

# WIXARIKA

## Summer 2021 Newsletter

September 1, 2021

Dear Donors and Subscribers,

The last year and a half has been long and surely has tested everyone's patience as we waited to return to some semblance of what used to be our normal behavior. We hope you have all been well and remained in good health and the best spirits possible as we wait to exit this pandemic. This newsletter is long overdue and we are excited to share updates on our latest agroforestry project, developing news on the defense of Wixarika sacred lands, our scholarship program and our expanding digital archive.

For us, this past year was not without loss. In July 2020, we lost our dear friend, Steve Aldrich, who was a key member of our board of directors and someone who dedicated much time over the years to promoting Wixárika art, the conservation of their land and resources and their cultural survival. During his three-year battle with cancer Steve continued to be deeply committed and involved with our foundation. He never missed a meeting of the board and traveled to Mexico in June 2019, in spite of his illness, to attend the inauguration of the exhibit *Grandes Maestros del Arte Wixárika* at the Museo Cabañas in Guadalajara. Steve was an ever-present source of support and encouragement from 1980 until his death. He was the founder of Friends of Huichol Culture based in Cambridge, MA, which helped support Juan Negrín's work through his Mexican nonprofit organization, ADESMO, and the work it did in the Wixárika communities building carpentry workshops, solar wood drying ovens and weaving workshops to help support Wixárika autonomy. It goes without saying that Steve is irreplaceable and will be greatly missed by all of us.



Steve Aldrich ~ Photo ©Mary McHenry

In February of the present year we also were saddened to lose our dear friend and longtime supporter of our foundation, Guadalupe Reader. She lost her battle with COVID and is survived by her son Luis and husband Rich, the latter who generously served on our board of directors for many years. Lupe had a sincere appreciation for Wixarika culture and held true enthusiasm for the work of our foundation.

In the Wixarika Sierra we lost quite a few friends during 2020. Among them were several elders, one, who along with his wife, died from confirmed cases of Covid-19. The causes of death varied from person to person but nonetheless it was a year of record loss of life among our friends in the

sierra. The loss of so many elders in one year was unprecedented and we remember with special affection Andrés Valdés who gave us support and profound friendship during many decades. He was a brilliant and humble elder who was also a compadre to Juan and Yvonne Negrín.

### Ongoing threats and new opportunities in Wirikuta

As many of you know, we have been involved in working to protect the sacred pilgrimage destination of Wirikuta from mining interests since 2010. Fortunately, First Majestic Silver and Revolution Resources have been kept from moving forward with their plans to exploit these sacred lands thanks to the injunction the Wixárika people won in the Mexican courts and which is still in place.

Since then, other threats have arrived and taken root. First came the tomato, cucumber, and chili farms that have expanded enormously over the years and tore up huge swaths of the desert with

