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# AIAN SEPM Newsletter



## Meet the 1994 Tribal Land-Grant Liaisons in the USDA Office of Advocacy and Outreach



USDA 1994 Tribal Land-Grant Staff: Stephanie Koziski, Program Analyst (left), Lawrence Shorty, Director (center), Lavinia (Vinnie) Panizo, Tribal Fellows Program Specialist. Pictured outside of the National Museum of the American Indian and the U.S. Capitol building.

## The Role of USDA Tribal Land-Grant College and Universities Program in the USDA Office of Advocacy and Outreach

By Stephanie Koziski

The USDA 1994 Tribal Land-Grant Colleges and Universities (1994 TLGCU) Program:

- ▶ Develops policy guidelines and procedures;
- ▶ Coordinates and oversees participation in the Department's programs and activities; and
- ▶ Monitors, evaluates, and reports on agency compliance with policy and Executive Orders to increase

participation of 1994 Tribal Land Grant Colleges and Universities in USDA programs.

The 1994 TLGCU Program provides one-on-one service to each of the thirty-two 1994 Tribal Land-Grant Institutions through three 1994 Tribal Land-Grant Liaisons. These Liaisons serve as the local face of USDA in communities with tribal colleges and universities. The first two Liaison

## NRCS Partners with American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES)

The NRCS recruiting cadre achieved tremendous recruitment success for the Agency at the 34<sup>th</sup> annual American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES) conference which was attended by over 2,918 students pursuing Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) career paths. The AISES conference was held in Anchorage, Alaska on November 1 through November 3, 2012. This year's conference theme was *Adaptability*. NRCS participated as a Lapis sponsor for the conference. Robert Jones, Alaska State Conservationist and NRCS cadre members, received the NRCS recognition award for the Agency at the AISES Gemstone Reception. NRCS was also recognized and honored for their sponsorship during the conference Opening Ceremonies, Closing Ceremonies and Honor Banquet. This conference attracted college students from 173 Tribal Colleges and Universities from across the Nation and 116 high school students. NRCS provided the Nation's brightest and finest American Indian and Alaska Native college students with information on the new Pathways opportunities. Cadre members handed out 300 of the NRCS 2012 American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) Heritage posters and Pathway flyers.

NRCS cadre members; Levi Montoya, David Elliott, Dr. Carol Crouch, Nathaniel Todea, Seanna Sparks, Rose Webb, and Jane Standifer-Trenton presented two professional and student concurrent sessions on November 3. The sessions were entitled *Balancing STEM, Native Traditions, Cultural Values, Protecting Our Land and Feeding America: Who are These Professionals and Can Your STEM Degree Play a Role?* and *Intertwining Leadership Competencies and Traditional Ecological Knowledge*. Nathaniel Todea and Dr. Carol Crouch represented NRCS as panelists in the STEM Grad session and Dr. Crouch attended the Government Relations Council (GRC) meeting, as representative for NRCS, on November 2. Jane Trenton and Kristina Harper, from NRCS Alaska, also assisted during the career fair. The NRCS presence at the annual AISES conference was a huge success.



## NRCS Partners with AISES to Hold Scholarship Readings

According to Dr. Carol Crouch, NRCS National American Indian Alaska Special Emphasis Program Manager, "For the last seven years NRCS recruiting cadre members have organized and conducted scholarship readings for American Indian Science and Engineering Society Scholarship (AISES).

The participants at the reading reviewed fifty of the A.T. Anderson Memorial Scholarship applications, which have been awarded to students since 1983. Between 50 and 75 A.T. Anderson Memorial scholarships are offered to graduate and undergraduate students each year nationwide. Scholarship applications from Arizona to Montana and California to Michigan were reviewed, and the reviewers had the opportunity to read about students from assorted walks of life.

Through its educational programs, AISES provides opportunities for American Indians and Alaska Natives to pursue studies in the science, engineering, and technology arenas. Organizing the scholarship readings this year was NRCS Montana AI/AN SEPM, Seanna Sparks. The AISES scholarship reading for 2012, was held at the Federal Building in Bozeman. There were seven Montana NRCS and two Montana FSA employees who participated in the scholarship reading this year. AISES is a national, nonprofit organization which nurtures building community by bridging science and technology with traditional values.

