

Honor Our Native Land: A simple guide and competency of land acknowledgement for NOLS instructors

Introduction

In this simple guide, NOLS instructors will learn how to create their own land acknowledgement step by step for their expeditions and courses. NOLS instructors are asked to use the examples below with intention and practice. This guide will also aid instructors in creating learning lessons and activities regarding native land, history, and indigenous tribes. Although a land acknowledgement can be impactful in itself, teaching students about the land you are recreating on with stories, applicable and decolonized terminology, and historical abundance to affirm the meaning of being “*the leading source and teacher of wilderness skills and its environment.*”

Within those vital parts of our mission, NOLS holds the responsibility to acknowledge the indigenous people oppressed and excavated from their land we now lead courses on. **For a thorough land acknowledgement guide and resource, please refer to [Center for Racial Justice in Education’s Honor Native Land guide](#).

A few disclaimers of this guide:

- This guide will not provide you every single resource that will aid your land acknowledgement or curriculum you wish to share with your students. It is up to you, a NOLS instructor, to create your curriculum and the objectives you want to use in these lessons.
- Native history and land acknowledgements are not simple. It takes practice, time, and preparation.
- Acknowledgements are about creating relationships and connections.
- Do not use past tense language when speaking about indigenous folk.
- Acknowledge your own privilege in creating these land acknowledgements. You are an example to your students.

What is a Land Acknowledgement? Why is it important?

- Refer back to the [Land Acknowledgement](#) NOLS curriculum on Iko Wapi for more details and examples

Simple steps on how to create your own land acknowledgement:

1. IDENTIFY the land you will recreate on

As a NOLS instructor you will be recreating on several ancestral lands throughout the semester. With this, it is best to begin your course with a land acknowledgment. When you transition from one course to the next, for example from skiing to canyoneering, you can create a new land acknowledgement to begin that portion of the course.

→ The best resource to use for this information is native-land.ca

This website will give you an overlay of indigenous tribes over the area you are recreating on. To help navigate through this website, input your hometown and read what indigenous tribes your town inhabits. This can be great practice for students to do at home as well.

→ Another resource to use to better understand indigenous tribes languages and linguistics is Native-languages.org. You will find more resources on this website to supplement these resources above.

2. CREATE and COMMUNICATE

Once you've identified the indigenous group or groups who should be recognized, start to write your land acknowledgement. Remember to use **present tense** language as these indigenous folk are still inhabiting their ancestral lands and/or working to fight to uncede these lands from colonizers.

The goal is to uplift and recognize the inhabitants of the land you will temporarily recreate on. There is no exact script. This is your craft, your intentional practice, and NOLS I-team/individual instructor land acknowledgement.

Acknowledging one's privilege: With this intentional practice, it is important to understand privilege in land sovereignty. In today's news, ancestral land is being claimed unjustly by the federal government and decayed by major pipeline projects. Alongside this privilege and power, it is important as NOLS instructors, and as students, to understand what privilege looks like in the outdoor field. Recreating on foreign and ancestral lands where preservation must exist and persist is privilege in itself. To acknowledge one's privilege, whether an ally to the Indigenous community or as a generational European colonizer, relating to your experience and meeting itself to the indigenous people of the land provides awareness in one's privilege.

Here are some land acknowledgement examples addressing one’s privilege in occupation of ancestral lands:

“As a settler and generationally-born colonizer myself, I am committed to... [describe your commitment to actively working against colonialism, towards reconciliation].”

“As a visitor on this land, coming from [describe your background], I strive to deepen my own understanding of the local Indigenous communities.... Reframe my responsibilities to land and community.”

“I come with respect for this land that I am on today, and for the people who have and do reside here.”

3. INTENTION AND PRACTICE

Once you have written out your land acknowledgement and are aware of all the ancestral lands you will be recreating on, the next step is to practice and educate with intention. Below are a few key points and guided examples on how land acknowledgements can be credible, intentional, valuable, and educational.

Purpose: Each land acknowledgement created by an individual should be created with a purpose in mind. It is quite easy to write up a land acknowledgement and deliver to students on the first day of the course. However simple as it may sound, providing these land acknowledgements should align with the intent to educate individuals on the importance of persons, place, and history.

Ask yourself this: What is the goal of my land acknowledgement and/or native history lesson I want to teach to the group? How can I as an educator do my part to teach this curriculum in the most intentional and unoppressive way to students?

Pronunciation: It is easy to mispronounce these tribes’ names and learning the correct pronunciation is important to your intentional land acknowledgment practices. As another teaching tool, write out the native and common names of the indigenous tribes to share with students.

Example: *Gros Ventre (pronounced: grow vaunt)*

The Gros Ventre, also known as the Aaniiih, A'aninin, Haaninin, Atsina, and White Clay, are a historically Algonquian-speaking Native American tribe located in north central Montana.

