



A redwood forest in California has been permanently returned to its Indigenous tribes

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(CNN)More than 500 acres of California redwood forestland has been officially returned to a group of Native American tribes whose ancestors were expelled from it generations ago.

The land, formerly known as Andersonia West, was purchased by San Francisco conservation group Save the Redwoods League and donated to the InterTribal Sinkyone Wilderness Council, the league announced Tuesday.

The Sinkyone Council consists of 10 federally recognized Northern California tribal nations including the Cahto Tribe of Laytonville Rancheria, the Pinoleville Pomo Nation, and the Round Valley Indian Tribes.

People Indigenous to the land, located in Northern California's Mendocino County, were "forcibly removed" by European American colonists, according to the league. But today, the Sinkyone people have been empowered with the ability to reclaim -- and rename -- the land they believe rightfully belongs to them.

"Renaming the property Tc'ih-Léh-Dûñ lets people know that it's a sacred place; it's a place for our Native people," Sinkyone Council board member and tribal citizen Crista Ray said in a statement. "It lets them know that there was a language and that there was a people who lived there long before now."

Tc'ih-Léh-Dûñ, pronounced tsih-ih-LEY-duhn, means "Fish Run Place" in the Sinkyone language, according to the release.

"Today I stand on the shoulders of giants, my ancestors ... to bring them honor, and to not let our old ways be forgotten, for our next generation, my children, my grandchildren and all the kids that I'll never get to see," Buffie Schmidt, tribal citizen and vice chairperson of the Sherwood Valley Rancheria of Pomo Indians, said in a statement.

"Our ancestors are still here, they're still around us. As I listen to the wind, I feel like my ancestors -- who I've never even known in my lifetime -- are here and happy that we call this place something that they're familiar with: Tc'ih-Léh-Dûñ."

Now that Tc'ih-Léh-Dûñ has been reunited with "the original stewards of this land," league president and CEO Sam Hodder said, the InterTribal Sinkyone Wilderness Council will partner with the organization to protect the forestland and all its wildlife.

Before the arrival of European settlers, the land was sacred to the spiritual lives of Native tribes who performed ceremonies when harvesting redwoods to build their homes and canoes, the nonprofit conservation organization explained on its website.

Eventually, the Indigenous people were expelled, and lumber companies discovered how cheap and easy it would be to log and profit from the trees.

"By the end of the 1950s, only about 10 percent of the original two-million-acre redwood range remained untouched," Save the Redwoods League said.

Tc'ih-Léh-Dûñ was purchased by Save the Redwoods League in July 2020 for \$3.55 million. The 523-acre property is known for its majestic, ancient redwoods, a portion of Anderson Creek, and a

diverse ecosystem -- including coho salmon, steelhead trout, marbled murrelets and northern spotted owls, all of which are endangered, according to the league.

Today, redwoods face numerous threats, including human-induced climate change, land development, and burl poaching, according to Save the Redwoods League.

"We believe the best way to permanently protect and heal this land is through tribal stewardship," Hodder said. "In this process, we have an opportunity to restore balance in the ecosystem and in the communities connected to it, while also accelerating the pace and scale of conserving California's iconic redwood forests."

This is the second time Save the Redwoods League has donated land to the council, with the first being the 164-acre Four Corners property located north of Tc'ih-Léh-Dûñ.

"The Council and League plan to apply a blend of Indigenous place-based land guardianship principles, conservation science, climate adaptation and fire resiliency concepts and approaches to help ensure lasting protection and long-term healing for Tc'ih-Léh-Dûñ and its diverse flora and fauna," the release said.

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