ANNUAL NEWSLETTER

Story Highlight: Returning Our Ancestors (Page 4)

Do things at your own pace.
Life's not a race, except if you are racing in an iy̱asugaayax̱.
Announcements

Atuχ Forever had a busy year. So many stories to be shared in this annual newsletter.

We are excited to announce we have memberships available now on our website! Join our mission as an annual member! You can find the link at: https://www.zeffy.com/en-US/ticketing/3886c417-89ea-4100-8a16-d02a863dccc0e

We are seeking interns and volunteers for our mission. Please reach out if you know of anyone that is interested by email: attuanjustice@gmail.com
We had our first nonprofit strategic planning meeting hosted by First Nations Development Institute.

Our Atuḵ Forever Team

Traditional Stewards to Our Lands and Oceans

A story of how our Saskinaḵ Ancestors returned home from the Smithsonian Institute located in Washington D.C. to their rightful home.

The gathering of creating our first iy̓asugaayax̱ since 1910 and the story of the Muckleshoot Canoe Journey.

First Nations Institute Development L.E.A.D. Conference

In Honor of Our Elders

Partnerships & Updates
Atuχ Forever’s Strategic Planning

Our team gathered in Auburn, Washington on the lands of the Muckleshoot Nation in February of this year. The goal of this was to build on our nonprofit and grow as a team. It was our first nonprofits organization’s strategic meeting hosted by the First Nations Development Institute and guided by Mr. John Hendrix (in photo).

The whole team had wonderful ideas and instilled in our team great values and hope for the future. We revised our mission, vision, and brainstormed our values. Other than the normal nonprofit sector goals, we as a people hope to establish a lot – from our story taught in schools across the Nation, to establish a museum or cultural center, and a screenplay written, which were all just a few ideas. It was so inspirational. Of course, a lot of the goals we seek are in relation to social justice issues.
Our Current Team

We welcomed three new board members. We would like to welcome Charles Frady to our team this year. He helped during the strategic planning and has a lot of project management experience. Organizationally, we voted in our first board chair, Damon Howell. We welcomed Damon Howell back. He is a leader who keeps the full board work focused on our mission, and vision, and helps with the strategic direction. We also welcomed a new board member to our team, Francisco Mercado. He has a vast background in history and political science with a focus on racism. Welcome to all of our new team members!

We renewed Mr. John Hallidays and Lean Reval’s board membership after their first year. We have a wonderful team. Kaniyusal with all of your help and we will see so much more with this team.
Traditional Stewards of our Lands and Oceans

We received a grant to protect our marine resources. Our intention with this grant was to gain stewardship back to the land and oceans that our Ancestors took care of for many generations. We hope to be acknowledged as the Traditional Stewards of our land and ocean. We created an organizational policy that helps briefly with understanding the region and where we are established as stewards. Through NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) we established our cultural affiliation with our traditional homelands. We met with the military branches to share this cultural affiliation with them. This included the US Coast Guard, US Army, US Army Corps of Engineers, and US Air Force. This is to establish ourselves as Traditional Stewards to federal agencies. We created our first Memorandum of Understanding with the US Fish and Wildlife Alaska Maritime Refuge that does just that. We are grateful we were able to create one MOU with one federal agency, which truly is a success. We hope to continue this work well into the future.
Returning Our Ancestors

In June of 2023, Helena Schmitz, the President of Atu̠x̣ Forever and the Caretaker of the Saskina̠̣̣ traveled to Washington D.C. to help with the repatriation process at the Smithsonian Institute in partnership with the Native Village of Atka. I was so thankful for this opportunity and am excited to share this story with you. This project began in 2018 and was completed in burial on the islands in August of 2023. In 2019 this nonprofit was developed with this repatriation in mind. Our nonprofit Atu̠x̣ Forever, the Native Village of Atka, Smithsonian Institute, and the US Fish and Wildlife had a meeting about Saskina̠̣ Repatriation in March of 2022. Everyone was one the same page on wanting to make this process and project successful. Also everyone set a goal to return our Ancestors in the Summer of 2023.

