



## Letter from the AICMC/SSMN Chairperson

*In 1972 the people organized as the American Indian Council of Mariposa County, Inc. the 501 3(c) nonprofit arm of the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation, and in 1973 partnered with Yosemite National Park to build a traditional Ceremonial Roundhouse in the reconstructed Indian Village at the Yosemite Valley Museum where we have been conducting our ceremonies and cultural activities.*

*My name is Sandra (Rhoan) Chapman Chairwoman for the Southern Sierra Nation, American Indian Council of Mariposa Co 501(c)3. I am a descendant of Chief Tenaya on my dad's side and Castro Johnson on my mother's side. Castro helped build the Ahwahnee Hotel and he and my grandmother, Grace Johnson, were both Miwuk dancers so I have strong ties to Yosemite. Remembering the elders that shared their life stories with me always reminds me of who I am and where I come from, and two of the most important things that they would tell me are that we are the caretaker of the land and we will always be here.*



*The Elders were very strong-minded people but always in a soft-spoken voice, because they knew what they were talking about because they had lived and learned the old ways. Many of our elders were born in Yosemite, they played as children there learning every plant, stone, and animal of the valley. Most lived and worked their entire life around and in Yosemite.*

*Our tribe has been working toward rebuilding Wahhoga Village and becoming federally recognized for nearly four decades. We stayed strong with the knowledge and wisdom we carry from our Elders; we have decades of oral and written history and continue on a path of action even through difficult times and sometimes with little hope of success. To give up is to let the Ancestors be forgotten, and that's just not who we are.*

*Following on the path of our ancestors before us we gained a lease to Wahhoga Village, a place to build our traditional Roundhouse that will be dedicated in the fall of 2022, excluding any setbacks. A place to hold our ceremonies, that keep us true to who we are, we, so we can pass the old ways on down to the next generations.*

*We are Southern Sierra Miwuks, we are proud people who are still the stewards of the land, most importantly the stewards of our homeland Yosemite. When I return to my homeland a quiet peaceful calm comes over me as though the new ways of life cannot invade my peaceful thoughts, that's how I feel when I enter Wahhoga Village, for me it's a blessing that I'm here one more day to experience that. Wahhoga Village being set into place is for the future generations from all nations that will follow after I'm gone.*

*Wahhoga will be a place where young and old can learn who they are and where they come from, a place that teaches respect not only for themselves and others, but for Mother Earth and all she provides for all living things, food and water for the people, the animals that live on the land, the winged ones and the ones who keep the ecosystem flowing, respect for the elders and for the teachings from their ancestors that have been passed down from the beginning of time.*

*Sandra*