

California Agricultural Land Equity Task Force Land Access, Acquisition, and Ancestral Land Return Subcommittee Meeting Summary: January 28, 2025

DRAFT until approved at subsequent meeting

Meeting Called to Order

Facilitator Wylie started the meeting at 1:04 p.m.

Welcome and Housekeeping

Facilitator Wylie provided housekeeping information for all meeting participants. Slides and materials presented during the meeting are available on the Strategic Growth Council ([SGC](#)) [website](#).

Roll Call

Roll call was conducted by the facilitator. Members present:

- Nelson Hawkins, Agricultural Land Equity Task Force Chair
- Emily Burgueno, Agricultural Land Equity Task Force Vice Chair
- Nathaniel Brown
- Ruth Dahlquist-Willard
- Darlene Franco
- Liya Schwartzman

Members absent:

- Lawrence Harlan
- James Nakahara
- Doria Robinson
- Qi Zhou

Quorum was established.

Action: Approval of Past Meeting Summary

Approval of September 26, 2024, meeting summary.

Task Force Discussion:

No discussion.

Action:

Vice Chair Burgueno moved to approve the September meeting summary. Chair Hawkins seconded the motion.

Motion passes (3 ayes, 0 nays, 3 abstentions, 4 absences).

Speaker

Staff introduced guest speaker Dr. Cutcha Risling Baldy, Rou Dalagurr: Food Sovereignty Lab & Traditional Ecological Knowledges Institute, Cal Poly – Humboldt.

Dr. Risling Baldy provided a presentation on Land Back, sharing the following and more:

- Land Back began in 1493.
- A good land acknowledgement should be followed by action.
- The [California #LandBack Special Report](#) includes policy recommendations.
- The [panel session recordings](#) from the 2023 Northern California Land Back Symposium contain valuable information.
- Native people know a time before colonialism and have carried that knowledge through generations, and they know what the world would be like post-colonization.
- Tribal Nations have proven to be great environmental land stewards, increasing biodiversity and restoration.
- Governor Newsom has acknowledged the connection between land return and climate resiliency.
- Land return should be perceived as joyful.
- A part of the story of the Wiyot land return.
- Land ownership is incredibly stratified.
 - White families are significantly wealthier than all other ethnic groups.
 - The top 1% of households own approximately 40% of non-home real estate.
 - The top 10 agricultural landowners are white.
 - White Americans own more than 98% of U.S. land.
 - The two families owning the most land in California, Oregon, and Washington own eight times more land than all California Tribal Nations combined.
- Forty-five percent of California land is owned by the federal government.
- Nationally, Tribal Nations have roughly 56 million acres of land in trust with the Bureau of Indian Affairs.
- Land trusts own more land than Tribal Nations.
- Tribal Nations lost land as a result of the gold rush, allotment, federal government acquisition, and more.
- Treaties with California Tribal Nations were drafted but ultimately never ratified.

A question-and-answer session was then hosted between subcommittee members and Dr. Risling Baldy where the following was shared:

- Subcommittee members reaffirmed that for Land Back to be true Land Back it must be unconditional.
 - Dr. Risling Baldy encouraged viewing the theft of land from California Tribal Nations akin to the theft of one's computer; the computer should be returned without conditions, as should land back to California Tribal Nations.

- Members asked about the details of the Wiyot land return, and Dr. Risling Baldy shared the following:
 - The land returned was considered surplus land and significantly degraded, but it was returned without restrictions.
 - The Wiyot people used their time, money, and resources to restore the land.
 - The Wiyot people created a land return organization.
 - Cal Poly – Humboldt also directly returned land to the Wiyot people through a grant that it received.
- Members noted the potential difficulty of determining which Tribal Nation a piece of land should be returned to, in response to which Dr. Risling Baldy shared the following:
 - Tribal Nations should be asked how to address such challenges.
 - All California land is associated with California Tribal Nations.
 - This work may take time, so it is important to start the work now.
 - Opportunities should be created for Tribal Nations to come together and engage with each other on this topic.
- Dr. Risling Baldy also shared the following:
 - California Tribal Nations should be able to set the context and goals of the land returned to them.
 - Current state programs, such as 30x30, often place restrictions on land returned to Tribal Nations, but Tribal Nations know how to build without harming the environment.
 - State officials and other government employees engaging with Tribal Nations should figure out how to meet the needs of Tribal Nations rather than focusing on all the ways those needs currently cannot be met.
 - Tribal Nations are often burdened with too many engagement requests; those engaging with them should respect this.
 - Co-management agreements should have Tribal Nations as the primary manager and should advance the needs and desires of Tribal Nations; authority should not be split evenly.
- Members asked for Dr. Risling Baldy’s input on recommendations for the Task Force to consider including in its report, to which she suggested the following:
 - Increase funding for Tribal Nations to acquire and restore land.
 - Be explicit that the goal is land return.
 - In hiring decisions, prioritize members of Tribal Nations and their perspectives, along with those who have received education on matters pertaining to Tribal affairs.
 - In California state government agencies, have an employee or team of employees directly working with Tribal Nations on land return.

Working Session

The Subcommittee then discussed key takeaways from the guest speaker presentation, including the following:

- Dr. Risling Baldy used clear, easy-to-understand language to effectively convey what true Land Back is and how it is possible without stipulations.
- The caretaking of land by Tribal Nations leads to different outcomes than with developers.
- The statistics in Dr. Risling Baldy’s presentation can be helpful in establishing the background and context for the Task Force’s work.
- Land return often requires funding for planning and restoration, not just land maintenance.
- Land trusts have many challenges associated with them.
- The consolidation of land ownership in a few hands demonstrates that current conditions are systemic.

Staff then asked what additional questions Task Force members may have. Subcommittee members shared the following questions:

- With so much California land held by the federal government, what can California’s national representatives do to transfer federal land back to Tribal Nations?
- How does the presentation from today connect with Tribal land trusts?
 - How and why was the Native American Land Conservancy developed?
 - Who were the key people involved?
 - What has the process been like?
 - Has it produced true land return or co-management?
 - What language do Tribal land trusts use?
 - How long did it take to set up these Tribal land trusts?
 - How many have been set up?
- Could a certain percentage of the State’s budget go to funding land return?
- Could a system be developed that grants Tribal Nations first right of refusal when land becomes available for purchase and then grants socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers second right of refusal?
 - Can land acquisition under a first right of refusal be of no cost to Tribal Nations?

The subcommittee then discussed next steps:

- Member Franco will join the Land Back Working Group.
- Member Schwartzman will join the Land Succession Strategies Working Group.
 - Staff will follow up with this working group.
- Staff will follow up with the Land Markets Working Group after the February meeting.

Public Comment:

No public comment.

General Public Comment:

No public comment.

The meeting adjourned at 3:00 p.m.