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Spiritual Leader and Chief of the Winnemem Wintu Tribe Caleen Sisk Receives Earth Day Award for Exceptional Advocacy for Indigenous Rights and Water Justice

Oakland, CA, April 19, 2019: The Rose Foundation for Communities and the Environment announced Winnemem Wintu Tribal Chief and Spiritual Leader Caleen Sisk as the winner of the 2019 Anthony Grassroots Prize, an annual $1,000 Earth Day award recognizing an outstanding example of grassroots environmental activism.

Since assuming leadership of the Winnemem Wintu Tribe in 2000, Chief Sisk has focused on uplifting the cultural and religious traditions of the tribe, such as the revitalization of the Winnemem’s H’up Chonas (War Dance) and BaLas Chonas (Puberty Ceremony). She also advocates tirelessly for salmon restoration, the undamming of rivers and lakes, and the basic human right to clean water. Chief Sisk is currently leading the Tribe’s resistance against the proposal to raise the Shasta Dam, and is an integral voice in the efforts to bring salmon home to the tribe’s sacred watershed above the dam.

Westlands Water District recently held public scoping hearings under California’s Environmental Quality Act for a plan to raise California’s largest dam, the Shasta Dam, by 18 feet. If the dam raise is implemented, not only would it harm salmon and violate California’s Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, but it would also flood the Winnemem Wintu Tribe’s remaining ceremonial lands.

In a recent article by KOED, Chief Sisk warned that nearly all of the Winnemem Wintu Tribe’s remaining sacred sites would be put permanently underwater by the reservoir’s expansion. The tribe has already faced the intergenerational injustice of losing 26 miles of their sacred lands along the McCloud River in the original building of the Shasta Dam; and the current remaining sites would be positioned permanently underwater with the dam’s expansion.

Chief Caleen Sisk truly embodies the Winnemem Wintu Tribe’s ancestral spiritual belief, “When we first bubbled out of our sacred spring on Mt. Shasta at the time of creation, we were helpless and unable to speak. It was salmon, the Nur, who took pity on us humans and gave us their voice. In return, we promised to always speak for them.” Providing a voice for the nearly extinct Chinook salmon, she leads the annual Run4Salmon, a statewide prayer run that raises awareness of the importance of protecting our waterways, restoring California’s salmon runs, and revitalizing Indigenous ways of life.
In addition to serving as a voice for the Winnemem Wintu Tribe and their Sacred Salmon (Nur), Chief Sisk is a leading voice in raising awareness of the human rights inequities suffered by other federally unrecognized tribes and unrepresented Indigenous peoples around the world. She is leading her Tribe’s efforts to work with Maori and federal fish biologists to return wild Chinook salmon from New Zealand to the McCloud River, the fish’s ancestral waters. Through her devotion to protecting sacred waters and empowering her community, she advocates for the necessary inclusion of Indigenous ecological knowledge in all aspects of environmental research, planning, and policy.

“Chief Sisk is helping all of us understand what the Winemmem Wintu has always known – we are part of the river, and the river is part of us,” said Anthony Prize founder Juliette Anthony. “Her eloquent advocacy for the rights of her people, and for the ancient synergy between healthy salmon and healthy humans, is an inspiration to me and a model for grassroots activists everywhere.”

To learn more about Chief Caleen Sisk and the Winnemem Wintu Tribe, please visit: www.winnememwintu.us/caleen-sisk

To learn more about Run4Salmon, please visit: http://www.run4salmon.org/

ATTENTION: Photographs featuring Chief Sisk’s work can be found at: www.rosefdn.org/anthony-grassroots-prize/2019-winner/

ABOUT the Anthony Grassroots Prize
The Anthony Grassroots Prize was endowed by Juliette Anthony, a lifelong environmental activist who has received wide recognition for her work in protecting the Santa Monica Mountains, banning the toxic gasoline additive MTBE, promoting solar power, and publicizing the negative environmental impacts of ethanol. To learn more about the Anthony Grassroots Prize, please visit http://rosefdn.org/anthony-grassroots-prize.

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