2026 IMPACT REPORT

Returning Power to Place

Equipping Native leadership and building practical partnerships to heal California's lands, waters, and Native communities



Redbud Resource Group.

Native Minds Changing Lives.

A Letter from Taylor Pennewell,

Executive Director

Water is the resource California depends on most and understands least. From the Sierra snowpack, water flows down to fill rivers, reservoirs, and eventually aquifers beneath farms in the Central Valley. The reservoirs feed the taps and swimming pools in the San Francisco Bay Area and beyond, and generate electricity for our grids, our Teslas, and Silicon Valley. And the state's ecosystems run on the same water.

Most people don't know where their water comes from, and few have seen the headwaters of these watersheds. Even fewer know the stories of the communities who stewarded those waters and lands for thousands of years. That knowledge has never been lost, and it cannot be reduced to a single dataset, let alone a media headline. Still, the people who hold that knowledge have been systemically excluded from the tables where decisions about that water get made.

This is not just a matter of historical awareness. We are all living with the results of that exclusion, and we have only just begun to pay for it: worsening fire seasons, lands choked with high fuel loads, rivers running warmer and dirtier, fisheries collapsing, and species vanishing from the places that were named after them.

For most of the last two decades, California argued about whether Indigenous knowledge has a place in how the state manages its land and water. The same argument ran through public health, through education, and through how honestly we were willing to read our own history.

Today there is a growing consensus that Native knowledge is essential to solving California's water, environmental, and climate challenges, and to changing the systems that produced them.

The question in front of us is, "Who can put that knowledge back into the rooms where the policies are written and the money is moved?" That is why Redbud Resource Group exists.



What We Believe, and Why It Works

Members of the Tyme Maidu community from Berry Creek Rancheria founded Redbud in 2020 around one idea. The most durable answers on land, water, and community health come from braiding Indigenous knowledge and Western science on equal terms, backed by institutional capacity. This means making Indigenous expertise part of the core strategy from day one, instead of adding a symbolic gesture or a land acknowledgment to a finished project.

Two things have to come together, and they are usually held by different people. Native communities carry generations of working knowledge about these landscapes. Agencies and large organizations control the budgets, policy influence, and reach on a scale most Tribal communities have never been resourced to match. Closing the distance between these groups takes more than good intentions and memorandums of understanding. It requires skilled facilitation, shared understanding built over time, and an organization that can hold partnerships together across differences in history, power, and priorities.

Redbud moves forward at the speed the work demands. This can mean moving fast, when a policy window opens and a coalition exists. Sometimes it means waiting for a council to meet, or for a relationship to ripen to the point where a hard conversation is possible. If you push past trust, the relationship breaks. A lot of this work gets assembled in a hurry and falls apart just as fast. What we build is designed to last.

What This Looks Like in Practice

Through the **Feather River Advocacy Project**, more than 50 Native leaders from six Tribal communities are building a shared five-year vision for the watershed. They organize through four participant-led



committees. Most workshops end when people go home. A committee structure keeps working.

The cohort has co-developed a learning exchange with the State Water Resources Control Board in Sacramento, preparing coordinated public testimony on the California Water Plan, meeting directly with the Department of Water Resources and its Tribal Relations Office, and organizing around the Oroville Dam relicensing process, which is likely one of the most consequential water decisions the state will make this decade. Participants in our **Restoring Right Relations** leadership program are now also preparing to guide implementation of California's Truth and Healing Council recommendations in their own communities.

What changed is the sequence. Tribes have long been invited to comment on plans already written. Here, Native leaders are taking part in designing these processes rather than reviewing them at the end.
The same pattern runs through the rest of our work. **Right Relations**, offered in partnership with TOGETHER Bay Area, has reached 34 organizations and more than 150 conservation professionals. Land-holding organizations are opening land return conversations and building Tribal priorities into their long-term plans. When TOGETHER Bay Area's Conservation Lands Network set out to map the region's biodiversity, Redbud is being brought in to write the Tribal chapter. That map shapes land acquisition and conservation policy across the Bay Area, and Indigenous knowledge is now part of the reference materials agencies and funders base their decisions on.

Restoring Right Relations, our program for the next generation of Native leaders, serves 25 people annually, with a 75 and growing alumni network from 37 Tribes nationally. **Going Beyond Land Acknowledgments** has trained thousands of professionals across agencies, health systems, and conservation groups, including workshops co-led with Tribal Affairs Secretary Geneva Thompson of the California Natural Resources Agency.

Through our films, most recently **Wings of the Feather River**, we have brought agency staff, Tribal citizens, and community members into the same conversation about the future of the watershed. The films have become the clearest way people encounter this work, and we still have far more stories than we've had the chance to tell.

More Than an Environmental Organization

A few years ago, leadership from the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC) came through our **Right Relations** training. The agency's water infrastructure runs from the Hetch Hetchy Reservoir in the granite peaks of the Sierra Nevada, through a network of reservoirs and pipes across the Central Valley, until it reaches Bay Area taps. All of it is built on Indigenous land. In the training, they realized that meaningful Tribal engagement could not be one more line on an employee's already overflowing to-do list.

Nothing moves quickly inside a 2,000-person public agency. Over two years, they advocated to their Commission for permanent, structural change.

The Commission created two Stewardship and Engagement Analyst positions, one for the Bay Area and one for the High Sierra. Both analysts report directly to senior leadership, and their roles are dedicated to partnership with Native communities and the policy work behind it. As one of their division managers recently told us, the impact on their day-to-day reality is "night and day." They moved from reading a land acknowledgment to paying Tribal people from the communities impacted by their infrastructure to drive the future of critical resource management. Redbud is occasionally taken for an environmental organization because of some of the issues we address. But that's only part of it. We work on systems, and systems are

made of people. Land, water, health, and education are where that impact shows up.

Our education and research programs develop curricula and put Traditional Ecological Knowledge back to work on the land it came from. In our **Seeing Our Native Patients** project, we train healthcare providers to better serve Native patients.

The project addresses health disparities and the crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons across North America, as well as issues around elder care, maternal care, and integrating traditional medicine with Western medicine.

You cannot treat the land and the people who belong to it as separate problems. When Native communities thrive and shape their own future, California is steadier, and it can start repairing what its systems broke.

