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WILD CENTER IS AWARDED $245,000 IN FEDERAL FUNDING FOR PROJECT WITH NATIVE AMERICAN PARTNERS

Tupper Lake, NY – The Wild Center has been awarded $245,000 from a prestigious federal grant program to fund a collaborative project that will honor indigenous perspective and knowledge and incorporate it into the everyday museum experience. The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) announced recently that the Tupper Lake museum was successful in its grant application for $245,161 for a Museums for America Grant for its *Ways of Knowing* project.

The *Ways of Knowing* project will bring several Native American tribal entities and indigenous knowledge experts together to help The Wild Center incorporate traditional ecological knowledge, different perspectives and culture into its exhibits and experiences. The Wild Center will partner with the Six Nations Indian Museum, the Akwesasne Cultural Center, the Indigenous Education Institute, and the Center for Native Peoples and the Environment at the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry for this three-year project.

“Even before The Wild Center opened in 2006, I recognized that The Wild Center was focused on western science and interpretation, missing the opportunity of the thousands of years of indigenous knowledge,” said Stephanie Ratcliffe, Executive Director of The Wild Center. “I also knew that adding this perspective was something we could not do alone. Building the relationships to initiate the *Ways of Knowing* project has been enlightening and the entire staff of The Wild Center is looking forward to this multi-year partnership that will broaden the exhibits and programs offered.”

“I’m excited to be working with the Six Nations Indian Museum and other indigenous organizations to bring a new perspective to The Wild Center,” said Sue Herne, Akwesasne Cultural Center-Museum Program Coordinator. “All three of our museums will be able to add new and creative aspects to our sites, and our visitors will gain new perspectives on how culture can impact environmental decisions. A ‘Ways of Knowing’ relationship is one in which there is equality. While The Wild Center is the larger organization, the two indigenous museums in the partnership will have an equal voice in the process.”
The Marsh Oxbow exhibit, in the permanent exhibit hall at The Wild Center, will be reinterpreted from the perspective of the Akwesasne Mohawk people, and include a storytelling video, by the Six Nations Indian Museum in Onchiota, NY and the Akwesasne Cultural Center in the Mohawk community of Akwesasne (located 75 miles from The Wild Center). The partnership will also develop a canoe trip along The Wild Center’s oxbow on the Raquette River that shares both western science and Native American ecological knowledge. Interns, specifically hired for this project from the Mohawk community and SUNY-ESF, will work at the three organizations leading the canoe trips and programs. Funds from the grant will also go towards permanently installing elements of these exhibits at both the Six Nations Indian Museum and the Akwesasne Cultural Center.

The Wild Center will also host two traveling exhibits in 2018, one created by the Akwesasne Cultural Center providing an introduction to their community’s culture, lifestyle and ecology and the second, *Roots of Wisdom*, created by the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry, will help visitors discover the modern-day partnership between western science and traditional knowledge through the stories of four communities addressing challenges using both of these perspectives. In 2018, the partners will co-curate a contemporary art and artisan exhibition at The Wild Center.

“The Six Nations Indian Museum finds this project important because it will allow for a broader audience to learn about the culture of the original inhabitants of the area and help diminish some of the misconceptions about the Haudenosaunee,” said David Fadden, Director of the Six Nations Indian Museum. “Our two institutions share a common philosophy of conservation and stewardship of the environment and natural world. Through programming and exhibit design we can help reach the goals of education and enlightenment with respect to the health of the earth during this critical time in earth’s history.”

Gail McDonald, Akwesasne Heritage Complex Project Developer for the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe, who has assisted the Akwesasne Cultural Center in this project development said, “this will help raise awareness of the authentic cultural attractions in Akwesasne available just down the road from The Wild Center and add to the momentum for sustainable economic development in our community.”

Senator Charles Schumer said, “The welcoming people and attractive landscapes of New York’s North Country and the Mohawk community of Akwesasne keep raising the bar for what visitors can expect. This federal investment in The Wild Center and this cross-cultural partnership is especially exciting for the awareness it may raise on the power of traditional knowledge in science, ecology, and culture.”

“The Wild Center is an Adirondack gem, and I congratulate them on this well-deserved grant,” said Congresswoman Elise Stefanik. “This funding will help The Wild Center further develop their programming, honoring the rich environmental history of our district and equipping visitors with the knowledge they need to protect our environment for generations to come. The North Country’s pristine environment is a defining feature of many of our communities across the district, and I applaud the work being done by The Wild Center to showcase our natural treasures.”
This year IMLS received 558 applications requesting $104,538,159. They selected 132 projects to receive funding totaling $19,189,929. IMLS’s peer reviewers evaluated all eligible and complete grant applications, assessing the merit of each proposal and its fit with the goals of the grant program and project category. IMLS staff presented this information to the IMLS Director, who then made the final funding decisions.

“As centers of learning and catalysts of community change, libraries and museums connect people with programs, services, collections, information, and new ideas in the arts, sciences, and humanities. They serve as vital spaces where people can connect with each other,” said IMLS Director Dr. Kathryn K. Matthew. “IMLS is proud to support their work through our grant making as they inform and inspire all in their communities.”

One reviewer noted how the collaborative project provides for inclusive educational opportunities and will strengthen the partner organizations by providing staff with the opportunity to learn from and with Native American and indigenous knowledge partners. The same reviewer said, “This proposal is an exciting opportunity to expand our way of teaching and telling our stories. It is well outlined and the team is exceptionally qualified. The project is poised to help The Wild Center and its partners journey into a new era of interpretation at their museums. It can also serve as a model for the field.”

The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) is celebrating its 20th Anniversary. The Institute of Museum and Library Services is the primary source of federal support for the nation’s approximately 123,000 libraries and 35,000 museums. Their mission is to inspire libraries and museums to advance innovation, lifelong learning, and cultural and civic engagement. Their grant making, policy development, and research help libraries and museums deliver valuable services that make it possible for communities and individuals to thrive. To learn more, visit www.imls.gov and follow them on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

For additional information about the Akwesasne Cultural Center, please contact Sue Ellen Herne at 518-358-2240.

For additional information about the Six Nations Indian Museum, please contact David Fadden at 518-891-2299.

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