

TAOS



PUEBLO

Governor's Office

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Town of Taos Renaming Committee
Board Members

October 23, 2025

Taos Pueblo Tribal Council — Statement on the Renaming of Kit Carson Park, the History of the Taos Valley, and the Requirements of Sovereignty.

We are the Tiwa people of Taos Pueblo. This valley is not a place we occupy — it is who we are. For over a thousand years our people have lived, worked, prayed, married, buried, and been born in this landscape. Our songs remember the rivers; our prayers speak to the mountains; our language names the springs. These are not metaphors. They are relations: land that teaches, ancestors that walk beside us, responsibility that binds generations.

This statement is for all who would claim to understand Taos: municipal leaders, civic committees, academics, neighboring tribal nations, and citizens who love this valley. We speak now to correct assumptions, to center truth, and to declare the conditions under which any change to our place-names, monuments, or public memory may proceed.

Who We Are — A People and a Place

We do not tell a story that begins with outsiders. Our story begins with the water and the willow and the first ceremony. Taos Pueblo's Plaza, acequias, fields, and houses were placed and maintained long before modern borders or land offices. Our governance, our kinship, and our responsibilities to the land sustained a living community generation after generation.

We have always been part of a regional fabric that included other Indigenous nations — Diné, Apache, Kiowa, Comanche, Arapahoe, Pawnee, and others. Those relationships were complex: there were raids; there were alliances; there were trade routes and marriage ties. Over centuries, practices shifted from conflict to trade, from raiding to negotiated commerce, from war pathways to shared markets. But through every change, Taos Pueblo remained rooted here. We were not removed. We did not have to return. Our continuity is attested in our songs, in our ceremony cycles, and in our mothers' voices.

When Spain came, when Mexico claimed this territory, when the United States imposed new borders and institutions, the Pueblo adapted in ways necessary to survive. We learned Spanish words, adopted some practices, negotiated with new powers — all while guarding our language, our ceremonies, and our land. The pressures were many: missions, taxes, new laws, forced conversions, and later American policies that sought to assimilate and remove. Yet we persisted. Our plaza stood. Our prayers were kept. Our children are raised in this valley. Most recently our forefathers spoke on the Federal Level to address our ancestral lands and their testimony defending our sovereignty against the United States Government in the battle for the “Return of Blue Lake”. That documentation serves as a written testimony to what are elders stated during those hearings, and serves as a foundation in resilience.

The Meaning of “Unceded” and Sovereignty in Practice

When we say this land is *unceded Tiwa land*, we mean what words cannot fully capture: we did not lawfully transfer our homeland to another nation. The overlay of municipal boundaries and land grants must not erase that deeper fact. Sovereignty is not simply a line on paper; it is woven into ceremony, decision-making, and the responsibilities we carry to the next seven generations.

Respecting our sovereignty requires more than symbolic gestures. It requires actions that change how decisions are made about places on our lands:

- Formal, public acknowledgment in language agreed to by Taos Pueblo Tribal Government.
- Procedural commitments that place Taos Pueblo as lead in matters concerning our places and cultural heritage.
- Protections for ceremonial access and cultural practices.

Sovereignty is not optional. It is the ground from which all legitimate conversations must begin.

Why Names Matter — Memory, Law, and Responsibility

Names hold law and memory. When a name is given to a place in the public sphere it frames what people remember, who is visible, and whose authority is assumed. For generations, colonial names and commemorations have honored conquest and masked suffering. This does not teach history — it hides it.

Our Intertribal History and the Limits of Representation

We value the histories and voices of other nations. The region’s history includes complex interactions with Diné, Apache, Kiowa, Comanche, Arapahoe, Pawnee, and others. Those histories include conflict, trade, negotiation, and shared pathways across the plains and

mountains. Such interactions affected the valley. They shaped routes and stories. They taught us how to adapt, how to defend, and how to trade.

But adaptation and respect do not mean surrendering our right to speak for our land. **No other nation has the authority to speak on behalf of Taos Pueblo.** Other nations' solidarity is welcome; representation is not. It is inappropriate for any tribe, organization, or individual to assume voice for Taos Pueblo without our explicit invitation and consent.

