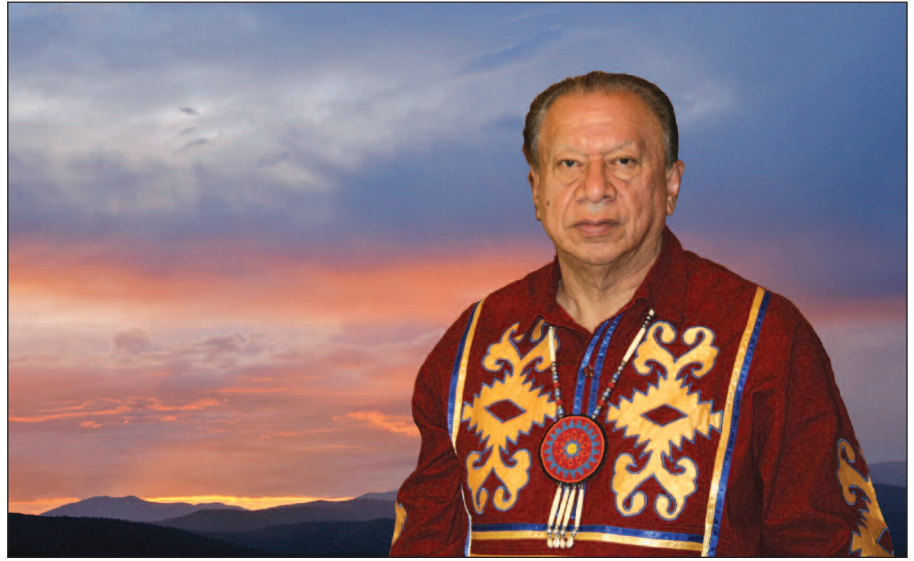


LAW OF THE LAND

New Documentary to Offer Native Perspective on Indian Sovereignty and Gaming



Former Kickapoo Tribal Chairman Steve Cadue has been involved with Indian gaming since its inception more than twenty years ago. Now President of Sovereign Life Productions, he is producing an ambitious documentary that will tell the history of Indian gaming from the Native American perspective. We recently spoke with Steve about this project and how he hopes it will change the way people look at the industry.

Tell us about the upcoming documentary *Law of the Land*.

Law of the Land is a story and documentary miniseries that will tell of the Native American struggle for genuine Indian sovereignty and the revolution of Indian gaming. Indian gaming has changed the course of history. The authentic story of Indian gaming has been one of conflicts, drama, and many conditions unknown to the world. In their quest to establish gaming, Indian leaders have faced many conflicts with local, state and the federal governments. Indian people faced armed conflict and their lives were in danger in some situations in the fight to establish Indian gaming. Also, there have been conflicts within the tribes themselves. The establishment of Indian gaming in many tribes was not a unanimous situation. So there were challenges that Indian tribal leaders had to overcome within their own tribes, which is part of the whole story. The film will include significant oral history accounts told by the many different Native American people, leaders and tribal members involved with Indian gaming. Indian Country is the studio and Indian people are the stars. Indian gaming has changed the course of history. It's a fascinating story that has a lot of conflict, a lot of drama, and the world needs to be educated about the Native American people's struggles.

What are the origins this project?

In my mind, *Law of the Land* began nearly forty years ago when I was first elected to the tribal council of the Kickapoo

Nation. Managing and leading the tribal government was a really challenging task. A lot of that challenge was because of the poverty of the Kickapoo Nation and a lot of Indian tribes. The greater purpose for the *Law of the Land* story is when I became engaged in bitter negotiations with the state of Kansas and our fight to establish casino gaming. Due to our poverty, I knew we needed to generate revenue and had a good understanding of our sovereign legal right to establish Indian gaming. It took nearly five years of a bitter fight with the state of Kansas for the Kickapoo Tribe to be successful in winning a compact. Many of those issues were fought in Kansas and in federal court.

