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Maine-Wabanaki REACH Newsletter, Summer 2020

Wabanaki REACH

Maria Girouard

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Maine-Wabanaki REACH

Restoration • Engagement • Advocacy • Change • Healing

Summer 2020

Mid-Summer Greetings

from the desk of Maria Girouard, Executive Director

Much has happened during these first six months of 2020. Spring sprang forth restoring winter-weary spirits and everywhere there are signs of change. At Maine-Wabanaki REACH, we have used this time of physical distancing to do inner organizational work and to increase our online presence. On Earth Day we hosted “100 Hand Drums for Healing.” All People everywhere were invited to join a one-hour collective drumming event to set intentions of healing for ourselves, our communities, and our planet. We hope for this to be an annual event.

Dawnland Signals, a monthly talk radio program, has begun. It airs every third Thursday of each month from 4:00 - 5:00pm on 89.9 FM and live-streamed at www.weru.org. *Dawnland Signals* holds space for critical conversations of truth, healing, and change here in the Dawnland. Our first three shows were about Circles; Decolonizing our Diets; and Five Years After the Truth Commission in Maine. Shows are archived and may be listened to on the WERU website.

In June we commemorated five years of our earliest work by revisiting the historic Maine-Wabanaki State Child Welfare Truth and Reconciliation Commission, its purpose, history, and accomplishments. We hosted an online screening of the documentary film *Blood Memory* and panel discussion with former Truth Commissioner Sandy White Hawk (Sacangu Lakota) and filmmaker Drew Nicholas. It was a great opportunity to reconnect, reflect, and nurture our organization’s roots that are based in protecting the Children.

Another round of Healing Circles at Maine Correctional Center and the Women’s Re-entry Center were completed. Since the current pandemic has future Circles and Sweat Lodges on hold, we are developing ways to remain connected with our incarcerated relatives and want those who read our newsletters from within correctional facilities to know that we have not forgotten about you.

There is a very enthusiastic group of volunteers helping to develop new programming for deeper learning and with fresh content. When cancellations began due to COVID precautions, we had to cancel a volunteer appreciation event. Since we were unable to share our gratitude in person, let me express my most sincere appreciation to the many volunteers who help Maine-Wabanaki REACH to be all that we are. We certainly could not do it without you and we are glad to be on this journey of truth, healing, and change with you.

Wishing everyone an abundance of health and hope during this time of uncertainty.



Black Lives Matter

On June 4 the REACH Board of Directors issued the following statement:

We are Maine-Wabanaki REACH. We are a collaboration of Native and non-Native people. We condemn police brutality, state-sanctioned violence, murder, and the dehumanization of Black people. We recognize that this crisis did not start with police violence, and that police violence is a tool of maintaining white supremacy.

We recognize this is a moment of accountability for REACH and that we must do better. It is not enough to take for granted that, of course, a Wabanaki organization is pro-Black, anti-racist, anti-white supremacy. We need to be vocal, deliberate, and intentional about all those things - in what we say and what we do. By not being vocal, deliberate, and intentional, we allow the killing of Black people with impunity and we are complicit.

We acknowledge that Black and Tribal communities are not entirely distinct - many Tribal people are Black and many Black people are Indigenous. We know that Black people and Indigenous people have been impacted in different ways by the same forces of white supremacy and colonization. As Indigenous people, we must stand with our Black relatives and fight for their liberation.

We acknowledge that white supremacy exists through strategies of oppression of Black and Indigenous people that benefit White people, particularly those of European descent. We know it is not enough to be passively non-racist, we need to be actively anti-racist, intentionally anti-white supremacy and pro-Black. As White people, we must acknowledge and repair the harms we have done and continue to do/allow to happen to Black people by the colonization of this country, recognize the lasting impact of these harms, and create a more just future through commitments and actions grounded in love, compassion, and generosity.

