Ohlone's Struggle to Save Sacred Site May Be Succeeding in Santa Cruz

Contributed by Jan Lundberg
25 August 2011

Editor's note: This report/photo spread is a follow-up to Native Ohlone of San Francisco-Monterey Bay Area Resist Destruction of Sacred Site, published Aug. 23, 2011. This story is about preventing cultural genocide after actual genocide was committed by our government's policies.

The campaign to halt desecration of a 6,000-year-old village site and burial ground on Ohlone ancestral land has leaped forward.
With native American chanting at the lead, a morning march paraded through downtown Santa Cruz, California on Thursday to bring its message to City Hall's Council meeting.

The meeting did not have the Ohlone on the agenda, but City Council found itself with a packed room and many speakers during open comment. Three council members were clearly moved, and became emphatic about holding another meeting as soon as possible. The need to respect the indigenous people was so well articulated by native and non-native campaigners that their heartfelt and logical sentiments may well be implemented.

There was a legalistic reason that no action could be taken at today's meeting. Proper notification means that the owner of the land, developer KB Home, needs to be able to be present. Then again, that party desecrating the Branciforte Creek would not have wanted to show its face in that room. Vice Mayor Don Lane has been in communication with the builder, KB Home, to convey rising concerns. Yet, at any time, the last unspoiled section of the rapidly transforming natural area, the Knoll, could be bulldozed and the site's legacy destroyed -- something the Council had approved. The common refrain across the U.S. is, "Well, Indian bones can be found anywhere anyway..."

Speaker after speaker emphasized the need to respect Ohlone homeland, even though (the speakers noted) the indigenous population all but vanished. Unsaid was the genocide committed by the City fathers' forefathers, when a bounty was put on any Indian head in California as the Gold Rush gathered steam. But the Santa Cruz Council members are all intelligent, sensitive liberal folk, simply under the usual pressures to approve any development if it has "green" aspects.

So it takes a surge of popular pressure to keep government in line. This rarely happens, but in the case of the Ohlone native people, of which there are so few -- no full bloods remaining -- feelings of both native and non-native conscious citizens are strong. Thanks to dedicated local activists organizing alongside Ohlone elders Ann-Marie Sayers and Charlene Sul, in addition to several young native men and women, the campaign to save the Knoll at Branciforte Creek cannot be ignored.

One beneficial aspect of the fight is to awaken the current occupants of the city -- newcomers, relatively -- about the rights of those displaced who have an ancestral claim for some respect, at least. And everyone has, or should have, love and respect for a natural area that had salmon in the confluence of two creeks for thousands of years.

Sitting in the Council meeting and hearing testimony against desecration of a sacred site where cherished ancestors are at rest, I had something to add. I said this at the podium:

"My name is Jan Lundberg, of Culture Change. I am in accord with the remarks we have heard about this Ohlone ancestral site. I would like to add something based on my knowledge from oil industry analysis. When a development involves driveways and caters to cars, this is desecration of nature that is all too common. It is also unsustainable from a peak oil standpoint, as the world has reached peak oil extraction. And since you believe in sustainability -- popular buzzword that it is -- please think of indigenous traditional ways over the millennia as the only real model of sustainability we have. Thank you."

Although today was a victory, and the protesters did all the right things, please keep up the pressure on KB Home and the Santa Cruz City Council. Contact them immediately regarding the preservation in perpetuity of the ancestral Ohlone Knoll at Branciforte Creek:

Attn: Chris Apostolopoulos, President

KB Home Northern California / South Bay Division

6700 Koll Center Parkway, Ste. 200

Pleasanton, CA 94566

website: kbhome.com

Tel: 1.877.587.4663

Attn: Jeffrey T. Mezger, Chief Executive Officer

KB Home Corporate Offices

10990 Wilshire Blvd.

Los Angeles, CA 90024

website: kbhome.com

Tel: 1.310.231.4000 Fax: 1.310.231.4222

Contact the City Council of Santa Cruz, the mayor, and the Director of Planning and Development:

The Council: Tel. 1-831-420-5020, email: citycouncil@cityofsantacruz.com

Ryan Coonerty, Mayor, Tel. 1-831-420-5027 or 1-831-423-8939 email: rcoonerty@cityofsantacruz.com

Juliana Rebagliati - Director of Planning and Development, Tel. 1-831-420-5103 email: jrebagliati@cityofsantacruz.com

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For further information see
Save the Knoll Coalition's website
SaveTheKnoll.org or email them at
info@savetheknoll.org

See the Action Alert: March to City Hall, Tomorrow (Thursday)

All photos by Jan Lundberg except for "Save the Knoll" by SaveTheKnoll.org.