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# Letter to the Reader:

## *The Courage to Build a Better Future*

DENISS J. MARTINEZ

Dear Reader,

### **Building a better future takes courage.**

The communities featured in this collection are doing just that. Rising through the violence of colonialism, communities are asking critical questions: How do we heal? How do we move forward after the violence that has occurred? In an immense act of generosity many of these communities are turning to settler colonial institutions willing to share and teach a new way forward, willing to build relationships with mutual benefit. But as Cynthia Wilson and Gavin Noyes ask in their piece: *Will we listen?*

The pieces in this special edition invite you to do just that.

This collection was first gathered after the influential conference on co-stewardship titled **Indigenous Co-Stewardship of Public Lands: Lessons for the Future**, planned by a broad partnership and held at the Graton Rancheria. Held in February 2024, this conference was a critical opportunity for those wanting to learn how to make the work of co-stewardship happen. In an audience of government agencies, academics, and community members we all heard and honored speakers who had made a way forward for their communities. This special edition is authored by many of those speakers.

The collection begins with a piece grounded in California where the conference took place. “Before Co-Stewardship and Management of Public Lands: The Historicity of Indigenous Land Stewardship and Management in Native California,” by Beverly R. Ortiz, PhD, helps us understand how far we’ve come by giving us a deeper understanding of the significance of the progress communities in California have made to advance co-stewardship.

Next comes “Following the Smoke: A Co-Stewardship Project of Karuk Indigenous Basketweavers and the US Forest Service,” by Dr. Ortiz with Renee Stauffer and Deanna Marshall. It is a close examination of Following the Smoke, a Karuk Basketweaver effort to bring fire back and in doing so renew vibrant basketry practice in Karuk territory. We continue in Karuk Territory for a piece authored by Abigail Varney, Isobel Nairn, Sara A. Clark, Bill Tripp, and Colleen E. Rossier for the Karuk Tribe titled “Cultural Burning: Under the Sovereign Authority of Tribes,” which outlines what co-stewardship means in their current work and practice.

After that, we zoom out to the statewide efforts of the California Indian Basketweavers Association, the first effort of its kind. In her piece “The California Indian Basketweavers Association and Its Organizationally Based Land Stewardship and Management Initiatives,” Dr. Ortiz takes us through the grassroots history of this immensely impactful effort that empowered basketweavers throughout the state to advocate for better conditions for cultural plants and for gatherers.

Cynthia Wilson and Gavin Noyes bring us out to Bears Ears in Utah in their piece “Indigenous Stewardship of Ancestral Lands Activates Land and Culture: Will We Listen?”, where we learn about the importance of cultural practice and cultural continuity for collaboration. They challenge us to listen to the grassroots practitioners who are closest to the caretaking of land and culture. Wilson and Noyes remind us that the land itself is a

teacher that cultural practitioners and youth need dedicated time with. The piece reminds us that the first step toward co-stewardship is removing the barriers that keep Indigenous people from their cultural landscapes.

Then we are lucky to hear from Minneth Beatriz Medina García, Juana Iris Sánchez Hernandez, and Maite Arce Argleben, the authors of “Maya Communities Preserve the Bioculturality of the Landscape and Lead Territory Management in Mexico: A Model of Indigenous Co-Stewardship of Public Lands,” about their work in Mexico expanding our perspective about what co-stewardship can look like—just as they did in person at the conference. The governance system they developed for co-stewardship of the Puuc Biocultural Reserve recognizes that the thriving of the Selva Maya relies on the thriving of Maya cultural practice. In doing so it prioritizes not just the endemic species of the jungle but also cultural and economic well-being of the community that cares for and relies on this precious natural resource.

Last, we hear from Dr. Ortiz and Gregg Castro about how someone interested in this work might begin to collaborate with a Tribe in their piece “Respectful Tribal Consultation Protocols from Native California Perspectives.” The article is pragmatic and supports co-stewardship practitioners from beginner to advanced.

The collection of sharings from the conference is capped by an Artist Statement from Kelly Redfearn Kinder (Yurok), who created “Radiant Lands,” the striking illustration on the cover of this edition of *Parks Stewardship Forum*. She explains how the symbolism of the work “integrates ancient Indigenous wisdom into a future that we make with our own hands.”

All in all, I hope you feel inspired by the courage in this edition—from the stories of basketweavers maintaining centuries of cultural practice despite persecution to current efforts to create new co-stewardship governance that values cultural vitality.

I hope you will join us in listening to the lessons woven in these stories and work with your communities to build a better future together, a future that supports a thriving planet and Indigenous sovereignty. After all, is there anything more courageous than that?

*Your guest editor,*

Deniss J. Martinez, PhD

Deniss J. Martinez is a researcher at the University of California, Davis, and a research affiliate at the University of California, Berkeley’s Institute for Parks, People, and Biodiversity. Her research focuses on finding natural resource management strategies that support Tribal self-determination and governance. Her vision is to work on creating a future that centers the wisdom of Indigenous people, not just as marginally relevant but as central to environmental decision-making. She believes that just as people are an essential part of the environment; decolonization, reparations, and justice are essential to a just climate future. She aims to continue work that informs both settler governments and Tribal governments on best strategies towards solving the climate crisis in a way that uplifts Tribal sovereignty, ensures justice for communities of color, and builds governance, culture, and decision-making based on values of reciprocity, responsibility, and seven generation thinking. [djmartinez@ucdavis.edu](mailto:djmartinez@ucdavis.edu)