Where We Are, and What We Are Asking

We will be direct about where we stand. We have built programs that work, and we now have to say no to people we should be saying yes to, because there's only so much a small team of Native women can take on. We have long waiting lists across all our initiatives. This is the one problem only unrestricted funding solves. We are not looking to become large. We are looking to become as durable as the change we are asking California to make.

The restricted grants we receive from state agencies and private foundations pay for the projects and programs themselves. Unrestricted grants, philanthropic investments, and gifts from individual donors, one-time or monthly, are necessary to build and run the organization those programs depend on. That money pays for the staff, the operations, and the capacity no single program budget will ever cover.

Restricted funding runs the programs. Unrestricted funding builds the institution that makes those programs possible. That is what we are asking for primarily.

An Invitation



This letter is only the opening. We invite you to read the rest of the report and see the work for yourself.

If that is the kind of relationship-driven change you want to back, we would be glad to have your support, whether this is your first year with Redbud or your fifth.

If you want to explore how to best support our work, or what a deeper partnership could look like, my door is open. Write to info@redbudresourcegroup.org and it will reach me.

With gratitude and confidence,

Executive Director and Co-Founder, Redbud Resource Group
Citizen of Berry Creek Rancheria Band of Maidu Indians of California

P.S. We started Redbud because we believe our Native communities deserve a strong voice in the future of our homelands. Six years on, that voice is organized, and a network of Native leaders and institutional partners has taken it into rooms I could not have pictured then. This report tells the most recent part of that story. I hope it leaves you with the same confidence I carry into this work every day.

Letter



Our Programs ...

Right Relations

Right Relations is a nine-month program co-led by Redbud Resource Group and TOGETHER Bay Area for conservation organizations and public agencies. It is designed to change the internal structures governing how these organizations relate to and work with Tribes. The program is entering its fifth year.

The Feather River Advocacy Project

The Feather River Advocacy Project builds the capacity of Maidu people to shape decisions about their own watershed. Now entering its third year, the project convenes more than 50 Native leaders from six Maidu Tribes and a growing network of partners. Our film "Wings of the Feather River" is part of this project.

Restoring Right Relations

Restoring Right Relations is a leadership and power-building program for Native people that pairs cultural education, wellness support, and land stewardship with political education and strategic planning. The program is entering its fourth year.

Seeing Our Native Patients

Seeing Our Native Patients is a training program for clinical teams to address disparities in care for Native patients. It covers intergenerational trauma, culturally informed interviewing, and connecting patients to traditional medicine practices and Native-run services.

Going Beyond Land Acknowledgments

Going Beyond Land Acknowledgments is a training system designed to move organizations from a symbolic statement toward concrete support for Tribal sovereignty. It currently reaches nearly 1,000 people a year, and has reached more than 10,000 over the past five years.

Programs

Our Programs

Right Relations

Changing Institutional Practice from Within

Most conservation organizations operating in California today hold legal authority over lands and water systems that were taken from Tribal communities without consent. The staff working in those organizations today did not make those decisions, and most of them did not write the consultation protocols, budget templates, or onboarding packets that now determine whether and how their institutions engage with Tribes. Right Relations addresses the skills, procedures, internal structures, and peer accountability that determine whether changes can last.

How the Program Works

Right Relations is a nine-month, cohort-based program co-designed and co-led by Redbud Resource Group and TOGETHER Bay Area. It serves conservation organizations and public agencies across the ten-county San Francisco Bay Area. The program helps participants develop institutional practices that account for Tribal recognition and land jurisdiction in the region. Admission to the program requires a formal commitment from each organization's executive leadership. During the program, participating teams build institutional action plans and present those plans to peer organizations in the cohort for discussion and accountability. Since its 2022 pilot, the program has run four cohorts, training 158 people from 34 organizations. Returning organizations may join an alumni "Community of Practice" cohort that meets online, in person, and in the field to continue implementing their action plans with additional support. A new cohort begins in January 2027.





Right Relations facilitates participant learning to initiate changes in organizational structures and practices. Redbud and TOGETHER Bay Area track whether institutions are moving beyond one-time initiatives. This includes tracking shifts toward long-term financial planning for Tribal relations, the integration of cultural competency into internal HR and training systems, the creation of dedicated liaison roles, and the development of concrete land access or stewardship partnerships. One land trust developed a Land Back strategy and returned coastal land to a local Tribe. Another organization established a stewardship partnership that provides ongoing access to cultural plants and ceremonial space. The Sonoma Land Trust committed to expanding land return efforts in Sonoma County, identified coastal properties for potential return to Southern Pomo communities, and added a Kashia and Southern Pomo representative to its Board of Directors.



Participants and Tribal Leaders in the Same Room

The TOGETHER Bay Area Spring Convening, a regional conference of roughly 500 people, put Right Relations participants in the room with 60 Native leaders from Redbud's Restoring Right Relations Tribal leadership network. In one workshop, each table received a scenario with no clean solution. One asked how an organization could fulfill the legal obligations of a cultural easement while remaining non-invasive and supporting a Tribe's self-determination and its authority over its own cultural practices. The scenarios tested whether groups would position Tribes as leaders and decision-makers rather than as stakeholders to be consulted. The groups' discussions centered on transparent communication and shared responsibility. Several Native leaders spoke up without waiting to be called on and led the discussion. One group chose a Native leader and a program participant to present together rather than designate a single spokesperson. The room was demonstrating shared leadership instead of merely discussing it.

