



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

San Diego Botanic Garden Partners with Tribal Communities to Launch Ecological Revitalization and Climate Resiliency Projects

Collaborative pilot program addresses climate change, drought, and wildfire, with a focus on plants of cultural significance, tribal health, and wellbeing

ENCINITAS, Calif. (February 11, 2025) – [San Diego Botanic Garden](#) (SDBG) is proud to announce the launch of a series of new collaborations with tribal communities across San Diego County and beyond including the Viejas Band of Kumeyaay Indians, the Pala Band of Mission Indians, and the Jamul Indian Village of California, a Kumeyaay Nation. These efforts aim to strengthen partnerships to improve climate adaptation and resilience, and build capacity for ecological restoration and cultural preservation among several federally-recognized tribal nations.

Officially launched in June 2024, one of these projects is funded in part by the [US Environmental Protection Agency](#) (EPA). A second, parallel effort, is funded by the [US Department of Agriculture Forest Service](#) in partnership with [The Morton Arboretum](#). Native American tribal communities often face challenges from climate change and urbanization, including drought and wildfires, which threaten both the environment and culturally significant plant species. Together with tribal governments, community-based non-profits, academic institutions, and industry groups, these efforts aim to support tribal communities, as well as build new relationships between other regional tribes and conservation organizations. Having been invited to work alongside these partners, SDBG will help build capacity for and jointly conduct habitat restoration projects, develop seed banks, gardens, and greenhouses in tribal communities, and coordinate hands-on educational activities for adults and youth to help care for and propagate culturally significant plants.

“We are excited to be embarking on this partnership with the San Diego Botanic Garden,” said Shasta Gaughen, Environmental Director for the Pala Band of Mission Indians. “Working together, we will be able to expand our efforts to grow culturally significant plants and engage Pala community members - especially youth and elders - in maintaining traditional plant knowledge and practices.”

“The Viejas Band of Kumeyaay Indians is delighted to partner with the San Diego Botanic Garden in order to enhance community awareness regarding native plant propagation, greenhouse facility management, and youth education,” said Ray Teran, Resource Management Director, Viejas Tribal Government.

SDBG's role in the partnerships builds upon its longstanding commitment to environmental stewardship and decades-long collaborations with local Indigenous partners. Following the guidance of tribal leaders to understand specific needs of their communities, the program seeks to create a model for integrating traditional ecological knowledge with modern scientific practices to address changing environments.

"We're very proud to be building upon a relationship that started between Jamul Indian Village and SDBG with Jane Dumas in the 1990s," said Lisa Cumper, Tribal Historic Preservation Officer and Cultural Resources Manager at the Jamul Indian Village of California. "Our partnership with this EPA Environmental Justice Collaborative Problem Solving Agreement and also the National Medicinal Plants Collection and Research Consortium from the Conrad Prebys Foundation are exciting and important projects with SDBG. We are also excited about a new opportunity to expand our Native gardening and plant based food sources. This relationship is allowing us to grow in a strong and positive way and we are looking forward to exchanging expertise, knowledge, and experiences."

In September 2024, Kekoa Cantwell joined SDBG's Science & Conservation team as Tribal Climate Resilience Specialist. In this new role, Cantwell works directly with communities on restoration, gardening, native plant propagation, and other activities on tribal lands. Several restoration projects are already underway, including two recent tree plantings at Viejas to reintroduce Engelmann oaks (*Quercus engelmannii*), a native tree to Southern California that is increasingly threatened in its natural habitat. A keystone tree vital to the health of ecosystems, oaks have been important to Indigenous peoples for thousands of years - and continue to be today - for food, medicine, shelter, and cultural and spiritual practices.

Led by partners at Viejas with support from SDBG, the San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance (SDZWA), and The Morton Arboretum, 48 Engelmann oaks were planted throughout the reservation over several weeks. A critical component of this event involved engaging local youth in planting and acorn gathering to offer hands-on learning experiences that highlight the vital role plants play in ecosystems, while emphasizing the power of young people to serve as environmental stewards. Similar restoration projects will take place throughout the coming years, with Cantwell and team members coordinating routine checkups on seedlings, monitoring, and reporting data back to partners.

