Welcome Autumn Equinox 2020
What is a Cultural Respect Agreement
The Woodlots in Mashpee

CULTURAL THOUGHTS
FROM THE CHAIRWOMAN

Native Americans traditionally responded with humility to the power of the sun, moon, wind, fire, water, life that can fly, swim without surfacing, and root deeply in the earth to drink and feed itself in one place. Everywhere we look we witness the awe of creation. When we open our full consciousness to earth, we are met with her supreme intelligence, utter compassion, and innumerable dimensions of awareness and capacity. Most Wampanoag ceremonial practices are expressions of our unconditional love and respect for her. Our ancestors practiced hunting, fishing, and harvesting respectfully. Giving thanks was and is a way of life for traditional Wampanoag people.

We give thanks to the very potential within a seed for the life it can bring. We are aware that there were other life forms that no longer walk, swim, nor fly here. Observing their remnants told us that our existence as two-legged beings may not be forever as well. Finding our best possible fit today in relation to other living things is a challenge, yet hopefully do-able. The quest for harmony is more noble than the existing competitive endeavor. By observing other life forms, we understood the dos and donts of nature. There are many good neighbor practices we learned by accepting our place as earth dwellers. For example, when we liked the same food another creature liked, we always left enough to share with them. We took turns fetching water and used a regular place.

We kept our bodies clean so animals would not have to smell the unpleasant scents that humans are capable of carrying. We took only what we needed and supplemented with other forms of energy besides protein. This creation offers us the ability to be one with it. It is through this oneness that our people knew when to move away from the coast before hurricanes or to hunker down before a blizzard. In fact, being one with nature will protect you from all possible harm. It has always been time to protect the earth. Let us recover our wisdom and show our devotion to the mother by not only giving thanks, but by seeking guidance to restore her.

