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# INDIAN AFFAIRS



## FIRST ANNUAL DAKOTAH LANGUAGE SCRABBLE TOURNAMENT

### DAKOTAH STYLE

By Jennifer Nielsen, Staff Writer  
Reprinted from the March 24, 2006 edition of the  
Watertown Public Opinion

With the sounds of the Dakotah Language Bowl championship round humming in the background, small groups of children and adults huddled around Scrabble boards to brush up on their language skills - their Dakotah language skills, to be exact.

For the first time, the popular Scrabble word game is available in Dakotah, and to help initiate the game into tribal schools throughout the region, a Scrabble tournament was held Friday at Dakota Magic Casino in conjunction with a Dakotah Language Bowl hosted by Tiospa Zina Tribal School.

"It's cool, it's fun," 12 year old Carina DuMarce of Sisseton said of the game as she tried to find a word in the stone tiles in front of her. While it's "just a little bit" harder than the English version, she said it was fun trying to make words out of her letters.



Photo: Jennifer Nielsen,  
Watertown Public Opinion

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# THE DIRECTOR'S CORNER

## JACK TROPE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



In this edition of *Indian Affairs*, we have reprinted an article about the development of a Dakota-language Scrabble game by the Association and the first-ever Dakota language Scrabble tournament that we sponsored. The event received a great deal of press coverage as the story was picked up by the Associated Press. Not everything that the media covers is worthwhile or even newsworthy. But this time I think that they got it right. The development of the Dakota-language Scrabble gives schools that teach children from communities that historically spoke the Dakota language an excellent teaching tool and it gives families a way to learn and speak Dakota together. When I attended the tournament, what most impressed me was the concentration of the students as they were playing the game and the enthusiasm of the teachers and elders working with the students. Everyone “really got into it”. That kind of enthusiasm for learning will spill over far beyond the efforts of the youth to learn their ancestral language; and efforts to revitalize the use of the Dakota language will spill over far beyond the schools into the communities themselves as they seek to strengthen and preserve their culture and create strong bonds between the generations.

### SCRABBLE CONTINUED

The Dakota Scrabble game is a project of the Association on American Indian Affairs' Native Language Programs, which seeks to foster a total revitalization of the Dakota language by incorporating it into every area of daily life.

“Our goal is to bring the Dakota language back to being a first language and not a second language,” said Tammy DeCoteau, director of the programs. “The only way to fulfill that goal is to raise a generation of speakers who can in turn raise the next one.”

Members of the AAIA saw a need to incorporate the Dakota language in games, music and entertainment. They created a project called “Skatapi,” which in Dakota means “they play,” in an attempt to use a unique and fun approach to learning the language.

“Our main focus has been creating early childhood materials in Dakota, which is basically children's books, translating children's songs, videos and we're just starting on some interactive computer programs,” DeCoteau said.

They also wanted to involve board games.

“So we thought about what games we could convert somehow into Dakota as a teaching tool, and Scrabble fit right in there,” she said.

So a group of educators, artists and elders began a year-long effort to create a version of the Scrabble game in the Dakota language, a process that would involve a lot of time and a lot of local talent.

### “Ecunpica”: It could be done

The first step was securing permission from Hasbro, Inc., to create a Dakota language version of the Scrabble game, DeCoteau said, which the company quickly gave to the AAIA.

She and others then went to work on designing the new game, securing funding and creating a dictionary for the game.



Photo by Jennifer Nielsen

## SCRABBLE CONTINUED

"It's long overdue," said Donald Eastman, a local artisan and student at Sisseton-Wahpeton College who designed the game box and the tiles. "It's pretty innovative. Once the home version comes out and a lot of people are able to utilize it, it's going to be quite a teaching tool for the people."

For the past several months Eastman has worked on putting the boxes together from a pattern, making them with rawhide and using leather to sew the corners together.

"We were trying to have the entire game made of things provided from Mother Earth," DeCoteau said. "I know that sounds kind of cliché, but that was the goal."

While not everything was made in the way and of the material that the group wanted, they were able to make the letter bags out of leather and the tiles out of stone. The letter tile holders were made by Solomon Derby, a carpenter and student at South Dakota State University.

For DeCoteau, it is pretty amazing how much they were able to accomplish right here in the area.

"We didn't have to go to Minneapolis or somewhere to make something that's really special, and we're pretty proud that we did this with all of our local people," she said.

The 30 games they created were then sent to schools throughout the area and even into Canada that teach the Dakota language and participate in a common language bowl.

Funding provided something of a challenge for the organization, but with the help of a number of groups, the money came through, DeCoteau said.

While the project did not meet the requirements of the Hasbro Children's Foundation for funding, the company's chairman, Alan Hassenfeld, provided a large amount for the game through the Hassenfeld Family Foundation.

