



## A new generation is preparing to lead in Indian Country

**W**hen you are 16 or 17 years old, and trying to figure out what to do with your life, it can be challenging to think more than a year or two out, never mind considering how you'll spend the next 25 or 30 years. Yet somehow, many of the young people we have met through various youth leadership activities across Indian Country are taking the long view. They have come to understand the importance of preserving Indian land, and now they're envisioning the part they can play in its future. That's what youth engagement is all about.

There are more opportunities than ever for young people to get involved, and this edition of the *Message Runner* is dedicated to highlighting some of the youth engagement activities Indian Land Tenure Foundation and the organizations we partner with have had a hand in. The goal is to raise awareness of places where Native youth can explore their future and, most importantly, to shine a light on the many young people who are leading the way.

The number of potential career paths in tribal land is almost unlimited, and there are countless ways for students to pursue them. Each year at the Native Youth in Food and Agriculture Leadership Summit at the University of Arkansas, we meet some of the brightest kids in Indian Country. They spend a week in the summer heat of Fayetteville exploring a wide variety of interests and activities. They learn practical skills and interact extensively with successful Native professionals.

Some are intrigued by the idea of law and policy. Others get turned on to soil science or environmental sustainability. Marketing-related activities capture the attention of many. Others are interested in the more traditional pursuits of farming and ranching. I think student Josh Winnett from Oklahoma may have put it best when he told us, "You can be involved in agriculture without getting your hands dirty on a farm."

The most important thing is that students be exposed to these opportunities. Ty Ducheneaux, who grew up on his family's ranch on the Cheyenne River Reservation in South Dakota, said the variety of opportunities students are given at the Summit is vital. "I think it's important that we have these different tracks so that people are able to find what they like, and figure out what they don't appreciate quite as much, so that they can go into what they enjoy. Then we can all work together through this network that we have. I genuinely believe that we have some of the smartest kids in the nation gathered here."

### Highlighting the opportunities

ILTF's tribal land office internship program was developed to expose young people to possible careers in tribal land as early as possible. High school students spend their summer working in a paid internship for their tribal land office. On pages 2 and 3 you'll meet Winona George and Raenetta Valencia, two young adults who participated in this internship program while they were in high school. You'll learn about their



*New Mexico high school students Sean Cruz and Ian Laate participated in ILTF's tribal land office internship program on the Pueblo of Tesuque in 2019.*

experiences and the influence these had on their current career goals.

On pages 4 and 5 we highlight youth activities that are part of the Federally Recognized Tribal Extension Program (FRTEP) across Indian Country. Tribal extension agents offer culturally adapted 4-H opportunities for Native children to learn, grow and develop in a safe environment where they often ignite a spark of interest in agriculture.

On pages 8-10, you'll meet Calico Ducheneaux, Marco Ovando, Sequoia Osborne and four of their peers. These college students have worked together for several years in youth engagement activities led by the Intertribal Agriculture Council (IAC) where they have developed their leadership skills, discovered their passions and become part of a network of inspiring young leaders.

Also in this edition of the *Message Runner* we'll catch up with former ILTF summer interns who have gone on to do great work in their careers, and look at two other ILTF initiatives that are making an impact on scores of young people – the *Lessons of Our Land* curriculum and the highly popular *When Rivers Were Trails* educational video game.

### Our future depends on it

Developing future leaders has never been more important in Indian Country. There are so many challenges in the here and now, and many more obstacles littered on the road ahead. But there are also more opportunities for Native youth than ever before. Our job is to present those opportunities to young people in the most compelling ways we know how.

What's exciting to me is how engaged this new generation of Native leaders has become. They

are intrigued by their history and traditional ways. They are more aware than ever about the importance of sound environmental stewardship. They are recognizing that they have an important role to play in preserving these things, while at the same time bringing the latest technology, management skills and science-based knowledge back home to the reservations where they grew up. Frankly, our collective future depends on it, and we're pleased that the Foundation is doing its part to ensure their success.



*Cris Stainbrook*

Cris Stainbrook, ILTF President





*The high school internship program is open to Native students interested in land-related careers.*

## Tribal land office internships offer students real-world experience

If you can see it you can be it. When it comes to the ways in which young people try to figure out what to do with the rest of their lives it often boils down to what they are exposed to. That is the thinking behind the Indian Land Tenure Foundation’s land office internship program, which was developed to expose high school students to possible careers related to tribal land.

“We want the students to have real-life experiences in a land office,” said ILTF president Cris Stainbrook. “Most young people have very little idea about what is happening on their own reservations as far as career opportunities go. By providing them with an opportunity for a paid internship over the course of the summer, they can experience it first-hand. Hopefully that ignites a spark.”

Students commit to working 400 hours over a period of 10 to 11 weeks during the summer. The internships can be in any land-related field. Students keep a brief daily log of their activities and at the end of the internship they submit the log along with a 2-5 page report.

“It was a great learning experience for me,” said Samaria Cervantes, who was a summer intern with the Mescalero Apache Tribe in New Mexico. “I learned how to do so many new things and work with new people. It was my first job and I was a little uneasy at first, but as the days went by I gained new experience. It wasn’t always easy but it was a great job!”

“Land surveying turned out to be something that was really fun for me. It was really cool to be able to see parts of the reservation I had never been to,” she said. “When I first learned how to use the navigator it was really tricky for me but after a couple of times I finally got the hang of it. Our land surveyor Jeff was really patient and understanding. He knew that this was something that was new to us.”

### Exploring new opportunities

The ILTF land office internships are intended for high school students. College students are not eligible. Interns have completed their sophomore, junior or senior year of high school and have an interest in working in some aspect of tribal land management. Tribal land staff recruit and select interns to participate in the program.

Tribal staff report that more than 75 percent of the internships have produced positive outcomes for both the students and the Tribe. Several interns are now exploring educational and employment opportunities in tribal land-related careers.

“The impact has been very positive,” Stainbrook said. “I have read every one of the student reports and they are fascinating. There are some very talented young Native students all across Indian Country. We’re pleased they are showing an interest in land.”



*Students work in a variety of different roles over the course of a summer internship.*

## Raenetta Valencia San Felipe Pueblo

One of the primary goals of the Indian Land Tenure Foundation’s land office internship program is to spark an interest in young people in exploring a career related to tribal land. That’s exactly what happened for Raenetta Valencia on the San Felipe Pueblo in New Mexico where an 11-week summer internship morphed into a full-time position with the Department of Natural Resources.

Valencia joined the San Felipe DNR in the summer of 2018 as one of two high school students in the ILTF land office internship program. It didn’t take long for her to figure out what land management entails for her Tribe. Working with the DNR, Valencia attended meetings to learn more about how the local government operates, planned trips with surveyors and participated in extensive fieldwork. This included projects involving managing rights-of-way across Pueblo land, sustaining wildlife migration routes and learning new skills like reading maps and writing official reports.

