

**POLITICS**

Pechanga Bans Kizh Leaders from Reservation as 'Undesirables,' but Kizh Nation Claims the Real Goal is Erasure

Disrespect our authority? You're now a 'safety risk.'



by Phil Hopkins · May 13, 2025 · 7 mins read



There's no Kizh Nation leadership at the Pechanga Resort & Casino pool. They've been added to the Tribal Exclusion File. Photo: Camarocruzin – Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0

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According to the [Cambridge Dictionary](#), the definition of “punch down” is “to attack or criticize someone who is in a worse or less powerful position than you.” Punching down then, according to the same dictionary, is “If you’re doing so much better than everyone else, why punch down?”

This concept isn’t new to observers of recent US foreign relations. However, when applied to federally acknowledged tribes punching down on less-advantaged California acknowledged tribes, it’s just not as well publicized.

A controversial [2014 article](#) titled “The Most Violent Era in American History Was Before Europeans Arrived” documented archaeological evidence indicating indigenous tribes of the Southwest were far less noble than the dominant scholarship was prepared to accept.

In pre-European North America, the strong frequently attacked the less strong until the less strong finally had enough. Sometimes, fighting back was to their advantage. Sometimes not.

In fact, indigenous people are...people. And many people are driven by a desire to exploit what economists call the [zero sum game](#). That’s where one group’s gain is theoretically balanced by another group’s loss.

That brings us to a proposed amendment to California’s [AB 52](#) and why the leadership of the local Gabrielino Band of Mission Indians – Kizh Nation are now considered “undesirable persons” by a casino resort-owning band of Indians from Temecula.

They’ve even been added to a “Tribal Exclusion File” referenced by the reservation’s police force just in case they show up.

What’s the what about AB 52

In brief, the amendment to AB 52 co-sponsored by California

[Assemblymember Cecilia Aguiar-Curry](#) (D-Winters) and the Pechanga Band of Luiseño Indians, Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria, and Habematolel Pomo of Upper Lake, would nullify parts of the 2014 law. The AB 52 amendment would, as currently written, put federally acknowledged tribes in operational charge of indigenous burial sites when they are not the “most likely descendants,” and requires only that state-acknowledged tribes with ancestral ties to the locations be “[consulted and their expertise on their culture and religion considered and respected.](#)”

In other words, the amendment eliminates bureaucracy so federally acknowledged tribes could be put in charge of a less powerful state tribe’s ancestors and burial artifacts.

The problem is, though, there may be a darker motivation involved. And the Kizh Nation claims it has seen it play out at an ancestral burial site in Corona.

“In Corona, the [federally acknowledged] Soboba tribe was monitoring a construction site under the auspices of the California Native American Heritage Commission,” says Kizh Nation chairman Andrew Salas. “Nothing was initially found.”

The Corona WRF-Station 3 project became a fiasco after human remains were subsequently discovered at the site. Initially, the Native American Heritage Commission properly designated *both* Soboba and the Kizh Nation as Most Likely Descendants (MLDs). However, not long after, the federally acknowledged Pechanga tribe intervened and sought to diminish the Kizh Nation’s role, refusing to work collaboratively to handle the Kizh ancestral remains.

[**Click here for the Kizh Nation statement regarding the Corona WRF-Station 3 Project**](#)



“We had to get the courts involved,” said Salas. “The court ordered us to move forward with the reburial. Pechanga said they wanted to push the remains and funeral artifacts into a trench. They would have liked nothing better than to erase any evidence of a Kizh site.”

It's approximately 65 miles, or over an hour of driving time during the best of conditions, between the Pechanga Reservation in Temecula and the Kizh Nation office in Covina. Map: Apple

Notice of Exclusion

“Please be advised that we are serving you with the attached documents.”

With no written explanation as to why, nine members of the Kizh Nation leadership received essentially identical messages dated April 30, 2025 that opened with, in capital letters, “YOU ARE HEREBY NOTIFIED THAT YOU ARE *PERMANENTLY* EXCLUDED FROM THE PECHANGA INDIAN RESERVATION BY EXECUTIVE ORDER OF THE PECHANGA TRIBAL COUNCIL.”

Following four paragraphs that begin “whereas” and dealing mainly with undisputed claims about the tribe’s “inherent, retained sovereignty,” the correspondence identifies the recipient of the letter as “an undesirable person who poses a viable safety risk to the tribal community and all reservation

properties.” In addition, the recipient apparently “poses a safety threat to public safety and constitutes a public nuisance.”

“Be it Further Resolved,” the notice continues, “the Tribal Council is denying [the recipient] the privilege of access to the Reservation and all properties under the authority of the Pechanga Band, including Pechanga Resort & Casino; Pechanga Gas Station / Mini-Mart; Pechanga RV Resort; Journey at Pechanga (golf course); Great Oak Marketplace; Temecula Creek Inn; Pechanga Resorts Incorporated, and all other Pechanga commercial properties regardless of their location.”

Then there’s some more text in capital letters, “VIOLATIONS OF THIS ORDER MAY BE PUNISHED BY A FINE OF UP TO FIVE THOUSAND DOLLARS (\$5,000).”

Left out of the messages is *why* the letters were sent. So we asked a representative from Pechanga’s Legal Department why the action was taken, how were these specific individuals identified and whether members of other tribes from the Los Angeles area were also classified as undesirable persons at the same time.

Jacob Mejia, the tribe’s Vice President of Public and External Affairs, forwarded this response from the Pechanga Tribal Council:

“The Tribe made the decision to exercise its sovereign right to exclude these individuals from our reservation lands. This action was not taken lightly, but was deemed necessary to protect the safety, well-being, and interests of our tribal citizens and community.

While we will not disclose specific details out of respect for all parties, representatives of the Kizh group have demonstrated aggressive and disrespectful behavior toward Pechanga employees and Tribal Members.

As a sovereign government, Pechanga is committed to ensuring a safe, respectful, and secure environment for our people, employees, residents, and guests.”

There was no response as to how the group of nine were identified. However, six of the nine names do appear on the Kizh Nation’s [Web site](#).

“Unbelievable,” said Kizh Nation Chairman Andrew Salas. “I don’t go to the Pechanga reservation at all, and I don’t think my 73 year-old sister went to Temecula and threatened to punch anybody.”

“These are tactics used to discredit us to keep our voices from being heard,” said Salas. “And it has everything to do with the Pechanga tribe and others trying to weaken AB 52 so they can gain footholds in Los Angeles County to open casinos here.”

h Nation Chairman Andrew Salas (L)
d tribal biologist Matthew Teutimez.
th have been banned from the
changa reservation. Photo: Phil Hopkins

“It’s all retaliatory and a massive overreach,” said the Kizh Nation’s legal counsel Kara Grant. “It’s unprofessional and has zero merit. It’s clearly an attack on the Kizh and these

[federally acknowledged] entities are absolutely coordinating with each other.”

“In addition,” said Grant, “the NAHC is acting like a sovereign entity. They may have commissioners who are members of sovereign entities, but they’re a California state agency and they are denying us our rights and due process. They have numerous conflicts of interest and must be held accountable.”

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