

November is **Native American/Alaska Native Heritage Month** – a time to not only celebrate the peoples and their heritage, but to commemorate the lessons and wisdom that we have gained from their traditions and partnership. Tribal engagement and strengthening the government-to-government relationship with tribes through interagency collaboration are essential for us as an agency. It is through these collaborative efforts with those in the federal family and beyond, that we have learned a tremendous amount. We celebrated and highlighted some of the talented people we work with throughout the month of November in a series called, #NativeFirstVoices.





Kicking off our first interview for #NativeFirstVoices to commemorate #NAHM.... we bring you **JoAnn Chase**, EPA's Director for the American Indian Environmental Office. Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation.

"We do live in a multi-cultural society. And I love that. I celebrate that. And I've always found it difficult when society tries to make you choose. I don't recall a question of identity. And I give that in large part a lot of credit to the family I was raised in - my dad, who was always an advocate for Native people, and my mother, coming from a Caucasian background, understood that the roots of my being were in the homeland, the place of my people where I was, and always supported that. So my lens has always been one as a woman of color. That's how I see the world and that's how I embrace it every day and that's how I say good night to it and give thanks to it every day, as a Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara woman. And that doesn't mean I don't celebrate my mother's family and some of the traditions and backgrounds that were more European-based that she has, but the essence of my identity is really connected to who I am as an indigenous person."



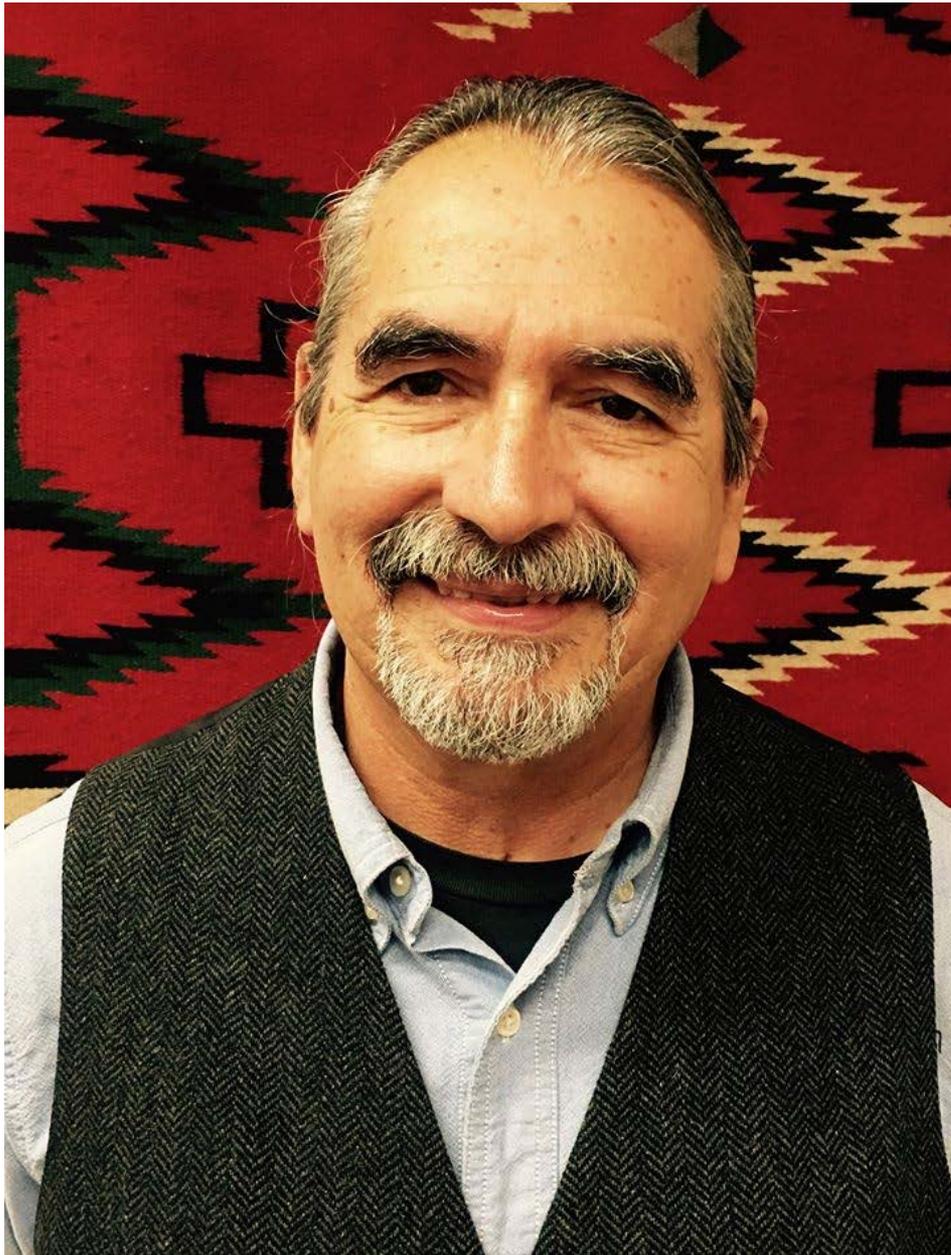
For today's #NativeFirstVoices, meet **Morgan Rodman**, Executive Director on the White House Council of Native American Affairs. Cherokee and Osage.

