



High Desert Voices

A newsletter published by and for volunteers

HIGH DESERT MUSEUM

Lunch & Learn: *Indigenous Identity and Our Relationship to Mother Earth*

by Siobhan Sullivan, Newsletter Editor



The High Desert Museum recently hosted a much-anticipated Lunch and Learn event. Aldine Thornton, team leader of By Hand Through Memory (BHTM) volunteers, was the presenter. Aldine is a tribal member of the Oglala/Lakota Nation (Sioux) from Pine Ridge, South Dakota.

Members of the BHTM team read sections of the [Haudenosuanee Thanksgiving Address](#). It's often recited at Native schools, gatherings, tribal councils, and other events. One section reads as follows:

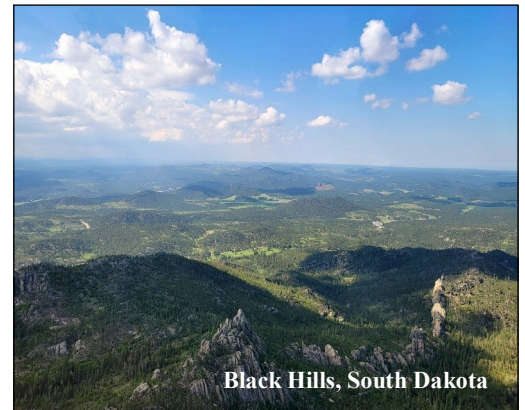
Today we have gathered, and we see that the cycles of life continue. We have been given the duty to live in balance and harmony with each other and all living things. So now, we bring minds together as one as we give greetings and thanks to each other as people.

The audience repeated, "Now our minds are one" after each section.

Aldine gave a brief history of her family. She hoped to give others a better understanding of what it's like to walk in both the Indigenous and non-

Indigenous world.

In 1819, authorities established Indian boarding schools across the United States. At these schools, children had their cultural identities ripped away from them. Aldine's father was taken from the Pine Ridge Reservation when he was four. He didn't return until he was an adult. Like many Native Americans, he later proudly served in the military. Unfortunately, others didn't always recognize Native American contributions.



Black Hills, South Dakota

Aldine's white mother grew up on the Pine Ridge Reservation. Her father purchased three land allotments and leased many more when the government allowed white ranchers and farmers access to reservations lands. Aldine's father ran thousands of cattle and several hundred horses on his land. Native peoples lost nearly one third of their land on their treaty signed land base. Tribes are trying to purchase this land back today.

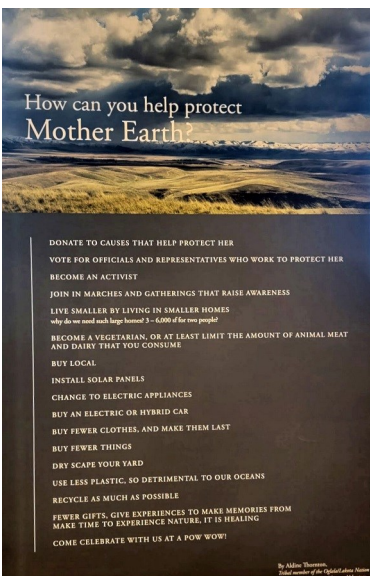
Aldine was born in Astoria, Oregon, and her family lived in Oregon, Colorado, and South Dakota. Aldine raised her own family in Massachusetts. They often visited their 1,500-acre parcel of inherited land in South Dakota. It is ten miles from the Wounded Knee Massacre Site. Aldine made sure her kids experienced things like powwows and other traditions.

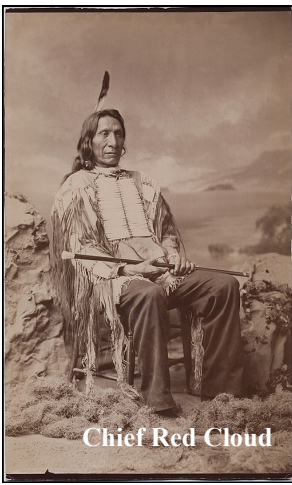
She noted Mother Earth provided everything Native people needed to live and flourish. Modern tools, such as carbon dating and Light Detection and Radar (LIDAR), prove this connection has existed for thousands of years. Aldine showed a map of historical migration routes in North and South America. An-

other map showed broad geographic regions where the tribes lived. Each has their own traditions and languages.

Several recent discoveries related to Indigenous people were noted:

- [Ancient footprints](#), found at White Sands, New Mexico, date between ~23,000 to 21,000 years ago.
- [Kennewick Man](#), found in Kennewick, Washington, dates from 9,000 years ago. His [DNA showed direct links](#) with the Confederated Tribes of Colville.
- [Camel teeth and human tools](#), found near Burns, Oregon, date from over 18,000 years ago.





