

FELLOWSHIP BRIEF

Pursuing Better Stewardship and Better Futures: Centering Native American Histories and Perspectives

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The Need.

The United States recognizes over 500 American Indian or Alaskan Native nations. There is extraordinary variety in the cultural, spiritual, and stewardship practices among Native American peoples. Sincere collaboration with Native nations provides non-Native land stewards an opportunity to confront an often terrible history, steward landscapes effectively for more stakeholders, and pursue a better future between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

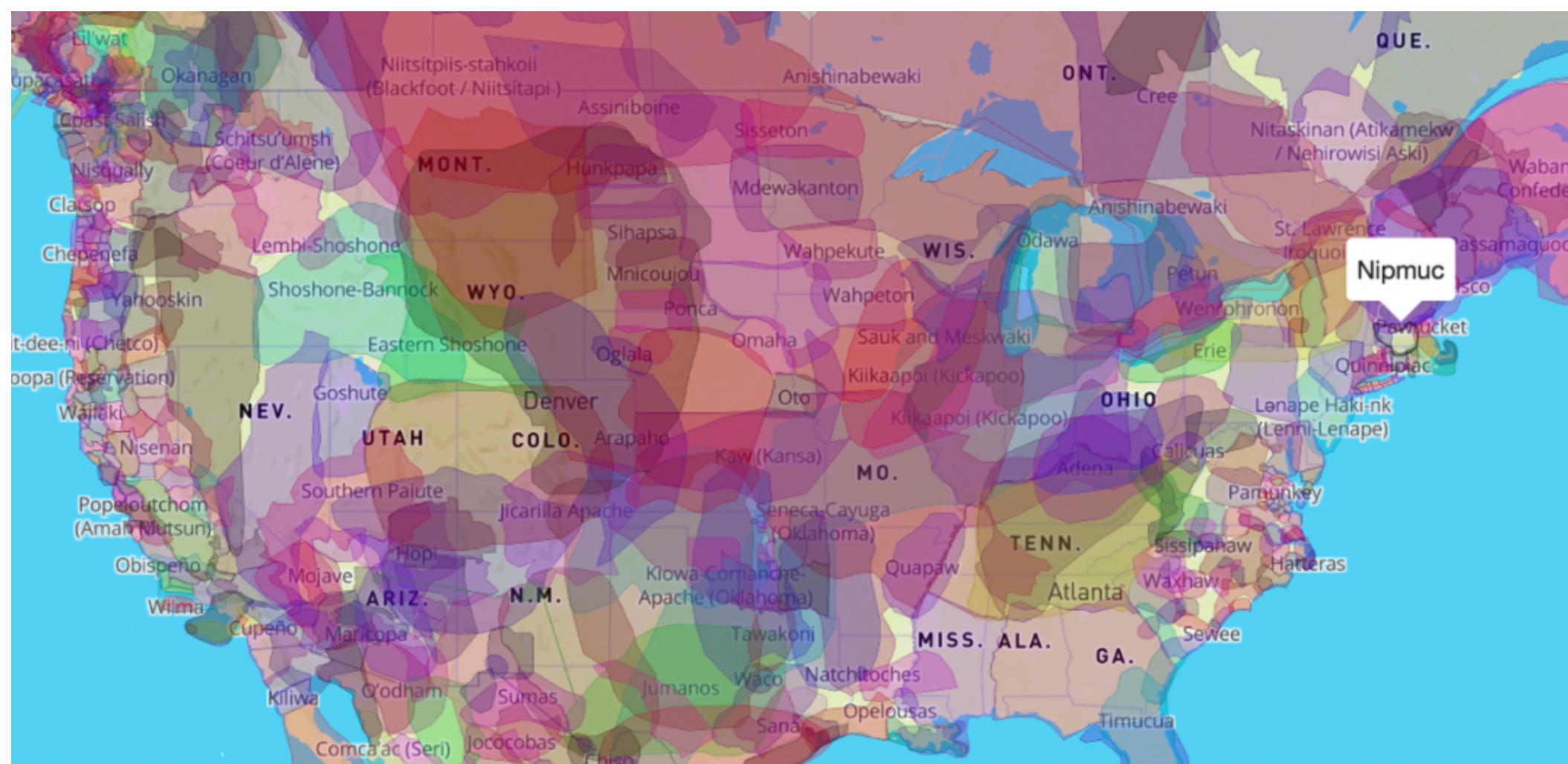


Photo from Native Land Digital: <https://native-land.ca/>

The first step to this collaboration is a process of learning. By respectfully listening to the histories and perspectives of Native voices, stewards can increase the likelihood of collaboration that is respectful and beneficial to Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders. This project provides an example for students at the Yale School of the Environment (YSE), as well as many others, of a first step towards this learning process.

The Project.

Reid worked with post-graduate fellows at Yale Forests to create a public reading group centered on Indigenous nations, especially the Nipmuc Nation in the Northeast. The organizers collaborated with Tiana Wilson-Blindman, as well as Meghanlata Gupta of Indigenizing the News, to highlight Native issues told from Native perspectives. Reid and his colleagues published weekly posts that centered on content from Native authors, podcasters, researchers, and storytellers. The posts were published through the Yale Forests Instagram account and through a separate listserv created specifically for the reading group. The reading group ended the summer with 140 listserv members and more than 1,000 Instagram followers. The eight weekly posts investigated: erasure and the concept of wilderness, land theft, King Philip's War regarding erasure and theft, tribal sovereignty, land allotment, guardianship, African-Native American Intersectionality, and Native activism.

The Findings.

Learning about local Indigenous nations requires learning about national, regional, and specific issues related to the unique Native nation. Tribal sovereignty, land allotment, blood quantum, erasure, cultural appropriation, "wilderness," and genocide are foundational topics that affect most, if not all, Native nations. In the Northeast, erasure is especially prominent due to the persistence of the "last Indian" narrative. Violent displacement and attempted genocide, especially through King Philip's War, are critical historical components to understand the relationship between the Yale-Myers Forest and the Nipmuc Nation. In addition, federal recognition remains a key issue between the Nipmuc Nation and United States government. The too common narrative of "Indigenous extinction" is both demonstrably false and actively harmful. Respectfully learning from knowledge that Native creators share is essential to unlearning this narrative of erasure. The enthusiastic engagement our reading group received demonstrates a growing understanding of the falsehoods within colonial depictions of Native nations, as well as a willingness to learn about Native nations from Native perspectives.

The Impact.

The Yale School of the Environment draws students from around the globe who hope to go forward and steward a variety of ecosystems. YSE, and Yale University more broadly, are institutions created from the colonial society of the United States. Learning about the complex issues facing Native nations, and the histories that back these issues, is critical for students to not only conduct stewardship that benefits more stakeholders, but also to pursue a future where stewardship betters the relationship between colonial and Indigenous societies. This project will complement learning opportunities available at the School of the Environment, empowering students to listen to Native voices and help create a field of environmental stewardship that does the same.

The Student.



Reid graduated with a Master of Forestry degree from Yale School of the Environment, and currently works for the Yale Forests in a postgraduate fellowship assessing the carbon stocks of Yale's forests. Hailing from Flagstaff, Arizona, he will soon be returning to YSE to pursue a PhD that examines the intersection of forest carbon, climate change, and active stewardship. Outside of work, you can find Reid going for a stroll, luffing a sail, or reading a good book.