

Native American Views and Values of Giant Sequoia¹

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He-Yuk. This means Hello in my Tribal language.

My name is Floyd Franco, Jr. I am the Tribal Chairman of the Tule River Tribe. Tribal members call me the Chief. I am glad to be here representing my Tribe.

The Tule River Reservation is located approximately 20 miles east of Porterville in Northern California. Our land base is about 56,000 acres. The elevation range is from 900 ft. to 7,000 ft. Yes, we do have (toos-pung-ish) (Hea-mi-withic) big trees, Ancient Ones that you call giant sequoia.

I have been asked to speak on the cultural significance of the giant sequoia in relationship to my Tribe. I would like to start by saying that from ancient times to modern times, trees have been very important to my Tribe.

Trees have provided nuts, fruits and berries to gather for food. Also, the leaves and roots of trees are used for medicines by Tribal members. Traditionally we continue to use the giant sequoia, when it has fallen by natural causes, for community projects such as fence posts, craft wood and recently, to purchase a surface water treatment plant to provide assistance in maintaining a domestic water supply during the summer months.

The giant sequoia also provide excellent recreation sites in which Tribal members can teach our youth tradition and respect for trees. The youth also learn a spiritual way to gain knowledge through fasting, holding sweats and praying for the ancient ones to pass on historical knowledge of past generations. Other activities for youth include looking for large hollows in giant sequoia, usually caused by lightening.

We also have a condors' nest which is visited by youth. There used to be a rope that Tribal members used to climb the giant sequoia to view the nest.

Trees are important in Tribal folklore. In creation stories the bald eagle represents the creator of all living things who lives in a tree growing in the sky.

After the eagle creates other animals, people, water and land, the tree comes down to the land to become the first tree in the world. And although in our creation story the tree is not a giant sequoia, it is through these stories that Tribal members are taught to respect trees at an early age.

In the logging industry, many Indian and non-Indian tree fallers believe that a prayer to a tree before falling it, such as thanking the tree for the contribution it will make to the community, has allowed old tree fallers to safely retire without becoming an accident statistic.

On the Reservation we have used Timber Salvage Sale proceeds to match grant funding to get an economic development plan implemented and a corporation started.

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