Title

Restoring San Leandro/Lisjan Creek: Re-establishing Sacred Relationships as Pathways toward Decolonization

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Re-establishing Sacred Relationships as Pathways toward Decolonization

by

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Abstract

In the United States, river and stream restoration projects rarely consider the importance that water ways have for Indigenous communities as a source of sustenance, culture, and spirituality. Restoration work, like most U.S. institutions and practices, is built upon the same systems of colonialism that have destroyed Indigenous peoples and cultures since the 17th century. But providing space for Indigenous voices and envisioning restoration projects as pathways toward decolonization could revitalize the ecology of rivers, as well as restore local Indigenous land, life, and cultures. Focusing on the stretch of Lisjan (San Leandro) Creek from Lake Chabot into San Leandro Bay and building on the San Leandro Creek Trail Master Plan, my research demonstrates that recognizing the history of Indigenous persecution, actively applying Indigenous traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) to the planning process, and giving land back would be beneficial for creek restoration. I first explore the impact of colonization on Indigenous relationships with land and rivers, then present TEK as a way to repair these relationships. I then compare TEK to efforts undertaken by local groups, Sogorea Te' Land Trust and Friends of San Leandro Creek, to restore sections of the creek. I then argue that local government entities involved in creek restoration should advance the cultural and ecological practices of these groups by 1) paying the Shuumi tax to local Indigenous peoples, 2) giving creek-adjacent land back, beginning with publicly-owned parcels, and/or 3) establishing cultural easements for Indigenous use. Facilitated by these actions, restoration projects around the creek could support, nurture, and provide long-lasting access to the shared environment for both Indigenous and non-indigenous communities.

Introduction: Problem Statement

Contemporary Indigenous peoples have survived through genocidal attempts by three consecutive governments on their territories: the Spanish Mission Period, the Mexican Land Grant/Rancho Period, and now the ongoing occupation by the United States. Embracing a utilitarian perspective of land and water, these governments have reinforced extractive relationships with the Earth, exploiting land for economic purposes and viewing rivers and streams as opportunities for sewage treatment and irrigation.[1] In contrast to Western possession and production, the relationship between Indigenous peoples, land, and water has always contained spiritual and cultural elements of reciprocity. Indigenous beliefs about Nature dictates that all living beings belong to the land and water, which are living entities rather than things to be conquered.[2] As Charles Sepulveda writes, the problem with restoration planning is that rivers are "still seen as advancing empire and economic opportunities; and nature is seen as a site of recreation instead of containing spirit."[3] Planning for ecological restoration presents an opportunity to re-establish the relationship humans share with Nature to advance future environmental sustainability by integrating cultural elements into restoration definitions and methods. For thousands of years, Indigenous peoples have accumulated knowledge about their local environments and are thus valuable sources for understanding and managing diverse ecological processes and habitats.[4] Because Indigenous knowledge systems emphasize mutualistic and moral obligations between humans and the natural world, they demonstrate that the restoration process can be more conscientious by viewing the world more completely.[5]

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[1] Sepulveda, 2018.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid., pp. 51-52.
[4] Senos, et al., 2006.
[5] Long et al., 2020.

However, urban river restoration projects in the U.S. tend to focus on improving regional connectivity and economic development, rather than repairing important human relationships with Nature. This threatens to further diminish Indigenous cultures and their traditional caretaking methods that have supported and protected Nature for thousands of years. To rectify this, restoration practitioners should seek Indigenous traditional knowledge to impart values such as spirituality, harmony, and balance with Nature. Utilizing Indigenous frameworks of sacred relationships when restoring native plants and fish habitats could help ecosystems recover holistically while creating a pathway to decolonizing restoration work. Decolonization is defined as breaking down the systems of colonialism that had changed Indigenous relationships to land and water by stripping away their lands and ways of life;[6] following this definition, decolonizing restoration planning is an approach to re-establish these relationships by providing Indigenous communities with meaningful opportunities to carry out their sacred responsibilities to Nature and to encourage others to be good stewards of the land.

To uncover the possibility of decolonization with a specific case study, this report focuses on the planning efforts to restore a six-mile stretch of San Leandro Creek—which I will refer to by its Indigenous moniker "Lisjan" Creek—from Lake Chabot to San Leandro Bay (Figure 1) to align with the site for the 2017 San Leandro Creek Master Plan (the "Plan") (Appendix A). Though the primary focus of the Plan was to create multi-use pathways for recreation and community development,[7] it also explored ecological restoration opportunities to re-establish native ecosystems in Lisjan Creek. For context, most of the creek runs above ground within its historic

[6] Tuck and Yang, 2012.
[7] According to the City of San Leandro website, "The proposed greenway and creek restoration provides opportunities for residents in adjacent neighborhoods to access green space and recreational areas while also improving water quality, increasing habitat for native species, and protecting areas of historical, cultural, and ecological significance."

channel[8] through Oakland and San Leandro's residential and industrial areas, though some sections are channelized with concrete (Figure 1). Because of current fencing, high creek banks, and dangerous creek channels, the public has little to no access to the creek.[9] With the Plan, local governments will change this by providing access points to the creek, as well as funding creek walks and clean-ups.