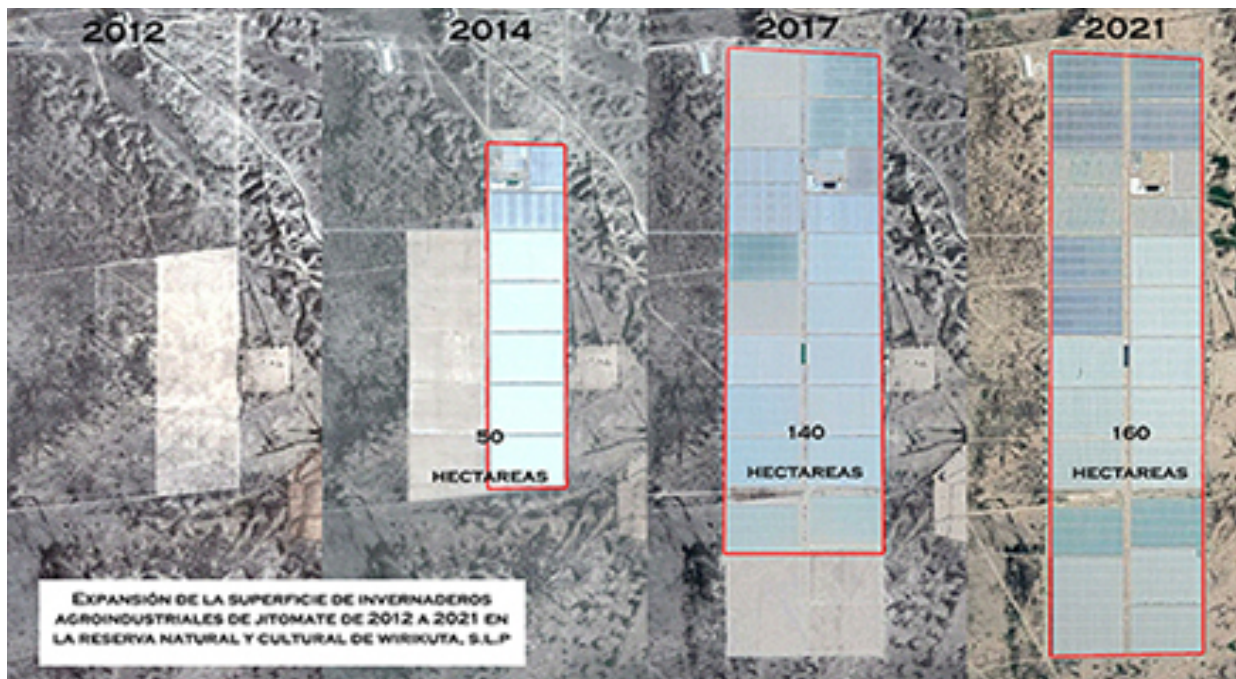


Diagram showing the expansion of greenhouses in Wirikuta between 2012 - 2021

tractors where they then construct green houses. This agribusiness model uses cannons and other artificial means to disperse the clouds and keep it from raining, while at the same time the farms are depleting the aquifer by pumping out large quantities of water for their crops. These crops also use abundant pesticides which leach into the aquifer. Rain modification has had a terrible effect on the crops planted by the small farmers who live in Wirikuta and survive off the land.

Next came the egg farms followed by the chicken and pig farms. These businesses are dumping excrement into pits that are leaching into the soil and contaminating the aquifer. There are two recent documents you can read where you can learn the extent of the damage being done. Both documents are in Spanish but if you don't read Spanish we suggest you use Google Translate and

that will give you a fairly accurate translation of the documents until we are able to get them professionally translated and posted to our website in English.

[Pronunciamiento por la defensa de nuestro territorio Catorce, San Luis Potosí](#)

[Pronunciamiento ante la situación que guardan los derechos humanos de las personas que habitan el territorio sagrado de Wirikuta](#)

[Agua y poder en el Altiplano Potosino por Diana Negrín](#)



Agroforestry Project – First training carried out in Wirikuta July 2021 ~ Photo ©Diana Negrín

Meanwhile, the Wixárika Research Center is carrying out an Agroforestry project in Wirikuta with the participation of a group of small farmers and Wixárika youth. The first phase of our agroforestry project foment the integral and agroecological management of cultivated land and of the natural landscape, allowing for ecosystem regeneration, an increase in productivity, and the improvement of socioeconomic conditions for the region's inhabitants. Specifically, we are working with mesquite, maguey and nopal cactus along with the traditional corn-bean milpa. We are developing this project with Wixárika agroforestry students and small farmers of the region with the hope of restoring relations with the land and across communities. We carried out our first training on Saturday July 31<sup>st</sup>, which was attended by 40 people from several local communities in Wirikuta and its surroundings, as well as several Wixárika communities in Jalisco and Nayarit. We invite you to read the full project proposal. We are still raising money to cover many of the costs of the first phase of this project which included buying the plants and

covering the transportation and lodging costs for the Wixárika youth who came from their communities to participate in the training. You can see the breakdown of costs in our budget on page 6 of our agroforestry proposal. The beauty of this initiative is that it can be modified for Wixárika communities in distinct geographic areas where there are serious problems with erosion, desertification and economic distress. The knowledge and skills gained by the young Wixárika participants will also be useful for projects in their own communities. If you are able to [donate](#) to this project your help will be greatly appreciated. We are very excited by this project and hope you will take the time to read our proposal in [English](#) or [Spanish](#).

In late 2020, small farmers from various ejidos in Wirikuta sent a petition to the Traditional Authorities of the community of Tuapurie, asking them to send their rain chanters to Wirikuta to call forth the rains as they do in their communities. Their petition stated that they were capable of caring for Wirikuta as the Wixárika people have asked them to but needed rain to nourish their crops in order to do so. Their petition was considered at Tuapurie's general assembly in January 2021, and the community agreed to establish a plan for three ceremonies for the 2021 agricultural cycle. The first ceremony was held on May 9<sup>th</sup> at Cerro Quemado, the birth place of the Sun and the second ceremony was held in the ejido of Las Margaritas on the 26<sup>th</sup> of June. The Wixaritari went on a hunt for peyote and an all-night chant was carried out. In preparation for the third ceremony a deer hunt was done and on the night of August 11<sup>th</sup> the hunters returned with a deer. The chanters returned to Wirikuta, and a final chant to call the rains took place on August 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>. Offerings are now being taken to other sacred locations in order for the commitment made by the chanters and the ejidatarios to be completed, a task that will carry over to next year.



