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NEVADA MUSEUM OF ART ANNOUNCES THREE NEW PUBLICATIONS CELEBRATING TRADITIONAL ECOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE OF THE GREAT BASIN

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



Reno, Nev. (February 20, 2026) — The Nevada Museum of Art announces the release of three new publications: 1) *Desert Friends*, 2) *Nevada Toneega'a (Wildflowers)*, and 3) *Wá·šiw / Washoe Native Plants*—developed in collaboration with the Museum’s Native American partners and supported by the Henry Luce Foundation. Together, these works honor Traditional Ecological Knowledge and highlight the significance and resilience of plants across the Great Basin. Their release coincides with the recent opening of a rooftop garden dedicated to Native American basketmaking plants at the Museum.

“At the heart of these publications—and a foundational tenet of the Nevada Museum of Art’s program—is a recognition that Indigenous Knowledge systems offer vital perspectives on environmental stewardship, cultural continuity, and a model for caring for the places we all love in the Great Basin”, said Ann M. Wolfe, the Museum’s Curator at Large. “Indigenous Knowledge can help to guide our understanding of the land and its stories and shape our commitment to honoring creative interconnections between people, place, and the natural world.”

The publications are being released in coordination with the Museum’s new rooftop garden, located atop the Stacie and Charles Mathewson Education and Research Center. With major support from the Henry Luce Foundation, the third-floor garden was planned in collaboration with Native basketweavers from across the Great Basin. It features plants such as willow, dogwood, pinyon pine, wild rose, and redbud that were used traditionally—and today—in Native American basketry.

“The Indigenous people of this planet have never been better positioned to tell our own stories, including those about traditional and contemporary reliance on plants, land, and other natural resources that require ongoing care and stewardship,” said Stacey Montooth, Executive Director of the Nevada Department of Native American Affairs. “Thanks largely to public-private partnerships like the authentic relationship between the Nevada Museum of Art and the Nevada Department of Native American Affairs, an Indigenous perspective is easy to find.”

The Publications:

Desert Friends: Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Cultural Survival at Stewart Indian Boarding School

A two-volume book set published in collaboration with the Stewart Indian School Cultural Center & Museum, with contributions by Stacey Montooth, Dr. Joshua Bonde, Izzy NewMoon, and Bobbi Rahder

Originally published in 1939, *Desert Friends* was created at the Stewart Indian School, a federal Indian Boarding School in Carson City, Nevada. Blending Traditional Ecological Knowledge with school-based instruction, the book was written and illustrated by Native and non-Native educators, students, and community members committed to preserving Indigenous relationships with native plants.

Rooted in the teachings of Native Elders and informed by the botanical studies and cultural revival efforts of the 1930s, *Desert Friends* offers a rare, Native-centered perspective on the plants of the Great Basin—presenting them not just as resources, but as “friends” with whom one lives in respectful relationship. This new edition invites readers to learn from a worldview that values gratitude, ecological balance, and the interconnection of all living things.

Reprinted in 2025 through a partnership between the Stewart Indian School Cultural Center & Museum and the Nevada Museum of Art, the updated publication provides expanded historical and cultural context. It highlights how Indigenous languages encode sophisticated ecological knowledge, and how language loss threatens the knowledge people use to understand and sustain their environments. Following its original release, *Desert Friends* was distributed statewide by the Nevada Department of Education in 1964, underscoring its lasting educational and cultural importance.

Nevada Toneega’a: Flowering Plants of Hungry Valley and Pyramid Lake

A 96-page, full-color field guide with new wildflower photography by Melissa Melero-Moose

Developed over a decade of seasonal documentation, *Nevada Toneega’a* is a richly illustrated field guide to the wildflowers of Hungry Valley and Pyramid Lake in Northern Nevada. Informed by Northern Paiute ecological knowledge and incorporating Northern Paiute plant names, the guide supports cultural and language preservation alongside botanical education.

Accessible and visually compelling, the publication invites educators, students, and plant enthusiasts to explore the beauty and complexity of Great Basin plant life.

Wá·šiw / Washoe Native Plants – Plant Identification Cards

A set of 30 language and plant identification cards, produced in partnership with the Cultural and Language Resource Department of the Washoe Tribe of Nevada & California

This set of 30 identification cards introduces users to key Washoe plant names and the cultural knowledge associated with them. Developed collaboratively with the Washoe Tribe’s Cultural and Language Resource Department, the cards serve as an intergenerational tool for language revitalization, environmental education, and community engagement.

Sustaining Language, Culture, and Ecology

Indigenous languages and traditional plant knowledge continue to face alarming rates of decline worldwide. As Julia Webster Ayuso noted in *Noema* (January 2025), “The preservation of endangered languages is about more than saving words—it could be vital to safeguarding centuries of human knowledge and understanding the systems that sustain us.”

The publications can be purchased from the Bretzlaff Bookshop located inside the Nevada Museum of Art. Together, they support Traditional Ecological Knowledge, strengthen language revitalization initiatives, and honor the Indigenous communities whose stewardship continues to shape the Great Basin.

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ABOUT THE NEVADA MUSEUM OF ART

The Nevada Museum of Art is the state’s only art museum accredited by the American Alliance of Museums (AAM). Founded in 1931, the Museum is distinguished by its focus on the relationship between art and environment. Located in Reno at the intersection of the Sierra Nevada and the Great Basin, the Museum features programming and collections organized around thematic areas including the Art of the Greater West, the Altered Landscape, contemporary art, and work ethic in American art. In 2025, the Museum completed a major renovation and expansion with the Charles and Stacie Mathewson Education + Research Center, further strengthening its role as a hub for learning, scholarship, and community engagement.

The Museum’s Institute for Art + Environment is an internationally recognized research center that supports the practice, study, and awareness of creative interactions between people and their natural, built, and virtual environments. The Institute houses archives, special collections, and rare books connected to the Great Basin Native Artists organization; artists Beverly Buchanan, Judy Chicago, Helen and Newton Harrison, Michael Heizer, Walter De Maria, Lita Albuquerque, Trevor Paglen; and organizations including Burning Man, High Desert Test Sites, Desert X, and the Center for Land Use Interpretation.

Learn more at nevadaart.org.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The Nevada Museum of Art acknowledges the traditional homelands of the Waší-šiw (Washoe), Numu (Northern Paiute), Newe (Western Shoshone), and Nuwu (Southern Paiute) people of the Great Basin. This includes the 28 Tribal Nations that exist as sovereign nations and continue as stewards of this land. We appreciate the opportunity to live and learn on these Indigenous homelands.