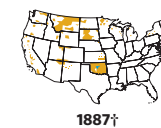
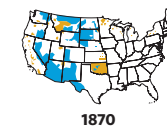
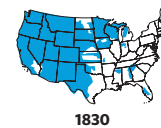
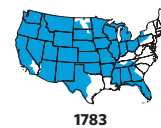


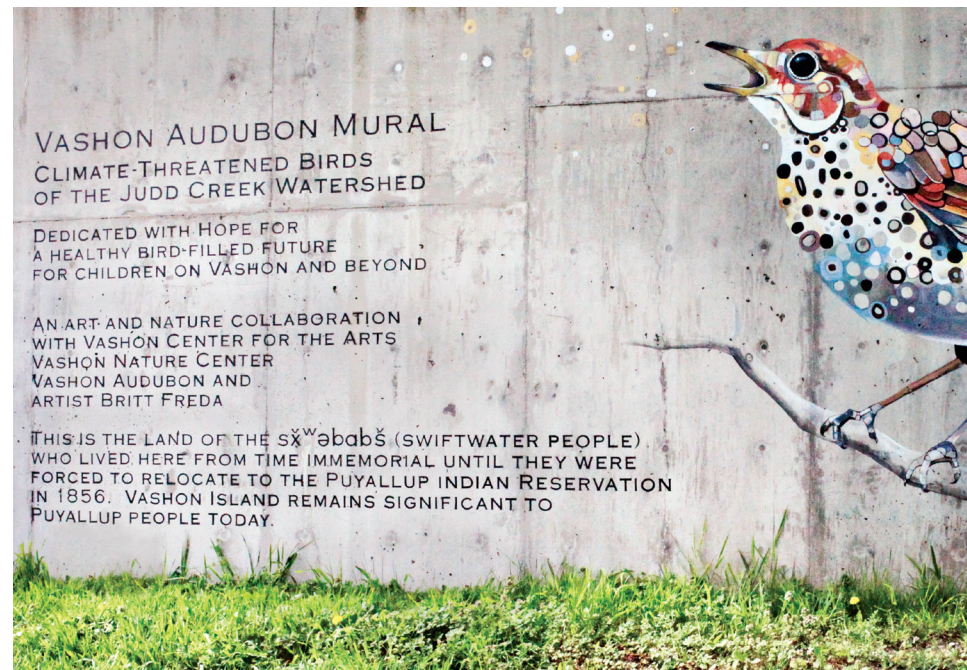
Wherever you are in the United States, you're on Native land. Here's how to acknowledge that.

Native land seizure: 1.5 billion acres, 1783-1887



● Native homelands
● Reservations
† The Dawes Act, which stripped land from Native people

For more Native stories, go to audubon.org/indigenous.



MAYBE YOU'VE HEARD ONE BEFORE: AT THE START OF AN EVENT, THE SPEAKER names the Indigenous groups that once or currently steward the land they're standing on. This is a land acknowledgment. The growing practice, spreading to the United States from Canada, recognizes Indigenous people as the land's ancestral caretakers and pays respect to modern native nations. Whether you're leading a bird walk or looking to understand your home's Indigenous history, this expert advice will help you find the words. —Hannah Waters

What Is It?

The exercise is based in protocol for inter-tribal meetings. "Whenever we go to someone's land, we recognize ourselves as visitors on their territory, exchange cultural practices, and welcome one another," says Allan Vicaire from the Mi'gmaq community of Listuguj and project coordinator with Concordia University's Indigenous office. "Land acknowledgment continues with that tradition." The formal statement, read aloud or shared in writing, honors the land and its original inhabitants, and expresses a commitment to connecting with their descendants today.

FRAMEWORK

Anatomy of a Land Acknowledgment

There is no formula. Writing your land acknowledgment requires research, thought, and time with uncomfortable truths. Done well, it is not performative but rather expresses an authentic, personal relationship with the land and its native people. Indigenous experts offer some guidelines.

LOCATION

Identify the land you're occupying or engaging with. Then name the group (or groups) with ancestral ties. Don't acknowledge "Indigenous people" generally. "It's important to be specific," says Felicia Garcia, who is Samala Chumash and creator of landacknowledgements.org. Share cultural knowledge, too. Vicaire's Concordia

University, for example, acknowledges Montreal as a Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) diplomatic and trade hub.

LANGUAGE

Use Indigenous language for group and place names. For example, a mural by artist Britt Freda (above), in collaboration with Washington's Vashon Audubon Society, foregrounds the s̓w̓əbāb̓s in their native

tongue. Confirm pronunciation and practice it before you read your statement aloud.