Funding also was provided by the Sisseton-Wahpeton College, the Emilie Hesemeyer Charitable Trust and the Shakopee Mdewakanton Dakota Community and Upper Sioux Community, both located in Minnesota.

**"Yuieskapi": They translated**

A Scrabble game needs a dictionary, so Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate elders David Seaboy and Edward

Williams, Jr., and Tiospa Zina Tribal School Dakota language teacher Edwina Bernard set to work developing one specifically designed for the game.

"It was hard," Bernard said about the experience. "I thought it would be just easy. Just go in there and find these words."

Instead, the process of choosing words, defining them, showing pronunciation and taking each down to its root became a project spanning many months.

"We had to go back to the depths of our memories to get some of these words," Seaboy said.

Yet all the hard work will be worth it, they said, if it helps teach children the Dakota language.

"We are slowly losing our language," Bernard said, adding that many tribes face similar challenges. "Because our true speakers are dying, and then next it's us. We are the next speakers, the next elders. I'd sure hate to lose our language." That is why a game like Dakota Scrabble and activities like the language bowl are so important, the game creators said. If something isn't done now to preserve the Dakota language and culture, then there will be no one left to carry it into the future.

**"Wihanbde": To dream of something.**

Eastman hopes the game will not only inspire the kids who are playing it but other tribes in the region and across the country.

"It's a pretty unique thing that they're doing here, and this kind of opens up the door for a lot of the Dakota language, and I think it's going to set a precedence for a lot of other projects," he said. "This is going to have a snowball effect for a lot of other tribes."



Photo by Jennifer Nielsen

"I just think it's a big part of our cultural preservation, and it's really going to enhance that for our communities to be able to have another teaching tool

**SCRABBLE CONTINUED**

for their language,” Eastman said. “It's pretty inspiring to see. And Scrabble's a fun game anyway”.

He and the others would like to see the game and the other language projects become part of family and community activities.



Photo by Jennifer Nielsen

“We have to get to the parents, because if the parents aren't interested or if they don't know the language, it's really hard to get their students interested,” Bernard said.

And they hope the Dakota Scrabble game will help.

“For the majority of the people who are not fluent in the language, you know, it's a good way for them to learn and identify the words and putting the words together and understanding that there's meaning behind those words along with using that dictionary,” Eastman said. “So it's a pretty positive thing for our language.”

And even as Dakota Scrabble is introduced into classrooms and school activities, officials with the Native Language Programs and other groups will continue to develop new and unique ways to get kids interested in the language.

“We just have to try whatever we can,” Bernard said, “come up with different ideas in keeping the language going and keeping the kids interested. And that is a big job in itself, trying to keep them interested.”

## EMPLOYER MATCHING CONTRIBUTION PLAN

### Matching Gifts

Many companies offer their employees a Matching Gift Contribution Plan. Generally, any charitable contribution that an employee makes can be matched in whole, or in part, by the company he or she works for. Many of our donors do not realize that their contributions to AAIA may be matched by their employers.

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By using your matching gift program, you can possibly double the amount of money you donate to AAIA which will allow us to provide more scholarships and fund more programs that benefit Indian families, children, tribes and communities.

If this is a benefit your company offers, why not use it?

If your employer does not already have one, encourage them to initiate one soon! Still have questions?

**Please contact Sheryl McCreary, Director of Development, at 240-314-7157.**





# Scholarships



## Get to know Crystal Gust.

Crystal is one of our 2005-2006 **Sequoyah Graduate Fellowship** recipients. She is Chippewa Cree from the Rocky Boy Reservation in Rocky Boy, MT. She is married and has a 2 1/2 year old son, Kody.

Crystal attends the University of Washington in Seattle and is seeking her *Masters'*

*degree in Public Health.* Crystal chose Public Health as her career because while growing up she saw a **lack of access to quality health care on her own reservation.** She also observed that **most of the people who work in tribal health care are non-Native.** She feels a personal responsibility to change those statistics and to be a role model for the younger generations of Native Americans. Crystal aspires to become a leader in Native health care by gaining knowledge in program management, evaluation and policy, and applying her knowledge to improve the current services offered.

In addition to going to school full time, Crystal works for the Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board. She recently received a grant to work on her thesis, "the Primordial Prevention of Overweight in American Indian Children." She previously worked in their Tobacco Prevention and Education Program. Additionally, Crystal has assisted in the grant writing process for grants sought by NPAIHB, assisted in writing the NPAIHB Health Status Report and authored articles for the NPAIHB newsletter.

With Crystal's ambition, dedication and experience, we have no doubt she will play an important leadership role in efforts to improve the quality of Native health care. AAIA wishes Crystal, all of our scholarship recipients and all students the best in their futures.

