

## **Wildland Firefighters and Native Youth Voice Support for '*Juliana v. US*'**

Press statement by: Jessica Conrad, Karuk Tribal Member. June 4, 2019

Hello, my name is Jessica Conrad and I grew up in northern California along the Klamath and Salmon rivers within what is now known as the Klamath National Forest that is the homelands of my people, the Karuk Tribe. My people have unique ties with our homelands, and our culture is centered on a relationship of reciprocity with the ecosystems that support our way of life. We regard all more-than-human life as kin and set out to care for it as such. We hold an identity as "*fix the world people*," an identity that is manifested in the annual world renewal ceremony (*Pikyavish*) and our daily interactions with our environment. Growing up in such a rural area, my family and I depend heavily on the land for food and other resources, and continue to carry out traditional practices of hunting, fishing, and gathering that are so vital to who we are.

I have always held an inherent responsibility to care for Mother Earth, a responsibility passed down by my ancestors. Upholding this responsibility is not an easy task in the settler colonial world we live in today. As both Western management policies and climate change have greatly impacted the ways in which we can interact with our environment. I am still quite young but I have already experienced so many changes to my life brought on by climate change and environmental degradation.

One topic that has been brought to the forefront of the climate change discussion that really hits close to home for me are wildfires that have been exacerbated by climate change and fire exclusion. Fire ecology has always been an integral aspect of Karuk culture. Since time immemorial the Karuk people have introduced fire to the landscape as a management tool, a practice which we now refer to as "good fire." This practice has effectively been outlawed by federal fire exclusion policies! There are a lot of misconceptions and fears surrounding wildfires that stem from over 100 years of fire suppression and fire exclusion.

As wildfire has recently become the poster child for climate change it is important to remember that natural fires have been, are, and will continue to be a part of the landscape. With the connections that science is making between fires and climate change we are now entering a time where space is opening up for more diverse conversations about fire, and indigenous voices need to be a key part of those conversations. It is vital that during this time we address the misconceptions and misplaced fear of fire, and that we do not let fires become a scapegoat for the real climate issues such as the extraction and burning of fossil fuels. Federal fire management policies, coupled with climate change, have had detrimental impacts not only for ecosystems but also for society, and more personally for me and my family, our ability to uphold a way of life that is connected to our Mother Earth and all beings.

Although these issues have made me a little cynical and worried for my future as many others are and should be, I still hold a lot of hope for change. Especially when there are so many people beginning to speak out on climate change issues. The '*Juliana v. US*' youth climate lawsuit is one such action that gives me hope for the future. The first time I heard about this case was in a

class at the University of Oregon and I was inspired by the connections between intergenerational and environmental justice aspects of this case and Karuk philosophies of reciprocity between us and all of our relations. Karuk people have been pushing back against mismanagement of public lands since settler contact. I also think it is so amazing and important that the *Juliana v. US* case highlights the need for a shift in forest and fire management policies. We all have something at stake when it comes to these issue and if any of us want to see a future we can survive in we need to get on board with supporting efforts like this lawsuit and the revitalization of prescribed fire practices. My people have always lived with and celebrated fire as a life renewing process, and we refuse to buy into the fear of wildfire being pushed by the government, logging companies, and the newmedia. What is truly threatening is climate change that we are already experiencing, and poses real risks to my culture and community's ability to survive.