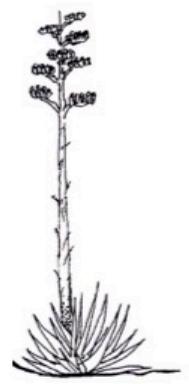




Gaan Bike' Goz'aa'

P.O. Box 766

San Carlos, AZ 85550



Coronado National Forest Supervisor
Kerwin S. Dewberry
300 West Congress St.
Tucson, Az 85701

July 15, 2020

Supervisor Dewberry:

As requested, I am responding to your request for information regarding the Mt Graham Sacred Run. Greetings and thank you for the opportunity to assist in understanding the needs of our people, at this crucial time in our lives as we face a virus that currently is devastating our country and the world, to give birth to a new beginning which will bring forward the respect to our Mother Earth. We have always been told our sacred and holy places such as Mt Graham, Oak Flats and many others places that are sacred will become the center place of our continuation of survival.

Mt. Graham, is the home of many important groups of supernatural beings. It's the home of our Gaan people, known as Angels, they appear in different religious ceremonies and serve as a critical spirit in the process of spiritually healings. The spirit of the Gaan resides at a place inside the mountain and have done so since the time of their first involvement with human beings.

Our holy mountain, Mt. Graham, is also the home of many natural springs, these waters are known to have healing powers. Our people, before being exiled from the area, used the holy water for all types of traditional healing in ceremonies. During the time our people were placed as prisoners of war, we were not allowed to return to gather the holy water, medicine plants and the sacred stones. It wasn't until the U.S. Government acknowledged the illness and social behaviors destroying our people from being held as prisoners war, that the U.S. military was allowed to arrange an escort for our religious people to retrieve the holy water and other sacred items for religious ceremonies. Once again, we were faced with another change in the U.S. Policy. In 1873 an executive order by the President of the United States was enforced taking Safford, Morenci, Clifton and Mt Graham away from Apache homelands. We again were not allowed to return to our holy mountain but only allowed to come to the east boundaries of the reservation to view our sacred mountain. Once again many of our Elders became ill emotionally, psychologically, physically and spiritually. Our younger generation at that time became more lost in a new world that brought a life of imprisonment and no longer lived a life as their fathers, mothers and grandparents before them.

I was born into a very spiritual and traditional family who retained the history of our people, which includes incidents and events that occurred during this era of tragedy. I have lived my entire life hearing the cries of our grandparents on the promises the United States made to assure that our children, and children's children will always be taken care of. As they witnessed, none of these promises were held to be true. Our elders clearly stated, we must not ever let them take our religion, if it happens then the world will go into chaos.

I have described a few reasons why we have returned to our sacred mountain, most importantly it is essential to our existence and the future.

This year, we will be celebrating 29 years of returning to gather our sacred water, stones, and conduct prayer ceremonies. It has been a long struggle. We have experienced the bad, the good, inconsistent relationships, but always in the end, both sides have come to understanding of the importance.