



NDN COLLECTIVE

POSITION PAPER:

MOBILIZING AN INDIGENOUS GREEN NEW DEAL

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INTRODUCTION

The NDN Collective is devoted to building Indigenous power, supporting movement-building infrastructure and advancing Indigenous rights. The NDN Collective was established to scale impact in Indigenous territories and to build the capacity of our communities to develop Indigenous-led, sustainable projects that are in alignment with Indigenous values. We understand that our Nations hold powerful visions, strategy, and have been taking action to create new worlds that can be models of resilience and equity, and are honored to uplift and support this work.

Before all else, we wish to acknowledge the work and the legacy of our ancestors and our elders. We carry their stories and their survivance with us every day, and know that their struggle and celebration, their commitment to their own humanity and the power of the life in the Earth, has given our future generations the audacity to dream.

We also want to uplift the truly remarkable youth leadership that has changed the narrative in the interrelated global climate justice, human rights, and environmental movements. It is their push that is the force behind the Green New Deal. This generation of youth leaders includes many incredible organizers with clear vision and impactful strategy. It is our responsibility to stand both with and behind them as they lead the way to a more just, relational and humane world.

That being said, we are pleased to support the groundbreaking and critically important Green New Deal Resolution¹ introduced by Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York and Senator Ed Markey of Massachusetts. This legislation comes at an important moment in history – the political and economic status quo is no longer acceptable. The original New Deal advanced by President Roosevelt was mobilized during the Great Depression during economic and ecological catastrophe. At this time, the response involved a national mobilization of transformational policy, reprioritization of the national budget, and action. The Depression-era New Deal was a set of policies and acts that created legally backed trade unions, child labor laws, minimum wage requirements, stabilized and regulated banks, renewed and expanded national infrastructure, ecological restoration programs to heal the impacts of exhaustive monocrop agriculture, and the Social Security Program. The New Deal era included significant though imperfect reforms like the so-called “Indian” New Deal programs and, in particular, the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 that recognized Native Nations right to self-govern and self-determine. Each one of these programs, Acts, and policies, originally decried as “socialist” in nature,^{2,3} are now societal and economic tenets – it is difficult to imagine our nation without them.



We are in a remarkably similar historical moment. Senator Markey and Representative Ocasio-Cortez’s Green New Deal Resolution highlights the current economic imbalance within the United States. We currently have the greatest income inequality since the 1920s, wage stagnation, continued racial and gender disparities in earnings and wealth, de-industrialization of the economy and the flight of manufacturing. In addition, we have seen a return of the volatility of the financial system characterized by unregulated profit-seeking, risk-taking and rent-seeking capitalism. We are also facing the ecological crisis of climate change, one which threatens the stability of ecosystems, nations and communities across the world--with the greatest impact felt by Indigenous peoples, working families, the poor and communities of color.⁴

Our communities hold vision, knowledge, and responsibilities to our homelands, ancestors and descendants. This vision, knowledge, and responsibility, as well as the immediacy of our need, are the creative source of transformational strategy and action, rooted in recognition of our status and rights as sovereign and self-determining First Peoples. The time is now to amplify, invest in, and expand Indigenous-based Just Transition economies, infrastructure, social and cultural movements, and climate solutions. In several decades we may look back at this time before implementation of Green New Deal policies, programs, and acts in disbelief that we did not act sooner.

AMENDMENTS TO THE RESOLUTION FOR AN INDIGENOUS JUST TRANSITION

While we firmly back the Green New Deal Resolution, the NDN Collective asserts that if this Resolution will support plans to achieve the goals of social, ecological and economic health and equity, it is imperative that certain passages be expanded and reinforced..

1. “to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions through a fair and just transition for all communities and workers.”

We stand with the Indigenous Environmental Networks’ (IEN) previously released statement⁵ calling for the rejection of net-zero emissions language. This language has long been utilized to advance carbon-trading schemes. These schemes include offsets, payments for “ecosystem services,” and other practices that place natural healthy complex ecosystems into a capitalist marketplace. The carbon market does nothing to stop the fossil fuel industry from continuing its decimation of lands, communities, and climate. Worse, it gives the industry a false veneer of environmental and social responsibility while business as usual goes on.

