



All photos courtesy of Ekvn Yefolecv



Presbyterian Hunger Program National Partner Highlight: Ekvn Yefolecv

Indigenous Maskoke persons were forcibly removed from their traditional homelands 180 years ago. Ekvn-Yefolecv (ee-gun yee-full-lee-juh) is a group of their descendants who began looking for a parcel of their ancestral homelands in 2013. In January 2018, the group took out a mortgage on 577 acres where one of their ancestral villages once sat in what is colonially called Alabama. Ekvn Yefolecv returned to build an intentional ecovillage community focused on revitalization of the Maskoke language and practices which are culturally and ecologically sustainable.

The Presbyterian Hunger Program first joined in partnership with Ekvn Yefolecv for their work in 2019. Since that time, they have been glad to share about many advancements.

During the first years, intergenerational cultural immersions offered participants a way to learn about the history of the land, lake sturgeon and other animals, and to identify wild plants by their Maskoke names. They began to practice the Maskoke language while stewarding animal and plant propagation, cultivation, and harvesting. And they had opportunities for reclaiming traditional cultural arts, such as sewing traditional clothing, beading, moccasin making, preparing traditional foods, plant-based medicinal healing, social dances with traditional songs and drumming, and recreational activities.

Lake sturgeon is one of the threatened animal species that are culturally significant to Maskoke people. An aquaponics system was designed, and a fishery was constructed. Once uprooted from the area, now lake sturgeon are being replenished. Buffalo, chickens, dogs, and a herd of endangered guinea hogs also being stewarded on the land.



Photos l-r: the aquaponics system; Mekkaneko releases a small sturgeon into the lake, with words of encouragement for the fish from elder Marilyn Cloud; buffalo, another threatened animal species that is sacred to Maskoke people

The ecovillage has grown and includes buildings constructed with care for nature, including solar, geothermal, and other alternative energy components. Rain catchments, earthen flooring, straw bale walls, cob ovens, local timber, and living roofs are just part of the ecologically sustainable

choices the community is making. In November 2020, a hurricane uprooted trees around the ecovillage. Residents harvested the trees and used them to build a tiny home duplex, an outdoor kitchen and dining space, and tables and benches for the school and the outdoor dining space.

Community members are growing heirloom crops in a deliberate effort to decolonize their diets. Besides growing in gardens and the greenhouse, they forage in the forest for food and medicine. The lead language immersion school teacher, who had struggled with diabetes and high blood pressure for many years, lost over 50 pounds and no longer has to take insulin or high blood pressure medication.



Young members of the community are learning from a curriculum centered on traditional agricultural and ecological knowledge. They help care for the community's animals, and all instruction is given in the Maskoke language. The immersion program is pivotal, as there were only a handful of people who still spoke the endangered indigenous language.

The residents of Ekvv-Yefolecv are working together to revive the Maskoke matriarchal system and to observe a traditional style of governance based on group decision making.

Even with many accomplishments, Ekvv Yefolecv faces challenges. In 2021, they were able to rescue 477 adjacent acres of land. Now instead of being clearcut for timber, a portion of that land will be used for rotation grazing for the pasture animals. And they are partnering with others to fight against an incoming graphite mine that has been proposed nearby. Residents are taking preparatory steps, such as measuring pH in the river so that they will have a documented baseline.

The people of Ekvv Yefolecv are working together to bring healing to the land and to collectively find healing from intergenerational trauma. They hope the ecovillage serves as an archetype for other Indigenous communities, modeling lifestyles that are linguistically, culturally, and ecologically sustainable. They have served as consultants for other communities that are interested in replicating the ecovillage's model in their own culturally responsive ways.

Ecstatic after receiving the group's official Release of Mortgage document in April 2020, one of the leaders reflected, "We are so grateful to you for becoming a part of our journey to regain Maskoke People's opportunity to steward our ancestral homelands. We were kayaking on the lake with the children yesterday when our daughter Hemokke asked "yv ekvnv omvlkv vcayecēt owa?" (do we take care of all of this land here), and we had a delayed reaction in realization that there was no need for anxiety over the possibility of once again losing our right to steward the homelands in which our ancestors resided since time immemorial. The overwhelming goodness of this reality is truly indescribable!"



The Presbyterian Hunger Program is glad to partner with organizations like Ekvv Yefolecv. Around the world in places where hunger, poverty, greed, and injustice have impacted communities, we can continue to lift our voices and work together to make a difference.

