



WINNEMEM WINTU TRIBE

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Santa Clara County Supervisors

Mike Wasserman, Cindy Chavez, Dave Cortese, Susan Ellenberg, Joe Simitian
70 W. Hedding Street, 10th floor - San Jose, CA 95110

Santa Clara County Planning Commission

Rob Eastwood, Planning Director
70 W. Hedding Street, 7th Floor - San Jose, CA 95110

Dear Santa Clara County officials,

I am the Traditional Chief and Spiritual Leader of the Winnemem Wintu Tribe. I represent an unbroken line of tribal leadership that has survived the California Indian genocide and the Indian boarding schools. Our tribe is located in the McCloud River watershed within Shasta and Siskiyou Counties in California.

I am writing to urge you to honor the requests of the original people of southern Santa Clara County, the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band, by preventing the development of a mining operation within the sacred cultural landscape of Juristac.

As a tribe that is bound closely to our traditional Winnemem religious practices, we understand the paramount significance of sacred places within our culture and way of life. We bear cultural responsibilities to continue to pray and conduct ceremonies at these places, renewing our relationship with the natural and spiritual world upon which our existence depends.

As California Indian people, our cultural knowledge is not held in books. It is found in these sacred places, and in the stories connected with these places. In the trails our ancestors walked, in the water, in the rocks. When these places are desecrated, or when our people are denied access to them, the harm is far reaching. It affects our ancestors, our people today, and most significantly, our future generations who are denied the knowledge and experiences they need to continue to be Winnemem, or to be Amah Mutsun.

For thousands of years, the ancestors of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band returned to the ceremonial grounds of Juristac, because they recognized Juristac as a place of power. Places like Juristac must be understood as cultural and spiritual landscapes of interconnected sites, spiritual beings, natural features and memories—not as a singular location that can be considered in isolation. To destroy one part of that landscape will bring harm to the integrity of the whole.

As Winnemem Wintu people, we know the pain of witnessing the desecration of our sacred places and the loss of access to our ancestral grounds. The construction of the Shasta Dam flooded our river and most of our sacred sites and villages, destroyed the salmon runs on which our lifeway depended, and left us homeless.

We ask you to listen very carefully to the testimony of the Amah Mutsun, and realize that what is at stake for them is the very survival of their culture, their way of life, and the singular pathways through which the knowledge and vision of their ancestors may be restored.

As California Indian people, we have lost too much, and cannot afford to move one inch when it comes to our remaining intact sacred places. I ask that you do whatever is necessary to ensure that the sacred Amah Mutsun landscape of Juristac is protected.

Under one sky,

Caleen Sisk

Caleen Sisk

Winnemem Wintu Traditional Chief
and Spiritual Leader

“If the Sacred Fires are not lit, how will our children learn?”

— Honor Traditional Lifeways —