

Land Acknowledgment at Camp Friedenswald

By Skye McKinnell, sustainability assistant

As spring blooms around us, bringing new life and colors to the landscape, we give thanks for the land that is Camp Friedenswald. We recognize the value of the natural spaces that make up Camp and are thankful for the opportunity to gather and retreat on such a beautiful landscape.

Over the past year and a half, we've been thinking about our connection to the land even more as we've taken on the process of creating a land acknowledgment statement to honor both the land and the people who stewarded it before us.

What is a land acknowledgment?

One of the most common definitions comes from LSPIRG (lspirg.org/knowtheland), "A Land Acknowledgment is a formal statement that recognizes and respects Indigenous Peoples as traditional stewards of this land and the enduring relationship that exists between Indigenous Peoples and their traditional territories."

Why acknowledge the land?

Land acknowledgment statements are a common practice used by both Indigenous People and settler organizations to honor the land and the original inhabitants of the land and as a reminder of contested histories and continued injustices. The statement is a reminder to re-examine our own history as settlers and a commitment to continue the work of relationship building, re-educating, and taking action. We can continue to live out our mission and values of stewardship, nature, and community by committing to this process of land acknowledgment and all that comes after.

How do we practice land acknowledgment?

Our process for creating a land acknowledgment statement began in the fall of 2019. One of the main resources we used to guide our process was the "Honor Native Lands Guide" developed by the US Department of Arts and Culture. The guide outlined three main steps for honoring the land with an acknowledgment statement: identify, articulate, and deliver.

Identify: The first step of land acknowledgment is doing your research to determine the original inhabitants of the land. It's important to answer three important questions: who was there, what happened to them, and where are they now. Although many different groups moved in and out of the Lake Michigan region over time, the Potawatomi (*Bodéwadmí*) are recognized

as the traditional inhabitants of this land at the time Europeans arrived. As more settlers arrived in the Michigan area, they began to push the Potawatomi and other Indigenous People out. The treaty of Chicago of 1821 ceded a portion of Southern Michigan to the US government and the Potawatomi were dispossessed of their traditional homelands. The 1833 Treaty of Chicago set the grounds for removal of the Potawatomi. The Potawatomi moved or were forcibly removed by the US military to different areas of the country including Kansas, Oklahoma, Wisconsin, and Canada in the 1830s. The Pokagon band of the Potawatomi purchased land in Michigan and were allowed to stay here because of their Catholic faith.

Articulate: The next step is writing the statement using the history you've learned. There is no set script for land acknowledgment, but language is important to set the correct tone and be a useful educational tool. The language in our statement was chosen carefully with guidance from many Indigenous resources including the Potawatomi.

Deliver: The final step of a land acknowledgment statement is to deliver it. These words hold a lot of meaning, weight, and importance, so speaking them requires a relationship between the speaker, the land, and the statement itself. Speaking or printing the land acknowledgment is a grounding exercise to recommit ourselves to education, relationships, and action.

We are glad to be able to share our land acknowledgment with the Camp Friedenswald community.

We acknowledge that we gather as Camp Friedenswald on traditional land of the Potawatomi People past, present, and future, and honor with gratitude the land itself and the people who have tended it throughout the generations. We recognize and affirm the sovereignty of the Potawatomi and other indigenous nations.

Following treaties between 1821 and 1833, Potawatomi people were dispossessed of their indigenous homelands by the United States government and forcibly removed. Our neighbors, the Pokagon band of the Potawatomi, were allowed to stay and remain an important part of our community today.

Knowing our history does not change the past, but a thorough understanding of the ongoing consequences of this past can empower us in our work for a just and peaceful future.

