



**PRESS RELEASE**  
**Save California Salmon**

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**California Land Back Special Report Released**

*Report Aims to Help Inform and Prioritize California Land Return and Climate Efforts*

*Humboldt County, California* - A peer-reviewed special report on Land Return to Tribes in Northern California is now available to the public. The report, published by Save California Salmon, is an outcome of the 2023 Northern California LandBack Symposium which was hosted in partnership with CalPoly Humboldt's Native American Studies Department. The symposium featured Northern California Tribal governments and nonprofits, universities, academics, the state of California's Natural Resource Agency, scientists, philanthropists, students, and community members. A draft report was released at the conference and a period for peer review followed.

"Land Back is one of the most important things we can do in our state and beyond. We know that land back leads to amazing outcomes like the protection of biodiversity and the building of climate resiliency." explained Dr. Cutcha Risling Baldy, Associate Professor of Native American Studies, Cal Poly Humboldt. " It is also addressing some of the most egregious historical wrongs and uplifting Indigenous communities. These collaborations and

land back examples highlighted in this report provide insight and inspiration into what we can do to truly address climate change."

Along with other findings, the report documents that in the United States, Tribes have lost nearly 99% of their lands, and the lands they retain are particularly susceptible to the impacts of climate change such as fires and flooding. It documents that in California where federal treaties were not ratified, Tribes own less than 1% of the land or around 635,739 acres. In contrast, the Emmerson Family (Sierra Pacific Industries) alone owes 2.3 million acres. For many Tribes the return of land is a chance for healing for their communities after major trauma and loss along with the chance to reclaim sacred sites and traditional village areas.

"This report provides a blueprint for land back strategies that will benefit tribes across the country." state Vice-Chairman Kenneth Brink of the Karuk Tribe. " As an elected representative and a ceremonial leader nothing is more important than regaining control of our most sacred lands."

The report also demonstrates that this is not an issue that impacts Tribes alone, but all Californians. According to sources such as Amnesty International and the World Bank Native people are protecting over 80% of the world's diversity even though they only own 6.8% of the land. In California Tribes are on the front line of climate change and are using indigenous sciences and traditional knowledge to combat the impacts of climate change such as flooding and fires and loss of diversity. Due to this the state of California is prioritizing land return as a critical action for combating climate change.

"The California Natural Resources Agency is committed to strengthening partnerships with California Native American tribes in advancing ancestral land return not only to begin the healing process from the historical wrongs committed against tribes, but also to ensure the original stewards of the land can strengthen their communities and continue to share and implement Traditional Ecological Knowledges for many future generations," said Secretary of the California Natural Resources Agency Wade Crowfoot. " This report provides a detailed description of past and current successes tribes have led for the return and care of their ancestral lands and lays out the benefits of this important work in the face of a changing climate. I am honored that the Agency and its departments through the goal to conserve 30% of California's lands and coastal waters by 2030, the \$100 million Tribal Nature-Based Solutions grant program, and many other funding and policy opportunities could help provide resources and support for tribes' land back priorities."

The organization Save California Salmon (SCS) sponsored the conference and report. They say the report highlights not only how land return has occurred but also lays out some of the work that still needs to be done to change the laws and policies that impact California's

Tribes, laws and rivers.

“California has a particularly brutal history when it comes to both treatment of native people and the environment. Current land ownership, water rights and current laws still reflect this.” explained Regina Chichizola, Save California Salmon’s Executive Director. What we wanted to do with this report was to document how land return is happening, why it is critical to achieving climate and justice goals, and what law, policies and funding priorities are standing in the way, and how they can be changed.”

In far Northern California, where the impacts of climate change are some of the most extreme in the nation and where California’s largest Tribes’ reside, Tribally led restorative practices and land return is especially important. Tribes are applying strategies such as dam removal, floodplain and estuary restoration, and implementation of both prescribed and cultural fire to not only combat the impacts of climate change and protect communities, but also to restore traditional foods and traditional practices.

Increasingly, large foundations agree that Land Return and Tribally led restoration are health and justice issues and should be receiving more philanthropic support.

“The Humboldt Area Foundation is excited to support this work. Land return is both a social justice and environmental issue that affects everyone in our communities,” stated Humboldt Area Foundation Vice President Pimm Tripp-Allen. “When local Tribes prosper and restore landscapes everyone in the community benefits.”

The final California LandBack Special Report and recordings from the 2023 Northern California Land Back conference are available at: <https://www.californiasalmon.org/>. The physical report can be requested by interested parties by emailing [info@californiasalmon.org](mailto:info@californiasalmon.org).

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