## AIAN Foods

### Cheddar and Corn Chowder

From Carol Crouch

1 lg. onion, diced  
 1 red bell pepper, diced  
 4 ribs celery, diced  
 2 tbsp. margarine  
 8 c. chicken stock  
 1 bay leaf  
 1 tsp. diced jalapeno pepper  
 1 tsp. dried parsley  
 3 c. fresh or frozen corn  
 1 1/2 c. shredded cheddar cheese  
 1 c. lowfat milk  
 1/2 tsp. black pepper & salt each

In large pot, sauté onion, celery and red pepper in margarine for 3 minutes. Add chicken stock, bay leaf, jalapeno pepper, corn and parsley. Bring to boil, reduce heat and simmer 20 minutes then stir in cheese until smooth. Add milk, salt and pepper. Heat but do not boil. Ladle into soup bowls.

## Montana Hosts Working Effectively with American Indians Training

By Herb Webb, Tribal Conservationist, Pablo

Forty-six NRCS employees from Montana and four from Washington state attended the Working Effectively with American Indians training delivered by the National Employee Development Center, Sept. 10 -14, at the University of Montana's Flathead Lake Biological Station located on the Flathead Indian Reservation, home of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes.

A cadre of three NEDC instructors from around the country (Utah, Oklahoma and Colorado) work hand-in-hand with local NRCS staff and Tribal presenters to deliver this unique learning experience.

It has been a decade or more since NRCS in Montana hosted a Working Effectively with American Indians workshop. Since that time we have many employees that are new to working with Tribes. These employees are either in a location where they will work directly with Tribes and Tribal members or are in support roles.

Providing service and delivering programs to Tribes and Tribal members can be challenging due to differences in culture, land status, Tribal sovereignty, Tribal laws or ordinances and the Department of Interior's rules and regulations. In addition, the federal government (including NRCS) has a trust responsibility to provide services to American Indians. The goal of this course is to provide an understanding of how NRCS can assist Tribes and Tribal members to participate in our programs, how we can work with Tribes in meaningful Government to Government consultation to ensure that any barriers or challenges with our programs are identified so that they may be addressed and, ultimately, how NRCS employees can provide better service so that Tribal lands and resources can be enrolled in our programs as effectively as possible.



Levi Montoya, NRCS district conservationist from Colorado, provides instruction at the Working Effectively with American Indians workshop.



Mike Dolson, (seated front and center) Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribal member and local instructor/historian, and Carol Crouch, (seated front and right) workshop instructor and National American Indian/Alaska Native Emphasis Program Manager, lead a discussion at the Working Effectively with American Indians workshop. Seated to the left is Allison Milodragovich, soil conservationist, Choteau, MT and to the rear is Blake Stiffarm, soil conservation technician, Fort Belknap, MT.



Working Effectively with American Indians workshop participants make presentation on planning exercise using the Indigenous Stewardship Guide with the conservation planning process to address a unique resource issue.

positions were established in 2008 – one, based at Little Big Horn College, serves 14 1994 Tribal Colleges in the Western Region. The Western Liaison position is currently vacant.

The other position, based at Sitting Bull College – serves 13 1994 Tribal Colleges in the Central Region. Lisa Yellow holds this position.



Lisa Yellow, Central Region Liaison, USDA 1994 Tribal Land-Grant Colleges and Universities Program addresses a group of students at Leech Lake Tribal College

The Program Analyst from the USDA 1994 Program Headquarters serves the five Eastern Region Tribal Colleges. Stephanie Koziski holds this position.



Danielle Diver, Bimaaji'idiwin Ojibwe Garden Program Coordinator, Fond Du Lac Reservation; and Stephanie Koziski, Program Analyst, USDA 1994 Tribal Land-Grant Colleges and Universities Program office take a closer look at some of the gardens native crops and discuss USDA programs available to assist garden projects.

