



## **Statement Regarding Ute Prayer Trees**

Office of the State Archaeologist

15 December 2016

There has been a lot of activity recently in Colorado around identifying Culturally Modified Trees, or CMTs. Culturally Modified Trees are trees that have been intentionally modified by humans for a number of reasons. While there are categories of CMTs that are recognized as intentionally modified in Colorado, including peeled trees and arboglyphs, there is one category of CMT that has become increasingly popular as a subject of study and public lectures- the so-called Ute Prayer Tree, often identified as a tree with a bent limb and erroneously associated with Ute spiritual practices.

The concept of the Ute Prayer tree has been unequivocally denounced by designated cultural representatives from the three Ute tribes- Mr. Terry Knight, Tribal Historic Preservation Officer for the Ute Mountain Ute; Mr. Alden Narajno and Ms. Cassandra Narajno, Cultural Preservation Specialists and NAGPRA Representatives for the Southern Ute; and Ms. Betsy Champoos, the Ute Indian Tribe Cultural Rights and Protection Director for the Uintah and Ouray Ute. There are no oral histories of cultural practices that provide any evidence for “prayer trees” in the Ute traditions. There is also no scientific evidence to support the claims that these trees have important cultural associations. In fact, recent studies have indicated that some of these identified trees are only a handful of decades old.

The public should be wary of individuals claiming to be able identify these types of artifacts, especially if they charge a fee for their services or public lectures. Legitimately credentialed archaeologists who work in the State of Colorado will be able to produce a state permit for archaeological investigations from the Office of the State Archaeologist. The Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation also maintains a publicly available list of archaeologists and archaeological firms in the state that can be found here:

[http://www.historycolorado.org/sites/default/files/files/OAHP/crforms\\_edumat/pdfs/1502.pdf](http://www.historycolorado.org/sites/default/files/files/OAHP/crforms_edumat/pdfs/1502.pdf)