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Prayers In Stone Project

Native Sites Stewardship Program

In collaboration with the Littleton Conservation Trust

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Mission Statement: Preservation, Protection, and Education of Native Ceremonial Stone Landscapes (CSLs) in the historical tribal lands of Sagamore Tahattawan's Nashope.

Introduction

The Prayers in Stone Project is a vision shared of Native Sagamores and CSL researchers here in Nashobah. It brings together the principle of Native leadership in Native cultural areas with CSL avocational research.

Prayers in Stone fills a leadership-by-example role in the community. It is based on collaboration and partnerships, it interacts with the local area as an organic whole, not as a land divided by town lines and highways. It is Native-led and operates from a Native-style respect for the stones, it recognizes and honors the spiritual aspects of sacred sites, and is non-invasive, both in the physical and spiritual sense.

Nashope & Nashobah Village

At the heart of Tahattawan's Nashope – and the Prayers Project – is Tahattawan's principle village of Nashobah, which is part of the 1654 Nashobah Praying Indian Plantation, and is located in the environs of the Sarah Doublet Forest.

Our work starts here – at Nashobah Village and – radiates outwards to abutting towns, and then towns in the 2007 USET* resolution 2003:022.

1. Nashobah Praying Indian Village towns:
Littleton, Boxborough, Acton
2. Abutting towns:
Harvard, Ayer, Groton, Westford
3. USET towns:
Carlisle, Concord, Lincoln, Stow

Native Leadership

The Prayers in Stone Project – and Site Stewardship – is Native-led. Prayers in Stone believes that Native culture should be in the hands of Natives.

Further, there is a spiritual aspect to the Native ceremonial stone sites. We feel the appropriate voice on the spiritual aspects of Native sacred sites is from Native medicine people.

The Prayers in Stone Project is under the guidance of Strong Bear Medicine, the Sagamore of the Nashobah Praying Indians. The Native sites in the local area are under his spiritual care and spiritual oversight.

Prayers in Stone has both Guides and Stewards:

- Guides: Strong Bear Medicine & Dan Boudillion
- Charter Members & Stewards: Kevin Gallant, Bettina Abe, Lyle Webster, Dustin Neild, and Jic Davis.

Sagamore Strong Bear Medicine is the spiritual guide and voice of Prayers in Stone. Daniel V. Boudillion is the coordinator of the Project.

Charter Members

The Prayers in Stone Charter Members have been specially chosen. They are all people of good heart, sensitive to Native sacred sites and respectful of them. Many are recognized experts in the CSL community.

Littleton Conservation Trust

The Prayers in Stone Project is in collaboration with the Littleton Conservation Trust (LCT), and is part of the LCT umbrella. Littleton is at the heart of Sagamore Tahattawan's Nashope, and the LCT's Sarah Doublet Forest & Nature Preserve is the site of Tahattawan's principle village: Nashobah Village.

The Littleton Conservation Trust, due to the lands it is entrusted with, has a leadership role in way-showing stewardship and preservation of Native ceremonial sites. Nashobah Village is the heart of Nashope, and is the vision quest center of the original lands. What we do here to steward and preserve radiates out into the wider community.

Interconnectedness

When the Native ceremonial sites were made, the world was not divided up in English towns, or by lines on maps, or severed by roads and highways. The land was a whole, and people thought and lived within this whole, rather than thinking and living within the mental boundaries of a set town, or the physical boundaries of highways that act as barriers and walls.

To best understand the sites requires their original context. The Prayers in Stone Project sees through the modern overlay of towns and highways to the original interconnectedness and site relationships. And as much, as we step out of the mental cage of town boundaries and see ourselves in light of the Nashope lands as a whole, we step into collaborations as a whole, as one people, rather than folk divided by towns and local politics.

Prayers in Stone is not a towns-centric project, but a land-as-a-whole project, radiating out from

Tahattawan's Nashobah Village. To understand the stones in context, we have to see the land as it was at the time the sites were constructed: as a whole. This is as much a spiritual principle as it is a physical one.

Site Stewardship

At the heart of our work is individual Stewardship of Native sacred sites on local Town and Trust lands, in collaboration with the Towns and Trusts involved. (Private land is a more complex issue.) Each Native sacred site is entrusted to a qualified Steward. Site Stewardship is taught by Strong Bear Medicine (and Daniel V. Boudillion), and only select people are entrusted with this responsibility.