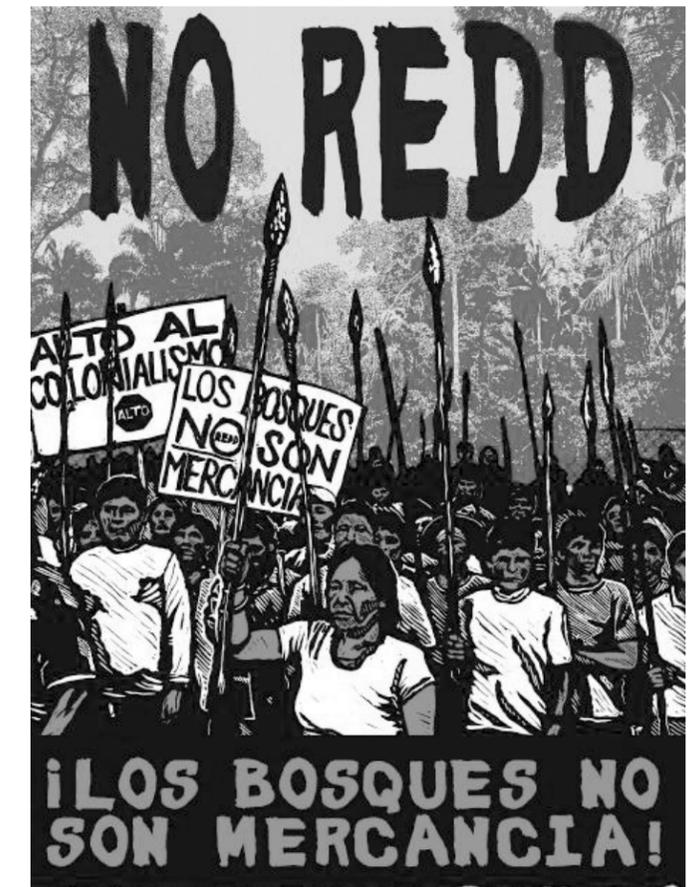
The creation of the carbon trading, offset, and REDD (Reducing Emissions through Deforestation and Degradation) practices have also subjected Indigenous communities worldwide to another wave of intensive land grabs, intimidation, violence, and have sparked internal conflict. Indigenous people’s lands are home to much of the remaining richest and most biodiverse ecosystems worldwide. Under carbon market systems, these ecosystems have a monetary value. Indigenous leaders in Papua



New Guinea, Ecuador, Mexico, Kenya, the Congo, Brazil, and more have been subject to violent intimidation, and even assassination to force them to sign their lands over to companies who want to claim the land’s carbon market value. When companies and other organizations obtain rights to the land, entire communities have been forcibly evicted, or told that they can no longer hunt, gather, and plant on the land. These laws are enforced by security, and Indigenous peoples have been arrested and shot for hunting and gathering on their traditional lands.^{6,7}

In the United States, carbon market schemes on Indigenous lands have been internally divisive, resulting in limitations being placed on a Tribes’ sovereignty and freedom to care for and interact with their lands as they choose, while allowing polluters to continue polluting.⁸ These market schemes claim “net-zero” emissions when companies are still being allowed to contaminate the air, land, and water – impacting low income communities, people of color, and Indigenous people.

Any Green New Deal policy, program, or action must reject fossil fuel energy development in all its forms, and eliminate tax breaks and subsidies for this industry. Those tax breaks and subsidies must be transferred to solar electric, solar thermal, wind, small hydroelectric energy development.





2. “Meeting 100 percent of the power demand in the United States through clean, renewable, and zero-emission energy sources”

NDN Collective shares the concern stated by IEN that the language around “green infrastructure” and “renewable clean energy” is not specific enough to prevent future co-optation and abuse. The term ‘green infrastructure’ has been utilized to describe various carbon capture mechanisms which, like carbon trading, allow extractive industries to continue the dirty and unjust extraction of fossil fuels. Nuclear energy production and energy generated by large hydroelectric dams are both zero-emission energy production practices that carry deep toxic and damaging legacies within Indigenous communities and homelands.