"One fact that is often left out of the dominant conversation, or conversation that takes place about Native Americans is that Native Americans or American Indians belong to tribal nations. They're citizens of tribal nations. And that is a government that makes its own laws, that has its own jurisdiction, that provides services to its citizens, and that's important to remember. And also promotes the arts of that tribe, and promotes the language and provides health service. It runs the whole gamut. It does everything that a government should be doing. That's one fact I'd like to remind people of is that it's more than just a group of people. These are citizens of tribal nations, of governments."



Tana Fitzpatrick, Senior Counselor to the Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs, U.S. Department of the Interior. Crow, Sioux, Panka, and Chickasaw.

“One of my life mottos is to practice forgiveness and to heal. One of the hardest things I've ever done in life was not only to forgive someone who has hurt me, but to forgive myself. I think that, especially in Indian Country, there is a lot of trauma that still exists and persists in today's modern day society where forgiveness and healing would do a lot of good. I think society as a whole could benefit from learning the tools of forgiveness so that we can heal our country. My grandfather Thomas Roughface was a United Methodist minister, who also practiced his traditional Ponca ways, which, especially in his time, was challenging. To practice both required a lot of leadership, knowing who you are, and pushing forward despite other's disapproval of your choices. One of his most important lessons that my mom passed on to me is forgiveness. I have to remind myself of this lesson every single day - to me it hasn't been one of those things where I casually say 'oh yea I forgive that person.' It's a continual, daily practice and being aware of that lesson day in and day out. It's a life long journey.” #NativeFirstVoices



Meet **Dr. Daniel Wildcat**, Ph.D.! He is a professor at Haskell Indian Nations University in Lawrence, Kansas and also a recipient of the EPA Tribal ecoAmbassadors grant. He is Yuchi, a Zoyaha culture.

"We go through our lives often so hurried, so harried, that we're not paying attention. We're not paying attention to the life around us. Although there's considerable ugliness in the world, that surrounds us every day, we're still surrounded by tremendous beauty in the world. And I think a lot of what the Dine call in their philosophies and embody actually in some of their ceremonies is their notion of walking in beauty. And that means we have to actively enact that. If you can block out some of the ugliness, some of the sadness, some of the real pain that surrounds us and is very palpable in the world today, it's a real blessing to be able to see the beauty that still surrounds us. And it can strike us in very unexpected ways, at unexpected times, and it's truly a gift, but I think it's a gift that only comes to those that are paying attention. So I try to live my life in an attentive way so that I could be respectful of the life relatives that surround me – plants, the animals, the land, the water, the air. I don't call that romanticism, I call that indigenous realism. I think by doing so, you begin to understand that sense of service." #NativeFirstVoices



Karen Diver, Special Assistant to the President for Native American Affairs. Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa.

"I had my daughter when I was 15. For me, being a young mother – having to deal with my own goals of being self-sufficient and self-determined and having to do that in the context of being a native woman – really highlighted for me the need to be in a position where you can tell those stories and impact the systems that affect people's lives. So whether it's in service delivery or in government, having that diversity of voices at the table changes the conversation about what is necessary, what is possible, and what is needed. There were few native people, and especially native women, in my area doing that, which pushed me to grow, build my own skills, build my own academic knowledge, and build my circle of influence, so we could start changing those discussions." #NativeFirstVoices



Raychelle Daniel, Tribal Climate Change Policy Analyst, U.S. Department of the Interior. Yupik from Tuntutuliak, Alaska.

"My favorite tribal tradition is this idea of reincarnation and this idea that with death, there's life again. I'm Aluaq, that's my Yupik name, and I'm my grandmother's father. That's who I am. And Raychelle, I'm Ray, which is my grandmother's son, and so that's who I am. I'm my uncle and I'm my great grandfather. And by taking name from our ancestors, we're bringing life to those people and we are those people. I was reminded about that recently. One of the reasons why we left Washington, DC to move back to Alaska was because my mom was sick. We were there when she passed. A year later, we come back together and we share a part of us- give away small gifts, things that belonged to my mom, with the community. But not only that, now there are other people there named after her. And I think that is very cool to think "there's my mom". It brings in this side of happiness in a time of sadness, so it's very uplifting."

#NativeFirstVoices



Ira Hight, EPA Region 6 in Dallas. Wichita and Osage.

