

# Sacred Natural Sites, Ceremony & the World Conservation Congress

## #IUCNcongress, #SacredNoGo

### Key Points

- The 2016 World Conservation Congress in Hawai‘i represents the flowering of the indigenous rights movement, gathering dozens of sacred natural sites guardians from around the world.
- According to the World Bank, indigenous people make up 4% of the world's population, control 12% of the Earth’s land surface, and on that land lies 80% of the remaining biodiversity on the planet. Indigenous cultures around “sacred natural sites and territories” conserve biodiversity, through worldviews and value systems that are both ecologically sophisticated and spiritually profound.
- The gathering of so many sacred natural site guardians from around the world is an historic event that will serve as a springboard to continuing cooperation, support and effective activism. The guardians will discuss strategy, do ceremony together, share success stories, address “scientists” and protected area managers, and build relationships simply by having a good time.
- The guardians will discuss the growing impacts of extractive industries and work to strengthen the resistance movement by creating, declaring and affirming sacred natural sites as “No Go Areas” where mining, drilling, logging, dams, land grabs, etc. are banned.
- The climate crisis cannot be solved without defending, protecting and conserving indigenous peoples’ sacred territories. Many indigenous people are on the front lines of climate change, losing their homeland to rising waters, their water sources due to disappearing glaciers, or their ability to live their traditional way of life as ecosystems change or die.

### Introduction

The Sacred Land Film Project, Altai Project and Protect Kaho‘olawe ‘Ohana (PKO) have collaborated for the last nine years in the production and distribution of a film series on indigenous cultures around the world asserting their land rights, reviving cultural practices, protecting sacred places, and linking with other native cultures with similar priorities. The *Standing on Sacred Ground* series has led to an inspiring new alliance between Hawaiian leaders and those in California, Australia, Papua New Guinea, Mongolia and Altai Republic in Russia.

In partnership with Amazon Watch, Borneo Project, Gaia Foundation, Womens’ Earth and Climate Action Network, and others we have organized a delegation to participate in the IUCN World Conservation Congress in Hawai‘i. This gathering represents a powerful opportunity for indigenous people to both challenge and contribute to the international conservation movement at a critical time in history.

Assembling 25 powerful indigenous leaders from around the world in Hawai‘i will underline the connection between indigenous peoples and biodiversity in sacred cultural landscapes. As these leaders discuss success stories and tragic losses, as they conduct ceremony with Native Hawaiians, as they address conservation experts from around the world at the IUCN congress— we will record their presentations, interviews and responses to questions, and produce short video clips. We will

tell these stories in real time over social media during and after the Hawai‘i events. This content will address the change in values needed to protect the earth, and the role of sacred natural sites in the protection of biodiversity.

Working together in Hawai‘i will cement bonds between indigenous communities as they network, share information, and plan future activities. This alliance of guardians is an important strategy, politically and spiritually, in defense of the earth—and it represents a potent public education opportunity.

## **Background**

The Sacred Land Film Project’s work at the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) goes back to the World Parks Congress in Durban, South Africa in 2004, when a group of indigenous leaders and allies embarked on a long, difficult journey to better integrate indigenous land rights and protection of sacred sites into IUCN activities and priorities. Working through the IUCN Specialist Group on the Cultural and Spiritual Values of Protected Areas (CVSPA), we published *Sacred Natural Sites: Guidelines for Protected Area Managers* in time for the IUCN World Conservation Congress in Barcelona, Spain, in 2008. Since then, we have succeeded in holding workshops on strengthening protection for sacred places at the World Conservation Congress in Jeju, South Korea, in 2012 and the World Parks Congress in Sydney, Australia, in 2014. Hawai‘i is the next step forward and our partners in the Native Hawaiian movement are thrilled to share their “40 years of *Aloha ‘Āina*” experience with indigenous colleagues from around the world.

The focus of the work in Honolulu will be fostering dialogue between traditional knowledge keepers and western scientists, academics and protected area managers with the goal of better protection of biodiversity, indigenous land rights and sacred natural sites and territories. We will discuss and hope to advance “No Go policies” for mineral extraction in relation to World Heritage Sites, sacred natural sites and primary forests.