Valencia also worked with kids from a local summer youth program, showing them how to conduct water quality tests on the Rio Grande. She said one of the reasons she wanted to apply for the internship was to learn more about her Tribe.

“I wanted to be more active within the Tribe and just get a better understanding of different perspectives and from different people,” Valencia said. “Basically learning how the Tribal government works in and out of the office was one of my main reasons. I just thought it would be fun.”

Valencia was able to attend meetings with the Bureau of Land Management and the Army Corps of Engineers, and also learned about the Public Land Survey System. She said working alongside Tribal professionals was “mind-opening” and helped her to grow both professionally and personally.

“One of my accomplishments was taking the initiative to be a part of something that will change the Tribe’s future,” Valencia said. “Just getting different perspectives from all the other mentors that helped me and guided me throughout the internship. They shared a lot of stories with me about the cultural significances and life stories and lessons.”

### Seeing the community in a different light

Valencia has long desired to be an attorney and was planning to study criminal defense law, but an environmental science class in high school ended up leading her in a slightly different direction. A combination of seeing the impact of climate change, along with help from a particularly supportive teacher, led Valencia to explore environmental law.

“I want to be there to help my Tribe protect the land and water because many of those aspects are essential to our everyday lives, and they’re a part of our core values,” Valencia said. “We’re all connected to the water, the land and Mother Earth, and that was one of the reasons why I wanted to go into environmental law because I wanted to help my Tribe have a better future.”

*Continued on page 3*



Continued from page 2

Providing opportunities for San Felipe youth is a top priority for the Department of Natural Resources, said director Pinu’u Stout. "The ILTF internship furthers the development of future Indian land attorneys, land base protectors and growers," Stout said. "The internships provide students with an opportunity to see their community in a different light as they gain a better understanding of what it takes to 'make something happen' and how much effort is involved.

“Raenetta is an excellent example of the beauty, intelligence and heart of Native youth,” Stout said. “Her ITLF internship has blossomed into completing her first semester of college and working in the San Felipe DNR full-time during the summer break.”

Through the internships, Native youth see first-hand what trades and professions are needed in the community, and what the day-to-day work for those careers looks like. Then they can get their education and come back home to work on behalf of their community.



*Raenetta Valencia (pictured with her parents above) was part of the internship program in 2018.*

## Winona George, Yakama Nation

From tracking pronghorn and spotted owls, to surveying plants and bird species, Winona George spent the summer of 2018 learning everything she could about land management on the Yakama Nation in southern Washington State. George was one of two high school students selected by her Tribe to participate in the Indian Land Tenure Foundation land office internship program. George worked with the Department of Natural Resources where she gained exposure to land planning, probate and natural resource management.

Working with 30 professionals across multiple programs, departments and enterprises, George learned how land management affects the tribe, along with the importance of preserving and protecting her community’s natural resources. George worked a total of 400 hours in four different locations in and around Toppenish, Wash., for the Yakama Nation Wildlife and Fisheries, Yakama Nation Land Enterprise and Yakama Nation Networks.

Although she had lived on the Yakama Reservation her entire life, George said she quickly realized just how much she had to learn. “Before the internship, my life was about basketball and school,” she said. “After that I realized, ‘Wow, I really don’t know anything about my reservation.’”

### Sharing what she learned

George and her fellow ILTF intern Raenetta Valencia of the San Felipe Pueblo in New Mexico traveled to the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community in Minnesota in the spring of 2019 to participate in the Tribal Land Staff National Conference. The conference is held each year by the National Tribal Land Association and brings together tribal land professionals for education and networking opportunities.

There the interns shared their stories with attendees from across Indian Country in a panel discussion. George said working alongside so

many tribal professionals has shown her what it takes to be an effective leader. “I learned what is to be expected of a manager,” she told the room of professionals. “Communication, leadership and fast decision-making is what I hope to gain, and I think that has helped me in this internship.”

George learned a lot through such hands-on experiences as the banding of ducks, tracking spotted owls, and surveying pheasant, quail, dove and native plants. Along the way, she encountered summer heat, aggressive mosquitoes, a flat tire, and hours-long hikes. In spite of the obstacles, George says she wouldn’t have wanted to spend her summer any other way.

One challenge was something most students experience at their first job: a full day’s work! “There were many challenges in this internship. First of all, I’ve never had a job before so adjusting to these 8-hour shifts compared to school was really hard for me,” George said. Another challenge was having to work through an arm injury that happened a short time before the internship began, which made hiking through dense forests more difficult. That didn’t dampen George’s enthusiasm for the work, however.

### Exploring career opportunities

One of the most memorable moments for George was tracking owls in the lush and remote forests of the Yakama Nation. With increasing timber sales in the region, the purpose of tracking the winged creatures is to make sure their habitats are safe.

Finding a female owl just feet away had George taking “a bunch” of pictures, she said, and marveling at the rare sight. “I’ve never been that far into the forest,” she said. “And there are these hills nearby that I had never discovered, or had only looked at from a distance.”

After trading in her hiking boots for office attire, George turned her focus to the Yakama Nation Land Enterprise, a group that oversees the



*Former land office intern Winona George*

administration, purchasing, selling, leasing and development of Tribal land.

As a result of these experiences, George was exposed to many possible career paths she hadn't been aware of. Having been set since she was in middle school on becoming a botanist, George’s thinking evolved after the internship. With the encouragement of a member of the Yakama Nation Tribal Council, George was looking into possibly becoming a land appraiser, a profession that is desperately needed in Indian Country.

“One thing that most youth are unsure of is what type of positions are actually out there because they haven’t been exposed to tribal jobs beyond those held by their immediate family members,” she said. “Yakama youth need early identification of their strengths, weaknesses and interests, especially in land management issues.”



# Tribal extension reaches out to youth on reservations

The Federally Recognized Tribes Extension Program (FRTEP) is a successful tribal community outreach model focusing on agricultural productivity and youth development. Just as most counties across the United States have extension agents from land grant universities, more than 30 extension programs operate on Indian reservations, as well, where they partner with local communities, governments and institutions.

FRTEP programming is developed through local objectives, reaching an audience that is often missed by broader extension efforts. In addition to providing invaluable assistance to Native farmers and ranchers, one of FRTEP’s most important roles is youth engagement.

From the Colville Reservation in Washington State to the Seminole communities of South Florida; from the Mashantucket Pequot in Connecticut to the Hopi, Hualapai and Navajo in Arizona, thousands of Native kids are involved in positive youth development activities on reservations across Indian Country. Extension agents deliver culturally adapted 4-H opportunities for Native children and youth to learn, grow and develop while providing a safe, positive environment, fostering healthy choices and sparking interest in agriculture.

