



July 26, 2022

Via email

Dear Topaz Museum Board,

In response to your letter of July 24, we would like to restate the Wakasa Memorial Committee's purpose: The WMC exists to protect the Wakasa Monument, Memorial Site, and National Historic Landmark.

On Saturday, July 23, the WMC held a ceremony of remembrance at Topaz with camp survivors and third-, fourth- and fifth-generation Japanese Americans. We marked the day that the Wakasa Monument and the Memorial Site were desecrated by the Museum Board's actions, one year ago, on July 27, 2021. With 156 handfolded paper flowers and a recitation of names, we paid tribute to the memory of James Hatsuaki Wakasa, to those who died while imprisoned at Topaz and to the Topaz soldiers who lost their lives while serving in the military. Amid the lighting of incense and a mass of colors in that landscape we connected with our ancestors, with each other and with the land on which Japanese Americans lost their freedom and Mr. Wakasa lost his life. We wish to raise public awareness of the Wakasa Monument, acknowledge the Monument's unearthing, and promote healing amongst those who care about the place and its preservation.

After one year, inexplicably, the unique and irreplaceable Memorial Site at the NHL remains unprotected. As we saw on July 23, the Topaz Museum Board has not implemented the National Park Service's recommended treatment of the Memorial Site. ("The NPS research team strongly recommends that the site associated with the monument is stabilized and that a site condition monitoring plan is developed to preserve and protect it. ... Erosion is a primary concern at the site as evidenced by a wash out that extends into the depression. Priority should be given to the immediate stabilization of the site to prevent further damage.") We also are troubled that our request to the Topaz Museum Board for a Community Archaeology program at Topaz, which is supported by the NPS and the Utah State Historic Preservation Office, was rejected by the TMB as "not a priority at this time" (June 16, 2022).

Beginning in September, 2021, the Wakasa Memorial Committee has asked to review the videos recorded by the TMB during the July 27 improper unearthing of the Monument and its removal from the Memorial Site. The TMB has refused to share the videos, which are part of the historical record of Topaz's most important artifact,

provide baseline archaeological information about the Monument and Site, and are part of Japanese American history. This video was also denied to the National Park Service before its site assessment in December, 2021. Despite the TMB's sensitivities, the WMC will continue to ask for the videos.

Importantly, the Wakasa Memorial Committee also will continue to press the TMB to meet its obligation to implement the recommendations of the NPS to ensure that the Monument and the Site are treated with care and that the process to make future decisions about the Monument and Site are collaborative, transparent, and inclusive. To that end, we remain concerned that planning for the six community outreach meetings that the TMB has announced, from July 30 to Aug. 30, were not planned collaboratively with, for example, the WMC, and with participation by survivors, descendants, community stakeholders, and subject-matter experts who are associated with the Wakasa Memorial Committee. This is a serious problem because TMB says the meetings and comments on the survey, which was designed solely by the TMB, will determine future treatment of the Monument.

We are disappointed that the Topaz Museum Board has not learned the simple lesson that, to quote the National Park Service's recommendation, "It is important that these decisions are made strategically through a collaborative decision-making process that takes the philosophies and concerns of key stakeholders into account and builds support for the final outcome."

Sincerely,

Wakasa Memorial Committee

Akemi Yamane Ina, Topaz Survivor, born at Topaz the day after Wakasa was killed
Kiyoshi Ina, Topaz Survivor
Hiroshi Shimizu, Topaz, Tule Lake, Crystal City Survivor; father, Iwao Shimizu, member of 1943 Wakasa Committee
Lauren Araki, Topaz Descendant
Sarah Julia Escobido Brandenstein, Topaz Descendant
Cheryl Ann Escobideo, Topaz Descendant
Midori Hogg, Topaz Descendant
Patti Iiyama, Topaz Descendant
Claudia Katayanagi, Topaz Descendant
Mari Matsumoto, Topaz and Poston Descendant
Martha Nakagawa, Topaz, Tule Lake and Leupp Descendant
Gail Nanbu, Topaz Descendant
Barbara Suyehiro, Topaz Descendant
Diana Emiko Tsuchida, Topaz Descendant
Nancy Ukai, Topaz Descendant
Ruth Wakabayashi Kondo, Topaz Descendant
Bif Brigman, historian, Minidoka Pilgrimage former co-chair

Karen Kiyo Lowhurst, Heart Mountain Descendant
Chizu Omori, Poston Survivor
Emiko Omori, Poston Survivor
John Ota, Descendant of so-called “voluntary evacuees”
Barbara Takei, Tule Lake Descendant
Paul Tomita, Minidoka Survivor

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Karen Umemoto, Manzanar Descendant, UCLA Professor of Asian American Studies and Urban Planning
Mary Urashima, Historian, author, Historic Wintersburg
Duncan Ryūken Williams, Buddhist priest and Professor of Religion/American Studies & Ethnicity, University of Southern California
Jay Xu, Director and CEO, Asian Art Museum of San Francisco

CC:

Mike Reynolds, Regional Director, Interior Regions 6,7,8, National Park Service
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Jani Iwamoto, Utah State Senator, 4th District