What our Right Relations Participants Say

> *"I've been in this field for 16 years, and Redbud's Right Relations program is a singularity. I have been incredibly moved by the thought and intention that has gone into it. Hearing directly from Indigenous teachers about their lived experiences, their history, and where we should go from here is completely different than just reading about it or engaging through formal colonial structures. If you open up to it, this program has the power to be truly transformative. It will have a profound impact on your worldview and your professional ability to connect and work with tribes in a better, more meaningful way."*
>
> — **Daniel Franco** | Senior Project Manager | Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy





> *"I sometimes think of Redbud Resource Group as our 'Indigenous therapist'. Working with them has given us so much confidence in who we are as an organization. Before Redbud, we knew our conservation work could never be fully successful without the meaningful inclusion of Native people, but we needed help guiding that shift in our capacity. Redbud helped us navigate the urgency and sensitivity of this work, providing direct actions that we as non-native allies could actually implement, as well as cultural context that continues to inform the direction of our work.*
>
> *The shift in our mission has been monumental. A year ago, we didn't have these relationships. Today, we are on a first-name basis with local tribes, welcomed onto their land, consulting on their native plant nurseries and stewardship projects, and partnering on grants. We wouldn't have been as consistent and confident in building these relationships without Redbud's support."*
>
> — **Valerie Lee** | Director of Community Engagement | Grassroots Ecology

> *"Working with Redbud has been one of our best training opportunities. There is so much history that needs to be shared, and it is extremely compelling when it's personal. It's great to have people from tribes lead the training. They do it in a way that is very disarming. People want to learn, ask questions, and share their own experiences. They create an environment where we can have honest, direct discussions, which is super important for this complex work.*
>
> *The impact on the SFPUC has been night and day. It's hard to describe how different our day-to-day work is now compared to before we started this. It even inspired us to make structural changes, creating new, dedicated staff positions to focus entirely on relationship-building with tribes. We aren't just reading land acknowledgments anymore. We are actively doing the work."*
>
> — **Tim Ramirez** | Natural Resources Division Manager | San Francisco Public Utilities Commission



Feather River Advocacy Project

Reconnecting the Communities the Dam Scattered

The Feather River once connected the Maidu peoples of the watershed. In the foothills, families from many Tribal communities gathered at ceremonial sites, fished, hunted, and spoke a shared language along the river's branches. When the Oroville Dam was completed in 1968, more than 600 village and ceremonial sites along the river system were buried underwater. Families who had lived on the river's banks were scattered to higher elevations, separated from the sites central to their ceremonies, seasonal rounds, and relationships with surrounding Tribal communities.

The Maidu are still here, and so is their knowledge of the ecological and social systems that sustained them. The Feather River Advocacy Project (FRAP) is the structure Redbud built to reconnect communities, knowledge systems, and lifeways.

What the Project Does

More than 50 Native leaders representing six Maidu Tribes work through four participant-led committees (Government-to-Government Relations; Food, Fiber and Medicine; Youth and Family Engagement; and Community Visibility). Each committee identifies its own priority issues, develops recommendations and multi-year strategies, and proposes projects. Redbud then works alongside them to locate partnerships, funding, technical support, and policy processes where participants can successfully advance those strategies.

In 2026, the cohort held a power-building and strategic visioning workshop on the Middle Fork of the Feather River, a stretch the Maidu language teacher Steven Young identifies by its traditional name, Wuwáyonoktom Sewí, meaning "the river that throws into piles." There the group mapped who actually shapes decisions about the watershed. Farmers, ranchers, fishers, utility providers, environmental organizations, water agencies, Tribal Nations, and local communities all hold pieces of that decision-making power. By the end of the day, the discussion had moved from whether Maidu people hold power in this process to how to use it.

In the months since, FRAP participants prepared public testimony related to the California Water Plan. They have met directly with the California Department of Water Resources and its Tribal Relations Office. Scientists involved in developing the California Water Plan now meet regularly with Redbud staff, a Tribal attorney, and a Tribal natural resources representative from the Feather River region. Those conversations led to a jointly designed day of learning for State Water Board staff and FRAP participants. A workshop co-hosted with the State Water Resources Control Board and Wilton Rancheria built participant capacity for direct engagement in state policy processes.

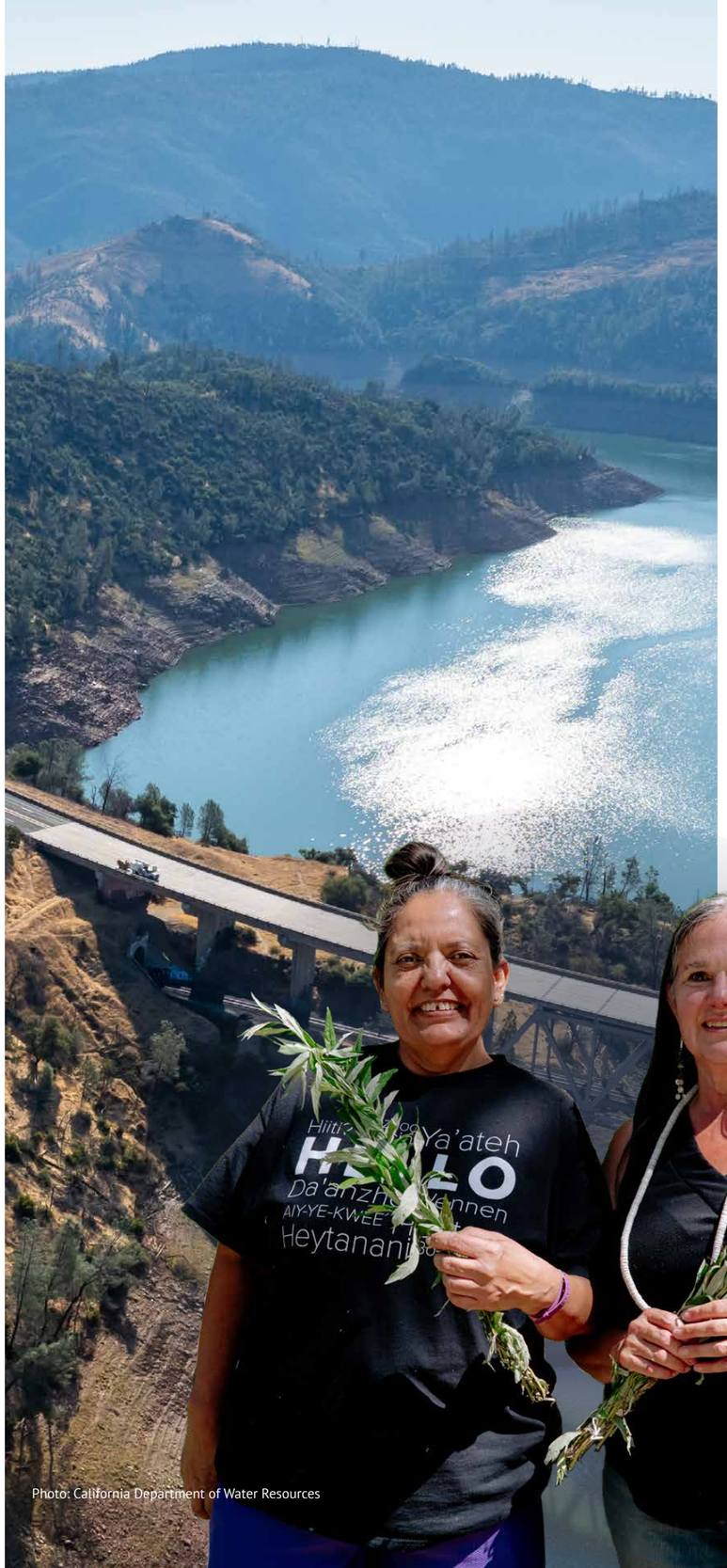


Photo: California Department of Water Resources

The Film: "Wings of the Feather River"

