

DOE/BP--2946

**FEDERALLY-RECOGNIZED TRIBES  
OF THE  
COLUMBIA-SNAKE BASIN**

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# YAKAMA

## PREHISTORY AND CULTURE

The people composing the Yakama Indian Nation have lived in this area for thousands and thousands of years. They used the entire forest from the lowlands around the Columbia River to the snow-clad Cascade Mountains. Known locally as the "Taptail" or "Wap-tail-min," the Yakama name meaning a "narrow river people" may refer to the narrows in the Yakima River at Union Gap where a large Indian village was located in the past. One of the first whites to visit the area, Alexander Ross, a Canadian pioneer, fur trader and author whose writing includes some of the first detailed accounts of the territory, described an Indian encampment while on a horse-buying trip to the Kittitas in 1814 for the Northwest Company at Fort Okanogan: "It extended six miles in every direction, and containing not less than 3,000 men, exclusive of women and children, and triple that number of horses, a very imposing sight."

People spent the coldest months in winter villages that were generally located on the valley floor, a place with a relatively moderate climate. Reliable sources of wood and water, and protection from cold winds, could be found there.



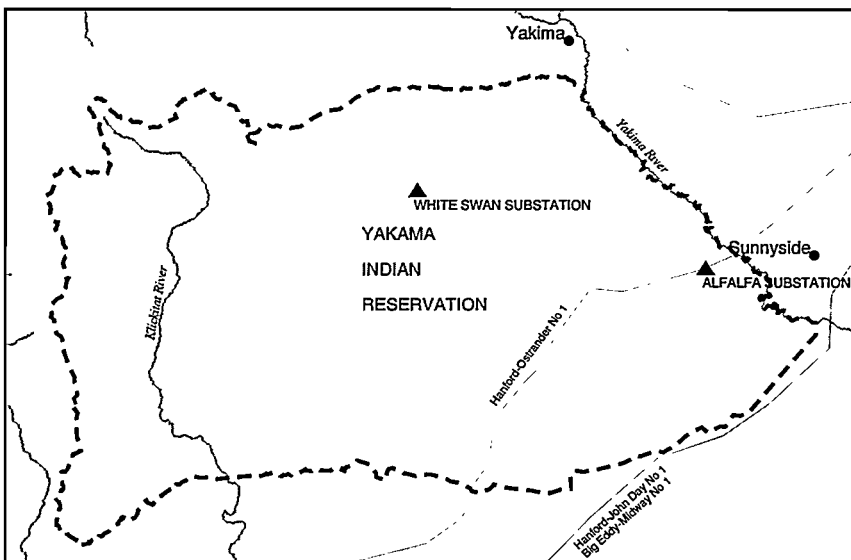
Food resources were also plentiful along the watercourses, such as deer, elk, salmon and steelhead, and other riparian and desert plants and animals.

In the springtime, as soon as the first edible greens appeared above the ground, people began preparing to move across the countryside in search of fresh food. The melting snows would be followed upslope, and edible roots would be collected as they matured. Some people would go to the rivers to fish. Others would remain in the mountains following the maturing plants upslope, ending with the huckleberry harvest in the fall. At that time, foods would be either stored or transported back to the winter village from both the mountains and the rivers, and people would settle in once more, living on stored foods and occasional fresh meat until the next spring.

The valley floor looked much different prior to the signing of the treaty of 1855 than it does today. The valley was wet in many places, covered with stream meanders, oxbow sloughs and wetlands, of both perennial and seasonal nature. Each watercourse supported groves of oaks and cottonwoods, and each had a riparian corridor

that hosted a variety of plants, waterfowl, and four-legged animals. It was possible for a person to canoe from White Swan to the Yakima River without ever using Toppenish Creek - something that would be impossible today. The drier areas were covered with grasses, and mixed in with the grasses were sagebrush. Today, for the most part, only the sagebrush remains.

The Yakama then and now believe every rock and tree of their homeland, every stream and lake, animal and bird - all things - are



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imbued with spirit: their land literally was alive to them, not dead matter. All that exists - not just humans, animals and plants but rock, water and air - is alive and sacred. From our place among the beings of the world, the traditional Yakama seek to maintain relationships with everything that is alive. These relationships must be in order: for as these beings are sacred, so these relationships are sacred. Something is sacred only when it is in its proper place. It could even be said that being in their places is what makes them sacred, for if they are taken out of their place, even in thought, the entire order of the universe would be destroyed. Sacred objects therefore contribute to the maintenance of order in the universe by occupying the places allocated to them. To occupy our own place in a correct proportion and balance to the rest of creation is central to Yakama spirituality. To place ourselves above other life would be presumptuous and violate Yakama cultural and spiritual ideals of generosity and hospitality. Life, land and water are the cultural spiritual resources to the Yakama People.

