They said, "It's too costly to do that." Well, when your people are dying around you, there isn't a price on that....

These chemicals are being used up there in our area at the same time as we go out and we gather our hazel sticks....

In an April 1993 letter, CDPR Director James W. Wells responded to some of the concerns raised at the meeting with a plan to "gather data on residues following spraying operations":

The staff will collect plant samples from a small number of locations around the State, under the direction of your members, to assure appropriate plant identification.... The samples will then be analyzed in our chemistry laboratory for the level of residues of relevant pesticides.

As for notification of pesticide spraying, Wells had this to say:

We need to establish contact with forest operations in other parts of the State in order to develop alternative mechanisms of notification that will assist your members. We will begin working with the relevant national forests and the Forestry Pest Council to establish necessary lines of communication to accomplish this goal.

Another CIBA proposal, that of establishing a pesticide-free zone on the lower Klamath River watershed, did not receive from Wells the same positive response.

Any limitations must be based on hazards to humans and/or the environment stemming from use of the pesticide. The Department cannot identify a pesticide-free zone for the use of one product, much less all pesticides, without a scientific basis for that limitation. To do so would not only ignore the scientific basis for our regulatory program, but would also ignore the health benefits of some pesticide products like disinfectants.... Arbitrary and capricious acts by government officials can result in legal actions directed at the prohibition of these acts.

CDPR's commitment to test for residues, one of CIBA's earliest successes, coming as it did mere months after the organization's establishment, would fuel its continued, passionate, and effective advocacy around multiple issues facing weavers.

CONTINUED ADVOCACY⁸

A joyous, celebratory feeling permeated the third annual California Indian Basketweavers Gathering, held at the Tuolumne Rancheria in June 1993, as speaker after speaker reported positive progress in their work to “preserve, promote and perpetuate” basketry.⁹ For instance, in cooperation with the Auberry Mono, the Forest Service produced a nine-minute videotape, “Basketry: Sustaining a Living Tradition,” which featured Norma Turner and Margaret Baty, two respected Elders, both now passed. Additionally, the Dunlap Mono had worked out an agreement with the Fresno County Public Works Department Road Division #10 to delay the cutting of redbud along 18–20 miles of Dunlap, Millwood, and Sand Creek Roads until the basketweavers reported to the department that they had completed their gathering of it.

Mono women also reported on their progress in identifying for Forest Service staff basketry plants on Mono homelands now “owned” by the agency.

In the Pit River area, pesticide spraying was postponed in a location where maidenhair fern (*Adiantum aleuticum*) had been gathered for generations. Elsewhere, the more than 100-member-strong Northern California Native American Basketweavers and Gatherers (“The Basketmakers”) had moved forward in its relationship with Six Rivers National Forest.

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As Millie Black-Graber (Karuk) explained, education was a large part of The Basketmakers' purpose, adding that because of that education, some resolution had been achieved with the Forest Service in solving some of the problems they raised. As she explained, “There's a feeling of great hopefulness which didn't exist two years ago. They have a better understanding of our needs. We have a better understanding of what the resource managers can and cannot do,” noting that the Klamath and Six Rivers National Forests had burned bear-grass, and had burned and pruned hazel, with negotiations underway with the Orleans Ranger District to protect basketry willow (*Salix* spp.) in an area slated for sand and gravel removal. The California Department of Forestry had also expressed a willingness to cooperate with The Basketmakers, and Simpson Timber Company had also pruned hazel on its lands.

That same year, 1993, the Maine Indian Basketweavers Alliance (MIBA) was founded. More than a decade later, at CIBA's 15th Basketweaver Gathering, MIBA Co-Director Jennifer Neptune bore witness to CIBA's and its own members' shared concerns and problems, the inspiration for MIBA's formation.