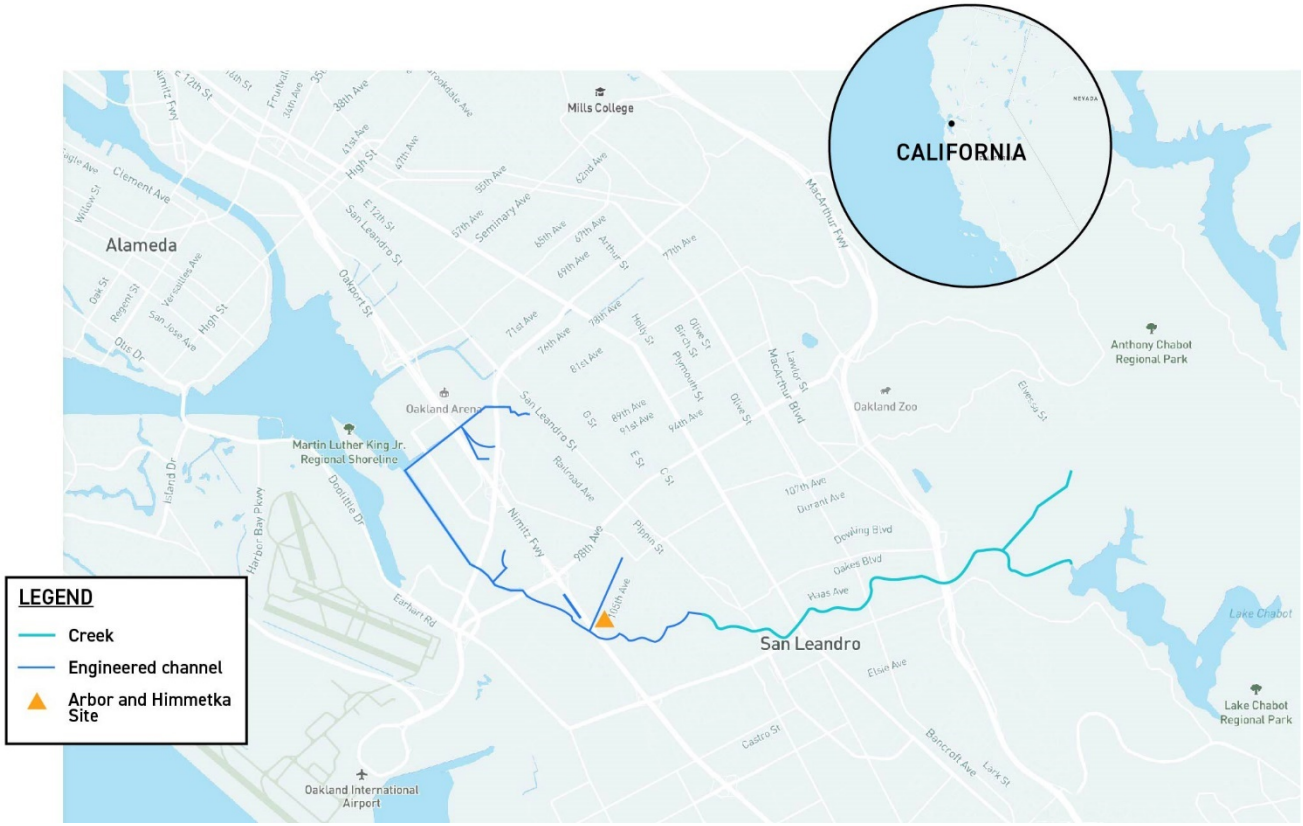

***Figure 1: Map of the site**, where San Leandro/Lisjan Creek runs from Lake Chabot to the Martin Luther King, Jr. Shoreline Regional Park at San Leandro Bay. The Indigenous arbor and Himmetka were built on land given back to the Lisjan Ohlone. Source: "Creek & Watershed Map of Hayward & San Leandro," Oakland Museum of California. Basemap: © Mapbox, © OpenStreetMap.*

The development of the Plan was made possible by a $201,510 grant from Caltrans and involved substantial public outreach.[10] As evident in the Plan's preliminary Tribal Consultation

[8] Wang, 2014.
[9] Susan Levenson, personal communication, December 3, 2020.
[10] City of San Leandro, n.d.

Report, the local government entities and groups involved in the Plan[11] followed Assembly Bill 52 (the Tribal amendments to the California Environmental Quality Act) and plan to include local Indigenous voices in future phases of the project.[12] Through individual meetings and correspondence with ten Indigenous people, the Plan specifies several ideas for protecting Tribal cultural resources, trail naming, educational programs, art, and potential partnerships. For local Lisjan Ohlone[13] communities belonging to the Huichin, Jalquin/Irgin, and Saclan territories (Appendix B), Tribal consultation is an important step toward long-term creek restoration and the possible reintroduction of rainbow/steelhead trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) and native vegetation, which provide traditional foods, medicine, crafts, spirituality, and culture. However, though the Tribal Consultation Report includes Indigenous perspectives on the project, the Plan does not fully consider Indigenous relationships and rights to land and water, because there is no mention of giving creek-adjacent land back to Indigenous stewardship. Because local Indigenous groups still use plants that grow in the creek's riparian corridor,[14] the San Leandro Creek Trail should deliberately protect and enhance the creek for Indigenous use and ceremony through a decolonized approach. The planning process moving forward should go beyond planning requirements dictated by state law (i.e. AB 52) to include Indigenous communities in the restoration process by returning land back to their care.

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[11] This includes the City of San Leandro, City of Oakland, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, and Merritt College.

[12] San Leandro Creek Trail Master Plan, Appendix B, 2017. According to the Tribal Consultation Report, AB 52 requires projects to undergo tribal consultation to "get needed information…to preserve the options of avoidance of cultural resources or preservation in place early in the planning process; build working relationships with tribes that are traditionally and culturally affiliated to the project area; avoid inadvertent discoveries of Native American burials," p. 23.

[13] There are eight different bands of Ohlone people, including the Lisjan people, who share similar histories and relationships to land, as well as connected but different territories and languages. The Lisjan Ohlone speak Chochenyo. For more info, see Appendix B or www.sogoreate-landtrust.org/lisjan-history-and-territory.

[14] San Leandro Creek Trail Master Plan, Appendix B, 2017. For more information about specific Indigenous use of plants, see Ortiz, 2009.

This report proposes preliminary steps to do so and is intended to urge planners to continue the important work of engaging Indigenous communities of the East Bay in decision-making about vital resources such as water. For thousands of years, Indigenous peoples have taken care of the land and the ecosystems of the many (now culverted) creeks throughout the area. When the land was taken from them for capitalist development, the Ohlone communities in the East Bay lost their means of survival; they continue to be denied federal recognition[15] and are politically and economically marginalized. Because the U.S. occupies the ancestral territories of Indigenous communities, examining rivers as sacred sites could be both beneficial in terms of uncovering new ways of thinking about restoration, as well as encouraging Land Back as compensation to Indigenous communities for centuries of cultural destruction, colonialist oppression, and genocide.

Methods and Approach

To learn more about the site, I reviewed archival maps, documents, and plans for Lisjan Creek, focusing primarily on the San Leandro Creek Trail Master Plan. I also conducted an interview with Susan Levenson of the Friends of San Leandro Creek (FSLC), a group involved with the Plan. Because she played a role in pushing the Cities of Oakland and San Leandro to conduct Tribal outreach for the Plan, I asked her about FSLC's engagement with Indigenous peoples on restoration projects and about community participation in the planning process.

Through historical research, I found background information on settler colonialism and its impact on local Indigenous communities. I then conducted a literature review focused on how traditional ecological knowledge (TEK)—the Indigenous understanding of Nature and land

[15] Many Tribes in California do not have federal recognition because of a long history of adverse state policies. In the 1800s, treaties guaranteeing lands and rights to California tribes were never ratified. In the 1940s through the 60s, under the "Indian termination policy" that sought to assimilate Indigenous peoples into U.S. culture, the U.S. government terminated over a hundred tribes, including many in California who continue to lack federal recognition status to this day.

management techniques—influences ecosystem restoration processes. This review also looked at the benefits of returning land back to Indigenous care and the importance of giving visibility to, and making space for, Indigenous peoples. Through this review, I investigated the question: *What does it mean to decolonize restoration planning?* I also examined articles and attended lectures (online) to supplement and fill in gaps in other methods. This includes information about the sacredness of land, "Himmetka," and Indigenous definitions of Land Back.

I then gathered and put zoning data layers from the Cities of San Leandro and Oakland into ArcMap to visualize current land uses around the creek. After determining which parcels were "public owned lands" or "parks and open spaces" (in my analysis, I excluded areas zoned for commercial, industrial, and residential purposes because of the difficulties embedded within private property ownership structures), I produced examples of possible lands that can be returned to Indigenous stewardship.