These are some of their stories.



Native students have a wide range of opportunities through tribal extension youth activities.

## Bristol Bay, Alaska

Located more than 300 miles west of Anchorage on the Bering Sea, Bristol Bay teems with wildlife, fish runs, and natural resources that support a subsistence lifestyle. The landscape and remoteness of the region make it impossible to build roads, meaning travel is usually done by air. The Bristol Bay FRTEP program serves an area the size of Ohio that includes 31 tribes and more than 7,500 people, and 4-H and youth development is the primary focus.

Youth activities and events, for kindergarten through 12th grade children, take place throughout the region in Dillingham, Nondalton, Iliamna, Levelock, Aleknagik, Clark’s Point,

Lou’s Point and Manokotak. With an emphasis on traditional values and cultures, Bristol Bay 4-H encourages youth to develop a sense of independence and responsibility to self, others and the community that will help them prepare for their future.

The goal is to engage youth in hands-on learning and culturally relevant activities in the areas of food security, natural resources and their role in conserving and protecting those. Club activities include trapping, skin sewing, birding, ballet, LEGO, and gardening, as well as culture camps and clubs. Tribal youth and community members gather to share stories and learn how



to create traditional meals. The focus is on values such as honoring Elders, respecting the land and each other, and providing for others.

## Colorado River, Arizona

The Colorado River Indian Tribes are comprised of the Hopi, Navajo, Mohave and Chemehuevi and are located on the Colorado River Indian Reservation in Southwestern Arizona. Cooperative Extension, the outreach arm of the University of Arizona, is “taking the university to the people.” A major part of what they do is focused on youth development.

4-H programming has existed in La Paz County and on the Colorado River Reservation for a very long time and continues to thrive. Its primary goal is to help youth acquire skills and knowledge for decision making that promotes healthy lifestyles and the development of productive and ethical behavioral patterns.

Programming includes nutrition, outdoor discovery, and technology, as well as the youth horse program. In each of these areas kids gain valuable knowledge and skills such as personal responsibility, ethical behavior, and community involvement, providing a framework for a productive adult life that will benefit the community as a whole.

Health and nutrition programming is combined with the agriculture and 4-H to promote healthier lifestyles and increase physical activity. Although food and nutrition assistance programs have helped reduce nutritional deficiencies, improving access to healthy and nutritious food for low income people remains a challenge.



Obesity, heart disease and diabetes are major issues of concern and FRTEP extension is helping to address these challenges.



# Bad River, Wisconsin

The Bad River Band of Lake Superior Tribe of Chippewa Indians is located on a 125,000 acre reservation in Northern Wisconsin, on the south shore of Lake Superior. About 1,500 of the Tribe’s 7,000 members live in an area that was originally known as “Gete Gititaaning,” meaning “at the old garden.” While Anishnaabe people followed seasonal routes around their territory, in the spring they would plant their gardens in the rich soil of the river flood plain, and return to harvest in the fall. Today, the FRTEP extension program at Bad River is using gardening as a tool to educate young people about their past and prepare them for the future.

### Gitigaaning Community Gardens

The Bad River Gitigaaning Community Garden project was started in 2003. One project operates on an ancient gardening site. There are also home gardens, a garden at the Elder Center, and experimental gardens where permaculture methods are being tested to grow more food in the heavy clay soil.

The turtle-shaped garden once held mostly medicinal plants, but has been expanded to include a variety of vegetables, such as tomatoes, squash, carrots, beans, and corn. There is also an apple orchard, as well as raised bed gardens at the Birch Hill Community House, the Boys and Girls Club, and the Elder Center.

About 60 youth have been involved in planting and harvesting, which encourages exercise and healthy eating. They take part in weeding and watering and learn about the different stages of plant life, soil composition, and soil health. A primary goal at Bad River is to give tribal members the knowledge and resources needed to harvest wild foods. Youth have learned how to make wild rice knockers (the sticks used to knock the kernels of wild rice from their stems), and how to navigate canoes to harvest the rice. This has been great for health and wellness while also providing an economic opportunity for families.

### Youth engagement through food

Youth engagement in a culturally grounded food system is one of the key initiatives of the FRTEP extension program at Bad River. The goal is to increase youth involvement in growing, gathering, consuming and producing food for others from local and traditional sources. This helps to reduce childhood and adolescent obesity and improve physical fitness through hunting, fishing, gathering, gardening and related activities.

Tribal youth are learning about the biological sciences, natural resources and food systems through engagement with traditional foods. There are leadership development opportunities, as well as cultural and economic engagement.



### FRTEP Youth Engagement

The Federally Recognized Tribal Extension Program (FRTEP) offers culturally-adapted youth development activities on more than 30 reservations across Indian Country. Pages 4 and 5 feature a few highlights of these important programs.

Youth have learned how to harvest maple syrup, spear and clean fish, the traditional Ojibwe game of lacrosse, Ojibwe language and traditional cooking. They have combined hiking with knowledge about traditional plants and harvesting methods, and mentored younger children in the process.

# Blackfeet, Montana

Agriculture is the primary economic industry on the Blackfeet Reservation with some 800 producers managing 1.5 million acres of land. Limited access to credit, capital and lack of a credit history has prevented beginning farmers and ranchers from returning to family farms, which threatens the sustainability of agriculture on the reservation.

Program director and FRTEP agent Verna Billedeaux extends life-long learning to individuals through unbiased, research-based education and information that integrates learning, discovery, and engagement. This, in turn, strengthens the social, economic and environmental fabric of communities on the reservation. The program’s priorities are focused on Indian farmer and rancher productivity and management, and tribal youth and 4-H.

### 4-H is making an impact

The 4-H program was established on the Blackfeet Reservation over 20 years ago and has grown from four participants to more than 100. With the assistance of partners and local volunteers, Extension designed 4-H programs that were a good cultural fit. This included the establishment of a unique local fair where every youth’s accomplishments could be recognized. As a result, the majority of youth are staying involved in 4-H until they graduate from high school, not dropping out after 7th or 8th grade.

FRTEP is considered a valuable, trusted community resource. Community members recognize that the Blackfeet Extension office serves an important function in the community

with the capacity to connect people to other programs and services. FRTEP has utilized a dedicated cadre of volunteers who design innovative programs specifically for youth, helping them to forge a connection between the land and its natural resources. These volunteers have managed a natural resource youth camp for the past 16 years.

### Reviving agricultural traditions

The Montana Junior Ag Loan Program, administered by the Montana Department of Agriculture, assists and encourages youth and new farmers and ranchers in financing agricultural projects. The program has helped revive agricultural traditions on the Blackfeet Reservation and given participants the opportunity to build their capital and credit.