July 1994 marked another watershed moment, when CIBA representatives met in Washington, DC, with federal agencies, congressional staff, and environmental organizations “about concerns over pesticides,” including a meeting with the chief of the Forest Service. CIBA

also developed a relationship with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).¹⁰

In November 1994, CIBA filed a petition with EPA “asking that changes be made in the Agency’s definition of crops to extend protections to a wide variety of plants used by Native Americans for food, medicine, cultural and religious purposes.” It also asked for protection of Native American gatherers from exposure to pesticides.¹¹

In February 1995, Sara Greensfelder and Jennifer Bates addressed a group of basketweavers and Tribal museum staff in Phoenix, Arizona, about “how CIBA became organized, the annual Gathering, and its work on policy issues,”¹² setting the stage for the establishment of the Tohono O’odhom Basketweavers Organization (TOBO) in 1996.

The following month, two CIBA board members met with Tribal Operations and Environmental Justice staff of EPA in Washington, DC, to renew the 1994 dialogue “about seeking solutions to the use of pesticides where they affect Native American basketweavers and gatherers.”¹³

In response to an EPA invitation “to enhance communications and understanding of pesticide issues raised by CIBA,” in May 1995, CIBA representatives participated in a meeting at the EPA Region IX office in San Francisco with the director of the EPA Indian Environmental Office; staff of EPA’s Region IX, Forest Service, and CDPR; and the chair of the Yurok Tribe.¹⁴

That October, a CIBA delegation attended the first Washington state-based Native American Basketweavers Gathering at Evergreen State College in Olympia to “give a panel presentation about CIBA’s history and work,”¹⁵ which led to the establishment in 1996 of the Northwest Native American Basketweavers Association (NNABA).

The next month CIBA joined “several environmental groups in appealing a decision by the Forest Service to apply herbicides (including aerial application) to more than 11,000 acres of the Stanislaus National Forest, located in the ancestral territory of the [Northern] Mewuk people,” an appeal that was subsequently denied.¹⁶

Also in 1995, CIBA held several meetings with CDPR “to give input and define its stance” regarding a Forest Service study of the effects of herbicide residues on plants used by basketweavers. This was also the year that CIBA gained the ability to go online with email, “enhancing its ability to communicate and network with

organizations and individuals,” and its members began attending conferences to speak about the pesticide issue, including at an Indigenous Environmental Network conference in Alaska in June; the National Tribal Pollution Prevention Training and Conference in Billings, Montana, in August; a public hearing and community action conference on Women’s Health and the Environment, held in the San Francisco Bay Area in August; and a Society for Ecological Restoration conference in Seattle, in September.¹⁷

The following year, CIBA continued to get the word out by participating in forest, ethnobiology, and environmental conferences, including the Indigenous Environmental Network’s annual conference, held that year in North Carolina, and the Tribal Risk Assessment Forum in Idaho. By June, CIBA had also produced with Creative Light Productions a 30-minute video highlighting its history and issues, “From the Roots: California Indian Basketweavers,” launching the video’s

▼ Denise Davis (Maidu) trimming the ends of sewing strands on the interior of a burden basket at the June 1997 California Indian Basketweavers Gathering, held at the Chumash Interpretive Center (now the Chumash Indian Museum), Oakbrook Regional Park, Thousand Oaks. CIBA’s logo is based on the design of one of Denise’s coiled baskets. LINDA YAMANE (RUMSIEN OHLONE)



viewing at that year's annual Basketweavers Gathering, where, as always, it continued to highlight issues of concern to basketweavers.

In the coming years, CIBA not only continued to advocate for Native California basketweavers, but continued to offer its support to those from other parts of the United States.

Then, in September, in an effort to “receive input for creating short and long-term pesticide strategies,” it hosted a Pesticide Strategy Meeting in Sacramento, attended by key CIBA board members and staff, Native and environmental activists, and agency staff and attorneys.¹⁸

In the coming years, CIBA not only continued to advocate for Native California basketweavers, but continued to offer its support to those from other parts of the United States, an exemplar of the latter taking place on June 17–20, 1999, when instead of a Native California Basketweavers Gathering, CIBA hosted its first and only Western Regional Indigenous Basketweavers Gathering in Reno, Nevada, bringing together Native California basketweavers with weavers from ten states west of the Rocky Mountains as well as Hawaii and Alaska.¹⁹

JOINT FOREST SERVICE AND BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT GATHERING POLICY

A meeting in Southern California between CIBA representatives, USFS Region V managers and staff, and California-based Bureau of Land Management (BLM) managers and staff would inspire the establishment in 2007 of an interagency Traditional Gathering Policy for lands in California respectively managed by the two agencies.²⁰ While CIBA presentations and displays that occurred that day definitely had their impact on the development of the policy, a key spark was a serendipitous conversation between basketweaver Lydia Vasser (Luiseño) and two USFS and BLM directors that she happened to sit down between.

