

Monday February 3, 2023

Ya'at'eeh shi k'ei doo shi' dine'e'
Shí éí April yinishyé
Honágháahnii nishłį
Fournier báhshíchíín
Ákót'éego diné asdzáán nishłį'
T'ahdii kóq honiidłq
Ahéhee'

Greetings Honorable Members of the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, My name is April Fournier, my pronouns are she/her, I am a citizen of the Navajo Nation and a resident of Portland. I am providing testimony today in support of LD294-An Act to Include a Tribal Member in the Baxter State Park Authority.

I am no expert on the co-management of our state and national parks and due to my own mother being taken from her tribe at the hands of the government in the 1960's I am still trying to reconnect and learn my own history. What I have learned however in my journey of reconnection and through the work I do around the country working with Native leaders from different tribes, is that the story of our struggle for sovereignty and management of our lands is the same story over and over again. We are guests on the land of the Wabanaki peoples, and yet this land is treated as though it is the Wabanaki who are guests.

I believe this imbalance of power, this inequity is changing however. In 2021 we experienced the first signs of this shift as Congresswoman Deb Haaland was appointed by President Biden to the office of the Secretary of the Interior, the first Native person to hold a cabinet position. What we have seen since her taking office is the return of oversight and stewardship of the land to the Native peoples who have cared for these lands since time immemorial. On November 15th, 2021, Secretary Haaland jointly issued Secretary's Order 3403 *Joint Secretarial Order on Fulfilling the Trust Responsibility to Indian Tribes in the Stewardship of Federal Lands and Waters* which recognizes that federal lands were previously owned and managed by Indian tribes and they hold historical, cultural, and natural importance to the tribes. In March 2022, Charles F. Sams III, Director of the National Park Service issued a statement to the House Committee on Natural Resources further defining how the Secretary's Order was to be implemented. Director Sams is also the first Indigenous person to lead the National Park Service. What the Secretary's Order and Director Sams' testimony highlight is that regardless of what has come before, they recognize the importance of including tribal members in decision-making, leadership, and oversight of the National Park lands.

This work to recognize tribal sovereignty, create co-management strategies, and return power to the original stewards of this land is not just something happening on a national scale. In California, the Yurok tribe and the state of California entered into an MOU to create co-management strategies, allow access to tribal members for gathering culturally important plants, and share decision making on conservation efforts. The Washington State Parks Department is in the process of hiring a Tribal Relations Director in an effort to further include the Washington state tribal nations in conservation, management and preservation.

What is beautiful about the work that we do, the public service that we engage in and the positions we hold is that we have the power to change the narrative for future generations. What was written in the past does not prescribe our future, we have the power to do better, to be better and to make more inclusive decisions based on the lessons we have learned.

Committee members, I ask that you support this bill to include an Indigenous voice on the Baxter State Park Authority and that it be the first step in creating a more inclusive partnership with Maine's tribal members, and not the last.

Thank you for your time and your service
Ahé, hee

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