

It is with deep humility, strong curiosity, and growing anticipation that we offer this letter to First Light. We want to outline our commitment to organizational change and the actions we can take to work towards return with Wabanaki communities. We consider the possibility of participating in the year-long Learning Journey “Confluence” to be a privilege – an opportunity to develop knowledge, insights, and sensitivity that will equip us to work more effectively in this complex, critical area.

As the president and CEO and a board member of Friends of Acadia, we represent an organization that has a unique vantage point. Founded in 1986, Friends of Acadia (FOA) is the official philanthropic partner of Acadia National Park. We also collaborate closely on programs and projects with Acadia National Park and Acadia’s research and education partner Schoodic Institute. Through this unique relationship, FOA can act as a supporter, funder, and catalyst to broaden and deepen the co-stewardship work resulting from the federal nation-to-nation co-stewardship mandate. Both Acadia and FOA are committed to working with indigenous communities.

**Acadia National Park is actively engaged in working with tribal nations collectively known as the Wabanaki Nations.** This directive focuses on developing collaborative arrangements with Indigenous communities to manage, conserve, and preserve federal lands and waters. This mandate also aimed to empower Tribes and Native Hawaiian organizations by involving them in the stewardship of lands and waters that hold cultural and national significance.

- **In 2022, the National Park Service (NPS) released a new, stronger framework to improve federal stewardship of national park lands and waters by strengthening the role of American Indian and Alaska Native Tribes, Alaska Native entities, and the Native Hawaiian Community in federal land management.** The goal was to increase collaborative engagement with these groups so the NPS would make better land management decisions, acknowledge and hopefully heal some deep wounds, benefit from Traditional Ecological Knowledge, and better interpret the history of the lands it administers and all the plants and animals that live in them.

The NPS’s 80 co-stewardship agreements not only acknowledge the historical and cultural significance of these lands to indigenous peoples, but also integrate traditional ecological knowledge into modern conservation practices.

**Acadia National Park is seen as a national leader for its work with the Wabanaki Nations of Maine.** The park has been actively working on co-stewardship initiatives with the Wabanaki Nations of Maine. [This collaboration aims to integrate Indigenous knowledge and practices into the management of the park’s natural and cultural resources.](#)

- **One significant aspect of this co-stewardship effort is the plant gathering initiative.** This initiative will allow Wabanaki Tribes to gather plants within the park for traditional purposes, following a formal planning process and environmental assessment.

[This process ensures that plant gathering is conducted sustainably and respects both the ecological integrity of the park and the cultural practices of the Wabanaki people.](#)

- **The co-stewardship efforts at Acadia include ongoing consultations and collaborative projects to preserve and interpret the cultural heritage of the Wabanaki Nations.** These efforts aim to foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of the historical and cultural significance of the lands now designated as Acadia National Park.
- **Acadia National Park has been involved in a multi-year project with the Wabanaki Nations of Maine on traditional gathering of Sweetgrass within the park.** The interdisciplinary work focuses on Wabanaki stewardship approaches through centuries of learned Indigenous knowledge, as well as cultural protocols to assert Indigenous sovereignty within natural and cultural resource management on ancestral lands. This research project aims to provide a template of culturally appropriate engagement between Native American gatherers and national parks. The results of the project have proven how effective incorporation of Indigenous knowledge can be, how plant gathering has a positive impact on the plant colonies when gathered in a culturally appropriate traditional manner, and how beneficial it is to include this knowledge at the initial stages of a project.

**FOA is also actively engaged in developing expertise and insight for its work with tribal nations.** FOA has been fortunate to participate in two valuable educational opportunities. Two staff members and three board members have participated in the First Light Learning Initiative. Also, FOA's president and CEO Eric has participated in the National Park Service's training program in Tribal Consultations to better understand the history, lessons, and framework of co-stewardship.

At the same time, FOA is moving forward with a DEIA assessment and action plan, which we call Acadia for All. Our goal is to ensure that our staff and board reflect the communities we serve, and our programs welcome everyone to Acadia. We have retained the services of a Cherokee Nation-owned firm to work with the board and staff to develop a three-year road map. Co-stewardship will feature prominently. Liz is co-chairing FOA's Conservation Programs Committee whose work oversees and informs co-stewardship.

Team Acadia and the Wabanaki Nations are poised to expand reclaiming traditional tribal use of Acadia National Park. FOA stands ready to help. Liz and Eric's participation in the Learning Journey "Confluence" will allow FOA to engage from a place of knowledge, understanding, and humbleness.

Respectfully yours,

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Friends of Acadia*

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