There are concentric rings of high rates of birth defects and incidents of cancer that surround every single nuclear facility in the country, increasing with proximity to the facilities.^{9,10} Just in the United States alone, the nuclear legacy impacts a tremendous number of Indigenous communities, whose rural lands have been seen as “National Sacrifice Areas” by the United States government.¹¹ In Washington and Oregon, the Yakima, Colville, Nez Perce, Coeur d’Alene, Spokane, Kalispell, Umatilla, and Klickitat all have elevated rates of cancer associated directly with the Hanford Nuclear Reservation and its release of radioactive gases and fluids. The Spokane Tribe in Washington State is impacted by the closed Midnight Mine, which left behind pits containing millions of gallons of radioactive water. The Navajo and Hopi in Arizona have been continuously contaminated by the nuclear industry since 1946. Home to uranium mining operations, the people themselves were historically given work in the mines with no safety equipment, education or precautions. There are now intensive and intergenerational cancer and leukemia clusters across those Nations. Radioactive tailings ponds have overflowed into drinking water and livestock water supplies, and there are currently over 1,000 abandoned, highly radioactive open pit uranium mines on Navajo and Hopi lands. The Western Shoshone and Southern Paiute in Nevada had their land appropriated to become the Nevada Nuclear Test Site. During the time of the 814 nuclear detonations occurring on their lands, children in tribal schools were given gamma ray test badges to wear to measure the impact of gamma radiation on their health. These commu-

nities have subsequent high cancer and leukemia rates. Uranium mining has impacted the water supplies of the Oglala Lakota, radioactive waste storage and contaminated water threatens thirteen other Indigenous communities who are in proximity to nuclear energy production facilities across the country.¹²

The waste from nuclear energy production does not become benign for 24,000 years. These are only a handful of examples. Every nuclear energy facility in the country faces a deep problem with storage of this waste, and the vast majority of proposed areas for waste storage have been on Indigenous lands.¹³

INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES WILL NOT TOLERATE BEING TREATED AS SACRIFICE ZONES.

It is hubris to imagine that we have the capability to safely utilize a technology that is profoundly toxic for thousands of years into the future. Any renewable clean energy plan must specifically call for the immediate phasing out of any nuclear energy production, and include language for the closure of facilities and the storage of waste that does not disproportionately impact Indigenous communities, low income communities, and people of color.

Large scale hydroelectric dams have also impacted Indigenous communities in traumatic and ecologically catastrophic ways. The Columbia River in Oregon and Washington was dammed, submerging virtually all of the Indigenous fishing sites, traditional villages, and camp areas, damaging the fish population. The Klamath River Dams in Oregon and California destroyed the salmon run that the upper river Tribes depended upon for physical and spiritual sustenance and submerged land. The aftermath is the current struggle of the lower Klamath salmon to survive, which deeply impacts the Klamath, Yurok, Tolowa, and Hupa people. The damming of the Missouri River in the Dakotas affected twenty-three reservations by submerging thousands of acres of land, evicting communities, destroying Native croplands, orchards, burial grounds, and ceremonial sites. The damming of the Alleghany River in New York and Pennsylvania flooded a third of the Seneca people’s landbase. Again, these are only a few of the examples to illustrate the devastation caused by hydropower--generally praised as a renewable, green alternative to fossil fuels.

The development of dams are linked not only to physical loss of land and livelihood, but dramatically increased social harm, suicide, and substance use.¹⁴ These are but a few examples of the decimation of Indigenous peoples lives and lands by large hydroelectric dams. We assert that renewable energy policies and plans actively reject any new hydroelectric dam construction, and support the dam decommissioning processes taking place in numerous states as a result of ecological and social, cultural, and spiritual harm.

3. “Removing greenhouse gases from the atmosphere and reducing pollution by restoring natural ecosystems through proven low-tech solutions that increase soil carbon storage, such as land preservation and afforestation;

AND “restoring and protecting threatened, endangered, and fragile ecosystems through locally appropriate and science-based projects that enhance biodiversity and support climate resiliency”

Indigenous peoples understandings of how to care for the land should be the foundation of restoration and recovery programs and projects. There is a history of “ecosystem and land preservation” removing Indigenous peoples from their traditional lands and harvesting rights, most notably expressed through the removal of Indigenous peoples and their harvesting rights to create the National Park system.¹⁵ The text of the Resolution must make clear that natural ecosystems include the Indigenous peoples who live in relationship to the lands, elements, and interconnected beings within that ecosystem. Land preservation, and ecosystem protection ideas cannot exclude the ability of people to harvest within, retain territorial sovereignty and self-determination, and otherwise live unimpeded within traditional territories. On the contrary, these practices can empower Indigenous peoples as sovereign nations and environmental stewards. In other countries, like Canada, Australia and New Zealand, governments are already exploring programs that restore lands and jurisdiction to Indigenous peoples to protect ancestral territories and meet climate targets. Decarbonization and decolonization can go hand-in-hand.

