

PRESENTATION FOR THE XII TAI SITUPA RINPOCHE'S PILGRIMAGE FOR
ACTIVE PEACE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Tim McKay, Director, Northcoast Environmental Center
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I feel very honored to be here today. I'm not very familiar with Buddhism, but I often feel as though I am a radical centrist in a world of extremes. Some assume that I am a pessimist because I regularly have to deal with so much of the environmental work's "bad news."

But last evening, when I was looking for a place for my children and myself to spend the night, I looked up at the Mountain just as a falling star dropped behind its summit. Without thinking, I made a personal wish for peace, love and narrowing the distance between us--a small affirmation of hope.

I do believe that when we mix hope with action that we can indeed help to ease the burden of bad news and transform it into the impetus for positive changes. Changes that are needed to bring peace between the World's various colorful peoples and their biology--the living planet Earth.

Towards this end I have had the privilege of working with the Northcoast Environmental Center, in Arcata, for the last 15 years. A major area of focus for the Center and its member groups is federal land policy issues. Throughout the Western United States, basic federal land policy has tended to benefit timber mining and ranching interests. These same interests are often the cultural descendants of the pioneers who displaced and decimated Native American peoples. Federal land policies in the 19th Century favored giving away Western lands to miners and

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settlers, until abuses against the land and consolidation of ownerships under corporate caused a public outcry.

In spite of some reforms in federal land policy at the turn of the century, there was a shift back to intensive development shortly after World War II. This meant extensive and intensive logging and road building in fragile mountain watersheds, here in Northern California, and throughout the Pacific Northwest. The victims of these radical changes are Native Americans, who continue to lose their holy places to development; the plant and animal species that become increasingly rare or endangered; and the ecological integrity of whole watersheds and their anadromous salmon and steelhead. We are all of us endangered by the mindlessness that allows alienation to separate us from one another and the Earth.

I want to urge all of you who have come here today on behalf of peace and the environment to become knowledgeable about two bills pending in Congress: H.R. 1546, an amendment to the American Indian Religious Freedom Act, and H.R. 1268 the "Bio-Diversity Act."

H.R. 1546 would declare that "Absent a compelling Federal interest, Federal lands that have historically been either part of, or necessary to, or been used by, a traditional Native American religion, shall not be managed in a manner that will pose a substantial and realistic threat to undermine and frustrate any traditional Native American religious practices."

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H.R. 1268 would make it federal policy "that conservation of biological diversity is a national goal, and conservation efforts are a national priority." Among other things this act would require the identification and delineation of "very large ecological regions in the United States" and require an "interagency strategy for conservation of biological diversity within each such region, which shall...emphasize management on a regional level, taking into account linkages between habitats."

Passage of these two measures is crucial if the remaining Native American cultures are to survive, and the broad biological function of North America is to be preserved. You can make these dreams pass from wish to reality, and thank you all for being here today!