



# SIERRA CLUB

## TEHIPITE CHAPTER

Thanks to the advocacy and organizing work of our Sierra Club Tehipite Chapter in Fresno, in September 2021, the Sierra Club national Council of Club Leaders passed a resolution in support of two California Native tribes, struggling for more than 40 years to be designated as “federally-recognized” tribes by the U.S. Department of the Interior. Federal recognition is crucial for tribes in order to gain the respect of our government as sovereign nations and to be eligible for healthcare and grant funding. The Sierra Club national Board of Directors followed up with a unanimous vote in support of the SSMN effort to achieve federal recognition. We are now ramping up our campaign as the tribe is getting close to succeeding in this effort, and is asking for your support.

The Council of Club Leaders resolution requested the Sierra Club national Board of Directors to support the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation (SSMN) petition to the U.S. Department of the Interior to: (1) recognize the SSMN as an Indian Tribe; (2) withdraw the Department’s 2018 proposed finding against federal acknowledgment; and (3) support the SSMN campaign through all appropriate actions. The Sierra Club was asked to help with survey research funding, online organizing, and generating support online and in the national media.

### Background

Prior to the mid-19th Century, seven Native tribes traversed Yosemite Valley and occupied it on a seasonal basis. In 1851, after a campaign of terror against the region’s Indigenous peoples, treaties were signed between the U.S. Army and more than a dozen Central California tribes. The tribes surrendered their sovereignty as nations and their lands in exchange for promises of reservation lands and food — promises that were never fulfilled for the Southern Sierra Miwuk tribe. The treaties were never ratified by the U.S. Senate after California’s Senators declined to support them. As a result, some tribes remain today without any government recognition or support. In 1979, the modern

process for federal acknowledgement of Native tribes was established by the U.S. Department of the Interior, which is responsible for the review of petitions from tribes desiring federal recognition. The Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation began its present petition campaign in 1982.

The Sierra Club Tehipite Chapter covers a four-county region of Central California region, including portions of the San Joaquin Valley and Sierra Nevada and Yosemite National Park, with more than 1,400 dues-paying members. In July 2019, the Chapter leadership took an interest in the SSMN’s campaign and established relations with its tribal chair. In October 2019, The Chapter’s Executive Committee voted unanimous support for the SSMN’s petition for federal acknowledgement, and was authorized by the national Club to submit a letter to the Department of the Interior in support of the SSMN’s petition on behalf of the national Club and its 800,000 members.

### Why This Resolution is Important

The legacy of the Sierra Club includes the famous camping trip where John Muir hosted President Theodore Roosevelt in Yosemite Valley, resulting in the Valley’s addition in 1905 to the National Park. Over the next five years, however, federal troops destroyed four Native villages in the Valley, including one that was burned to the ground. Although Muir himself demonstrated a respect for Indigenous peoples, the Sierra Club, which Muir founded in 1892, did not speak out against these injustices.

Our Club has an opportunity now to take a leadership role in addressing the continued harm done to California Natives for nearly two centuries. It is both the morally right thing to do, and politically strategic for the Club to do this, as we recognize the errors of our past historical figures, and learn from their limitations. Specifically, Indigenous leaders are now rejecting the 200-year effort to airbrush Indigenous residents out of the modern concept of Wilderness, which was itself based

on the experiences of 19th Century painters and writers as a reaction to modern industrial cities. In fact, the “virgin” forests that explorers found in the American West were not untouched; rather, they were maintained through efforts by Native communities, shaping the landscape to keep it sustainable.

This moment is also a historic opportunity to move public opinion to recognize the importance of tribal sovereignty. With the recent inauguration of President Biden and the confirmation of New Mexico Pueblo Native Deb Haaland as Secretary of the Interior, we can reverse the destructive actions of the Trump Administration. This is our unique opportunity to build bridges between the Club and outside groups as we appreciate the importance of structural change in our nation’s attitudes and policies toward America’s Indigenous peoples.

### How You Can Help

The SSMN is presently conducting a survey of its roughly 600 widely dispersed members in order to complete its application to OFA. As a result of limited resources and the pandemic, the tribe received from the Interior Department this May its seventh 6-month extension on the deadline for submitting this application.

The Sierra Club Tehipite Chapter recently made its second \$5,000 grant to a tribal researcher who is compiling surveys which document the activities of the tribe’s members who, although scattered across California during the pandemic, have been active on social media. This painstaking research is demanded by the Department of the Interior in order for the tribe to prove its existence.

*The Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation needs your help, either through your volunteer time or a financial contribution. For more information, contact Gary Lasky at 559-790-3495.*

### Additional Reading:

- Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation website: [www.southernsierramiwuknation.org](http://www.southernsierramiwuknation.org). Includes Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation pamphlet, narrative, and a timeline of the tribe’s application for federal recognition.
- Benjamin Madley. *An American Genocide: The United States and the California Indian Catastrophe*. Yale University Press, 2016.
- Mark David Spence. *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks*. Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Brendan C. Lindsay. *Murder State: California’s Native American Genocide, 1846-1873*. University of Nebraska Press, 2012.
- Albert L. Hurtado. *Indian Survival on the California Frontier*. Yale University Press, 1988.

**Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation**  
Homelands~Yosemite Valley, Mariposa California

**TEXT TO DONATE**  
Your financial support will strengthen our efforts & power our petition for **Federal Acknowledgment**

**Text the word "GIVE" to:**  
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Follow the text prompts that follow to donate. Toll Free.

 **paypal.me/Miwuk**  
<https://www.southernsierramiwuknation.org>  
Check donations payable  
"American Indian Council Mariposa County"  
P.O. Box 186 Mariposa, CA 95338



 Scan. Pay. Go.

The Tehipite Chapter of the Sierra Club invites the public to its June Zoom meeting with Mark Silberstein, Executive Director of the Elkhorn Slough Foundation. Elkhorn Slough is located in the geographic



center of Monterey Bay in central California. It is a tidal embayment that harbors the largest tract of salt marsh south of San Francisco Bay and has been a focal point for conservation for five decades. The slough is a remarkable environment that supports a tremendous diversity of fish and wildlife and has become a ‘living laboratory’ for understanding the nature of these coastal environments and a cherished place for people to explore. Mark will share images and insight into this gem on the central coast drawn from his many decades of engagement here.

Visit [sierraclub.org/tehipite](http://sierraclub.org/tehipite) to register and receive the Zoom link. Advance registration is required. Free and open to the general public.