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UW officials hold talks with tribal leaders about environmental and forest science



On Jan. 8 Polly Rigdon and Dan Brown talk to the Yakama Nation Tribal Council about the Memorandum of Understanding with the University of Washington's program that encourages tribal students to enter the environmental programs to come back and work for the tribe. YNR photo by Carol Craig.

By CAROL CRAIG
Yakama Nation Review

TOPPENISH, Wash. — The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Yakama Nation (YN) and the University of Washington (UW) dates back some two decades, according to YN Dept. of Natural Resources Supt. Phil Rigdon.

He told the YN Tribal Council Jan. 8 the relationship is going great.

"We're talking about something [MOU] that goes back to even before I was in this position in 2003," he said.

At that time, two UW professors approached Rigdon to discuss why there was no relationship between the tribe and university. The MOU was in motion between the two and was developed in 2006.

The MOU includes a field trip and incorporates professional tribal

people who work for the tribe.

"Since that time we've had that trip to demonstrate our forestry activities," said Rigdon.

He said one of the topics they talked about is that the relationship should be reciprocal in nature.

"We need to look at avenues to create opportunities. We did it and a lot of things have changed. What we did in the beginning was forestry," Rigdon said.

Tribes are leading the way in dealing with the work of fisheries and wildlife management, according to Rigdon, and the relationship with the university has been maintained.

"It is really good and started over two decades ago," he said.

Professor and Director of Environmental and Forest Sciences Dan Brown leads the MOU program and indicated there is a need to modify and identify the needs of the tribe and school.

"I support Phil's [Rigdon] motivations that assure this relationship is reciprocal," Brown said.

Brown also sits on the Natural Resources Board of Wash. State that oversees the management of state land.

"We are doing our best to support that relationship and continue to support Yakama students with earth sciences, fisheries and environmental science," he said.

Brown said the flagship elements of the MOU are courses offered and incorporated with environmental topics.

"We bring students from the university to the reservation to see environmental management," he said.

Polly Rigdon, a Yakama, is part of the UW's School of Environmental

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and Forest Sciences and leads the classes onto the closed portion of the reservation so students can see and hear directly what is being done for the natural resources. For the past six years she has been

in collaboration with Cristy Fiander, Yakama Forest Products to help collaborate with the students and talk about the exceptional work being done on the Yakama Reservation.

Her class, "Role of Culture and Place in Natural Resource Stewardship: The Yakama Nation Experience" has attracted hundreds of students

over the years.

"It is an honor and privilege to work with Dr. Alvarado bringing fire management practices into the field trip," she said.

Rigdon would also like to start with youth programs that focus on college readiness.

"I'd also like to know what we can do better," he said.

Polly Rigdon described the

students' field trip.

"We stay on the floor of the reservation looking at fisheries projects before going to the mountains. Visits are at that level. We are making an impact," she said.

There may be changes or modifications with the revised MOU for this year that will make its way back to the YNTC.

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relatives

