

**BOARD OF REGENTS  
BRIEFING PAPER**

1. **AGENDA ITEM TITLE:** UNR Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters to Carrie and Mary Dann

**MEETING DATE:** March 3-4, 2022

**2. BACKGROUND & POLICY CONTEXT OF ISSUE:**

The University of Nevada, Reno is pleased to nominate posthumously sisters, Mary and Carrie Dann for the Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters in proud recognition of their significant contributions to the the state of Nevada and the Western Shoshone Tribe.

Please see the Honorary Degree Form for more details.

**3. SPECIFIC ACTIONS BEING RECOMMENDED OR REQUESTED:**

Brian Sandoval, President of the University of Nevada, Reno requests approval to present posthumously to Carrie and Mary Dann with an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters.

**4. IMPETUS (WHY NOW?):**

After decades of advocacy for the Western Shoshone Tribe and other Nevada Tribes, Mary and Carrie Dann the University of Nevada, Reno would like to acknowledge their work and commitment.

**5. CHECK THE NSHE STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL THAT IS SUPPORTED BY THIS REQUEST:**

- Access (Increase participation in post-secondary education)
- Success (Increase student success)
- Close the Achievement Gap (Close the achievement gap among underserved student populations)
- Workforce (Collaboratively address the challenges of the workforce and industry education needs of Nevada)
- Research (Co-develop solutions to the critical issues facing 21<sup>st</sup> century Nevada and raise the overall research profile)
- Not Applicable to NSHE Strategic Plan Goals

**INDICATE HOW THE PROPOSAL SUPPORTS THE SPECIFIC STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL**

**6. BULLET POINTS TO SUPPORT REQUEST/RECOMMENDATION:**

Honorary degrees may be awarded to persons who have made significant contributions to the improvement of the quality of academic programs and academic life at the University of Nevada, Reno.

- Mary and Carrie Dann co-founded the Western Shoshone Defense Project, which chronicles the battle to preserve unceded Western Shoshone homelands to the U.S. Government. It is now housed within University of Nevada, Reno University Libraries Special Collections and University Archives department.
- The Defense Project is a collection of documents spanning decades that demonstrates the Project’s mission to affirm Western Shoshone jurisdiction over Western Shoshone ancestral homelands by protecting, preserving, and restoring Shoshone rights and lands for present and future generations.
- Carrie Dann also advocated for Native American Tribes in Southern Nevada. She also protested against mining companies contaminating sacred land and waters of the Western Shoshone.

**7. POTENTIAL ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE REQUEST/RECOMMENDATION:**

There may be other individuals who need to be honored at this time.

**8. ALTERNATIVE(S) TO WHAT IS BEING REQUESTED/RECOMMENDED:**

Consider this request at another time.

**9. RECOMMENDATION FROM THE CHANCELLOR'S OFFICE:**

**10. COMPLIANCE WITH BOARD POLICY:**

Consistent With Current Board Policy: Title # 4 Chapter # 1 Section # 15  
 Amends Current Board Policy: Title # \_\_\_\_\_ Chapter # \_\_\_\_\_ Section # \_\_\_\_\_  
 Amends Current Procedures & Guidelines Manual: Chapter # \_\_\_\_\_ Section # \_\_\_\_\_  
 Other: Procedures and Guidelines Manual: Chapter 8, Section 1.2  
Fiscal Impact: Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No x  
Explain:



## Honorary Degree

## Nomination Form

1. Degree to be Awarded:

Honorary Doctorate     Honorary Baccalaureate     Honorary Associate

2. Please state the name and address of your nominee for an Honorary Degree.

Carrie and Mary Dann  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. Honorary degrees shall be awarded to persons who have made significant contributions to the improvement of the quality of academic programs and academic life at one of the NSHE's institutions. Persons currently holding public elected office are not eligible for the degree except in extraordinary circumstances.

What are your reasons for nominating this person? (Attach additional pages, if necessary.)

Please see attachment  
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\_\_\_\_\_  
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\_\_\_\_\_  
President Brian Sandoval

January 31, 2022  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

University of Nevada, Reno  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Institution

(B/R 3/03; Added 6/05)

Mary and Carrie Dann were born in Nevada's Crescent Valley in Eureka County, Nevada to Dewey Dann and Sophia Hall Dann, members of the Shoshone Tribe. They grew up in Beowawe, Nevada on their father's ranch granted by the federal government. Deciding not to create a reservation, the federal government granted 160 acre lots for farming and cattle grazing to certain Shoshone men in Crescent Valley. It is this land that started Mary and Carrie's disputes with the federal government.

Mary and Carrie Dann were Western Shoshone leaders embroiled in a political and legal battle to retain their ancestral lands. "The Territory of the Western Shoshone Nation as defined in the Treaty of Ruby Valley, which was concluded with the US government in 1863, included two-thirds of the State of Nevada and small portions of California, Idaho and Utah."<sup>1</sup> This treaty granted the United States safe passage through Shoshone territory and allowed for mining on their land.

Mary and Carrie Dann's ranch was in Crescent Valley in the heart of Western Shoshone territory. In 1973, US Bureau of Land Management asked the sisters to apply for grazing permits and to pay grazing fees required under the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934. According to the Treaty of 1863 signed in Ruby Valley, Nevada, the sisters claimed the Shoshone Tribe legally owned the land. This treaty precluded the government from requiring them to obtain permits or pay grazing fees. According to the Dann sisters, their cattle were grazing on Western Shoshone territory.

