

On January 12 the SCHS hosted a free screening of the short 2022 documentary *Saging the World*, a special program that was jointly co-sponsored by the L.A./Santa Monica Mountains and the San Gabriel Mountains chapters of the California Native Plant Society (CNPS), as well as the Theodore Payne Foundation. All of the hosting organizations had representatives on hand who were available to interact with the 170 or so attendees after the screening.

The documentary was created by Rose Ramirez and Deborah Small in partnership with the California Native Plant Society to bring attention to the alarming increase in the poaching of white sage (*Salvia apiana*), and to advocate for its protection. White sage is only native from San Luis Obispo in California to Baja California in Mexico, – a limited range that had already been reduced due to housing developments, when the global trend of “smudging” endangered it further. Demand for the plant has increased greatly during the last ten years, leading to over-harvesting and poaching. The plants are under threat because they are unable to regenerate due to the constant cutting back that is occurring. Stands of sage which once grew to 6’-7’ high are now stunted at a

mere 2’-3’ high and are struggling.

The film included interviews with local indigenous people representing a number of native communities who have traditionally used white sage for spiritual, medicinal and ceremonial purposes, while carefully cultivating the plant to ensure its longevity and ability to reproduce. They spoke about how plants are considered to be “relatives and ancestors” to be respected and maintain our balance with the earth. Cultural appropriation – i.e. smudging – was also addressed in the film as was the need to correction miseducation about the practice and the plant. An example was given that a Google search on smudging will share how to use the sage, but not how it came to market or what its history is. This narrow view as well as an international demand spurred by social media videos and clips on smudging has led to an increased demand for sage. It is estimated that 90% of the sage available online has been poached. The film also shared some suggestions on mitigating the problem (responsible farming, growing your own plants at home, not buying from unknown sources, improved education and legislation), but preventing illegal harvesting was still paramount in protecting the plant for future generations.

The screening was followed by a panel discussion and a Q & A session with the film’s director Rose Ramirez (artist, photographer, filmmaker, writer,

and California Indian basketweaver of Chumash and Yaqui descent) and Rico Ramirez (botanist, Gabrielino-Shoshone Nation), and moderated by Evan Meyer, Executive Director of the Theodore Payne Foundation. They spoke in greater depth about their personal connections to the plant as well as addressed the topics of appropriation, legislation and the need for improved education, including soliciting support to find a wider audience for the film, as it seeks to foster awareness and inspire action for the preservation of this threatened plant.

After the panel discussion, attendees were encouraged to ask questions and check out the various materials – including plants! – that representatives from the hosting organizations had on hand. And as a special treat, live background music was provided by Sage Against the Machine, a musical duo consisting of Meyer and Antonio Sanchez, who were joined for a few numbers by Rico Ramirez. All around, it was a very special evening!

🌀 Sabine Steinmetz

This program was not videotaped, but you can learn more about the film and ways in which to protect white sage by visiting:

cnps.org/sagingtheworld

🌀 SCHS MONTHLY GARDEN SHARE 🌀

February is still winter, and the season dictates our garden chores.

- Finish your winter rose pruning early in the month!
- Monitor your in-ground seedlings and don't let them dry out - unfortunately we can't rely on consistent rain although they were well-watered last month!
- Check other plants that may need to receive supplemental watering – especially on or right after windy days.
- Continue harvesting your citrus fruits and give the trees their first feeding if you haven't already done so.
- Feed your azaleas this month to keep them blooming longer, as well as your deciduous fruit trees which will begin budding out this month.
- If you really want to do some planting add some cool-season annuals and get summer-blooming bulbs into the ground now.
- Pick up spent camellia blossoms soon after they drop – do not let them “compost” underneath the plants – they cause camellia blight.
- Last chance to schedule some serious tree pruning for best results before they come out of winter dormancy. And please, hire a reputable firm to do the work or better yet, an arborist!
- We're not out of the winter yet, so keep monitoring for frost warnings and protect your sensitive plants, including many varieties of succulents.
- And last, but not least, stay on top of your weeding so you don't regret it later. The recent rains have sent up a nice crop of uninvited intruders and this is the best time to go after them before they become semi-permanent residents, or worse, set seed!

Have fun! 🌀 Sabine Steinmetz

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