**Headline:** Indigenous-Led Organization Opens New Salvo in Fight for Climate Justice

**Teaser:** NDN Collective, inspired by the Standing Rock Sioux movement, releases a report on Dakota Access Pipeline.

By Aric Sleeper

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**[Article Body:]**

Climate justice means something different to everyone but when it brings to mind images of shrinking glaciers, islands of floating garbage, or oil leaking into the soil from a cross-country pipeline, the associations being made are actually examples of climate injustices, according to climate justice campaign organizer for [NDN Collective](https://ndncollective.org/), [Kailea Frederick](https://ndncollective.org/people/kailea-frederick/).

“We often envision climate injustices first before we talk about climate justice,” says Frederick. “It’s because we see a lot of injustice in terms of what has created climate change and continues to exacerbate it, [along with those] in the front-line communities that are most impacted, who happen to be our people,” says Frederick.

The concept of [climate justice](https://climatejustice.ndncollective.org/?_ga=2.109098945.513830969.1654450048-1314747368.1654012889) conforms to the belief that global warming and climate change are social, economic and political issues as much as they are environmental or scientific dilemmas. For organizers like Frederick and her colleague, [Jade Begay](https://ndncollective.org/people/jade-begay/), climate justice campaign director for NDN Collective, climate justice is more than just an acknowledgment that climate change is man-made and rooted in socioeconomic issues, it stands for a better future where the economy thrives while ethical considerations are made for the environment and all people—rich and poor, white or BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color).

“Climate justice is part of the social movement or activism lexicon, which isn’t always the most accessible to regular everyday people,” says Begay. “The unfortunate part is that climate justice is centered around meeting the needs of everyday people. In practice, climate justice is really about health and safety, having clean jobs and dignified wages for everyone.”

Founded in 2018 by [Nick Tilsen](https://ndncollective.org/people/nick-tilsen/) of the Oglala Lakota Nation, NDN Collective is an Indigenous-led nonprofit organization focused on building the power of Indigenous people through organizing, activism, philanthropy and narrative change. Based in Rapid City, South Dakota, the collective’s formation was inspired by the efforts of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and many other Indigenous groups, and their struggle to stop the construction of the [Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dakota_Access_Pipeline_protests#:~:text), which began in 2016.

“Thousands of Indigenous people came together and self-organized a fairly low-impact town that was partially fueled on solar power and governed by Indigenous people,” says Begay. “People first came together to fight the pipeline [DAPL], but it wasn’t just about the pipeline, it was about systemic racism.”

While forming NDN Collective, Tilsen was also heavily influenced by his work with the [Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation](https://www.thundervalley.org/), which seeks to preserve the culture of the Oglala Lakota Nation in South Dakota through community and economic development.

“Tilsen was already leading this incredible model in his own community and saw the need at Standing Rock for the growth and expansion of [the work being done by] Thunder Valley,” says Begay. “That was when the idea of NDN Collective came to be.”

Before committing to creating the collective, Tilsen and others decided to seek the counsel of their ancestors in the spirit world. The message they received in their ceremony was a question, “How long are you going to let other people decide the future for your children? Are you not warriors?” The question spurred Tilsen and his colleagues to proceed with forming the collective.

Begay and Frederick were drawn to the organization through their similar paths. Begay, a descendant of the Diné people and a citizen of the Tesuque Pueblo of New Mexico, had worked with Indigenous organizations in the past. She began consulting for NDN Collective in 2018 and was soon hired as a creative director. Now, as the climate justice campaign director, she focuses on informational campaigns and impacting governmental policy, while also serving as a member of the [White House Environmental Justice Advisory Council](https://www.whitehouse.gov/ceq/news-updates/2021/03/29/white-house-announces-environmental-justice-advisory-council-members/).

“In my relatively short career and life, I’d never seen something so ambitious, and so exciting in terms of moving resources directly to Indigenous folks,” says Begay while referring to the work being done by NDN Collective.

Frederick, who came aboard NDN Collective’s climate justice team in 2021, identifies as a Black American and is a descendent of the Tahltan and Kaska nations. In addition to her work with NDN Collective, she is the editor of [Loam](https://loamlove.com/about) and serves as a member of the City of Petaluma Climate Action Commission in California.

“I met Jade some years ago, so when I heard NDN Collective was starting a climate justice team, I was excited,” says Frederick. “It felt like a good fit to have the opportunity to work on a team that was focused on advocacy and capacity building for Indigenous communities in a climate-changed world.”

In March 2022, NDN Collective’s climate justice team released the report, “[Faulty Infrastructure and the Impacts of the Dakota Access Pipeline](https://climatejustice.ndncollective.org/dapl-report/?_ga=2.70293332.513830969.1654450048-1314747368.1654012889),” which provides an analysis about the safety issues associated with the pipeline and chronicles the lack of due diligence that occurred throughout the planning and construction process. Begay and Frederick worked with contractors and engineers to compose the report, which includes a demand that the Biden administration drain and shut down the pipeline permanently.

“The report is the first to lay out a full and factual timeline of the DAPL process, and by laying out the entirety of the process, it became clear that there was a co-conspiracy happening between the Army Corps of Engineers [that granted permission for the construction of the pipeline] and the owners of DAPL,” says Frederick.

Even with the report published, and a full environmental review by the Army Corps of Engineers ongoing, oil continues to be [transported](https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/illinois-court-vacates-approval-dakota-access-pipeline-capacity-expansion-2022-01-12/) through the pipeline. Despite the U.S. government’s refusal to shut the pipeline down, the work of NDN Collective’s climate justice team, who wrote the report, has created a precedent and structure for those who want to fight against the development of projects similar to DAPL down the road.

“We’re now stuck in the regulatory space,” says Begay. “But we can share the knowledge we’ve gained over this process with our partners and community members so that if we have to fight another pipeline, we’ll be that much better at shutting it down.”

Moving forward, NDN Collective’s climate justice team is focused on influencing policymaking at the state and federal levels and building climate-resilient communities through traditional ecological knowledge like executing safe [prescribed burns](https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/prescribed-fire) and building low-impact [adobe architecture](https://www.archdaily.com/937851/using-adobe-in-architecture-techniques-and-application).

“We are giving Indigenous people the knowledge, skills and tools that will help us prepare better for the shifts we will soon start experiencing in our ecosystem,” says Begay.