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Facing widespread looting on and desecration of tribal lands and cultural sites, the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe has developed an initiative to protect and uphold the significance of these sites by training tribal citizens to preserve the land. With a team of 16 volunteers, including two elder spiritual experts, the Tribe monitors its traditional homeland, provides services to other Indian nations in five states, partners with outside agencies in preservation and enforcement efforts, and assists in creating tribal legislation by developing a Cultural Resource Code.

Located in the central regions of North and South Dakota, the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's reservation is bordered on its eastern side by the Missouri River. Spread across 2.3 million acres of land, approximately 1.4 million of which is tribally owned, Standing Rock encounters many of the challenges that face other rural tribes. Allotted reservation lands, sparse population, and a river that has changed drastically after many years of drought have all brought land issues to the forefront of tribal concerns. Efforts to dam the Missouri at various points and ensuing years of drought have left miles of riverbank exposed, unearthing many cultural sites and countless historic community artifacts. As more riverbank has been exposed, looting and desecration of sites has increased and is now rampant along the River's edge and throughout the reservation. Faced with the pressing problem of preventing looting and preserving culturally important sites, the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe created a tribally-run monitoring program.

Protecting tribal interests, on and off reservation lands, is difficult, particularly in remote areas that are difficult to reach and where human resources may be stretched thin. Tribal governments concerned with desecration and looting often face uphill battles with external agencies in charge of upholding land use laws and policies. Through the creation of programs that promote the ability to monitor activity internally and build strong partnerships with outside enforcement entities, Indian nations are better able to protect culturally important sites with tribal input and direction.

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) sought to manage the flow of the Missouri River by building six dams, essentially turning the River into a series of lakes. The Standing Rock reservation's border is most accurately described as both Lake Oahe and the Missouri River. In 2005, the region experienced its seventh consecutive year of drought, and decreasing water levels exposed shoreline

previously flooded when the dams were built. These changes resulted in increased exposure of many culturally significant sites. While close to 2,000 archaeological sites have been identified throughout the region, the River's edge alone has over 400 cultural sites documented. These include 66 recorded earth-lodge village sites. People walking along the shores often find pottery, tools, arrowheads, animal bones, and even human remains on the surface areas.

While the USACE is responsible for managing, maintaining, and preserving historic resources along the River, limited funding and staffing prevent it from effectively enforcing federal laws over such a large and growing area. In fact, the USACE has one staff person assigned to 3,000 miles of shoreline along Lake Oahe. Sheer size and the growing number of identified culturally significant sites make it difficult, if not impossible, for one person to oversee the entire area with any degree of effectiveness. Additionally, given the sacred and significant nature of many of these sites, there are specific preservation needs that can only be addressed by those with particular cultural knowledge and authority. The Tribe's preservation interests were not being addressed.

The Standing Rock Sioux Constitution requires that the Tribe manage, protect and preserve the property of the tribe. Under this mandate, the Standing Rock Sioux Tribal Historic Preservation Office initiated the Tribal Monitors Program in 2000. As the name suggests, the Program employs and trains tribal citizens to monitor cultural resources and historic properties significant to the nation. The Program relies on visual reporting methods and documentation procedures to log newly identified sites, report incidents or illegal activity, and monitor any physical changes in the Missouri River (e.g., water level or current changes). The Tribe also stewards sites significant to other Native people who previously lived in the region, expanding Standing Rock's mission to protect their ancestors and the ancestors of their relatives.

With these efforts, the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe is aggressively practicing sovereignty and upholding its constitutional preservation mandate by certifying its citizens to perform rigorous and culturally significant resource protection. The Tribal Monitors Program is important because it works to develop skills and knowledge in tribal citizens, and fosters their sense of responsibility for preserving cultural sites. Through the Program, citizens gain the cultural and technological skills needed to monitor, manage, and protect important sites. Elder spiritual leaders share their knowledge of cultural traditions and guide community members in learning how to act as stewards of their tribal homelands. As part of their responsibilities as stewards, program volunteers and staff work with outside agencies and tribal communities throughout the Sioux Nation to share knowledge and preserve cultural sites.

The Tribe oversees and ensures the preservation of historic sites and artifacts through the Monitors Program. Western and Native knowledge are bridged to form a system that provides for deep and rigorous training of tribal monitors. Monitors learn about water levels and current flows, how to anticipate if new sites are about to emerge, how to identify types of ceramics, how to handle artifacts and remains in culturally appropriate ways, and how to assist the USACE in its preservation and enforcement duties.

