

Indigenous Science and Tribal Perspectives

Melissa Ann Ehrenreich

Melissa Ann Ehrenreich is the Executive Director of the Indigenous Conservation Council (ICC) has three decades of experience in marine and terrestrial conservation at all levels working on strategy and policy development, philanthropic partnerships, capacity building, and community economic development that she is now sharing with Tribal Nations to build capacity to rematriate and care for ancestral lands and waters. She lives with her husband and three children in the Anacostia watershed and on the traditional hunting grounds of the Piscataway-Conoy. Her family dates back to the 1620s as colonizers of stolen Indigenous lands in what is now known as Virginia.



Desiree Shelley, *Monacan Indian Nation*

Desiree Shelley is a citizen of the Monacan Indian Nation and serves as the Indigenous Knowledge and GIS Specialist for the Indigenous Conservation Council. Her work and research are interdisciplinary, spanning restoration ecology, forestry, agroecology, community education, and geospatial analysis. She is committed to advancing Indigenous Science and supporting Indigenous land return and tenure through community place-based approaches that strengthen relationships between communities, culture, and the landscape.

Desiree is also a Ph.D. student in the School of Plant and Environmental Sciences at Virginia Tech. Her research integrates Indigenous Knowledge to explore the relationships between cultural revitalization, food sovereignty, and ecological restoration, with a focus on how Indigenous land-use practices can inform biocultural restoration efforts.



In her community, Desiree is a Seedkeeper and a board member of the Yesa:sahj Language Project and the Southwest Virginia Agrarian Commons. She lives with her family in Monacan ancestral homelands near the Appalachian Divide and Virginia's Blue Ridge and the Upper James River watershed.

Panelists

Victoria Ferguson, *Monacan Indian Nation*

Victoria Persinger Ferguson is an enrolled citizen of the Monacan Indian Nation and serves as the Program Director for Solitude / Fraction and the Presidential Ambassador to Native Nations at Virginia Tech. She is a graduate of Marshall University with a degree in Dietetics. She has focused her recent research on food practices of the Eastern Siouan and living off the land. She currently serves on the Historic Resource Committee for the Monacan Indian Nation.



Kelsey Leonard, *Shinnecock Indian Nation*

Dr. Kelsey Leonard is an enrolled citizen of the Shinnecock Indian Nation and an Indigenous water scientist, legal scholar, and advocate for Indigenous water justice. She is an Associate Professor in the School of Environment, Resources and Sustainability at the University of Waterloo, where she holds the Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Waters, Climate and Sustainability and directs the WAMPUM Lab.

Dr. Leonard's work advances Indigenous-led water governance, climate justice, and legal protections for water and Ocean systems. Her research and advocacy bridge Indigenous law, environmental science, and policy to support Indigenous Nations and communities in protecting their waters for future generations.



Martin Saniga, *Sappony Tribe*

Martin Saniga is a citizen of the Sappony Tribe with more than 25 years of experience creating traditional Indigenous artwork and teaching Indigenous lifeways. He helped launch and currently leads the Yesa:sahj Language Project, supporting language revitalization efforts among Yesaj-speaking communities.

Martin currently serves as the Cultural and Environmental Specialist for the Upper Mattaponi Indian Tribe. Throughout his career, he has developed cultural teaching collections for major institutions, including the National Museum of the American Indian and the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. His work focuses on preserving and sharing Indigenous knowledge through art, language, cultural education, and community engagement.

Martin is passionate about community history, language revitalization, and youth cultural programming. Through his work, he strives to strengthen cultural connections and ensure that traditional knowledge is passed onto future generations.



Casey Thornbrugh, *Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe*

Dr. Casey Thornbrugh is a citizen of the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe. He is a graduate of the University of New Mexico and the University of Arizona with degrees in geography with a focus on climate science. He taught and served as a Land Grant Office Director at Tohono O'odham Community College, a Tribal College on the Tohono O'odham Nation in Arizona. He returned home in 2015 to work for his Tribal Nation and community and then for United South and Eastern Tribes (USET) serving as the Climate Resilience Program Manager. He now runs a consulting business with his wife Sarah, called Just Collective, providing cultural competency trainings for organizations working with Tribal Nations and communities, and providing direct technical support to Tribal Nations and organizations working on climate change adaptation and related projects. He has also begun a new position as the Tribal Liaison with the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation – Division of Natural Heritage.



Pronunciation Guide:

Thornbrugh: THORN – BREW

Wampanoag: WAMP-PAN-AUG

Tohono O'odham: TONO – AUTHAM