

## **Supporting Essay 1**

### NSF Graduate Research Fellowships

Throughout Indian Country in the United States today, there is much need for natural resource managers due to increased levels of resource scarcity and conflict, and an upward trend in development activities. As an American Indian and an enrolled citizen of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, I am interested applying my graduate work to engage the cultural connections that a people have to their natural surroundings in order to effectively produce sustainable resource management initiatives. Most indigenous methods of resource management are a direct result of the relationship the people have with their environment. Accordingly, culture and natural resource management are a part of the same continuum, and a holistic approach to challenges of resource management results only from a proper understanding of the human-environment relationship.

The above perspective has evolved out of personal as well as academic influences. On the one hand, it is important to me to contribute to my own community in a way that will positively affect future generations. Cultural and environmental preservation are two vitally important goals for Indian people today, and I argue that one cannot be accomplished without the other. On the other hand, as a former student of anthropology, I have learned that the field of environmental management not only requires an understanding of the ecological systems of the non-human environment, but also an understanding of how people come to live in their environment over time. My undergraduate work with Dr. Richard Stoffle at the University of Arizona greatly contributed to my learning this lesson. In an NSF-funded group research project lead by Dr. Stoffle, we applied ethnographic research methods to learn more about traditional systems of sea tenure in the Bahamas and to collaborate with local people on issues of marine management. The results of our research conclude that collaboration with local communities is beneficial - and even necessary - for effective reserve design due to the extensive amount of environmental knowledge that local people have developed and the elaborate systems of sea tenure that exist.

Following my undergraduate education, I worked as an environmental technician for the Cherokee Nation Office of Environmental Services. My employment involved the formulation and initiation of a project that incorporates traditional botanical knowledge into the tribe's environmental policy. During this time I was able to independently design and conduct an investigation and to involve myself with local environmental issues. I also received encouragement from local and national EPA representatives and I laid the foundation for the project that I hope to continue as a graduate student at the University of California, Berkeley. My studies at Berkeley have further instilled a passion for the field of environmental policy and management, and they are an exciting but smooth transition from my experience in anthropology. In my dissertation, I intend to expand on the project I initiated at the Cherokee Nation, applying the information, experience and resources I will gain during the time I will be studying for my doctorate. On a larger scale, I foresee exciting career opportunities in my chosen area of work. The Cherokee Nation is home to the Inter-tribal Environmental Council (ITEC), which provides support, training and environmental services to 36 tribes in Oklahoma, Texas and New Mexico. Currently, this organization is lacking in a critical cultural component, perhaps as a result of outside criteria and organization. My research goals would fill this cultural niche, and the creation of a "traditional ecological knowledge branch" is an exciting possibility that I have set as a career goal of my own.