

Historical and Cultural Overview of the Flathead Reservation

Location

The Flathead Indian Reservation is located in northwestern Montana on the western slope of the Continental Divide. The exterior boundaries of the reservation include portions of four counties – Flathead, Lake, Missoula, and Sanders. The Flathead Reservation land base consists of approximately 1,243,000 acres. The eastern border of the reservation is at the top of the Mission Range of the Rocky Mountains. Flathead Lake and the Cabinet Mountain Range are to the north; the Lower Flathead River runs through the heart of the reservation; and to the west are the Salish Mountains and rolling prairie lands.

Population

The three tribes of the Flathead Indian Reservation are the Salish, Pend d'Oreille, and Kootenai. *Seliš* is the proper name for the Salish, who refer to themselves as *Sqélix*^w – the People. The Salish have often been referred to as “Flatheads,” but this name is a misnomer and, in actuality, there are no Flatheads. *Ql'ispé* is the proper name for the Pend d'Oreille. The aboriginal name of the Kootenai Tribe is *Kutanaxa*, a name that means “licks the blood” in reference to a traditional hunting custom. The term *Ktunaxa* describes the Kootenai political sovereignty as a nation and all citizens who identify themselves as Kootenai. “*Ksanka*” refers to the name of the *Ktunaxa* band of the Flathead Reservation. *Kasanka* translates, “Standing Arrow,” which is a traditional warring technique. The tribes today are known by the contemporary title of The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. For the purposes of this document and for reader understanding, I will use the terms Salish, Pend d'Oreille, and Kootenai.

After the reservation period, when lands were allotted and then subsequently opened to homesteading in 1910, many non-Indians moved to the reservation. The influx of homesteaders and the continuing movement of non-Indians onto the reservation have resulted in the Confederated Salish and Kootenai People being the minority population on their own reservation. Presently there are many Indian people from other tribes that live on the Flathead Reservation. Many are attending Salish Kootenai College or Kicking Horse Job Corps. Some have intermarried with tribal members and live among the community with their families. Both Salish Kootenai College and local K-12 public schools have identified over 40 different tribal nations represented within the student populations.

There are 6,961 enrolled members of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. Of this population, 4,244 live on the reservation.

Land

The Hellgate Treaty of 1855 created the Flathead Reservation. The treaty defined the boundaries of the reservation. A formal survey by the government actually diminished the reservation both on the northern and southern ends. The lands that remained as reserved by the treaty are approximately 1,243,000 acres. This land base was soon to

change, however, with the passing of the Allotment Act (Dawes Act) of 1887, and the subsequent Homestead Act that opened the reservation to non-Indians in 1910. This resulted in the tribes becoming the minority landowners on their own reservation.

While much of the prime agricultural land remains in non-Indian hands, the tribes have been aggressively buying back land. At this time they have become the majority landowners at roughly 56%. Following is a breakdown of the current status of reservation lands:

Reservation lands are comprised of 451,000 acres of forested land, agricultural lands, prairie habitats, and numerous watersheds, pristine mountain lakes, and the lower half of Flathead Lake, which is the largest freshwater lake west of the Mississippi River. Three hundred twenty-two thousand acres of forested lands are considered commercial forest. This forestland is managed as a whole to include reforestation, fire management, insect and disease control, timber, and economic opportunities for the tribes. A variety of trails in the Mission Mountains are maintained annually by the Wildland Recreation Division of the tribe's Natural Resource Department. Hiking and recreation on reservation lands by non-members requires a tribal recreation permit.

The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes were the first tribal nation to designate a wilderness area. Much of the Mission Range falls under this category, and no development is allowed in this area. Both the northern and southern areas of the reservation have lands that are designated as "primitive." The Jocko and Lozeau Primitive Areas are available only to tribal member use, and that use is restricted to certain activities. It is the intent of the tribes that tribal members have access to pristine lands for gathering plants, ceremonial use, and solitude.

The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes believe in their role as stewards of the land and its resources as articulated in following statement from the Salish Culture Committee:

The earth is our historian; it is made of our ancestor's bones. It provides us with nourishment, medicine, and comfort. It is our source of our independence; it is our Mother. We do not dominate Her, but harmonize with Her.

Historical Background

Salish and Pend d'Oreille

Pre-reservation history provided by the Salish & Pend d'Oreille Culture Committee

The Salish and Pend d'Oreille tell of having lived in what is now Montana from the time when Coyote killed off the Nə́tsiqé́lix^w – the giants. The tribes' oral histories tell that the Salish and Pend d'Oreille were placed here in their aboriginal homelands. Their beginning and history in this place is a story of genesis, not of migration. This beginning was told by the late Clarence Woodcock:

Our story begins when the Creator put the animal people on this earth. He sent Coyote ahead as this world was full of evils and not yet fit for mankind. Coyote

came with his brother Fox, to this big island, as the elders call this land, to free it of these evils. They were responsible for creating many geographical formations and providing good and special skills and knowledge for man to use. Coyote, however left many faults such as greed, jealousy, hunger, envy and many other imperfections that we know of today.