We truly believe there can be no peace without justice, and we follow the lead of Black people, organizations, and communities in this journey of truth, healing, and change. We take responsibility for our own education and we figure out the best ways to act in solidarity with Black people. We act from a lens of decolonization, of undoing the ways in which we have been indoctrinated to devalue Black people and accept their systemic dehumanization.





Indian Radio Days in Production

“The time is now twenty-nine minutes past the hour and you are listening to Indian Radio Days on AIR, American Indian Radio. . .”

With the goal of connection and fun, the Wabanaki Maine Interactive Theatre Troupe is using technology to create a video recording of our favorite play by LeAnne Howe (Choctaw) and the late Roxy Gordon (Choctaw / Assiniboine), *Indian Radio Days, An Evolving Bingo Experience*.

The video will be made available to Wabanaki people and will be offered as an online, interactive program on the healing power of play, so stay tuned!



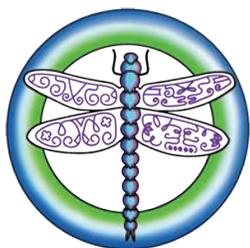
Welcome

We’re excited to introduce to you our newest member of the REACH team, Heather Augustine! Heather joined us on February 24 as one of our Maine Community Organizers. Some of you may have met Heather in Portland last October when she was a member of the Indian Radio Days cast. It’s good to know she can be zany just like us!

Heather is a mother of four and a member of the Elsipogtog First Nations Mi’kmaq. She is a passionate leader and educator, a builder and creator with interest in food sovereignty, language preservation and community building in urban

settings. She is actively involved with Mawita’nej Youth Leadership Group, an educational and cultural program serving the mid-coast region of Maine.

Heather’s enthusiasm for the work of REACH makes her a valuable addition to our team and we are so pleased to welcome Heather!



Decolonizing Our Diet

In opening the May 21 broadcast of Dawnland Signals, Esther Anne quoted from Robin Wall Kimmerer's chapter "The Honorable Harvest" in Braiding Sweetgrass:

"One of our responsibilities as human people is to find ways to enter into reciprocity with the more than human world. We can do it through gratitude, through ceremony, through land stewardship, science, art, and in everyday acts of practical reverence."

What followed was a rich and wide-ranging dialogue among Esther Anne, Maria Girouard, Alivia Moore, and Brian Altvater. Brian described the contrast between the Sipayik diet before the causeway was built [with plentiful gardens, porpoise and seal, herbal medicine, little sugar], and afterward,

when the Passamaquoddy language was forbidden in school, diabetes began to spread, pharmaceutical medicines often did as much harm as good.

Alivia shared how the loss of land and access to water undercut the practice and sharing of deep knowledge, means of survival, and the spiritual grounding of Wabanaki people. Maria noted the importance of restoration – of relationship to the land, to free-flowing rivers and the fishes' food chain. Brian described how alewives provide nutrients for freshwater and the watershed; how many species (eagles, osprey, otters, bass, codfish, and eventually salmon) depend on juvenile alewives to flourish.



Second Island, Sipayik ("On the edge")

So many encouraging initiatives are underway:

- planting projects in Wabanaki communities
- a planting curriculum on sustainable food sovereignty at Indian Township school
- community access to cultivation of traditional medicine as well as food
- development of Wabanaki Community Herbal Apothecary, including traditional medicine apprenticeships through Eastern Woodlands Rematriation
- creating intentional gardens using traditional seeds (beans, squash, pumpkin, corn) and sharing these seeds with prison inmates for the indigenous gardens they cultivate

Flowing into this exciting rejuvenation is the growing understanding of the importance of centering relationships in decolonization of how we eat, rejection of the cruelty inherent in commodifying food for mass production, and the ancient teaching to ask permission, to take only what we need. Kimmerer writes: "How do we consume in a way that does justice to the lives that we take?...Our ancestors found ways to harvest that bring long-term benefit to plants and people...Acknowledging the lives that support ours and living in a way that demonstrates our gratitude is a force that [will keep] the world in motion."

