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News Release

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Sitka Tribe, Ranger District open Tlingit potato garden for community

SITKA, Alaska, March 22, 2017 – The Sitka Ranger District and Sitka Tribe of Alaska have joined forces to create an educational opportunity and traditional food source for community members. The Forest Service and the tribe will share how to grow Tlingit potatoes, as well as the biology, history, and cultural aspects of these interesting potatoes.

The Sitka Ranger District is providing a plot of land to serve as the shared potato garden. The Sitka Tribe's Traditional Foods Program and the gardening class from Pacific High School will be assisting on the project, but community involvement is also needed. Attendees are asked to bring boots, gardening gloves, and shovels. Five gallon buckets of kelp to incorporate into the soil would be beneficial as well.

Members of the community who help tend the shared garden may receive more than gratitude as their reward.

“We hope to share the harvest among those helping out and possibly share potatoes through the Sitka Tribe's Traditional Foods Program and Social Services,” said District Ranger Perry Edwards. “This project will teach people how to grow and sustain a traditional food, while supporting the growing need for food security among Sitka Families.”

K'únts' (sometimes called Maria's potatoes) have been present in Tlingit gardens for over 200 years. The potatoes originate from Mexico or Chile* and were a trade item in Southeast Alaska in the early 1800's.

The first work day and educational opportunity will be April 14 at the Sitka Ranger District office, located at 2108 Halibut Point Road, at 12:30 p.m. For more information, contact Michelle Putz at 907-747-2708 or mputz@fs.fed.us.

*Zhang, Linhai with Charles R. Brown, David Culley, Barbara Baker, Elizabeth Kunibe, Hazel Denney, Cassandra Smith, Neuee Ward, Tia Beavert, Julie Coburn, J. J. Pavek, Nora Dauenhauer and Richard Dauenhauer. Inferred origin of several Native American potatoes from the Pacific Northwest and Southeast Alaska using SSR markers. *Euphytica* 174:15-29

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