Redbud produced Wings of the Feather River, a short documentary, as part of the Feather River Advocacy Project. The film follows Maidu community members through the cultural, historical, and environmental significance of the river: the deep ties of Maidu people to the watershed, the impacts of the dam's construction, and the work underway to protect Feather River lands and waters. It centers intergenerational dialogue, lived experience, and the role of Indigenous knowledge in modern water management.

The film was made first as a teaching tool, to share stories of Maidu relationships with the river and build community understanding about the impacts of hydropower on local communities. Several dams on the Feather River will come up for relicensing over the coming years, each setting terms that will determine management decisions for decades. The film prepares Maidu people to take part in those processes and drive reform in how they are made.

Nearly 400 people attended the film's premiere in April 2026, and regional community screenings that followed have reached roughly 1,000 people so far. At the screenings, Tribal people from other parts of the country describe how the film helped them understand their own histories and moved them to engage with water issues in their own territories.



"Our tribes used to do everything together and share ceremony. We were all connected across the river. The construction of the dams physically separated our communities and put a wedge in our culture. Now, through Redbud's Feather River Advocacy Program, we are seeing local tribes unite again with a common goal. It is incredibly moving to see so many of our youth and elders getting involved to advocate for the watershed. As tribes, we have to ask who we are if we do not advocate for our lifeblood. The river is the lifeblood of the people, and Redbud has become a strong and trusted partner in providing a space for this vital work. The river tells a story to everyone differently. I just hope the Feather River continues to tell its story to future generations."



— Matt Hatcher,
Tribal Historic Preservation Officer,
Mooretown Rancheria (FRAP participant)

Programs







Restoring Right Relations

Before removal, the tribes of California held complex economic, political, spiritual, and cultural relationships with one another. Those ties were deliberately severed and the isolation that followed shows up today as poor health, poverty, and cultural and spiritual harm. Restoring Right Relations reverses that harm by rebuilding relationships between tribes, between Native people and their cultures, and between people and the land.

The program brings participants from across California to Tribal homelands to learn from Tribal mentors and Native-led organizations, and combines cultural education, integrative mental health and wellness support, and land stewardship with political education and strategic planning. Each participant completes a community improvement project. Co-designed and co-led by Redbud Resource Group and Tribal and Native community leaders statewide, the program has graduated roughly 75 leaders representing 37 tribes, with a coalition now forming to sustain cross-regional mentorship and organizing.

What makes the network durable is what participants do with each other afterward. For example, after the first cohort, Maidu graduates from different communities focused their final projects around post-wildfire stewardship; one now leads Tribal workforce development at the Sierra Institute, another leads her Tribe's Traditional Ecological Knowledge crew, and a third serves as Tribal Chair directing water quality work on the Feather River. Michelle Garcia (Wintu) of Native Roots Network is accelerating her organization's stewardship and emergency response work by drawing on the alumni network. Violet Smith (Rumsen) is working with State Parks, Kasil Willie, J.D. (Walker River Paiute) with Save California Salmon, and Saxon Thomas (Nisenan) is organizing a cultural burning day with CalFire. Jocelyn Garcia (Lake County Pomo) entered the program hoping to grow her film and animation business and has since won multiple awards for her short film Tule, using storytelling to teach the public about traditional ecological knowledge.





Seeing Our Native Patients

Within the healthcare system, clinical staff who work with Native patients often begin their tenure with no formal preparation in Tribal cultural practices or the particular histories that shape how Native community members relate to medical settings. Seeing Our Native Patients seeks to expand clinical notions of wellness, medicine, and public health. The pilot program delivers cultural and technical training for physicians and medical staff in partnership with Feather River Tribal Health, led by Madison Esposito, M.D. (Maidu) and Katie Wilson, M.D. (Luiseño). The training includes interviews with Tribal healers from across the region, elevating Indigenous knowledge and enabling physicians to braid Western and Indigenous medicine.

Because a one-time training cannot reach future staff, an asynchronous version is in development for release in early 2027, guided by an inter-tribal board of representatives from the Oroville tribes, each elected by their general Tribal council. Once released, it will reach every new provider as part of onboarding.

Core Sessions:

1. Intergenerational Trauma and Healthcare in American Indian / Alaska Native (AI/AN) Communities
   Explores how trauma is transmitted across generations and expressed through health disparities, with case-based learning on trauma-informed care strategies.

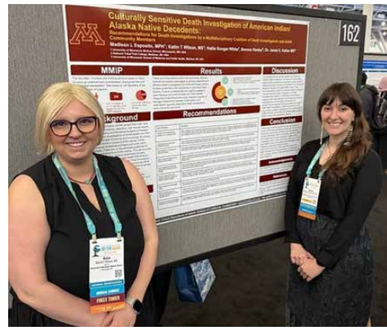
2. Pediatric Populations: Breaking the Cycle of Trauma and Disparities
   Examines AI/AN child health disparities and the intergenerational effects of removal policies, boarding schools, and Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), emphasizing family-centered and culturally responsive pediatric care.

3. Geriatric Populations: Elders, Language Revitalization, and Multigenerational Care
   Highlights the role of elders in sustaining community knowledge and language as a foundation of well-being, with case-based learning on culturally respectful end-of-life and long-term care.

4. Culture as Medicine: Integrating Traditional Healing in Harm Reduction
   Connects Indigenous healing practices with harm reduction and chronic disease management, exploring the protective role of culture in addressing substance use and mental health.

