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Alma Beck has spent 23 years building expertise in estate planning, trust and probate law, but her recent focus on Land Back issues represents a groundbreaking intersection of traditional estate practice with Indigenous sovereignty movements.

Beck, certified as a specialist in estate planning, trust and probate law by the California State Bar Board of Legal Specialization, now advises stakeholders on Land Back issues for titleholders, tribes and indigenous tribal nonprofit organizations. She also presents on these topics to professional advisors and non-Indigenous titleholders.

The Land Back movement, which Beck describes as “an Indigenous-led movement that strengthens Indigenous sovereignty and Tribal communities by returning land to Indigenous Tribes,” has gained momentum across multiple states. Land transfer efforts are already playing out in California, Minnesota, Oklahoma, Alaska and Maine.

“Over the last several years, I have worked to incorporate the critical but often overlooked aspect of Land Back into my estate planning practice, often in the context of charitable planning to tribal nonprofit organizations,” Beck said.

In one case, Beck worked with a client and their financial advisor to determine what assets the client's children would need, then identified what portion could be designated for testamentary Land Back transfers. Another client required assistance determining the appropriate Tribal nonprofit recipient for land return and calculating additional funds to include with the property gift.

Beck encounters particularly complex situations when multiple tribal groups have potential claims to the same land. In one case involving several different Tribal groups -- including both federally recognized and nonrecognized tribes, some with established nonprofit organizations and others without -- Beck crafted language allowing a successor trustee to choose appropriate recipients based on ancestral connections to the land and track records in cultural preservation and ecological restoration.

“One of the most significant challenges in Land Back transactions in general, not necessarily to these two matters, is identifying the right questions to ask and structuring the transfer effectively,” Beck said.

The legal landscape presents ongoing challenges. As Beck notes, Land Back “remains a developing area of law with few published cases for guidance,” requiring navigation of evolving legal terrain for both federally recognized and non-federally recognized tribal groups.

Beck proactively educates clients about Land Back opportunities, recognizing that many non-Indigenous titleholders may not initially consider such transfers. “I proactively educate individuals, especially non-Indigenous titleholders, about their connections to land, helping them explore how to contribute to Indigenous land restoration efforts,” she said.

Her work extends beyond individual client representation. Beck is building capacity within the legal community to handle Land Back disputes, working to establish networks of culturally competent mediators for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous practitioners.

The broader estate planning field is experiencing significant shifts, according to Beck. Digital legacy management, changing family structures and cultural shifts in legacy planning are reshaping practice demands. More clients are naming friends or professional fiduciaries rather than family members as executors and trustees.

“Legacy is no longer defined solely by financial assets,” Beck said. “Clients are increasingly interested in passing down values, stories and social impact.”

Beck's integration of Land Back principles into estate planning represents a response to evolving client values and growing awareness of Indigenous land rights. Her work demonstrates how traditional legal practice can adapt to address contemporary social justice movements while maintaining legal and tax compliance requirements.