

Cow Creek Umpqua Tribe Modern History

The modern history of the Tribe is marked by persistence, survivance, and success. This brief provides an overview of the Tribe from termination of federal recognition in 1954 to the return of promised lands in 2018.

Termination

The United States Congress passed the *Western Oregon Termination Act* on August 23, 1954. This Act terminated federally recognized status for the Tribe and stated that the US government will withdraw from services and support to Tribes in Western Oregon in a span of no more than two years.

Despite lack of federal recognition, Cow Creek Tribal members continued to be active in improving the social conditions for fellow Tribal members. In the



Cow Creek Umpqua Tribal Government Office

1970's, Tribal members met with members of the Confederated Tribes of the Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians and focused efforts on such important issues as education, job training, and land claims. The Tribe formed a working relationship with the South Umpqua Historical Society, as well as acting as the liaison for several reburials of aboriginal ancestors' remains within the Umpqua Valley. The Tribe also played an active role in several cultural resource programs through the Umpqua National Forest and Bureau of Land Management, Roseburg Division. Land Claims



Cow Creek Umpqua Tribe Seal

In 1979, Cow Creeks worked with members of Congress to introduce a bill that would allow the Tribe to sue the United States Government over land compensation and acquisition in the 1850's. On May 26, 1980, the bill, P.L. 96-251, passed and was signed into law by President Jimmy Carter. The Tribe soon filed a court of claims case regarding the value of ancestral lands. While this case was ongoing, the Tribe again worked with the United States Congress on a bill to restore the Tribe's *federal recognition* as a sovereign nation. On December 29, 1982, the Tribe's standing

with the federal government was once again restored and was signed into law by President Ronald Reagan. In February 1984, the Tribe finally won the court of claims case and the *land claims settlement* consisted of \$1.25 per acre, or approximately \$1.5 million “reimbursement” for the lands sold to the US Government in the Treaty.



President Reagan 1981-1989)

The events of the early 1980’s were a time of great excitement for the Tribe, especially around 1983, right after federal recognition. A Eugene Register-Guard article attested to that fact by featuring several comments by Tribal members and

leaders at the time.

“After making sure individual Indians have services they are entitled to, we will move into developing the Tribe economically,” noted Tribal manager Dr. Kathryn Staiano. The Tribal Chairman at the time, Charles Jackson, commented, “It lifts a burden off you. Only a person who is terminated can understand the feeling. You’re like a person not wanted by your government.”



Eugene Register-Guard Article

Despite this victory, however, the Tribe continued to face legal difficulties. According to claims litigation at the time, the Tribe could not secure either any interest or land from the sum awarded.

The Tribe attempted to secure an endowment with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, but the BIA instead insisted upon a per capita distribution. Despite the fact that this path was against the mission of the land claims settlement, the BIA insisted on this course of action. In order to ensure fair compensation, Tribal leaders introduced another bill, P.L. 100-139, the *Indians Distribution of Judgment Funds Act* of 1987, that would allow the Tribe to establish an endowment and draw interest from the \$1.5 million to use for economic development, education, housing, and elderly assistance. The bill was passed on October 26, 1987, by Congress. The lands had previously been taken into trust by the Department of the Interior on September 15, 1986. Land was



U.S. Capitol Building

purchased with this settlement amount, including the site of what was in 1987 the Evergreen Hotel in Canyonville.

Tribal Businesses

In 1991, the Tribe secured an \$825,000 federal loan through the BIA's Direct Loan Program for financing a small bingo hall. The bingo hall was built on the Evergreen Hotel site. The Tribe engaged in a management agreement with the British American Bingo (BAB), for assistance in bingo hall management. In April 1993, the Tribe gained the first Tribal-state contract with the state of Oregon, to conduct Class-III gaming in the bingo facility. Later 1993, 35 slot machines were added, which enabled the Tribe to expand into the Cow Creek Gaming (CCG) in 1994. CCG featured poker and blackjack tables, 250 slot machines, and a 24-hour café, according to Lonnie Rainville, the Government Operations Officer at the Tribe's Governmental Offices. In 1996, the CCG became the Seven Feathers Hotel and Gaming Center. The Convention Center was added to the building in 1997. Seven Feather's financial success was a vital boon to the Tribe, providing financially self-sufficiency, and to develop the Umpqua Indian Development Corporation, a conglomeration of businesses including Creative Images (now Anvil Northwest) and the Seven Feathers Truck and Travel Center. Several major changes were made to the Seven Feathers facility in 2000, including the addition of a gaming floor, and upstairs gaming hall. According to the Seven Feathers website:

"Today, Seven Feathers is a full Nevada-style casino with 1300 Slot machines, Table Games, live Poker, Keno and Bingo. Seven Feathers features 68,000 square feet of gaming space, including non-smoking casino areas, and is Southern Oregon's largest facility of its kind. More than 1 million guests visit Seven Feathers Casino Resort annually."