5. Sexual Health, Pregnancy, and Intimate Partner Violence in AI/AN Communities
   Addresses reproductive and sexual health inequities and the prevalence of gender-based violence, with exercises in trauma-informed screening and intervention.

Additional optional sessions include:
Death & Dying: Culturally Responsive End-of-Life Care and AI/AN
Dentistry: Oral Health Disparities & Culturally Informed Dental Care.









Going Beyond Land Acknowledgments

Going Beyond Land Acknowledgments is a body of work centered around developing support for Tribal sovereignty. Through public and private trainings, the Steps to Land Back film series, and one-off sessions with state agencies and institutions, GBLA reaches nearly 1,000 people a year — the majority working in the conservation sector, nationally. More than 10,000 people have taken part over the past five years.

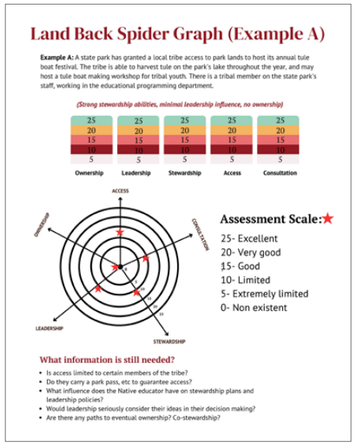
The offerings share a starting point: an institution has adopted a land acknowledgement and wants to know what follows. The public workshop, roughly two and a half hours and held online, asks participants to examine what land acknowledgments accomplish and what they do not, and where their institution actually sits between symbolic gesture and concrete support for Tribal sovereignty.

Sessions are open to staff at any level or in any department, so colleagues from different parts of an institution can arrive at a shared language together. Redbud has also co-facilitated a Tribal land access summit in Sacramento with the Office of the California Secretary of Tribal Affairs, drawing more than 100 Tribal and agency representatives.

Participants learn about the strengths and limitations of land acknowledgements and explore concrete, action-oriented strategies for building connections with Native communities and organizations:

- They gain skills and strategies to successfully address inequities and disparities that exist in their communites.
- They improve their understanding of the challenges faced by contemporary Native peoples in relation to their own life and work.
- They connect with like-minded people across fields and organizations who can support them in their diversity, equity, and inclusion goals.





RESOURCE: The Land Back Spider Graph is a free tool for assessing Land Back initiatives through the lenses of ownership, leadership, access, stewardship, and consultation. Interested organizations can access it online: https://redbudresource group.org/land-back-spider-graph

"Redbud is helping build the capacity that makes land return possible. Their Land Back Spider Graph gives tribes a practical tool for reducing barriers to accessing ancestral lands, while offering landowners a path into genuine relationship rather than a transaction. As California works to see meaningful and durable tribal stewardship over at least 7.5 million acres of land and coastal waters, tools like the Land Back Spider Graph turn policy goals into reality."



— Geneva E. B. Thompson
(Cherokee Nation)
Deputy Secretary for Tribal Affairs
California Natural Resources Agency

Programs

How to get involved

Make a Tax-Deductible Donation

Your support helps Native communities thrive and California's lands and waters to regenerate. Donations fund Redbud's programs that bring healing, education, and leadership development to tribes and their partners across California and beyond.

Your gift helps us:

- Grow our Native leadership initiatives, building strong partnerships that strengthen cultural and community resilience.
- Expand our youth and women's wellness programs to address health disparities and create safe spaces for growth and connection.
- Keep all participation, travel, and program costs free for tribal communities, ensuring equitable access to every opportunity we offer.

To donate, visit https://redbudresourcegroup.org/donate

SCAN ME

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Interview

From Symptom Change to Systems Change

A conversation with Taylor Pennewell, Executive Director and Co-Founder of Redbud Resource Group

When we see others struggling, we know the standard options at hand. We can volunteer our time and energy, or we can write a check. But what if the visible problem, whether a health disparity, a degraded river, or a struggling community that lacks resources, is only a symptom of something less obvious and far more entrenched?

Redbud Resource Group was founded on the conviction that Native communities deserve a stronger voice in shaping the future of their homelands. Today this Native-led nonprofit works alongside Tribal and non-Native partners to strengthen Native leadership, support Tribal sovereignty, and move entire systems toward more equitable, relationship-based approaches to land, health, and governance. In this conversation, Taylor Pennewell explains why charity alone can't undo what history created, why talking about "special treatment" misses the point, and why all of this matters to every Californian, Native or not. Because when systems heal, everyone downstream benefits. Literally.

Let me start with a story from your own work. Through the Feather River Advocacy Project (FRAP), several women discovered they were related. What happened next?

Several of the women in FRAP turned out to be descendants of a single ancestor, a basket maker and midwife. When they reconnected, we saw how perfectly their skills fit together. We had teachers of traditional food gathering and fishing, herbalists, doctors, organizers, and people who understand Tribal government. All those skills mapped onto traditional village roles.

The women from FRAP formed a women's group. Last year they held the first Maidu women's gathering. Next year they're launching a Maidu girls' camp, covering leadership, puberty education, nutrition, and cultural self-care. After that, they want to bring back ceremonies that have been dormant for nearly a century. But how do they give the next generation something they never got themselves? They have to heal that loss in themselves first.

A skeptic might say that's a lovely story, but it sounds like a support group. You would call it systems change. Why?

Of course, it's a support group. Support networks are how system change happens. Without them, people are just stuck struggling. You can't change systems without having strong relationships. Your community carries you through.

I'll give you another example. Angela Bolton-Tout, a Berry Creek Tribal member who came through Restoring Right Relations (RRR) and FRAP and now sits on our advisory council and Redbud's Board, works with the Sierra Institute training Tribal members in forestry and firefighting certification. She couldn't sustain that job without the support network of people she comes home to. Magan Herrera, another program participant, helped build Berry Creek's Tribal stewardship program from scratch. Now she's bringing traditional medicine into the Feather River Tribal Health clinic, where doctors prescribe herbs grown on the tribal land that hosts the women's group. This is exactly what systems change looks like.









Photo: Jade Elhardt / Sierra Institute for Community and Environment

I think many readers quietly wonder: Aspirin is aspirin, and insulin is insulin. When Redbud talks about a different approach to Native health, it is obviously not about different pills. What do you actually mean?