Results and Discussion

Local Indigenous History in the Settler-Colonialism Context

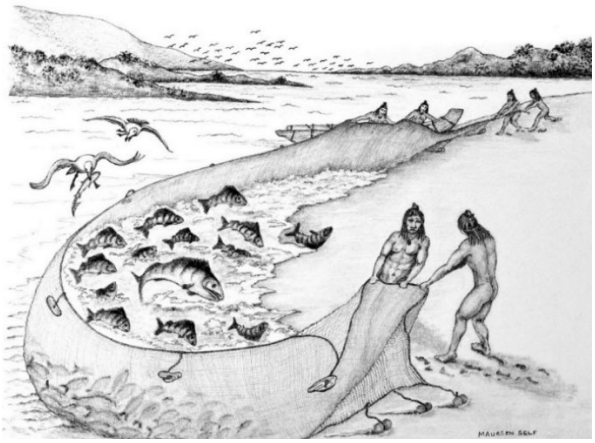

Figure 2: Ohlone fishing in the San Francisco Bay. *Long before Spanish colonization, Indigenous peoples living in the Bay Area relied on the sacred waters to provide them with fish, including trout. Illustration © Maureen Self. Source: www.shellmound.org/learn-more*

For countless generations, the Lisjan Ohlone people lived on land now known as the East Bay (Figure 2). They cultivated reciprocal relationships with all living things that shared the land and developed cultural practices that kept the human and natural worlds in balance. When the Spanish arrived in the eighteenth century, they established the Spanish mission system in California, including Mission San Francisco de Asis (Mission

Dolores) and Mission San Jose, which led to the erasure of much of the local Indigenous cultures, despite strong resistance. The Spanish also brought invasive plant species and grazing cattle and horses that destroyed native food sources.[16] The outlawing of Indigenous burning practices[17] diminished native grass populations upon which animals such as elk, deer, and antelope grazed; the gradual decline of these animal populations led to a loss of food for Indigenous communities that hunted these animals.[18] Based in an ideology of dominating the natural world,[19] Spanish colonization led to the destruction of Indigenous ancestral lands and ways of life.

The Land Grant/Rancho period began with Mexican governance in 1821, which led to further displacement of the Lisjan Tribes, who were not given back any of their land. Even though ranchos were built upon their ancestral lands, they instead became indentured laborers and often slaves—subject to legalized corporal punishment—on privately-owned land granted to Mexican citizens,[20] including Rancho San Leandro (Figure 3).

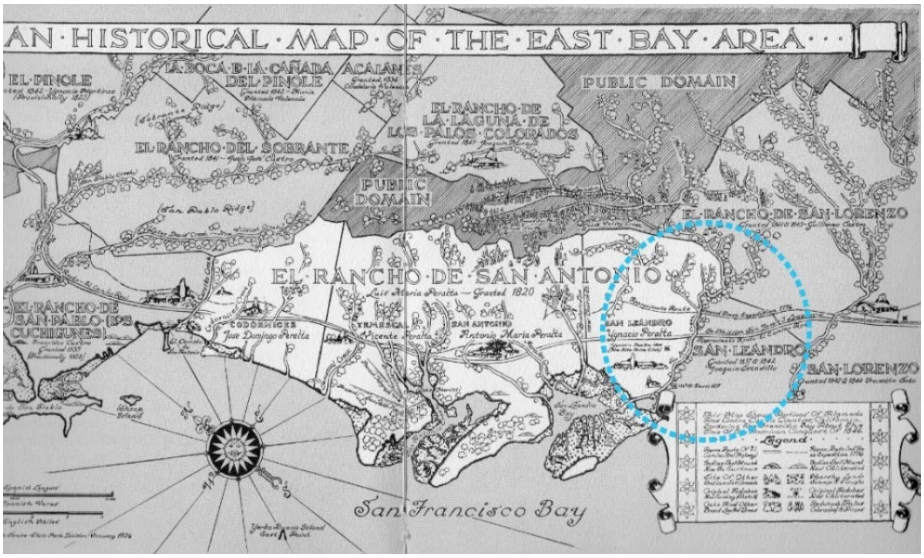

Figure 3: A Historical Map of the East Bay Area in 1846, *with Rancho San Leandro in the bottom-right corner of the map. The map shows many "Oaks and other broad-leafed trees" along the creek's riparian corridor. Source: "Historic Map of Rancho San Antonio" (January 7, 1932), Wikimedia Commons via UC Berkeley.*

[16] San Leandro Creek Trail Master Plan, Appendix B, 2017.
[17] Indigenous peoples used prescribed burning as a land management practice to remedy the Earth. By clearing underbrush, annual controlled burns allowed new vegetation to grow and thrive as part of the environmental cycle.
[18] San Leandro Creek Trail Master Plan, Appendix B, 2017.
[19] Sogorea Te' Land Trust, n.d.-a.
[20] Milliken et al., 2009.

As the century continued, U.S. military rule and the Gold Rush of 1849 led to more hostility towards Indigenous peoples, and they became racialized and classified as inferior human beings.[21] Under the U.S. expansionist ideology of "Manifest Destiny," the U.S. government enacted extermination policies[22] that aimed to destroy California's Indigenous populations and cultures. To maintain their colonist dream of dominating lands they wanted to occupy, the U.S. government created a reservation system in 1851, providing Indigenous peoples with land in designated (often isolated) areas with limited sovereignty and independence; this led to a period of Indigenous diaspora and relocation from their ancestral homes.[23] Many Tribes in California do not have federal recognition due to legal and bureaucratic struggles with the U.S. government. The process for federal recognition, which requires Tribes to prove that they are a "legitimate" Tribe with a distinct culture,[24] is nearly impossible due to the systematic and aggressive campaigns to eliminate Indigenous cultures. The Ohlone, including the Confederated Villages of Lisjan, are still denied federally-recognition of Tribal status; as a result, the thousands of Ohlone peoples who exist today do not have access to reservations and protected land bases given to federally-recognized Tribes, nor the rights, benefits, services, and grants associated with Tribal status.[25] During U.S. occupation, industrialization and capitalist ventures also led to the degradation of environmental resources upon which Indigenous peoples rely. Many plants that are and were used for Indigenous food, medicine, and ceremony, along with important aspects of Indigenous cultures, were continually destroyed over generations.[26]

[21] Milliken et al., 2009.
[22] Wires and LaRose, 2019.
[23] Milliken et al., 2009.
[24] Ragland, 2018.
[25] Wires and LaRose, 2019.
[26] Sepulveda, 2018.

This history of cultural assimilation and genocide, discrimination, land dispossession, and environmental destruction has not been reconciled. Colonialism, or the multilayered and violent processes of forced dispossession and acculturation of Indigenous peoples, anchored colonizers to place and attempted to reconfigure Indigenous relationships to land and water by taking away their traditional lands and cultures.[27] Focusing on Indigenous visibility shows that, despite centuries of violence enacted against them, the Indigenous peoples who live today continue to understand that their lands and waters are sacred gifts from Nature and provide them with spiritual strength and sustenance,[28] in contrast to the Western idea of Manifest Destiny that asserts dominance over land and people. Contemporary Indigenous peoples continue to revitalize their cultural practices and languages through knowledge preserved and passed down through generations.