4. Relationship and Engagement with Indigenous Peoples

The language within the text of the Green New Deal resolution stated that any new project or development involve, “Obtaining the voluntary, prior, and informed consent of Indigenous peoples for all decisions that affect them, honoring all treaties with Indigenous peoples, and protecting and enforcing the sovereignty and land rights of all Indigenous peoples.” We appreciate the language referencing the protection and enforcement of sovereignty, treaties, and land rights, reflecting the articles and practices outlined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. In practice, we have seen the obtaining

of “free, prior, and informed consent” (FPIC) transformed into an end-game goal of companies and governments seeking access to our lands and resources. These companies and governments have utilized co-opted “consultation sessions,” and other means of obtaining “just enough” Indigenous participation to claim FPIC, often using tactics designed to manipulate, divide, and undercut the intelligence and vision of our people.^{16,17}

To combat these aversive practices, we assert that no project, program, business development or other action that could impact our lands and people should be designed, planned, or initiated without first engaging our Nations as potential equal collaborative co-design partners, whose ancestral rights and sovereignty are central throughout the decision making and development process. Additionally, any Green New Deal project or program that impacts our lands and people must have Indigenous leadership and occur in transparent, and collaborative partnership, in line with the law and spirit of the treaties and in accordance with the Jemez Principles for Democratic Organizing.

5. Equity across Impact

It is well understood that frontline and vulnerable communities have both borne the toxic load of polluting and extractive industry. Our communities also are experiencing the damaging impacts of climate change first.¹⁸ If we are to catalyze a system-wide willingness to change, we must find ways to tighten the feedback loops and ensure that political and economic decision makers personally experience the short-term and generational impacts of their decisions through re-structuring and localizing the way that decisions are made and the weight of local peoples power. This false distancing of decision makers from the social and ecological impacts of their decisions creates no incentive for change.

6. The Necessity of Resistance

It is absolutely critical that the Green New Deal include support for the necessity of resistance to extractive industries. This includes resistance to any form of infrastructure expansion, from pipelines to new facilities. The industries and interests that are the prime movers behind climate chaos need to experience real pressure, cost, and accountability. Governments must also experience resistance and be pushed to enforce basic standards of equity, Indigenous rights and sovereignty, and ecological care in how companies operate, de-invest in toxic industries and re-invest in economic practices and infrastructure that supports the continuance of life.

POINTS FOR INDIGENOUS ACTION

Tribes and Indigenous Peoples are in an entirely unique situation that can help leverage the Green New Deal's long-term impact... The Green New Deal isn't going to be one sweeping policy, but rather, it is going to be a road map for the next 20-50 years that will consist of multiple policies, agendas, narrative and an overarching political agenda.

—NICK TILSEN, NDN COLLECTIVE PRESIDENT AND CEO

Regardless of the political tides in Washington, now is the time to build active, linked strategy and action to catalyze a systemic Just Transition from extractive economies and industries that commodify lands, peoples, and the climate to economies and industries that support the continuous regeneration of life. This Just Transition must both emerge from and benefit the front-line communities who have borne the heavy price of historical and contemporary extractive economies, policies, and industry. Senator Markey and Representative Ocasio-Cortez's Green New Deal Resolution referenced this need, having learned from grassroots leaders across the country. We understand that this is accomplished by centering these communities in collaborative, transparent and horizontal partnerships to vision, strategize, and create this transition. We advocate that this work be done with the guidance of the Jemez Principles¹⁹ and the related Equity Manifesto²⁰ which both lay out principles that can assist in building partnerships that do not unwittingly replicate colonial

hierarchy and systems of oppression.

We also believe that our Indigenous nations are a uniquely powerful place to mobilize communities, policy, investment, and action towards this change. There are 573 recognized and many more unrecognized Indigenous nations solely within the nation-state of the United States, holding 56.2 million acres in trust. **Our Indigenous national sovereign status, interconnectivity, responsibilities, and readiness to act lead us to be ideal locations for model systemic level climate resilience strategies and renewed, regenerative economies.** This is going to require intentional deep investment in community led solution mapping, education, training, and action, impacting, inspiring, and groundbreaking work that has already begun within many of our Nations. The time is now to amplify, invest in, and expand Indigenous based Just Transition economies, infrastructure, social and cultural movements, and climate solutions.

