

# Indigenous Land Conservation Summit 2023 Impact Report

## Honoring Indigenous Leaders, Building Relationships and Learning Together

In partnership with an Indigenous planning team, the Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts (COLT) and Friends of Tryon Creek (FOTC), the Land Trust Alliance hosted a first-of-its kind Indigenous Land Conservation Summit on September 6, 2023 in conjunction with Rally: The National Land Conservation Conference. The Summit was an affinity space for over 80 Indigenous land conservationists and tribal leaders from over 40 Indigenous communities to gather for relationship building and shared learning at Tryon Creek State Natural Area in Portland, Oregon.

While the Alliance, COLT and FOTC managed the fundraising and coordination of logistics for the Summit, the Indigenous planning team developed the agenda, speaker list, and invitations and made other key decisions that shaped the gathering. Facilitated by Dirlle Calica (Warm Springs) and Serina Fast Horse (Lakota/Blackfeet), the Summit featured a mix of discussion and panel presentations on land back, fundraising and the connection between land management and tribal sovereignty. Panel presenters represented both elder and youth perspectives, and the gathering was closed with a keynote by Dr. Terry Cross (Seneca) of the National Indian Child Welfare Association. A salmon and eel bake lunch was provided by Clifton (Wasco) and Christine (Comanche) Bruno, and attendees explored the natural area with a plant identification tour and a hike.

*"This gathering brought together Indigenous leadership from across turtle island, in order to protect and support one another as we work to heal the land and water. This is an incredible moment, and the first of many gatherings yet to come. Our shared work and lessons are valuable, but the true gift of this group is to be able to reshape our future together, in community, as Native Peoples." – Gerard Rodriguez (Yaqui/Nahuatl)*

*"Tribes were given the responsibility to take care of Mother Earth and all living things by Creator. Our people learned over thousands of years how steward and manage the plants, wildlife, fish, waters, etc., and we did so in a very sustainable way. Both this deep knowledge and moral responsibility are essential today. At our Summit meeting we talked about our obligations to take care of the land and we shared ideas and strategies of how we can effectively do this and support each other." – Chairman Val Lopez (Amah Mutsun)*

## Growing Community and Commitments

One of the most valuable and significant aspects of the gathering was the community-building and personal connections that grew between attendees. From the early days of planning for the Summit, to the post-Summit survey, Indigenous leaders reflected that safe, intentional space to gather with peers and relatives is critically needed and all too uncommon.

***“[there are usually] a lot of people talking about indigenous land conservation but not a whole lot of folks from the Indigenous community. It is so important to get Indigenous people together to support one another.” – Tara Fouch-Moore, Tribal Secretary and Project Manager (Southern Sierra Miwuk)***

Attendees reflected that they appreciated the discussion topics, the speakers and the opportunity to spend time outdoors in relationship with the land.

Survey respondents ranked their satisfaction with their overall experience at the Summit and the relevance of the topics covered. On a scale from 0 (Very Dissatisfied) to 5 (Very Satisfied):

- **28 of 29 respondents (97%) scored their experience as a 4 or 5;**
- **28 of 29 respondents scored the content relevance as a 4 or 5; and**
- **28 of 29 respondents felt that they made connections that will help them advance land return, access and stewardship.**
- **Respondents also shared which topics they were interested in for future discussions and learning: 92% were interested in land return, 81% in land stewardship, 77% in cultural harvest and food sovereignty, 54% in approaches to conserving culturally important land, and 54% in funding and fundraising. Other topics of interest included water protection, cultural connections to the land, and protection of sacred knowledge.**

Indigenous leaders resoundingly requested additional in-person Summit gatherings and in response, the Alliance has pledged to host a second Indigenous Land Conservation Summit in Providence, Rhode Island in 2024. Feedback from the post-Summit survey and conversations with the 2023 planning team and attendees will shape future gatherings and the Alliance's approach to supporting Indigenous land relationships, return, access and stewardship more broadly.

***“As Indigenous people, we need spaces to be together. It is medicine for our soul.” – Anonymous Attendee***

### **The wealth of recommendations and requests include:**

- **At future in-person affinity gatherings, more time for knowledge exchange and discussion, accommodations and activities for families, and opportunities for seed exchange.**
- **At the wider Rally conference and other Alliance-hosted gatherings, more relevant content, greater representation of Indigenous expertise, spaces for Indigenous vendors and expansion of policies and practices that promote inclusion and belonging.**
- **Implementation of new grant programs and virtual peer networking and learning spaces for Indigenous land conservationists.**
- **Deepened, transparent investment in Indigenous leadership at the Alliance including public statements of commitment, inclusion of Indigenous leaders as high level and program level advisors to the organization and expanded Indigenous staff and consultant expertise.**





2023 Indigenous Land Conservation Summit attendees pose for a group photo at Tryon Creek State Natural Area. Photo courtesy of Amanda Craig (Coos).

Just as the Summit served as an essential growth moment for new relationships and Indigenous community building, the Alliance has grown in important new directions and continues to learn through this relationship and trust building work. The Alliance will continue to prioritize listening and action in support of Indigenous-led land conservation as we respond to the requests highlighted above. The Alliance will ensure that all responsive programs and activities are shaped by Indigenous Peoples, and identify opportunities for Indigenous leaders to more broadly engage with, benefit from and shape Alliance programs and strategies.

***“The Summit was an invaluable opportunity for us to carve out our space in the land trust community. I hope that it can play a pivotal role in fostering an emerging community of practice, one working relentlessly to Indigenize conservation.” – Anna-Liza Victory (Cherokee)***

The Alliance is currently fundraising to support the 2024 Summit and a larger body of work that will respond to the priorities raised by Indigenous leaders at the 2023 Summit to first and foremost support their needs, but also prepare the larger land conservation sector to better show up as allies.

“The Summit trail-blazed a much-needed and long-awaited reconnection of Native land trusts and repatriation projects across Turtle Island. From local tribes in Oregon to New York, and from California to Maine, Native nations gathered to discuss Indigenous land stewardship, tribal sovereignty, and the innovative fundraising needed for Land Back to be realized. It was an honor to be a part of the planning committee which created this powerful, safe space for Indigenous



people to share stories, food, and strategy. Many thanks to the Friends of Tryon Creek, Cayuse, Umatilla, Walla Walla, Siletz, Cowlitz, Klamath, the many other nations of the Big River, sponsors, and attendees for making this gathering of people, salmon, and plants underneath the sacred redwoods possible.” – Dominique Daye Hunter (Saponi/Nansemond)



Speakers and planning partners were honored with wool blankets. This photo features the planning partners, facilitators and planning team with Tori McConnell (Yurok and Karuk), Miss Indian World 2023.

**Thank you to the attendees, planning team, facilitators, organizing partners and sponsors for making the 2023 Indigenous Land Conservation Summit possible. The 2023 planning team members were: Chairman Val Lopez (Amah Mutsun), Gabe Sheoships (Cayuse/Walla Walla), Amanda Craig (Coos), Dominique Daye Hunter (Saponi/Nansemond), Gerard Rodriguez (Yaqui/Nahuatl).**

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