The Yakama People's relationship to the land is indicative of this respect. The Earth is everyone's mother. She supports all life: from her all the people - salmon, roots, berries, humans - take their sustenance. The people's relationship to the earth must always be one of recognition of their interdependence. The proper balance must be nourished and renewed between people and the continuing creation of the earth. It is inconceivable to traditional Yakama to "own" their mother. Rather, the human people see themselves as a living part of the living whole.

## HISTORY

In 1842, the Oregon Trail reached the Willamette Valley and opened the floodgates for hordes of immigrants from the east. As more and more white people settled in the Yakama country, the clash of two different cultures escalated into



armed conflict. The following account, taken from the Smithsonian Institute's Handbook of North American Indians, History of Indian-White Relations, states:

*"Large numbers of White settlers arrived in Oregon during the 1840s...and as their numbers increased, conflicts arose with the many small Tribes of Indians who inhabited the Pacific Northwest. Missionaries had set up stations in the 1830s, but they were unable to quell antagonisms, and when Marcus Whitman, his wife, and other Whites were killed by Indians in 1847, the Federal government realized at last the need for official administration of the territory...(H)owever, not until June 5, 1850, did Congress extend the provisions of the trade and intercourse act to Oregon and otherwise provide for Indian affairs in the region. Commissioners were appointed to negotiate treaties with the Indians, with instructions to extinguish Indian title to all lands west of the Cascades to concentrate the Indians on reservations. They met resistance to their plans from the Indians, and the six treaties they negotiated were*

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*rejected by the Senate. Subsequent treaties, too, failed to be ratified. In 1854-1856 new treaties with the Tribes in Oregon and Washington were negotiated....(T)he treaties extinguished Indian title to most of the land in the Pacific Northwest, assigned the Indians to reservations, and provided annuities and other assistance. The treaties with the coastal Tribes recognized their fishing rights. Meanwhile, the movement of miners and settlers into Oregon and Washington precipitated severe conflicts with the Indians that ranged through the mid 1850s (Rogue River and Yakima war), and new warfare broke out in 1858."*

Pressed to clear the land for white settlement, the federal government began negotiations with various Indian tribes in the territory. In the summer of 1855, the Walla Walla valley was the site selected for treaty talks with the inland tribes of the area, including the tribes and bands of the Yakama people.

By May 29, 1855 most of the expected Indians had arrived, and accordingly, at two that afternoon, the council was formally opened. Joel Palmer and Isaac Stevens sat beneath the arbor with their secretaries, agents and interpreters, while the Indians gathered in a vast semicircle before them. The number of Indians is in dispute, with one source claiming two thousand, another saying one thousand, and Kip estimating five thousand. What ever the actual number, there was a significant representation of the region's population of about fourteen thousand Indians. This may not have pleased Stevens, who preferred dealing with tribal notables. It is possible that he either was ignorant of or disregarded the Indian belief in communal ownership of the land and that, in theory at least, no chief or group of chiefs had the power to sign away what belong to all.

The leaders of the Yakama People of that time were devastated to learn of the threat of losing all the resources. The Yakama attendees said very little during the first days of the 1855

treaty council. When they finally spoke, they expressed four objections to the federal proposal.

First, they did not believe Stevens and Palmer, the United States Treaty Commissioners. A second concern was that the treaty commissioners had not consulted with the indigenous peoples on the location of the reservations. These United States representatives had drawn up the reservation boundaries "without our having any voice in the matter," Young Chief stated. The intent of the federal government, of course, was to separate the Nch' i-wana (Columbia River) Plateau People from their ancestral lands and resources, and to obtain lands for the railroad and for the benefit of immigrating farmers. To the Yakama Peoples, this meant leaving religious, spiritual, cultural and traditional areas. This was most troubling, since nearly all lands proposed to be ceded contained the graves of their ancestors. Culturally and spiritually to the Yakama Peoples present at the Council, this meant being torn from their ties to the past, a traumatic deprivation that would leave them alone in the present. The final concern of the Yakama Peoples attending the treaty council was that they would be obliged to live with tribes other than their own.

After 13 days of negotiations, the Yakama Treaty was finally signed with much anguish by Chief Kamiakin, head of the 14 tribes and bands of the Yakamas on June 9, 1855. Indian leaders who also signed the treaty were Skloom, Wohi, Te-cole-kun, La-hoom, Doo-lattoose, Sch-noo-a, Me-ni-nock, Shee-ah-cotte, Sla-kish, Elit Palmer, Tuck-quille, Wish-och-knipits and Ka-loo-as. With the signing of the treaty, the Yakamas were forced to relinquish nearly 11 million acres of their homeland. They were allowed to keep 1.2 million acres, known at first as the Simcoe Reservation and later as the Yakima Reservation.

