

Eagle-Condor Exchange Strengthens International Indigenous Relationships 7-07

Dear Editor,

The Eagle-Condor Exchange Project has sparked a number of new currents and a building momentum that cuts across continents and national boundaries. Through the aegis of Oregon State's USAID supported Aquaculture Collaborative Research Support Program (ACRSP), Heifer International's Indian Nations Program, and the Indigenous Environmental Network, American Indian "Eagles" had the opportunity to exchange and share information about the water world with Shipibo and Chontal Mayans - "Condors" in Peru and Mexico respectively.

The results of these extraordinary visits planted the seed for future tribal community relationships in regard to revitalizing, restoring and relating in traditional ways to issues central to the water world. Overall the major outcome of these successful exchanges illustrated a turn toward precepts derived from Traditional Knowledge in seeking to reassert Indigenous Sovereignty and interconnected ways to act in relationship to shared resources and experiences.

In Peru, Wilson Wewa (Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs), Larry Campbell (Swinomish), David

Vanderhoop (Wampanoag), Tom Edwards (Lummi), Jeff Thomas (Muckleshoot), William "Jimbo" Simmons (Choctaw), and BJ McManama (Seneca) comprised the Eagle delegation.

They were hosted by Dr. Fred Chu of Instituto de Investigaciones de la Amazonía Peruana (IIAP), located in Pucallpa, an upper Ucayali River town. The Eagles were also accompanied by Paul Smith (Oneida), who serves as Heifer International's Director of the Indian Nations Program.

In presentations, informal talks and visits to two remote Amazonian riverside villages, the Condors discussed their traditional livelihoods that were threatened by corporate encroachment, lack of indigenous rights and an absent, aloof, and sometimes corrupt government bureaucracy. Sustainable forest and fish harvest, and crafts comprised the traditional practices, and were the focus of discussions.

Interestingly, a visit to one remote lakeshore site featured a large "paiche" experimental industrial scale cage culture project. The paiche is an ancient fish, revered over the centuries by many indigenous communities in South America as a source of food, adornments, tools and their collective mythology. Eagle and Condor impressions were mixed, given that this effort

was initiated and largely run by outside government officials, with the villagers serving mainly as laborers and guards over the US \$250,000 investment. Eagles however, were favorably impressed with efforts of the Shipibo/Condor communities to raise juvenile paiche for stock enhancement purposes, as this activity fits traditional fishery practices that began thousands of years ago.

In Mexico, Eagle delegates David Vanderhoop, Tom Edwards, William Simmons, and BJ McManama were hosted by Dr. Wilfrido Contreras Sanchez and Mr. Ulyses Hernandez Vidal from the Universidad Juarez Autonoma' de Tabasco located in the coastal plain city of Villahermosa.

The combined delegation also included Alejandro Musalem, Heifer International's Mexico Country Director.

In contrast to Peru, the Chontal Condors demonstrated what amounts to the beginnings of a vibrant aquaculture network. Village-run hatcheries, small scale tank and cage culture contributed to local food security and modest yet sustainable economic improvement.

At the same time, the Eagles observed and discussed with the Condors the ever-present threats to water quality from industrial oil production, land tenure issues and limited agricultural productivity. The

Eagle responses to these issues were to consistently reaffirm cultural, spiritual and traditional ways - while also offering technical advice and suggestions for action based on similar experiences within their communities.

In summary, the Eagle-Condor exchanges vastly exceeded initial expectations. The success of these meetings was supported through shared traditional protocol and respect that has, in the past with non-indigenous groups, been lacking in advancing Indigenous sovereignty and standards. In both countries, the Eagles were introduced to universities founded by educators who have gone to great lengths to preserve ancient indigenous knowledge and pass this collective perspective on to future generations.

In Mexico, the Chontal from the communities of Bocca de Chilapa, Tucta, and Simon Sirlat were able to travel with the Eagles to Misul Ha, a Chole' community and a visit to the ancient Mayan ruins at Palenque. Additionally, Condors were introduced to their Mayan counterparts in the Lacondones communities of Metzobak and Na Ha, who have preserved and practice a great deal of their ancient lifeways and ceremonies.

The group was honored by a visit to a protected sacred site and a special invitation to participate in a Mayan ceremony

conducted by a Lacondones Elder and Spiritual leader. These experiences were especially valuable in building a regional network but more importantly in regard to natural and cultural resource restoration. In all, this is the underlying yet central focus of these exchanges.

At present, the organizational vehicle for strengthening the significant international momentum that has resulted from these exchanges is the Indigenous Aquaculture Network (IAN). The IAN is overseen by the Indigenous Environmental Network in a manner that keeps consistent with the desired balance between the need for economic development and maintaining traditional practices and standards in relation to the water world. As such, a network of this scope and magnitude is unique and vital in that it provides for the re-establishment of a sound indigenous basis for understanding, proceeding and practicing cultural and spiritual traditions on the pathway to a healthy and sustainable future. Upon returning home, Eagles have been active in holding presentations with various Tribal members, councils and the general public.

For fish culture practitioners and community representatives that would like more information about our exchanges and future projects, please contact: Tom Goldtooth - ien@igc.org / 218-751-4967 or BJ McManama - nativefish@bellsouth.net / 828-628-2862.

BJ McManama and Michael Skladany

Websites:

Oregon State ACRSP:

http://pdacrsp.oregonstate.edu/pubs/featured_titles/eagle-condor.html

Heifer International: www.heifer.org

Indigenous Environmental Network: www.ienearth.org

Indigenous Aquaculture Network: www.ienearth.org/ienaqua