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## WE ARE OCEAN PEOPLE: INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP IN MARINE CONSERVATION

CINDY BOYKO &amp; 'AULANI WILHELM, GUEST EDITORS

**A Sea-Skin Song***Gina Kapualanihoapiliokaua McGuire*

The young mullet warble a single, bubbling song  
 mouth to tail, full spine. Eyes to sky,  
     greeting soft raindrops.

Swallow the falling glow of full moon's light,  
 gills open wide, open and shut,  
     tasting whispers of 'Ōhua Rain.

Mouth to tail, full spine, in echoing  
   low-tide song.  
 Against the currents and white-wash of high, sharp cliffs,  
 within the eddying, rolling waves,  
     while humpback whales croon  
 un-hurried lullabies to drowsy calves.

A disjointed melody to outside ears  
 it moves through lava's cracks as  
   fresh water poised  
     between uplands and boulder beach.  
 Boulders churn in ever-dance  
   with solemn waves,  
 bringers of silver schools, the young mullets.  
 Crowding of open mouths at sea-skin's break  
 as limu kala slow-tugs on  
   remnants  
     of alien-invaded forests.

*Sargassum* spp. seaweed used in forgiveness ceremony

Mouth to tail, full spine, the spirits' song endures.  
 horizon to beach united voices  
   of sprats  
     and village and sea-skin  
     and now the moena,  
 soft woven leaves cradle child's dreams.

mat

The strange scurry of 'a'ama crabs,  
 over crumbling cliffs,  
   past village-sites long gone.  
 memories carried in ti-leaf crowns  
     the iwi of soil flesh.

bones

Grave sites meander into solemn-waves,  
 leaping off points for ancestors' duty  
 while ever-more, mouth to tail, full spine,  
 the single, bubbling song prevails.  
 Winter through summer and winter again



the ‘opihi whisper a mournful hum  
as the elders  
slowly disappear.  
with them follows practice, follows ola  
as shadow to light.

*Cellana* spp. limpets

life, well-being, health

Aging leaves turn dust to settle within  
the scarred and resting pohaku,  
the heiau hidden but not yet  
forgotten,  
their dreams soar over waves to horizon edge.  
The pohaku stir uneasy as their people  
become severed from land and sea and spirit,  
the forest roots press deeper  
to carry the kaumaha  
ever growing.

stones

stone platform

grief, sadness

Tentative, quavery  
mouth to tail aligned  
and stubborn with grace  
the girl sings.  
And hānai aunt strips,  
quickly strips,  
the thorns and ribs from sea-dried lauhala,  
weaving moena,  
weaving coast,  
through mango-scented dusk,  
and her stories murmur  
to the heavy resting keiki heads.

adopted

*Pandanus* leaves

children

And tutu wahine  
scrapes the poi surface  
with cowry shell before feeding guests,  
and sometimes she smiles  
a private, closed smile  
as she listens to the singing girl.

grandmother or older woman

dish made from taro

The young mullets find their way to tidepool home;  
dart amongst smooth lava walls  
of light and air, of the tumbling blue  
and hear her voice.

The sprats start  
to sing  
mouth to tail, full spine  
as our song lives.

*This poem is written in honor of and conversation with Peter Blue Cloud. It is my hope that this poem presents a way of knowing sea, of knowing coast, that is embodied, that prevails despite loss of land and way of life through practice and as family.*





**Citation for this article**

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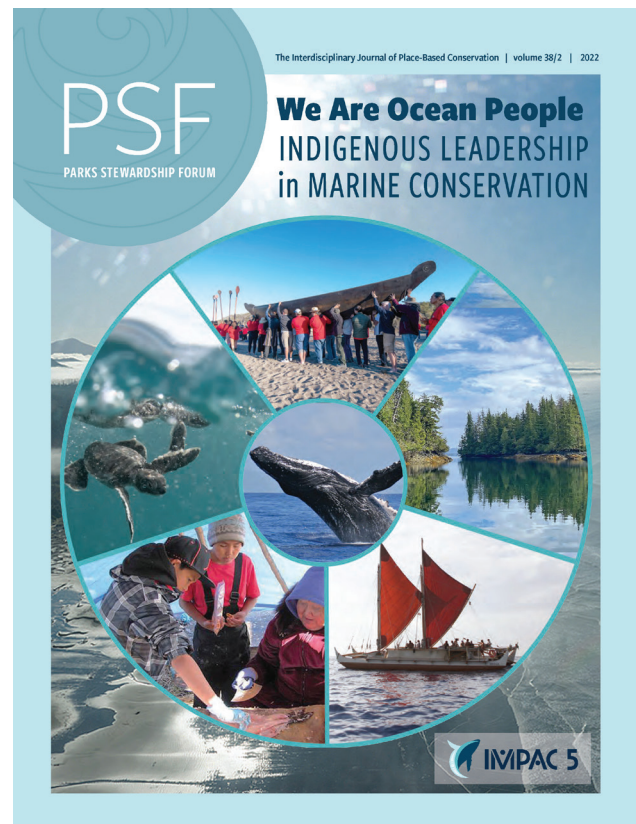
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**On the cover of this issue**

CIRCLE DESIGN, clockwise from top:

- Northern Chumash ceremony | [ROBERT SCHWEMMER](#)
- Haida Gwaii | [CINDY BOYKO](#)
- The Polynesian Voyaging Society's voyaging canoe Hōkūle'a | [NOAA](#)
- Elder teaching youths, northern Alaska | [US FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE](#)
- Baby Honu (sea turtles), Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument | [NOAA](#)
- Center: Humpback whale, Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument | [NOAA](#)

Background: Pacific Rim National Park Reserve | [PARKS CANADA](#)