Traditional Ecological Knowledge, Land Back, and Restoration Planning

A combination of recognizing Indigenous peoples and cultures, deliberately including Indigenous voices in the decision-making process, and giving land back to Indigenous stewardship could decolonize the planning process for the San Leandro Creek Trail. For thousands of years before colonization, Indigenous communities thrived in the Lisjan watershed because of their beliefs about human beings' place in nature as equal to all other natural elements and inhabitants. For Indigenous communities, rivers are living beings that have a spiritual relationship with humans, and the health of a river is inextricably connected to the health of communities.[29] Rivers provide a spiritual link between Indigenous peoples and their ancestors,[30] and are sites of traditional ceremony.[31] Indigenous knowledge dictates that humans and Nature are part of an

[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Fox et al., 2016.
[30] McCool, 2007.
[31] Fox et al., 2016.

extended ecological family descended from the same ancestors, and a sense of balance is only attainable when humans regard all natural elements as relatives.[32] In this way, Indigenous identities are tied to rivers and land; this kind of spiritual relationship provides many beneficial insights into the natural landscape through an extremely localized understanding of ecology, derived from meticulous observations and adaptive interactions with a particular place over an extended period of time.[33] By recognizing more than just our material dependence on Nature, traditional Indigenous knowledge systems emphasize people's moral responsibilities to maintain natural ecosystems because humans are part of a larger united system.[34] This intimate connection to the Earth influences their horticultural techniques such as burning, selective pruning, and cultivation that enhances certain species while suppressing others.[35] The system of knowledge around Indigenous land management techniques, and the spiritual relationships and values embedded within them, are referred to as traditional ecological knowledge (TEK).

TEK is rooted in creation accounts and natural laws, entrusted to human beings from spiritual beings, on how to respectfully and sustainably use natural resources.[36] For Indigenous communities, TEK has always been a mechanism for Tribal elders to pass down their heritage and understanding of natural resources to younger generations.[37] This includes traditional management practices and techniques that are not published in Western literature.[38] However, though Indigenous communities have protested the disruption of natural river processes by "dominant" entities (i.e. the federal government, developers, and industry), they have largely been excluded

[32] Senos et al., 2006.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Long et al., 2020.
[35] San Leandro Creek Trail Master Plan, Appendix B, 2017.
[36] Senos et al., 2006.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.

from the ecological restoration process. Researchers have found that involving Indigenous peoples in any ecological restoration project has several benefits, including 1) assistance in site and species selection for restoration, 2) increases in local participation in restoration activities, and 3) shared historical information about management of the ecosystem.[39] These findings demonstrate the importance of having Indigenous voices in the planning, design, and rebuilding of functional ecosystems because of their sacred and ancestral relationships to the Earth. Corrina Gould, spokesperson for the Confederated Villages of Lisjan, notes, "My ancestors lived in villages that were close to the water. Our houses, boats, water, skirts, baskets—all sorts of things—were made of tules that grew along the marshes. Two hundred years ago, you can drink water out of every freshwater creek in the Bay Area, and salmon and rainbow trout swam up here, and there was an abundance in our territory...Our ancestors lived in reciprocity with the land [and] were able to take care of the land so that it continued to feed us and our future generations."[40]

This reciprocal relationship of giving between humans and Nature, which restores both ecosystems as well as Indigenous traditional practices, is rooted in the concept of Land Back, or rematriation of land. According to Steven Newcomb, Executive Director of Indigenous Law Institute and member of the Shawnee/Lenape, rematriation of land "restore[s] a living culture to its rightful place on Mother Earth…and a people to a spiritual way of life, in sacred relationship with their ancestral lands, without external interference."[41] In this way, rematriation acknowledges the community's sacred duty to maintain the spiritual relationship with the Earth and all living things for the benefit of future generations.[42] Based in this concept, Land Back is a global Indigenous movement to dismantle systems of power that allow for genocide and continued oppression of

[39] Reyes-Garcia et al., 2019.
[40] Gould, "Colonization, Decolonization and Rematriation on Ohlone Land," 2020.
[41] Newcomb, 1995.
[42] Ibid.

Indigenous peoples. Beyond returning stolen lands back to rightful Indigenous stewardship, Land Back—which recognizes the destruction of Indigenous culture caused by colonialism—is an approach by Indigenous peoples to reclaim their identities and relationship with the Earth and calls for "Indigenous consent when decisions are made that impact Indigenous lives and land."[43] As Gould notes, "We're at a time where we could begin to think outside of the government structures that we've been given [to] restructure our minds [and] think about a different way of living…Land back is about beginning to have this relationship with land [in which rivers are] given the same rights as human beings (not to be abused)…When the water runs free, all of the plants, animals, and human beings thrive more."[44] Because the destruction of ecosystems in streams are linked to the loss of Indigenous knowledge systems, customs, languages, and identities,[45] re-establishing Indigenous relationships to the Earth would allow for more opportunities to heal Nature for both Indigenous and non-indigenous communities.

Restoring Lisjan Creek for Indigenous spiritual and cultural revitalization is positively associated with environmental stewardship that will help maintain healthy rivers and provide long-term benefits for all. Indigenous peoples believed every ecosystem required specific human care and interaction; in the Lisjan watershed—which consists of mudflats, marsh and grass lands, oak savannahs and woodlands, and riparian corridors—different ecosystems have required their own forms of annual management, harvesting, and processing in the past,[46] so planned ecological restoration of Lisjan Creek would benefit from intentionally and actively applying TEK. Given that we live on the ancestral lands of Indigenous communities, it is important to include Indigenous voices in restoration projects, because every aspect of their daily life—including food,

[43] Two Bulls and Tilsen, 2020.
[44] Gould, "A Conversation with the Sogorea Te' Land Trust," 2020.
[45] See Chen and Gilmore, 2015.
[46] San Leandro Creek Trail Master Plan, Appendix B, 2017.

dress, philosophy, values, songs, and rituals—have always and continue to depend on the health of the land and water ways.

Lisjan Land Back Efforts

For local Indigenous communities, Lisjan Creek is a sacred and complex ecosystem intertwined within a larger natural landscape that provides many resources essential for survival. However, patriarchal and capitalistic ideals of landownership/possession have adversely affected the health of the rivers. The San Leandro General Plan (2016) acknowledges the difficulties of restoring water quality, noting, "non-point source pollutants such as runoff from lawns and parking lots [can] contain oil, grease, litter, animal waste, household chemicals, pesticides, and other substances that are washed into storm drains and local creeks. San Leandro [Creek is] considered impaired by diazinon, which was once a commonly used insecticide."[47] Because the Lisjan Creek watershed area continues to be sprayed with herbicides and pesticides, local Indigenous peoples face the challenge of finding areas where it's legal to manage and gather traditional plant materials while preventing the spread of *Phytophthora ramorum*, an herbicide that causes Sudden Oak Death.[48] The lack of plant-gathering sites due to urbanization has destroyed efforts to re-establish Indigenous cultural practices, demonstrating the need for legally-protected Indigenous lands as sites of cultural and ecological preservation. In the face of modern urbanization and development patterns, returning land to Indigenous stewardship would allow for creative ways for revitalizing and enhancing the landscape through TEK. This includes reinforcing the idea that all human beings are responsible for protecting and caring for the Earth. To re-establish sacred relationships with Nature, Sogorea Te' Land Trust, an Indigenous women-led land trust based in the San

[47] San Leandro General Plan, Chapter 7: Environmental Hazards Element, p. 19.
[48] San Leandro Creek Trail Master Plan, 2017, Appendix B, 2017.