We have also planned events to take place before and after the Congress. We will gather 10–15 sacred site guardians on Kaho‘olawe Island in Hawai‘i in August 28–31 for three days of strategy discussions and ceremony. Participants will then travel to Honolulu to attend the Congress. Afterward we are collaborating with the University of Hawai‘i at Manoa’s Biocultural Initiative of the Pacific for an educational film screening and full-day symposium on Wednesday, September 7.

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## **Specific Events for the Sacred Sites Leaders delegation:**

**September 2**            **History Review: IUCN and Sacred Natural Sites**  
Noon–1pm — Protected Planet Pavilion

### **Cultural, spiritual and sacred dimensions of protected and conserved areas**

An overview of the work that has been developed through various initiatives such the CSVPA, the Sacred Natural Sites Initiative, the Guidelines on Sacred Natural Sites and the Delos Initiative.

Danil Mamyev and Toby McLeod will present. URL: <https://portals.iucn.org/congress/session/12474>

**September 2**            **Introductory Meeting**, 2–5pm — ILWU Hall, 451 Atkinson Drive

**September 3**            **The Conservation Potential of Sacred Landscapes**  
Film Screening: *Standing on Sacred Ground: Pilgrims and Tourists*  
Danil Mamyev (Altai) and Caleen Sisk (California)  
7:30–9:00pm, Room 317A

Around the world, indigenous communities stand in the way of government megaprojects as they continue ancient cultural obligations to protect sacred natural sites. In the Russian Republic of Altai, traditional native people create their own mountain parks to rein in tourism and resist a gas pipeline that would cut through a World Heritage Site. In northern California, Winnemem Wintu girls grind herbs on a sacred medicine rock, as elders protest U.S. government plans to enlarge one of the West’s biggest dams and forever submerge this touchstone of a tribe.

URL: <https://portals.iucn.org/congress/session/15497>

**September 4**            **Workshop on Sacred Natural Sites**  
11am–1pm — Workshop in Room 315

**From Rhetoric to Reality: Exploring laws, customary governance and No Go area policies for future protection of sacred natural sites.**

From mountains to rivers, forest groves to coral reefs—sacred natural sites “connect the dots” between biodiversity conservation, ecosystem integrity, cultural heritage and climate mitigation. We invite you to learn from successful strategies for protecting indigenous sacred natural sites and territories from Hawai‘i, Altai, Mongolia, Uganda, Benin, Ecuador, Myanmar, the US and other stunning bio-cultural land and seascapes, and contribute to shifting the discourse to effective policy and practice, with a specific focus on declaring sacred lands “No Go Areas” for extractive industries. This workshop is part of the IUCN-ICOMOS “Nature-Culture Journey.”

URL: <https://portals.iucn.org/congress/session/10217>

**September 4**            **40 Years of Aloha ‘Āina — Cultural Event with Film Screening**  
7:30–9pm, Room 312

Native Hawaiians present the story of Kanaloa Kaho‘olawe: “*40 Years of Aloha ‘Āina*,” including a presentation led by Craig Neff, Luana Busby-Neff, Protect Kaho‘olawe ‘Ōhana

The presentation will share 40 years of experience in restoring the cultural and natural resources of the sacred island of Kanaloa Kaho‘olawe after 50 years of military bombing and training exercises. The challenges of reserving a sacred place from commercial development will also be shared. The presentation will highlight the role that the Protect Kaho‘olawe ‘Ōhana (PKO) played in the renaissance of Native Hawaiian culture and the revival of the core Hawaiian value and practice of aloha ‘āina—loving, respecting, protecting and honoring land and natural resources. The ‘ohana and its leaders have also been important in the work to protect Hawaiian burial sites and artifacts, the volcano deity Pele from geothermal development, and the sacred mountain of Mauna Kea from desecration. This story will be told

through hula, chant and speakers and we will show the 22-minute film segment on Kaho‘olawe from *Standing on Sacred Ground*. URL: <https://portals.iucn.org/congress/session/15490>

**September 5**            **Standing on Sacred Ground: Aloha ‘Āina Around the World**  
Screenings & Discussion  
2:30–4:30pm, Room B (public event), Hawai‘i-Pacific Pavilion