The Present Problem — Procedural Erasure

The current renaming process has revealed the modern version of a familiar pattern: committees, panels, and campaigns that appear inclusive but fail to center the living sovereign people of the place they aim to change. Well-meaning actors — activists, scholars, neighboring tribes, and municipal commissions — step forward and frame the narrative. They speak of justice while leaving the original people on the margins. This procedural erasure looks different than conquest by force but produces the same result: decisions made about us without us.

We reject that process.

What Respect Must Look Like

To proceed with dignity, justice, and enduring recognition, we require the following actions as conditions for moving forward with any renaming or reinterpretation of public spaces within our landscape:

1. **Formal Land Acknowledgment (Text & Ceremony)**

The Town of Taos must adopt, in a form agreed to by Taos Pueblo Tribal Government, a formal statement acknowledging that the lands in question are unceded Tiwa territory. This acknowledgment must be public, recorded, and included in municipal materials and digital presence.

2. **Sovereign Leadership in Process**

Taos Pueblo must lead the renaming process. Leadership means decision-making authority over name selection, interpretive content, ceremonial protocol, and the timelines for all public acts.

3. **Tiwa-Led Interpretation and Education**

All signage, materials, school curriculum components, and visitor resources about the park and valley history must be developed and approved by Taos Pueblo.

4. **Protection of Ceremonial Rights**

The Town must formally recognize and protect our ceremonial calendar and access to traditional spaces.

5. **Restriction on Third-Party Representation**

Other tribal nations, NGOs, academics, or organizations may provide support or solidarity but shall not make unilateral public statements or take actions purporting to represent Taos Pueblo. Any external efforts must receive prior written consent.

6. **Public Apology & Correction Plan**

Where municipal or institutional practices have privileged outsider narratives or failed to consult Taos Pueblo, the Town should issue a public corrective statement and commit to correct interpretive materials and public records.

A Teaching to All – Inclusion vs. Centering

Inclusion without center is tokenism. Many actors use language of “including Native voices”—but inclusion becomes meaningless if the people whose land is at stake remain peripheral. If the Town wishes to be truly decolonial in practice, not only in words, it will yield authority. It will let the sovereign people lead in how their land and memory are represented.

We invite allies to stand with us, but not to speak for us. Listen. Learn. Follow the leadership of Taos Pueblo.

Council Determination and Direction

After full deliberation, prayer, and consultation within our community and governance bodies, the Taos Pueblo Tribal Council issues this determination in our sovereign authority: the Taos Pueblo Tribal Council supports the renaming of Kit Carson Park to **“Red Willow Park.”**

This support is an act of restoration and identity, not a concession. It affirms who we are — the Red Willow People — and it asserts our right to name the land we continue to care for. The Town of Taos and the Renaming Commission must meet the conditions laid out, including a formal acknowledgment of unceded Tiwa land, full sovereign leadership in the renaming process, Tiwa-led education and interpretation, protection of ceremonial access, and clear restrictions on third-party representation.

To name this park **“Red Willow Park”** is not an act of erasure of historical facts. It is an act of restoration. It places the Tiwa language and identity back into the public landscape where it belongs. It tells the next generation: this land has a people who cared for it long before the fort, long before the plaza became a tourist photo. It corrects the imbalance of public memory and signals that the people who carry this place’s life are present and leading.

Closing – We Are Here, We Will Remain

We are not a footnote. We are not a backdrop. We are Tiwa — the living people of Taos Pueblo. This valley carries our memory, and our memory carries this valley. We do not yield our voice to convenience, to academic framing, or to public relations.

We welcome true partnership grounded in respect and in the actual redistribution of decision-making authority. We welcome citizens, neighbors, and friends who will listen and

act accordingly. But make no mistake: we will assert our rights. We will protect our memory. We will lead in our homeland.

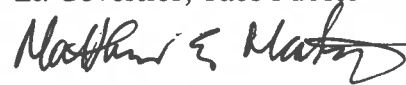
Respectfully submitted and authorized by the Taos Pueblo Tribal Council.

With Respect,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Edwin Concha".

Edwin Concha,
Governor, Taos Pueblo

Matthew Montoya,
Lt. Governor, Taos Pueblo

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Matthew E. Montoya".