Liaisons assist the thirty-two 1994 Tribal Land-Grant Colleges and Universities in their development as Land-Grant Institutions. Liaisons have knowledge of available USDA programs, communicate that knowledge to Tribal College Presidents and faculty, as well as local farmers and ranchers in a manner that meets their needs. The Liaisons facilitate working partnerships between USDA field offices, 1994 Tribal Land-Grants, and local tribal producers. Their work includes ensuring that the priorities and needs of the 1994 Land-Grants are addressed by the appropriate USDA agency or office. This work also includes working with both the Land-Grant and the Department to ensure the presence of academic curriculum that meets Departmental employment requirements.

The USDA 1994 Program has made tremendous progress in assisting tribal colleges and universities in their land-grant development and in identifying barriers that have prevented their full participation in all USDA programs and services. Working with USDA Agency Outreach Coordinators has proved to be a good partnership in reaching tribal colleges with USDA resource information.

For example, in 2010 Stephanie Koziski, the 1994 Program Analyst serving the Eastern Region, met with USDA State Agency representatives in Michigan and encouraged their participation in her annual meetings at Michigan's two 1994 Land Grant Colleges. The USDA state agency representatives visited Bay Mills Community College and Saginaw Chippewa Tribal College in Michigan to hear tribal college needs and describe USDA resources. USDA field office staffs from FSA, NRCS, and RD now have a strong working relationship with the Bay Mills Community College (BMCC) Land-Grant Faculty and have used program resources to assist BMCC in developing the Waishkey Farm, their sustainable farm that grows and produces vegetables, fruit, grazing, livestock, and poultry. Through various agency programs from RD, FSA and NRCS, BMCC has installed water lines, fencing, grazing system, high tunnels and a barn. Utilizing the Federal Excess Personal Property Program has garnered trucks and tractors for use on the farm.

## Continued from page 3—The USDA 1994 Tribal Land-Grant Colleges & Universities Program



Steve Allard, Fond Du Lac Tribal College alumni and newly enrolled student at University of Minnesota, Crookston, is a recipient of the USDA Tribal Scholars Program (scholarship sponsored by NRCS). To his right are Stephanie Koziski, Program Analyst and Lavinia (Vinnie) Panizo, Fellows Program Manager, USDA 1994 Tribal Land-Grant Colleges and Universities Program

In 2012, Stephanie Koziski coordinated a meeting with key USDA state and field office staff from FSA, RD, NRCS and NASS who traveled to the Saginaw Chippewa Tribal College to discuss, with the President and faculty, technical assistance and funding available from USDA. This tribal college just received 200 acres from the Saginaw Chippewa Indian tribe of Michigan to build their own campus. As a result, RD is working with the college on funding for buildings, while NRCS is developing a conservation plan to include outdoor learning areas. (Note: Saginaw Chippewa Tribal College is now in rented shopping center buildings).

Lisa Yellow, the Central Region 1994 Tribal Land-Grant Liaison, has developed a close working relationship with USDA RD and ARS in North Dakota; and coordinated tribal college meetings in North Dakota during July 2012 for the USDA Research, Education and Economics Mission Area Under Secretary and in South Dakota during August 2012 for the USDA Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights.

1994 Liaisons participate in key tribal college conferences. The 1994 Team organized the first USDA Symposium at the First Americans Land-Grant Consortium (FALCON) conference held in October 2012, highlighting examples of successful TLGCU and USDA partnerships, resources available through the FEPP Program, a presentation for 2012 Fellows Program, a history on American Indian and Alaska Native efforts to improve representation within USDA and that the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) was instrumental in legislating for a 1994 Program. As a result of two new power points on the 1994 Program history and surplus federal government program, the presentation was very well received by the 1994 community who commented they better understood what USDA offers TCUs and the purpose of the USDA 1994 Program.

[Get to know your 1994 TLGCU Liaisons!!](#)



NRCS-Texas attended the Intertribal Ag Council meeting in Las Vegas in December 2012, with a display highlighting their work with the Tigua Tribes of the Yselta Del Sur Pueblo. The **Indian National Finals Rodeo Dance Troupe** poses for a photo at the NRCS-Texas booth.