"I came to work for EPA because I've always wanted to work for Native American people. I began working for my tribe straight out of college. The tribes supported me going to school both financially and being there to encourage me to continue my efforts. I was afforded the opportunity to work at EPA. I felt a calling to help other tribes within the region by working for EPA and I've been able to work with many tribes within the region to develop their environmental program capacities throughout the years." #NativeFirstVoices



Victoria Sissy Kotongan, former National Tribal Caucus member, Unalakleet, Alaska.

"My favorite tribal tradition would be berry picking. I love being out in the Tundra and I love watching my bucket fill up and the feeling of accomplishment that's there. I love watching my hands get stained from berries, and I love the smell of the Tundra. It's just one of my favorite places to be. I learned how to make Aqutaq from my nephew's other grandma. You use fish and bake it and squeeze it out and then whip it together and mix it with berries and that's kind of one of our traditional desserts. I also make a lot of jams, jellies, and syrups. I go berry picking as often as I can in the summer." #NativeFirstVoices



Teddy McCullough, Center for Native American Youth Program Coordinator, Coyote Valley Band of Pomo Indians, Northern California.

"I was just reintroduced to my culture. And one of the things I'm passionate about is language revitalization. So our language, formally, is extinct, or dormant. I've been working a lot with my community to reintroduce what we do have. We thought that when our last fluent speaker died, that the language was pretty much lost. But we found out that a professor who was working at Berkeley had been interviewing our elders for like 30 years, and studying the language, and so now we're working with her. We have a website and an app that has the language on it. We're doing research on how to reintroduce the language properly into the tribal communities and so I have been working with her on that. We've been working with the tribes and tribal elders. My cousin's name, Maayu, comes from the language and it means "dove". And I really like the word for "thunder", which is mak'ila. The word for butterfly is ʔuyt^hoktok (oi-tok-tok). There are also some more complicated things that have tonal differences." #NativeFirstVoices

Rachael Novak, Climate Science Coordinator, BIA. Navajo, Arizona and Utah.

“I’ve been running since I was very young, with my parents’ support. It’s a very common cultural and recreational practice in Native communities. One of my good buddies, Pete, also Navajo, is like a big brother. He encouraged me to do my first full marathon- on a trail. It started at 10,000 feet above sea level and went up to over 13,000. I was nervous. He said, “you can, and you should”. For some reason, something within me believed it. “I can and I should”. I don’t need to doubt myself, I’m capable. You’re running for people who can’t run – the elderly, the very young. So it’s not just an individual thing- it’s for the community- especially in the case of prayer runs. My friend Pete also talked me into running the Grand Canyon Rim to Rim to Rim about seven years ago. So, I put a little message out to friends asking for their prayers and good thoughts the first time I ran it because I hadn’t done that distance or elevation change before- 42 miles.

At about mile 30, I was running along the river, and I just had this realization that all these prayers were carrying me and strengthening me. At the same time, I was so grateful for my body. I had this moment of awe for how strong and amazing our bodies are and what a blessing they are. We are all amazing and are capable of so much. My grandma would say “you’re just right, you’re strong”. I think of her words when I run. Your body is connected to your spirit and your being and you should take care of them. That’s what our Creator wants. It doesn’t matter what it looks like. It’s important to be grateful, to do things purposefully, with prayer. It means something.” #NativeFirstVoices





Michelle Sauve, Intergovernmental Affairs Specialist, Administration for Native Americans, Health and Human Services, Saint Regis Mohawk and French Canadian.

“I came to DC to be the director for a program called WINS – it’s the Washington Internships for Native Students at American University. What drew me to it was the opportunity to work with native students and to help shepherd them through an experience that I didn’t get to have as a college student. It provided full scholarships for students to come and study at AU and do an internship at the Federal government, which was a sponsor. One of the traditions of that program was to do an annual pow wow, with different traditional regalia, different dance styles, different music – and the sharing of all that and their significance came out naturally, through conversations and interactions. These pow wows were always on the AU campus. One year there was a wedding that was coming out as we were having the pow wow, and they joined us in a social dance, so we did a round dance with the bride and groom. And that’s part of the reason why we wanted to have it on the campus, to say Native students are still here. They’re still a part of the country; to be able to expose AU students, alumni, whomever, and to connect with the DC community.”
#NativeFirstVoices



Macy Rae Kenworthy, US Arctic Youth Ambassador, Inupiaq, Eskimo from Kotzebue, Alaska.

“I was raised to be humble and look outside of myself. That’s easy when your livelihood is based off the lands and you rely primarily on fishing and hunting for food source. We do have grocery stores, but they’re super expensive. And there aren’t a lot of job opportunities. When you’re living off the lands, you’re forced to pay attention. We’re taught, by example mostly, to take care of each other, and we see it a lot when people go out of their way to help those who need it by providing what we catch and sharing that with the community, or with the elders. In a small town, you know when someone is struggling, but you need to be able to step back and look around at the people surrounding you.” #NativeFirstVoices