

Yurok Tribe takes action to end MMIP crisis

May 15, 2022



In December 2021, the Yurok Tribal Council issued an emergency declaration in response to multiple missing persons cases and attempted abductions on the reservation and in the Arcata/Eureka area.

“The Yurok Tribe is currently developing a comprehensive response to MMIP cases as well as taking direct action to prevent future victims,” said Joseph L. James, the Chairman of the Yurok Tribe. “Most commonly MMIP cases involve a large geographic area with many jurisdictional boundaries. We are asking local, state and federal legislators to work with us on establishing a solution to stop the crisis.”

Accompanying the declaration is a resolution that identifies the root causes of the MMIW crisis. The resolution states: “The intergenerational impacts of 170 years of violence, trafficking and murder through missions, massacres, forced relocation, state sanctioned indentured servitude, boarding schools, widespread removal of children from their families through the child welfare system, disproportionate incarceration, police violence, and high rates of gender violence are still playing out to this day, and directly contribute to the crisis.”

The MMIP epidemic negatively impacts numerous Tribes across the United States. In 2020, 5,295 indigenous people were reported missing to the National Crime Information Center. At the end of the same year, 1,496 were still missing.

In California, there were 18 documented cases involving missing and murdered indigenous women and girls, according to a report produced by the Yurok Tribal Court. The actual number is likely much higher because MMIP cases are poorly recorded at the state and federal levels.

A third of all cases in California occurred in Mendocino, Humboldt and Del Norte Counties, despite the sparse populations in these areas. Murders of Native women in the state are seven times less likely to be solved.

The Yurok Tribal Court recently started an MMIP Program to combat the crisis. The Court also formed the Office of the Tribal Prosecutor to aid in the investigation and prosecution of MMIP and domestic violence cases in all jurisdictions. The program is also developing the first MMIP database in the state.