They can continue to borrow through other loan programs such as the Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI’s). Many have built up their cattle herds and collateral and have been able to establish cattle operations. Several participants have used the profits from those operations to fund their college education.

As farmers and ranchers age, it is becoming more important for Blackfeet youth to acquire the knowledge about agriculture and natural resource programs that will help them to be successful farmers and ranchers in the future. Extension specialists are an integral part of that educational process, providing research-based knowledge to an audience who may not otherwise have that learning opportunity. By being present in the




community, Extension agents have earned trust, helping connect people with the land, teaching young people the importance of agriculture, connecting youth and elders, and reinforcing the cultural and nutritional importance of food.

Read more about FRTEP youth activities by visiting the Indian Country extension website.

[www.tribalextension.org](http://www.tribalextension.org)




# Young leaders showing the way in Indian Country




**Winona George**  
**Toppenish, WA**

Winona is a member of the Confederated Tribes of the Yakama Nation in Washington.  
  
(See story on page 3)




**Ellise David**  
**Warm Springs, OR**

Ellise is a member of the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs in the state of Oregon.  
  
(See story on page 10)




**Sequoia Osborne**  
**Browning, MT**

Sequoia is a member of the Blackfeet Nation in Northern Montana.  
  
(See story on page 9)




**Marco Ovando**  
**Owyhee, NV**

Marco is a member of the Shoshone-Paiute Tribes of the Duck Valley Indian Reservation in Nevada.  
(See story on page 9)




**Raenetta Tenorio**  
**Algodones, NM**

Raenetta is a member of the Pueblo of San Felipe in the state of New Mexico.  
  
(See story on page 2)



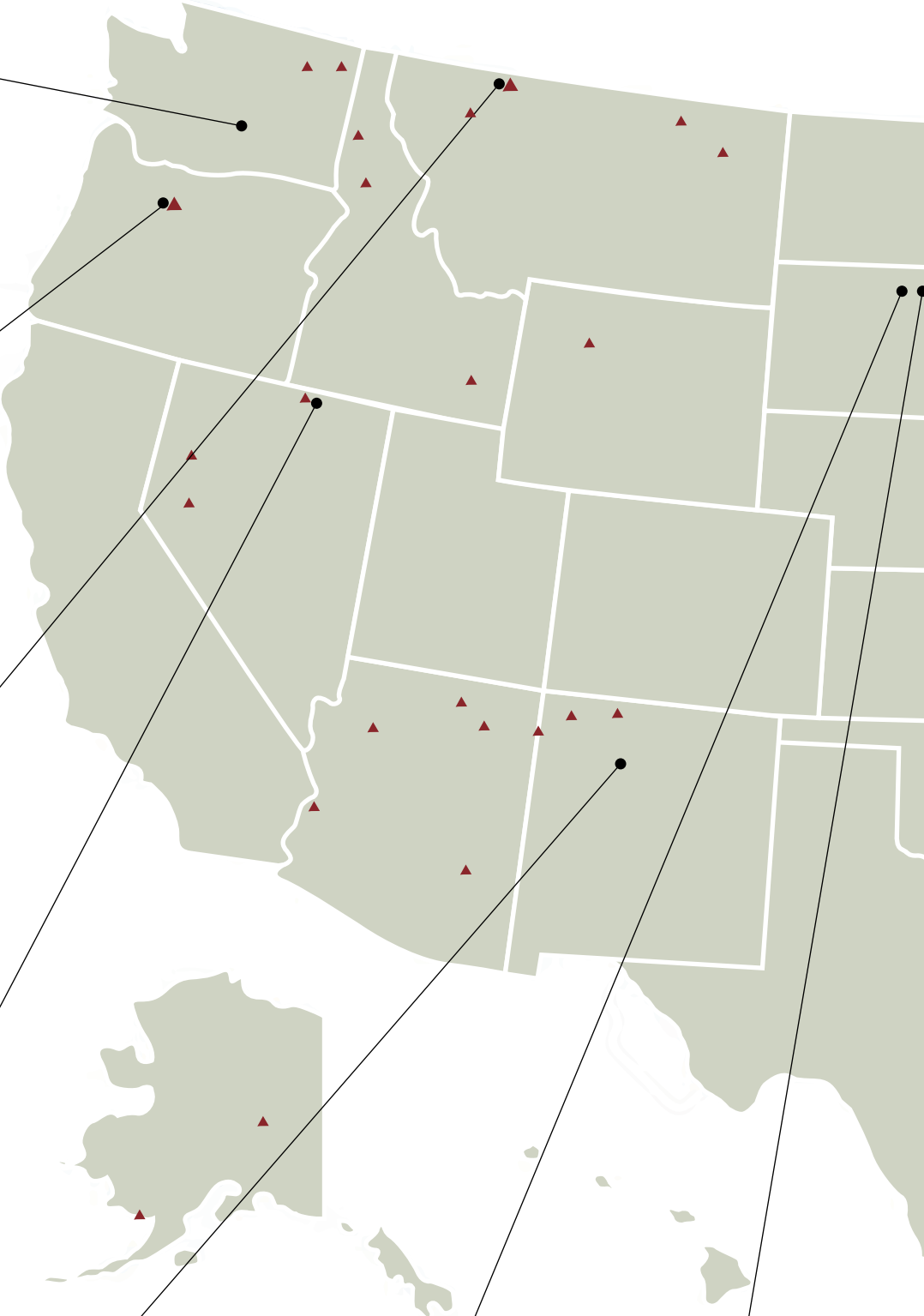
**Ty Ducheneaux**  
**Timber Lake, SD**

Ty is a member of the Cheyenne River Lakota Nation in South Dakota.  
  