Francisco Bay Area, is working to return Indigenous land to Indigenous people. Founded by Corrina Gould and Johnella LaRose, Sogorea Te' explores several avenues for Indigenous peoples to (re)claim urban land: the Shuumi Land Tax, land rematriation, and cultural easements.

Shuumi is a voluntary contribution from non-Indigenous people and institutions occupying traditional Lisjan Ohlone territory to support rematriation and cultural revitalization efforts.[49] The tax acknowledges the history of colonialism and violence that has displaced Indigenous communities for centuries and are continuously maintained through the civic infrastructure, capitalist economy, private ownership and development of land, and consumption of natural resources; it is a way of supporting Indigenous futures in the Bay Area.[50] Rather than going back to a time past, the Shuumi Land Tax advocates for Indigenous self-determination and respect for the land and water to create sustainable futures for all.

Sogorea Te' works toward the return of their ancestral lands through direct donations and title transfers from existing owners and fundraising to purchase of land.[51] The return of these lands would restore traditional foods (such as acorns) and plants, as well as provide sacred places for ceremony.[52] Related to rematriation, cultural easements grant access to lands for the purpose of preserving cultural heritage.[53] They allow Indigenous peoples to establish places where they can practice their cultural beliefs and traditions together, protect their sacred places, and amplify their voices in decision-making about their ancestral lands and water. Having legally protected land, through either rematriation or cultural easements, would allow the Lisjan Ohlone to re-learn and

[49] Sogorea Te' Land Trust, n.d.-b. *Shuumi* means "gift" in Chochenyo.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Wires and LaRose, 2019.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.

carry out their sacred duties to take care of the land. This also includes traditions such as prescribed burning to restore native plants, basket weaving, and medicine making.

The Sogorea Te' Land Trust recently received a quarter-acre lot from Planting Justice, a food-justice nonprofit in Oakland that empowers formerly incarcerated people.[54] Planting Justice donated part of their land on 105th Avenue, where they operate the Rolling River Nursery, to Sogorea Te' as their first piece of rematriated land (Figure 1), which now acts as a village site with a traditional arbor for gatherings, dances, and ceremonies (Figure 4). They have permanent control over land use and are currently cultivating native plants used for traditional medicine (such as sage, tobacco, mugwort, soap root[55]), food, and basket-weaving[56] (Figure 5). The arbor serves as a spiritual center for Ohlone peoples in the East Bay to gather safely and participate in collective healing and spirituality. This reclamation of ancestral land near the sacred water way of Lisjan Creek provides protected land access that would allow the Lisjan Ohlone people to engage in community healing and environmental stewardship.

Figure 4: Traditional Village Site and Arbor near San Leandro Creek. *The arbor is built on land between a suburban residential neighborhood and a Highway 880 overpass, which can be seen in the top right corner. Lisjan Creek runs along the right side of the photo, which is looking south toward San Leandro. Source: www.sogoreate-landtrust.org/lisjan.*

[54] Planting Justice, "The Planting Justice Nursery + Sogorea Te Land Trust," n.d.
[55] Sogorea Te' Land Trust, n.d.-c.
[56] Wires and LaRose, 2019.

The new village site is the location of the Lisjan *Himmetka* (meaning "in one place, together" in Chochenyo), a culturally-based emergency response hub for mitigating the impacts of climate change and preparing for natural and human-made emergencies.[57] The Himmetka, which was built from a shipping container, includes ceremonial space, food and medicine gardens, water catchment, filtration, and storage, among many other resources[58] (Figure 6 & 7). With three more Himmetkas planned throughout the East Bay,[59] Sogorea Te' is creating spaces for sustainable Indigenous self-determination through an alternative approach to community resilience in planning.

Figure 5: Johnella Larose, co-founder of the Sogorea Te' Land Trust, shows a soap root plant growing on rematriated land given by Planting Justice. *Photo © Deonna Anderson. Source: "These Indigenous Women Are Reclaiming Stolen Land in the Bay Area," YES! Magazine.*

Figure 5: Traditional medicine-making at the Lisjan Himmetka *includes echinacea tincture, fire cider, and elderberry syrup. Source: sogoreate-landtrust.org/himmetka.*

Figure 4: Weaving tule (Schoenoplectus acutus). *Among many other crafts, the Lisjan are re-learning how to weave tule, which serves many purposes for their community. Source: sogoreate-landtrust.org/cultural-revitalization.*

[57] Sogorea Te' Land Trust, n.d.-c.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid.

Community Restoration Efforts

In describing community restoration efforts for Lisjan Creek, Sogorea Te' references the work of FSLC,[60] who are dedicated to cleaning, protecting, and revitalizing the creek. Susan Levenson, the Watershed Awareness Coordinator of FSLC, notes that "thousands of pounds of trash are washed annually into the San Francisco Bay where the creek meets Martin Luther King Park. San Leandro Creek is a tidal creek, so twice a day, trash is washed into and up the creek for one to two miles with tidal flow."[61] For decades, FSLC has been promoting community spirit and environmental awareness/activism to improve the health and resilience of the creek. They host river cleanup days where volunteers pick up trash along the river, partake in projects to beautify the river, restore native plants to the creek's habitat, remove invasive plant species, and participate in sheet-mulching to prevent the overgrowth of weeds.[62] Through the San Leandro Creek Watershed Awareness Program, the group educates others about protecting and enhancing the creek, establishes an information exchange amongst the community to better understand the effects of human activities on the creek, raises public awareness about the creek, and reduces pollutants and urban runoff.[63] FSLC's activities and ethics are similar to Indigenous caretaking perspectives in that they strive to return the Lisjan Creek watershed to a pristine state—because they recognize the importance of restoring the ecological health of the creek—while encouraging others to join in the restoration efforts.[64] In this way, their grassroots efforts contribute to the reciprocal human-Nature relationship and the gradual abolition of dominant hierarchies that center humans above all other beings in Nature. Their hands-on work has shown that the creek responds quickly to being

[60] Gould, "A Conversation with the Sogorea Te' Land Trust," 2020.
[61] Susan Levenson, personal communication, December 3, 2020.
[62] Friends of San Leandro Creek, n.d.; Susan Levenson, personal communication, December 3, 2020.
[63] Friends of San Leandro Creek, n.d.
[64] Susan Levenson, personal communication, December 3, 2020.

restored and "reclaimed" by community groups to protect it from further harm.[65] Levenson says that FSLC "envision[s] more public awareness and a greater use/love of the creek, as well as empathy for the life in and surrounding it."[66] These words echo Indigenous respect for Nature as an approach to restoring ecosystems by emphasizing the mutualistic relationship in which humans care for the creek, and in turn, the creek allows for multiple human uses. Both Indigenous groups and volunteers working with FSLC share the sentiment for having cleaner waters where future generations of children can play.[67]

In addition to protecting and enhancing the creek, supporting the work of community groups like Sogorea Te' Land Trust and FSLC could lead to long-term benefits. FSLC has been working with the East Bay Municipal Utility District on a Fisheries Plan, which could potentially restore Central Coast Steelhead Trout and other salmonids historically living in the watershed.[68] The possibility of providing fish passage and/or habitat and flow enhancements downstream could lead to the return of Indigenous fishing in tule boats, which would be achievable through rematriated land providing a space to re-learn weaving methods (Figure 7). Though watershed restoration is beyond the scope of this paper, it is meaningful to visualize the impact community groups can have on decision-making at a larger scale. Restoring just a portion of Lisjan Creek could be scalable, providing an opportunity for all to reconnect with the land at different levels—ranging from cleaning up pieces of trash to restoring steelhead and rainbow trout populations.