Page 6 **San Carlos 4-H Garden Club members receive blue ribbons at the County Fair**

The San Carlos 4-H Garden Club members all received first place blue ribbons for their Apache squash and corn entries at the Gila County Fair in the 4-H Member Division and Junior Division. Members of the 4-H Garden Club who submitted entries were Amber Hosay, Kelsea Mariano, Brian Mariano, Noah Titla, Ryan Stiffarm, Braiden Titla, and Jeremy Paddock. Noah Titla, a seventh grader at the San Carlos Junior High School, also received the Grand Champion Award for his entry and interviewing skills.

The San Carlos 4-H/Community Youth Garden Club, with a total of 14 members, began its six weeks of garden instructions in June at the San Carlos University of Arizona Cooperative Extension Office with a grant funded by USDA Rural Development. Millie Titla, 4-H Leader and NRCS District Conservationist, helped the Club members install the water drip system and taught the members when and how to plant the seeds, and how to make compost. The members also learned about the soil, parts of a seed and the plant, and important garden tool safety.

Gardening has been a traditional activity for the Apaches for thousands of years. Many Apaches have lost the culture of growing and harvesting traditional crops, changing their diet dramatically in the past 100 years, with adverse health consequences. These problems include diabetes, obesity and heart disease.

Titla said she wanted to volunteer as a leader because she wanted to teach the youth the appreciation of gardening and how fun it can be. Future plans for the Garden Club are traditional cooking demos and expanding the types of foods planted.



Millie Titla  
Courtesy photo

These students won first place ribbons at the Gila County Fair last month. They are members of the San Carlos 4-H Garden Club and include (l-r) Jeremy Paddock, Braiden Titla, Noah Titla and Ryan Stiffarm.

**2012 NRCS American Indian Heritage Poster Artwork Presented to Choctaw Nation**

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) recognizes and celebrates the many different cultures to which we have the opportunity to offer our services and programs. Each year NRCS sponsors a contest for American Indian artists, with the winning artwork being produced into a poster and distributed nationwide. On June 6,



Left to Right:

Kathy Sturch, Choctaw Artist,

Jamey Wood, II, NRCS

Chief Gregory Pyle, Choctaw Nation

the winning artwork was selected for the 2012 American Indian Heritage poster that was released during American Indian Alaskan Native Heritage month. The title is "Our Past, Present, and Future" with the theme being "Tell me and I'll forget. Show me and I may not remember. Involve me and I'll understand." This year's winner of the poster contest was Choctaw member, Kathy Sturch. "Although the poster was not released until November; NRCS Oklahoma decided to present the winning artwork to the Choctaw Nation during their annual Choctaw Festival" stated Dr. Crouch, AI/AN National SEPM. The artwork was presented to Chief Pyle, of the Choctaw Nation on August 29, 2012, at the Choctaw Nation Headquarters in Durant, Oklahoma.

**AI/AN Proverbs**

When we show our respect for other living things, they respond with respect for us.

Arapaho

## Ladies Fancy Shawl Dance



Dance is one of the most beautiful parts of American Indian culture. Generations of American Indians have developed a variety of dances for many different kinds of occasions. Ladies Fancy Shawl is one of the newest forms of Women's Dance, and is quite athletic! Fancy Shawl is often called Northern Shawl, as it does come from the Northern Tribes along the U.S. and Canadian Border. This is very similar in dancing and the bright colors to the Men's Fancy Dance. The ladies wear their shawls over their shoulders, and dance by jumping and spinning around, keeping time with the music. They mimic butterflies in flight, and the dance style is quite graceful and light. Emphasis is paid particularly to the shawls, with elaborate designs, appliqué, ribbon work, and painting. Long fringe hangs from the edges of the shawl, and flies round.

Contributed by Wendy Smith, SEPM in Alabama

# USDA Tribal Fellows Program

By Lavinia Panizo

The USDA 1994 Tribal Land-Grant Colleges and Universities Program works with 1994 tribal land-grant colleges and universities to develop their land-grant capacities and rural tribal economies to ensure the US' food security. To achieve this mission, the Department offers accepted applicants a Tribal Fellowship, a one-week intensive workshop which includes the cost of travel, lodging, and per diem with the provision that the schools continue to pay their staff members' salary. Over the course of the workshop, Fellows learn about programs and resources available throughout USDA and where to access them.

