

# SAVING Land

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## SAVING THE *Sacred*

**Partnering on Ballot Measures  
Kingsbury Browne Fellows**

 Land Trust Alliance  
Together, conserving the places you love

Tribal Chair Val Lopez helps Tribal Steward Nathan Vasquez learn the traditional ways of their ancestors.

HARRY WHO PHOTOGRAPHY



## Until the Last Sunrise

*The Amah Mutsun Tribal Band in Northern California has never been federally recognized because of a reporting error that occurred in 1927. Suffering oppression first from the Spanish Missions, then Mexico, then the American government, the tribe works to heal from a history of trauma with help from the land.*

**I**n spite of our history and continuing injustices, our Tribe is determined to find a path that will allow us to fulfill our mandate from the Creator and follow the path of our Ancestors. We believe restoring our lost ceremonies, language, songs and other traditional practices will allow healing for our Tribe and our members to find balance within our life and our world. Our work is also designed to ensure our Tribe's existence until the last sunrise.

These are the goals of our wellness meetings. We say to find balance we must have healthy relationships with all things. This theme is important in everything we do. Our Tribe is actively working to restore a healthy relationship with the Creator. In 2005, elders told our Tribal Council that the Creator never rescinded his mandate that we take care of Mother Earth and all living things. They told us, "We must find a way to fulfill this obligation." Among ourselves

we thought, "We are an unrecognized tribe and most of our members live at or below the poverty line; we own no property—how are we going to do this?"

As a result of this request, we began to develop relationships with Pinnacles National Park, California State Parks, Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District and local land trusts. We signed tending and gathering permits and memoranda of understanding to allow us to consult on the management of their lands. At the same time we also began to restore our traditional land stewardship knowledge. We entered into partnerships with UC Berkeley, UC Santa Cruz and other educational institutions that could help us, leading to a 55-acre Mutsun garden at UC Santa Cruz that is designed to help us restore our indigenous knowledge of plants and to use the plants to help restore landscapes.

We created the Amah Mutsun Land Trust to conserve and protect our sacred and sensitive sites and to relearn our indigenous knowledge so we can return to the path of our ancestors. We created a two-year Mutsun Stewardship Corps to help our youth learn traditional land stewardship knowledge so they can develop a healthy relationship with Mother Earth. We teach them our ethnobotany and traditional ways so they can understand how to tend and gather our food, medicine and basketry plants. They learn to speak our Mutsun language, make tools and hunt. They attend dances and ceremonies, most of them outside our territory as we seek to restore these ceremonies and bring them back. It is our hope that at the end of this two-year program they will want to continue to work for the land trust or obtain degrees in the natural sciences.

Our Tribe has a long way to go if we are ever to achieve balance. But it feels good to know that we have identified our path and are working to fulfill our obligation to the Creator. At a recent wellness meeting, a 6-year-old member accepted the eagle feather during our healing circle and said, in a strong voice, "My name is Angelo and I'm here because I'm Mutsun," and then he proudly passed the feather. I immediately thought to myself, "He knows who he is and why he's here; what more could we ask?" 🍂

EDITED EXCERPT IS FROM "HEALING FROM HISTORICAL TRAUMA" IN NEWS FROM NATIVE CALIFORNIA, WINTER 2014/2015. VALENTIN LOPEZ IS CHAIR OF THE AMAH MUTSUN TRIBAL BAND.