

STAFF REPORT UPDATE

**Illegal Removal of Human Remains by the Juaneño Band of
Mission Indians Acjachemen Nation 84A**

Although the matter of the illegal removal of human remains by a representative of the Juaneño Band of Mission Indians Acjachemen Nation 84A was resolved, it was requested that Native American Heritage Commission staff provide an update to the staff report and recommendation presented at the August 1, 2025, Commission meeting.

I. OVERVIEW

On May 29, 2025, NAHC staff received notification from the Orange County Coroner that Native American human remains, specifically a full mandible, partial cranium, partial long bone, and scapula fragments were unearthed at 104 S La Senda Drive, Laguna Beach, California. On June 2, 2025, NAHC staff designated the Juaneño Band of Mission Indians Acjachemen Nation – Belardes as the Most Likely Descendant of the remains. Before the designated MLD could begin consultation with the landowner a representative of the Juaneño Band of Mission Indians Acjachemen Nation 84A entered the property, represented that they were the MLD, and removed the human remains. Although NAHC staff advised the Juaneño Band of Mission Indians Acjachemen Nation 84A that because they were not the MLD, their behavior was illegal, and that they were to either return the human remains to the site of disturbance or turn them over to the named MLD, they failed to do so. After being warned that failure to comply with the directive to return the human remains would result in suspension from being named as an MLD pending a public hearing, the Juaneño Band of Mission Indians Acjachemen Nation 84A continued to ignore the NAHC’s instruction. Consequently, the Juaneño Band of Mission Indians Acjachemen Nation 84A was suspended from being named as an MLD pending the outcome of a public hearing.

II. STAFF RECOMMENDATION AND COMMISSION ACTION

In advance of the public hearing on August 1, 2025, NAHC staff provided Commissioners with a report and recommendation that the Juaneño Band of Mission Indians Acjachemen Nation 84A be given a week to return the human remains and if they fail to do so, be suspended from being named an MLD for a minimum of one year. During the public hearing Commission staff summarized the report and recommendation after which time Nathan Banda, Chairman of the Juaneño Band of Mission Indians Acjachemen Nation 84A, presented his rationale for removing the human remains and reiterated his opposition to the Commission’s MLD designation. Individual Commissioners then questioned both NAHC staff and Chairman Banda after which they voted to suspend the Juaneño Band of Mission Indians Acjachemen Nation 84A from being named an MLD

for five years if they failed to return the human remains to either the Coroner's Office or the properly designated MLD within a week from August 1, 2025.

III. RESOLUTION

On August 8, 2025, counsel to the Juaneño Band of Mission Indians Acjachemen Nation 84A informed the Commission via electronic mail that on August 6, 2025, the human remains were returned to the site and were in the possession of the MLD. As a result, the Juaneño Band of Mission Indians Acjachemen Nation 84A's suspension from being named an MLD was lifted and there have been no further incidents of this nature involving the Juaneño Band of Mission Indians Acjachemen Nation 84A.