Since the Dann sisters refused to obtain permits or pay grazing fees, in 1974, the Bureau of Land Management sued the sisters, claiming they were trespassing by letting their cattle graze on federal land without payment. When they still refused to pay, the Bureau of Land Management seized their cattle.

For the next three decades, the Dann sisters led the efforts to reclaim the land granted in the Treaty of Ruby Valley of 1863.

The fight continued when the tribe sued the government for failure to honor the treaty in a district court. They argued that "20 million acres named *Newe Sogobia*, meaning the People's Earth Mother in Shoshone, a third of about 60 million acres covering parts of Nevada, Idaho, Utah and California, were not legally alienated by the Treaty of 1863. They claimed under the treaty that the U.S. formally recognized the Western Shoshone Tribal rights, so they did not have to pay the grazing fees."<sup>2</sup> They lost that case, and the court ruled that they were not entitled to compensation for the seizure of their cattle.

In 1979, the same complaint was filed with the Indian Claims Commission. This time, the Commission awarded the Tribe \$26 million for the taking of Western Shoshone land. However,

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<sup>1</sup> *Mary and Carrie Dann of the Western Shoshone Nation*. Right Livelihood. (2021, August 10). Retrieved January 19, 2022, from <https://rightlivelihood.org/the-change-makers/find-a-laureate/mary-and-carrie-dann-of-the-western-shoshone-nation/>

<sup>2</sup> Cafferata, P. D. (2021, April 7). *Carrie Dann*. Nevada Women's History Project. Retrieved January 19, 2022, from <https://www.nevadawomen.org/research-center/biographies-alphabetical/carrie-dann/>

more than 80 percent of the Western Shoshone people voted against accepting the money.<sup>3</sup> Still, the federal government deposited the money in the Tribe's account. When the settlement money went unclaimed, the Department of Interior accepted it on their behalf. But because the money was never formally accepted, the Western Shoshone believed they demonstrated their desire to not sell or cede their land, and continued to request that the US observe the 1863 Treaty of Ruby Valley.

The dispute continued in 1985, but this time, at the U.S. Supreme Court. The highest court in the nation ruled the Western Shoshone lost title to the land after the government deposited \$26 million in the Tribe's account, regardless of the tribe not withdrawing the settlement money.

This ruling did not deter the Dann Sisters and Western Shoshone. Their case was argued in December 1991, by the US 9th Circuit Court. It ruled that the claims award, despite not being accepted by the Western Shoshone, had nevertheless relinquished the rights given by the Ruby Valley Treaty.

Later, while many members gave up the fight and accepted roughly \$22k each, the Dann sisters still refused to accept this settlement.

Finally, in 2003, the dispute ended with the Bureau of Land Management seized all the Dann's horses and cattle.

Carrie Dann also advocated for tribal residents affected by nuclear weapons testing and nuclear waste dumping in Southern Nevada, particularly around Yucca Mountain. She was one of dozens of activists arrested along with actor Martin Sheen during a 2011 anti-nuclear protest at the Nevada Test Site north of Las Vegas.<sup>4</sup>

Continuing to advocate for the preservation of Western Shoshone land, Carrie Dann joined other tribal leaders and environmentalists fighting a number of mining projects, including Barrick Gold Corp.'s Cortez Hills project, an expansion at one of the biggest gold mines in North America next to a mountain the tribe considered sacred. To reach the microscopic gold, the company needed to dig below the water table, which would disturb the waters that to Western Shoshone are important to maintaining the balance and power of life.

"Carrie Dann said Mount Tenabo was home to Western Shoshone creation stories and the water running beneath it is a sacrament important to maintaining the balance and power of life. 'This area is where the seasons of the year were named — in the time before people were here,'"<sup>5</sup> Carrie Dann said in 2011.

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<sup>3</sup> *Mary and Carrie Dann of the Western Shoshone Nation*. Right Livelihood. (2021, August 10).

<sup>4</sup> Associated Press. (2021, January 14). *Carrie Dann, Native American land rights activist, dies*. The Washington Post. Retrieved January 19, 2022, from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/obituaries/carrie-dann-native-american-land-rights-activist-dies/2021/01/14/0e19a5ba-5676-11eb-a08b-f1381ef3d207\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/obituaries/carrie-dann-native-american-land-rights-activist-dies/2021/01/14/0e19a5ba-5676-11eb-a08b-f1381ef3d207_story.html)

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

Despite their best efforts, the Cortez Hills mining project was granted permission to move forward.

The Dann sisters also co-founded the Western Shoshone Defense Project in 1991.

The records and documents generated over decades by the Western Shoshone Defense Project comprise of a “collection documents the sisters’ and other members of the Western Shoshone Nation’s resistance, and also records the Dann sisters’ decades long tenacious legal battle against the United States government’s control of Western Shoshone ancestral lands, a fight which took them all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court and the United Nations.”<sup>6</sup>

The collection now resides on the University of Nevada, Reno campus as part of the University Libraries Special Collections and University Archives department.

Mary Dann died in 2005, and Carrie Dann died in 2021.

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<sup>6</sup> Sunstrand, J., Monteith, R., & Stockton, J. (2021, February 9). *Two sisters' story unforgotten*. University of Nevada, Reno. Retrieved January 19, 2022, from <https://www.unr.edu/nevada-today/news/2021/libraries-western-shoshone-mining-exhibit>