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## In Their Own Words: Cow Creek Tribal Sovereignty

### Examples of how the Cow Creek Tribe puts sovereignty into practice...

- A. I define it as self-determination, the ability to exercise governmental activities that are uninfluenced and unrestricted by other governments.
  
- B. A fundamental right of sovereignty is determining your own history and your own truths.
  
- C. We are on equal footing with the state, the state does not dictate how we live. States and tribal governments exist on same level, but tribes have a little bit more sovereignty. For example, tribes can enter into treaties, states cannot.
  
- D. The definition of a sovereign government is that it is recognized by other governments, like how the federal government recognizes the sovereignty of Tribal governments.
  
- E. A treaty is a political agreement entered into by two governments.
  
- F. Sovereignty doesn't mean shunning others. We value our good relationships with neighbors. We are good neighbors, we're all in a community together, it doesn't make sense to be confrontational or isolated, the tribe is proactive with the community. We believe that a "high tide floats all ships." We have developed our own emergency management system, but we don't just focus on Cow Creek, we respond community wide.

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## In Their Own Words: Cow Creek Tribal Sovereignty *(Continued)*

### How Cow Creek Tribal Board Members describe sovereignty...

- 1. Relationship with Sheriff's Department:** We don't have our own established law enforcement. We are doing a study to determine if it is wanted or needed. Right now, we have a contract with the sheriff's department, and we want to keep them informed of our process. Open communication is essential for good relationships. As part of our collaboration, every year we provide funding for an officer to be dedicated to the forest.
- 2. Hunting/fishing/gathering:** We manage the resources on our lands and provide access to tribal members. We have our own tags, our own hunting calendar, and an arrangement with the state to have transportation rights (for when someone leaves the tribal area).
- 3. Utilities:** We have our own water and sewer department, independent from other providers. Creekside Development is the first of its kind and was the largest mass construction program in the state (at the time it was built). Utilities are an essential responsibility of government. Water wells (and the water within) are owned by the state and drillers cannot drill in the wells. To exercise our sovereignty, we hired well drillers from California. To summarize, we have responsibility to our land, we will still follow regulations, but we get to decide how to provide water, sewage, etc.
- 4. Healthcare:** Nesika Health Group is a self-funded insurance health plan. It is available to citizens for a small fee. We were the first tribe to offer an insurance program to our members (outside of members employed by the tribe). About 15 percent of members opt in. It's expensive but it's (healthcare) a priority for our tribe. Another way we've demonstrated our dedication to health is by awarding a half million-dollar grant to Asante in Jackson County for developing a regional behavioral health unit with 24 rooms dedicated to behavioral health needs of the region.

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## In Their Own Words: Cow Creek Tribal Sovereignty *(Continued)*

5. **Housing:** We own and operate our own low-income housing, part of the national HUD system, and we set our own guidelines.
  
6. **Historic preservation office:** We assumed the duties from the state; the state office no longer has oversight. For us, cultural resources are archaeological sites plus plants and animals. When we run the office, we can manage our resources more holistically than under the state process.
  
7. **Philanthropy and the Cedar Fund:** Philanthropy is a big value to the Tribe. We donate 6% of casino profits to nonprofits and other community projects, like high schools and community colleges. In 1997, the Tribe formalized this tradition of philanthropy by establishing a grant-making foundation.

The Cow Creek Umpqua Indian Foundation is a private, independent foundation. Each year the foundation makes grants to eligible nonprofit organizations in communities in Coos, Deschutes, Douglas, Jackson, Josephine, Klamath, and Lane counties. Aside from the Cow Creek Foundation, the Tribe makes many donations to worthy causes in the community. Tribal giving supports many smaller causes, such as projects that fund sports for students, improve schools, provide for veterans or those experiencing food insecurity, and many more.

Another arm of the Cow Creek Tribe's support for the community is the CEDAR program. CEDAR partners with local governments and organizations on projects and programs that benefit and strengthen the community. The CEDAR awards help schools, fire departments, improvement programs, youth organizations, local colleges and universities, service centers, and more.