In 2012, USDA graduated the first Tribal Fellows cohort with participants from Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe Community College - WI, Institute of American Indian Arts - NM, and Little Big Horn College - MT. This past program included presentations from Administrators and Deputy Administrators from USDA Mission Areas and Agencies including USDA Research, Education, and Economics (REE); Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS); Forest Service (FS); and Rural Development (RD). Fellows learned about the array of funding and other opportunities available at USDA directly from the Program Directors and staffs that manage the programs including: Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE), Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR), Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI), Rural Business Enterprise Grant (RBEG), Rural Cooperative Development Grant (RCDG), Community Facilities Tribal College Grant and met with the staffs from other USDA offices who work specifically on the behalf of American Indians/Alaska Natives, such as the Office of Tribal Relations and other Federal Departments including the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Department of Energy (DOE).



(right) Todd Brier, Eastern Band of Cherokee Tribe, Sustainable Agriculture Research Manager, Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe Community College (LCOOCC), WI, gives (left) Stephanie Koziski, USDA 1994 Tribal Land-Grant Colleges and Universities Program, a tour of the LCOOCC Research and Training Farm.



Over the course of the program, Fellows consider which of the resources discussed might benefit their schools and how they could apply these resources to achieve their institutions' objectives. When Fellows return to their institutions, they are asked to apply their new-found knowledge by developing a strategic plan to address the needs of their 1994 Tribal Land-Grant college in the areas of agriculture, conservation, and the development of their rural communities.

Fellows are encouraged to develop a plan in collaboration with their institutions' tribal community, and the support of the USDA 1994 Tribal Land-Grant Colleges and Universities Program staff. This is where working with the local USDA service center can really make the difference in the success of these schools to optimize their plan. The Tribal Fellows Program offers participants an overview of the USDA landscape and opportunities to share ideas and develop potential partnerships, but in order to successfully apply to and implement these programs the support of the local service centers is crucial. It is their targeted expertise and regional knowledge that will help schools to implement a well thought out plan and to realize goals.

Eligible applicants are faculty or staff employed by a 1994 tribal land-grant college or university that work in the areas of agriculture, conservation, science, or community development. One faculty or staff member from each of the thirty-two 1994 Tribal Land-Grant Institutions may be accepted to participate in the program.

To apply or recommend an applicant to the 2013 Tribal Fellows program contact:

Lavinia Panizo, USDA Tribal Fellows Program,  
202.205.2319, [1994@osec.usda.gov](mailto:1994@osec.usda.gov)

### What 2012 Fellows Are Saying About the Program...

*"There are actually quite a few programs that are not just for me and my program at the farm but for the college overall. The idea was for me to come here and learn as much as I can and help the college to be able to access a lot of these programs..."*

Todd Brier, Eastern Band of Cherokee Tribe  
Sustainable Agriculture Research Manager  
Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe Community College, WI

*"There are opportunities for us to expand some of our programs so that we can build our capacity in communities with youth... [USDA] resources available to tribal colleges are wonderful."*

Jacquelyn Gutierrez  
Coordinator, Center for Lifelong Education  
Institute of American Indian Arts, NM



(center) Jacquelyn Gutierrez, Coordinator, Center for Lifelong Education, Institute of American Indian Arts, NM, (center) receives award for completion of the 2012 USDA Tribal Fellows Program from (left) Dr. José Vicente, President, Miami Dade College, North Campus., (right) Dr. Catherine Woteki, Under Secretary, USDA Research, Education, and Economics.



Riley Singer (center) poses with a plaque for participating in the in 2012 USDA Tribal Scholars Program (scholarship sponsored by NRCS). Standing next to Mr. singer are Lawrence Shorty (right), Director, USDA 1994 Tribal Land-Grant colleges and Universities Program office and Dr. José Vicente (left), President of Miami Dade College North Campus. Singer is an NRCS student trainee Soil Conservationist from Little Big Horn College in Crow Agency, MT."