## SCHOLARSHIP TRACKING PROGRAM

We are often asked by our donors, board members and interested parties, what happens to our scholarship recipients. ***People are interested in finding out what our scholarship recipients are doing now.*** Did they graduate from the program they started in? Where are they working? Have they stayed in the same job or have they changed career paths? Have they gone on to seek a Masters or Doctorate? Are they in leadership roles within the Indian community? Are they married? Do they have children? Do they donate to AAIA?

We would like to ask our previous recipients to participate with us in a tracking project that we are developing. As you know, our scholarships are funded by the generosity of our donors. By participating in this project and letting our donors know where you are, you are helping other students receive scholarships just as you did in the past. Of course, you are welcome to submit as much or as little information as you would like.

If you are a previous recipient of one of our scholarships and willing to help us in this endeavor, please contact Lisa Wyzlic at our Rockville office. Thank you in advance for your help. We appreciate your participation.

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# SACRED LANDS AND FOREST MANAGEMENT:

## HOW CAN THE RELIGIOUS FREEDOM NEEDS OF NATIVE AMERICANS BE ACCOMMODATED

by Jack F. Trope, Executive Director

Reprinted from the Winter 2005-2006 edition of *Evergreen* magazine

Many traditional religious and ceremonial practices of Native Americans are inseparably bound to land and natural formations. These sites may be places where spirits live or that otherwise serve as bridges between the temporal world and the sacred. Areas of sacred geography may be related to tribal creation stories or historical events of religious significance. They may also be areas where sacred plants or other natural materials are available, sites with special geographic features, burial sites or places where structures, carvings or paintings made by tribal ancestors are located. It is often difficult for non-Indians unfamiliar with traditional tribal culture to understand how deeply felt and integral these beliefs are for those who practice and believe in these traditional ways. The continuation of traditional native religions and tribal cultures over time is dependent upon the performance of ceremonies and rituals, many of which have been performed since time immemorial at specific sites and which must be performed at those sites in order to be effective.

A large number of those sites sacred to traditional Indian religions are located in federally-owned National Forests. Goals of resource development can sometimes clash with preserving the integrity and sanctity of sacred places.

This article discusses the differing world views that can give rise to such conflicts, analyzes some of the legal framework surrounding land management decisions in National Forests, and advances some ideas about how these conflicts can be avoided.

A recent decision by the Forest Service is one of the best examples of this conflict between world views. On March 11, 2005, the Coconino National Forest approved the expansion of the Snowbowl ski area on the San Francisco Peaks in northern Arizona. It did so in order to provide for "a consistent/reliable operating season" for the ski area. A key component of the expansion is the use of recycled water for snowmaking. This proposed expansion was heatedly

opposed by numerous tribes in the area, including the Navajo, Hopi, Havasupai, Hualapai and Acoma Pueblo. In the words of Leigh Kuwanwisiwma, Director of the Hopi Cultural Preservation Office,

"The use of wastewater to make artificial snow goes completely against our belief that Nuvatukya'omi (the San Francisco Peaks), the home of our Katsina spirits, is the natural embodiment that brings rain, snow and moisture to bless all of life...The creation of artificial snow with wastewater...[will] forever diminish the sanctity and spiritual value of Nuvatukya'ovi as a sacred place...[T]o allow this type of development on the Hopi's place of worship and the place which our sustenance in the Hopi Villages comes from will most certainly contribute to the demise of the Hopi way of life and the Hopi religion...A significant part of the peace that I once felt in my life has been robbed and taken away from me by the Forest Service and its decision to harm Nuvatukya'ovi and to treat the Hopi people and their religion with callous disregard."

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**San Francisco Peaks**  
Photo: Christopher McLeod,  
Sacred Land Film Project

## SACRED LANDS CONTINUED

The Snowbowl expansion is a textbook example of a case where the goals and needs of those who want to “develop” the land were more readily incorporated into government land management decision making than were the religious beliefs of Native Americans affected by that development.

Unfortunately, from the tribal perspective, existing law explicitly recognizes the value of accommodating the religious needs of Native Americans to only a limited extent. The National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) provides that “a Federal agency shall consult with any Indian tribe or Native Hawaiian organization that attaches religious and cultural significance” to a historic property when a federally assisted undertaking may affect that property. The American Indian Religious Freedom Act and Executive Order 13,007 declare that it is federal policy to protect the integrity of and access to sacred sites, but neither is judicially enforceable. These laws are helpful tools, but none of them provide the kind of enforceable, substantive legal protection that would ensure that these sites are protected.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, strengthening of the laws protecting sacred places has been a goal of the Indian community for many years.