We were extremely fortunate to have the support, understanding and knowledge of then-governor Finney, who was the only governor in all of the states to publicly support Indian gaming. Governor Finney knew that in recognizing Indian sovereignty, the state of Kansas would also benefit. One such benefit of Indian gaming was that it would grow the economy, which of course it has done. So *Law of the Land* came about from my own life experiences and involvement with other Indian leaders and knowing their struggle for genuine Indian sovereignty. When I use the term "genuine Indian sovereignty," I mean you've got to have the money, the financial ability to do your own choosing – to have options. That's what genuine Indian sovereignty's all about, but it takes financial ability to do that. *Law of the Land* is a project that has been a lifelong fight and has taken determination from me and many other Indian leaders.

Who is involved with production?

I founded Sovereign Life Productions, an independent film company, in the state of New Mexico, with cofounders Jeff Franken and Joseph Lujan. The production team will be made up of the three of us as producer and associate producers. Jeff Franken published a very successful oral history book titled *Sovereign*, which is about the history of Indian gaming in America. Joseph Lujan has worked on many feature films and is experienced in film production. Shawna Shandin Sunrise is our documentary and research director and historian. Shawna is of the Santo Domingo Pueblo Tribe in New Mexico and she has a wealth of professional experience in radio, television and film. She will be primarily responsible for the research and conducting the oral history with the interview subjects in the documentary. Alton Walpole, who has been the producer and director of major films, is also on the production team. He has been involved with some noted HBO productions like *PabaSapa: The Struggle for the Black Hills*. So he's a great addition to our team. We also have Daniel Montañño, who is a successful businessman and understands economics, on our production team. So we have an experienced team of people who are excited about *Law of the Land*.

What type of research has gone into this project?

The research has been carried out in the archives of many different organizations. For example, in tribal libraries as well as places like the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian. A lot of research has been done on Congressional hearings that have been conducted, like the hearings surrounding the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act. Research has been done with attorneys and legal representatives for and against Indian tribes as well as with state agencies that were involved with Indian gaming in their respective states. Primarily, the documentary will consist of the oral history as told by the Indian people, which will reveal the authentic story.

How do you feel Indian gaming has been portrayed in the mainstream?

I think it's been, if you're talking about the news media, a very poor portrayal. The news media has a lack of knowledge about the real reasons behind and the authentic story of Indian gaming, as well as why Indian leaders chose to establish Indian gaming. Indian tribal government is very complex, very responsible, and deeply rooted in trying to bring a better life to the respective tribal members. The portrayal by the news media has been neglectful and many times has only focused on something sensational, like some type of problem that can happen in gaming and business.

There have been some problems in Indian gaming and those problems seem to get all of the attention. The real story of Indian gaming never gets told, though.

Why do so many myths about Indian gaming persist?

Well, again, it's due to lack of knowledge. Lack of knowledge causes an absolute misrepresentation to the public by the news media, by radio, television and film. The real history of Native American tribes has never been taught in the school systems, for example. People who end up as professionals in the news media have never learned through their formal education about Indian tribes and it becomes a problem because they just try to gloss over history when they cover stories about Indian people. What we will do with *Law of the Land* is go directly to the source. We will go to the Indian leaders, who are the stars of this documentary. The Indian leaders know the story because they have lived this story. So we'll go to the source, because it's a story that needs to be told.

How will this film address those myths that are so prevalent among the public?

We will address those myths by interviewing Indian people themselves, which will make the film authentic. There's no better education than presenting the real people who have lived the actual experience. The Indian leaders and tribal members are extremely knowledgeable and extremely committed to their responsibilities. Indian people know that these stories need to be told in their authenticity and that's how we'll do it. We will tell the true story.

When will the film be going into production?

The projection is to begin shooting in September, but *Law of the Land* is a major film documentary and we are finalizing the financial support with major investors now. We're very excited about the response that we're getting. We know that Indian Country needs this publicity and we think *Law of the Land* will help immensely in getting this publicity to the Native American people.

We launched our public information about *Law of the Land* at the 2010 National Indian Gaming Association convention in San Diego and we got great support from Chairman Stevens and the board of directors. This told us that this story can be very successful. The response was just overwhelming and we really appreciate NIGA's support. I am truly honored to be a producer of *Law of the Land*. It's a great honor and responsibility that I will give my heart and soul to. I'm just excited. ♣

For more information about "Law of the Land," visit www.sov-life.com.