Ramona Peters,
NLC Founder & Chairwoman
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First and foremost, entering into a Cultural Respect Agreement with the Native Land Conservancy makes the noble statement that you (organization) honor and respect the cultural continuance of indigenous people. Establishing Cultural Respect Agreements in the southeastern Massachusetts area will rekindle indigenous connectedness to the ancestral homelands that has been lying dormant for centuries. The Native Land Conservancy, Inc. (NLC), is a Native run non-profit organization dedicated to rescuing land and its stories. Land absorbs history yet most of our American folklore that is embedded in the earth is being lost. Many local conservation areas hold such untold legacies. The NLC invites towns, private landowners, and conservation trusts to illuminate those cultural legacies by establishing a Cultural Respect Agreement. This agreement also functions like an easement, giving access to traditional Native Americans to conduct ceremony, re-new the oral tradition formerly attached to that land, and in some cases sustainably harvest medicinal plants and cultural resource materials. Indigenous people of this country have oral histories of events including perhaps even phenomena that have happened upon the land. For example, the place in Cotuit, MA where a Wampanoag massasoit and his wife were standing when they witnessed a lightning bolt spin a circle in the sky. The clay pounds of Truro where for thousands of years indigenous potters gathered and processed clay to make cooking pots, pipes, and smaller vessels. Just as culturally significant is the West Barnstable clay pits. The Barnstable Brick Company fired bricks for about thirty profitable years before the clay pits were flooded by a poorly placed well. Clay pounds and quartz outcrops are unique natural land features that would be considered cultural resources by indigenous people. Cultural resources are determined by several characteristics such as: scarcity, value to indigenous life ways, and sometimes classified as sacred. In Algonquin languages, place names are specific to land features and cultural resources. For example; Mashtuxet: place of the reeds/cat o nine tails (used to make summer lodge roof coverings and mattresses); Copacut: a place where the trees grow close together; Aquidneck: place beyond the hill; and, Metemesik: place of the black earth. Those spellings are likely to be incorrect, but are meant to give one the idea of how places were named by the New England tribes that speak Algonquin languages. These place names gave early travelers an array of locations to place them in the natural world around them. These too deserve recognition through oral tradition because they identify areas where cultural resources can be found for harvesting, restoration, and educational programs. The NLC may also help preserve natural cultural resources that have intrinsic value to indigenous cultures by partnering with land purchases and conservation restrictions. We have done so with four trusts and one town so far. There are several natural cultural resources that are needed by Native American people of New England today. A CRA is a legal document with a commitment of the utmost respect for your property to gather seeds or harvest an annual bloom or to simply honor the legacy through ceremony. Guidelines for such activity will be provided. A list of desired cultural resources will be sent to interested parties. If you are interested in entering a CRA relationship, please contact us at (508) 477-1361 or info@nativelandconservancy.org
The NLC was able to purchase three modest woodlots from a Mashpee tribal member last year. They are classified as unbuildable lots and land locked for the most part. We purchased them to make a statement about our organization’s values; both culturally and historically. Culturally, we consider all land as sacred, no matter the size, shape, or location. We also value the sanctity of the homes of other living things that dwell on those little lots no matter the size, shape, wearing fur, feathers, scales, or shells. This general area was also very likely a former Wampanoag village or campsite. Historically, there are a couple of remarkable stories about woodlots in Mashpee. First, by the early 1800’s much of Cape Cod was clear-cut and a good amount of Massachusetts all the way out to the Berkshires was balding. Mashpee conspicuously had the only standing forest on the Cape. It was not a town then but rather classified as an Indian Plantation with assigned non-native overseers. The Tribe enjoyed shared use of all the “natural resources” until the overseers started to sell the wood. The Mashpee Tribe declared their independence from the state’s corrupt plantation system to Governor Levi Lincoln, Jr., and his council on May 21, 1833, by publishing three resolutions: "The Mashpee Tribe Resolved: Resolved: That we as a Tribe will rule ourselves and have the right to do so for all men are born Free and Equal says the Constitution of the Country. Resolved: That we will not permit any white man to come upon our Plantation to cut or carry off any wood or hay or any other article without our permission after the first July next. Resolved: That we will put said Resolution in force after that date of July next with penalty of binding and throwing them from the Plantation if they will not stay away without”. Yes, these Resolutions were quickly tested. During the first week of July, a neighbor from Cotuit named William Sampson entered tribal lands and cut a wagon load of wood. Before he could leave, three Pocknett brothers; Joseph, Jacob, and Nicholas, William Apess, Aaron Keeter, Charles DeGrasse, and Abraham Jackson, stopped his cart, unloaded it and sent him away. Somehow, this single incident became known as the “Mashpee Indian Revolt” and the “Mashpee Wood Riot”. The Indian men that stopped the thief were arrested and charged with riot, assault, and trespass. link: https://www.newenglandhistoricalsociety.com/william-apess-leads-the-bloodless-mashpee-revolt-1833/

In 1860, the Mashpee Indians were forced to divide up the reservation/plantation into allotments. Due to this State action, the Tribe would no longer share common land and its former collective responsibility for the entire Mashpee area. Each adult member was given a homestead, wood lot and hay lot, all totaling approximately 60 acres. Since then, the town of Mashpee was incorporated in 1870. The Native Land Conservancy is in the act of protecting three Mashpee wood lots into perpetuity from being cut and carted away, as of the 24th of July 2019.
Mashpee Wampanoag elder, and NLC Board Secretary, Sharman Brown, is thrilled to be part of the organization. She believes that embracing an indigenous approach to the land and water is the only way these natural resources will be protected. Her interest in Wampanoag culture shows up in many different ways while she does a deep dive into the Wôpanâak Language. For years, Sharman studied the Wôpanâak language under the leadership of the Wôpanâak Language Reclamation Project’s (WLRP) Head of School, Mashpee Wampanoag, Nitana Hicks Greendeer, PhD. Currently, when Sharman isn’t taking courses at Cape Cod Community College, she is working at the school to teach tribal children the Wôpanâak language and culture; something near and dear to her heart.

Additionally, Sharman worked in the Tribal Historic Preservation Office for the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe and was a cultural guide at the Mashpee Wampanoag Indian Museum. In her not so distant past, she was an award-winning media producer and has served as a development officer for non-profit organizations. She is also learning sign language. Sharman’s upbeat spirit is a gift, and we celebrate her in our 2nd edition Autumn Equinox Newsletter.