



Mundo Esperanza / World Hope
544 W Main St. #106
Madison, WI 53703
Phone: 608-658-6588
WhatsApp: +1 (608) 658-6588
vicvillacrez@gmail.com

The Wisdom of Water

From the Andes to the Great Lakes

Water Connecting Cultures Across the Americas

EarthFest 2026 Symposium

Date: Saturday, April 18, 2026

Time: 8:30 AM-2:00 PM (Lunch Provided)

Location: Wisconsin Energy Institute
University of Wisconsin-Madison
1552 University Ave, Madison WI

Admission: Free and open to the public

Hosted by:

Center for Culture, History, and the Environment (CHE)-Nelson Institute
Mundo Esperanza -World Hope

About the Event

The Wisdom of Water: From the Andes to the Great Lakes is part of **EarthFest 2026**, a series of events hosted by the Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison that brings together scholars, practitioners, and communities to explore environmental challenges and solutions.

Across the Americas, cultures developed deep knowledge of water because survival depended on it. From the mountain canals of the Andes to the lakes of Wisconsin, water shaped where people lived, how they farmed, how they traveled, and how communities worked together. Today, as climate change and water scarcity challenge societies around the world, that knowledge offers important lessons for the future.

This symposium explores how cultures across the Western Hemisphere have understood, managed, and honored water as both a practical necessity and a sacred presence. The event brings together scholars, Indigenous leaders, and practitioners to examine how water has shaped civilizations and how these traditions can inform modern approaches to environmental stewardship.

The program is a collaboration between the Nelson Institute's Center for Culture, History, and the Environment (CHE) and Mundo Esperanza, highlighting Indigenous knowledge and cross-cultural perspectives on water stewardship from the Andes to the Great Lakes.

About the Speakers

The symposium features speakers whose work explores the relationship between water, culture, and environmental stewardship across the Americas.

Victor Villacrez-Mundo Esperanza

Victor Villacrez will present the work of Mundo Esperanza in the highland Andean community of Tomacaya, Peru. In partnership with local residents, the project is strengthening water access from an artisanal mountain source while respecting community traditions and local knowledge. The Tomacaya water project illustrates how water can bring diverse communities together in a shared effort to support sustainability and human dignity.

José De Piérola-Andean Water Engineering

José De Piérola examines the hydraulic wisdom of Inca and pre-Inca civilizations. His work highlights the sophisticated engineering traditions that allowed Andean societies to move and manage water across mountainous landscapes long before modern technology. These systems demonstrate that successful water stewardship has always required knowledge, cooperation, and respect for natural systems.

Jon Greendeer, President of the Ho-Chunk Nation

Jon Greendeer is President of the Ho-Chunk Nation, currently serving his second term. A lifelong advocate for his people, he has dedicated his leadership to strengthening cultural identity, community well-being, and the Nation's sovereignty.

His work reflects a deep commitment to heritage preservation and to restoring balance through culturally grounded approaches to health, land stewardship, and traditional food systems. Guided by Ho-Chunk values, President Greendeer honors the understanding that water, land, and all living things are sacred relatives—interconnected and deserving of respect.

Through his leadership, he continues to uplift the voice of the Ho-Chunk people while fostering a renewed relationship between community, culture, and the natural world.

Dr. Eduardo Santana-Castellón-University of Guadalajara

Dr. Eduardo Santana-Castellón, Emeritus Professor and Director of the Environmental Sciences Museum at the University of Guadalajara, studies watershed governance and ecological stewardship in western Mexico. His work explores how watershed science, environmental law, and Indigenous territorial knowledge intersect in the management of rivers and lakes. Drawing on the traditions of the **Wixárika people**, he highlights how springs, rivers, lakes, and pilgrimage routes form a sacred ecological network linking communities, ecosystems, and cultural responsibility. His research demonstrates that effective water stewardship must integrate scientific understanding with Indigenous knowledge and meaningful community participation.

Dr. Sissel Schroeder- Director of the James B. Stoltman Laboratory of Wisconsin Archaeology, UW-Madison.

Professor Schroeder is the Bradshaw Knight Professor of Environmental Humanities and Professor of Anthropology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where she also directs the Wisconsin Archaeological Laboratory. A nationally recognized archaeologist and elected Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, her research explores the long-term relationships between Indigenous communities and their environments.

Her current work on the Wisconsin Dugout Canoe Survey reveals how ancient watercraft technologies shaped mobility, trade, and cultural life across the region's lakes and rivers. Through a deep-time perspective, Dr. Schroeder brings forward the enduring significance of water landscapes in shaping human history and resilience.

Symposium Schedule

8:30-9:00 AM

Arrival, Coffee, and Registration

9:00-9:05 AM

Opening Welcome & Land Acknowledgment.
Host: Ed Freer

Land Acknowledgment
Teejop / Ho-Chunk Homeland

9:10-10:00 AM

Victor Villacrez-Mundo Esperanza

From Ancient Canals to Living Water

The Tomacaya water project and water as a force for connection across cultures.

José De Piérولا-Andean Water Engineering

Hydraulic Wisdom of the Inca and Pre-Inca Civilizations

10:00-10:45 AM

John Greendeer- Indigenous Voice on Water.

10:45-11:00 AM

Break

11:00-11:45 AM

Dr. Eduardo Santana-Castellón-University of Guadalajara

Science, Laws, and the Wixárika Cosmovision in the Management of River and Lake Resources in Western Mexico

11:45 AM-12:30 PM

Dr. Sissel Schroeder-UW-Madison Archaeology Lab

Navigating Wisconsin's Indigenous Dugout Canoe Landscapes

12:30-1:00 PM

Reflection Circle

Moderated discussion with speakers

Guiding Question:

What does Indigenous water wisdom teach the modern world?

1:00-2:00 PM

Community Lunch

Catered by **Mishqui Peruvian Bistro**

Supporting Partners and Sponsors

Mundo Esperanza-World Hope
Latin American, Caribbean, and Iberian Studies Program (LACIS)
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Contact Information

Victor Villacrez
Mundo Esperanza / World Hope

544 W Main St. #106
Madison, WI 53703

Phone: 608-658-6588
Email: vicvillacrez@gmail.com