



**Office of Emergency Services  
County of Tuolumne**

Tracie M. Riggs, Director  
Dore A. Bietz, Assistant Director

**Tuolumne County Administration Center**  
2 South Green Street  
Sonora, CA 95370  
Phone (209) 533-5511  
Fax (209) 533-5510  
[www.tuolumnecounty.ca.gov](http://www.tuolumnecounty.ca.gov)

September 24, 2024

TO: Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors

FROM: Dore Bietz – OES Assistant Director

SUBJECT: **Consideration of Resolution Proclaiming September 27, 2024, as California Native American Day**

**Historical Background**

Tribal governments are the oldest governments in existence in the Western Hemisphere. Despite common misperceptions, the United States was not the first government to institute democratic rule and introduce concepts of fair representation, equality, and justice for all. At a time when European governments were authoritarian and hierarchical, traditional tribal governments were based upon principles of democracy, equality, freedom, and respect.

In fact, not everyone is aware of just how much American government and political life as we know it today has been drawn from Native American Indian culture. From the very beginning, the founding fathers saw tribal government as something to be admired and emulated. Did you know that the U.S. Constitution is modeled after the oldest constitution in North America — the constitution of the Seven Iroquois Nations? The Indians of that time called this constitution “The Great Law of Peace” and it governed an alliance of Indian tribes that was four hundred years old when the first settlers arrived.

The U.S. Constitution recognized tribal governments and, starting with Thomas Jefferson, America’s founding fathers pledged that their sovereignty was to be protected.

The U.S. Supreme Court has repeatedly recognized tribal sovereignty in court decisions for more than 150 years. In 1831, the Supreme Court agreed, in *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*, that Indian nations had the full legal right to manage their own affairs, govern themselves internally, and engage in legal and political relationships with the federal government and its subdivisions.

In 1942 Supreme Court Justice Felix Cohen wrote, “Indian sovereignty is the principle that those powers which are lawfully vested in an Indian tribe, are not delegated powers granted by express acts of Congress, but rather inherent powers of a limited sovereignty which can never be extinguished.”

Today, 200 years later, tribal governments still exist for the same reasons they were originally founded: To provide for the welfare of the Indian people.

Tribal governments build and maintain services like water, roads, waste disposal, emergency assistance, law enforcement, and transportation, education and health care. Like the United States government, tribal government leaders are charged with protecting and developing an economic base. Like state, federal and local governments, tribal governments work to preserve and encourage culture and to support higher education, improve infrastructure and provide support for its community members.

Tribal governments today are in a transition that began with independence, progressed through a long, difficult period of survival, and are now moving again toward self-determination and control. California tribal governments continue their progress protecting the legacy of sovereignty and providing for the future self-sufficiency of their people.

### **California Tribes - Overview**

California has 109 Federally recognized Tribes out of the 573 across this nation. California has been home to Native Americans for thousands of years. There are two federally recognized Tribal governments in Tuolumne County, the Chicken Ranch Band of Me-Wuk Indians and the Tuolumne Band of Me-Wuk Indians. Each of these two tribes are distinct different sovereign governments and have suffered much from historical genocide seen throughout the State.

Tens of thousands of Native Californians were affected by discriminatory laws and policies. Native Californian children were forced to assimilate into white culture and attend “Indian Assimilation schools”. There, they were forbidden to speak their languages or take part in tribal ceremonies. Although Native peoples resisted discrimination and fought for civil rights, federal recognition, poverty, health disparities and limited opportunities were, and still are, common. Despite these wrongs, California Native Americans resisted, survived and carried on cultural and linguistic traditions defying all odds.

Rising above the historical injustices, these two Tribal Governments in Tuolumne County have provided not only for their community members but the county as a whole, multiple programs and services, including, social programs, health services, first responder services, education, workforce development and land management. They also build and maintain infrastructure, including roads, bridges, medical clinics, schools and public buildings.

In 1998, the California Legislature passed Assembly Bill 1953, establishing California Native American Day as an official day of education about the culture and heritage of American Indians in California. Since then, this day has been established to not only recognize the rich culture of Native American Communities within our State but to acknowledge the sacrifices they made and the continued commitment they give to their communities and the people within their county. Native American Tribal Governments are sovereign nations that have deep rooted commitment to their members but understand and support the communities around them regardless of affiliation.

Recognizing the importance of acknowledging and honoring the rich history, culture and contributions of California Native American by designating the 4<sup>th</sup> Friday in September as California Native American Day provides an opportunity to celebrate the heritage, traditions and resilience of California Native American peoples. California

Native American Day offers a chance to educate the community about the diverse California Native American cultures that have shaped our region and our state. Recognizing California Native American day will foster a greater understanding and appreciation of the historical and contemporary issues faced by California Native American communities as Tuolumne County aims to promote inclusivity, diversity and respect for all individuals and communities within our county limits.

Staff recommend that we join other counties and the State of California in recognizing and acknowledging the contribution that the two Native American Tribal Governments, the Chicken Ranch Band of Me-Wuk Indians and the Tuolumne Band of Me-Wuk Indians have had and will continue to provide for in this county. We encourage all citizens to join in recognizing the accomplishments and contributions California Native Americans have made.

We have invited both Tribes to speak today and upon completion, we recommend that your Board Proclaim the fourth Friday in September and this Friday September 27, 2024, as California Native American Day in Tuolumne County.

**Recommendation:**

Approval of resolution Proclaiming Friday September 27, 2024, as California Native American Day in Tuolumne County.