



My name is Jhon Goes In Center and I am an advisor for the Oglala Lakota Tribal Historic Preservation Office. I take my position of speaking on behalf of our tribe very seriously. Everything I say here is in regard to what other elders also talk about, and are concerned about.

This issue with the grizzly bear is intertwined with our religious rights, because bears are significant to us.

How can it be proved that grizzly bears are significant to us? The fact that if you look at the Lakota population, the citizenry, many still hold names which embody and were inspired by the grizzly bear. If we look at geography and examine names, there are many places that still carry the grizzly bear name: creeks, buttes and sacred sites, multiple places where our knowledge has subsequently been overlaid with the non-Native view of the landscape, when ours is an original view of the landscape that really describes the significance of the area.

Let's take for instance Devil's Tower, and the non-Native attitude that completely overshadows the fact that a lot of Northern Plains' tribes view that site and story as being associated with the grizzly bear. Lakotas call it Mato Tipila, and then we have another sacred site, Mato Paha, which is Bear Butte. All of these places are held in contention because of the dominant society's world view that doesn't recognize or validate the spiritual aspects of the grizzly bear, or the attributes of the grizzly bear, and how they actually taught (and still teach us today) the elements of harmony of nature and how to live with some sense of equilibrium.

So non-Native thinking has been totally overpowering the Native perspective. But if you look at our culture, we still revere the grizzly bear; we really do. The grizzly bear is knowledgeable; he's one of the species that knows what plants to ingest to heal himself and to teach others. And if you did gather a lot of spiritual leaders and healers you would find this to be validated. But of course, academia and science doesn't validate the Native worldview. With our government to government relationship through the treaties we should be able to have that kind of input – to be on a par. So here our sovereignty is also at stake.

Jhon Goes In Center