The time at the Smithsonian went by fast with only two business days to work on the repatriation. About a dozen people were helping in the process of wrapping our Ancestors and packing them appropriately in boxes to be able to travel all the way home safely. Our Ancestors included 63 Saskina̠̣ family members from the Smithsonian, 4 individuals from a university museum, and one individual from a military family member. Our Ancestors were held in the Smithsonian Museum for a total of 87 years. After all the preparation for their travel, our Ancestors were ready to return home.
Returning Our Ancestors

Total Miles our Saskinaḵ Ancestral Remains traveled:
7,500 miles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Route</th>
<th>Distance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>From DC to Dallas then Dallas to Anchorage</td>
<td>4,235 miles in the air</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anchorage to Homer</td>
<td>223 miles by land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homer to Atuḵ, Angatuḵ, am Samiya</td>
<td>3,042 nautical miles by boat</td>
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When they arrived in Anchorage, Alaska Reid Johnson and I transported the remains into a safe truck. Then I drove to Homer, Alaska. We needed to transport them to Homer to the US Fish and Wildlife’s warehouse for their next step in their journey. The US Fish and Wildlife Alaska Maritime Refuge Center volunteered their boat and their staff to help return our Ancestors on their research vessel. Thus, we had to get the remains onto the research vessel located in Homer. After our Ancestors rested awhile in Homer, they then traveled on boat to Atuḵ, Angatuḵ, and Samiya. Atuḵ Forever supported four Saskinaḵ members to travel on the boat, with three being Elders. The whole trip was successful and there were no barriers or issues in the returning of our Ancestors.
Returning Our Ancestors

We would like to thank all of those who were involved from the Smithsonian Repatriation team, US Fish and Wildlife, the Native Village of Atka, our Board Members, Sherry Thompson, and to the Alaska Community Foundation. We would like to personally thank Barbara Riley Asher and Richard Asher, Blanche Murphy, and Reid Johnson for helping our Ancestors return home. This long journey could not have happened without all of everyone’s help.

From Left to Right: Brad Schmitz, Helena Schmitz, Anecia Schmitz, and Brad Schmitz Jr. in Homer. Photo Taken by USFW
During a two-week intensive cultural build of a two-person kayak, known in our language as iyğasugaayaâx, a lot of healing and a lot of fun times were had! Mr. Marc Daniels from True North Boats, a craftsman and artist in recreating traditional kayaks, came up from Ferndale, California to help with this endeavor. Over the two-week period around a total of 25 people helped with the build! We had an amazing turn out and an amazing time together. We served five Saskinaâx youth ranging from 5 to 16 years of age.

Over the research period of how Saskinaâx made their kayaks – there wasn’t enough information. The authors would state that ours were different, but then would not explain how they were different. So, we did the best we could. Kaniyusal to everyone for helping create an iyğasugaayaâx, which has not been built since 1910. We are grateful for the hosts located in Vancouver, Washington, Theresa Deal and Mark Brooks, for allowing us to build this momentous memory and to create a new living member to our Saskinaâx family.
Iyğasugaayał Touching the Waters of the Suquamish Nation

The Muckleshoot Canoe Journey’s theme was Honoring our Warriors Past and Present. The iyğasugaayał did its first journey beginning in the waters of the Suquamish Nation and then ended on the shore of the Alki Beach Park in Washington State. As part of this ceremony, we gave honor to those that allowed us to depart and also gave honor at the landing point to assure our safe landing. It took my son Brad Schmitz Jr. and I around 4 ½ to 5 hours to paddle. Then it took about 2 hours at the landing site to be part of the landing ceremony. The iyğasugaayał was part of the water and waves and guided us through the journey. It was a spectacular ride even though we were exhausted afterwards. Traditionally, our people were seafarers and I could see why through becoming part of the iyğasugaayał. This wasn’t our peoples first journey - there were many. We were just beginning something that was once lost and now is found.
As part of this Canoe Journey each canoe family has an opportunity to share their culture by performing. Our Canoe family’s name was Misiiim Izigaa, which is my son’s name. The Saskinał dance and drums have not been danced or drummed for generations. This was the first of many. Our dance was off of a Qaglaał tale. We want to thank the Muckleshoot family that invited us as well! Thank you to the Halliday family for the invitation to be part of something so incredible.
Many indigenous leaders from across the country gathered together for this wonderful and amazing conference. As FNDI’s President and CEO stated and is a message worth sharing repeatedly:

“Since time immemorial, Native people have managed, protected, and honored the lands that have sustained Native people for generations. Native people have adapted and cultivated practices, transferred traditional ecological knowledge over many generations, and have understood the importance of maintaining balance with the natural world – a balance centered around reciprocity, honor, kinship, and harmony.

