

Shared Learning Session: Tribal Sovereignty – Learning from the Past/Leaning into the Future

Intended Audience, Location, and Purpose: During the June 2024 Indian Health Service (IHS) Executive Leadership Team meeting, a shared learning session with leaders from IHS, Bureau of Indian Affairs Eastern Region, and United South and Eastern Tribes (USET)/USET Sovereignty Protection Fund (USET SPF), Inc. will be held on the property at the Cabin by the Spring of The Hermitage, home of President Andrew Jackson.

Participants will participate in a bifocal view of the historical impact of forced removal, assimilation, termination, and relocation juxtaposed with a contemporary view of ushering in the next era to support Tribal Nations to fully exercise their sovereignty.

At least three times a year, IHS senior leaders, office directors, and area directors gather for a strategic in-person session to ensure proper planning and implementation is occurring across the agency to advance its mission. These meetings occur at a different IHS area and are often in close proximity to IHS, Tribal, or Urban Indian settings that allow for a site visit collectively or individually to ensure the strategic session is bolstered with a local experience for greater understanding of the strengths and challenges faced by that particular region. For the June 2024 meeting in Nashville, Tennessee, the location presents a unique opportunity since tribal nations are not in close proximity. However, the surrounding area carries significant historical locations, such as the route of the Trail of Tears which was a direct result of Andrew Jackson's Indian Removal Act.

Address: The Hermitage, 4580 Rachels Ln, Hermitage, TN 37076
Walk or take golf cart to the Cabin by the Spring (see attached map)

Learning Objectives

- To learn a more truthful understanding of the complex and complicated history and continued modern-day diplomatic relationship between Tribal Nations and the United States.
- To identify actionable steps to individually and collectively support the IHS mission in manner that best aligns with Tribal Nation interests, goals, priorities, and sovereignty.
- To learn how past and current federal policies have a modern day impact that includes continued institutional barriers that prevent Tribal Nations from fully exerting their inherent sovereign authorities and powers.
- To engage in collaborative dialogue to formulate concrete steps for leveraging federal resources to more appropriately support tribal sovereignty.

Dress for the Day

All participants are invited to wear traditional cultural dress or business casual. Comfortable walking shoes are recommended. Golf cart transportation is available from the front entrance breezeway of The Hermitage to the Cabin by the Spring.

Background Information

“Federal policies of past eras, including termination, relocation, and assimilation, collectively represented attacks on Tribal sovereignty and did lasting damage to Tribal communities, Tribal economies, and the institutions of Tribal governance. By contrast, the self-determination policies of the last 50 years—whereby the Federal Government has worked with Tribal Nations to promote and support Tribal self-governance and the growth of Tribal institutions—have revitalized Tribal economies, rebuilt Tribal governments, and begun to heal the relationship between Tribal Nations and the United States.

Now is the time to build upon this foundation by ushering in the next era of self-determination policies and our unique Nation-to-Nation relationships, during which we will better acknowledge and engage with Tribal Nations as respected and vital self-governing sovereigns. As we continue to support Tribal Nations, we must respect their sovereignty by better ensuring that they are able to make their own decisions about where and how to meet the needs of their communities. No less than for any other sovereign, Tribal self-governance is about the fundamental right of a people to determine their own destiny and to prosper and flourish on their own terms.” Executive Order 14112

Opening Welcome - Nashville Area: Reckoning with the Past – 9:15-9:30

Beverly Cotton will welcome participants to introduce themselves with their tribal nation identity or as Native ally. An overview of the purpose will be provided on the importance of examining the history of the Indian Removal Act, the significance of being present on the grounds of Andrew Jackson’s home with the location in Nashville, Tennessee, and the importance of understanding the past in order to move forward. This session requires a hard examination of our nation’s history and a contemporary view of change and healing.

