

# CALIFORNIA VALLEY MIWOK TRIBE

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**San Joaquin County Board of Supervisors Presents  
Indigenous People's Day Proclamation  
to  
Local Native American Tribe  
Amidst the Bureau of Indian Affairs  
Refusal to Conduct Relations with  
the federally recognized Tribe's Rightful Government**

**Le Grange, CA -- California Valley Miwok Tribe of California, a federally recognized tribe** received an official proclamation from the San Joaquin County Board of Supervisors, which proclaimed October 12, 2021 as "Indigenous People's Day" in San Joaquin County. The County's Proclamation is a welcome shift in America's relationship with Indian people and the Tribe is grateful. The action also shines a light on an obscure, but critical decades-long fight the local Miwok Tribe has been engaged in with the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Senator Dianne Feinstein.

Accepting the proclamation was Mildred Burley, a tribal elder with the California Valley Miwok Tribe. Burley, in her 80s, is also the Tribe's language retentionist, cultural director and Director of the "Food For Tribal Families" (FFTF) program.

Burley is the last known living full-blooded Miwok Indian. As a fluent Miwok language speaker, she spoke at the meeting in her Tribe's native dialect. Other Miwok bands of Indians in the region consult her exceptional knowledge of cultural practice and assistance in preserving the Miwok language.

Burley accepted the honor on behalf of the Tribe and "all native people that live in California," thanking the Board of Supervisors "to use this day to recognize the first people of this great nation."

San Joaquin County Supervisor Chuck Winn, District 4 said during the presentation, "We appreciate you (Mildred Burley) for advocating on behalf of others who are facing challenges. We hope your population continues to prosper here and achieve the quality of life you are seeking."



Burley is recognized around the country for her traditional basket making and her work appears locally at the San Joaquin County Historical Museum and the Smithsonian Museum of the Native American Indians.

“The Tribe is grateful to San Joaquin County for recognizing the struggles of Indian people and our tribe in California,” said Angelica Paulk, the Tribe’s Vice Chair. “The pandemic has compounded existing struggles our people have endured with the BIA during a frustrating fight to restore government relations with the United States. During this fight we have had limited access to healthcare, which is ironic as US elected representatives, including Sen. Feinstein, tout Indigenous People’s Day, but are actively engaged in harmful efforts to dissolve our Tribe and replace its leadership with individuals who have few or zero traditional connection to our ways and territory. It’s shameful that our Tribal elders like Mildred Burley are denied access to healthcare and other benefits provided by the United States to Indians.”

President Joe Biden and his Administration recognized Indigenous People’s Day formally this year, an important action that celebrates and honors Native American peoples and commemorates their histories and cultures, counteracting the longtime narrative of Columbus Day, which every year serves as a reminder for many of the cruel history of colonization in the United States. Elder Burley hopes today’s action at the County level sends a message to the BIA that “the local community knows who the California Miwok Tribe is and who our government is,” and efforts to replace the Tribe’s leadership with that preferred by the federal government “is wrong” because it is inconsistent with the community and nation’s determination to truly reconcile with native peoples and support their self-determination.

### **Background**

The California Valley Miwok Tribe has been engaged in a dispute spanning nearly two decades with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), which has included Senator Dianne Feinstein’s insertion of influence, stemming from the Tribe’s potential for gaming. The BIA has blocked the Tribe’s access to federal Indian health care programs and critical relief monies threatening the health and safety of its members because it refuses to conduct relations with the leadership of the Tribe.

Senator Feinstein's influence has been driven largely by an effort to install new tribal leadership and bolster that new leadership and their non-Indian developers' plans to build yet another casino in central California. (Copies of correspondence available upon request). Burley's tribal government is against and has no intention to develop a casino and confirmed this position to the Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs in a letter in February 2021.

"The childish notion of the get-rich-quick-scheme of a tribal casino is no substitute for building a sustainable, multigenerational commitment to a greater community," said Sylvia Burley, Chairwoman of the California Valley Miwok Tribe and daughter to Mildred Burley. "We see no need to intrude on the markets of our brother and sister tribes operating gaming facilities. In addition, the people of California voted in a 2014 referendum to limit the proliferation of more Indian casinos. We hear our neighbors. We must take actions that strengthen and support our own tribal sovereignty and our surrounding communities, not divide or undermine them."

Burley's tribal government determined that taking a Tribal Casino off the table allows the Tribe to avoid costly litigation between gaming developers, advocacy groups and taxpayers and instead place the focus on building connections with their non-Indian neighbors and protecting and building the Tribe's culture and self-sufficiency for generations to come.

To request a copy of correspondence or additional information, email [pollo@cvmt.net](mailto:pollo@cvmt.net). A copy of the proclamation is attached.

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**About the California Valley Miwok Tribe**

*The California Valley Miwok Tribe is a federally recognized tribe. The Tribe, formally known prior to 2001 as the Sheep Ranch Rancheria, is listed on all lists eligible to conduct relations with the United States from 1947 forward including the most recent list published by the federal government in 2021. The Tribe and its current leadership have conducted relations at various times with the United States since adopting governing documents in 1998 with the assistance of Department of the Interior officials. The Tribe is landless and desperate to access congressionally mandated government programs to support its members. The Tribe and its leadership have no casino development agreement and no plans to develop a casino.*