As later recounted, Lydia arrived at the meeting with an ironically timely story to tell about how, on the way to it, she had been ejected from BLM lands when she tried to gather basketry materials under the aegis of an old policy. Understandably upset, as Lydia relayed her story to the directors, she shared some of her materials with

them and described what she did with those materials, touching the directors on a deeply personal level.²¹

Following that meeting, work began on USFS and BLM development of the joint policy “in consultation with tribal governments and in coordination with” CIBA, the California Indian Forest and Fire Management Council, and agency staff. This included the hosting of “listening sessions” across the state that more than 400 people reportedly attended, with Tribal governments, organizations, and individuals “from various regions of California” providing “valuable contributions.”²²

As for the policy itself, it applies to the gathering of “culturally-utilized [sic] non-timber plants and fungi” on USFS and BLM lands in California, enabling the granting of “free use without permits ... at the local level for personal, community, and other non-commercial uses,” the latter referring to the prohibition of the sale of the materials gathered, not objects made by the gatherers from those materials.

Of special note on a larger USFS and BLM policy level, the joint policy states that “[l]ocal units shall consider prioritizing local traditional native gathering in land management plans and ... other management documents.” It also directs local units to address, in consultation with “traditional practitioners, Tribes, and tribal communities,” the “access, sustainability, and other concerns” of cultural gatherers; and directs local agency managers to collaborate on the identification, restoration, and enhancement of “traditionally important plant resources” and to “identify opportunities and tribal partnerships to incorporate tribal traditional management practices to restore, enhance, and promote ecosystem health.”²³

While the preceding is merely a snapshot of the advocacy CIBA has done and continues to do on behalf of basketweavers, two relatively recent CIBA programs illustrate how the organization is bringing its land-based initiatives into the future.

FOLLOWING THE SMOKE II

Inspired by the 1997–2013 Karuk Indigenous Basketweavers-led “Following the Smoke” (FTS) project detailed elsewhere in this issue of *Parks Stewardship Forum*, on August 10, 2018, CIBA convened a meeting in Wiyot country at the Sequoia Conference Center in Eureka to discuss the possibility of initiating a new version of FTS. This well-attended meeting was followed by others intended to further shape the new version’s goals, content, and activities, including a much more intimate and focused March 2, 2019, planning meeting

that led to CIBA’s convening on May 24–26, 2019, its vision of a second-generation FTS, called “Following the Smoke II,”²⁴ launched at the site where most of its predecessor’s camps had taken place.

While CIBA’s new iteration of FTS retains many of the features and goals of its forerunner, albeit sometimes in different form, it emphasizes participation by Tribal people indigenous to the broader region, with localized workshops planned to occur in varied locations each year. Among Following the Smoke II’s goals: (1) basketry and related cultural skills teaching, demonstrating, and learning; (2) forest restoration; and (3) gathering site management consistent with Traditional Ecological Knowledge.

Since Following the Smoke II’s initiation, mere months before the March 2020 COVID-19 pandemic shutdown, one of its

signature events was the virtual symposium “Cultural Fires to Strengthen Our Traditions,” moderated by Carolyn Smith (Karuk), PhD, who has “worked with Karuk basketweavers to dispel settler colonial narratives about Karuk basketweaving, and instead show how basketweaving is a way of knowing and living in relation with the world.” Carolyn emphasized that the day’s agenda was “the culmination of the work that CIBA, and especially Alice [Lincoln-Cook (Karuk), CIBA’s chair] has done to broaden a network of prescribed and cultural fire practitioners, state and federal agencies, and basketweavers ... to educate, promote, and broaden the scope of knowledge about good fire in Northern California.”