[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Gould, "A Conversation with the Sogorea Te' Land Trust," 2020; Susan Levenson, personal communication, December 3, 2020.
[68] Ibid. For the site in this report, the construction of Chabot Dam and Upper San Leandro Dam landlocked the population of steelhead trout from swimming downstream. Though the dams and changing water flows led to the end of major salmon runs, many believe the re-emergence of salmon is possible with creek restoration in the future.

Zoning and Land Use around Lisjan Creek

Though the Plan brings Indigenous groups to the table, the planned restoration for the San Leandro Creek Trail does not emphasize the role of Land Back in the ecological restoration of the creek. The Cities of San Leandro and Oakland should investigate public parcels that can be rematriated back to Indigenous stewardship and prioritize these parcels for restoration funding. Doing so would give government entities a greater stake and responsibility to invest in Indigenous TEK and cultural practices that would bring about long-term ecological restoration. Figure 8 shows a large number of parcels in the area that can potentially be donated back to Indigenous peoples, either through cultural easements or rematriation, including many creek-adjacent, publicly-owned parcels.

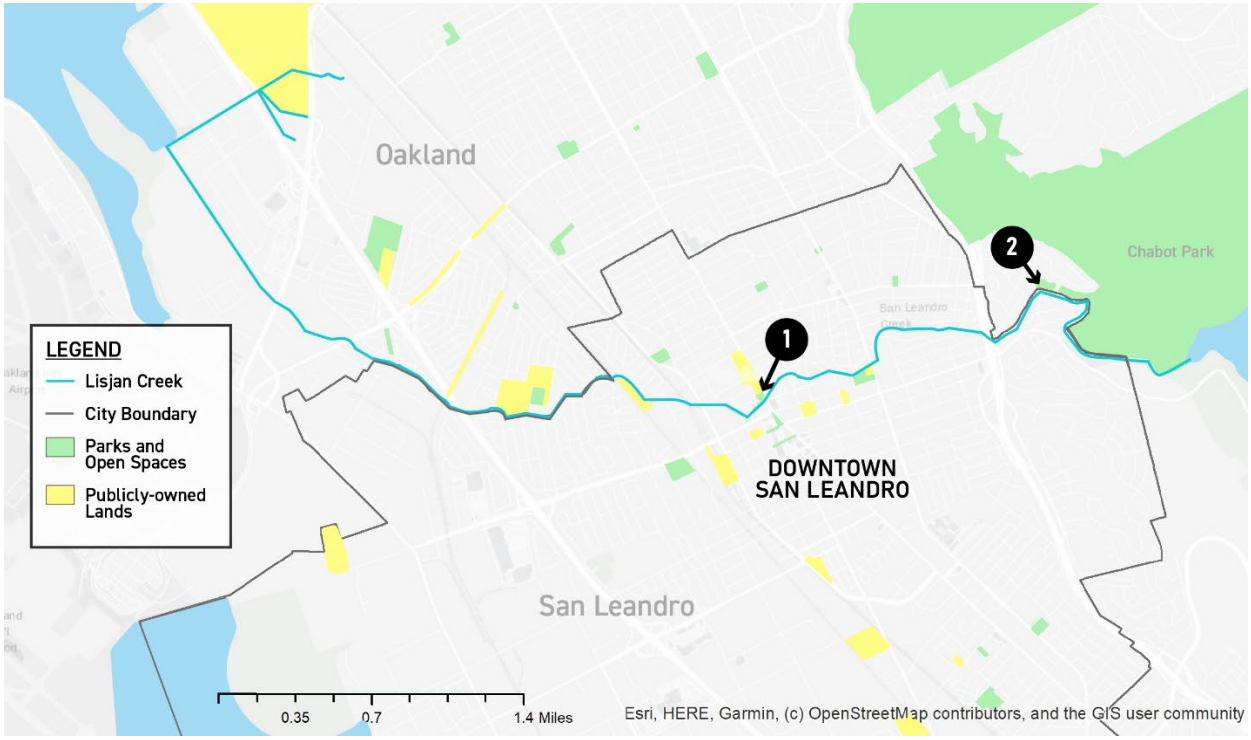

Figure 8: Areas zoned for parks, open space, and public/semipublic space. *Geospatial Data Sources: City Lots & Publicly Owned Properties within City of Oakland Borders (interactive map) (2020), Oakland Zoning (2018) and Zoning for the City of San Leandro (2020), and San Leandro City Limit (2020).*

The following conceptualizations are based on my own research and do not reflect any Indigenous suggestions; it is intended only to illustrate possibilities.

Example 1: Cultural Easement at Root Park

Figure 9: Lisjan Creek at Root Park. *Stairs provide access to the creek. A portion of the "Nature's Hidden Treasure" community mural (painted in 1998) can be seen.*

Root Park ("1" in Figure 8) at East 14th and Hayes St. is an existing creekside park at the northern part of the Downtown San Leandro area. The park has stairs for the public to access the creek bed below (Figure 9). A cultural easement on a section of this park land could provide legally protected land where the Lisjan Ohlone can relearn and practice TEK to carry out their sacred duties of caring for the creek. A cultural easement would also protect a ceremonial space through which they can repair sacred and ancestral relationships with the Earth, support biodiversity, cultivate/gather traditional plants, and groom the creek; this would ultimately allow for a return to balance that could lead to future cultural and environmental sustainability. Having a greater understanding about the relationships between Indigenous ancestral traditions and ecological outcomes can inform both planners and the public about the level of human engagement with the ecosystems of Lisjan Creek in the creation of a creek trail.

As a point-of-interest in Downtown San Leandro, the location of this cultural easement would provide opportunities for non-Indigenous groups to honor Indigenous histories, heritage, and natural amenities. The proximity to the downtown area increases visibility of Indigenous lives and provides a platform for educating others about the importance of both environmental stewardship and preserving Indigenous cultures. A community mural from FSLC painted on the creek culvert, entitled "Nature's Hidden Treasure," promotes Indigenous cultural presence in its

portrayal of an Ohlone individual hunting for fish with a tule boat.[69] The mural provides another incentive for educational visits to Root Park, encouraging conversation about the relationships between Indigenous peoples, native plants, and animals that inhabit the shared environment. Because the San Leandro BART station is within a short walking distance, this park is conveniently accessible for Indigenous peoples needing to travel to the park. Additionally, planned bike facilities, through the San Leandro Bike and Pedestrian Master Plan (2018),[70] would allow for convenient travel to the park by bike. Having an accessible site for traditional ceremonies and practices ensures that as many Tribe members as possible would be able to gather at the place.