To that end, Native people are the original stewards of the land. Once again, as wildfires tear through mountainsides, ocean temperatures rise, and floods ravage through communities, traditional ways and practice of ecological stewardship are on the forefront of solving many of today’s environmental issues.

The 2023 L.E.A.D. Conference is dedicated to the original stewards of these lands and the knowledge and innovation they shared that have contributed to a resilient people and community. This conference is about honoring the past, present, and future stewards of the lands, as we tell their stories, reclaim our rights, restore our lands, and return to our ways.” -Mike Roberts

We learned about how nonprofits can obtain land acquisition through the session, ‘Ancestral Land Acquisition & Stewardship Tribal Nonprofit Path.’ We learned about digital storytelling, how to reclaim our narrative, about co-management, and so much more! Some bullet points of our lessons learned is as follows:

- Lessons Learned
  - Uphold and Assert Sovereignty.
  - Long-term goals.
  - Land return as an end-goal.
  - Capacity Building and Funding.
  - People make a difference.

There were so many takeaways from this short and informative conference. One main takeaway is that it is a possibility for non-federally recognized Tribes to obtain land and to also have co-management agreements with State and/or Federal agencies. Each pathway is different and there may be challenges; however, there is always a pathway to a solution.
In Honor of Our Elders

This year both the last of the Attuan Survivors who were in Japan during WWII passed to the other side. We are so saddened by this. We are so thankful for their strong and resilient lives that they led. Elizabeth Kudrin was only one when she was a prisoner in Japan and her brother, Gregory Golodoff, was only three when he was a prisoner in Japan.

More of their stories can be found in these articles:

https://alaskapublic.org/2023/03/10/elizabeth-kudrin-remembered-as-great-survivor-of-world-war-ii/


https://obituaries.adn.com/adportal/listingView.html?id=5777

https://www.janssenfuneralhomes.com/obituaries/Gregory-Golodoff?obId=29986617
New Partnerships formed in 2023

We are so grateful for our new partnership with the Social Justice Fund of the Northwest. They were supportive of our efforts the first day we met with Valeriana E.B. Estes. The Social Justice Fund, founded in 1978, is a grantmaking organization dedicated to addressing the root causes of social, economic, and environmental inequities. We look forward to growing our partnership with this organization!

We were so grateful to meet up with another partnership at the end of this year, Ancestral Connections. Ancestral Connections is an indigenous-led nonprofit based in Hawai‘i. They work on a lot of various projects. However, with us we are hoping to learn more about the Ainu way of life. We eventually will build a traditional bridge between the Saskinax̂ and the Ainu.

Ukyuigal to Some of our Team Members

We are so grateful for Theresa Deal’s Vice Presidency! We loved having her on our team. She helped with the formation of the nonprofit back in 2019. Her amazing quilt wrapped our Ancestors with love and warmth. Kaniyusal Theresa!

We are so grateful for Tobi Iverson’s board membership! We loved having her on our team and she helped our goals in many ways. We are glad she helped us during the strategic planning and her mother helped us with an embroidery project. She also helped with a lot of networking. Kaniyusal Tobi!
Upcoming Updates

Atuḵ Forever has been coordinating with a film student, Joe Everitt who resides in the United Kingdom. He will be creating a short documentary about Attu and the Botanist Isobel Hutchinson who was from Scotland (circa 1936). Here is more information from them:

“We are a small film crew from The Northern Film School at Leeds Beckett University in the UK; the film is directed by Holly Price and produced by Joe Everitt. When we found out about Isobel Wylie Hutchison’s visit to Attu we were taken with the poetry about the island. We want to share Isobel’s video footage of local people on Attu and words describing the island.

We are also looking for any Saskinaḵ people who would like share their stories of Attu in the film by making a short voice recording. This could be anything from family stories handed down or major historical events that you would like to retell. We are keen to hear real voices telling an authentic story, this section of the film is guided by you.”

Please consider donating to the project at: https://www.gofundme.com/f/attu-short-film-at-the-northern-film-school.

Projects coming up for 2024 are:

- Dancing: Establishing our dancing and understanding.
- Organizing the Saskinaḵ language words.
- Working on publishing a cultural appropriation report (Saskinaḵ are not Unangaḵ).
- FNDI Ecological Stewardship Grant: Historical research and federal recognition work.
Please donate to continue our work and mission!!

atuxforever.org
Email any questions to attuanjustice@gmail.com