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YOUR CELL PHONE: GREAT FOR CHATTING...AND DEFENDING YOUR LAND!

California indigenous tribe uses smart phone to protect ancestral lands

by Anne Ryan | Communications Associate

You know that technology is making it increasingly easy to connect to friends and find information. We here at DataCenter know it too! By harnessing widely available cell phone technology, DataCenter is helping communities capture information in their own words, through their own eyes.

Developers and policy makers often see a geographic location as an individual place that can be useful in some way. But an indigenous tribal community sees that same location as a piece of a whole; indeed, a sacred space they call home. In 2011, DataCenter is helping the Winnemem Wintu Tribe document their sacred land with a new tool: the smart phone.

A tribe's sacred land is like a human body. If you pave over a few miles to build houses, it's like paving over someone's heart. And what is the body without the heart?

Here's how it works: youth tribal members will walk the sacred trails with their elders. As their feet follow the same paths that their ancestors have walked for centuries, their fingers will push one button and a smart phone will record the Global Positioning System (GPS) data. These GPS points will then become a full map of traditional trails. In addition to collecting key data, this is a powerful opportunity for young Wintu members to learn stories and sacred traditions from their elders.

This project is a partnership between DataCenter and Pacific Institute. In addition to generating a map of Winnemem Wintu sacred lands, this process of democratizing mapping will be featured in an upcoming documentary by



the Sacred Lands Film Project. In the words of its award-winning director, Toby McLeod, "[t]his methodology that honors the authentic knowledge of the tribe offers a potential model to help indigenous communities around the world advocate more effectively for their sacred sites from Siberia to Papua New Guinea."

Undeniably, technology has the power to affect individuals and communities in many ways. DataCenter, with this project and others to come, is committed to ensuring that technology is harnessed so communities can broadcast their voices and usher in positive social change.