



*The Catawba Nation*

## **Office of Tribal Government**

996 Avenue of the Nations • Rock Hill, SC 29730

p: (803) 366-4792 • f: (803) 327-4853 • e: info@catawba.com

### **Sacred Lands in Lancaster County, South Carolina Restored to the Catawba Nation**

The Catawba Nation, located in South and North Carolina, has reacquired 32.3 acres of sacred land in Lancaster, South Carolina. The more than 32 acres was given back to the Catawba Nation by the State of South Carolina. The Catawba Nation plans to apply to have this land taken into trust by the federal government.

The newly reacquired land, which is located near the Catawba's Reservation, is sacred to the Nation and is home to a historic Catawba village site. Traditionally, Catawbas lived in villages, which were surrounded by a wooden palisade or wall. Catawba villages hosted a large council house as well as a sweat lodge, homes, and an open plaza for meetings, games, and dances. Catawba village homes housed extended families and were made of bark with rounded tops.

"I appreciate the opportunity to bring to the attention how important discussions and collaborations are in these types of situations," said Catawba Nation Cultural Director Dr. Wenonah Haire. "I strongly feel that us taking charge of this important site is far better than being granted the opportunity to visit the site. I wish others would understand that it is very important to Tribes that they be given the opportunity to deal with these issues instead of someone else doing things for us, about us but without us."

With the reacquisition of its sacred land, the Catawba Nation plans to preserve and protect the lands. The Nation also plans to work with archaeologists to study the site.

This site was discovered as part of a remediation project completed by the South Carolina Department of Commerce. Upon discovery that this land included sacred cultural patrimony of the Catawba people, representatives from the State of South Carolina reached out to the Catawba Nation to negotiate the return of this land to the Nation.

According to Chief Brian Harris the return of ancestral lands to Indigenous tribes is an important step towards rectifying historical injustices and honoring the sovereignty and rights of Indigenous peoples. "For many Indigenous communities, these lands hold immense cultural, spiritual, and economic significance. Restoring ownership and control over these lands allows tribes to preserve their cultural heritage, practice traditional ways of life, and exercise self-governance," said Chief Harris.

"It is essential to acknowledge that the history of Indigenous land dispossession is complex and varies across regions. The return of ancestral lands requires careful attention to legal, historical, and cultural considerations," Chief Harris said.

Chief Harris went on to say that each case may involve unique circumstances and requires specific solutions tailored to the needs and aspirations of the Indigenous community involved. "Effort towards land return should be guided by principles of justice, respect, and cooperation" Chief Harris continued. "By recognizing Indigenous rights and returning ancestral lands, societies can contribute to healing historical wounds, fostering reconciliation, and supporting the self-determination of Indigenous peoples."

The Catawba Nation, which regained its federal recognition in 1993, has lived on their ancestral lands along the banks of the Catawba River since time immemorial, with artifacts dating back at



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least 6,000 years. Before contact with the Europeans, the Nation inhabited most of the Piedmont area of South Carolina, North Carolina, and parts of Virginia. In 1763, the Nation received title to 144,000 acres from the King of England; however, this land base was greatly reduced to the 630-acre Reservation now held in trust for the Catawba. The Nation will continue its fight to reestablish its land base that has been stolen over the centuries.

**Patricia Leach**  
*Assistant Chief*

**Brian Harris**  
*Chief*

**Roderick Beck**  
*Secretary/Treasurer*