



Chief Chester Brooks, Delaware Tribe of Indians and President Kerry Holton, Delaware Nation sign historic Memorandum of Understand with US Forest Service Eastern Region.

MEDIA RELEASE

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TRIBES RETURN HOME, SIGN HISTORIC AGREEMENT

At the close of a three-day collaborative meeting at Grey Towers National Historic Site, the Delaware Tribe of Indians and Delaware Nation executed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Forest Service Eastern Region for the reburial of ancestral human remains on national forest lands throughout the Eastern Region.

The Delaware Tribe and Delaware Nation are two federally-recognized Indian Tribes now headquartered in Oklahoma whose ancestral homelands are in New York, New Jersey, and Eastern Pennsylvania. Prior to this agreement, the tribes wanted to rebury human remains repatriated from museums, but they did not have a secure place to establish a new burial ground. With this document, it now establishes the ability to do this on national Forest Service land in the Eastern Region.

“We know of thousands of ancestral remains held by museums and other institutions that need to be put to rest. But prior to this, we didn’t have a place to do so, and we couldn’t move forward with reburials,” said Chet Brooks, Chief of the Delaware Tribe of Indians. “This agreement has removed that obstacle, and I look forward to working with the Forest Service to establish burial grounds as close as possible to where the ancestors were originally interred.”

“It’s time to bring our ancestors home,” said Kerry Holton, President of the Delaware Nation. “We appreciate the Forest Service providing us with a home to rebury our ancestors.”

The Miami Tribe of Oklahoma signed a similar memorandum of understanding with the Forest Service in 2016. “This agreement has given the Miami Tribe a place to rebury our ancestors close to where they lived and died,” said Diane Hunter, Tribal Historic Preservation Officer for the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma.

These agreements represent further steps in strengthening the relationship between the Forest Service and federally-recognized tribes: “In recent years, the number of self-identified Indian groups and individuals has increased in our region. Federal agencies like the Forest Service recognize this concern and are proud to affirm that we only work with federally-recognized tribal nations,” said Bill Dauer, Director of Grey Towers.

“Groups making unsubstantiated tribal claims undermine the sovereignty and misrepresent our history and culture, which is damaging to both the public and the tribal nations,” said Holton.

States do not have the legal standing to recognize Indian tribes. This authority is reserved to the Federal Government under the Commerce Clause of the United States Constitution. Federal recognition is the United States’ acknowledgement of tribal sovereignty and subsequent government to government relationship with tribal nations based on past treaties, administrative process, or acts of congress with such tribal nations. There are no federally-recognized tribes currently headquartered in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. However, they may soon have a presence in the region again. According to John Donahue, Superintendent of Delaware Water Gap (DEWA), “The Delaware Water Gap is waiting with open arms to work with the federally-recognized Delaware tribes to establish a cultural center within the park boundary.”



In addition to the two Delaware tribes, also present at this historic gathering were representatives of the Shawnee Tribe, the Absentee Shawnee Tribe, Stockbridge-Munsee Community, and the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma. The sole purpose of the meeting at Grey Towers was to allow the opportunity to address the issues faced by these federally-recognized tribes that have been removed from their original homelands in the Eastern region.

President Kerry Holton and NAGPRA Coordinator Nekole Alligood, Delaware Nation; DTHPO Assistant Larry Heady, Chief Chester Brooks, and DTHPO Director Brice Obermeyer, Delaware Tribe of Indians