Traditional Blessing 9:30-9:40

Sally Wells will open with a traditional blessing in the Choctaw language to begin the session allowing words to wash over participants to create a safe space to feel the emotions of the trauma and to allow hearts and minds to begin healing

Indian Removal Act: Jackson’s Rightful Responsibility 9:40-10:00

This portion of the session will feature Erin Adams. The thesis for this learning session is that Jackson’s rightful responsibility is the Indian Removal Act and established Indigenous removal as the ongoing policy of the nation. Participants will delve into Jackson’s place in the overall context of indigenous removal (Washington’s Civilization Program, Jefferson’s introduction of Removal, discovery of gold in Cherokee territory) and the competing relationships between the state and federal governments that added to the friction. Erin will discuss Jackson’s goals for the Indian Removal Act and examine the Congressional process for passing the bill. The session

concludes with examining how the bill's passage leads to humanitarian disasters, like the Cherokee's Trail of Tears. We can discuss briefly how the Act has not been revoked by Congress and is still invoked in federal courts today.

The Story of Tribal Nation-United States Relations, Human Rights Violations, and Our Cultural Survival and Perseverance 10:00-10:30

The session will feature documented truths and insightful perspectives from prominent thinker on tribal sovereignty, Kitcki Carroll. He will reveal a chasm between what we have learned as an American society – or more prominently, not learned about our Nation's history and its relationship to the present and the painful truths of genocide, removal, relocation, and assimilation of Native peoples.

Historical facts and timelines of exploration and colonialism will be presented along with tribal experiences and insights related to the impact of past federal policy on Tribal Nations today. Participants will have the opportunity to gain valuable insight and knowledge for their personal and professional growth.

Through this dynamic lecture, participants will embark on a transformative journey inspired by the survival, resiliency, and perseverance of Native indigenous peoples. This session will unveil the power of leveraging the past to impact the future by dismantling mindsets that do not support tribal sovereignty and self-determination.

Shared Dialogue 10:30-11:00

Chief Kirk Francis, Sr., Chief of Penobscot Indian Nation and Ms. Roselyn Tso, IHS Director will lead a roundtable of shared dialogue on leaning forward to better support tribal sovereignty in a Nation to Nation relationship. Chief Francis and Ms. Tso will be joined by Kitcki Carroll, Liz Malerba, Katie Klass, Stacey Ecoffey, Mitch Thornbrugh, and Eric Wilcox. Participants will be invited to participate in this session.

Closing 11:00-11:15

Jerry Pardilla will close the session with a traditional song and prayer in the Penobscot language.

On-Site Services 11:15-11:30

Jerry Pardilla will offer to smudge upon leaving the learning session. Onawa Miller is available for brief behavioral health coping techniques. Jennifer Downs is available for faith-based prayer and brief behavioral health coping techniques. She will be available in the afternoon of June 11 at the Drury Plaza Downtown Nashville.

IHS shuttle departs at 11:30

Presenter Biographies – listed in alphabetical order



Erin Adams is the Director of Education at Andrew Jackson's Hermitage since 2013, overseeing all K12, lifelong learning, and youth leadership initiatives. Prior to her time at The Hermitage, Erin served as an educator and administrator at museums and historic sites in Tennessee, Virginia, and Washington DC. Since coming to The Hermitage, Erin has tried to make the interpretation of Jacksonian America relevant to modern audiences by developing audio tours, school curriculum, and building relationship with stakeholders of all kinds. Her philosophy is that all meaningful learning is built together, shared in community, and useful for problem solving.



Kitcki A. Carroll is Executive Director for USET/USSET SPF, Inc. In this capacity, he fights to protect and promote the sovereignty of USET member nations. He is a strong advocate for all Indian people and actively works to ensure that the United States fulfills its trust responsibilities and obligations to Indian Country. Mr. Carroll is an enrolled citizen of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma and a direct descendant of Chief Black Kettle.



Beverly Cotton serves as the Nashville Area Director for Indian Health Service. In her capacity, she leads a federal workforce serving 36 tribal nations and 3 urban Indian health programs sharing territory in a region spanning present day Maine to Florida to east Texas. Dr. Cotton is an enrolled citizen of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians.



