The SSMN’s federal acknowledgment effort commenced long before the creation of the federal acknowledgment process in 1978 and the filing of its federal acknowledgement petition in 1982. The SSMN’s effort to secure federal acknowledgement commenced in the late 19th Century when the Southern Sierra Miwuk people sought through petition and other means to obtain the federal protection and other benefits promised in treaties signed by its ancestors with eh united States in 1851. Indian gaming today, which is authorized and regulated by the Indian Gamin Regulatory Act of 1988, has never been an element motivating the SSMN federal acknowledgement effort, and the SSMN’s effort has never been supported by a gaming developer of gaming revenues. Rather, the SSMN’s major motivation behind the SSMN petition for federal acknowledgment is long-deferred and denied justice for its people, many of whom have passed away during a tribal effort that has spanned more than a century and continues under the Tribe’s federal acknowledgment petition, which has now been pending before the Department of the Interion for almost 38 years.

The goals that motivate the SSMN petition for federal acknowledgment, all of which speak to the underlying issue of fundamental justice for its people, are the following:

* Self-determination and Sovereignty – The U.S. Supreme Court has long recognized that tribes have inherent sovereign authority to govern their internal affairs. Federal Acknowledgement would recognize the SSMN as a domestic sovereign government, and provide authority for the SSMN to manage their internal affairs, the United States promised in the treaties of 1851. In addition, Federal Acknowledgment would confirm the special trust relationship between the SSMN and federal agencies, including the National Park Service (NPS).

The SSMN relationship with the NPS spans more than a century, encompassing the historic presence of Southern Sierra Miwuk villages in Yosemite National Park (including the recently reestablished Village of Wahhoga), consultations regarding cultural programs and the protection of SSMN cultural resources and traditional practices within the Park, and NPS employment of tribal members and consultation with the SSMN on many of the Park’s planning and management documents. Federal Acknowledgement would significantly enhance and facilitate this interaction by establishing a formal government-to-government relationship.

SSMN sovereignty and self-determination has immeasurable intrinsic value, and Federal Acknowledgement is the cornerstone of self-preservation and fulfillment of the dreams and efforts of our ancestors.

* Indian Child Welfare – While Mariposa County’s Child Welfare Agency works within the intent of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), the tribe has no guarantee that will always be the case. Federal Acknowledgement would ensure that occurs. “Indian child” is defined in ICWA to mean “any unmarried person who is under the age of eighteen and is either (a) a member of an Indian tribe or (b) is eligible for membership in an Indian tribe and is the biological child of a member of an Indian tribe.” To protect our children and our tribal families, the child needs to be a member of a federally recognized Indian tribe or eligible for membership in a federally recognized Indian tribe.
* Revenue Sharing Trust Fund (RSTF) – As a non-gaming, Federally Acknowledged tribe, the SSMN would be eligible to receive quarterly distributions from the RSTF created by the California gaming compacts. The annual distribution to each non-gaming tribe from the RSTF is $1,100,000. This would represent significant revenue to sustain the administration for the SSMN government.
* BIA Operation of Indian Programs – Federal Acknowledgment would make the SSMN eligible for a wide array of BIA programs, intended to assist tribes in administering vital government services including the following: Tribal Government Programs (e.g. social services, welfare assistance, ICWA program funding), Community and Economic Development Programs, Natural Resource Management Programs, Public Safety and Justice Programs.
* Health Services – Most SSMN members are HIS eligible beneficiaries as California Indians, as defined in the Indian Health Care Improvement Act, and the SSMN has served on the Board of the Mariposa, Amador, Calaveras, and Tuolumne (MACT) Indian Health Board, which delivers Indian Health Service (HIS) ), since 1974. However, Federal Acknowledgement would allow SSMN to serve on the governing board of MACT and to contract directly with the HIS under the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (ISDEAA) to carry out programs that MACT may not currently provide.
* Additional Federal Indian Programs – As a Federally Acknowledged tribe, the SSMN would be eligible for the Community Development Block Grants, Administration of Native American Programs, Head Start Programs, Child Care and Development Block Grants.
* Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (ISDEAA) – With Federal Acknowledgement, the SSMN would be eligible to enter into contacts and agreements to manage federal Indian programs directly and to tailor those programs to meet the unique needs of the SSMN.
* Staffing – The SSMN has not money to pay for staff. All monies collected through its non-profit entity, the American Indian Council of Mariposa County, are dedicated to pursuit of Federal Acknowledgement, protection of cultural resources, efforts to preserve the Southern Sierra Miwuk language, continuation of tribal traditional ceremonies and practices, and provision of limited employment and other benefits to the tribal community. Most of the tribal effort is unpaid, volunteer work by tribal members and, to a significant extent, pro bono work by its attorneys. Funding such as the RSTF would create capacity for the SSMN to pursue grants and other funding streams available to Federally Acknowledged tribes.
* Environmental Protection and Infrastructure development – Federally Acknowledged Indian tribes are eligible to receive funding and assistance under the EPA Indian General Assistance Program. Additionally, USDA grants and loans are available to Federally Acknowledged tribes to provide for installation of water and sewer deliver and processing capabilities. SSMN would also be eligible to Department of Transportation programs such as the Tribal Transportation Program and the Tribal Transit Program.
* Education- Federal Acknowledgment would provide SSMN young people who choose to pursue a college degree with eligibility for BIA higher education programs.
* Protection of Cultural Sites, Traditional Gathering and Other Interest in Federal Lands – The SSMN are working hard to protect cultural and archeological sites, but all of this work is conducted by volunteers as the tribe receives no reimbursement. Federal Acknowledgement would provide them significant procedural rights under the national Historic Preservation Act and make them eligible for t a Tribal Heritage grant and provide funding for a Tribal Historic Preservation Officer. Federal Acknowledgement would also provide the SSMN with the protections and rights under the Native American Graves Repatriation Act regarding the inadvertent discovery or planned excavation of Native American cultural resources on federal or tribal lands.
* Land Acquisition and Development - Federal Acknowledgement provides opportunities for the SSMN to develop existing trust allotments or acquire new trust land under the Indian Reorganization Act to provide benefits for tribal members including increased housing, social and community services, health care and educational facilities.
* Housing – If Federally Acknowledged, the SSMN, would be eligible for grants under the Native American Housing and Self- Determination Act for decent, affordable housing.
* Economic Opportunity – If Federally Acknowledged the SSMN would be eligible for BIA guaranteed loans, Small Business Administration’s Native American business programs, etc. Additionally, members of the SSMN would be eligible for Indian Preference under the procurement and employment provisions of the ISDEAA.
* For more information regarding the SSMN’s history, its activities, its petition for federal acknowledgment, and those person and entities who support its petition, please visit the SSMN website at: <https://www.SouthernSierraMiwukNation.org/>