## History of Dream Catchers

Contributed by Wendy Smith, SEPM in Alabama

Long ago an old Lakota spiritual leader had a vision. In his vision, Iktomi, the great trickster and searcher of wisdom, appeared in the form of a spider. Iktomi spoke to him in a sacred language. As he spoke, Iktomi the spider picked up the elder's willow hoop which had feathers, horsehair, beads and offerings on it, and began to spin a web. He spoke to the elder about the cycles of life, how we begin our lives as infants, move on through childhood and on to adulthood. Finally we go to old age where we must be taken care of as infants, completing the cycle. But, Iktomi said as he continued to spin his web, in each time of life there are many forces, some good and some bad. If you listen to the good forces, they will steer you in the right direction. But, if you listen to the bad forces, they'll steer you in the wrong direction and may hurt you. So these forces can help, or can interfere with the harmony of Nature. While the spider spoke, he continued to weave his web. When Iktomi finished speaking, he gave the elder the web and said, The web is a perfect circle with a hole in the center. Use the web to help your people reach their goals, making good use of their ideas, dreams and visions. If you believe in the great spirit, the web will filter your good ideas and the bad ones will be trapped and will not pass. The elder passed on his vision to the people and now many people have a dream catcher above their bed to sift their dreams and visions. The good will pass through the center hole to the sleeping person. The evil in their dreams is captured in the web, where it perishes in the light of the morning sun.

## United South and Eastern Tribes Annual Conference 2012, Uncasville, CT

By John Whitney

Six NRCS employees attended the Annual Meeting and Expo of the United South and Eastern Tribes, Inc. (USET), held at the Mohegan Sun Convention Center in Uncasville, Connecticut, during October. Charlotte Pyle (AI-AN SEPM, CT) and John Whitney developed a display with some input from Cassius Spears (AI-AN SEPM, Massachusetts/Rhode Island) and a lot of technical help from Connecticut's Visual Information Specialist, Carolyn Miller. Help with staffing the booth came from New London, CT District Conservationist, Javier Cruz and CT State Soil Scientist, Debbie Surabian. Debbie has done considerable of Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) work in partnership with the CT State Archaeologist and she brought the equipment which proved to be of much interest to the group.

The sixth NRCS employee and AIANEA member who attended was David Elliott. David is the NRCS Tribal Liaison to the Poarch Band of Creek Indians (PBCI) in Alabama and has been involved with USET for many years. He prepared background materials about NRCS that were distributed to all tribal representatives and he assisted with a roundtable discussion on USET's Ethnobotany and Climate Change Initiative during the Natural Resources Committee session.



David visited the NRCS display booth and introduced Robert Thrower, chair of the USET Culture and Heritage Committee. David's introduction led to an agenda adjustment to accommodate a GPR presentation by Debbie Surabian to the USET Culture and Heritage Committee. Debbie discussed NRCS use of GPR as part of cultural resources assessments.



David Elliott, Debbie Surabian, Charlotte Pyle, Javier Cruz and John Whitney at the NRCS display.

GPR is a non-invasive way of examining the soil to see if there are inconsistencies in the profile that would suggest disturbances or buried objects. Debbie's slide talk was followed by a lively Q&A session.

The USET meeting was an excellent opportunity to meet people from different tribes. To get a flavor of what happens at the meeting, take a look at the USET Board of Directors and Committee agendas: [http://www.usetinc.org/AboutUSET/2012\\_Annual\\_Meeting.aspx](http://www.usetinc.org/AboutUSET/2012_Annual_Meeting.aspx)

All current USET officers were re-elected to two-year terms by a unanimous vote of the Board of Directors on October 9<sup>th</sup>. With his re-election, Oneida Nation representative, Brian Patterson, will continue as USET President. Congratulations, Brian and all the returning officers. See: [http://www.usetinc.org/NewsAndAnnouncements/12-10-09/USET\\_Board\\_of\\_Directors\\_Re-Elect\\_Officers\\_at\\_2013\\_Annual\\_Meeting.aspx](http://www.usetinc.org/NewsAndAnnouncements/12-10-09/USET_Board_of_Directors_Re-Elect_Officers_at_2013_Annual_Meeting.aspx)

Continued NRCS/AIANEA participation in these conferences is strongly encouraged. Our participation in the Expo resulted in a nice write-up about NRCS in the conference program and it is important for USET members to continue to see NRCS as a partner and player in conservation initiatives and activities. As USET President Brian Patterson says at almost every meeting, "Relationships are paramount. Everything else is derivative." Additional photos are posted at the American Indian Alaska Native Employees Association Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/home.php#!/media/set/?set=a.494479913905202.117485.160121254007738&type=1>