Site Stewardship is Native-led. We feel the learning required to steward Native sacred sites must come from Native medicine people and be under their guidance. Stewards are chosen from people that seek to walk this path.

Part of Stewardship – the most visible part – involves walking the sites, archiving pictures, GPSing features, mapwork and reports. But the heart of Stewardship isn't the site reports.

The heart of Stewardship of a Native sacred site is learning its ways, watching over it, building relationship with it, and speaking for it with its voice.

Part of Stewardship is learning how to interact with sites in a Native-style respectful way, and teaching others how to do so. Stewardship is as much about learning as it is about unlearning.

The Prayers in Stone Project is currently Stewarding 9 Native sacred stone sites in the local Nashobah area.

Education

The Prayers Project is here to help educate local communities on preservation and protection of Native ceremonial sites. We collaborate with local Conservation Trusts and Commissions, and Historical Societies and Commissions, to help educate on Native sites including: how they are identified, means of preservation and protection, and how to interact with Native sites in a respectful way as outlined from a Native viewpoint. We are here to advise and help.

Our teaching tools include:

- Littleton-Nashobah Native Sites Protocol Worksheet (Site Identification Worksheet)
- Assessment Criteria for Ceremonial Stone Landscape (CSL) Environments
- Guidelines on Respectful Interaction with Native Ceremonial Stone Sites
- Best Practices in Preserving and Protecting Native Sacred Sites
- A Handbook of Stone Structures in Northeastern United States by Mary Gage

Public Education

We also help educate the public on Native ceremonial sites. The goal is awareness and respect, and fostering the ideals and practice of Stewardship. We are all stewards of this green earth, we all have a role to play.

Prayers in Stone provides formal and informal programs, including Native led Walk & Talks and slide presentations. Please ask us about these. We are happy to bring awareness to the community, as well as simply talk and mingle with people who wish to walk and learn the path of stewardship and preservation.

The Way of Collaboration

Collaboration is at the heart of Prayers in Stone, it is our Way. We seek to work together with others in Nashobah on the preservation, protection, and education of Native ceremonial stone structures. We are all part of one large Nashobah area unity. Historical Societies and Commissions, Land Trusts, Conservation Commissions, interest groups like Friends of Pine Hawk, selectboard members, and more, are all part of the good folks that make up our Way.

Part of our Way is to host informal roundtable talks with local towns on preservation and protection, and share best practices.

We feel that collaboration is the spirit best suited to the sacred sites themselves.

Vandalism of Native Sites

Unfortunately, vandalism of Native sacred sites is an ongoing issue. There are sites in Acton, Littleton, and Harvard that have been vandalized in recent years. This ranges from rearranging stones, graffiti issues, to destroying structures.

Education vs. Secrecy

The discussion on how to best preserve and protect sites has been ongoing in the community. The two basic positions are: should we protect via education, or protect via secrecy? Both have their points, but neither provides a complete answer. Part of this is because these structures are in the open woods which is a situation that carries with it a certain level of risk of vandalism no matter what one does.

Best Practices in Preserving and Protecting Native Sacred Sites

We cannot preserve and protect Native sacred sites without knowing what are the most effective methods, and what exactly contributes to vandalism of these sites.

Towards this end, the Prayers in Stone Project initiated a study on vandalism of Native sacred sites. This involved gathering the known examples of Native site vandalism in the local community and analyzing the data. After analyzing the data, it was clearly identified what causes, and what mitigates, vandalism. The study data clearly showed what works and what doesn't.

See: Best Practices in Preserving and Protecting Native Sacred Sites.

From this the Prayers in Stone Project developed a set of Best Practices for use in the community. So far one town has put the Best Practices into play, and others have requested copies of the study.

This is a breakthrough study. To date, the discussion has been along emotional lines, with no collection and study of occurrences of vandalism, analysis of data, or drawing conclusions.

We are now in the position where we have clearly identified what causes vandalism, mitigates it, and what does not work – and have begun sharing this data in the local communities.

Prayers in Stone Project:	Sagamore Strong Bear Medicine	Bettina Abe
	Daniel V. Boudillion	Jic Davis
		Kevin Gallant
		Dustin Neild
		Lyle Webster