During this event we will screen film clips featuring challenges to sacred lands and their ecosystems in Ecuador, Papua New Guinea, Russia, Mongolia, California and Hawai‘i as well as the spiritual work of indigenous guardians to sustain reverence for these places and protect their natural resources. Discussions with sacred site guardians follow each short film clip: Altai in Russia (Danil Mamyev), Mongolia (Oyunbaatar), Papua New Guinea (Melchior Ware, Banak Gamui), Ecuador (Patricia and Nina Gualinga), California (Caleen Sisk) and Hawai‘i on Kaho‘olawe and Mauna Kea (Davianna McGregor, Emmett Aluli, Craig Neff). Hosted by the Protect Kaho‘olawe ‘Ohana.  
<https://portals.iucn.org/congress/session/12255>

**September 6**            **Work/Service Day**

Our delegation will participate in fieldwork, cultural, spiritual, and ecological restoration work with Native Hawaiians at Maunawila Heiau at Hau‘ula in northeast Oahu.

**September 6**            **Reception and Film Screening: *Islands of Sanctuary***  
7:00–9:30pm, University of Hawai‘i at Manoa, Art Auditorium

This event will include a film screening and reception as well as an introduction a symposium on September 7. Hosted by Kaliko Baker, Protect Kaho‘olawe ‘Ohana and filmmaker Toby McLeod

**September 7**            **Lands, Seas & Skies — Conversations with Science, Tradition & the Sacred**  
Univ. of Hawai‘i at Manoa, Orvis Auditorium, Music Dept. 2411 Dole St.

This all-day conversation between traditional knowledge holders, guardians of sacred lands, western scientists, academics and protected area managers will unfold through a series of discussions about specific places and issues. The goal of the symposium is growing collaboration, mutual understanding and better protection of biodiversity, indigenous land rights and sacred natural sites and territories. Whether perceived through the lens of science or the sacred, nature and nature’s spaces and cultural diversity alike face tremendous threats, and now more than ever we need innovative approaches, new thinking, and concerted efforts to provide appropriate solutions. Fostering dialogue between different epistemic communities, different ways of thinking about and approaching western science, tradition, and the sacred is the goal. A concluding round table and dialogue seeks to raise the meaning of the day’s conversations for our work as scientists and scholars, the policies at our university, and for the research goals and directions this gives us as a community of teachers and learners. Sponsored by the Biocultural Initiative of the Pacific.

8:30–10:30am    **Lands**            Global Focus: Indigenous Guests from around the world  
Moderator: Toby McLeod and Tamara Ticktin  
Danil Mamyev, Altaian ranger & geologist

Slava Cheltuyev, Altaian shaman  
Oyunbaatar Tseren, Mongolian Shama  
Caleen Sisk, Winnemem Wintu Chief and Spiritual Leader  
Patricia Gualinga, Sarayaku, Ecuador, Living Forest Proposal  
Brendan Mackey, ecologist, Australia

10:30–11:00am **Break**

11:00–12:30am **Seas** Moderator: Rosie ‘Anolani Alegado  
Alan Friedlander, National Geographic  
Mac Poepoe, Mo‘omomi North Coast of Moloka‘i  
Hi‘ilei Kawelo, He‘eia Fishpond and Papahanaumoku  
Ruth Gates, Director Hawai‘i Institute of Marine Biology, UHM

12:30–2:00pm **Lunch**

2–3:30 pm **Skies** Local Focus: Mauna Kea  
Moderator: Davianna Pōmaika‘i McGregor  
Kalei Nuuhiwa, Kama‘aha Education Initiative  
Luana Busby-Neff, Kū Kia‘i Mauna Kea & Protect Kaho‘olawe ‘Ohana  
Paul Coleman, SOEST, Institute for Astronomy, UHM  
Guenther Hasinger, Director, Institute for Astronomy

3:30–4:00pm **Break**

4:00–5:30pm **Round Table** Moderator: Alex Mawyer  
Hökūlani Aikau, Indigenous Politics & Education  
Maxine Burkett, Richardson School of Law  
Vilsoni Hereniko, Academy for Creative Media  
Participants from the day

5:30pm **Reception**

#### **RELATED COLLABORATIONS (note: all three of these are at the same time)**

##### ***A Deep Dive on Gender and Climate Change: Exploring Policy Progress, Implementation Challenges, and Women’s Frontlines Solutions***

