

AMLT Newsletter – Spring 2018



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AN INTRODUCTION FROM CHAIRMAN VALENTIN LOPEZ



Chairman Lopez speaking at the United Nations in April. Courtesy Amah Mutsun Tribal Band.

Dear Friends,

A lot has happened since our fall newsletter was published. On December 13th, 2017, our AMLT signed a Cultural Easement agreement with Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District for the 36-acre top of Mount Umunhum. This easement grants to our Tribe permanent rights to help steward the mountain top for natural resource conservation, cultural relearning and public education.

It is the goal of our AMLT to develop a native garden on Mount Umunhum and to share with the public the traditional land stewardship practices that our ancestors applied to our territory for thousands of years. We also plan to hold ceremonies on Mount Umunhum. Some of these ceremonies will be open to the public and others will be closed. We will announce the dates of the open ceremonies on our website and we hope you will attend.

This summer we have at least twelve weeks of stewardship work planned with our Naive Stewardship Corps. We are also planning to increase the number of tribal stewards from eight to fifteen. Some of these hires will be student interns. These interns will be Amah Mutsun Tribal members who are either junior or seniors in high school or college/university students. The interns will work varying amounts of time depending on their summer breaks. We're excited about our internship program. These interns will experience working on the land, participating in ceremonies, spending time with other tribal members, and learning our tribal history, culture, and environments. It is our hope that these interns will return after they graduate and become active members and leaders within our Tribe. Most of the stewards' work this summer will be at the Quiroste Valley Cultural Preserve, where they'll begin fuel reduction work and help restore coastal prairies to their pre-contact condition.

On April 19th, I attended the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues as a delegate of the American Indian Movement – West. I spoke regarding our Tribe's efforts to protect our most sacred site, Juristac, from a proposed sand and gravel mining project; [you can watch the video here](#). I spoke of how our Tribe experienced three brutal periods of colonization, including the Mission/Spanish period, the Mexican period and the California/American periods. These periods included genocide, slavery, brutality, forced

religious conversion, rape and much more. I said that our Tribe does not ask for, nor do we expect, an apology. Rather, what we ask is for all people to help dismantle the systems of oppression that the colonizers built and that governments and institutions maintain and benefit from today.

In my speech I specifically asked Santa Clara County to deny the mining permit for Juristac. You can learn more of our Protect Juristac campaign by [visiting our website](#), [signing and sharing our petition](#), and attending the public events that will start soon. The vast majority of our sacred and cultural sites have been destroyed. Our Tribe knows that we must fight to protect our sites or there will be no sites left. We will not allow our ancestors to be ignored, forgotten or erased from history.

Finally, we are happy and [honored to announce that both Steve Abbors and Tribal Member Abran Lopez](#) are the two newest additions to our AMLT Board of Directors. Steve recently retired as the General Manager of Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District and Abran Lopez has been a member of our AMLT Stewardship Corps for five years. We have no doubt that their addition to our Board will make our AMLT stronger and help us achieve our goals of returning to the path of our ancestors and fulfilling our obligation to take care of Mother Earth and all living things.

suruuruy yuu tumsan ak kannis, Prayers and blessing,

Ho!

FROM THE DESK OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

By EkOngKar Singh Khalsa



Photo credit Sempervirens Fund

It has been a busy time at the Amah Mutsun Land Trust (AMLT).

With our dedicated partners we are working hard to grow our capacity and to build organizational support for a variety of projects and initiatives - and we are succeeding!

Whether expanding the Native Stewardship Corps program, coordinating legal and public relations work for the Juristac campaign, or supporting our growing research and educational programs, we know it is essential to secure the funding and staff needed to fulfill tribal members' vision for our young organization.

And yes - we are growing. In addition to AMLT's professional research consultants and more than two dozen Amah Mutsun stewards, elders, and cultural practitioners, this year the land trust will hire its second full time employee. I am happy to report that long time AMLT associate Sara French will join AMLT this month as Director of Programs and Development. Sara's full time contributions to the AMLT team will make a very important difference.

In addition to expanding full-time and seasonal staff positions, I am delighted to share that for the second year in a row, AMLT has been able to increase its budget by more than 150%.

