



The Wildlife Society
Native Peoples Wildlife Management
Working Group



**Native Student Professional Development Program
Albuquerque, New Mexico
September 23-27, 2017
Final Report**

TWS grants bring more native students to Annual Conference, compiled by Julia John, TWS writer and published online October 5, 2017. Full article available: <http://wildlife.org/tws-grants-bring-more-native-students-to-annual-conference/>



The 2017 Native Student Professional Development program cohort poses with Coordinator Serra Hoagland (third from right) in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Seventeen aspiring wildlifera representing tribes from across the continent traveled to this year's Annual Conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico, through TWS' Native Student Professional Development program.

Organized by the Native People's Wildlife Management Working Group, the NSPD program aims to remedy the wildlife profession's lack of cultural diversity and support indigenous youth entering the field.

APHIS Grant No. 17-7400-0872-GR

“It provides them a sense of belonging, feeling like they have a place, and they’re valued here at TWS,” said NSPD program coordinator Serra Hoagland. “They’re here with a group of other students from across the country that have similar goals and passions, and they’re able to share that with each other. It helps bring them up together.”

Since 2006, more than 100 Native American, Native Hawaiian and First Nations students focused on wildlife at the high school, undergraduate or graduate level have received travel grants to attend the Annual Conference as part of the NSPD program. They follow a dedicated schedule to engage in career development sessions, obtain advice from mentors, deliver personal presentations to Council on wildlife and culture, sit in on the working group meeting, share research projects, and learn from talks and network with hundreds of peers and professionals.

“We try to cater what the conference already offers to members to this particular population of native students and ensure they’re getting the most out of the agenda,” said Hoagland, who joined TWS after participating in the NSPD program in 2010. “The program is helping them move along in their careers.”

At this conference, a participant in the first NSPD program spoke to the students about “coming full circle,” Hoagland said. Since then, increased funding has allowed the program to grow from a minimum of six to 18 students in one cohort.

“We’re able to offer this opportunity to a higher number of students to provide them with a community here at TWS,” Hoagland said, noting that one of the biggest challenges native students face is a lack of indigenous faculty who could serve as role models.

“Being part of this group, I can let first-time students know how the conference is and bring my experiences from the first time,” said Harlan Tso, a Navajo student from Arizona who was at the Annual Conference for a second consecutive year and serves as president of the Northern Arizona University TWS student chapter. “Now that I’m comfortable, I can talk to people and bring those for whom it’s their first year into the conversation.”

For Tso, the major highlights of this year’s program was the field trip the NSPD program participants took to the Santa Ana Pueblo, neighboring Albuquerque to the north, to see firsthand how the reservation was implementing management plans the students had learned about through lectures beforehand.

“That opened my mind,” said Tso, who hopes to become a TWS officer and further his work with the working group.

“I want to bring my voice into the working group and try to make it to where there’s more involvement with students,” he said. “It’s difficult to get to the meeting and put yourself out there.”

Raised in New Mexico’s Kewa Pueblo, Victoria Atencio, who’s pursuing a master’s degree in natural resource stewardship at Colorado State University, has attended annual conferences since

2015. This year's, with an emphasis on cultural crossroads and taking place in New Mexico, "hit a lot closer to home," she said.

"Talking to professionals who spoke for the symposium about native communities and diversity in the profession was interesting because I work with tribal governments," she said. "Being able to provide that perspective of what we share with the landscape as native people to other professionals, I see it open doors for native people and people who want to work with tribes."

Western science lacks that cultural perspective, Atencio said.

"It's about being one with environment," she said. "Just like we have our own thoughts and feelings, so do plants and animals."

Atencio found it empowering to represent and observe indigenous diversity in the wildlife field through the working group, "to meet people from different reservations, see how we share the same problems and talk about how we could find solutions."

Until Native Hawaiian Aaron Pila got to Albuquerque for his first Annual Conference, he wasn't sure he wanted to choose the wildlife path over botany.

"It's been life-changing," said Pila, a junior at Hawaii's Leeward Community College, where he found few chances to network and collaborate with other indigenous students committed to wildlife. "This program gave the opportunity to create those bonds and receive mentorship, which is huge in tribal communities."

