

Survival



**For tribes, for nature
for all humanity**

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**We are Survival International, the
global movement for tribal peoples.
We're fighting for their survival
around the world.**

January 7, 2022

Dear Secretary Haaland,

I am writing from [Survival International](https://www.survivalinternational.org), the global movement for tribal peoples, in regard to the denial of the Southern Sierra Miwuk tribe's petition for Federal recognition.

Created 105 years ago, The National Park Service sold the idea of a natural, untamed wilderness. As you will well be aware, however, the creation of many of the US National Parks involved human rights abuses, including land theft, violence and mass evictions of the Indigenous communities that lived on and managed those lands for generations. This includes the Yosemite area, where the Southern Sierra Miwuk had villages.

This sad legacy continues today. This model of conservation that sees Indigenous and local peoples as threats to nature is still used around the world under the guise of "protected areas". Protected areas are rarely created with the consent of Indigenous and local peoples, who are often no longer allowed to use the natural environment to feed their families, gather medicinal plants or visit sacred sites. They are beaten, tortured and abused by park rangers when they try to hunt to feed their families or just to access their ancestral lands.

The theft of ancestral lands in the name of "protecting nature" is particularly wrong-headed given that evidence proves that Indigenous Peoples are the best protectors of the environment. 80% of the planet's remaining biodiversity is in Indigenous land. In the Amazon, for example, areas managed by Indigenous peoples have lower deforestation rates than official 'protected areas' like national parks.

The conservation industry must be decolonized. Historical wrongs must be recognized and addressed. The false narrative as a wilderness empty of humans must be exposed as a myth that erases the long stewardship of biodiverse environments by Indigenous Peoples. Guaranteeing the protection of Indigenous land rights must be the principal mechanism for biodiversity conservation.

We urge the Federal government to reconsider the Southern Sierra Miwuk tribe's petition for recognition. Federal recognition could be a first step in addressing historical wrongs perpetrated against Indigenous peoples and in recognizing that Indigenous land rights as critical to conservation.

Sincerely,
Survival International

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Lavelle'.

Daniel Lavelle
US Director
Survival International
50 years fighting for tribal peoples' rights

A large, stylized number '50' in red, with the word 'years' in black below it.

Since 1969

Offices in Berlin, London, Madrid,
Milan, Paris, and San Francisco

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