Jennifer Downs is a member of the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California, is currently detailed to the Office of the Nashville Area Director. In 2020, she joined the Indian Health Service (IHS) Nashville Area Office as the Behavioral Health Consultant, but has also served as the Area Urban Coordinator and Acting Unity Healing Center Acting CEO. Jennifer provides direct telebehavioral health services to our federal sites, administrative support to our IHS/Urban/Tribal locations, and wellness education to our staff as a licensed independent social worker. Prior to her time with the Nashville Area, Jennifer worked for IHS Headquarters Division of Behavioral Health and provided direct services via the Telebehavioral Health Center of Excellence. Outside of work, she enjoys spending time with her husband and two daughters.



Stacey Ecoffey, an enrolled member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, is the deputy director for intergovernmental affairs for the Indian Health Service. As the deputy director for intergovernmental affairs, Ecoffey provides leadership on tribal and urban Indian health activities through oversight of the Office of Tribal Self-Governance, Office of Direct Service and Contracting Tribes, and Office of Urban Indian Health Programs. Ecoffey was born, raised, and resides on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. Prior to joining the IHS, she served as the principal advisor for Tribal Affairs at HHS for over 15-years. In this capacity, she has advised six HHS cabinet-level secretaries during their tenure at the Department. Ecoffey has led tribal issues through administrative transitions, providing guidance and advice on HHS policies and programs and their potential and real impacts on Indian Country. Her leadership in this role has resulted in numerous concrete policy and programmatic changes at HHS for the betterment of Indian Country



Chief Kirk Francis, Sr. Chief Francis is the Chief of the Penobscot Indian Nation, which is located at Indian Island, Maine. He has served as Chief of the Nation since 2006 and holds the distinction of being the longest serving Chief of the Penobscot Nation since the electoral system began in 1850. Chief Francis has become knowledgeable and effective in handling the myriad of issues facing tribal governments today. Chief Francis is currently the President of the United South and Eastern Tribes (USET)/United South and Eastern Tribes Sovereignty Protection Fund (USET SPF) an organization comprised of 30 federally-recognized Tribal Nations from the Canadian Border to the Everglades and across the Gulf of Mexico. Chief Francis was born and raised on Indian Island, Maine, the home of the Penobscot Indian Nation. He has deep cultural ties to the people, the land, and the river. He is an avid outdoorsman practicing the traditions of hunting and fishing for which his family is well known.



Katie Klass serves as General Counsel for the United South and Eastern Tribes and the USET Sovereignty Protection Fund. Katie is also an enrolled citizen of and represents the Wyandotte Nation. Katie fights to protect the inherent sovereign rights and authorities of Tribal Nations and to hold the United States accountable for its trust, treaty, and statutory obligations. Before joining USET, Katie was a partner at Hobbs, Straus, Dean, and Walker, LLP. She also participated in the U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of the Solicitor's Honors Attorney Program. Katie received her Juris Doctor from the University of Arizona, where she earned a certificate from the Indigenous Peoples Law and Policy Program.



Liz Malerba, a citizen of the Mohegan Tribe, is the Director of Policy and Legislative Affairs for United South and Eastern Tribes Sovereignty Protection Fund, a 501(c)4 non-profit, inter-tribal organization advocating on behalf of 33 federally recognized Tribal Nations from the Northeastern Woodlands to the Everglades and across the Gulf of Mexico. Located in Washington, DC, she works with Congress and the Administration to advance a comprehensive legislative and regulatory agenda on behalf of member Tribal Nations. Her current work includes advocacy related to Tribal Nation rebuilding, modernizing the federal-Tribal trust relationship, government reform, the restoration of Tribal land bases, health care delivery, and the federal budget. She also assists in directing the organization's engagement in strategic litigation, with the goals of preserving foundational Indian law and advancing the recognition of inherent Tribal sovereignty. She has over 15 years of federal policy and advocacy experience, having previously served as Legislative Assistant for the National Indian Health Board, as well as in a variety of staff positions in the U.S. House of Representatives. Liz is a graduate of Allegheny College in Meadville, PA and resides in the DC metro area with her husband, Jeremy, and her son, Connor.