Thank you to all our generous individual contributors and for the steady support of our dedicated private foundations and public agencies. With your help we are making a difference.

To learn more about the AMLT programs and initiatives these donations support, please [take a look around our new website](#). You can also find more ways you can become involved.

If you have any questions or need more information about all the news, please feel free to [contact me](#). I will be happy to hear from you.

Wishing you the best in the seasons ahead and looking forward to seeing you outside!

AMLT WELCOMES NEW BOARD MEMBERS STEVE ABBORS AND ABRAN LOPEZ

By EkOngKar Singh Khalsa, AMLT Executive Director

(AMLT) is pleased to welcome two new members to its board of directors – Steve Abbors, the former General Manager of the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (Midpen), and Abran Lopez, Amah Mutsun Tribal Band member and AMLT Native Stewardship Corps member.



Photo credit Steve Abbors

Steve Abbors brings over three decades of experience protecting and managing conservation lands to AMLT. Steve started his career as a naturalist with East Bay Regional Parks, went on to manage 28,000 acres in the East Bay Municipal Utilities District, and finished his career as General Manager for Midpen, overseeing 26 open space preserves totaling more than 63,000 acres. Steve helped Midpen achieve financial sustainability during the 2008 recession with the passage of Measure AA, and oversaw the redevelopment and opening of the summit of Mt. Umunhum to the public. One of his final tasks at the district was signing a precedent-setting cultural conservation easement with the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band, granting the Tribe land rights on the summit of the sacred mountain into perpetuity. Steve is a powerful addition to the AMLT team. As AMLT's opportunities to steward, manage, and eventually own conservation lands expand, Steve's decades-long experience managing large areas of conserved land will be of great value.



Abran Lopez removes invasive poison hemlock from Quiroste Valley. Photo courtesy Richard Morgenstein.

Abran Lopez is an active member of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band and a founding member of the AMLT Native Stewardship Corp program. Abran has specialized skills in wildland firefighting and a strong interest in returning cultural burning to his Tribe's territory. Abran is deeply committed to his Tribe and he works to foster a sense of community in AMLT field activities. Abran also brings an important perspective to the AMLT board on how to expand Native youth engagement within the organization.

The addition of these two highly qualified individuals to the Board of Directors will help guide and support the growth and success of our organization.

MANY HANDS HELP OUR ETHNOBOTANICAL GARDENS THRIVE

By Sara French and Jay Scherf



Volunteer planting day at the new entrance to Castle Rock State Park. Photo courtesy Rebecca Schoenenberger, California Nativescapes.

You made our gardens bloom - thank you volunteers!

From planting in the snow to watching newly-hatched chicks in our garden at San Juan Bautista, this spring has been AMLT's busiest season ever for our educational gardens. In just the past two months, AMLT has completely overhauled the gardens at Pie Ranch and San Juan Bautista State Historic Park, while simultaneously building from scratch our largest garden to-date at the new entrance to Castle Rock State Park. How were we able to get so much accomplished on such a tight schedule? It was only possible with the dedicated efforts of our supporters, our volunteers!

We first broke ground at San Juan Bautista State Historic Park (SJB) in summer of 2015, but last fall the garden was still far from complete. Large ornamentals still took up a lot of space, and other areas lacked native plant cover. Our revamp began in earnest when volunteer docents at SJB transplanted a huge historic rose and removed the last of the ornamentals with our Native Stewards. Then in March, accompanied by two of SJB's feral hens and their broods of baby chicks, AMLT staff, Native Stewards, and volunteers planted out the rest of the garden. We planted 28 species in the garden, and added 20 metal plant labels including Mutsun names! Installing a large illustrated interpretive panel will crown the garden revamp this summer.



Volunteer workday at Pie Ranch. Photo courtesy Nancy Vail.