(See story on page 10)

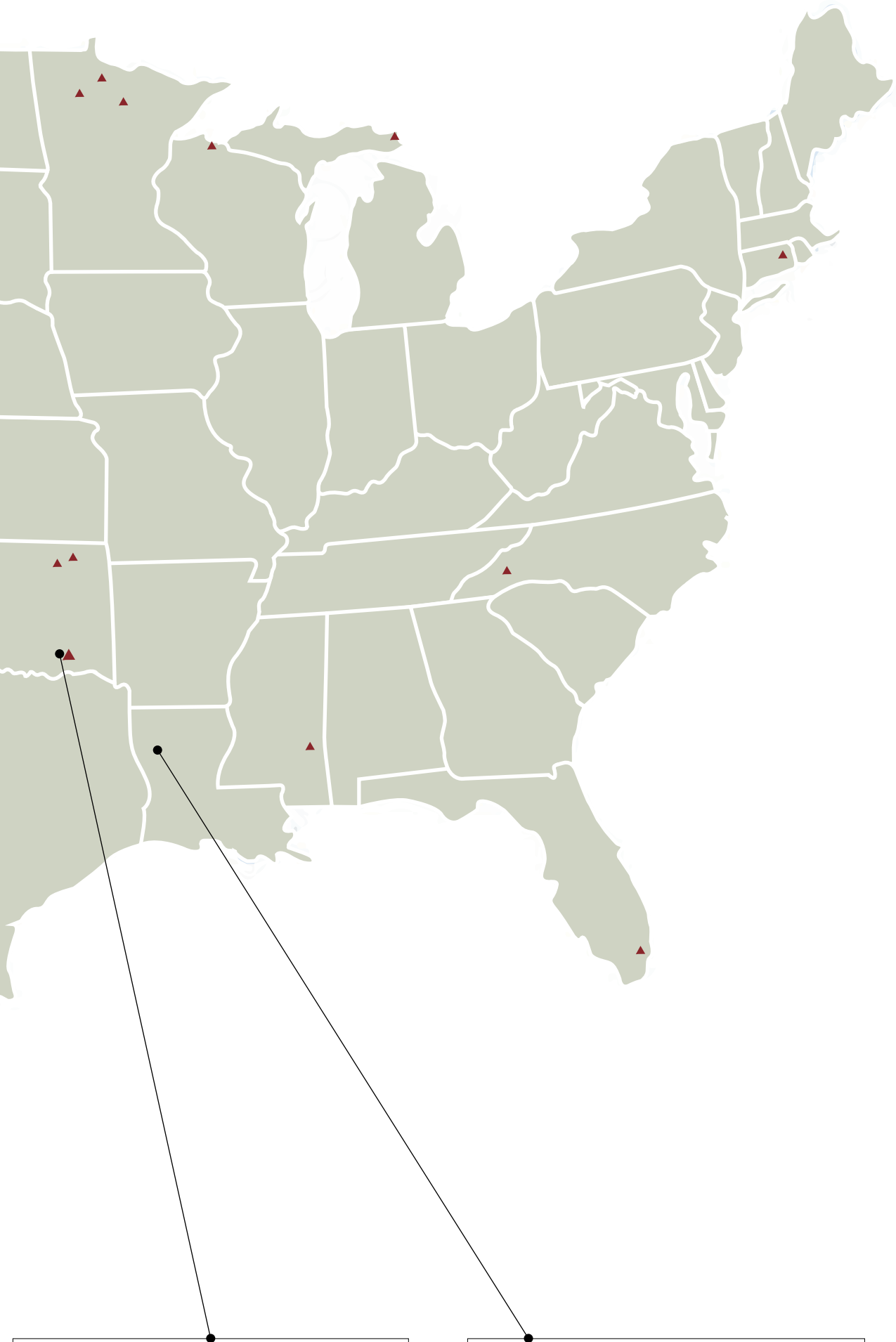


**Calico Ducheneaux**  
**Mobridge, SD**

Calico is a member of the Cheyenne River Lakota Nation in South Dakota.  
  
(See story on page 8)







Tribal Extension Programs

- Bristol Bay, AK  
Tanana Chiefs, AK  
Colorado River Indian Tribes, AZ  
Hopi, AZ  
Hualapai, AZ  
Navajo (Shiprock), AZ  
Navajo (Tuba City), AZ  
Navajo (Window Rock), AZ  
San Carlos Apache, AZ  
Mashantucket Pequot, CT  
Seminole, FL  
Coeur d’Alene, ID  
Fort Hall, ID  
Nez Perce, ID  
Bay Mills, MI  
Leech Lake, MN  
Red Lake, MN  
White Earth, MN  
Choctaw (Mississippi), MS  
Blackfeet Nation, MT  
Flathead, MT  
Fort Belknap, MT  
Fort Peck, MT  
Duck Valley, NV  
Pyramid Lake, NV  
Walker River, NV  
Jicarilla, NM  
Eastern Band of Cherokee, NC  
Choctaw (Oklahoma), OK  
Osage, OK  
Pawnee, OK  
Warm Springs, OR  
Colville, WA  
Kalispel, WA  
Bad River, WI  
Wind River, WY



Josh Winnett  
Durant, OK

Josh is a member of  
the Choctaw Nation of  
Oklahoma.

(See story on page 10)



Mackenize Martinez  
Zwolle, LA

Mackenize is a member  
of the Choctaw Apache  
Tribe of Louisiana.

(See story on page 10)

Key

- ▲ FRTEP projects
- Student locations



# IAC is planting the seeds to grow leaders in Indian ag

The average age of Native American farmers and ranchers is well into the 60s. That’s a problem. The average number of youth who engage in leadership development activities each year through the Intertribal Agriculture Council (IAC) is over 600. That’s a big part of the solution. Through its Native Youth Food Sovereignty Alliance (NYFSA), national and regional conferences, its national youth essay contest, college scholarships and the annual Native Youth in Food and Agriculture Leadership Summit, IAC’s youth-oriented endeavors are having a huge impact on the future of Indian agriculture.

“There’s a new leaf turning in Indian agriculture and Indian land,” said Kelsey Ducheneaux (Lakota), who led IAC’s youth engagement activities from 2015 to 2019. “We expanded our youth outreach coordinator position from one role into two to really grow our reach and amplify our impact on an annual basis. We’re now seeing how the leadership development pipeline that we worked to create with our youth programming is going to have a much farther, deeper reach into Indian Country.”

Zach Ilbery (Cherokee) and Azelya Yazzie (Blackfeet and Navajo) are IAC’s leadership development specialists who work on a vast array of youth engagement efforts. Among Ilbery’s projects is writing a Native agriculture curriculum that will be taught in all Oklahoma

schools. Yazzie, who became fascinated with gardening as a young child, is pursuing a degree in sustainable agriculture. “It was really eye-opening to make that connection with IAC and learn that somebody believes in me and thinks that I can make a career out of this,” Yazzie said. “It was a life-changing experience to realize that I could make this happen.”

Ducheneaux said it has been gratifying to watch Yazzie evolve from a quiet, reserved teenager into a full-time staffer. “She is an outstanding young leader,” Ducheneaux said. “By the time she gets that four-year degree she’s going to have almost that same amount of experience directly engaging in the workforce. That is going to set her leap years ahead in her professional capacity but it’s also going to help carry our youth programming along with her wherever she goes. Azelya is one of IAC’s many success stories.”

The Intertribal Agriculture Council is a non-profit organization established in 1987 to promote conservation, development, and use of Indian agricultural resources for the betterment of Indian communities. IAC conducts a wide range of programs designed to help improve Indian agriculture, land management, cultural food systems and product marketing.