That's right, aspirin is aspirin. But aspirin doesn't heal a headache, it only masks the pain. Insulin manages diabetes, but it doesn't touch the conditions that shape how people eat, move, and rest. Both fight symptoms, not root causes. Aspirin won't fix your stress. Insulin doesn't give you better lifestyle choices. It's not going to resolve the depression or anxiety that's keeping you from moving, and it doesn't address emotional exhaustion or the underlying causes of lifestyle choices or the policies that ultimately lead to early death.

That's what people miss: lifestyle choices are not always a choice. Our traditional fishing practices are illegal. Gathering food the way our families always have can get you a misdemeanor or land you in jail. Add chronic underemployment, housing instability, and the ongoing crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, and you're describing conditions that shorten lives long before a diagnosis.

In the Indigenous worldview, water is medicine, the food you're cooking is medicine. Being around people, laughing, basket weaving, that's all medicine. That's not something Redbud came up with. This is how Indigenous cultures understand health, and it is still intact among California Tribal people, and it has something to offer everyone.

It becomes most obvious with chronic disease. Cardiovascular and metabolic disorders are two of the biggest drivers of healthcare costs and the leading causes of early death. Studies clearly show how closely they're connected to lifestyle. The data is incredibly clear. But the Western healthcare system still operates like it isn't true, ignoring the cultural dimension of healing and the policy conditions that make "lifestyle" so much harder for some people than others.

Native medicine equally values physical, emotional, and spiritual health and has always understood how they feed each other. It's not about "special treatment." It's about a holistic perspective on human health.

The American Dream says anyone can make it if they work hard enough. What does that story get wrong?

The American Dream works fine for many people, but for Tribal communities it misses the point. Native people work extremely hard and still face disproportionate poverty. Much of that labor holds communities together, like ceremony, caregiving, teaching, and land stewardship, but it isn't the kind of work that gets you into the rooms where power is held, decisions are made, and resources are distributed.

Many Native people do far more work than they are ever compensated for. Spiritual doctors run ten-day ceremonies and attend births and deaths, all unpaid. Meanwhile, they're barred from singing over dying relatives in hospitals.

The same pattern shows up in land management. For example, agencies and organizations that hold land will invite the Tribes to steward it—to bring back cultural burning, tend the plants, care for the place—and offer no funding to do it. It's framed as a gift: "We really need this service, and letting you do it is what you get in return."

And of course, it's not just being asked to manage land for free. Native people often do three times the work for a fraction of the





pay because they consider it their responsibility to their Tribal community. For example, a Native woman hired as a land steward by a nonprofit was tasked to become the Tribal liaison to seven Nations across thousands of acres, with no training, structural support or additional compensation. That doesn't seem like the American Dream to me.

When a well-meaning person donates to help Native communities through food drives, scholarships, or one-time grants, what happens? And what doesn't?

A one-time gift is a band-aid. It might buy someone access for a short window, but it doesn't touch the real cause. Of course, single donations can still make a big difference when pooled and used in the right way. If an organization receives a steady stream of these small gifts, it can plan strategically. But one-time grants can cause more harm than good if a strong foundation hasn't been built. It's seed money with no runway for implementation, and no time to build relationships or trust. To be fair, Native intermediary institutions give one-time grants too, because the funding structures upstream often don't allow for a different approach. They're working within a flawed system, too.

What is the difference between symptom change and systems change? Give me your plainest definition.

Take Type 2 diabetes. Symptom change means you go on Ozempic or Metformin and change your diet. You might reintroduce Native foods into your diet, and you buy farmed salmon and imported pine nuts from Safeway. These are store-bought imitations of the foods our communities once harvested together in their homelands, for free. Systems change asks why this community has no access to any of its Indigenous foods in the first place.

The land was seized illegally in most cases. The government forced commodity foods, lard and Velveeta cheese blocks, onto reservations. Traditional hunting and fishing were legally banned, and spearfishing remained illegal in Maidu communities until the end of the 20th century. We had an elder who was brutally beaten by the police, arrested, and thrown in jail for fishing less than 30 years ago. He then had to fight in court for a year just to win back fishing rights for his family and the Tribe.

Land dispossession, assimilation policies, and ecosystem destruction systematically cut Native people off from their traditional foods like acorn. Acorns are our staple food. They literally fight diabetes. To get acorn back, we need concrete systems-change remedies: reducing land-access barriers; restoring oak woodland habitats; funding subsistence gathering, hunting and fishing; and fixing food law. If you want to eliminate diabetes, you have to address all of these laws and human rights violations.

Redbud says relationships are not just a value but an organizing strategy. That sounds soft. What am I missing?

A senior federal attorney working in Indian law told me FRAP's approach stands out even in Indian Country. We spent a year and a half on relationship-building, reconnection to place, and "Water 101" before writing a single policy goal. The usual model, in which policy experts tell a Tribal community what it needs, produces hollow organizing.

Hollow organizing collapses when it comes into contact with reality. Regulatory fights take decades, whether through FERC [Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, the federal agency that licenses dams] or against a utility like PG&E. Communities can't sustain that without relationships underneath. And there's a deeper layer. Identities were stripped through the boarding schools and the missions, and that lostness has real costs. Community organizing starts with giving people purpose and helping them regain what they've lost.

The same principle works on the non-Tribal side. How can you ask a Tribe to come into a meeting room and have a good-faith conversation when they're in fight-or-flight mode, when they don't know if they're safe? You have to start with the fact that we're both human and we both care about this place. Try asking, "What are your kids up to this week?" We need human conversations to re-humanize people. You can't sustain the work that needs to be done without building the relationships first.

You could have written Redbud's five-year plan for the Feather River watershed yourself. Instead, FRAP participants formed their own committees and authored the strategy. Why is handing over authorship more effective, not less?

A good teacher, coach, or organizational leader needs to ensure the ship can sail without them. I don't think movements should be built around figureheads, because they collapse as soon as that person leaves. If you're thinking intergenerationally, then you have to get over yourself and think five, six, seven generations ahead. And no one person can lead a vision across seven generations. It has to come from sharing power across the entire community.