Our Amah Mutsun garden at Pie Ranch received a similar revamp on April 21 when over 30 volunteers came together to plant almost 500 additional native plants in the four 'slices' of the garden. The Pie Ranch garden contains four themed sections that hold grassland foods, plants for basketry and fibers, nuts and berries, and plants used for personal care. The slices surround a traditional tule hut built by Native Stewards. On May 19, volunteers came together again to install interpretive signs that were designed by AMLT and include original artwork by Amah Mutsun Tribal Band members. Interpretive signs in both the Pie Ranch and San Juan Bautista gardens formalize the gardens and make them more effective as educational resources for the thousands of visitors who come through Pie Ranch and San Juan Bautista annually. We are very excited about these developments, and grateful to our dedicated volunteers who attend our [monthly work days](#) to help these gardens grow.



Volunteer planting day at the new entrance to Castle Rock State Park. Photo courtesy Rebecca Schoenenberger, California Nativescapes.

Volunteers who joined us the weekend of March 24-25 endured freezing temperatures and rain to help us install our [ethnobotanical demonstration garden at the new Robert C. Kirkwood entrance to Castle Rock State Park](#). This garden, designed in partnership with

Sempervirens Fund, members of the Muwekma Ohlone tribe, and help from the landscaping company California Nativescapes, is over 3,500 square feet and contains 60+ species of culturally significant native plants local to the area. As this garden is just outside of Amah Mutsun territory, we relied on members of the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe to bless our work at the site and communicate with the ancestors of the land. Vincent Medina, Muwekma Ohlone tribal citizen, offered a prayer in the Chochenyo language on the first day of our work in the Castle Rock garden, and his prayer reminded us that like the Native people, the native plants are beautiful, they are powerful, they are strong, and they should be honored. Volunteering in our ethnobotanical gardens is a way to honor native plants and Native people, and we welcome all people to join us in this important and beautiful work.

Volunteer days happen in our Mutsun garden at the San Juan Bautista State Historic Park every 2nd Saturday of the month from 10:00-2:00, and in our Mutsun garden at Pie Ranch every 3rd Saturday of the month from 1:00-5:00.

AMAH MUTSUN ETHNOBOTANY

By Sara French, AMLT Research Associate



Photo courtesy [Laura Camp](#), CC BY-SA 2.0

Mutsun Name: siska

English Name: Indian milkweed

Botanical Name: *Asclepias eriocarpa*

Indian milkweed is a perennial plant that grows up to three feet tall, with thick, fuzzy leaves, and large clusters of characteristic milkweed flowers with reflexed flower petals. It grows in the chaparral and oak woodlands, preferring sunny, dry sites. Like other milkweeds, Indian milkweed is a critical host plant for monarch butterflies, providing food to the caterpillars. It also benefits many bee species. Planting native milkweeds is a wonderful way to support these beautiful and important native bees and butterflies.

The Amah Mutsun appreciate siska not only for its benefit to the animal kin, but for its powers as a medicinal plant. Various preparations of the plant were used by the ancestors of the Amah Mutsun as a remedy for colds or asthma, and as a treatment for corns. Other California Indian tribes used milkweed for fiber. Stem fiber was made into twine and cordage which was then used to make sacks, nets, slings, and clothing.

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WISDOM FROM ASCENCIÓN

Edited by Jay Scherf, AMLT Program Coordinator



Valley phacelia (Phacelia ciliata) and other California wildflowers in bloom. Photo courtesy Nik Kronick.

Ascención Solórsano was a Mutsun healer and leader who had extensive knowledge of Mutsun culture, language, plant uses, and customs. In the 1920s and '30s she shared her knowledge with John P. Harrington, an ethnographer from the Smithsonian Institute. Harrington recorded over 78,000 pages of her wisdom, which are stored at the Smithsonian. In each newsletter, we share a selection from these notes. Here are some of Ascención's words:

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Tiwsí pire, the land is in bloom. And how many wildflowers there used to be! And how you'd see the plains streaked with colors! And herds of horses pastured on the plains, and so fat! Oh what rich grasses there used to be! And there were no fences, it was just an open country.

There used to be so many flowers at Sargent [Juristac] that it looked like a carpet of flowers. There was a lot of wild onions and wild cilantro and irises. I too got to see that, and it smelled so nice. And my mother used to tell me that it used to be so much prettier before.

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