Forming those connections was his "wakeup call" to a career in wildlife, Pila said.

"Almost considering a different field, I felt alone in the journey," he said. "Being around these people is inspiring. Everyone needs that in their journey, especially this one, saving the planet, the ultimate provider."

Pila's biggest takeaway from the conference was the need for cross-cultural cooperative research and action.

"We all are in that big fight," he said. "Through unity, we can make change."

Pila plans to return to the annual conference in Cleveland, Ohio, with another year of wildlife experience under his belt so he can build on the conversations he had this time with professionals.

"We need to bring more indigenous people out here," he said, "more native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders."

Besides covering registration fees, lodging, meals and transportation for the conference, the program also makes participants members of the working group and awards them a one-year

TWS membership. Applicants, who need not have any previous experience with TWS, can find the application on the society's website.

"I want the annual conference to reach the highest number of students," Hoagland said, "more opportunities for students to work together in the future, meeting again or staying in touch through social media. Follow-up helps students feel that when they go home, they still have somebody rooting for them and wanting them to succeed."

Former PD program recipient and Professional Development Program Coordinator Serra Hoagland was awarded The Wildlife Society's 2017 Diversity Award at this year's conference. The Wildlife Society's Diversity Award commends wildlife professionals or entities for exceptional contributions to the task of boosting ethnic and gender diversity in the wildlife field through the workforce, education or organizational membership.

2017 Native Student Professional Development Program participants:

Ashley Archer
Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians
Michigan State University

Victoria Atencio
Kewa Pueblo
Colorado State University

Bryan Begay
Navajo
Northern Arizona University

Daniel Bird
Santo Domingo Pueblo
Purdue University

Kelda Britton
Wailaki/Nomlaki/Concow
Humboldt State University

Caitlin Ferry
Metis
University of Winnipeg

Danielle Freemont
Northern Cheyenne
University of Montana

Celina Gray
Blackfeet and Little Shell Chippewa
Salish Kootenai College

Mateen Hessami
Wyandotte Nation
University of Montana

Xavier Lovato
Cochiti/Kewa Pueblo
New Mexico State University

Aaron Pila
Hawaiian
Leeward Community College

Michelle Quillin
Hughes Village
University of Alaska Fairbanks

Joseph Reustle
Oglala/Lakota
Texas A&M University – Corpus Christi

Jessica Rich
Eskimo
Michigan Technological University

Nerisa Taua
Samoan
Chaminade University of Honolulu

Harlan Tso
Navajo
Northern Arizona University

Ty Werdel
Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate
South Dakota State University

The Native Peoples Wildlife Management Working Group also co-sponsored two symposia and a panel discussion this year at the conference that PD students attended and participated in. The Sunday afternoon symposium entitled *Tribal Wildlife Management and Conservation in the Southwest I*, included eight talks and a panel discussion. The Monday afternoon symposium

entitled *Tribal Wildlife Management and Conservation in the Southwest II*, continued with another group of nine presentations and a panel discussion. The NPWM working group co-sponsored a Panel Discussion on *Tribal Bison Conservation* at a session on Monday morning. A full description of the symposium can be found online: <http://wildlife.org/tws-grants-bring-more-native-students-to-annual-conference/> and <http://twsconference.org/sessions/tribal-wildlife-management-and-conservation-in-the-southwest-i/>

List of partners:

The 2017 NSPD program was sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture-APHIS-National Wildlife Research Center, Sundance Consulting, TWS' North Carolina Chapter, the U.S. Forest Service Rocky Mountain Research Station, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Forest Service.

Acknowledgements:

Contributions to this report included most of an article on the PD program by Julia John, posted on the TWS website, October 5, 2017. *TWS grants bring more native students to Annual Conference.*

We would like to thank Dr. Larry Clark, Director of the National Wildlife Research Center, for his continued support for grant funding and his interest in this student program.

We would like to extend a special thank you to The Wildlife Society for their continued support.

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Date: 26 January 2017