Redbud currently has five full-time staff. Yet about 300 leaders and partners are active across your programs, you are training state agencies, and FRAP preparing for the Oroville Dam relicensing. How does that math work? How does five become three hundred?



The real answer to the math is the network. Moving into our seventh year, thousands of people have taken our programs, and at least 300 close alumni trained in Redbud's pedagogy, curriculum, and tools now teach others. Participants come out unable to look away. Once you've seen it, you can't pretend it doesn't exist anymore, so alumni go change their own institutions from the inside.

Still, a leadership program sounds simple until you run one. The two biggest reasons RRR and FRAP participants drop out are gas money and childcare. Many of them are hardworking single parents who simply can't afford the extra costs. It's like you're cut off at the knees the moment you try to move forward. So the program keeps expanding. Gas sponsorships, babysitters, food. We also realized we need a counselor in the room, so now we're working to get a therapist to every FRAP event. We call it a leadership program, but it's much more complex. The whole village has to be there.

You describe Redbud as a bridge and a braider. What does a braider do that a conventional service organization does not?

We won't sit you down for a lecture and Q&A, then send you out to consult with tribes thinking you're an expert. We have all met the person who took a training on government-to-government relations and then completely missed the mark in the actual work with tribes, because they thought they could push their way through with logic and a checklist and not through heart-centered relationship building.

Redbud is a braider because we help people combine the relationship building and the human parts of the work with the logical checklist. We help them weave the MOUs [memoranda of understanding], the policies, and the legal requirements together with genuine human connection. Joining a Redbud program means joining a community with ongoing accountability with respect, reciprocity, and relationship, and we'll give you support when you inevitably mess up. We don't just train you and leave you to figure it out. After attending, you're in it with us.



This spring, California announced a landmark policy that aims to return 7.5 million acres of land and coastal waters to Tribal stewardship in California. Is that the kind of inside-the-institution change you're describing?

It's genuine progress, and it was driven by people inside CNRA [California Natural Resources Agency] and other state agencies, mostly Tribal lawyers and scientists motivated by justice, science, and law. It's not perfect, but it is a great start, and it's a real signal. People are in there making good things happen.

But it's fragile. There is a huge knowledge deficit in government, which means an administration change could unwind these policies because the institutional knowledge isn't deep enough yet. The people who championed this won't be there forever. It's a call to action to get in there and make sure systemic change runs deep and becomes intergenerational. And there's still an equity problem. Certain legal tools only apply to federally recognized tribes. What happens with Tribes that aren't federally recognized? How do we fix that problem?

A lot of institutions do land acknowledgements now. How do you tell the difference between an institution checking a box and one facilitating real change?

Look at what happens beyond talking—what actions are being taken? Our Right Relations program in partnership with TOGETHER Bay Area works with San Francisco Bay Area land and water institutions including landholders, policy drivers, and funders to create systems change from within and reduce barriers to Tribal land access. The Bay Area is a politically complex territory. In certain parts, there are no federally recognized Tribes. The Tribes there are unrecognized, which makes institutional relationships matter even more.

We're there as the guide, the cheerleader, and the accountability partner. Which requires real relationships, right? When someone in one of these institutions pushes for change at work, they're not picturing a faceless group of Native people—they're picturing us, specifically, saying: remember to reach out to that Tribe, remember what extractive behavior looks like. They need a voice behind the choice. Some of our closest relationships now are with people who came to the first training, did the work, and kept showing up. Those are the ones who become real partners you can call when things get hard.

The structure filters out the box-checkers, too. Executive Directors are required to sign letters of intent, and every institution builds an action plan and present it to its peers. From there we see them restructure their budgets so Tribal Relations work is funded permanently, not as a one-off. They rebuild their onboarding with Tribal Relations modules so the knowledge stays when staff turnover. They share their commitments openly with peers and even with competitors. You can see it between Midpeninsula Regional Open Space and Sonoma Land Trust and the Napa Resource Conservation District. They push each other. We're creating systems change together, in real time, and we're using positive peer pressure to make it deeper and faster.

We've watched organizations go from hesitant to fully committed, and now they're bringing their partners along with them.

For readers in Sacramento or San Francisco who are not Native, why should the health of the Feather River Watershed, or Tribal sovereignty in general, matter to them personally?

The natural resources we consume daily come from somewhere else, and there are human and non-human communities on the other side of that extraction. San Francisco's water comes from Hetch Hetchy, a distant watershed deliberately chosen and engineered for the city at the expense of local Tribal communities. Before contact, Indigenous peoples lived and thrived in all these places. The abundance that urban centers enjoy today was built on the forcible, sometimes bloody removal of human beings from their ancestral homelands.

There is also plain self-interest. Do you want water coming out of your tap? Because if you do, you need to care about what's happening upstream. Ignore what's happening upstream and your resource eventually disappears. In the 1800s, San Franciscans voted to ban prescribed burning in the Sierra Nevada foothills because they didn't like the smoke. They didn't understand that prescribed burning was necessary. Well, look what happened. Now, during wildfires, none of us can breathe for weeks, and this time the smoke is toxic because it's not just the trees that burn.

In 2019, Governor Newsom apologized to California Native peoples for the state's history of violence and neglect, but said the apology was empty without action. The California Truth and Healing Council was created to document that history and make recommendations. The report is almost ready, after many delays. What would you like to see happening the day after it's finally published?

Fund the work. Don't just tell us to do truth and healing for free. The reason is simple. By creating this commission, the state acknowledges there's a benefit in having healthy Native people and healthy Native landscapes. If there is a benefit, then there needs to be a sizable and serious commitment to fund the work.

The state also has a responsibility to either educate the public on why this matters to all Californians, or to fund people who can. If the state doesn't back these initiatives with real funding and public education, the state is setting this up to fail. And when it does, Native people will be scapegoated, even though the failure won't be ours. Land Back [returning political control, legal ownership, and environmental care of ancestral lands to Tribes] without stewardship funding is flashy policy and a setup for failed conservation.

