

OCEJ - Communities Organizing for Better Water

Indigenous Stewardship

Policy Brief



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Indigenous practices and leadership are integral to the environmental justice movement. We recommend the following policies to help us adapt to climate change and restore sustainable practices:

Indigenous Stewardship:

1. Create leadership positions for Indigenous communities, practices, and solutions. It is important for indigenous communities to lead the conversation on stewardship, and for their voices to not only be uplifted, but at the front in a leadership role.
2. Include Indigenous peoples in conservation and restoration conversations with water authorities in order to increase Indigenous representation in seats of power.

Santa Ana River

1. Plant native plants along the entire Santa Ana River to limit erosion, increase biodiversity, and reduce the risk of environmental disaster. This should include the increase of green zones next to the riverbanks (i.e., grassy area between ARTC and the Riverbed). Indigenous leadership should be included in this process.
2. Include signage about the importance of native plants along the Santa Ana River and provide historical information about the indigenous people of the area and their environmental practices. Indigenous leadership should be included in this process.
3. Increase employment of maintenance workers with a focus on prioritizing local hires with full training and benefits. Indigenous leadership should be included in this process.
4. Increase recreational opportunities along the Santa Ana River. Indigenous leadership should be included in this process.
5. Restore Wetlands using native plants and biodiversity at the mouths of waterways (such as the Santa Ana River outlet between Newport Beach and Huntington Beach). Indigenous leadership should be included in this process.
6. Grant indigenous leaders with guardianship over the Santa Ana River.
7. Grant the Santa Ana River with legal personhood. This would entitle the river and its guardians with rights to sue, to utilize compensation for its own wholesomeness, and to have a say in multipurpose projects that may impact the body of water.

Successful examples and benefits of granting personhood to a river have been found in the following locations:

- United States: Klamath River
- New Zealand: Whanganui River
- Colombia: Amazon River
- Canada: Magpie River