INTENTION

Articulate why you or your organization wants to acknowledge the land and what you hope to achieve. "How does it relate to you personally and the work you're doing?" Garcia asks. Finding the right words can take work and discussions. Continually refine your aims. Reading your statement should not be rote. "It has to be very authentic," Vicaire says. "Speak from the heart."

HISTORY

Explain the history. Don't avoid harsh realities. Colonizers often stole land and killed or displaced Indigenous people. Say so plainly. Naturalists can also acknowledge traditional stewardship. "Indigenous people have been doing conservation work for time immemorial but are often left out of the conversation," Garcia says. "It's important to credit them."

PRESENT-DAY

Describe where and how ancestral tribes live now. "People often think that native people are figures of the past," Garcia says. But despite dispossession and colonization, they persist. "They have ties to that land and still practice that culture."

ACTION

Land acknowledgment is not a performance of inclusivity. "It's a commitment to future work to dismantle the harmful legacies of colonialism," Garcia says. "Otherwise it's kind of pointless." Look up the named nations' priorities and examine how you can support them, for example by donating money, skills, or time. Then act on your intention.

PHOTO AND ART: BRITT FREDA

Putting Words into Practice

Three Auduboners reflect on how land acknowledgment has renewed their approach to conservation.



Birders have a norm around: "What can I cross off my list at this place?" Land acknowledgment leads to deeper engagement with cultural and social dynamics of land we're visiting. **At a meeting, before we delve into work, we recognize historical wrongs that need to be righted.** We are actively looking to support tribes' priorities. Making the statement can be uncomfortable. It requires constant learning and adjusting. There is no perfect way to say it. But are we better off saying it or keeping quiet about it? That's where I tend to come down. —Trina Bayard, director of bird conservation, Audubon Washington



In science-based management plans, we talk about plants and soils. Those patterns incorporate traditional knowledge. Many Indigenous cultures had a low-intensity way of working the land, which created a mosaic of habitats. A diversity of habitats supports a diversity of birds. **In my plans, I am starting to include a paragraph about how the land was influenced by Native nations** and how that influences what you're seeing today. It gives me another way to talk about the importance of nature and the legacy of our land. —Aimee Tomcho, conservation biologist, Audubon North Carolina



In Alaska, Indigenous nations steward a greater portion of land than they do in much of the United States. They know about wildlife and ecology from living here for so long. We learn so much from them that's not reported in Western science. **I have committed to doing a land acknowledgment no matter what meeting I'm in and whether anyone else does it.** When you lead, others start to join in. Alaska Natives have told me how welcome it made them feel. It sets a foundation for trust. It's not everything, but it's a step in the right direction. —Rebecca Sentner, senior communications manager, Audubon Alaska

PERSONAL STORY

The Wilderness Myth



ON A RECENT WARM DAY I BIKED along the Chicago River. Migrating songbirds sang in the trees, night-herons fished the site of a recently removed dam, and waterfowl lined the riverbank. In awe, I found myself saying, "*neewee sikaakwa siipiiwi*—thank you, Chicago River, for being here." Before a forced removal to the West in the 1800s, my community—the Miami Tribe—called the southern Great Lakes, including Chicago, home. But many Chicagoans don't know our history. That's because America's mythology depends on our omission. The idea of manifest destiny, taught in U.S. history classes, describes the land as empty and ripe for European colonists' taking—even though Indigenous peoples have stewarded the landscape since time immemorial. Land acknowledgment chips away at that dominant, ahistorical narrative by countering stereotypes that Indigenous people are bygone footnotes and that we are a homogeneous group. A land acknowledgment isn't a solution in itself. But showing gratitude can open up a new perspective. For birders it isn't only being thankful that a lifer appears in a local park, but also that the land can provide so much for people and wildlife. —Bradford Kasberg



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Research Routes

Get started with these resources.

Native Land is a tool that uses your zip code to drill down into native territories, languages, and treaties—each a keyword to unlocking more information. Go to native-land.ca.

Cultural institutions point you to knowledge and experts. Indigenous scholars at universities and museums can answer questions or confirm language and pronunciation.

Tribal governments can be excellent resources. However, ensure you're not seeking approval, Vicaire says. Be respectful if tribes don't help. "They have their own challenges."

Examples online can provide models to follow and inspiration. Glean language tips and, along the way, absorb a variety of Indigenous experiences.