

## Land Acknowledgement

Angela D. Garcia-Lewis

It is vitally important to acknowledge that the land we live and work on is the homeland of the Native people who have inhabited this landscape for millennia, and continues to be spiritually connected to the O’Odham of the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community (SRP-MIC) who live here today. The SRPMIC is located in central Arizona nearest the city of Scottsdale, Arizona within the metropolitan area of Phoenix, Arizona. The SRP-MIC is a confederation of two unique cultures with their own languages, customs, cultures, religions, and histories; The O’Odham (known as the Pima) and the Piipaash (known as the Maricopa). Both the O’Odham and the Piipaash are oral history cultures.

The SRP-MIC and the Gila River Indian Community claim aboriginal territory of lands exclusively used and occupied by the Akimel O’Odham (Pima) and Piipaash (Maricopa) equalling 3,751,000 acres of South Central Arizona, as was adjudicated in 1970 by the U.S. Indian Claims Commission under Docket 228 acknowledging the colonization and illegal ceding of these lands. Recent anthropologic studies recognize the ancestral land use area of the O’Odham, Piipaash, and their ancestors to include a much more extensive area including lands east – west from east along the present day New Mexico border across Arizona to as far west as the Pacific Coast, and from north to south from present day Utah in the north, including the lands directly along the entire Colorado River and further south into Baja California and other parts of northern Mexico northward of the Sierra Occidental where there are still O’Odham villages that are a part of the Tohono O’Odham Nation. This includes all areas inhabited by the Hohokam, Salado, or Patayan cultures as well as those ancestral to these groups.

The landscape is sacred and it reflects cultural values that are central to our way of life and to the way we define ourselves. The oral history and the song culture of the people are specifically tied to tangible places like the mountains that surround our valleys are associated with specific historic, cultural, and religious values. Those places are tangible reminders to our people about our shared attitudes, goals, and practices that characterize who we are, where we belong, and how we related to each other in the past continuing today and into the future.

Our oral histories use places to remind them what happened in a geographic region during a specific period of time. Our song culture used the same processes to describe and direct sacred pilgrimages across the southwest. Our ancestors did not conceive of a time when human beings could destroy or own the landscape. They didn’t think it was possible, and more so, our ancestors never foresaw a time when any human being would ever want to do that, because the destruction would obliterate our links to our ancestors.