The Tribe's Governmental Offices have undergone several different developments, and physical locations, since the Tribe's recognition in 1982. The current location for the office is along NE Stephens Street, and services include health and wellness, housing, education, natural resources management, financial consulting, and others.

The Tribe's business corporation, the Umpqua Indian Development Corporation, has several other businesses besides Seven Feathers Casino Resort, including K-Bar Ranches, Seven Feathers Truck and Travel, the Nesika Health Group, and others. These businesses are described on the Tribe's website at <https://www.cowcreek.com/tribal-business/>. With these business developments and land acquisitions, the Tribe has secured a bright and prosperous future, and more importantly, political and economic self-sufficiency as a sovereign nation.

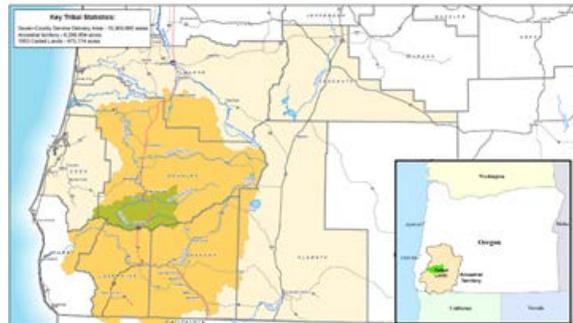
The Cow Creek Umpqua Land Conveyance

On January 8, 2018 President Donald Trump, the 45th President the United States, signed the *Western Oregon Tribal Fairness Act* (P.L. 115-103), which returned 17,519 acres of land to the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians. The lands will be held in trust for the Tribe and be part of the Tribe's reservation. The co-sponsors of the legislation were Oregon Congressmen Peter DeFazio and Greg Walden and Senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley.

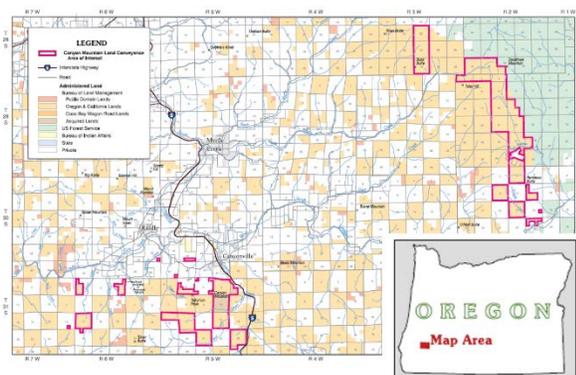
The conveyed lands are in Douglas County, Oregon and the center point of the Cow Creek Tribe's 6.2-million-acre ancestral area. With this land restoration, the federal government finally affirmed its commitment to the Tribe as established in the negotiated treaty on September 19, 1853, which is when the Cow Creek ceded land to the federal government in exchange for goods, services, annuities and a reservation. The promises of the government to the Tribe in the treaty were never fulfilled.

The Cow Creek Umpqua people were one of the first two Tribes in Oregon to secure a treaty with the United States of America, and although this treaty was ratified by the U.S. Senate on April 12, 1854, it was never signed by the president. The Tribe has been waiting more than 160 years for their lands to be returned.

The Cow Creek people are deeply connected to the land. They are deeply committed to the long-term sustainability of these lands to support economic returns through the sale of forest products that can be used to support health and human service for the membership while providing opportunities for recreation and cultural uses, preservation of cultural resources, and long-term stewardship authority over a portion of their ancestral territory.



Cow Creek Umpqua Tribe Ancestral Lands (all lands in yellow; green ceded by treaty in 1853)



Approximately 17,519 acres conveyed by the U.S. government to the tribe in 2018

Sources

Excerpt with minor adaptations from the Cow Creek Umpqua Tribe *Integrated Resource Management Plan* (2014, pages 22-24). Written by the tribe's Department of Natural Resources.

Pictures were added from various sources. Adaptations were informed by the Tribe's Cultural Program Manager and the Tribe's website <https://www.cowcreek.com/>.

For more information on the land conveyance, please see:

Office of Congressman Defazio. (2017). *Western Oregon Tribal Restoration Bill Passes Senate, Goes to President's Desk To Become Law*. Retrieved from <https://defazio.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/western-oregon-tribal-restoration-bill-passes-senate-goes-to-president-s>