

Thank you all for coming, and thank you in advance for listening.

We are gathered here on land widely recognized as Eugene, named to celebrate the colonizer, and Springfield, named by the colonizer, who worked to steal the land with direct sanction and support from the imperial United States. Through the Oregon Donation Land Act and blatant lies from Oregon's first superintendent of Indian Affairs, white settlers illegitimately claimed nearly 9 million acres of land in the 1850s. As the United States broke down the communal structure, through physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual violence, it forcibly removed established tribal nations and peoples who had already been here for hundreds or thousands of years. Despite this oppression, however, at no point did local tribes relent, and this gathering is proof of their spirit and resiliency.

You may know this land by one name, drenched in the continuing legacy of settler-colonial terrorism against tribal nations and other Native communities; but, this is Kalapuya land, and its name is Kalapuya Ilihi, meaning homeland. A homeland, an Ilihi, cannot be possessed, it possesses its people, it holds them. Kalapuya Ilihi continues to hold its people. Many Kalapuya descendants are today citizens of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde and the Confederated Tribes of Siletz. The governments of these nations each contribute to citizens' connections with traditional knowledge and ancestral community by offering Cultural Camps and other cultural education programs, leading efforts to revitalize and maintain language, managing institutes and centers such as the Chachalu Museum and Cultural Center in Grande Ronde and *Ghii Dee-ne Dvn* (A Place for the People), for which the Siletz Tribal Arts and Heritage Society is currently sourcing funds.

Tribal nations and peoples across Oregon are defending and exercising their powers of self-determination in old and new ways. But many of these nations and peoples go unrecognized by the federal government. Indeed, the federal recognition system is designed to violate, erase, and silence Indigenous leadership, agency, and claims to land and resources. Therefore, it is important to name more than just those tribes that are federally recognized. Wherever you are within the arbitrary borders of this state, remember you are on the land of the: Burns Paiute; Chinook Nation; Confederated Tribes of Clatsop-Nehalem; Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua, and Siuslaw Indians; Coquille Indian Tribe; Cow Creek Band of Umpqua; Fort McDermitt Paiute & Shoshone Tribes; Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde; Klamath Tribes; Confederated Tribes of Siletz; Confederated Tribes of Umatilla; Cayuse Tribes; Walla Walla Tribes; Clatskanie; Celilo Wy'am; Nez Perce or (Niimiipu); Northern Paiute; the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs; and other communities with ancestral ties to this land.

While acknowledging this land and its history is important, mere acknowledgement is not enough. Rennard Strickland, the former dean of the University of Oregon who was of Osage and Cherokee heritage, cautioned in his book *Tonto's Revenge* that "if there is to be a post-Columbian future—a future for any of us—it will be an Indian future." That is, the way of the colonizer, who brought lingering systems of greed, overaccumulation, exploitation, and hierarchy, cannot persist nor be reconciled with common goals of environmental and community wellness. Indigenous epistemologies that have been developed over millennia, highlighting the interconnectivity between the human and greater-than-human world, must be treated with the authority they hold. Mainstream environmentalism must be reimagined and reconfigured to not

only include but align with Indigenous knowledge systems that recognize mutually-beneficial relationality with lands, waters, and more-than-human beings.

Recognizing that Indigenous environmental leadership is imperative to the health of our planet and communities, I would like to take this opportunity to advocate for the following actions:

As we are gathered here through the Public Interest Environmental Law Conference, we should reimagine conservation in a way that disrupts the colonial hierarchies in place and decenters whiteness. Instead of believing that the environment is best kept away from human interference, as we have seen through the National Parks System and other non-Indigenous conservation movements, we must listen to the Indigenous epistemologies that teach us that humans must act in reciprocity with the land. We should imagine ourselves as not separate nor better than the more-than-human world, but interconnected. We must center community and amplify the Indigenous perspectives that have been developed over centuries of interacting with the land.

In centering Indigenous environmental leadership at an institutional level, the university must create a decolonized learning environment that provides culturally relevant education and support to Native students. To quote Leilani Sabzalian, an Alutiiq woman and professor here at the University, “Indigenous students deserve Indigenous teachers.” Native students deserve not only access to Native professors who can speak to shared experience and identity, but also to Indigenous and ancestral knowledge systems. One important way the university can act toward this goal is by centering Indigenous pedagogies and knowledge, perhaps by emphasizing the importance of storytelling and learning from youth and elders. Unless it takes action to respond to inadequacies within its epistemologies and with other initiatives that claim to support Native students, the university will fail to fulfill both its commitment to these students and its purpose as an educational center.

Indeed, we all fail as members of a community when we are not responsive to the self-determined and evolving needs, concerns, ideas, dreams, and questions of others.

Thank you all so much for taking the time to celebrate and build community tonight. My name is Chloe Tesch, and I am a Research Fellow with the Environmental and Natural Resources Law Center’s Native Environmental Sovereignty Project here at Oregon Law. It is my privilege to help welcome you here to the Many Nations Longhouse for the 13th Annual Indigenous People’s Reception. The purpose of this event is to center community connections as we celebrate tribal and Indigenous environmental leadership, tradition, and innovation in the legal field and beyond. Again, we are only here together temporarily. But I hope the connections we make this evening will be long-lasting. Thank you.