“REKINDLING FIRE”

On June 24–26, 2022, CIBA hosted a “Rekindling Culture and Fire”-themed Basketweavers Gathering at the Bear River Band’s Rohnerville Rancheria in Fortuna

▼ Photos taken at a June 26, 2022, demonstration cultural burn on the Rohnerville Rancheria during a California Indian Basketweavers Gathering. **UPPER LEFT** Wilverna “Verna” Reece (Karuk) with some of her baskets and basketry materials. Verna shared with participants and onlookers the relationship between “good fire” and the growth of healthy, flexible shoots needed to make a shapely basket. **UPPER RIGHT** Torchbearr Board Member, Operations, Scot Steinbring, explaining the logistics of the demonstration cultural burn to participants and onlookers. **LOWER LEFT** CIBA Board Chair Alice-Lincoln Cook using a torch to initiate the burn. **LOWER RIGHT** The burn in progress. ALL PHOTOS BEVERLY R. ORTIZ



that included presentations and activities featuring this relatively recent CIBA “initiative that promotes the reintroduction and increase of cultural burns to promote safe and healthy traditional gathering areas on public, tribal, and private lands in collaboration with California Indian basketweavers.”

One of the many highlights of this gathering was its Friday, June 24, presentations on Traditional Ecological Knowledge, culminating in its Saturday, June 26, demonstration cultural burn at a pre-arranged site on the Rancheria, and a prescribed and/or cultural fire training certification class for basketweavers, which continued on Sunday morning, with the burn and training overseen by Torchbearr, a non-profit that seeks to “promote prescribed burning” through, in part, working with its partners, like CIBA, and with landowners, “to do more beneficial prescribed burning at every scale.”²⁵

IN CONCLUSION: CONTEXTUALIZING CIBA’S WORK THROUGH THE FRAMEWORK OF INDIGENOUS ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

In the 1980s, the decade before CIBA’s establishment, Environmental Justice (EJ) emerged as a field of study “out of the recognition,” as the Climate Museum has put it, “that throughout modern history, indigenous peoples, people of color, and the poor have been exposed to higher levels of pollution, waste, and resource extraction, making homes, health, and communities more vulnerable.” As characterized by Robert Bullard, one of four scholars who coined the term, EJ is based on “the principle that all people and communities have a right to equal protection and equal enforcement of environmental laws and regulations.”²⁶

While the field of EJ was never overtly broached nor discussed during CIBA’s establishment and annual Gatherings, its members’ basketry materials management practices and advocacy work modeled some of EJ’s basic tenets, while, at the same time, the basketweavers’ standing as Indigenous cultural practitioners broadened EJ’s meaning well beyond a relatively straightforward consideration of equal enforcement and equal protection of existing environmental laws and regulations to a more holistic centering of the continuance of eons-old relationships between people and place within a “healthy physical, social, cultural, spiritual and economic environment.”²⁷

In 2023, in an article published in the journal *Ecology and Society*, three of CIBA’s board members, Alice Lincoln-Cook, Carolyn Smith, and Cristina Gonzales (Chumash), joined biologist John R. Oberholzer Dent to proclaim

The basketweavers’ standing as Indigenous cultural practitioners broadened EJ’s meaning well beyond a relatively straightforward consideration of equal enforcement and equal protection of existing environmental laws and regulations.

CIBA’s place within the more nuanced framework of Indigenous Environmental Justice (IEJ), which “addresses environmental harm and restores just relationships with the environment through action rooted in Indigenous philosophies and onto-epistemologies,” noting that, “By facilitating gatherings, empowering weavers and their communities, and fighting for their right to gather materials, CIBA has promoted healthy and just relationships with land and basket plants, the revitalization of critical cultural practices, and the leadership of cultural practitioners.” As the authors concluded:

CIBA’s work demonstrates how approaching environmental stewardship from Indigenous onto-epistemologies results not only in the continued cultural and physical survival of Indigenous communities but also in manifold environmental benefits sought by Western environmentalism. Principles of reciprocal restoration hold potential not only for Indigenous peoples but also for the major shifts needed to survive global climate catastrophe. CIBA’s work prompts non-Indigenous people to ask why land management decisions (and indeed EJ scholarship) are made without those who have been tending the land for thousands of years and provides inspiration for those seeking solutions.²⁸

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ENDNOTES

1. Sara Greensfelder, transcript of unpublished lecture given at the North Columbia Schoolhouse Cultural Center in San Juan Ridge, Nevada County, California, to Gary Snyder’s University of California, Davis “Nature and Culture” class, September 1996.
2. Sara Greensfelder, “California Indian Basketweavers Association: A Brief History,” p. 1, a handout distri-

- buted at the 1997 California Indian Basketweavers Gathering, and Sara Greensfelder, untitled essay in “California Indian Basketweavers Gathering,” a special report edited by Beverly Ortiz and the staff of *News from Native California*, Winter 1991/1992, p. 2.
3. Ibid., p. 15, and event program.
 4. Field data, 1996.
 5. Greensfelder, “California Indian Basketweavers Association: A Brief History,” p. 1.
 6. The content of this section is based on a recording of the meeting made by Beverly R. Ortiz. For a more detailed account of this meeting, see Beverly Ortiz, “Our Stories, Prayers and Poems: California Indian Basketmakers and the Forest Service,” *News from Native California* 6(3): 24–27 (1992).
 7. To learn more about CIBA’s early history and activities, see Catherine Louise Cardozo, *The California Indian Basketweavers Association: A Native Agency for Change and Cultural Continuity*, dissertation in Native American Studies (Davis: University of California, Davis, 2005).
 8. Unless otherwise noted, all material in this section is based on field research at CIBA’s Basketweavers Gatherings.
 9. CIBA’s vision in brief.
 10. Greensfelder, “California Indian Basketweavers Association: A Brief History,” p. 2.
 11. Ibid.
 12. Ibid., p. 3.
 13. Ibid.
 14. Ibid.
 15. Ibid. and Sara Greensfelder, pers. comm. with Beverly R. Ortiz, September 4, 2024.
 16. Greensfelder, “California Indian Basketweavers Association: A Brief History,” p. 3.
 17. Ibid., p. 4.
 18. Ibid.
 19. For more about this gathering, see Staff, “Western Regional Indigenous Basketweavers Gathering,” a special report edited by Jeannine Gender, with contributions by Beverly R. Ortiz, Jacquelyn Ross, Dugan Aguilar, Sadie Cash Margolin, Doug Mullens, Marian Walkingstick, and Linda Yamane, *News from Native California* 13(1): 31–44 (1999).
 20. Forest Service Manual Supplement #1560, Region 5, approved July 25, 2007, and Bureau of Land Management Instruction Memo no. CA-2007-017, April 10, 2007.
 21. Diania Caudell (Luiseño), CIBA board member, pers. comm. with Beverly R. Ortiz, June 25, 2022.
 22. “Traditional Gathering Policy,” brochure, 2012, https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fseprd611926.pdf; and “Traditional Gathering: The Policy,” brochure, n.d., https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fseprd901235.pdf.
 23. Ibid.
 24. Not to be confused with an article by the same name, Beverly Ortiz, “Following the Smoke II: Plants and the Karuk,” *News from Native California* 12(3): 13–16 (1999), which described the focus and activities of the second (1998) year of the original project’s camp.
 25. <https://www.torchbearr.org/about>, accessed on September 5, 2024.
 26. <https://www.climatemuseum.org/vision>, accessed on December 5, 2024.
 27. Field data, 1991–2024; and <https://ciba.org/our-vision/>, accessed on December 5, 2024.
 28. John H. Oberholzer Dent, Carolyn Smith, M. Cristina Gonzales, and Alice B. Lincoln-Cook, “Getting to That Point of Balance: Indigenous Environmental Justice and the California Indian Basketweavers’ Association,” *Ecology and Society* 28(1): 1–14, pp. 1 and 8; <https://doi.org/10.5751/ES-13674-280114>.