



MUSCOGEE (CREEK) NATIONAL COUNCIL Press Release Protection of Mvskoke Cultural Sites

September 1st, 2023, 12:00 pm CST
Okmulgee, Oklahoma

As the legislative body representing the Mvskoke people, the Muscogee (Creek) National Council has many responsibilities for addressing the needs of tribal citizens. The Muscogee Constitution, adopted in 1979, in **Article VI-Legislative Branch**, Section 7, sets forth ten (10) general powers that the people have entrusted to the tribal legislature.

In addition to the Article VI, Section 7 powers, **Article XI-Burials and Cemeteries** adds broad authority to the tribal government. The first three (3) requirements of Article XI charge the tribal government to: 1) protect Muscogee burials and cemeteries; 2) participate in the reburial of remains of tribal ancestors; and, 3) protect tribal artifacts as tribal intellectual (or common) property, unless those items are held by a tribal ceremonial ground.

Perhaps the most forceful part of Article XI is found in the final sentence of the Article:

The jurisdiction of the Muscogee Nation in enforcing this Amendment shall include: the cultural perimeter of Muskogean peoples in the southeastern United States, routes of removal, the routes and camps of the exodus to Kansas and Texas caused by the United States Civil War, and those lands described by the Treaty of 1833.

Thus, the Muscogee Constitution, *charges* the tribal government with protecting the ancestral homelands in the southeast United States.

For over 150 years, following the forced removal of our people from their homes, our historic places were subject to desecration and violation. In the southeastern United States, state and local governments, colleges and universities, private enterprises and individuals all took part in defiling sacred sites, collecting human remains, and continuing the cultural genocide practiced against our people. Only with the adoption of the 1979 Constitution did the people of the United States begin to hear a formal response to such practices. In the constitutional language referred to above, the Mvskoke people declared their will in protecting ancient burial mounds and sites, tribal towns and our history.

Another means of protecting indigenous history occurred when the United States government passed the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), in 1990. The law began a policy of reversing American complicity or silence in policies and practices attacking sacred Indigenous places.

In present times, the National Council and the Principal Chief must address many situations occurring in our ancestral homelands. There are new opportunities arising in the southeast United States, where the Council has the beginnings for potential partnerships, cooperation and agreements with public and private interests, in Alabama and Georgia. Individual American citizens, schools, chambers and other non-governmental groups want to hear from descendants of the original Mvskoke inhabitants of the southeast. Modern-day Mvskokes have an opportunity to raise awareness regarding our sacred places, with joint cooperation in site protection a potential result.

Should our elected representatives cease to remain vigilant in protecting those places, we know that opportunistic and exploitative practices will continue, as we have witnessed in the current millennium, in Alabama. The Muscogee (Creek) National Council is committed to providing financial resources, planning, collaboration and a presence in Alabama and Georgia, to honor the past and protect the future of our culture. Our people spoke nearly fifty years ago on this matter, and elected Mvskoke leadership continue to honor the mandate.