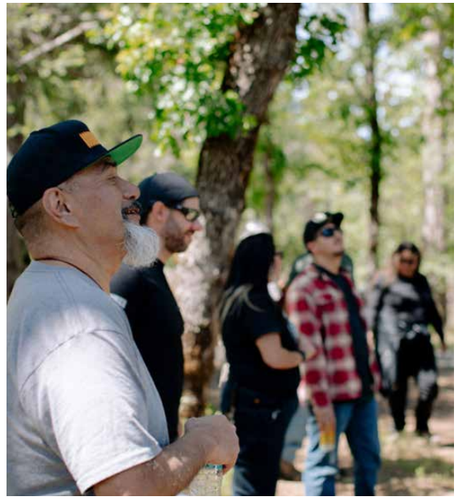
Twenty years from now, when Redbud has succeeded, what exists that doesn't exist today? And what doesn't need to exist anymore?

What shouldn't need to exist anymore in 20 years is the constant fight to justify our existence. Dehumanization is still alive. People still say these things out loud in rooms we sit in. Hopefully my daughter's generation won't have to walk into rooms and justify why they exist.

In 20 years, Tribal perspectives and ways of knowing should be leading conservation. It shouldn't be secondary anymore. LandBack should be measured in depth, not acreage. We don't need a million acres if our ancestral territory is 10,000. A Tribe needs those specific 10,000 acres they know intimately. That's where our language was created.

The way we create this change is through the networks we are already building. Native women leading women's groups and youth development, with men stepping up alongside them. It's all connected. And there's room in that future for everyone willing to do the work alongside us.







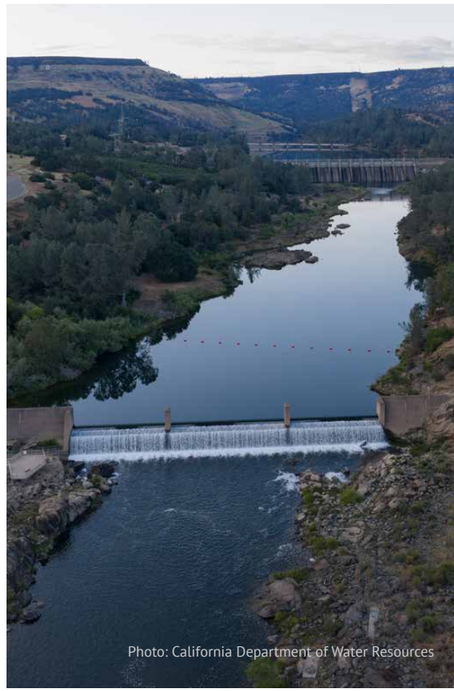


Photo: California Department of Water Resources





















2026 Impact Report — Financial Brief

Abstract:

Redbud entered 2026 in a strong financial position and continued to grow fundraising while maintaining disciplined midyear spending. Revenue timing should not be confused with a final year-end surplus.

MIDYEAR FINANCIAL SUMMARY

Measure	Jan - Jun 2025	Jan-Jun 2026	Change
Revenue	$536,065	**$738,370**	+37,7%
Expenses	$473,301	**$501,886**	+6,0%
Change in net assets during period	$62,765	**$236,484**	*Timing-driven*

REVENUE GROWTH HIGHLIGHTS

Measure	Jan-Jun 2025	Jan-Jun 2026	Change
Grant revenue	$398,602	**$571,526**	+43.4%
Individual donations	$11,699	**$32,896**	+181.2%
Program fees	$99,284	**$102,118**	+2.9%
Contracting fees	$23,900	**$30,000**	+25.5%

Financial position

as of June 30, 2026

Total assets:	$1,241,494
Total liabilities:	$17,490
Total net assets:	$1,224,004
Donor-restricted net assets:	$299,479
Unrestricted operating support:	Approx. $467,000

CORE POINTS

- Revenue grew substantially compared to the same period in 2025, driven by strong grant partnerships and individual donors.
- Midyear expenses increased by only 6%, reflecting disciplined spending while expanding our funding base.
- Restricted funds are fully committed to specific grants and upcoming program work, rather than general reserves.
- Approximately $467,000 provides about five months of operating support. To ensure stability, Redbud's goal is six months.

Major Partners & Funders

Real systems change requires time, trust, resources, and a strong network. The organizations and individuals listed here provide the foundation that makes our long-term work possible. Their support allows us to resource Native leadership and rethink how California cares for its homelands. We thank everyone stepping into this work alongside us.

Coalitions:

TOGETHER Bay Area
Black Liberation Indigenous Sovereignty Collective (BLIS Collective)

Tribal Funders:

Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria
Lytton Rancheria Band of Pomo Indians
Mooretown Rancheria of Maidu Indians of California
Yahaaviatam of San Manual Nation
Yocha Dehe Community Foundation

Funders:

California Endowment
California Environmental Protection Agency
California State Coastal Conservancy
California Tribal Fund
California Wellness Foundation
Campbell Foundation
David and Lucille Packard Foundation
Decolonizing Wealth Project
East Bay Community Foundation
Feather River Tribal Health
Fund for Nonviolence
Indian Land Tenure Foundation
Ishkode Foundation
James Irvine Foundation
Kalleaopeia Foundation
M.S. Grumbacher Foundation
Native Cultures Fund
Resilience Initiative
Return to the Heart Foundation
Shasta Forest Legacy Foundation
Sonoma County Community Foundation
The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation
Winnifred and Harry B Allen Foundation

Participating Organizations and Program Partners:

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Alameda County Resource Conservation District
American White Water
California Academy of Sciences
California Natural Resources Agency
California State Water Board
County of Santa Clara Department of Parks and Recreation
David and Lucille Packard Foundation
Department of Water Resources, Office of Tribal Affairs
East Bay Municipal Utility District
Feather River College
Feather River Land Trust
Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy
Golden Gate National Recreation Area
Grassroots Ecology
Happy Valley Film Co.
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California Indian Museum and Cultural Center
California Native Vote Project
Enterprise Rancheria of Maidu Indians of California
Feather River Tribal Health
Greenville Rancheria
Happy Valley Film Co.
Konkow Valley Band of Maidu Indians
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Mooretown Rancheria of Maidu Indians of California
Muchia Te' Land Trust
Native Roots Network
Paloma Flores Consulting Agency
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Tribal Eco Restoration Alliance
Two Ol' Native Women and a Pot

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“You cannot treat the land and the people who belong to it as separate problems. You have to recognize them as one path.”

Redbud Resource Group is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization ID # 85-1919822

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