"We are honored to have the privilege of working alongside Indigenous communities to better understand, interact with, and conserve plants," said SDBG President & CEO Ari Novy. "By fostering collaborations and leveraging the knowledge and expertise of diverse partners, we hope to help protect not only the land, but also the human heritage that thrives upon it."

These initiatives are funded by the EPA through the Environmental Justice Collaborative Problem-Solving Cooperative Agreement Program; the US Department of Agriculture Forest Service in partnership with The Morton Arboretum; along with The Donald C. & Elizabeth Dickinson Foundation and a number of private philanthropic donors. Additional project partners include community-based non-profit organizations Coastal Roots Farm, and Flower Hill Institute; for-profit organizations, Cota Holdings and Tree of Life Nursery; and academic organizations,

California State University San Marcos (CSUSM), San Diego State University (SDSU), and University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCo-opExt). The medicinal plants program at SDBG was established with initial funding from Martin & Carol Dickinson and The Conrad Prebys Foundation.

For more information about Science and Conservation projects at San Diego Botanic Garden visit www.sdbg.org/science-conservation-projects.

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About San Diego Botanic Garden

Established in 1970, San Diego Botanic Garden (SDBG) is an urban oasis located in Encinitas, California, just north of San Diego. The Garden's 37-acres and 8,000 square foot glass conservatory display more than 5,300 plant species and varieties. As a premiere 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization for botanical science and conservation, SDBG is involved in conservation horticulture, botany, and applied plant sciences to address our biggest local and global challenges, from biodiversity loss to climate change, food insecurity to environmental degradation. Featuring four miles of trails, SDBG has the largest public bamboo collection in North America; gardens representing different regions and flora of the world; and demonstration gardens showcasing fruits and vegetables, water-smart ornamentals, and native plants. Through an array of educational programming, events and activities for both children and adults, the Garden aims to create, share and apply plant wisdom to the world. Learn more at sdbg.org. | FB [@SDBotanicGarden](https://www.facebook.com/SDBotanicGarden) | Instagram [@sandiegobotanicgarden](https://www.instagram.com/sandiegobotanicgarden) | TikTok [@sandiegobotanicgarden](https://www.tiktok.com/@sandiegobotanicgarden) | LinkedIn [@SanDiegoBotanicGarden](https://www.linkedin.com/company/SanDiegoBotanicGarden) | Twitter [@SDBGarden](https://twitter.com/SDBGarden)

About Jamul Indian Village of California

The Jamul Indian Village of California, a Kumeyaay Nation, is proud to share its rich heritage that spans an impressive 12,000 years. Our ancestors thrived in what is now San Diego County and Northern Mexico, living independently and sustainably off the land. Through hunting, fishing, and raising families, they developed a deep understanding of their environment and the changing seasons, which they called Kupiihaw (fall), Hiichur (winter), Chiipam (spring), and lipall (summer). These traditions and values remain an integral part of the Jamul Indian Village today.

About Pala Band of Mission Indians

The Pala Band of Mission Indians is a federally recognized tribe whose reservation is located along the Palomar Mountain range approximately 30 miles northeast of San Diego. The majority of the over 1,000 tribal members live on the over 13,000-acre reservation, established for Cupeño and Luiseño Indians, who consider themselves to be one proud people - Pala.

About Viejas Band of Kumeyaay Indians

The Viejas Band of Kumeyaay Indians (Viejas) is a self-governing federally recognized Indian Tribe exercising sovereign authority over the lands of the Viejas Indian Reservation, which

consists of 1,699 acres about three miles east of the unincorporated community of Alpine in San Diego County, California. The Kumeyaay have lived in Southern California and Northern Mexico since pre-historic times. The Reservation is bordered by Cleveland National Forest on the west, north, and east. Interstate 8 (I-8) crosses four acres of the Reservation on the southern boundary. The reservation has a population of over 500, with a transient population of 5,000.