



National Congress of American Indians

NCAI News

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DESECRATION OF NATIVE AMERICAN SACRED SITES
TOPIC OF MARCH 20 FORUM IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

(Washington, D.C.) The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) will host a Native American Sacred Lands Protection Forum at the Sidney Yates Auditorium of the U.S. Department of Interior (DOI) (1849 C Street, N.W., Washington, D.C.) on Wednesday, March 20, 1-5 p.m., to discuss why and how federal agencies should protect Native American sacred lands. The forum --open to the general public -- will include American Indian leaders and federal government officials. The Department of Interior also will announce a new initiative to protect sacred sites.

"Every year, our sacred sites – so integral to the practice of our religions – are being destroyed," said Tex G. Hall, NCAI President. "It is our hope that this forum will start raising awareness in the Nation's Capital about the importance of our sacred lands, the well being of our cultures, and the health of the earth."

A screening of *In the Light of Reverence*, an award-winning documentary film, will take place at 1 p.m. The film tells the stories of three communities and their struggles to protect sacred sites: the Lakota at Devil's Tower, Wyo.; the Hopi in the Southwest Four Corners area; and the Wintu at Mt. Shasta, Calif. The film documents obstacles to religious freedom for land-based practitioners and impacts on sacred sites that range from mining and ski resorts to New Age practices and rock-climbing. *In the Light of Reverence* was nationally broadcast on PBS in August 2001.

At 2:30 p.m., a keynote speech by Lakota author and historian Vine Deloria Jr. will address the history and status of sacred land protection. Deloria is the author of *Custer Died for Your Sins*; *God is Red*; *For This Land: Writings on Religion in America*; and many others.

A panel discussion featuring Tex G. Hall; Eddie Tullis of the United South and Eastern Tribes (USET); Vine Deloria Jr.; and Department of Interior Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Neal McCaleb (invited) will follow.

The forum also will bring together members of the newly formed Sacred Lands Protection Coalition, which includes representatives from the Association on American Indian Affairs; Seventh Generation Fund; and the Native American Rights Fund. "The Coalition plans to seek Congressional

oversight hearings and legislation to ensure that the U.S. government fulfills its trust responsibilities to Native Americans, including freedom of religion,” said Hall.

U.S. Rep. Nick Rahall (D-W.Va.), has already announced his intention to introduce legislation to protect sacred lands.

The Sacred Lands Protection Forum is hosted by NCAI and coordinated by Christopher McLeod, Sacred Land Film Project of Earth Island Institute; Emogene Bevitt, U.S. National Park Service (DOI); Kevin Tennyson, Office of the American Indian Trust (DOI); Pemina Yellow Bird, Cultural Resources Representative, Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation; Danny Gogal, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Environmental Justice; and Lillian Sparks, NCAI.

The Sacred Land Film Project (www.sacredland.org), producer of *In the Light of Reverence*, has been working with a broad coalition of Native American Tribal governments, activist groups and federal officials to raise awareness of the issue of threats to Native American sacred places.

Additional information is available at the NCAI web site: www.ncai.org. Media inquiries about the DOI initiative can be addressed to Nedra Darling, Director of Public Affairs at the DOI Bureau of Indian Affairs (202) 219-4152.

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