



Education Youth Media Professional Development Connect Blog

## How the #LandBack Movement Might Help Save the Planet



### ABOVE THE NOISE

## Land Back: The Indigenous Fight to Reclaim Stolen Lands

By [Cheyenne Bearfoot](#) Apr 21, 2022

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Millenia prior to contact with Colonizers, Indigenous Peoples throughout what is now North America and other parts of the globe were the sovereign caretakers of the land; each tribal nation with their own sustainable practices for obtaining natural resources, and mindful preventative measures that limited the chance of environmental catastrophes. However, with the onset of colonization, Indigenous Peoples were forcibly removed from the picture, and racist policies were enacted to prevent tribal nations from carrying out such traditional practices.

**TEACHERS:** Guide your students to practice civil discourse about current topics and get practice writing CER (claim, evidence, reasoning) responses. *Explore lesson supports.*

Check out the [Reparations in California Project](#) to understand the importance of Indigenous land reclamation as a form of reparations.

But some Indigenous communities are reclaiming their power by continuing to demonstrate that humans can share a reciprocal relationship with nature that minimizes negative impacts on the environment. Current [research](#) shows that [areas managed by Indigenous communities are as equally healthy as some protected areas](#), like our National Parks. With a consistent track record of meeting the needs of the land, why isn't the United States giving the land back to Indigenous Peoples to manage? And what are Indigenous communities doing to not only combat climate change but reclaim stolen land?

### How Were Indigenous Peoples Removed From Their Ancestral Homelands?

Historically, Indigenous People are viewed as an inconvenience to Western expansion, and the creation of National Parks isn't an exception to this narrative. Colonizers forcibly removed Native Americans from their ancestral homelands utilizing a variety of tactics: starving tribes by destroying their food sources, tricking tribal leaders into signing treaties, and murdering entire Indigenous communities. ([Which, was perfectly legal and people were often monetarily compensated for doing this dirty work.](#)) Between the 1600s through the early 1900s the government paid people the equivalent of \$12,000 in today's currency per scalp of each Indigenous man and HALF of that for each Indigenous woman.

## What Is The Land Back Movement?

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An Indigenous-led environmental, cultural and political movement that seeks to place Indigenous land back in Indigenous hands. The concept for this movement began when Colonizers first came into contact with Indigenous tribes over 500 years ago, and tribes fiercely defended their sovereign right over their ancestral territories. However, Land Back as a movement with the power to mobilize not only different Indigenous communities, but non-Indigenous allies in the fight against environmental injustice, was catapulted into broader mainstream consciousness in recent years. #LandBack began trending on social media during the height of the No Dakota Access Pipeline (#NODAPL) protests on the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation between 2016 and 2017, which helped highlight the struggles Indigenous communities were facing.

Following the protests at Mt. Rushmore in July of 2020, the Indigenous organization **NDN Collective** created a formal Land Back campaign that launched later that same year. Although acquiring sovereignty over stolen lands is a key goal, Land Back seeks to heal and reclaim other things that are connected to land reclamation: languages and ceremonies, governmental sovereignty, food, and housing security; equitable access to healthcare and education. All part of a larger goal to dismantle white supremacy and uplift BIPOC groups.

## What Are The Key Differences Between Colonial and Indigenous Land Management?

There are two big differences between the Indigenous and Colonizer relationship with nature. Historically, the general vibe of Colonizer culture as modeled in the Bible is that nature is something to control and dominate: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth. (Genesis, 1:26-28)" In contrast, many Indigenous tribes believe in a cosmological relationship with all things and value reciprocity between themselves and the land. Human beings are viewed as equal to nature, not above it.

## Can Indigenous Land Stewardship Mitigate Climate Change?

Research shows that lands managed by Indigenous communities in **Brazil, Australia, and Canada** are equally and sometimes even MORE biodiverse than special conservation lands managed by the governments. **Indigenous Environmental Network and Oil Change International** discovered that **Indigenous-led actions against fossil fuel projects in the US and Canada have prevented or delayed a quarter of annual carbon dioxide emissions from both countries.**

## Examples of Indigenous Land Reclamation

The Esselen tribe purchased **1,200 acres in Big Sur, California after 250 years** to be used for educational, cultural, and conservation purposes. **In January of this year, the group Save the Redwoods League, purchased 523 acres of forest in Mendocino County and then transferred ownership of the property to the Intertribal Sinkiyone Wilderness Council, which consists of a group of 10 Native tribes who will serve as the protectors of the land in partnership with the League.**

These success stories demonstrate that adopting Indigenous land stewardship practices and returning land back to Indigenous people is not only beneficial to all, but possible.

## SOURCES:

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<https://landback.org/>

### NDN Collective: LandBack

<https://ndncollective.org/ndn-collective-landback-campaign-launching-on-indigenous-peoples-day-2020/>

### Indigenous Climate Action

<https://www.indigenousclimateaction.com/>

### Stop Line 3

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### Seven Indigenous Climate Activists You Should Know About

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### International Indigenous Youth Council

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