

Eagles, Condors build community between continents

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PUCALLPA, Peru - Eagle delegates from the Indigenous Aquaculture Network landed in Peru on April 22 and were greeted by Condor representatives in Pucallpa for a weeklong exchange of shared issues, perspectives and knowledge.

The Eagles included indigenous representatives from the tribal programs of the Puyallup, Lummi, Swinomish and Gay Head Wampanoag nations, an Eagle team leader representing the Indigenous Environmental Network/International Indian Treaty Council, a Paiute man who is one of the recognized spiritual leaders of the Northwest Plateau and a Seneca woman who is a freelance journalist and former assistant editor for a fish-farming industry publication. The Condors were representatives of the Shipibo peoples of the Ucayali River region (Amazon River basin).

The idea for a network of this kind was conceived at the Native Food Summit in 2003. At that time participants acknowledged that the water world and the interlinking systems were in ever-increasing danger from external factors of development from globalization market demands, which has culminated in continued natural resource extraction and direct negative cultural impacts.

As the goals and mission of the IAN were defined, the network expanded and attracted the support of Heifer International's Indian Nations project and Oregon State University's Aquaculture Collaborative Research Support Program.

From the first IAN conference to this Eagle/Condor exchange, members have shared their ideas, expertise and their hopes for the future of aquaculture and fisheries resources based on indigenous sovereignty and standards.

Tribal governments in the United States have had a long and difficult battle with non-indigenous stakeholders over usage and harvesting rights. Treaties, as they were written and understood by tribal nations, have assisted in maintaining control over ancestral lands and resources.

For the Shipibo and other tribal groups in Peru, these are also centuries-old issues, from European conquerors seeking precious metals to modern-day multinational corporations clear-cutting the rainforests for exotic hardwoods, exploiting animals and fish, oil and mineral extraction and the environmental devastation left behind.

The indigenous peoples of Peru have little or no legal control over their traditional land and waters. However, Peru's current government has recognized and granted some sovereignty over tribal land bases and resources, which could change with new administrations and corporate influence in the future.

During the weeklong exchange, the Eagles traveled to two Shipibo villages several hours from Pucallpa by boat up and down the Ucayali River and its

tributaries. Eagle delegates were able to see firsthand the effects of deforestation and everything connected to the rivers, including the people.

Eagle delegates also visited the Pucallpa campus of the Institute of Environmental Investigations of the Pacific for presentations of aquaculture operations and the International Intercultural University of the Amazon, which is in its first year of operation. Classes at the university include native/indigenous plant identification, preservation and restoration.

During the daily exchanges, integrating modern technology was a continuing theme. It was agreed and discussed that when technology works with nature or enhances the balance it is a good thing, but when technology attacks nature it should be abandoned or modified to serve the people and the environment.

At issue is the introduction of fish farming of Paiche, a highly prized and sacred native fish that was over-harvested by nonindigenous fishing. The Shipibos' goal is to return this fish to the rivers and lakes of the region and provide jobs and economic growth for their communities.

Wilson Wewa, Pauite, spiritual leader from the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, offered a more traditional perspective on this issue:
"Some things I have heard, I disagree with. I don't know if it's good or bad. My ancestors would not agree because [aquaculture is] not natural ... the fish may not be able to return to their natural ways as they rely on [food] pellets and unnatural spawning. More work needs to be done to put the fish back into the rivers so they will multiply on their own ... so when you throw your nets into the river you will find fish."

Juan Chavez Mufioz, Shipib, and technical coordinator for the Association for the Investigation and the Integral Development of the Amazon Region, summed up the exchange for the Condors.

"I am happy to have met and gotten to know our brothers and sister from the north. Our ancestors didn't know how to write but they were wise - some missionaries taught us some things but we were later disrespected - our way of viewing our world, our language and spirituality. Things have now changed. We feel stronger now because of our time together. We still want a connection and continued exchange. Thank you for helping us to be strong."

Another Eagle/Condor exchange is planned for Mexico this fall. Also planned are continuing contact and technical support for the Shipibo as they work toward repairing years of exploitation of the land and their cultures.

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