

---

## Reading Jigsaw: Cow Creek Tribal Life

The Cow Creek Tribe has lived in the territory now known as Oregon since time immemorial, meaning they have been here for so long it is beyond written or legal memory. Their ancestral territory in Southwest Oregon was rich in natural resources that supported a seasonal hunting and gathering lifestyle. This way of life remained constant for thousands of years until the arrival of fur trappers, miners, and other white settlers in the 19th century. The U.S. government promoted this expansion by white settlers, which led to conflict as the settlers and miners wanted more and more land and more and more access to the natural resources. This conflict ultimately led to the signing of a treaty in 1853 and the forced removal of the Cow Creek Tribe from much of their ancestral territory. It is important to understand that the Cow Creek Tribe had an established way of life and governance long before non-Native people entered the area and that the story of the Tribe did not end with the signing of the treaty. The descendants of the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua continue to fight for their tribal sovereignty and the right to live on their ancestral territory in a way that upholds tribal values, teachings, and ways of life.

### Relationships with the Land and People

The Cow Creek Tribe traditionally lived in the Umpqua and Rogue River Valleys between the Cascade and Coast Ranges in Southwest Oregon. The heart of this territory centered on the South Umpqua River and its primary feeder stream, Cow Creek. The Cow Creek Umpqua Tribe are stewards of this land.

The Cow Creek Tribe values the reciprocal relationship between people, land, animals and plants. Much of the way in which the land was tended to was due to this relationship. The land and resources weren't just things to be owned by individuals but were part of an interconnectedness in which each had a role to take care of the other and to be respectful of the cycles. It was this concept that the U.S. government exploited in order to steal tribal land through treaties.

The Tribe continues to focus on sustainable resource management through its Natural Resources Department. This governmental department helps to teach tribal members and others about plant identification and uses, water quality, and wildlife management. Through these and other topics, cultural teachings continue for tribal members. Other community members can learn through annual workshops and events hosted by the tribe. They also continue the practices of using fire to manage the landscape and encourage renewal, and the forests tended to by the tribe are among the healthiest ecosystems in the state.

---

## Reading Jigsaw: Cow Creek Tribal Life *(Continued)*

### Governance

Traditionally, Cow Creek tribal members were organized in extended family units called bands. There were five distinct bands, each of which had its own unique traditions and ways of life. Those five bands were: Miwaleta, Quintiousa, Targunsan, Wartahoo, and Myrtle Creek. They were named based on the areas in which they had their villages.

The Cow Creek were semi-sedentary, which means they lived half the year in those villages in plank houses. The other part of the year was spent in task-specific camps based on a series of seasonal activities. In the village, families participated in preparing and preserving food, and they tended to their physical and spiritual health through sweat lodges and other ceremonies. This provided time for members to pray for good things for others and the land. It also allowed for time to reflect on their place in the order of things. The heat and special smoke help the body release toxins to also take care of their physical health.

### Education

Families were interconnected and important information was passed along to each generation through traditions, actions, and stories. In addition to learning how to hunt or gather food and medicine based on seasonal rounds, tribal members also learned skills such as basket weaving. Baskets were used as art, as functional vessels, and as teaching tools. Baskets could be used for cooking, storage, and gathering. Baskets for gathering and storage were often made with hazel, willow, beargrass, and maidenhair fern. Basket weavers had to learn which materials were available and the best for each purpose. While weaving, it is important to work with a happy heart. The emotion of the person is connected in the process and into the final basket.

Members of the Cow Creek Tribe mainly spoke Takelma but many could also speak the languages of nearby tribes, as well as the Chinook Jargon. Chinook was a simplified language that allowed people from different backgrounds—including other tribes and non-Native settlers—to communicate for the purpose of trade. Over time, with the coming of white settlers, tribal members spoke less Chinook Jargon and Takelma and more English. The Tribe is now working hard to revitalize the Takelma language, particularly among young people, by conducting language camps and creating instructional books and recordings.

---

## Reading Jigsaw: Cow Creek Tribal Life *(Continued)*

### Seasonal Sustenance Rounds and Housing

Tribal members were seasonal gatherers and hunters and were very mobile, migrating to different parts of the Southwest Oregon Valley at specific times of the year, depending on local traditions, seasonal impacts, and available resources. During the warm months of spring the Tribe hunted for ducks and geese along the Umpqua River. Men and boys would also fish for lamprey which would be smoked and dried by the falls of Cow Creek or South Umpqua. In the summer they fished for silver salmon and then made use of the winter runs of steelhead. The Cow Creek Tribe depended greatly on deer and elk which were hunted for food as well as the use of hides for clothing. The use of fire management across the land supported this cycle because women used fire to remove sticky tar from seeds to eat, while men used fire to have new growth and provide feed for animals.

Salmon and lamprey were also important to the tribe, and tribal members were taught how to make spears, nets, traps, and fishing hooks from a young age. They also learned to build weirs across streams and to make basket traps out of hazel shoots to catch the salmon. To this day, there is a ceremony to celebrate the salmon harvest and to request their annual return.

