FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: (date)

**Buying back their ancestral lands, the Pueblo of Santa Ana preserves the past and protects the future.**

**(logo)**

**Presents**

**ANCESTRAL CONNECTIONS**

**(Airdate/Time, Channel)**

**And streaming on the PBS App.**

**“It's actually a number one priority, to buy our lands back.” — Nathan Garcia, Former Governor, Pueblo of Santa Ana**

**“Maybe some people don't realize what we're losing in America.” — Julia Garcia, Pueblo of Santa Ana**

**“A lot has been taken. I'm just going to put it plain and simple. A lot has been taken. And nothing has been given back.” — Dillion Eustace, Pueblo of Santa Ana**

**(City, State) — (Station)** In 2016, the Pueblo of Santa Ana paid more than $30 million to buy back some of their own ancestral lands, Tamaya Kwii Kee Nee Puu. At the time, the tribal council resolved to protect the lands for traditional uses only. In an effort that unites elders and young people, traditional knowledge and western science, the pueblo is continuing to preserve their cultural heritage, heal the lands and their waters from more than a century of grazing, study wildlife populations, and protect the future.

ANCESTRAL CONNECTIONS premieres **(Day/Date/Time) on (Station / Channel)** and is available to stream for free on the PBS App. The film was created by NMPBS Senior Producer Laura Paskus and NMPBS Director/Editor Antony Lostetter. This standalone special is part of the series, Our Land: New Mexico’s Environmental Past, Present, and Future, currently in its eighth season.

For Thomas Armjio, being on Tamaya Kwii Kee Nee Puu connects him to the past. “I’m still learning about my culture,” says Armjio, a cultural resource technician at the Pueblo of Santa Ana. “It reinforces wanting to know who you are, where you come from.”

Buying back their lands is a number one priority, says Nathan Garcia, former governor of the Pueblo of Santa Ana: “This was home, and I still feel that.”

When the Pueblo of Santa Ana’s tribal council decided to protect Tamaya Kwii Kee Nee Puu for traditional uses, the Tribal Historic Preservation Office was able to protect ancestral and sacred sites, including cliff dwellings. And the Department of Natural Resources began working on grasslands restoration, the removal of more than 60 miles of interior fencing, and studies of species like mountain lion, elk, deer, pronghorn, and more. This work complements restoration projects and the reintroduction of certain species on the pueblo’s other lands along the Rio Grande and atop Santa Ana Mesa.

For five years, beginning in 2006, the pueblo put a moratorium on hunting, to boost deer and elk populations. With that increase came a rise in mountain lion populations, as well.

“It was pretty amazing because it was right about 2015 or 2014 that you just saw lions showing up on the [wildlife] cameras, and it would be a female lion with three adult kittens. Like 10-month-old or 11-month-old kittens,” says Dan Ginter, Range Program Manager for the Pueblo of Santa Ana. “For a female lion to get three kittens to that age group means that she's being really successful and that she's got a good prey base.”

By collaring lions with GPS trackers, the pueblo has learned about their diets and their ranges. One lion, nicknamed Squeaks, migrated out of his natal range on the Pueblo of Santa Ana’s lands to Colorado, where he was photographed on wildlife cameras set up at Mesa Verde National Park — more than 200 miles away.

Witnessing the journey of Squeaks, as well as other mountain lions and GPS-collared elk, has helped the pueblo better identify wildlife corridors — and their barriers. Now, the pueblo is working to connect important wildlife corridors currently severed by busy highways. The pueblo’s lands also hold the line against rampant development in central New Mexico.

And while the Land Back movement is growing, it’s not easy or straightforward for tribes to get their lands back. The Pueblo of Santa Ana had to pay more than $30 million to a private landowner for Tamaya Kwii Kee Nee Puu — and Congress has yet to put those lands into trust for the tribe.

“A lot has been taken. I'm just going to put it plain and simple. A lot has been taken. And nothing has been given back,” says Dillion Eustace, Wildlife Technician with the Pueblo of Santa Ana.

As a young leader, Eustace wants everyone to do more to steward the land. “I always talk about this with my family: certain pueblos kind of have politics with each other and they can't really agree on certain things. But this, I feel like shouldn't be something that should be even debated about,” says Eustace. “As native people to the land, we're pretty much stewards of the land. I would even extend it to outsiders. We're all stewards of the land.”

Ancestral Connections is made possible with the support of The Neeper Natural History Fund, NMPBS, and viewers like you.

**Bios:**

Laura Paskus, Senior Producer

Laura Paskus is Senior Producer of the NMPBS series Our Land: New Mexico’s Environmental Past, Present and Future. Paskus has reported on environmental issues in New Mexico since 2002, when she began her career at *High Country News*. She has worked for print, online, radio, and television outlets, covering the most important environmental issues of her generation, including climate change and its impacts. She’s the author of the 2020 book, “*At the Precipice: New Mexico’s Changing Climate*” and in 2024, Torrey House Press will publish her new book, “*Water Bodies: Love Letters to the Most Abundant Substance on Earth*."

Antony Lostetter, Director/Editor

Antony Lostetter is the Production Manager at New Mexico PBS and chief videographer and editor of Our Land: New Mexico's Environmental Past, Present and Future. For 18 years, his award-winning videography, as well as his audio and graphic work, have been an integral part of the station’s programming and events, including debates, town halls, and performances. His drone photography, 4k footage, and outdoor lighting push the boundaries of what people previously considered possible for a quick run-and-gun style production. Equipped with battery-powered lights and multiple 4k cameras — and employing both pride and precision — Antony and his crew tell visually compelling stories about culture, the environment, and all the issues that matter to New Mexicans.

**Ancestral Connections interviewees:**

Julian Garcia, Pueblo of Santa Ana

Nathan Garcia, Former Governor, Pueblo of Santa Ana

Ruben Lujan, Former Lt. Gov, Pueblo of Santa Ana

Thomas Armijo, Cultural Resource Technician, Pueblo of Santa Ana

Dillion Eustace, Wildlife Technician, Pueblo of Santa Ana

Dan Ginter, Range Program Manager, Pueblo of Santa Ana

Glenn Harper, Range & Wildlife Division Manager, Pueblo of Santa Ana

Monica Murrell, Tribal Historic Preservation Officer, Pueblo of Santa Ana

(Insert Station Boilerplate)

**New Mexico PBS (NMPBS)**

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