Chief Red Cloud

Source: John Karl Hillers, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

Aldine told part of a “Plateau” creation story. After the plants and animals were created, the Creator asked them to help a new being called a “human being.” He said, “These human beings are rather dumb and pathetic, and do not know how to take care of themselves. Who of you can help them?” Salmon, the first to step forward, said, “If they can catch me, they can use my flesh to feed themselves and for ceremonies.” Then the deer stepped forward and said, “If they can catch me, they can use my flesh to nourish themselves, my hide for shelter and clothing, and my antlers and bones for tools.” This story shows how the Plateau tribes have a strong connection to all animals and the Creator. It confirms why they are activists for Mother Earth and fight in courts for her today.

Everything changed after European explorers came to North America with “Gold, God, and Glory” as the motives for colonizing the New World. Through the “Doctrine of Discovery” written by Pope Alexander VI in 1493, they believed they had the right to claim lands. The early explorers were told to convert Native peoples to Christianity. Unfortunately, the diseases they brought wiped out 90% of the 50–60 million Indigenous people. Aldine noted that the slaughter and death of so many millions of people was a genocide.

In 1830, the Indian Removal Act forced more than a hundred tribes from their homelands in the eastern third of the U.S. to free up land for the colonists. They traveled to the area currently known as Oklahoma. The 1,000-mile route became known as the “Trail of Tears.”

Native American Tribes signed 400 treaties, but only 375 were ratified. The resistance against being forced onto reservations and abandoning their way of life was fierce. However, they could not win against a foe so numerous and well armed. Aldine’s great-great-grandfather, Chief Red Cloud, was the only chief to win a war against the U.S. Army. The war in Wyoming and Montana territories took place from 1866 to 1868 and is called “Red Cloud’s War.”

Meanwhile, bison, an animal Plains Tribes depended upon, was being exterminated by European settlers. By the late 1880s, only 100 bison remained in the wild. Often left to rot in huge piles, the bones proved to be the most valuable part. Ken Burns’ documentary, [The American Buffalo](#), describes this animal’s decline and comeback.

After the Homestead Act of 1862 passed, settlers forced Indigenous residents from their land. Many died, but survivors maintained their resiliency.

There are about 9.6 million Native Americans currently living in the U.S. Half of the population live off reservation. Reservations often offer language immersion programs. Solar energy, affordable housing, and locally produced food are providing sustainable futures on reservations.



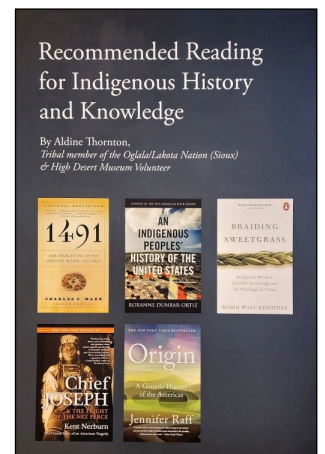
Aldine mentioned casinos and explained how their profits fund Native museums and cultural centers. Gambling has long been a part of Native culture. In the past, they made bets on foot races, horse races, and archery competitions.

Aldine pointed out several recent Native American accomplishments. U.S. Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland is a member of the Pueblo of Laguna Tribe. Lily Gladstone, actor in *Killers of the Flower Moon*, has Piegan Blackfeet, Nez Perce, and European heritage. Popular television shows starring Natives, like *Reservation Dogs* and *Dark Winds*, present more realistic portrayals. Aldine remarked on how important it is for Native children to witness and emulate Native individuals in positions of power and acclaim.

Aldine spoke of various ways to learn more about Indigenous cultures. She recommended several books and PBS television series. On Saturdays, a local channel broadcasts Indian programming. Powwows, celebrations open to all, include colorful regalia and dances. Past exhibitions, like the Museum’s *Creations of Spirit*, highlighted contemporary and historic pieces. The [Museum at Warm Springs](#) offers more opportunities to learn of local Indigenous people.

Several people asked questions at the end of the presentation. Someone asked which term is appropriate: *Native American*, *Indian*, *Indigenous*, or *Tribal Affiliation*? Aldine said the best thing to do is ask the person how they wish to be addressed. Some individuals prefer to use Indian because of its historical usage in treaties, place, and organization names. Others prefer not to be called Indian.

