

July 4, 2020

The Honorable Tara Sweeney  
Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs  
Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, NW  
MS-4071-MIB  
Washington, DC 20240

Subject: We Should Be Federally Recognized

Dear Assistant Secretary Sweeney:

In 1971 Jay Johnson and I and a group of us got together and created the non-profit organization, American Indian Council of Mariposa County. The Miwuk from Yosemite and Mariposa needed a voice.

We have come a long way and have accomplished many good things, mostly being seriously involved in our culture, which is the real backbone of our existence. Our activities are what our ancestors used to do; celebrating the good times through ceremonies and the healing of ourselves, living with nature and nature's laws and being connected to the land. This is what the creator created us to do, protect and preserve the land and its every living plant, animal, fowl and creature, for our way of life. We have been doing this for centuries. This can be attested by the awe expressed by Europeans when they first set foot in Yosemite.

Early on we asked ourselves, who are we? We are a Tribe; what Tribe? We are the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation. This led us to the Federal Recognition Process. We submitted our letter of intent on April 19, 1982, submitting our petition through our non-profit organization. We were given a list of seven criteria to fulfill. We answered all the criteria, spending many days, long hours, and making several trips to Washington D.C. To this day it has been a night mare. We feel we are being singled out by people in high places that do not want us to be Federally Recognized, they would like for us to disappear so they don't have to deal with us. I don't know of any other tribe who has had to go through this grueling process, including the Timbisha Tribe in Death Valley, the last California Tribe to be Federally Recognized.

We as a non-Federally Recognized Tribe do not qualify for Federal amenities, such as, college, grants, training, or the ability to purchase land.

We are in partnership with the National Park Service here in Yosemite, and if we were Federally Recognized we would be better able to help the NPS protect and preserve Yosemite from further destruction of our foods, medicines, archaeological sites and sacred areas.

I feel our accomplishments can speak for themselves. I would like to add that there are only four of the original people that did the initial footwork on this Federal Recognition Process still alive today: Barbara Kirshmer, our legal Representative, now retired; Steve Quesenberry, who is still with us; Julia Parker, who is in her 90s; and myself, and I am 85.

We feel we have fulfilled all of your criteria that matters and that the next time we hear from you that you have acknowledged that we are the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation, that we are Federally Recognized.

I will be expecting a response from you soon.

Respectfully Yours

Les James   
Tribal Elder

Copy to:

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