IAC events bring Native youth together from across Indian Country to take part in educational opportunities rooted in agriculture and land management. These events offer a path to the



*Zach Ilbery and Azelya Yazzie are IAC's youth leadership development specialists.*

full spectrum of IAC programs and help students explore different career paths and fields of study. They are now more informed, more passionate and more prepared to be the next generation of leaders.

The students have forged an informal network of valuable connections that will serve them well throughout their careers. “It makes me feel really secure knowing that I have this huge network of allies out there who can help me with whatever it is I want to do,” said Calico Ducheneaux (Lakota), who is a student at Stanford University. Sequoia Osborne (Blackfeet), a student at the University of Western Montana, agreed. “The network I have built here has been everything to me,” she said. “We are like family, and it has really opened tons more doors for us.”

## A passionate leader who is influencing her peers



**Calico Ducheneaux, Mobridge, SD**

Tribe: Cheyenne River Lakota  
College: Stanford  
Career Goal: Law and Policy

When Calico Ducheneaux talks people listen. She’s obviously very bright – nobody gets into Stanford University by accident, after all – and full of great ideas. It’s not surprising then to learn that Calico has become an evangelist of sorts for Indian agriculture, a highly-motivated young leader whose energy and enthusiasm spills over onto everyone around her. When she was 14 or 15, Calico attended the Native Youth in Food and Agriculture Leadership Summit in Arkansas. It was a life-changing experience for the teen from the Cheyenne River Reservation in South Dakota.

“I grew up on a ranch on my reservation and we had horses and cattle. It was just how we lived. I didn’t really think of it as agriculture,” she explained. “The second I got to the conference I realized how broad an impact agriculture has in my community and in so many communities... It was so cool for me to see that agriculture was something I could do. It’s what I have grown up doing. It’s what my people have done.”

Calico returned home to Mobridge High School in South Dakota ready to take action. “Honestly I was just so excited. I wanted to do everything!” she said. “Farming and ranching is huge where we live. It’s everywhere, but there is such a disconnect.”

Ducheneaux talked with her peers about the importance of the land and how they could get involved. Together they worked on a school garden and a food sovereignty assessment, and took a much deeper interest in traditional plants and foods. Calico starting composting and grew her own tea. Before long a half-dozen of her peers were attending events, and the fire had been lit.

“It was cool to see that disconnect start to disappear and see all of us get closer to the land again,” she said. “Even labelling my mint with the Lakota word for mint was a big deal for me. It makes me feel more connected to something bigger than myself.”

Ducheneaux is planning to attend law school with a goal of working on agricultural policy that can help Native farmers and ranchers. Today, producers earn only a fraction of the proceeds from animals they raise. Calico wants them to control more of the process, earn a greater share, and pursue food sovereignty.

Among Ducheneaux’s network is Marco Ovando from Nevada (see profile on page 9). He shares Calico’s passion for agriculture and admires what she has done. “I was definitely blown away by Calico,” he said. “This girl really knows what she is talking about. She knows how to go in depth, down into the details of what her passions are, how she wants to change agriculture, especially where she is from. She is such an inspiring individual.”



# Stepping out of his comfort zone to do great things

**Marco Ovando, Owyhee, NV**

Tribe: Shoshone-Paiute  
College: Boise State  
Career Goal: Environmental Science

Courage is essential to leadership, and sometimes you just need to step out of your comfort zone. Case in point: 20-year-old Marco Ovando, from the Shoshone-Paiute Tribe’s Duck Valley Indian Reservation. Having grown up on an isolated ranch near tiny Owyhee, Nevada, Marco had no idea what lay ahead when he got involved with Future Farmers of America (FFA) and elected to run for state-wide office. “I used to be terrified of public speaking and would just be overcome with anxiety,” he admitted. “But through my involvement with FFA I gained those skills and overcame my fears. Now I speak in front of thousands of people without flinching an inch!”

Ovando was elected president of the 5,000-member organization, becoming the first Native American in the country to hold the position. He spoke to every FFA chapter in the state and participated in FFA’s national convention, interacting with members, industry leaders and top government officials where he stressed the importance of diversity in agriculture. Along the way he impacted a ton of young people. “It feels really rewarding. When the year was over I realized that running for state office was one of the best decisions I have ever made,” he said. “I enjoy working with youth, pushing them to achieve something greater than themselves.”

Ovando is an Environmental Science major at Boise State University and a third-generation college student. His mom worked in public health, his dad is a rancher from Chile. His passion for agriculture grew further when he became involved in the Intertribal Agriculture Council’s youth activities.

“It has just been super inspiring being involved in IAC,” he said. “I used to feel like I was probably the only young Native American who cared about agriculture, but now I have met so many other young people who are doing great things. Being involved in youth programs like FFA and IAC has given me a whole new perspective on how to help my people in different ways.”

Marco continues to take on new challenges, serving as a UNITY youth ambassador for environmental stewardship and working for his Tribe as a program director for an adaptation and resiliency project related to climate change. His long-term goal is to be a leader for change in Indian Country.

“I want to inspire a generation to do better than the generation before us,” he said. “We need to get to a point where our cultures are no longer threatened by assimilation, our languages are back in our communities, our people are learning who they are, and we are working together with Mother Earth so that we can all benefit as one again.”



# Finding her voice to make a difference back home

**Sequoia Osborne, Browning, MT**

Tribe: Blackfeet  
College: Montana Western  
Career Goal: Environmental Sustainability

Sequoia Osborne was intimidated. Here she was, just a high school kid, attending the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) meeting in Milwaukee, and she was being asked to do something that was incredibly stressful: lobby tribal leaders from across Indian Country to take action on the Farm Bill. That’s not how the average teenage girl spends her free time. But then there’s nothing average about Osborne, a young leader from the Blackfeet Reservation in Montana who is making an impact in a big way.

“That was one of the more intimidating things I have done,” she admitted. “I mean, here we are walking up to tribal leaders and saying, ‘Hey, I’m only 17 but you should listen to me.’ But they actually did listen to us. It definitely boosted my confidence.”

Osborne was 15 the first time she attended the Native Youth in Food and Agriculture Leadership Summit at the University of Arkansas. It exposed her to new ideas, new people and the depth and breadth of Indian agriculture. “I expected to meet a bunch of kids like me who had grown up on a ranch, but it was so much more diverse,” she said. “It opened my eyes to the types of opportunities I could have.” Osborne found that to be exciting. She also found something else during the time

at the Intertribal Agriculture Council (IAC) gathering: her voice.