Indigenous people are survivors who have kept their relationship with Mother Earth. Aldine, on rare occasions, hears Museum visitors say, “Oh, I thought you were all dead.” Yes, it’s hard to believe, but it’s true. That is why it is so important to be diligent in educating visitors about the contributions of Indigenous cultures, past and present.



Behind the Scenes at the Donald M. Kerr Birds of Prey Center

by Torree Abrams, Newsletter Writer



Have you ever wondered what goes on behind the fence at the Donald M. Kerr Birds of Prey Center? Recently Kristen Campbell sent out emails asking for volunteers to work behind the scenes with the birds of prey. Currently, there are 29 birds of prey under the care of the people in the wildlife department. Eight birds are on exhibit (counting the western burrowing owls in the Desertarium). Others are ambassadors for the birds of prey talks. During spring break and in the summer months, the High Desert Museum uses other birds for *Sky Hunters* and *Raptors of the Desert Sky* programs. If you have never seen these demonstrations, it is worth seeing the results of innumerable hours of training. Being in the presence of these magnificent birds is an awe-inspiring experience.

That is why working behind the scenes is such an important volunteer position. By cleaning enclosures and doing other necessary tasks in the mews (where the birds are kept), the staff is free to train the raptors and create thrilling experiences for Museum visitors. Recently, the Museum acquired a new aplomado falcon and a young peregrine falcon that require hours of practice flying with cues. Helping contribute to this work is rewarding. Established and trusted volunteers sometimes get to help an owl or hawk get used to being on a falconry glove. Being proficient using a falconry knot is a necessary skill before being allowed to do this. When birds need flight time, volunteers may learn to cue them with quail tidbits to fly from perch to perch during indoor talks or outdoor flight programs. Being trusted by the staff and the animals is an honor not to be taken lightly.

Most of the time, working behind the scenes with birds of prey is not a glamorous job. Typically, enclosures are cleaned by spraying down perches, scooping droppings from gravel, picking up feathers, raking the gravel, and providing clean dishes and fresh water. Sometimes walls need to be scrubbed down. It is physical work, but the staff is very accommodating and appreciates whatever volunteers can accomplish in the three-hour shifts. Wearing layers of work clothing and comfortable closed-toed shoes are a must, especially in winter, when the mews can be colder than the temperature outside. Lined work gloves are also available for use.



There are two mews. One is behind the exhibition hall, referred to as the New Mews. The Aines Mews, named after some generous donors, is up behind the maintenance facilities. As you walk up to the Aines Mews, you will pass the weathering yard where many of the raptors spend their days outside of their enclosures. You also pass the mammal yard, which houses the skunk, the bobcat or gray fox, a porcupine, and now the baby beaver. You don't get to see these animals much unless they are brought into the kitchen area of the New Mews. There may be times when volunteers are asked to help with food preparation for these hungry mammals. When the weather is good, opportunities to take the skunk for a walk in the woods arise. Jon Nelson, curator of wildlife, says the skunk is responsible for the high retention rate of behind-the-scenes volunteers.

While enclosure cleaning is the majority of what volunteers do, no two days are alike. Every day, you will learn something new about the specific needs of each type of bird of prey. You will get to know the personalities of many of the birds and gain even more respect for the wildlife staff. They hold a wealth of information and welcome questions.



One benefit of volunteering behind the scenes is something that must be felt. Sometimes when cleaning, you might feel a bird in another enclosure watching you. Or perhaps a raptor that was nervous when you were present calms down and accepts you as part of its world. It is then that you realize what a privilege it is to be in the presence of these intelligent creatures and contribute to their care.

Please consider becoming part of the wildlife care team by volunteering behind the scenes with the birds of prey. You will be enriched in ways you never expected and provide meaningful help. Contact Kristen Campbell if you are interested. Other opportunities also may be available for working behind the scenes in the Desertarium, if turtles, lizards, and snakes interest you.

Photos by Jon Nelson

Natural History Pub: *Steelhead Return to the Crooked River*

by Tom McGibbon, Newsletter Writer



Source: Oregon State University, CC BY-SA 2.0

The High Desert Museum (HDM) Natural History Pub series welcomed Chris Gannon as the featured February speaker. With a background in Soil and Range Sciences working in the U.S. Forest Service, Chris is the current director of the Crooked River Watershed Council (CRWC). Jack Gaines, HDM associate curator of visitor and volunteer engagement, introduced Chris.

An overflow crowd attended the talk at McMenamens Old St. Francis School in Bend. Chris's lecture continued the HDM themes highlighting the passage of the 1973 Endangered Species Act and focused on the ongoing effort to return anadromous fish species of steelhead and salmonids to the Crooked River, a major tributary of the mid-Deschutes River watershed. These native fish were extirpated

from the Crooked River in the 1960s when Portland General Electric's (PGE) Pelton-Round Butte (PRB) tri-dam hydroelectric complex blocked their historical migratory routes along the Deschutes.

