

Havasupai Nation Field Trip

May 16 – 20, 2012

By Melissa Armstrong



The ESA SEEDS program had a field trip to Flagstaff, AZ the Havasupai Nation in Western Grand Canyon from May 16 – 20, 2012 as part of the Western Sustainable Communities project with funding from the David and Lucille Packard Foundation. The focus of the field trip was on water sustainability of the Colorado River Basin from a cultural and ecological perspective. The idea for this field trip arose during the Western Regional Leadership Meeting held in Flagstaff in April 2011 as a way to ground our meeting discussions in one of the most iconic places of the Colorado Plateau – the Grand Canyon. SEEDS alumnus Hertha Woody helped ESA connect with the Havasupai Nation; she worked closely with the former Havasupai tribal council during her tenure with Grand Canyon Trust as a tribal liaison. Hertha was instrumental in the planning of this experience for students.

In attendance for this field trip were 17 undergraduate and graduate students, 1 alumnus, 1 Chapter advisor, and 2 ESA staff members (21 people total), representing eight Chapter campuses (Dine College Tuba City and Shiprock campuses, ASU, NAU, UNM, SIPI, NMSU, Stanford) – See Appendix A. The students were from a diverse and vibrant background; 42% were Native American, 26% White, 26% Hispanic and 5% Asian. All four of our speakers were Native American. The overall experience was profound given the esteem and generosity of the people who shared their knowledge with our group, the scale of the issues that were raised, the incredibly beautiful setting of Havasu Canyon, and the significant effort that it took to hike to Supai Village and the campgrounds – approximately 30 miles in three days at an elevation change of 1,500 feet each way. Below is a summary of our activities:

Wednesday, May 16, 2012: All participants arrived in Flagstaff. During our welcome dinner, we had an orientation from Four Season Guides, the outfitter of our trip, to help prepare our group for the next

day's hike. Following, Carletta Tilousi of the Havasupai Nation presented to the group on Havasupai culture and history, and their deep traditions with water as a "people of the blue green water", which is the translation of Havasupai into English. Carletta discussed their work on the regional issue of uranium mining including their connection of the source (mines of Northern Arizona), to point (nuclear power plants in Europe), to waste disposal (mountain town in Switzerland). Carletta connected the grass roots efforts of communities in voicing their opposition to the use of uranium across its life span. Carletta's talk was essential in focusing our group on water – from a cultural perspective, from a place perspective as Havasu Creek is the second largest drainage of the Colorado River in Arizona, and from a place in peril perspective with the threat that uranium mining has on the water supply of Havasupai Nation.



Thursday, May 17, 2012: The group departed Flagstaff bright and early at 5:00 am for a three hour drive to Hilltop, which is the trail head for the hike to Havasu Canyon. We started hiking at about 8:30 am before the temperature hit almost 100 degrees later in the day. With three fantastic guides, plenty of water and snacks, lots of photography, and a swimming break, we arrived to Supai Village at approximately 2:00 pm. This was our first encounter with this community of approximately 700 people. There seemed to be as many horses as people, and the redwall sandstone canyon walls soar high above. The only vehicle in town is a small off road looking golf cart. Other than that, everyone is on foot, and many people are relaxing in the town center where lots of activity takes place. We stopped to fill our water and purchase some cold drinks or postcards in the small store, where every single item is flown in by helicopter. The trail to the campground goes directly through the village, meters away from the front door from some homes. It was apparent what a presence tourism is in this small community.



After our rest in the village, we continued on the trail through the canyon to the campground below. This is when we began to encounter some of the first waterfalls. We stopped for a long period to swim at the dramatic Havasu Falls, pouring 200' into a large pool. Here we were able to gather our second wind to continue on to the campground, another mile along the trail. While we swam at Havasu Falls, the guides were setting up our camp. We arrived to camp at about 5:00 pm to an amazing site – a fully set camp, complete with tents and picnic tables and shady giving cottonwood trees along a quiet stretch of Havasu Creek. We ate a delicious meal and had a brief discussion refocusing our attention to water sustainability and reviewing our following day. Most people slept well despite the winds that picked up in the evening and blew through camp.



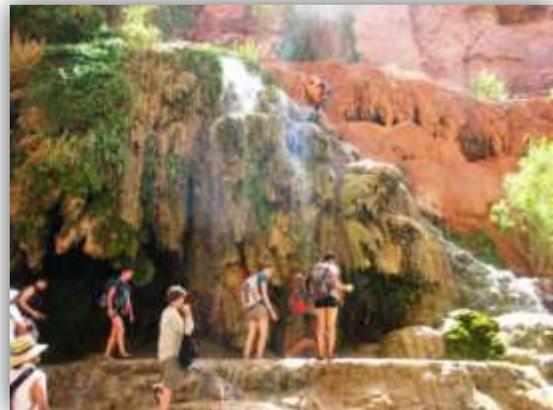
Friday, May 18, 2012: A very adventurous day. We began our day with an outstanding presentation from one of our participants, Roberto Nutlois of Black Mesa Water Coalition (BMWC). Roberto discussed the work of BMWS, starting as a student group on campus, and the tireless efforts they have gone through to promote sustainability on tribal lands.



