



UC Irvine Environment Institute

Global Change, Energy, and Sustainable Resources

April 4, 2013

SUBJECT: UCI Innovation

To Whom It May Concern:

Please allow this letter to attest to the innovative nature of the collaboration between the UCI's Environment Institute and the Women's Earth Alliance to initiate dialogue between environmental researchers and tribal communities in the region. I am qualified to comment on the innovative nature of this work because I am an environmental and human rights lawyer. Most of my work prior to joining UC Irvine at the Environment Institute involved supporting indigenous community claims of environmental and human rights grievances arising from mining, oil, and gas operations across the Global South.

In October 2012, the Environment Institute partnered with the Women's Earth Alliance to convene the first ever Southern California Tribal Listening and Strategy Session on Environmental Issues. The listening was initiated by myself and Angela D'Arcy, at the time the North America Program Advocacy Fellow at the Women's Earth Alliance, now Founder and Executive Director of *Sacred Places Institute for Indigenous People*, a Native-created and controlled grassroots organization dedicated to building the capacity of Tribal Nations and Indigenous peoples to protect sacred lands, waters, cultural and natural resources.

The event was groundbreaking in that it was the first time that tribes in the region have met with researchers in a coordinated manner to discuss research needs on environmental issues. Furthermore, it has initiated a cascade of additional efforts building from the first listening including:

1. The participation by tribal desert community members in the recent Sonoran Desert Conservation, Ecology, and Natural History Research Symposium in Borrego Springs, co-hosted by UCI
2. Initial conversations between coastal tribal community members and other academic units at UCI
3. Invitation to two Session participants to present at subsequent conferences on related topics
4. A service learning field placement for one Native student with the UCI Environment Institute and newly-launched Sacred Places Institute for Indigenous Peoples

Given the success, we are holding a follow up Tribal Listening and Strategy Session focused on Climate Change in October 2013 in Borrego Springs, California. We look forward to building on this innovative collaboration and creating a more fair and fundamental bridge between environmental researchers and tribal communities in our region.

Sincerely,

Abigail Reyes, *Sustainability Researcher*, UCI Environment Institute

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