Altar for the Deer ~ Photo ©Andrés Guadarrama

Alongside these ceremonies, we have had the pleasure of holding dialogue with the leaders of the Unión Wixárika de Centros Ceremoniales and the Consejo Regional Wixárika. This dialogue is indicative of a new phase of unity and work to protect Wirikuta and other sacred territories across organizations. Since July human rights commissions from the states of Nayarit, Durango, Jalisco and San Luis Potosí have also led an initiative to protect the environmental, cultural and labor rights of people in Wirikuta in the face of this latest onslaught of corporate activity and land use change. On August 23<sup>rd</sup>, the Consejo Regional Wixárika for the Defense of Wirikuta, the governor and the Commissar of Communal Goods from the Community of Tuapurie, attended meetings in Mexico City and delivered a letter to President Manuel López Obrador asking, among other things, to elevate the protected status of Wirikuta, nationally and internationally.

## Wixárika Students and the Scholarship Fund

We are delighted to announce that, despite the pandemic, five more Wixárika students completed their undergraduate university programs in the 2020 – 2021 academic year. That brings the total



Isaías Navarrete Chino Graduated in 2021 with a degree in Forestry  
Photo ©Diana Negrín taken during the training in Wirikuta

number of Wixárika graduates we have assisted to eight, one during the first year of the scholarship program in 2019, two in 2020, and five to date in 2021. Our ninth graduate, Carlos Carrillo Lopez just finished his degree in Natural Sciences in August.

We congratulate Tanima Enríquez López (Law), Deysi Lemus Aguilar (Nursing), Herminio Ramírez (Law), Isaías Navarrete Chino (Forestry), Virginia Eligio de la Cruz (Pharmacy), Casiano

Martínez Carrillo (Primary & Indigenous education) and Carlos Carrillo López (Natural Sciences). We look forward to seeing many more Wixarika youth graduate and achieve their dream in the coming years. It has been remarkable how these students were able to complete their studies despite numerous pandemic-driven educational challenges. You can learn more about how our 2020 – 2021 students succeeded by reading Brian McDougal’s report [Wixárika Scholarship Fund Newsletter - Spring 2021](#). Don't miss what students said when we asked them what messages they had for our donors! We were touched by their words and hope you are too! We hope you'll be proud of what we achieved together as you read through Brian's Newsletter.

We have chosen 13 new students for the 2021 – 2022 school year. We also have 7 returning students, two of whom will graduate at the end of this year and received partial scholarships. Along with the modest scholarship, we have been actively working to create a network of mentorship and resource sharing with alumni and current scholarship recipients. In the spring Diana Negrín began to organize “virtual cafes” with students and graduates so that they may meet each other and discuss matters that are on their mind. Over the year, several students and graduates have received awards or been featured in local news for their accomplishments and deeds.

To keep this program running we need ongoing financial support. Some of you have already signed up to make automatic monthly donations to the scholarship fund and we thank you for your generosity. Donations to the scholarship fund can be made via the Wixarika Research Center website. When completing the online PayPal form, please put “Wixárika Scholarship Fund” in the space for “Special instructions to the seller”. You can also split your support between the scholarship fund and our general fund that supports our overall work.

## **Online Archive**

We have continued to improve and expand our website and digital archive and hope you enjoy exploring the pages and reading the news, articles and videos we have posted. The home page highlights one or two news stories and a featured artwork that periodically changes and you will always find updates at the bottom of the home page, where artworks and news stories rotate. If you have any requests or suggestions you can write us at: [comments@wixarika.org](mailto:comments@wixarika.org). We are always happy to hear from our audience and receive content recommendations.

Finally, we want to remind you that we have several items available in our online store, most notably our trilingual catalogue, [Grandes maestros del arte wixárika. Acervo Negrín](#), which features some of the most exceptional artwork collected by Juan and Yvonne Negrín, along with important articles on Wixárika history, art and territory.

The Wixárika Research Center is a 501(C) 3 non-profit corporation registered in the State of California. All donations are tax deductible to the full extent of the law. We thank you for your support! Without your generosity our work would not be possible.

¡Pampariyutsi!

[Make a donation.](#)