NDN COLLECTIVE IS RESPONDING TO THIS MOMENT WITH OUR PLATFORM AND DIRECTIVE OF **DEFEND, DEVELOP, DECOLONIZE.**

To **DEFEND**, we must organize across all levels of engagement and resistance to protect our land, air, water, human and non-families, and nationhood. To **DEFEND** we need to build creative partnerships and hold those that have done harm accountable to clean up toxic sites. To **DEFEND** we need to respond actively to climate change, remembering that we have always adapted and responded to shifts in our lands, and that we have the capacity to make changes. We must look internally to our peoples' knowledge as well as other forms of scientific data to map climate resilience plans for our Nations. This knowledge can and should inform the way we develop our infrastructure, economies and food systems.

To **DEVELOP** we must re-envision and create new systems of trade that do not extract and exploit but revitalize the life within our lands and ensure equity and cultural continuity for our people. We must re-evaluate our level of participation in a society and economy based in excess and exploitation, self-



determining partnerships and pathways out of this consumptive throw-away culture. In her book *All our Relations*, Winona LaDuke shared the words of Danny Billie, an Independent Traditional Seminole. He compared the different ways of life to a clay cup and a styrofoam cup. The styrofoam cup is comparable to the extractive economy and way of living. Its toxic to make, easy to use, and returns toxins to the land when you're done with it. The clay cup is like traditional ways of life. It comes from the land, and doesn't cause harm when it returns to the land. However, it requires consciousness and care to use, ensuring you don't damage or break it. As we find our way toward a path of living that is based in our values, it may require more care, but it will also cultivate our conscious awareness and allow us to move into the future in power. To **DEVELOP** we must build new and adapt old infrastructure, while keeping our knowledge and responsibility towards the sacredness and care of water, land and our families. We must use bioregionally sourced natural materials to build affordable homes. We must base the design of our communities, buildings, homes on the values, knowledge, and beauty of our people. We must work with our Mother Earth's knowledge and patterns to design our water and waste systems, allowing our water to be cleaned and purified without toxins. To **DEVELOP** we must provide energy and transportation for our people in a way that frees us from our dependence on extractive and toxic systems. We must revitalize and invest in our food sovereignty, supporting the traditional food economy, determining what equitable trade and access to healthy food looks like for our Nations, and consider traditional and organic food and fiber production in our economic visions.

To **DECOLONIZE** we must work to restore our spiritual relationships with our homelands and each other, through personal engagement, reflection, ceremony, and community building. We must commit to re-learning our languages that are at the core of our vision. We must remember that we are powerful and contain the brilliance of our Creator within us. To **DECOLONIZE** we must be willing to deeply look at the ways in which colonial forces have impacted us internally, and dialogue with others to collectively build our new future that is rooted in our values together. We must bravely face our own healing and the healing of our communities, re-emerging our systems of reparation, healing, and justice. And, to **DECOLONIZE** we need to support the parents of our Nation to relearn our traditional parenting values and strategies, and support our children with

education designed to build power, so that our children will be grounded in their teachings and homelands even as they are able to discover and navigate within many paths of knowledge and experience.

There are many lifetimes of work ahead of us, but we are a continuance of the resilience and dreams of our ancestors. The meaningfulness of our work is both timeless, and a sacred offering to the future, and our Nations, communities, and families are already making incredible impact as we build our movements to defend, develop and decolonize. We honor the struggle and beauty of our ancestors and elders, who have brought us to this pivotal moment. We support this generation of youth who have been affecting deep change in the narrative of justice, opening the way to create truly multigenerational organizing to build our collective power, care for our land, and change the way our economies function. The NDN Collective is preparing to publish an Indigenous Green New Deal Toolkit, exploring these points of action and more, highlighting work that is already occurring, and offering details on strategy, planning, and technical resources.

WE INVITE YOU TO JOIN US AT WWW.NDNCOLLECTIVE.ORG

Sign up for our newsletter, receive announcements of our resources when they become available, read our blog posts and tune in to our podcasts, featuring stories of decolonial inspiration from Indigenous peoples across the Americas!





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