



Honoring Puvungna Today

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Photo courtesy of Friends of Puvungna

By Jeanne Ferris

Puvungna, which means Gathering Place, has been an active site of immense historical and cultural significance for the Original Peoples of California since time immemorial.

It is here, 10,000 years ago, that the profound emergence story of the Juaneño Band of Mission Indians Acjachemen and Gabrielino Tongva Indian Tribe began.

Once spanning 500 acres, Puvungna is a sacred ground, a direct connection to the earth's heartbeat, and the final of seven sites of reverence for the Acjachemen and Tongva nations.

The Acjachemen and Tongva Nations are the traditional caretakers and stewards of the land on site at California State University Long Beach (CSULB).

Regrettably, the remaining 22 acres have become a point of contention between the Juaneño Band and CSULB, which demands immediate attention and resolution.

In 1993, the university moved to develop Puvungna as a shopping mall and parking lot, ignoring its registered status with the National Register of Historic Places in 1974.

The Juaneño Band won and blocked the move.

Despite a landmark court decision in 2021 to protect Puvungna in perpetuity, the 6,000 cubic yards of construction debris and soil dumped there continue to depress the earth and damage its integrity.

This sentiment resonates with many organizations that value cultural preservation, calling for our collective support.

Despite a landmark decision in 2021 to protect *Puvungna* in perpetuity, the university did not issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) until 2024 to identify a land trust that could manage the property under a conservation easement.

In response to an inquiry regarding the delay, Thalia Gomez (Jacqui-Yoeme), Director of Tribal Relations, forwarded the question to CSULB News Media Services and Strategic Coordinator James Milbury.

"A treatment plan agreed to by the university and the State Historic Preservation Office was completed in 2024. Information on Puvungna is available online," Mr. Milbury responded.

The CSULB website has a video of CSULB President Jane Close Conoley giving a speech about *Puvungna* as a conservation easement with a land acknowledgment.

Also on this page is a *Call for Proposals* from the university with an inactive hyperlink seeking a conservation easement manager. [The hyperlink activates an error message.]

Ms. Joyce Stanfield Perry, the Cultural Resources Director for the Juaneño Band, refutes CSULB's transparency, "A qualified tribal nonprofit applied, but the university withdrew the RFP without a legitimate reason."

The Friends of Puvungna and Tongva Taraxat Paxaavxa Conservancy, long-standing caretakers and land stewards with Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), submitted the Request for Proposal (RFP).

“We did have monthly meetings for a year, and they acted in good faith,” Ms. Perry said. “But after they rejected the RFP, the meetings stopped and now everybody has gone silent.”

This lack of engagement and fiduciary responsibility underscores the need for open and transparent communication, a key element in building trust and ensuring accountability.

Since founded in 1875, CSU is a public university system in California with the most extensive public university system in the United States.

It has 23 campuses and seven off-campus centers, with the CSU headquarters in Long Beach.

CSULB is the second largest campus in the CSU system, at 322 acres.

In March 2020, a comprehensive report by Robert Lee and Tristan Ahtone in *High Country News (HCN)* revealed “two open secrets” about the Morrill Act.

The Morrill Act, which Abraham Lincoln signed in 1862, distributed public domain lands to raise funds for fledgling colleges across the nation.

It worked by turning land expropriated from tribal nations into seed money for higher education.

First, according to the Morrill Act, all money made from land sales must be used in perpetuity, meaning those funds still remain on university ledgers to this day.

And secondly, at least 12 states are still in possession of unsold Morrill acres as well as associated mineral rights, which continue to produce revenue for their designated institutions.

It’s a common misconception, for instance, that the Morrill Act grants were used only for campuses.

In fact, the grants were as big or bigger than major cities, and were often located hundreds or even thousands of miles away from their beneficiaries.”

As stated in the *HCN* report, “79,461 parcels of Indigenous land totaling 10,700,000 acres [were channeled] to 52 land-grant universities to fund their endowments.”

The data compiled in the report also determined that “expropriated Indigenous land is the foundation of the land-grant university system.”

The Treaty of Temecula, also known as California Treaty K, is significant evidence to substantiate the data above.

It was one of 18 unratified treaties signed on January 5, 1852, between the United States and California tribes.

Ms. Perry can also claim a direct connection to Puvungna: “My grandfather was a signatory for Treaty K in the village of Temecula.”

The U.S. Senate never ratified these treaties, which remained undisclosed until 1905.

Because of the unratification, the tribes were unaware that these lands were, in effect, unsecured.

As a significant landowner in a new era of Indigenous land reclamation today, CSULB should naturally want to preserve the only Native California site on a CSU campus.

The Acjachemen and Tongva Nation seek immediate action from the university to comply with its agreement, which begins with removing the debris.

It would be refreshing to hear the good news that President Conoley and the CSULB Board of Trustees fulfilled their promise, leaving a legacy that sincerely honors Puvungna.

“Leave no footprint; take only memories.”

Attribution to the “Leave No Footprint” concept practiced within the U.S. National Parks.