Deromanticizing: In addition, native-land.ca provides you sites and native history for the specific indigenous tribes' land you are occupying. It is easy to list these tribes' native history as "fun facts", however it is important as NOLS instructors to decolonize and deromanticize native history to your students. Listing facts is not the best teaching tool either when revisiting historic events. Use pictures and share important dates to students when explaining the tribe's native history and impact on the land.

Land Acknowledgement Examples

Below are some examples used to construct your land acknowledgement.

***Please use these examples with intention and as a practice. We ask that you write a land acknowledgement that can be heavily practiced and used in the field as you are a leading source and teacher of wilderness skills, leadership, and education in the NOLS and outdoor community.*

From The Center for Racial Justice in Education

At its simplest, an acknowledgment could look like this:

"We acknowledge that we are on the traditional land of the _____ People."

Beginning with just this simple sentence would be a meaningful intervention in most U.S. gathering spaces. From there, there are many other elements to bring into acknowledgment:

Honoring elders: *"I would like to acknowledge that this meeting is being held on the traditional lands of the _____ People, and pay my respect to elders both past and present."*

Reciprocal relationship with land: *"I want to respectfully acknowledge the _____ People, who have stewarded this land throughout the generations."*

Acknowledgments may also make explicit mention of the occupied, unceded nature of the territory in which a gathering is taking place.

Explicit mention of occupied, unceded nature of territory in which a gathering is taking place: “We would like to begin by acknowledging that the land on which we gather is the occupied/unceded/seized territory of the _____ People”

“I would like to begin by acknowledging that we are in _____, the ancestral and unceded territory of the _____ People.”

From NOLS Rocky Mountain - Lander, Wyoming

At the start of this program briefing we will be role modeling formal land acknowledgement. Today we start by formally recognizing the indigenous cultures on whose land we live, work and recreate.

*In Lander, we occupy lands historically and presently occupied by the **Eastern Shoshone, Sioux, Crow, Cheyenne and Northern Arapaho tribes.*****

*The **Wind River Reservation**, which exists on lands around Lander and in the Wind River Range, is occupied by the **Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho**. If you are traveling in parts of the Winds, you may border the boundary of the reservation. **NOLS courses are not allowed to travel on or enter this land.***

*We ask that you teach and speak in ways that respectfully acknowledge and recognize the **history of genocide, fraudulent treaties and forced removal of these people from their land. We ask you to teach in ways that do not appropriate, romanticize, or whitewash indigenous culture.***

**Depending on your NOLS course location, you also may travel on the ancestral lands of the Eastern Shoshone, Sioux, Crow, Cheyenne, Northern Arapaho, Lakota, Paiute, Ute, Nez Perce (nez 'pærz), Gros Ventre (pronounced: grow vaunt), Shoshone-Bannock or other tribes.

Land Acknowledgement from The Wilderness Society (TWS) -

The Wilderness Society recognizes Native American and Indigenous peoples as the longest serving stewards of the land. We respect their inherent sovereignty and self-determination and honor treaty rights, including reserved rights that exist off their reservation.

We acknowledge the historic and ongoing injustices perpetrated against Indigenous peoples and are committed to being more conscientious and inclusive and working with Indigenous peoples to advance the establishment of trust and respect in our relationships.

We seek the guidance of Native American and Indigenous peoples to effectively advocate for the protection of culturally significant lands and the preservation of language and culture. We strive to support actions that respect the priorities, traditional knowledge, interests and concerns of Native American and Indigenous peoples to ensure a more just and equitable future.

Online/Virtual Meetings - Land Acknowledgement

***As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, many in-person gatherings, meetings, and workplaces transitioned into the online and virtual world. Although this has been the case for the past year, organizations are still finding ways to incorporate land acknowledgements in their daily virtual meetings.**

Here is an example of a land acknowledgement to apply to your next virtual session:

Thank you for meeting together in this virtual space. I would like to begin by acknowledging the indigenous people of all the lands that we are on today and to which we call home. My name is _____ and my pronouns are _____. Currently I reside on the ancestral lands of the _____ People, also known as (current location).

If you are open to introducing yourself to the group with your name, pronouns (if comfortable but not required), and the indigenous land you are on that would be great. While we meet today on a virtual platform, we will be taking a moment during our introductions to acknowledge the importance of the lands and reaffirm our commitment and responsibility in improving relationships between nations and to improving our own understanding of local Indigenous peoples and their cultures.

Resources:

- native-land.ca
- native-languages.org
- [Center for Racial Justice - Native Land Guide](#)

Books to read:

- [Why Indigenous Literatures Matter](#)
- [An Indigenous Peoples' History](#)
- [Peoples History United States](#)