

Oregon Land Justice Project

Vision Statement

A statement of why the work of land justice is needed in the Oregon land conservation community, being in relationship with Northwest Indigenous communities, and commitments to work collectively as a conservation movement to increase Indigenous stewardship of land.

The ultimate goal of the Oregon Land Justice Project is to expand Indigenous access, ownership and stewardship of land. To achieve this goal, the land trusts and conservation community in Oregon are committing time, energy and resources into the Learning Journey, which seeks to transform knowledge, thinking and actions of the Oregon conservation community to focus on expanding Indigenous stewardship of land in order to repair relationships, grant legal access, share and repatriate land to Northwest Indigenous communities.

Why Land Justice in Oregon

The work of land justice is needed in the Oregon conservation community for the following reasons:

- The history of conservation, land trusts and national parks are products of a western construct that historically only served a smaller segment of society. We have a responsibility to redefine conservation and who it serves, and ultimately be an authentic partner to Indigenous communities of the Pacific Northwest conserving land under Indigenous value systems.
 - The true history of Indigenous occupation and their intimate knowledge of and relationship with Oregon's lands for thousands of years prior to colonization needs to be acknowledged and respected by the dominant culture. There is a responsibility to learn and understand the legacy of Indigenous land dispossession and destruction of lifeways, Indigenous people and cultural genocide, intergenerational trauma and Indigenous-identity loss. In addition, understanding the role of power and privilege significantly impacted the current landscape in Oregon and the wellbeing of the tribes and Indigenous people of this region.
 - If conservation aims to be a universal public good, then it must open to other voices, perspectives and definitions of success. Conservation successes must be broadened to include rebuilding Indigenous sovereignty if conservation aims to be an authentic partner to Northwest Indigenous communities. Therefore, the conservation community must work towards creating conditions for real collaboration and relationship with Northwest Indigenous communities, share and cede power in support of Indigenous needs and priorities.
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Opportunities for Land Trusts to Align with Indigenous Priorities

An ongoing list of ways land trusts could be a partner to Northwest Indigenous communities:

- Grant safe, legal access and use of land that land trusts steward where Indigenous people have been denied access to. An important Indigenous need is providing safe public access for hunting, fishing, gathering, harvesting and conducting traditional ceremonies, but have been denied access even though that is in violation of their treaty rights.

This is an evolving document as of March 1, 2021 and will be built upon as we continue the work of land justice.

- Find agreements for allowing cultural practices and access on land trust properties.
- Open the door for Indigenous people to speak for themselves about their needs, and invite them to fully participate in exploring options together.
- Support existing efforts to include Indigenous history in signage and remove anti-Indigenous/anti-Indian language in signage if at the request of an Indigenous group. Acknowledging that mapping was historically a tactic for colonizing a place. Land holders, managers and stewards can serve as important agents of change to restore Indigenous place names, history and stories.
- Reconstitute Indigenous relationships to land trust properties in places that were previously inaccessible, including waterway and oceanic access. Opening access creates opportunities to bring back Indigenous traditional practices, language-revitalization, lifeways and land management on community lands that were previously unavailable to older generations and now could potentially be available to future generations.
- Protect native plants and animals from development, degraded habitat and commercial harvesting. Protect places for the purpose of caring for and harvesting First Foods, medicinal plants and materials of cultural and spiritual significance, and for the preservation of important archeological sites and/or sacred sites to Northwest Indigenous communities.
- Build support for Indigenous water rights and sovereignty. Conserving water for improving water quality and habitat for important species (like salmon) to be abundant for sustenance.
- Using federal funding for conservation easements pose a real challenge to Indigenous sovereignty and potentially their treaty rights.
- Managing land for the purpose of providing prosperity and increasing wellbeing for Indigenous communities within or close by reservations.
- Fund and share resources to increase the capacity of positions and jobs in land conservation, land tending and management for Northwest Indigenous people, as well as professional development of Indigenous educators to teach the next generation. Partnership, financial support and intergenerational education are key to supporting Indigenous communities so that they can lead conservation work.
- Improve and make greener and safer schoolyards, outdoor play areas and gardens to increase safe community gathering places.

Commitments Moving Forward

The purpose of the Learning Journey is to foster shifts in thinking and worldview that allows land trusts to collectively accomplish the goals of the Oregon Land Justice Project. Through engaging in the learning journey process, land trusts endeavor to develop and practice equitable principles for Indigenous engagement, and create new tools to share land and resources.

The goals of the Learning Journey are to:

- Challenge our current thinking with understanding of Indigenous worldviews and an exploration of hidden histories, in order to strengthen conservation.

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- Be personally and professionally rewarding. Create intentional space to unpack whiteness in conservation and environmental protection to understand it and evolve beyond it, then work towards centering Indigenous-voice as the learning journey progresses.
- Come together as a collective to work collaboratively on land justice and be inspired by work done in other Indigenous territories and regions in the United States.
- Create time and space for self reflection on why land justice is important in conservation, and how it will help land trusts stay relevant and grow.
- Experience a different way of working together, where cohort members need to assume they will be vigorously tested on what it takes to create a true partnership with sovereign nations.
- Work collectively as a movement, rather than as individual organizations, in support of Indigenous stewardship of land.

The Oregon land trusts are participating in the Learning Journey to:

- Initiate cultural change at the organizational level by building an organizational self-awareness to end colonizing paradigms, change our definition of success through supporting the success of others. Explore ways to open doors to diversify leadership, instill inclusive practices and share assets.
- Develop new relationships with a group of people to co-create a conservation vision and goals throughout this year-long program. Participate in a facilitated structure that brings in authentic and vulnerable discussion and mutual exploration.
- Pursue shared work that is important and transformational to us and, potentially, to others. Follow a model that's had success and traction in other states, yet come together to develop a collaboration that is unique to Oregon's Indigenous landscape.

**Oregon Land Justice Project
Contact Information:**

Katie Young: katie@oregonlandtrusts.org,
Indigenous Peoples Collaboration Project
Manager, Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts

Gabe Sheoships: gabesheoships@gmail.com,
Lead Facilitator, Tributaries Network

Peter Forbes: peter@peterforbes.org,
Lead Facilitator, First Light

The Oregon Land Justice Project is a partnership between the [Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts](#), [New Learning Journey/First Light](#) and [Tributaries Network](#) with the ultimate goal to expand Indigenous access, ownership and stewardship of land. The Learning Journey is a year-long program targeted to a non-Indigenous land trust audience who own or manage lands and/or work with private landowners and funders in Oregon and the Pacific Northwest region.

This Vision Statement is based on 14 months of formal interviews and conversations with land trusts and Indigenous communities in the Pacific Northwest. The project team solicited direct feedback and insight from land trusts and Indigenous colleagues to produce a narrative that aligns closely with the priorities of Northwest Indigenous communities in COLT-member land trust service areas, and where there are current opportunities land trusts can provide and share resources, and support existing efforts.