After Roberto's talk, the two main things we had planned for the rest of the day were exploring Havasu Canyon and meeting with two Havasupai elders in the village at 5:00 pm. Because a late afternoon meeting was going to present logistical challenges for our group as far as hiking back and forth to the village, and eating a very late dinner with no time for discussion, one of our guides offered to run to the village and ask for an earlier meeting time. Fortunately he did because it was then we realized there had been a miscommunication and the elders were not in the canyon. They were in Flagstaff for a

uranium mining briefing. At this point, it was still only about 9:30 am, which gave us all day to figure out a plan B.

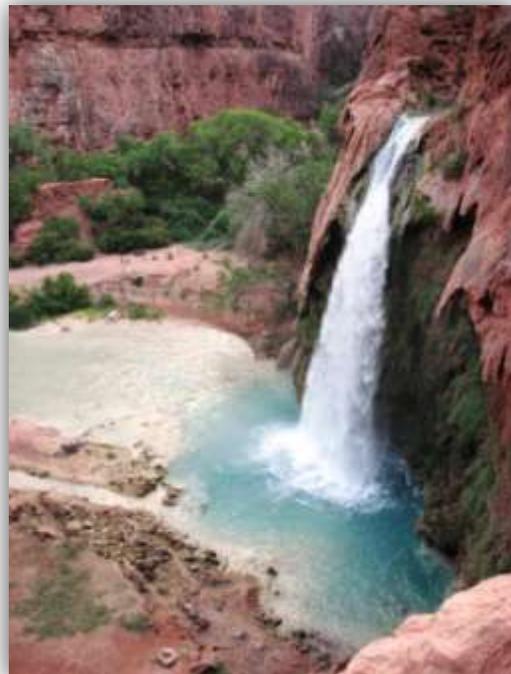
The students went with the guides to hike to the magnificent Mooney Falls and below, which entailed a 200' climb down the canyon wall! The students experienced natural wonders that expanded their minds, including a smaller dripping waterfall called fern falls that they were able to climb the face of, a grapevine stretch as far as one could see, and plenty of private stretches of swimming holes where they could rest and process their surroundings.



Meanwhile, Melissa and Hertha hiked back up to the village to seek another speaker for our group. It was a day I will cherish for the rest of my life, not only because I was able to spend it with an alumnus that I have been working with for 7 years, but because I was able to spend an adventurous day in Supai Village approaching community members in a way that could never have done without Hertha. We

talked with person after person who pointed us in directions, guided us to offices, invited us into homes, and who personally led us through the community back roads to the people we were looking for. The process seemed to be an authentic Havasupai process of finding people on foot in a place that has is not reliant on cell phones or computers to communicate. We returned to the campground at about 4:00 pm, and fortunately found one of the people we had been looking for on the trail! Edmond Tilousi agreed to meet with our group before dinner, and was then invited to stay and share a meal with us.

Edmond discussed Havasupai ways and culture, and answered tons of questions. Edmond was open and accessible and students felt comfortable to ask the many questions they had about Havasupai ways and their relationship with water. Afterwards, it was getting dark and the guides helped our group prepare for the next day's hike out.



Saturday, May 19, 2012: The guides woke our group at 3:45 am to get our group hiking by 5:00 am before the heat of day. It was early, but it was beautiful to witness dawn in Havasu Canyon. The hike out was great, with great attitudes by all and fast hiking by unexpected people! It was an energetic and empowering experience that demonstrated our strength. We all arrived to the top by 12:00 pm, had a nice lunch in the Havasupai parking lot, and surprised the guides with an impromptu poem (one line from each person around a circle) to thank them for their outstanding support. We arrived to Flagstaff by 4:00 pm and happily cleaned up.