Example 2: Rematriated Parcel near Chabot Park

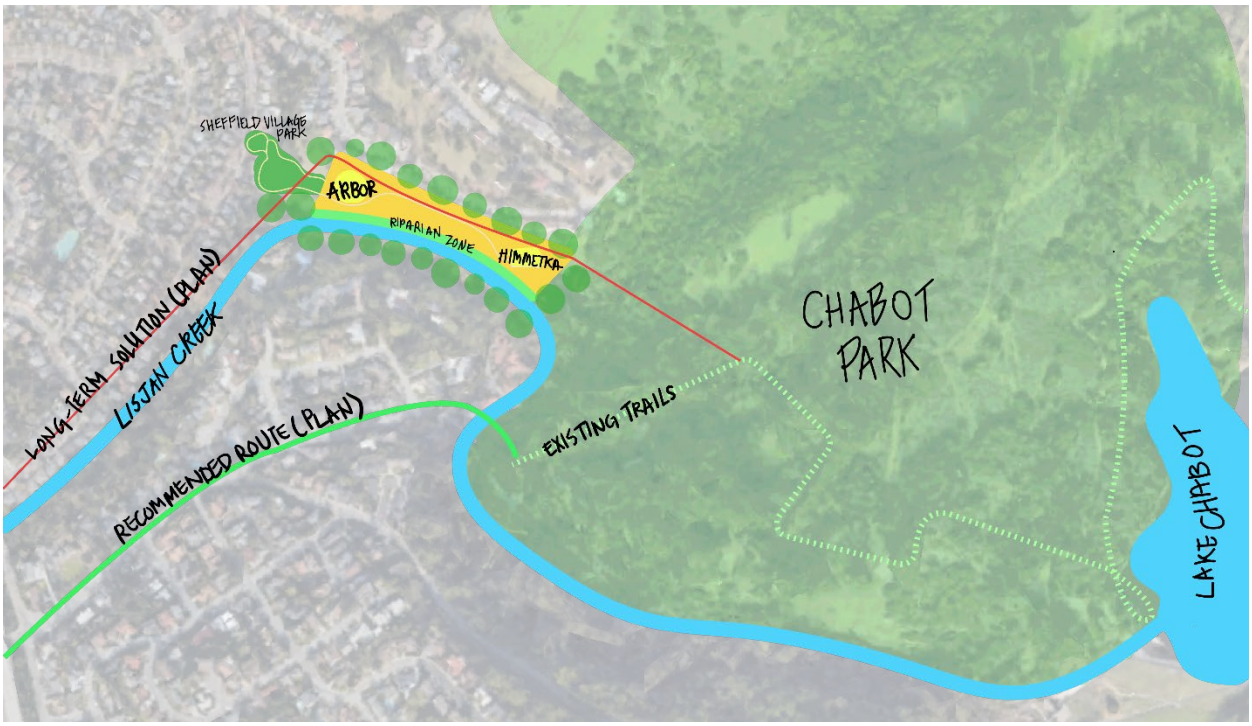

Figure 10: Conceptual diagram of potential Indigenous site near Chabot Park*. The diagram includes the San Leandro Creek Trail Master Plan's recommended route and long-term solution/alternative, showing potential relationships between the site, creek, parks, and planned and existing trail routes.*

[69] San Leandro Creek Trail Master Plan, Appendix B, 2017. However, the Plan also notes that tribal consultants—while appreciative of the mural's image of the Indigenous person and boat—had pointed out inaccuracies with the image.
[70] San Leandro Creek Trail Master Plan, 2017.

Land near Chabot Park ("2" in Figure 8) could be given back to Indigenous caretakers through rematriation (Figure 10). These publicly-owned parcels are adjacent to the creek in a more secluded, residential area. In this conceptual diagram, a village site similar to the existing one near 105th Avenue includes an arbor and Himmetka, with direct access to the riparian corridor of the creek. Figure 10 shows the trail route for the long-term solution noted in the Plan, which would provide access to Sheffield Village Recreational Center and to Lake Chabot Regional Park; however, this trail route would run either through or parallel to the village site. As with the cultural easement at Root Park, an adjacent trail could expand visibility of Indigenous cultures, including traditional caretaking methods. A trail route adjacent to the village site may also generate support for an Indigenous-led stewardship program for the creek, such as educational walking tours, which was an expressed interest in the Plan.[71] This route would also provide ease of access from the village site to Lake Chabot for Indigenous groups, which would be pertinent for traditional fishing if fish runs were restored in the future. On the other hand, the Plan's recommended route, which runs along Estudillo Avenue and would provide trail users with access to Chabot Park, does not encounter the conceptual village site. Though this decreases the visibility of Indigenous traditions that could occur at the village site, it would establish a safe and private place where Ohlone peoples can gather their own plants and practice traditions without outside interference from trail users. Thus, either trail route would have benefits for an Indigenous village site built near Chabot Park, especially if the conceptual village site is envisioned as a part of a larger network of connected, rematriated sites for Indigenous use.

Furthermore, FSLC has a grant from the City of San Leandro to restore sections of creek in Chabot Park, which has included increasing creek bank stability and removing invasive plant

[71] The Tribal consultation report of the Plan indicates that tribal consultants expressed interest in creating paid opportunities for Indigenous people to lead walking tours along the creek.

species.[72] Because this restoration work is being done nearby, the conceptual village site would benefit from FSLC's efforts to increase the creek's health and resilience. FSLC has worked with a local Ohlone elder, Ruth Orta, who participated in a special service, storytelling, and creek blessings.[73] Working together, the two groups can bring awareness about creek care through seasonal festivals and public events at the site. They can enhance food sources and promote biodiversity in the riparian corridor, which they would have direct access to at this creek-adjacent site. FSLC is already in contact with Ohlone leaders and owners of Café Ohlone in Berkeley, Vincent Medina and Louis Trevino, helping them grow and collect native plant species for Tribal use and for traditional food purposes.[74] Thus, there is already an infrastructure and partnership in place for creek-adjacent lands to be given back to the community. With priority funding from the government to do restoration work, these lands could be adopted within a network of other rematriated lands along the creek to provide a foundation for long-term ecological restoration, which goes hand-in-hand with revitalization of Lisjan Ohlone culture and practices. Through an intentional and meaningful government Land Back program, there is a lot of potential for the creek to support, nurture, and provide long-lasting access to the shared environment for both Indigenous and non-indigenous communities.

