**Campo Kumeyaay Nation**

*Our Strategies*

**Narrator:** In the 1990s, the Campo Kumeyaay Nation established its own environmental protection agency. Today, the tribe is setting an example of how to use the knowledge of the past to restore the environment and work toward a more sustainable future.

**Michael Connolly, Environmental Consultant and Former Tribal Councilman, Campo Kumeyaay Nation:** So we saw the Campo EPA as a way to help to bring that back—bring back the spirit of the *Kuseyaay* within a department of the tribe that would have that kind of knowledge that could provide that kind of advice on things that we were doing, so that our leaders would be able to make much better decisions, and so our people would be able to make much better decisions.

One of the tasks given to CEPA was to reduce the erosion that was occurring in the valley. And so what was done at CEPA was to look back in the records, and look at what was done traditionally. What was done in our villages, and what was done in our environment.

**Paul Cuero, Jr., Singer and Tribal Councilman, Campo Kumeyaay Nation:** So there was techniques that were taught to us by our, what we call *Kuseyaay*. On our reservation, we use an old technique that was recorded through an anthropologist by the name of Florence Shipek. And she was talking to older people, and she asked them about a lot of different things. And one of things they talked about was how to slow water down.

**Michael Connolly:** And one of the things that came out was that the building of rock-drop structures—placing rocks in the channels and rocks and brush—was something that was commonly done to try to enhance the wetland areas. And so we took that and adapted it.
And with modern technology, we’re able to bring in large rocks that we could anchor into these stream beds, and we wouldn’t have to worry about them washing out during big rains. And it was remarkable how quickly the land started to restore. The water table rose, and the plants started taking root.

**Paul Cuero, Jr.:** It would slow down the water flow, and it would retain in the valley. And by doing that, it raised our water table 20 feet, which is significant, which now we’re using as a water source for many of our residents.

**Michael Connolly:** And all of these trees that you can see in here are all ones that have come in just the last 20 years, so they’re all very young. And the whole area that had once been on its way to becoming a desert became a lush habitat. And many different types of animals have been seen there. And many of the materials then became available that we used. It was also a place where we could harvest our traditional medicine plants and traditional food plants.

**Narrator:** Based on their first success, the Campo EPA added more rock-drop structures to eroded areas of the reservation.

**Michael Connolly:** Well, here is the rock-drop structure we put here on Campo Creek. And after we put it in, we didn’t get rains for a long time so it was basically just a rock pile here. It wasn’t really doing much, but once the rain started, it gradually started filling in on the high side. And as it filled it in, it helped to slow down the water so that we got more water storage occurring, which allowed a lot of these riparian plants then to start growing up.

We calculate over 600 acre-feet of water are now being stored there that weren’t before. And an average home uses about a half an acre-foot of water a year. So, we now have in storage, in our central valley, enough water for 1200 homes for a year.

On Campo reservation, was we eliminated commercial cattle grazing. It just got to be too hard to try to preserve our wetland areas.

**Narrator:** The improved natural environment on the reservation has also created new jobs and other opportunities.
Michael Connolly: It’s only been in the last 20 years that we have been able to actually start to create conditions on the reservation where we can have people coming back in because of different types of enterprises that we are doing and different kinds of work.

Fidel Hyde, Senior Technician, Campo Environmental Protection Agency, Campo Kumeyaay Nation: OK, we’re going to take a well sample because it’s been sitting a long time without being used.

Narrator: Environmental protection is an ongoing job. The Campo EPA is involved in several projects to protect their environment for the future, and to sustain a better quality of life for the Campo people.

Raymond Leon, Air-Quality Technician, Campo Environmental Protection Agency: We are looking for the quality of the air. We have a lot of dirt roads and we are growing. So right now we just want to make sure that the people stay healthy and we are not, you know, contaminating their air.

David Shipp, Data and Natural Resource Technician, Campo Environmental Protection Agency: There are several goals of this nursery. One is to basically replenish the native plant habitat that has been destroyed through construction, or whatnot, or fires. The next would be also to provide people with an alternative for their landscaping projects, so that they can actually landscape with native plants that require less water and require less care but can still look very beautiful. And then the third is to retain the ethnobotanical heritage of the reservation.

Juncus is a wetlands plant that the people here generally use for basketweaving.

Narrator: The Campo reservation sits at a high elevation with frequent winds. They currently have a wind power project and are planning another that will add environmental and economic benefits.

Michael Connolly: We’re pursuing a 160-megawatt project. And we’re looking forward to it as a way not only of providing a revenue stream to the tribe, but something that is needed in general by our society at large to help create that shift away from fossil fuels into more renewable sources.
Narrator: The combination of traditional knowledge and modern technology has been very successful for the Campo Kumeyaay people.

Paul Cuero, Jr.: So using those old techniques and then applying today’s science to it, we’re able to go back and listen to some of those old stories that were told that we’re finding out were not just stories, but actually science.

There’ll be a time when we’ll be able to utilize the very wind that the Creator gave us to light our lights up at night.