Back home, Sequoia got involved in several activities including her school’s food pantry, a vital resource in an impoverished community. In 2019 she organized a day-long event that brought together students, teachers, health professionals and elders to address serious challenges in their school, including a wave of suicides. The community and the elders were very supportive. “I didn’t realize how much of a leader I was and how I was being shaped by the skills I had learned with IAC,” she said. “It has really shaped how I view myself and my capacity to be a leader in my community.”

Osborne is now studying environmental sustainability at the University of Western Montana. After earning her degree Sequoia plans to go back to Browning to help implement the Tribe’s Agricultural Resource Management Plan (ARMP) with the ultimate goal of helping her people achieve food sovereignty. She feels strongly that young adults need to return home and be part of the long-term solution to the community’s problems.

“I can’t even begin to stress how important that is. We have all grown up seeing the lack of that,” she said. “Our ancestors went through a lot, and we have been through many hardships. We really do owe it to the ones before us, and we owe it to ourselves and the ones coming up.”



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**Ellise David**  
**Warm Springs, OR**

Tribe:  
Confederated Tribes  
of Warm Springs

College:  
Central Oregon

Career Goal:  
Agribusiness

Ellise David celebrated her 14th birthday at the Intertribal Agriculture Council meeting in Las Vegas, and attended her first IAC Youth Summit later that year. What she learned back then would be life-changing. “The Ag Summit showed me that I can do something important regardless of my age,” she said. “I had this impression that I had to be a certain age and have a four-year degree to make an impact. They said I shouldn’t wait for an opportunity to come up, that I needed to make opportunities or else we’ll never get to where we need to be.”

That’s exactly what she has done. Despite pushback due to her age, David organized a food sovereignty assessment on her reservation. Later she lobbied in Washington with the Native Farm Bill Coalition, and has worked to sell her peers on careers in agriculture.

“We have so many issues in Indian Country that agriculture can solve,” she said. “We do need farmers and ranchers, of course, but we also need ag lawyers, welders, farriers, policy makers, marketers and more.”



**Ty Ducheneaux**  
**Timber Lake, SD**

Tribe:  
Cheyenne River  
Lakota

College:  
South Dakota State

Career Goal:  
Rancher and teacher

When Ty Ducheneaux was younger all he knew about agriculture was the fact it kept his dad from making it home in time for some of the boy’s football games. After attending his first IAC youth event, Ty’s views were transformed. “I think the biggest thing I went home with that first time was passion,” he said. “It made me understand the passion that my dad had for agriculture and happy that he was helping as many Native farmers and ranchers as possible.” Ty is pursuing a double major in American Indian Studies and history

at South Dakota State University and intends to pursue a career in education. At the same time he wants to be as involved as possible with the family ranch, a successful business operation that employs traditional ways of raising animals.

“I see myself in a reservation school,” Ty said. “Teachers can be a huge role model and make a lasting impact. Traditionally our elders were our teachers, and what they taught were life-long lessons. I think we need to revert back to that.”



**Mackenize Martinez**  
**Zwolle, LA**

Tribe:  
Choctaw Apache

College:  
McNeese State

Career Goal:  
Ag Policy

Mackenize Martinez grew up off the reservation in Zwolle, Louisiana, a tiny town about an hour south of Shreveport where there were 21 students in her graduating class. She was involved in Future Farmers of America (FFA) and 4-H youth activities, showing and judging livestock and learning a variety of skills including public speaking, leadership and entrepreneurship. Now majoring in Animal Science and intending to pursue a master’s degree, it is agricultural policy that has caught her interest. Martinez

lobbied for the Farm Bill in 2018 in Washington, D.C. and in 2020 interned with the U.S. House of Representatives Agriculture Committee.

“My career is definitely going to be in agriculture. That’s what I am passionate about,” Martinez said. “You don’t have to just go out and take care of your cows to be involved in agriculture. Everybody is involved in some kind of way. Long-term I want to be able to see the changes that I made in someone’s life through agriculture.”



**Josh Winnett**  
**Durant, OK**

Tribe:  
Choctaw Nation

College:  
Oklahoma State

Career Goal:  
Teacher

When young adults pursue higher education and have long-term career goals, so often their success can be traced back to the impact of one or two key people. For Josh Winnett, that person was his agricultural education teacher. “Seeing the dedication that my ag teacher had towards his students and towards me kind of triggered something that made me want to do that, to get involved in the lives of students and show them stuff they wouldn’t see otherwise,” he explained. Josh began his involvement with IAC youth

activities when he was 15. He learned a lot, made some good friends, and was inspired to take action back home where he grew up on a farm that has been in the family for generations. Now he is planning a career in agricultural education.

“I feel like that kind of mentorship is needed, especially for high school kids,” he said. “If you start going on the right path in high school then I think you are going to keep going on that right path after that.”





# ILTF summer interns: Where are they now?

Each year, Indian Land Tenure Foundation hires student interns who work on special projects that help to advance ILTF’s mission while broadening their understanding of Indian land issues and preparing students for future careers. Many go on to do great work, including 2006 intern Leah Sixkiller. She earned a bachelor’s degree from Harvard University and graduated from the University of Arizona School of Law.

Sixkiller practices with the firm of Faegre Drinker Biddle & Reath, LLP in Minneapolis. “My internship at ILTF was one of the most valuable experiences on the path to where I am today,” Sixkiller said. “I chose to work at ILTF for its strong presence in the national spotlight.”

Sixkiller, who is an enrolled member of the Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians, worked on a research project on the legal and political history of Indian land allotment. “At the time, the internship gave me the opportunity to meet

and learn from the knowledgeable staff,” she said, “and it helped me decide that I wanted to apply to law school that coming fall.”

Today Sixkiller works with Native nations, financial institutions, and developers, and is an expert in tribal law. She also provides pro bono counsel in the community. “In retrospect,” Sixkiller said, “I am so thankful for the connections I made that summer at ILTF, and that my experience solidified my path to becoming an Indian law attorney.”

Sixkiller isn’t the only former ILTF intern to earn a law degree and go on to do important work in Indian Country. Christina “Tina” Deschampe, a member of the Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, was an ILTF intern in 2005. Deschampe earned her Bachelor’s Degree in Criminal Justice from Hamline University and graduated from the University of Minnesota Law School. In 2011 she was named Chief Judge of the Grand Portage Tribal Court.



Former ILTF summer intern Leah Sixkiller



## ILTF Internships

ILTF hires Native and non-Native student interns each year who work on special projects that help to advance ILTF’s mission and goals while broadening the students’ understanding of Indian land issues.

Julius Snell was a graduate student at Syracuse University when he interned at ILTF in 2011, doing research on an Indian land database. Today he is a familiar face in tribal land offices across Indian Country thanks to his role as a Senior Advisor for Tribal Relations at the Department of the Interior. Snell helps Native landowners and nations navigate the complexities of the Land Buy-Back Program for Tribal Nations. He has been a presenter at the Tribal Land Staff National Conference, hosted annually by ILTF and the National Tribal Land Association.