CRWC's Connecting Waters (CW) program, initiated in 2007, identified 12 barriers to migratory fish passage on the lower Crooked River. Their primary goal is to deconstruct, remove or modify each barrier to allow volitional upstream and downstream migration for steelhead, chinook, and sockeye to traditional spawning and natal habitat. Chris's presentation focused on one of the most ambitious of those projects, the construction of a fish-ladder at the Opal Springs Dam.



Opal Springs Dam prior to fish ladder construction

Opal Springs Dam, first constructed in 1921, had its height and reservoir size increased in 1982 to add six megawatts of generating capacity. The revenue from the power generation sales is used to offset Deschutes Valley Water District's costs to pump drinking water out of the 800-foot canyon from Opal Springs to its customers. Prior to the fish-ladder project, the dam represented the last major barrier on 72 miles of the main stem of the Crooked River between the Billy Chinook Reservoir and Bowman Dam.





Source: Crooked River Watershed Council

Chris explained that the project, ranked as the second highest priority by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, began when PGE applied to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission for a 50-year renewal of its operating license for the PRB complex. Downstream anadromous fish migration and water quality on the lower Deschutes were included as a condition of that re-licensing.

Focus then shifted to Opal Springs volitional fish passage as the next major upstream barrier on the Crooked River. Protracted negotiations between agricultural interest, environmental groups, fish proponents, landowners, regulatory agencies, and utilities hammered out the project guidelines and goals into a formal Settlement Agreement in 2011. A consortium of financial interests was then assembled, allowing the project planning, design, specification, contracting and construction to proceed. The project was completed in November 2019.

On November 19, 2019, the first adult steelhead passed through the newly commissioned Opal Springs fish ladder. While this was an exciting milestone event, the long-term success of the reintroduction of native fish remains uncertain. Only a small number of steelhead and salmon have been observed passing up or down the Opal Springs ladder since it opened, significantly below the metrics that define success. Successful reintroduction relies on many complex variables that all have to align in a certain way.

It's been a historically long and steady path to extirpation of summer steelhead, chinook salmon, and sockeye salmon from the Crooked River. It's also been an arduous and committed battle by fish proponents, environmental activists, and waterway stewards like the CRWC to reintroduce and restore these native anadromous fish to their historical stream habitats.

Several questions from the audience concerned what additional steps were needed for anadromous fish restoration in the Crooked River. Chris outlined a number of those initiatives. First, screening needs to be added on irrigation ditches and man-made channels to keep fish from becoming entrapped in those side waters. Next, several habitat improvements need to be undertaken, including riparian zone repairs, and returning channels to their natural shape and flow. He noted that these projects, along with ongoing juniper reductions and the reintroduction of beavers, would reduce water temperatures, turbidity and dissolved gases, all improvements to water habitat quality.



Source: Crooked River Watershed Council



Source: Crooked River Watershed Council

Chris acknowledged the vast sums of money, time, and work by so many dedicated people to this cause, have yet to yield the long-term goal of reintroducing healthy and sustainable anadromous fish runs, but he added that projects like the Opal Springs fish ladder, habitat restoration, and dam removals are important steps toward that noble goal. As Chris said regarding Stearns Dam and the CRWC program to eliminate fish barriers, "... as it turns out, there is no bad day, actually, to remove a dam. All days are good days to remove a dam. If that's what's called for and that's what you can do, let's get on with it."

Photos by Siobhan Sullivan and other sources as noted

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2024



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	April 2024
1	Natural History Pub: <i>Finding Patterns in Nature</i> . 7:00–8:00 pm. Doors open at 5:30 pm. Free. RSVP here .
7	Exhibition Closing: <i>Andy Warhol's Endangered Species: From the Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and his Family Foundation</i> .
14, 21, 28	Museum Event: <i>Tracks & Trail Cameras</i> . 8:00 am–5:00 pm. For adult caregivers with children ages 8–11. Register here . FULL .
20	Exhibition Opening: <i>Near, Far, Gone: From the Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and his Family Foundation</i> .
25	Museum Event: <i>Inquiry into Heritage: A Conversation with Gwendolyn Trice</i> . 6:30–7:30 pm. Doors open at 6:00 pm. \$12 members, \$15 nonmembers. RSVP here .
28	Exhibition Closing: <i>Timber Culture</i> .
	To RSVP or register, click the link next to the event description or call 541-382-4754.