

CA State Parks and Cher-Ae Heights Indian Community of the Trinidad Rancheria sign memorandum of understanding

April 26, 2023



California State Parks and the Cher-Ae Heights Indian Community of the Trinidad Rancheria (Trinidad Rancheria) signed a historic 5-year memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the tribe and State Parks on Monday, April 24.

The MOU removes barriers for Trinidad Rancheria to gather and access their ancestral lands and recognizes that a collaborative approach will better facilitate managing and preserving cultural and natural resources in the North Coast Redwoods District.

During a formal signing at Sumeg Village at Sue-meg State Park, and in the presence of the Trinidad Rancheria Tribal Council and tribal members, and State Parks staff, Trinidad Rancheria Chairman Garth Sundberg and State Parks Director Armando Quintero executed the MOU.

This MOU formalizes a government-to-government relationship between Trinidad Rancheria and State Parks to discuss, in a systematic manner, park unit management actions of concern or interest within the ancestral homelands of Trinidad Rancheria. The MOU also establishes a protocol for continuing open discussions and outlines the responsibilities of State Parks and the Trinidad Rancheria to promote successful cooperation and partnership between the parties for the mutual benefit of State Parks and the Trinidad Rancheria.

“I would like to thank State Parks for their acknowledgment of equal standing and rights for all tribes within shared ancestral territory” said Garth Sundberg, Trinidad Rancheria Tribal Chairman.

“Through this act, we remove barriers for the Trinidad Rancheria Tribal Members to access and gather in their ancestral lands,” said State Parks Director Armando Quintero. “State Parks also formally acknowledges the benefits of traditional ecological knowledge in the land management of these lands and processes as we better learn how to care for and sustain the land in which we all live and love.”

“It is our natural born right to gather and manage cultural resources within our ancestral lands,” said Trinidad Rancheria Vice Chair Robert Hemsted. The Tribe and State Parks shall develop a mutually beneficial approach for the maintenance of traditional cultural practices by providing the Trinidad Rancheria tribal members access to places within the park units and properties covered in this MOU, including sacred and spiritual places.

“This is a small but significant step toward restoring and acknowledging the inherent relationship of the people to the land from which we come,” said Rachel Sundberg, Trinidad Rancheria Tribal Programs Director and Tribal Historic Preservation Officer. “For years, we have been required by the State of California to be permitted to exist in relationship with the lands of our ancestors. As the original people of this land, with the responsibility to take care of our plant relatives, many of us have rightfully refused to be permitted. We have always gathered the plants and medicines gifted to us by the wo-ge in these lands. We have done it according to the way our grandmothers taught us and their grandmothers before them, sustainably and with consideration for those who would come after us.”

In 2019, Governor Newsom issued **Executive Order N-15-19**, also known as the state’s formal apology to California Native Americans, which acknowledged that: “the relationship between the State of California and California Native Americans was fraught with violence, exploitation, dispossession and the attempted destruction of tribal communities.”

As part of addressing these wrongs, State Parks is taking stock of and critically reexamining its past, looking specifically at contested place names, monuments, and interpretation in California’s State Park System as part of a **Reexamining Our Past Initiative**. This work includes efforts to expand mutually beneficial agreements with California Tribal Nations through the **Tribal MOU Program**.

“By entering into this agreement, State Parks and North Coast Redwoods District specifically acknowledge Trinidad Rancheria as a sovereign nation and supports contemporary traditional cultural practices on their ancestral lands,” said North Coast Redwoods District Superintendent Victor Bjelajac. “We enter a period of cooperative stewardship of these special places with the Trinidad Rancheria and commit to strengthen and

support the good relationships that have been developed and supported by so many Indigenous elders, for so long.”