We met again at the Photography Center for dinner, and were joined by a highly esteemed Havasupai elder Rex Tilousi, who we has planned to meet with on Friday evening. Luckily he was still in Flagstaff and able to join us with his daughter and son in law. Rex, who is likely approaching his 90s, stood up from his place in our circle and spoke to us for over an hour about Havasupai culture. He shared his own

life story, explaining how he was sent to a boarding school and prohibited to speak his language. He explained how the National Park Service was formed and what that meant for Havasupai tribal land. His great great grandfather was the last to leave Indian Gardens along the Bright Angel Trail in Grand Canyon National Park. He spoke about the ancient trade routes with the Navajo and Hopi people through Grand Canyon National Park and what they traded. He spoke about their native range – hunting on the rim in the winter, and farming in the Canyon in the summer. He spoke about the dynamic nature of the young canyon a long time ago when it would open and shut, making it a dangerous place to go. He spoke about the four Pai tribes, and the gatherings they have at Red Butte, one of their sacred sites. He spoke about the issue of reclaimed water on another of their sacred sites, the San Francisco Peaks. He spoke about how Havasupai village was formed, what the homes were made of, and when helicopters and tourism was allowed into the canyon. Finally, he spoke of the need to speak out for the plants and animals who do not have voice on issues such as water sustainability, uranium mining, and climate change. Rex shared with our group a wealth of information. We were all deeply humbled and inspired by his presence. Rex closed by singing a Havasupai song for us to give us clarity and inspiration as we move forward in the name of positive change. Following Rex's talk, it was getting late and we all quite tired, but we still had a lot of work ahead of us. We had to decide what to do together as a group to address the issue of water sustainability in the Colorado River Basin. The ideas that came forth are attached in Appendix B. We will be working together on SEEDSNet to narrow down our focus, and finalize our products.



Sunday, May 20, 2012: On this day, we all departed with the commitment to make progress on the ideas we generated the night before. The experience we had at the Havasupai Nation highlighted better than anything we could possibly done together, the critical nature of being involved in water sustainability issues not only for our ecosystems, but for the people of the Colorado River basin whose time for justice is long overdue.

Appendix A – Participant List

1. Mathew Begay – Dine College
2. Leiloni Begaye – New Mexico State University
3. Darwin Cajero – Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute
4. Ernest Charley – Dine College
5. Ricardo Duran – Arizona State University
6. Yarrow Greaney – Stanford University
7. Jessica Guo – Northern Arizona University
8. Andrew Mann – Northern Arizona University
9. Ana Miller-ter Kuile – Stanford University
10. Regis Maloney – Dine College
11. Adeline Murthy – University of New Mexico
12. Roberto Nutlouis – Northern Arizona University
13. Lorre Pennoyer – Coconino Community College
14. Sarah Renteria – Northern Arizona University
15. Jamie Solomon – Stanford University
16. Rachel Steagall – Northern Arizona University
17. Angelica Swanson – University of New Mexico
18. Hertha Woody – Navajo EPA
19. Beverly Maxwell – Dine College (faculty)
20. Melissa Armstrong – Ecological Society of America
21. Frederick Abbott – Ecological Society of America

Appendix B – Brainstorm on field trip follow up ideas to be discussed on SEEDSNet (prepared by Adeline Murthy of UNM)

- Make a statement on SB2109
- Write a letter to AZ senators, or even NM, CO, CA senators
- Email the offices (do not call—they won't listen)
- Need a unified action
- We could each individually write a letter, mass flood
- Share stories and pictures back at home
- Letter writing party
- Picture slide show
- Community events
- Write a SEEDS blog for promotion
- Use SEEDS Net to communicate, write a draft
- Write an article in local newspaper
 - Work with the editor to get it published
 - Write about poisoned springs in newspapers, put the companies to shame
 - e.g. Navajo Times, Navajo & Hopi Observer
- Do departmental presentations at university
- Lori will put talking points on SEEDS Net
- Work with public affairs office
- School newspapers
 - contact: seeds@esa.org
- Put a sign at trail head about history of Havasupai, since no one right now has a clue
 - design the sign, then present to tribal council
- Inform citizens about green energy option
- The laws are put into place, but the regulatory conditions are not made by lawmakers
 - regulators: BLM, BIA, NRC
- The old plants are not in compliance with the new plants and new standards
 - pressure them to raise their standards and it will no longer be economically viable to keep the plant open
- Taylor McKinnon, works for CBD, very knowledgeable on uranium issues
- Buyers of ore: Switzerland and South Korea, owned by a Canadian company
- John McCain's argument of defense, uranium in Iraq... very hypocritical when other countries are mining minerals from our own earth and selling these nuclear minerals to other countries
- Commit to make this issue live on in some way
- Begin a SEEDS “train”
 - Partners: Black Mesa Water Coalition, CBD
- Dine chapter contribution to Supai tribe: bring historical food sources to Peach Festival
- Colorado plateau Bioblitz at Havasupai school
- Offer up-to-date water systems that reduce water waste
- **Deadline for Western Sustainable Communities grant application: September at the latest, must be finished by June 2013**
- Water and Sustainability workshop, during the ESA meeting in Portland (on Tuesday)