### Julius Snell Washington, DC

Tribe:  
Navajo and  
Choctaw/Cherokee

College:  
Fort Lewis College  
Syracuse University



Not all former ILTF interns go on to pursue land-related careers. After earning her undergraduate degree at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minn., Gwendolyn Gilson was a summer intern at the Foundation in 2010 where she did research on land appraisal. She went on to earn master’s degrees from the University of Oklahoma and the University of Iowa before being awarded a Ph.D. in Religious Studies from Iowa, where she was a Fulbright Scholar. Today Gillson is an Assistant Professor of Asian Studies at Illinois College in Jacksonville.

### Gwendolyn Gilson Jacksonville, IL

College:  
Gustavus Adolphus  
University of Iowa

Career:  
College Professor



## The Message Runner



ILTF first published the *Message Runner* in 2002 to provide Indian people and others with much-needed information about Indian land tenure issues. Previous volumes include:

- Vol. 1** — "Restoring Indian Lands." Major issues surrounding Indian land tenure along with solutions and strategies.
- Vol. 2** — A primer on Indian estate planning and probate, including the 2004 American Indian Probate Reform Act (AIPRA). This volume was updated in 2019.
- Vol. 3** — "Rights-of-Way." History of rights-of-way in Indian Country, including a helpful how-to section for landowners and tribes.
- Vol. 4** — "From Removal to Recovery: Land Ownership in Indian Country," an historical account of Indian land ownership from pre-contact to today.

- Vol. 5** — "Cutting through the Red Tape: An Indian Landowner’s Guide to Reading and Processing Federal Forms."
- Vol. 6** — "Native Land Law: Can Native American People Find Justice in the U.S. Legal System?"
- Vol. 7** — "Now hiring! Exploring career opportunities in tribal land."
- Vol. 8** — "Appraisals are at the heart of federal trust responsibility."
- Vol. 9** — "Managing Indian land in a highly fractionated future."

To learn more about the *Message Runner*, visit [www.iltf.org/resources/publications](http://www.iltf.org/resources/publications). To order copies, email [info@iltf.org](mailto:info@iltf.org) or call (651)766-8999.



## Award-winning video game is remaking history

One of the keys to reaching young people with important messages is to deliver the information in ways that capture their attention and keep it. What better way to do that than with an educational video game like *When Rivers Were Trails*, which teaches students about the impact of allotment acts on Indigenous people. “There is a plethora of research that shows that when the learning process is memorable, then deeper learning takes place,” said Nicholas Emmons of the Indian Land Tenure Foundation, which released the game in 2019. “That was one of the motivating philosophies behind the creation of the video game.”

Set in the 1890s, the 2D educational game takes players on a journey across the west as Anishinaabeg displaced from their lands in Minnesota. Students meet Native Americans who are experiencing the life-changing impact of land allotment. Players are challenged to balance their physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being with foods and medicines.

The journey changes from game to game as players randomly encounter Indigenous people, animals and plants, and have run-ins with Indian Agents. Gameplay speaks to sovereignty, nationhood, and being reciprocal with land. The impact of the award-winning game has been profound. “We have teachers using the video game in classrooms as early as 3rd grade, with the teacher or teaching aide leading the game play and reading the narratives with the students,” said Emmons. “We also have a number of parents using the video game as part of their home-schooling.”



The reaction from teachers and parents has been overwhelmingly positive. “I never knew how to teach this history,” said John, an educator in Oregon. “We talk about the Trail of Tears in our textbook but it’s brief and doesn’t humanize the Indians forced from their home at gunpoint. But when I play the game, I feel a side of my own humanity I have never known.”

Keira teaches 3rd grade in California in a diverse setting. “When we played the video game, every student was paying full attention,” she said. “My one Native American student, who is usually very quiet in class, spoke up to tell us more about how his family gathers different berries on their family land. It was really fun for everyone.”

Moira is a home-school parent in Minnesota, whose 11-year-old enjoys the game. “Every time she plays, she asks me different questions about why this or that happened,” Moira said. “I don’t know all the answers, but your curriculum has helped me to understand the real history of the United States.”

Employing a team of more than 20 Indigenous writers and artists, the game was developed by ILTF in collaboration with Michigan State University’s Games for Entertainment and Learning Lab, thanks to support from the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians in California. It is available for free download for PC or MAC, iPads, Android tablets and Chromebooks.

## Telling stories that come to life in the classroom

Most U.S. public schools fail miserably when it comes to teaching American Indian history and culture. Students learn little about the Native nations and the people who originally inhabited this continent, their diverse values or customs when it comes to ownership of land, or how land in the U.S. was “acquired” from the tribes. That’s why the Indian Land Tenure Foundation (ILTF) developed the *Lessons of Our Land* curriculum, which brings culturally appropriate, locally relevant materials into the classroom.

*Lessons of Our Land* gives educators the opportunity to incorporate relevant materials about American Indian land tenure into pre-existing curriculum while at the same time satisfying state and federal educational requirements. The curriculum provides all students with a broader understanding of land, cultures, inherent rights, and tribal sovereignty,



and enables students to better appreciate American history and the importance of our relationship to the land. Perhaps more importantly, Indian students will see themselves and their ancestors reflected in their classroom materials, often for the first time.

“This curriculum tells a forgotten history,” said Marta, a 4th grade teacher in Montana. “The

curriculum is really helpful because the lessons are easily taught by someone who doesn’t know American Indian history very well,” said Akisa, who teaches 2nd grade in Minnesota.

The *Lessons of Our Land* curriculum enables Pre-K through 12th grade teachers to easily incorporate Native American stories, lessons and games about land, cultures, histories and languages into regular classroom instruction. The website ([lessonsofourland.org](http://lessonsofourland.org)) has more than 200 searchable lessons that are ready to use in the classroom. ILTF also provides professional development on the curriculum.

All of the lessons can be used in any state, but there are also lessons designed specifically for use in California, South Dakota, Montana and Minnesota.

For more information on the curriculum, visit [www.lessonsofourland.org](http://www.lessonsofourland.org)



The Indian Land Tenure Foundation (ILTF) is a national, community-based organization focused on American Indian land recovery and management. ILTF’s primary aim is to ensure that all reservation and important off-reservation lands are owned and managed by Indian people and Indian nations.

As a community foundation, ILTF relies on funding from private foundations and donations from Indian nations, corporations and individuals to support its programming in Indian Country. Please consider making a donation to the Indian Land Tenure Foundation today.

To learn more about our work and programs, and to make a donation, visit our website at: [www.iltf.org](http://www.iltf.org).

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