



## NEWS

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### **Forest Service and Tribes Consider Sacred Sites, Tribal Advisory Committee**

**Custer, SD-** The USDA Forest Service and several tribes came closer to understanding one another's concerns when the two groups met for two days of discussion. Topics brought to the table included adopting a Forest Service sacred sites policy and establishing a tribal leaders advisory council.

Tribal and federal government representatives from six states across the Midwest and West and Washington, DC were among the approximately 125 participants.

“Most Indian people would not have dreamed that there could be a place for them to express their opinion on these things even a year ago. I commend the Forest Service for having the initiative to provide a forum for those folks,” said Charles C. Colombe, president of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe.

The Forest Service asked the tribes their views on developing a policy for managing sacred sites. “This is for the Indian people. This is a policy for the Forest Service to help the people access their sacred sites and protect them and all those other things that we have yet to articulate in a draft policy,” said Susan Johnson, Rocky Mountain Regional Office tribal relations specialist, who facilitated the event.

The Indian people believe defining the word *sacred* using the English language is not possible. “I think that’s a perfect solution to it (using the Lakota language to describe the word *sacred*). What (the tribes) are saying is they don’t have a command of the English language that allows them to translate those words that truly describe these sites and these spirits and this feeling, so they want to do it in Lakota,” Colombe said.

Tribal members expressed concern about protecting the intellectual knowledge of sacred sites under such a policy. “What can we document? How can we provide to any manager the opportunity to recognize that there are some significant areas that relate to people as a whole for the sustainability of that culture?” asked Tim Mentz, Standing Rock Sioux Tribe historic preservation officer.

Tribal members agreed a tribal advisory council has the potential to improve communication between the forests and tribes but had differing ideas about who should make up the board. Participants hope the relationships being developed should serve to resolve those issues in time.

“It’s been a long road. I have a really good feeling about what’s going on right now because basically we’ve made our pitch. We’ve given the issues to them. The Forest Service has acknowledged that those are very significant issues. Dialogue is very important to any type of working relationship with federal agencies,” Mentz said.

His optimism is matched by that of Forest Service officials. “Personally I have a passion for working with people and talking about things like sacred places and maintaining cultures. It interests me, so it’s not hard to develop an enthusiasm for doing that,” said Dave McKee, Black Hills National Forest historic preservation officer and tribal liaison.

“I don’t like to have somebody just say, ‘No, you can’t do it.’ I want to know ways that I can do it, and that’s how I want to approach it. We’re going to look at some ways to get some things done,” said Brad Exton, Black Hills National Forest acting forest supervisor.

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## **Sound bites:**

### **Charles C. Colombe, Rosebud Sioux Tribal President**

“Most Indian people would not have dreamed that there could be a public forum – a place for them to express their opinion—on these things even a year ago. So I commend the Forest Service for having the initiative to bring forth a forum for those folks.”

“I think that’s a perfect solution to it (using the Lakota language to describe the word *sacred*). What they’re saying is they don’t have a command of the English language that would allow

them to translate those words that truly describe these sites and these spirits and this feeling, so they want to do it in Lakota.”

**Tim Mentz, Standing Rock Sioux Tribe Historic Preservation Officer**

“It’s been a long road. I really have a really good feeling about what’s going on right now because it’s basically we’ve now made our pitch. We’ve given the issues to them. The Forest Service has come back in saying and acknowledged that those are very significant issue that we have raised now that the dialogue is creating now into more of a working relationship that includes dialogue that is very important to any type of relationship of federal agencies.”

“What can we document what can we provide to any manager that’s managing land the opportunity to recognize that there are some type of areas that we can actually agree upon that there is some type of significance and that significance relates to people as a whole for the continuing and sustainability of that culture.”

**Susan Johnson, Rocky Mountain Regional Office Tribal Relations Specialist**

“This is for the Indian people. This is a policy for the Forest Service to access-- help them access --their sacred sites and protect it and all those other things that we have yet to articulate in a draft policy.”

**Dave McKee, Black Hills National Forest Historic Preservation Officer and Tribal Liaison**

“Personally I have a passion for working with people and talking about things like sacred places and maintaining culture and that’s just something that of interest to me so it’s not hard to develop an enthusiasm for doing that.”

**Wes Martel, Executive Director, Inter-Tribal Economic Alliance, Wind River Reservation, Wyoming**

“We really need to start addressing the overall picture. It’s not just a sacred site, it’s not just your cultural area. There is that whole area that’s out there. The kind of plants that are out there. The kind of birds and the animals. All of those things that are sacred to us.”