

WE ARE OCEAN PEOPLE: INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP IN MARINE CONSERVATION  
CINDY BOYKO & 'AULANI WILHELM, GUEST EDITORS

# We Are Ocean People

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**Welcome.** This special Indigenous issue of *Parks Stewardship Forum* has been put together to bring attention to the responsibility of all people to protect the oceans and waters of this planet. Across the globe, Indigenous Peoples have known and accepted this responsibility without question, in the past, the present, and for the future. Our cultures, languages, and laws spring from the lands and waters of our homelands, where we as Indigenous Peoples share teaching of reciprocal relationships and responsibilities to these treasured places, it is where this inherent responsibility lies in our hearts, our tears, and our DNA.

It is often thought that heritage refers to aspects of culture that are inherited from the past to the present. But that is only half the story. What makes heritage important is that it is something that must also be preserved for the future, or the connection ends. It becomes just a story of something precious from the past that no longer persists. Without the active perpetuation of culture and knowledge—through language, stories, song, dance, and practices of many kinds—the relationship we as people have with our inheritance begins to fray, to fade. As coastal and island peoples, the ocean is our heritage. Simply put, we are ocean people.

As ocean people, we are at home on the water—the oceans, lakes, and rivers—it runs through our veins and encircles our hearts. Our bodies are nourished by what the sea brings to us; we are grateful. We know how the lands, oceans, lakes, and rivers are connected because we live in a place of seeing, of experiencing and being in relationship with these places as the creator has taught us. We see how everything is connected to everything else, and everything we know is dependent on water.

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CINDY BOYKO is Haida from Haida Gwaii. 'AULANI WILHELM is Kanaka 'Ōiwi from Hawai'i. ▲ Pacific Rim National Park Reserve PARKS CANADA





▲ A preview of some of the images shared by Indigenous contributors to our special issue.

The water upon this planet provides moisture to the clouds, which carries water to the earth, to our rivers and oceans. The marine environment provides food and from that our mental and physical health is nourished. As humans, we are dependent on and connected to the oceans on so many levels.

**With heart, we welcome you to read the stories gathered here from our brothers and sisters located around the world.** They are sharing with you what’s important to them, and their experience of the oceans and lands they live on. The incredible beauty and power of the ocean, the depth and breadth of it, is important to all of us.

They write for us to create a bond, that helps us feel, to understand, by bringing knowledge and creative works that are inspired by the power of the ocean, the critical nature of it. Their stories and testimony remind us why we must continue to care for it and each other, to deepen our connections and uphold our responsibilities for our own well-being and the well-being of all life on this planet.





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### On the cover of this issue

CIRCLE DESIGN, clockwise from top:

- Northern Chumash ceremony | [ROBERT SCHWEMMER](#)
- Haida Gwaii | [CINDY BOYKO](#)
- The Polynesian Voyaging Society's voyaging canoe Hōkūle'a | [NOAA](#)
- Elder teaching youths, northern Alaska | [US FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE](#)
- Baby Honu (sea turtles), Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument | [NOAA](#)
- Center: Humpback whale, Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument | [NOAA](#)

Background: Pacific Rim National Park Reserve | [PARKS CANADA](#)