Notwithstanding their limitations, it is important to recognize that these federal laws have allowed for strengthened protection of sacred sites through the negotiation of some agreements to protect sacred places located on non-Indian lands. For example, in 1996, a Historic Preservation Plan (HPP) was developed based upon these legal authorities for the Big-horn Medicine Wheel and Medicine Mountain in Wyoming. Among other things, the HPP provides for consultation with tribal representatives whenever a government undertaking impacts an 18,000 acre area surrounding Medicine Mountain and Medicine Wheel,



Medicine Wheel

places restrictions upon vehicular access to the site and limitations on timber and mineral production in the area, recognizes the needs of practitioners for time-limited exclusive

access to the site and seeks to retain the quality of the viewshed from the Medicine Wheel. The HPP also permits the continuation of a number of multiple uses in the area that are compatible with protecting the integrity of the site, including grazing, hunting, hiking and tourist visitation to the Wheel.

Protection of Native traditional cultural and sacred places, however, continues to be a case-by-case struggle to convince land managers that it is necessary and possible to protect these places. In the case of the San Francisco Peaks, the Forest Supervisor was obviously not convinced. Ultimately, the dispute over the Snowbowl development will be settled by the Courts.

How can this be avoided? There is no answer that will work in every instance. There are administrative actions, however, that can be taken to lessen the frequency of these disputes.

The starting point is early consultation. The Forest Service planning regulations recognize “the Federal Government’s trust responsibility for federally recognized Indian tribes. The Responsible Official must consult with, invite and provide opportunities for federally recognized Indian Tribes to collaborate and participate in planning.”



Petroglyphs National Monument

Moreover, it is also appropriate for Federal agencies to consult with Native American traditional religious leaders and practitioners who have knowledge about sacred places under Federal jurisdiction, in addition to consulting with representatives of tribal governments, if they are to fulfill their obligations under such laws as the American Indian Religious Freedom Act and National Historic Preservation Act. Consultation with Native

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<sup>1</sup> The Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) is another law that has been raised in recent court cases dealing with the protection of sacred lands. RFRA is a general law that seeks to protect the free exercise of religion. It does not specifically mention Indian religions or sacred sites and it is unknown at present to what extent this law will provide substantive protection to threatened sites.

## SACRED LANDS CONTINUED

American religious leaders and practitioners does not take the place of government-to-government consultation with tribes, but at the same time consultation with religious leaders and practitioners is not inconsistent with the government-to-government relationship between the United States and each Indian tribe. A well designed consultation process should ensure that tribes and traditional practitioners that can



**Bear Butte**

be reasonably identified by the agency will receive notice and a meaningful opportunity to provide information and input into the agency action.

Consultation by itself is not enough, however. The Forest Service should establish some concrete management goals that can be adopted administratively and developed through the type of consultation that has been described. Among steps that can be administratively authorized are the following:

- Each National Forest should be directed to amend its Forest Plan to provide greater protection for traditional cultural properties and sacred places. These places need not be specifically identified in the consultation process to be managed for their protection, but rather can be identified as being located within areas of sensitivity. Areas so designated can then be placed in a land management classification designed to protect their integrity and allow for access by traditional Native practitioners, allowing only such multiple uses as may be consistent with the ceremonial needs of these practitioners. In appropriate cases, the Forest Service should petition the Bureau of Land Management to withdraw certain lands from development to protect these areas of sensitivity. It is important to remember that access is not enough. The key is access plus protecting the integrity of the site – not just the physical integrity per se, but also those qualities that make it of spiritual or ceremonial importance.

- The Forest Service should seek to encourage co-management or shared stewardship of traditional cultural and sacred places between the Forest Service and Indian tribes, including a numerical annual goal for the negotiation of such agreements. There are examples where tribes and federal agencies have already entered into co-management agreements, such as Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument. Moreover, Congress recently endorsed agreements involving federal land management between tribes and the Forest Service for purposes such as fire prevention and land restoration in the Tribal Forest Protection Act of 2004.
- Establish a policy providing for temporary closures of federal lands for ceremonial purposes. There are both legislative (El Malpais National Monument) and administrative (Bighorn Medicine Wheel) examples where such policies have been adopted. The authority of local land managers to make this accommodation should be made explicit.

It is incumbent upon the Forest Service to encourage these reforms. Recently, the Forest Service appointed a Sacred Lands Task Force that is charged with developing recommendations to strengthen Forest Service procedures pertaining to sacred sites on National Forest lands. That Task Force could recommend and the Forest Service could adopt a policy that would require all Forests to consult with tribes and traditional practitioners in order to implement the administrative changes that have been described. Through consultation at the planning stages, by steering development to acceptable places through the planning process, establishing co-management agreements and providing for temporary closures for ceremonial use, the number of cases where conflict occurs in the context of specific projects can be greatly decreased. Such policies would be an important step toward fully respecting the beliefs and traditional cultural and sacred places of Native peoples.



**Medicine Lake**



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