Conclusions: Pathways toward Decolonizing Restoration of Lisjan Creek

In promoting sustainable uses of the environment, ecological restoration projects in the East Bay should consider the history of colonialism, the power of Indigenous relationships to land and water, and the importance of utilizing traditional ecological knowledge. For centuries, the racialization of Indigenous peoples in the U.S. has presented each Indigenous generation as "less

[72] S. Levenson, personal communication, December 3, 2020.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid.

authentic" than previous generations as a way to diminish any Indigenous claims to land in favor of settler claims to property.[75] Within this settler colonialism context, the desire to erase Indigenous peoples and their cultures is tied to a corrupt and capitalistic societal structure. Restoration work, like most U.S. institutions and practices, is still built upon the same system of colonialism that stole the land and water from Indigenous peoples. As a step towards truth and reconciliation with the past, land rematriation is the key to making decolonization possible, and can lead to the revitalization of Indigenous cultures, languages, and practices, as well as the restoration of biocultural diversity in the face of environmental degradation. In adopting Indigenous perspectives of land and water, river and creek restoration projects could benefit from distinct Indigenous traditions of protecting rivers, while also playing a large role in protecting Indigenous cultures. As Gould puts it, "If we don't do this work together, the genocidal project that was planned for us will be complete."[76]

With the development of the San Leandro Creek Trail and related creek restoration, the San Leandro/Lisjan Creek presents an opportunity to decolonize restoration planning, which includes returning land back to Indigenous caretakers. Planners recognize the importance of Tribal consultation and Indigenous inclusion in planning for the creek restoration; they should now also integrate Land Back ideas into the creek restoration process. There are several ways the Cities of San Leandro and Oakland can do this: 1) pay the Shuumi Land Tax to Sogorea Te' Land Trust for occupying the land and creating the trail; 2) give creek-adjacent public lands (and private lands if possible) to Sogorea Te' to work with other community groups to nurse the land and water back to health; 3) grant cultural easements in parks and open spaces to allow Indigenous peoples to re-

[75] Tuck and Yang, 2012. Their paper provides more context about settler colonialism and the legacies of occupation.
[76] Gould, "Colonization, Decolonization and Rematriation on Ohlone Land," 2020.

learn and practice their methods of restoring Nature. As demonstrated by the examples of a cultural easement at Root Park and rematriation near Chabot Park, returning land back to Indigenous stewardship could provide meaningful places for local Indigenous groups to cultivate their knowledge and practice their traditional methods of ecological healing. This allows for the revitalization of Indigenous culture along the creek, which would benefit the environment and communities living around the planned trail. In addition, local governments can support restoration work enabled by partnerships between Indigenous groups and community groups like Friends of San Leandro Creek. These actions would provide both Indigenous and non-indigenous communities with a greater understanding of how to take care of, and preserve, Lisjan Creek for future generations to use, while gradually restoring our reciprocal relationships with the lands upon which we all depend.

Land Acknowledgement

I acknowledge that UC Berkeley and all of us in the surrounding community are living on occupied territories of the Huchiun, one of the many traditional territories in the San Francisco Bay Area. I am honored to be a guest upon this land that is, has always been, and will always be the ancestral homeland of the Ohlone peoples.

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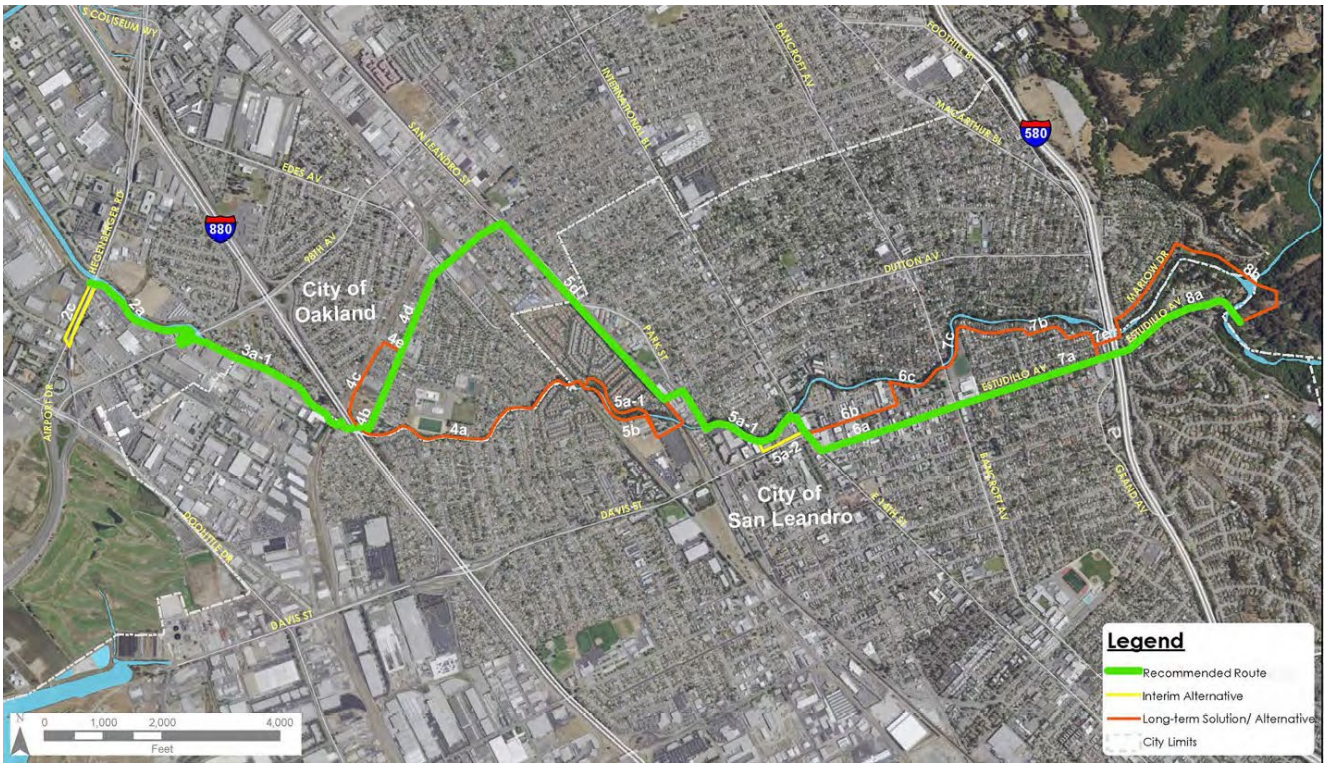
Appendices

Appendix A. San Leandro Creek Trail Master Plan Possible Routes



Source: San Leandro Creek Trail Master Plan, 2017.

This map shows the Plan's recommended route, long-term solution, and interim routes. According to the Plan, "the 'recommended route' is the most implementable route as the project moves forward and will need some coordination with agencies. The 'long-term solution' is the most desirable route but might take additional outreach, coordination with multiple agencies and property owners, and funding to implement. This will take longer compared to the recommended route. Even after outreach there is a chance that consensus might not be established, or the route might not be feasible based on environmental assessments in some segments [and] therefore, might not be implemented. The recommended route takes a longer path in certain segments and proposes certain on-road facilities. Even after the implementation of the long-term solution, the recommended route will remain as an alternative route or can be integrated with the bicycle plans of the Cities. 'Interim routes' are suggested to establish immediate connectivity until coordination with property-owners or additional studies are done."

Appendix B. Indigenous Peoples of the East Bay

Source: East Bay Regional Park District, "Native Peoples of the East Bay, Past to Present" brochure. My emphasis on the site, the San Leandro Creek and its major tributaries.

The text reads: "Prior to Euro-American intrusion, about 23 independent tribes lived in the place now known as Alameda and Contra Costa counties. Each tribe had between 200 and 300 members who lived in three to five permanent villages and several seasonal camps. Each tribal homeland covered about eight to twelve square miles. Each tribe had its own leaders and a culture that, while similar among neighboring groups, also varied. Everyone spoke two or more languages, and marriages occurred between neighboring groups.

"For tribal name pronunciations, use Spanish vowel and consonant pronunciation. Tribes printed in all capital letters had the largest populations."