REACH now contemplates the embodiment of these ideas in a book celebrating coming together to decolonize; a collection of stories about food enjoyed in celebration, solidarity, and grief in our journey toward truth, healing, and change, promising to be far more than an ordinary cookbook!

Work with the Portland Public Schools

Over the past two years, Maine-Wabanaki REACH has provided programs for the staff and community of the Portland Public Schools, about the history of the relationship between Native and non-Native people here in Maine. We have been at teacher and administrator trainings, in classrooms with students, and at community events. It has been rewarding for the participants and for REACH staff and volunteers.

About this time last year, REACH was invited to present at the outdoor workshop on Sugar Island, as a part of the Penobscot Cultural Department's collaboration with Portland Schools regarding LD 291 (the 2001 state law mandating that Wabanaki history and culture be taught as part of the curriculum



in public schools). Maria Girouard recalls a fun and engaging day with the team, which is committed to teaching our Children the true history of our land.

To read more on the progress Portland educators are making, please go to www.mainewabanakireach.org/blog for our latest installment, contributed by Fiona Hopper who is the Portland Social Studies Teacher-Leader and Wabanaki Studies Coordinator. Her blog is entitled "Confronting Place-Ignorance in Education" and sheds valuable light on an important awakening.

NMAI History Curriculum Resources

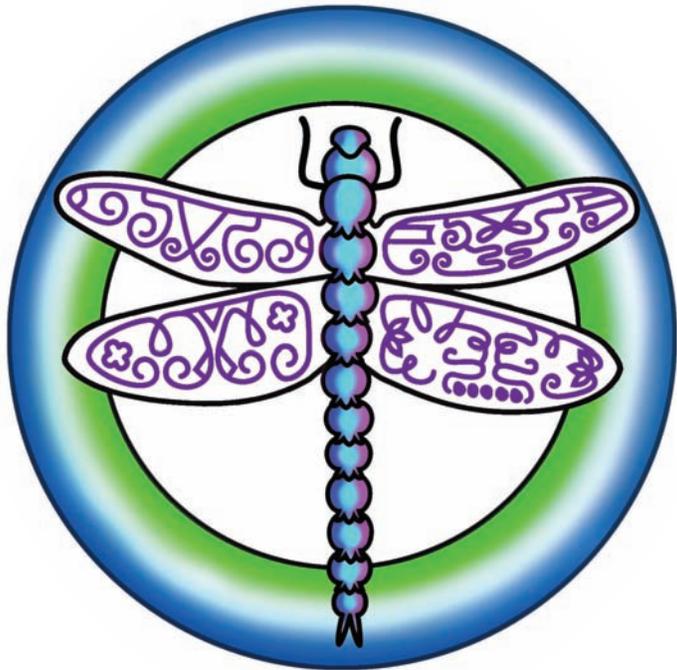
The National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) has been building national curriculum resources online to help elementary through high school teachers incorporate Native American history, cultures and contemporary lives into their classroom studies. You can find Native Knowledge 360° and Essential Understandings material at <http://americanindian.si.edu/nk360>



Statements continue to be added to the archive of the Maine Wabanaki State Child Welfare Truth and Reconciliation Commission. To access these Statements, go to <https://digitalcommons.bowdoin.edu/maine-wabanaki-trc>

“Because I firmly believe in your rights to live in your land, and I support your cause.”

“We received the gift of the Wabanaki REACH workshop with Penthea Burns as a way to ground our selves in the truth of this place where we live and work. We cannot thank you enough for creating such a powerful way to help us learn what we did not know nor understand about the tremendous loss that the First People of this land experienced and continue to experience. We are grateful to have this as a foundation as we move forward in our program of civic education, discovery and learning here in Portland, Maine.”



For more information or to make a donation, please go to www.mainewabanakireach.org.

You can also find us at

www.facebook.com/MEwabanakiREACH

and at https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=Maine+Wabanaki+Reach