Plants were also an essential source of food and medicine for the Cow Creek Tribe. Plants were used to make arrows, clothing, and baskets. In summer the Tribe moved to the uplands and gathered huckleberries along the Rogue-Umpqua Divide. The Tribe also gathered blackberries, blackcaps, tarweed seeds, hazel nuts, wild onions, Indian lettuce, acorns, camas bulbs, mushrooms, and lambsquarters. To heal burns, cuts, or blood poisoning, the Tribe used the snakeweed plant, which is typically found in more arid grassland. The silvery green leaves of the mullein plant were used to make cough syrup, and wild ginger was made into teas for reducing fevers.

Huckleberries are an important crop for the Cow Creek Tribe. For centuries the tribe has been going to a place called Huckleberry Patch, to gather the tart berries. Huckleberries ripen in the high mountains in the late summer, and in traditional times multiple families would gather to pick berries, share stories, teach skills, and catch up with relatives and friends. Tribal members continue to gather at Huckleberry Patch in an annual event.

During the winter the Tribe left the mountains and took up residence in the lowlands where they had set up permanent winter villages to last through the cold months. Many tribal members lived in plank houses made of cedar or pine boards over shallow excavations in the earth, while others lived in shelters made from rock and animal hides.

---

## Reading Jigsaw: Cow Creek Tribal Life *(Continued)*

### Multiple Treaties and the Effects

The Treaty of 1818 established boundaries between British-controlled and U.S.-controlled territories in the Pacific Northwest region. At the time, both countries claimed to have ownership of large areas of the Northwest, despite the presence of Native people. The treaty of 1818 also established fishing and hunting rights, and as a result fur trappers began to pour into the Pacific Northwest in search of riches. One early company of fur traders came into contact with the Cow Creek Band, but they treated the Tribe poorly and were quickly driven away. When the British-owned Hudson's Bay company arrived, they were respectful and observed tribal customs, and the Tribe allowed them to set up trading posts. By the 1830s the U.S. government was again looking to take over sole control of the Oregon Territory. As a result, the Hudson's Bay Company enacted a policy to exterminate all the fur-bearing animals in the territory, with the goal of maximizing its profits and discouraging others from moving there. This had a devastating impact on the environment and on the traditional lifeways of the Cow Creek Tribe.

The Oregon Treaty of 1846 finally ended the territorial dispute between Britain and the United States, again failing to acknowledge the multitude of tribal nations that were already established and living there.

As a result of this treaty, the Applegate Trail opened, which cut directly across the Cow Creek Tribe's ancestral territory. This resulted in a steady flow of white settlers, all of whom were unfamiliar with the area and knew nothing about the culture of the Indigenous people living there. For example, many of the newcomers saw tribal villages that were empty because the tribe was following a seasonal cycle of migration in another part of its territory. The settlers mistakenly thought the villages were abandoned and began claiming the area for themselves.

With the Gold Rush of 1848 even more white settlers began pouring into the West, including the ancestral territory of the Cow Creek Tribe. Many of these miners were different than the earlier settlers. They were lawless, violent, and disrespectful of both the natural landscape and the Tribe. They began to lay claim to certain areas and to mine for gold and other metals. These mining activities polluted the rivers and threatened fish runs. At the same time, settlers began building houses and fences on land that was typically used by the Cow Creek to hunt, gather, grow, and replenish the landscape by fire. Lack of access to these territories, as well as the spread of diseases for which the Tribe had no immunity, quickly led to starvation and the death of many tribal members, including Mi-Wa-leta, a prominent chief who had always counseled his people for peace and against retaliation or violence against others.

---

## Reading Jigsaw: Cow Creek Tribal Life *(Continued)*

The Donation Land Act of 1850 was intended to promote even more white settlement in the Oregon Territory in the name of the U.S. government. All white male citizens over the age of 18 were given 320 acres of land for free if they were willing to settle there and farm it. Married couples or families could have 640 acres of land for free. Again, no tribal nations were included in this decision to give away land. If a person could get to the land by 1854, they got 170 acres of land, again for free. After 1855, the U.S. government began to sell the land for \$1.25 an acre. All of these actions were taken without any legal basis for claiming ownership of land on which Native people had been living for thousands of years.

As white settlement increased—and wars with American Indian tribes continued to break out—the U.S. government began pressuring tribes to sign formal treaties that would cede the rights to their ancestral territory in exchange for certain other rights. The Cow Creek Tribe, weakened by disease and starvation and overpowered militarily, had little choice but to sign a treaty or face annihilation. The Cow Creek Umpqua Tribe Treaty of 1853 was the first such treaty between the U.S. government and an Indian tribe in the Oregon Territory to be drafted, signed, and ratified. Among other rights, the treaty ensured that the Cow Creek Tribe would retain some of its ancestral territory and be able to hunt, fish, and gather in its traditional way. However, the U.S. government would break the terms of this treaty almost immediately, and even today the Cow Creek Tribe continues to fight for the rights that were formally agreed to more than 150 years ago.

---

## Reading Jigsaw: Cow Creek Tribal Life *(Continued)*

Team Members

<b>Topic(s):</b>		
<b>Important to Know</b>	<b>Important to Know</b>	<b>Important to Know</b>
<b>Picture or sketch to help your team's thinking</b>	<b>Question you would like to know more about in your topic area</b>	