Many of the Coyote stories contain what may be considered fairly precise descriptions of the geologic events of the last ice age. Anthropologists and other non-Indians have long been skeptical of this, thinking that there was little evidence that Salish and Pend d'Oreille people had been here that long ago. But recently, archaeologists have found sites in the South Fork of the Flathead River dating back 12,000 to 14,000 years, about the time of the end of the last ice age.

From the beginning of time, the Salish and Pend d'Oreille people made their living off the land through a complex pattern of seasonal hunting and gathering activities. The land provided all that the people needed. Elders say that life was hard, but good. Spring would yield a plentiful bitterroot harvest, followed by sweet camas bulbs in June.

The bloom of the wild rose signaled the people that the buffalo calves had been born and that it was time for the summer buffalo hunt. Throughout the rest of the summer, berries and fruits, including serviceberries, huckleberries, and chokecherries would be gathered, dried and stored. The Salish and Pend d'Oreille regularly gathered hundreds of different plants for food and medicinal uses.

In the fall, hunting began in earnest. Men hunted for large game, which the women butchered, dried and stored for winter. As the hunters brought home elk, deer, and moose, the women tanned hides for clothes, moccasins and other items such as a parfleche. A parfleche is a rawhide container used for storing a variety of things like dried foods and clothing. Fishing was also important throughout the year. Both fish hooks and fish weirs were used to catch fish. Elders tell of days when the fish were so plentiful that you could almost cross the creeks walking on their backs.

The winter season involved trapping, ice fishing, and some hunting. Cold weather brought families inside and women made and repaired clothing while the men made and repaired tools and weapons. Coyote stories were brought out with the first snow. This was a sacred and happy time when ceremonial dances would be held.

The Ksanka Band of Ktunaxa

Historic information provided by the Kootenai Culture Committee

Ktunaxa history describes the evolution of The People from the time when the first sun rose in the sky and human beings were equal to the animals. From the beginning of time the Sun and the Moon were brothers and they produced the powerful life force for all earthly creations. The Sun and Moon transformed all beings who chose to live on this earth into physical forms and assigned them with a domain and complementary tools. The concept of interdependence that maintains the delicate balance of the natural world is intrinsic to Ktunaxa culture.

The aboriginal territory of the Ktunaxa Nation encompasses three major ecosystems: the Columbia River Basin, the Rocky Mountain Region, and the Northern Plains. Although an official census was never taken, ethnographic studies estimate an historical population in excess of 10,000 Kootenai people.

With a massive homeland to protect and keen environmental skills, the Ktunaxa chose to live in distinct bands to maintain their unique life cycles. The seven bands of the Ktunaxa Nation are distinguished by the location they inhabited throughout the winter months. The Ksanka or the Fish Trap People reside in the Dayton, Elmo, Big Arm, and Nairada communities of Montana. The Wood Land People of St. Mary's Band are in Cranbrook, British Columbia. The Two Lakes People of the Columbia Lake Band are at Windmere BC. The People of the Place Where the Rock is Standing (the Lower Kootenai) reside in Creston BC. The Meadow People live in Bonners Ferry, Idaho and the Tobacco Plains Band live in Grasmere, BC. The Not Shirt People (Upper Kootenai or Shushwap) live in Invermere, BC.

Prior to reservation settlement, the Ktunaxa lived a bi-cultural life style, possessing cultural traits of both the Northern Plateau and Northern Plains tribal groups. Ktunaxa subsistence was based on seasonal migrations that followed plant and animal production cycles, and coincidentally served to prevent an environmental degradation of aboriginal lands. Food preservation was an integral part of the Ktunaxa life cycle. Seasonal migrations for hunting and harvesting began in the early spring when bitterroots ripened and fisheries were bountiful. In early summer, they traveled east of the Rockies to hunt buffalo, returning in mid-summer to process and store the meat. In summer, camas, huckleberries, serviceberries, chokecherries, and other plants were harvested. By fall, big game expeditions were organized and some of the hunters returned to the plains for more buffalo. The people preserved and processed food for the winter cache.

The Ktunaxa life cycle also depended on a commerce sector, which involved agriculture and aquaculture. A unique species of tobacco was cultivated by the Ktunaxa for personal use and trade with other tribes. They specialized in water, fisheries, bird hunting, trapping, and other aqua cultural activities that were ongoing in Kootenai society.