Onawa Miller, CHES®, NT, CHC, Director of USET's Office of Tribal Public Health (OTPH), joined USET in 2022 with over 25 years in health programming and now provides leadership and oversight to the OTPH department. Additionally, she is passionate to address the mental health needs and the impacts of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and the correlation between chronic disease and quality of life. To help reduce the stigma often associated with mental health challenges and train others to recognize signs and symptoms, she serves as a National Trainer for Mental Health First Aid through the National Council for Mental Wellbeing and is formally trained in trauma recovery. Ms. Miller has a Bachelor of Science degree with a concentration in Health and Human Performance - Public Health from Austin Peay State University.



Jerry Pardilla has served as Director of the Office of Environmental Resource Management with the United South and Eastern Tribes (USET) since 2012. He has dedicated his professional career in several capacities to Indian Country, having served in leadership positions at Penobscot Nation including Tribal Governor; and in recent decades, to Tribal organizations, including the National Tribal Environmental Council and Alaska Inter-Tribal Council. Jerry is passionate about revitalizing Tribal cultures and is a traditional singer. Jerry is also of Kiowa lineage and is a member of the Kiowa Gourd Clan. He is a veteran and served as a commissioned officer and rated aviator in the Maine Army National Guard. Jerry and his wife Marla live in Rio Rancho, New Mexico.



Mitchell Thornbrugh is the chief information officer and the director of the Office of Information Technology (OIT) for the Indian Health Service. He is an enrolled member of the Muscogee Creek Nation. Thornbrugh leads the IHS in all aspects of information resource management and technology and promotes adherence to federal information technology laws, regulations, and policies. Under his leadership, OIT designs, develops, implements, and maintains policies, budgets, standards, architecture, and systems for IHS information technology, including the IHS Health IT Modernization Program. He also manages OIT's participation in cross-government initiatives with federal, tribal, state, and other partners to serve American Indians and Alaska Natives.



Roselyn Tso, an enrolled member of the Navajo Nation, currently leads as the 11th director of the Indian Health Service, an agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The IHS operates as the 17th largest health care system in the nation and serves as the principal federal health care advocate and provider of health care services for American Indians and Alaska Natives. In her role of director, Tso oversees a nationwide health care delivery program that is responsible for providing preventive, curative, and community health care to approximately 2.8 million American Indians and Alaska Natives in hospitals, clinics, and other settings throughout the United States. She assumed her role after serving as the director of the IHS Navajo Area since 2019, where she led the administration of comprehensive federal, tribal, and urban Indian health care services for over 244,000 American Indians and Alaska Natives throughout Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah. Since beginning her career at the Indian Health Service, Tso has held several key positions within the IHS Portland Area, the Navajo Area, and at IHS headquarters. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in interdisciplinary studies from Marylhurst University in Portland, Oregon, and holds a master's degree in organizational management from the University of Phoenix in Portland.



Sally Wells is a founding member and President of the Native American Indian Association of Tennessee. Ms. Wells serves as coordinator for the Arts & Crafts Demonstrators at our Pow Wows. She is a citizen of the Mississippi Band of Choctaws. Sally has worked tirelessly for many years helping to make the Tennessee Indian Education Pow Wow one of the finest in the country. She enjoys traditional beading and other crafts. She resides in Smyrna, Tennessee with her husband Bill.



Eric Wilcox is a citizen of the Narragansett Indian Tribe of Rhode Island. After graduating from Central High School, he attended Central State University in Wilberforce, Ohio. Mr. Wilcox is a military veteran by virtue of his service in the United States Air Force. He worked for the Narragansett Indian Tribe as the Director of Community Planning and Development, and was hired by the Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Eastern Region in March of 2005. In January 2020, Mr. Wilcox joined the Region's leadership team as the Deputy Regional Director for Trust Services.