

Idle No More SF Bay - Organizing & Inspiring Communities

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Background:

The indigenous movement, Idle No More, was begun by four women from Canada in November 2012: three First Nations women and one woman of "settler" descent. These women started the movement in response to devastating legislation that the conservative Harper administration proposed which violated First Nation's rights and eliminated protections of the environment. The most glaring example of the legislation is Bill C-45: on December 4, 2012 there were over 2 million bodies of water (rivers, lakes, streams, etc.) protected in Canada. After the Bill was passed on December 5th, there were under 200 bodies of water protected.

The women started the movement on social media in November. Within weeks there were events throughout Canada that manifested as "flash mob" round dances and teach-ins on the streets and in shopping malls. Additionally, as people around the world are dealing with similar issues of environmental degradation, "corporatocracy" and loss of rights, there were solidarity events on every continent except Antarctica.

The response to Idle No More in the San Francisco Bay Area was immediate. In December, 2012 there were solidarity actions taking place at the Canadian Consulate, along with flash mob round dances and teach-ins in city squares and malls.

Idle No More SF Bay:

On February 17, 2013, 350.org activists along with other Bay Area activists organized the Forward on Climate action in San Francisco which approximately 7,000 people attended. Folks who had been attending Idle No More actions put out the call for indigenous people and our allies to attend. We called the organizers and explained to them that it was important to have an Ohlone person conduct the welcome and opening prayer. Fortunately, the organizers were respectful and agreed to all of our requests. This was the very beginning of the group "Idle No More SF Bay".

On March 23, 2013, there was a nonviolent direct action training at the San Francisco Federal Building. An Idle No More prayer, teach-in and round dance was conducted prior to the training. During the training it was suggested that folks form affinity groups and the official Idle No More SF Bay was born. Since then, we have met every month to plan actions at a variety of places including Richmond Chevron, Kinder Morgan, the Canadian Consulate, the San Francisco Federal Building, and every action in the Bay Area concerning the environment and climate chaos. Idle No More SF Bay is currently organizing a series of healing walks along the refinery corridor in the San Francisco Northeast Bay: www.ConnectTheDotsHealingJourneys.org

Since our local group is an affinity group, our membership is closed. Affinity groups are made up of like-minded people who trust one another, agree to decide which actions to attend, organize actions, and support those who risk arrest.

Organizing the Grassroots:

Organizing has been made much easier with social media. We created a private Facebook page once our group was formed. We also created a public Facebook page which we use to post informative articles and information, as well as events. We also maintain an email list for our group.

We meet at least once a month. We send a member of our group to as many of the larger activist meetings as possible. We also send members of our group to assist with projects that other groups are doing. We understand that it is important to not only create relationships, but to maintain them as well.

Our group has become well known and we often receive requests for speakers. We also receive requests to conduct opening prayers and to sing the "Women's Warrior Song". We are training our younger members to be able to give radio interviews and speak publicly. We are committed to mentoring the next generation of activists.

Idle No More SF Bay has become a well known group in California within one year. It is one of two of the most active Idle No More groups in the United States. We do what we say we are going to do, we show up and we educate.

The Women:

I see women starting to rise up in defense of Mother Earth and all of her life all over the world. There are many iconic images on social media of women praying and standing strong in her defense in front of long lines of police officers. This is important as these images inspire other women to also rise.

As women, we have a stronger connection to Mother Earth, her waters and all of her children. With that connection comes a responsibility that many women today are heeding. Because we have the capacity to give birth we have an easier time responding to the web of life and the harms to that web that our human relatives are causing. Many of us feel that even if we can't put it into words.

At the International Summit on the Rights of Mother Earth in Ecuador in January, there was an evening with indigenous women and Vandana Shiva. One of the women from the Amazon expressed that culturally, it was the men who are the leaders and how do they, as women, respond to Mother Earth's call. Vandana responded that, as women, our responsibility is to Mother Earth and her defense. All of the cultural ideas of what women can and can't do was cut with that response. It is not only our responsibility, but the most important way that we can spend our time at this time in the big story of life. It is the most important thing we can do. In fact, the future of life as we know it on our beautiful Mother is at stake. Mother Earth herself will be fine. She is at least 4.5 billion years old and we are barely a blink on her timeline. It is for humanity and our other relatives here that we must do everything we can to save. We are doing all we can to ensure that we are not Mother Earth's failed experiment.

Native American & Settler Women:

Because I am an urban person, because I am Yaqui/Mexican/Choctaw/Cherokee/European, because none of my ancestors ever lived on a reservation, because I come from a long line of strong ancestors, I am a bridge. In our group, kindness is mandated regardless of who your

ancestors are. Any sign of dispute along settler/indigenous lines is quickly quenched and the persons involved are spoken to in private...we must all go forward together, or none of us may make it. We don't have time for such petty responses. We must all remain clear on our goals of transitioning off of fossil fuels and creating the new and beautiful world. We don't have time for these types of differences so they are not tolerated. That said, the settlers in our group are respectful. They listen, they learn, they participate, as we all do. Settlers have been a part of our group from the beginning. We have all learned and worked and prayed and acted together, as one.

Additional Information:

Our group consists of indigenous and non-indigenous members. The ages range from the early 20s through the 60s. Most of the members of our local Native American grandmothers prayer group are also members of Idle No More. These women lend their wisdom, strength and knowledge base to the other members. The energy of our group is one of understanding that it will take all of us to move beyond the fossil fuel crisis which is causing climate change. We are all committed to nonviolent direct action. When we pray at actions, we also pray for the police that are there and the workers at the facility. There is an understanding within the that it will take all of us to move beyond the fossil fuel crisis which is causing climate change. We are all committed to nonviolent direct action. There is an understanding within the group that we are part of Mother Earth's immune response to the crisis that life is facing.

Resources:

Official Idle No More website: <http://www.idlenomore.ca/>

Idle No More SF Bay on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/INMSolidaritySF>

Connect the Dots: Refinery Corridor Healing Walks: www.ConnectTheDotsHealingJourneys.org

Connect the Dots: Refinery Corridor Healing Walks on Facebook:
https://www.facebook.com/events/613049345437280/?ref=br_tf

Nonviolent Direct Action: <http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/nonviolent-action-defined>