Monday, September 5 — 8:30–10:30am in Room 317B

URL: <https://portals.iucn.org/congress/session/10233>

Patricia Gualinga (Ecuador) will present at this workshop

Womens’ Earth and Climate Action Network

##### ***Cultural and Spiritual Significance of Nature in the Management and Governance of Protected Areas and World Heritage Sites***

Monday, September 5 — 8:30–10:30am in Room 315

URL: <https://portals.iucn.org/congress/session/10211>

IUCN WCPA Specialist Group on the Cultural and Spiritual Values of Protected Areas (CSVPA)

***Successful campaigns led by Indigenous Peoples for the restoration of waterways—new partners, new approaches—in New Zealand and Hawai'i***

Monday September 5 — 8:30–10:30am Room 311-8

Knowledge Café hosted by Aroha Mead

**OTHER RELATED COLLABORATIONS**

***Extractives and protected and conserved areas: impact and alternatives***

Saturday, September 3 — 8:30–10:30 in Room 318A

Panel moderated by Liz Hosken

URL: <https://portals.iucn.org/congress/session/10220>

***Connecting Practice: Linking culture and nature through World Heritage***

Saturday, September 3 — 11am–1pm in Room 318B

URL: <https://portals.iucn.org/congress/session/10216>

***Biocultural Creativity and Traditional Knowledge Documentation in the Pacific***

Saturday, September 3 — 11am–1pm in the Hawai'i Pacific Pavilion Room B

Hosted by Aroha Mead

***World Heritage, Wilderness and Large Land and Seascapes***

Saturday, September 3 — 5–6pm in the Protected Planet Pavilion

Organized by Cyril Kormos; Buyanbadrakh (Mongolia) to present

***Conserving nature via self-determination and resistance to destructive development in ICCAs***

Sunday, September 4 — 8:30am–1pm in Room 304A

Peter Kallang, Kameok, Jettie Word to present; Moderator: Grazia Borrini-Feyerabend

<https://portals.iucn.org/congress/session/9626>

***Earth-Centered Law and Regulation for Safeguarding Nature***

Sunday, September 4 — 8:30–10:30am in Room 318A

Organized by Linda Sheehan, Earth Law Center; Sostine Namanya (Uganda) on panel

URL: <https://portals.iucn.org/congress/session/10223>

***A Deep Dive on Gender and Environment: Policy Landscape, Strategies in Action and Women's Frontlines Solutions***

Monday, September 5 — 8:30–10:30am in Room 317B

Sponsored by The Women's Earth & Climate Action Network, Patricia Gualinga presents

URL: <https://portals.iucn.org/congress/session/10233>

***Water, Culture and Indigenous Connections***

Monday September 5 — 9:30–10:30 in the Water Pavilion

Indigenous people believe water to have spiritual and cultural connections. Caleen Sisk to present. URL: <https://portals.iucn.org/congress/session/12196>

***Connections: Spirituality and Conservation***

Monday, September 5 — 2:30–4:30pm in Room 310

High Level Dialogue of some of the world's most eminent religious leaders hosted by Dr. Pualani Kanaka'ole Kanahele, Hawaiian spiritual leader, Hula master.

URL: <https://portals.iucn.org/congress/session/13830>

**Further Information and Related Details:**

**All WCC Sessions are listed here**

<https://portals.iucn.org/congress/sessions>

**Our WCC Motion 026 (proposed for WCC 2016) — Protected areas and other areas important for biodiversity in relation to environmentally damaging activities**

<https://portals.iucn.org/congress/motion/026>

**Motion 048 — Protection of primary forests, ancient forests and intact forest landscapes**

<https://portals.iucn.org/congress/motion/048>

**Related Motion 083 — Affirmation of the role of indigenous cultures in global conservation efforts**

<https://portals.iucn.org/congress/motion/083>

**Related Motion 053 (approved Barcelona WCC 2008)**

Recognition and conservation of sacred natural sites in protected areas

[https://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/motions\\_english\\_collated.pdf](https://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/motions_english_collated.pdf) (see page 98)

**IUCN publication *Sacred Natural Sites: Guidelines for Protected Area Managers* (2008, 106 pages) is available for download at:**

<https://www.iucn.org/content/sacred-natural-sites-guidelines-protected-area-managers-0>