Monitors receive multiple certifications. First, they must complete an 80-hour para-archaeology certification process to even begin monitoring work. Since a majority of the work is conducted along the River, monitors also receive GPS training, boat search and rescue certification, and EMT training. This ensures that tribal personnel are qualified to work on federal lands, that reporting procedures are clear and rigorous, and that monitors are safe while performing their duties.

Tribal monitors are trained to properly document evidence of looting and desecration so that the Tribe can use information gathered to prosecute thieves. Evidence documentation also allows the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe to better hold outside governmental agencies accountable for duties with regard to tribal land and artifacts. For example, monitors logged over 400 hours in overtime to establish a case against the USACE Omaha District for the destruction of identified archaeological sites. They provided damage assessments at four sites, which led to the Mad Bear Litigation involving a burial site along the shores of the Missouri River. The USACE's liability was clear and the Tribe won the case, making certain that the over 100 human remains in the site would be properly handled and moved to an appropriate location. Tribal Monitors' efforts to identify and document illegal activities involving significant sites and cultural artifacts also have resulted in four federal Archaeological Resources Protection Act convictions; 19 federal felony misdemeanors (Title 36 Citations); six ongoing federal investigations; and five cases that are still open concerning the sale of looted objects over the internet.

To deter further looting, the Program publicizes ongoing investigations and convictions in addition to involving citizens and non-citizens in the area in activities to encourage land stewardship and respect. For many, the first encounter with the monitoring program is through outreach and education efforts. Similar to community policing efforts in law enforcement, the Program educates the public (e.g., the tribal community, federal agencies, neighboring Indian nations, and local non-Native communities) about the significance of protecting aboriginal homelands and how this relates to the preservation of Standing Rock's culture. All community members are encouraged to report suspicious activities and the Program has fostered many Native and non-Native allies.

The Program also promotes interaction between spiritual leaders and tribal community members that might not otherwise occur. Currently, the Tribal Monitors team includes 14 local volunteers and two spiritual leaders. The spiritual leaders work closely with the Program, traveling long distances to perform the necessary reburials and ceremonies at sites with human remains. Additionally, they provide cultural guidance and conduct ceremonies for Standing Rock's citizens.

Standing Rock stewardship of land is a serious responsibility for all tribal citizens and is not limited by reservation boundaries. Monitors provide essential services to other nations that lack the capacity to preserve and protect their own homelands and historic cultural sites. The staff is qualified to monitor and assess sites within the nine Sioux Nations in Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming, and Nebraska, encompassing 66 million acres of land. In addition, the processes and protocols used by the Tribal Monitors Program are being shared with other Indian nations along the Missouri River and beyond. Program staff has also assisted with the development of a Cultural Resources Code that proactively addresses potential damage to important sites. The Code furthers ongoing efforts and supports other nations' work to monitor and preserve tribal lands, and includes measures to hold outside agencies accountable for preserving and protecting cultural sites of significance.

As part of their stewardship, spiritual leaders and monitors also invest in building relationships and educating representatives from outside entities. Leaders from a number of outside agencies have completed Standing Rock's Tribal Monitor training. Staff and monitors have worked to build strong relationships with agencies such as the BIA's Land Operations, the USACE, law enforcement agencies, and the U.S. Forest Service. These relationships help to ensure that tribal interests are integrated in service delivery and enforcement.

The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's Tribal Monitors Program emphasizes the cultural values of protection and preservation. The Tribe believes that by protecting its sacred sites, it is preserving Standing Rock's culture for the present and future generations. As stewards, tribal monitors are trained to protect the land, artifacts, and remains, as well as to preserve the emotional and spiritual significance of sacred places. Central to carrying out this responsibility is sharing knowledge with other nations and holding external entities accountable for upholding tribal preservation interests. This initiative highlights the importance of bearing the responsibility to care for ancestors and land.

Lessons:

- By combining the strength of citizen volunteers with the knowledge and wisdom of tribal spiritual leaders, nations can build internal capacity around areas such as site monitoring, while also renewing community and cultural ties.
- A Cultural Preservation Code is a useful tool in laying out internal and external organizational responsibilities and accountability measures and in sharing knowledge about the preservation processes with others.
- Native nations can invoke a unique sense of sovereignty over ancestral homelands by supporting and nurturing its citizens' efforts to steward traditional lands. Furthermore, the physical and spiritual significance of areas are also protected.

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