The Confederation of the Salish, Pend d'Oreille, and Kootenai Tribes

The westward movement of traders, homesteaders, and settlers, advanced the reservation period. In 1855, Isaac Stevens, Territorial Governor of Washington Territory, met with leaders of the Salish, Pend d'Oreille, and Kootenai Tribes at Council Groves near present day Missoula, Montana. Tribal leaders were under the assumption discussions would be centered on their problems with their encroaching enemies, the Blackfeet. The resulting discussion however ended with tribal leaders reluctantly signing the Hellgate Treaty, ceding over 22 million acres to the United States Government. The prominent Salish leader at this time was Plenty Horses, or Victor. The treaty provided for a survey to be done of the Bitterroot Valley for Victor and his people in Article XI. The survey was never done, however, and in 1871 President Grant sent Representative James Garfield to negotiate for the removal of the Salish to the Jocko Reservation (present day Flathead

Reservation). Victor had died during a summer buffalo hunt, and his son, Charlo – Small Grizzly Bear Claws – was chief. Charlo refused to sign the removal document, but when it was subsequently published, it showed his mark. Charlo asserted that this was a forgery and refused to move. He remained in his beloved homeland until 1891, when he and his remnant band of Salish were forcibly removed by military escort to the Jocko Reservation.

From the inception of the reservation system, Indian people lost control over their own destiny. The administrators and policies of the Bureau of Indian Affairs controlled governance decisions for the tribes. The Indian Reorganization Act began the slow transition back to tribal control over tribal affairs. Incorporation under this act allowed the tribes to again determine their own path. This journey was to be challenging, as evidenced in the government's movement to terminate tribes during the 1950s.

Termination policy was initiated with various tribes, beginning with the Menomonee of Wisconsin. Their final termination took place in 1961. Though the Salish, Pend d'Oreille, and Kootenai were targeted, they were not terminated. Termination policy ended during the administration of President Richard M. Nixon. Since then a number of tribes have successfully sought reinstatement.

The Indian Self-Determination Act of 1976 bolstered the tribes' capacity to manage their own affairs. Tribes were given authority to manage federal programs that had historically been under the direction and control of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Initially the tribes contracted programs, but a more recent amendment to the Self-Determination Act allows the tribes to negotiate compacts with Federal agencies on a government-to-government basis. Since 1994, the tribes have shifted from contracting federal programs to compacting them.

Today the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes are still faced with many challenges. However, the historic and contemporary commitment to tribal sovereignty provides hope and confidence in a sound future. The vision and mission of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, the Sovereign People of the Flathead Reservation, are articulated in a formal statement adopted by the Tribal Council in May of 1996:

***Vision** - The traditional principles and values that served our people in the past are imbedded in the many ways that we serve and invest in our people and communities, in the ways we have regained and restored our homelands and natural resources, in the ways we have built a self-sufficient society and economy, in the ways that we govern our Reservation and represent ourselves to the rest of the world and in the ways we continue to preserve our right to determine our own destiny.*

***Mission**-Our mission is to adopt traditional principles and values into all facets of tribal operations and service. We will invest in our people in a manner that ensures our ability to become a completely self-sufficient society and economy. We will strive to regain ownership and control of all lands within our reservation boundaries. And we will provide sound environmental stewardship to preserve, perpetuate, protect, and enhance natural resources and ecosystems.*

Government

In 1926, a survey was authorized by the Secretary of the Interior, Hubert Work, to assess the economic status of Indians. This survey came to be known as the Meriam Report. Findings of the survey “Shocked the administration since it called for radical revisions in almost every phase of Indian affairs” (Deloria and Lytle, *American Indians*, American Justice, p12). Response and reform to the Meriam findings came under the Interior Department administration of John Collier. Under Collier’s administration, the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA), or Wheeler Howard Act, was passed in 1934. This legislation provided for the cessation of allotments and the opportunity for tribes to regain unallotted lands. The IRA also enabled tribes to reorganize their governmental structures and adopt a Tribal Constitution and Bylaws. It was under this provision that the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes adopted their Constitution and Bylaws that were ratified by the United States in 1953.

Article III of the Constitution and bylaws of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes established the Tribal Council as the formal governing body along with Chiefs Martin Charlo and Eneas Paul Koostahtah.

Initially, Tribal Council meetings were held quarterly. Presently, meetings are held every Tuesday and Thursday at the Tribal Complex in Pablo, Montana. Quarterly meetings are still held with these meeting days designated for the community to attend and address issues of concern. All council meetings are open to the public unless the council is meeting in executive session. Visits can be formally arranged by calling the Tribal Administrative Office at (406) 675-2700. Tribal Council members will visit classrooms upon request and as their schedules allow.

The Tribal Council is more than just a policy-making body. Unlike most legislative bodies, they are expected to deal with everything from fiscal management to assisting individuals in personal crises. While the welfare of tribal members is the single-most influencing factor of Tribal Council decisions, other interests weigh heavily on the future of the tribes. At the forefront of tribal interests are future generations, preservation of tribal resources, tribal rights, environmental protection, fiscal management, legal issues, and community support. The Tribal Council depends on expert staff for accurate information to guide decisions on important issues.

Contemporary Issues

- Native Language Restoration and Preservation
- Stewardship of Natural Resources
- Tribal Sovereignty
- Repatriation and Cultural Resource Protection
- Relationships with County and State Government
- Responsible Economic Development
- Improving the Education of Indian Children