# A Few Thoughts on Cultural Understanding

By Charlotte Pyle, SEPM Connecticut

Last August, one of the BIA Sacred Sites Listening Sessions was held at the Mohegan Tribe reservation in Connecticut. Since I am the state Cultural Resources Coordinator and it was so close by, I took the opportunity to attend and "listen in." As I listened, I started making a list of things that were relevant to general cultural understanding. Before I get started on my list of things, I should say that I have not taken the Harmony course. So for those of you who have, I expect my thoughts on cultural understanding will be pretty rudimentary.

Sacred sites are connected to the need to preserve Tribal customs and culture. (And practicing culture and traditions is important.) Religious places are tied to Native identity. Some places of faith are places people go to and some are places people look to. And it is important to protect these places for the protection of the human spirit.

Several people expressed mistrust of the Federal government with a feeling that Agency people don't understand Tribal cultures. And, it was noted that Tribes are very, very likely to lose when administrative or public agendas are pitted against Tribal agendas. This plays into the reluctance to put things on a map.

Certain Native ways of knowing are not readily-recognized as valid by governmental agencies. Historically, anthropologists archived items of a tribe's material culture so this is the basis of the understanding that non-tribal members have of tribal cultures. And this negates culturally important oral traditions and knowing about things that are felt rather than seen.

It is important not to put people into a box by trying to make them think as you think (or as your paperwork wants them to think). When you do this, people are not free to speak as they feel and know.

One thing that was mentioned at the BIA Sacred Sites Listening Session was *ceremonial stone landscapes* which refers to piles of rock that have spiritual significance. (There is a lot more to this than the words above convey!) Please let your regional editor know if you would like to write an article on **CEREMONIAL STONE LANDSCAPES** for our next issue.

## NRCS and Choctaw Nation Partner to "Kick-off" American Indian Heritage Month

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This year, NRCS partnered in a celebration with the Choctaw nation to "kick-off" American Indian heritage Month on November 9, 2012, at the Choctaw Nation Headquarters in Durant, Oklahoma. The celebration featured an autograph signing of the NRCS 2012 American Indian heritage Poster. Choctaw artist, Kathy Sturch, designed the poster (see article on page 6).

"Having the Choctaw Nation host the autograph signing to kick-off American Indian Heritage month was a honor," stated Dr. Crouch, National AI/AN SEPM. Representing NRCS were Ann Colyer, Valerie Hannon, Ron Hilliard, Oklahoma NRCS State Conservationist, Cambra Fields, Oklahoma AI/AN SEPM and Dr. Crouch. Two signings took place; Choctaw Nation Headquarters and Choctaw Nation Community Center in Durant, Oklahoma.



Left to Right:

Ron Hilliard, NRCS

Kathy Sturch, Choctaw Artist

Cambra Fields, NRCS



**West Regional Tribal Conservation Advisory Council**

Front Row l - r: Michael Sloan, Nome Eskimo Community, Alaska; Norm Lopez, Ute Mountain Tribe / Towaoc Community, Colorado; Keisha Tatem, State Conservationist, Arizona; Sylvia Peasley, Confederate Tribes of Colville Res., Washington; Patty Quisno, Gros Ventre Tribe, Montana; Thora Padilla, Mescalero Apache Tribe, New Mexico; Amy Amoroso, Cow Creek Band of Umpqua, Oregon; Harold Joseph, AZ Assoc. of Tribal Conservation Districts, Arizona; Back Row l - r: Astor Boozer, Regional Conservationist, DC; Robert Jones, State Conservationist, Alaska; Martin Lowenfish, Conservation Initiatives Team Leader, DC; Phillip Bravo, Hualapai Tribe, Arizona; Terry Williams, Tulalip Tribe, Washington; Harold Cuthair, Ute Mountain Tribe, Colorado; Roylene Rides At The Door, State Conservationist, Washington; Barry Hamilton, Assistant State Conservationist, Utah

NOTE: In the October issue one of the West RTCAC member names was inadvertently left off the listing of members.

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*USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.*