

Linda Engle Sustainable Idaho on KISU is brought to you by the Portneuf Resource Council.

Charlie Medema: Welcome back to Sustainable Idaho. I'm your host, Charlie Medema. This week I had the absolute privilege of speaking with someone I have been very excited to join me on the show, Randy L. Hido-Teton. Randy L. is the former public affairs manager for the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, former strategic communications specialist for the Forest Service Office of Communications in Washington, D.C., the youngest and only living model for U.S. currency today, serving as the model for the Sacajawea Dollar Coin, and currently a featured speaker with the Idaho Humanities Council. Beyond this, she is a renowned cultural advocate, published author, and a truly legendary Idahoan. This week we spoke on the nature of cultural sustainability in the state of Idaho.

CM: Welcome to Sustainable Idaho. We are so incredibly excited to have you here today. Would you like to tell our listeners a little bit about yourself?

Randy'L Teton: Sure. So, you know, again, my name is Randy L. Hido-Teton. My Indian name is Hido, which means metal arch in Shoshone, but I was given my Indian name by my mother, who named me after my father's great, great, great grandmother, who is a matriarch of the Teton family. So I hold that name very tightly to my heart, and I was born and raised on the Fort Hall Reservation from the Lincoln Creek District. Our tribe, we are a patrilineal tribe, and so my father's side were considered Mount and Bannock. My mother was a museum director, so I was really fortunate to have, you know, my own library through my mother, you know, when it comes to family genealogy.

RL: But, you know, being raised in the tribal museum in Fort Hall, it planted a seed for me to become involved in museum, and that's something I really was passionate about. I took eight years of internships at various museums throughout the United States, so I've done a lot of work over my whole career. That's what I think makes my expertise a little bit unique, is I have that training in conservation and museum and art history, and then communications.

RL: You know, that actually fell in my lap when the public affairs position for the tribes was just barely getting developed, and that was a really interesting switch to a career that placed me with our tribal leadership to be basically their right-hand woman when it came to communications and talking points and press releases and social media and all those great things. And I did it for 11 years. I loved it. I felt that I needed to grow more into where I really wanted to be as a Native American woman.

RL: I felt like I had more to contribute in regards to my role with Sacajawea, and I was then offered a position at the federal level, so I kind of switched the table around because I was always at the tribal table. Now I was entering a new world of federal, and so I was hired at the Office of Communications in Washington, D.C. with the Forest Service, and I was the first Native American in their communications headquarters.

CM: Really? Wow.

RL: Yeah. It was interesting. It was eye-opening to just how much the D.C. level needed tribal input, so I felt, okay, there's a reason why I need to be in this position because they need to understand real reservation issues. It's so much different when you grow up around it and you are immersed into the reasons of why you want to retain a culture or an art or just have that knowledge. Language, the songs, our ceremonies, you know, people that don't know, they don't understand why we do what we do, and that was so needed at the federal level, and I was there to provide input, and if I didn't have the answers, I knew someone from almost every reservation. They're either leaders, they're attorneys, they're conservation workers, they're fire workers, you know, you name it. I've got somebody that I can rely upon in Indian Country.

CM: We often associate sustainability solely with environmental conservation and using our resources mindfully, which is incredibly valuable, but there is this vast other realm concerned with cultural sustainability. What does cultural sustainability mean to you?

RL: Well, cultural sustainability means that we don't own the land, that we are here as guardians. That is one thing that our elders constantly remind us when we're young and growing up is that you take care of the land and it will take care of you. You know, how we all can be sustainable of our own space. So I feel like there's more to it when you're thinking about land, and I think for Native Americans, it's just on a deeper level. Sustainability, I think, is just everything on the land. Water, trees, the soil, just making sure you're telling your kids.

RL: I mean, that's one thing that I constantly, you know, we could be out picking choke cherries and we start talking about how this tree used to be bigger and now it's not as big no more, and that develops into a conversation of why. It's because there's a drought. We didn't have winter. There's no water. It's a domino effect when, you know, we as Native American people are just going out and exploring our back country. We start having these conversations that's probably not typical with any other families, and I think that's what's important to have Native Americans at federal level because we're able to provide that side of cultural sensitivity topics and discussions.

RL: That's kind of reason why I wrote a book about Sacajawea. It's not because I'm the model for the Sacagawea dollar. It's because we need to have a Shoshone perspective of our own. When I think about, you know, all of this and how I grew up and all this information, you know, I'm the type of person, I don't want to talk about it. I want to do it. I want to do something about it, and we're losing a lot of elders. We're losing the language. We're losing songs that are specific to certain dances. Someone's got to record them. Someone has to be able to share them with our own, and I'm not talking about the outside. I'm talking about internal. If we don't share these, they are forever going to be gone. That's what I'm doing. I want to help preserve. I want to help archive. I want to help, you know, get things out there so people understand our tribe a little bit better.

CM: What do you think conventional environmental conversations still get wrong about Indigenous stewardship, or what sort of aspect do you think is missing when Indigenous stewardship isn't really brought into the conversation?

RL: I can tell you right there is, do they have Indigenous staff? That's what's missing. Yeah. I would say if I was to be invited to a meeting, and we're talking about stewardship of the lands in an area where I know there's a lot of Natives, and if I walked into that room and there was no other tribal faces, I would say right there that's the problem. Okay. Number two, I would then say we need to get some tribal staff, people that are advocates from that tribe, and bring them to the table. And that's what's been really interesting for me being a student of the Forest Service is just learning the different practices, bringing them to the table, having them explain it. I was sitting there like just like a student too.

CM: And then I guess finally, I would just want to ask if you could leave a lasting message for our listeners, what would you want it to be?

RL: I would suggest knowing your family background, because again, I think that was the foundation of where I'm at today is just learning where you come from, and appreciating, and acknowledging, and being able to share that. I mean, every family's got a story of how they got to Idaho, or the tribal band they come from. And I think that's what history is so appealing to me is that it doesn't matter what color of skin you have, we all have a story.

CM: Thank you so much to Randy'L Teton for coming on the show and sharing with us more on the topic of cultural sustainability. If you would like to learn more about our guests, you can go to randylteton.com. We had a much longer, wonderful discussion. And if you would like to hear the full version, you can go to kisu.org slash Sustainable Idaho. Funding for our Sustainable Idaho student hosts is provided in part by this radio station, the ISU Office for Research, and the Center for Ecological Research and Education through the ISU Career Path Internship Program.

Direction, funding, and additional support is provided by the Portneuf Resource Council.