To the Indian people, the treaties were looked on as a means of ensuring survival for their tribes and for retaining at least a portion of their homeland. Regarding their treaties as a sacred

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pledge on the part of the federal government, the tribes viewed their agreements as valid as long as the United States existed.

Four long years would come and go before the treaty was ratified by the Senate on March 8, 1859. James Buchanan, as President of the United States, signed the Yakama Treaty on April 18, 1859. This delay increased tensions between Indians and whites and led to the eventual outbreak of hostilities in 1855.

Even though the Yakama Treaty would not be ratified by the Senate and signed by the President for four years, Governor Stevens distributed legal notices to the Northwest newspapers declaring the ceded lands in all Indian treaties to be open and available for white settlement only a month after the treaty signing. Kamiakin led a group of Indians from several of the area tribes and bands to resist Steven's plan to open their homelands to white people. Military expeditions against the Yakamas and the other tribes in late 1855 failed to quell the uprising. In the spring of 1856, a strong command was sent to occupy the Yakama country, especially the vital fishing sites. By late summer, the war had drawn to an inconclusive close. The unrest in the Columbia basin continued until the spring of 1858. In May 1858, a force of Spokane, Coeur d'Alene and Palouse warriors attacked the military command of Colonel Steptoe, who eventually escaped to Fort Walla Walla. The Indian force was later defeated at the Battle of Four Lakes on September 1, 1858, and at Spokane Plains on September 5, 1858. Shortly thereafter, 15 Indian leaders were hanged by Colonel Wright at Latah Creek, near Spokane. Kamiakin escaped the hangings, but Chief Owhi was shot and killed at Latah Creek. Thus, the Yakama War drew to a close in 1858. The bands and tribes of the Yakama retired to their reservation and began to learn farming.

Farming brought a change in character not only in the Yakama traditional way of life, but in the character of the land itself that the Yakama

reverenced. Many things changed with the passage of the Allotment Act (Dawes Act) in 1887. Under the Allotment Act, the federal government divided communal lands into individual holdings. Individual tribal members were given title to 80 acre allotments, and "surplus" lands were sold to whites. Most of the first allotments were found along the larger watercourses. By 1900, all lands along streams and containing sub-irrigation were allotted. Also, all lands seen fit for irrigation were claimed, as were even the arid places populated by sagebrush, even though no water was yet available for irrigating those arid lands. Government representatives realized that for most people to subsist through agriculture, more land would have to be brought into production. Numerous wetlands were drained, and other areas were leveled and filled to obtain additional agricultural lands. Accordingly, several ditches were constructed. By World War I, a large-scale irrigation system, the Wapato Irrigation Project, was in place.

As the Allotment Act was implemented, followed by the spread of irrigation agriculture, many former grazing lands were no longer available for grazing. Allottees with irrigable land tended to rely on agriculture as a means of subsistence, while those without irrigable lands tended to rely on livestock. Sheep in particular became big business.

By the early 1900s, sheep grazing was eclipsed by that of cattle. During the 1930s, various Indian cattle associations were formed. Many Indian families made their living raising cattle, and a few still do.

Non-Indians gradually gained control over reservation lands. This was accomplished through the purchase of lands of deceased Indians through their heirs, through the purchase of Indian lands that had received fee patents, and through the leasing of Indian allotments. Indians were encouraged to sell the lands they inherited by government representatives and other whites. In

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## *Forest Management*

Until the 1940s, forest management was primarily fire control with some individual allotment harvest. In 1941, the general council decided to sell tribal timber. The first formal forest management plan was developed in 1942. Timber harvesting under this plan began in 1943. Nearly all cutting was directed toward Ponderosa pine stands where western pine beetle outbreaks were near epidemic levels.

As long-range management objectives were developed, forest management plans were prepared and updated. The basic policy in the beginning was to bring the reservation forest's virgin stands into a managed state compatible with sustained yield objectives. This policy evolved over the next five decades into a multiple use policy integrating Yakama social and cultural values and goals with their economic goals for the future.

The Yakama Indian Reservation is the homeland of the Yakama People, and as such possesses important religious and spiritual values. Concern is often expressed regarding how all values of the forest ecosystem will be maintained or enhanced. To protect these values several areas within the forest are removed from commercial timber production. These sites include food and medicinal plant areas, sites of traditional cultural and spiritual use, and current-use sites. On areas where commercial timber production occurs, the primary objective is to protect the forest ecosystem while sustaining the production of timber in balance with other values. These values include: soil productivity, water quality, old growth, native vegetation, fish and wildlife populations and habitats, archaeological and historical properties, employment opportunities and income to support the economic needs of the Yakama Indian Nation.

Since harvest began in the 1940s, the Yakama tribal leadership has established a special version of multiple use, incorporating specific values unique to the Yakama people. As a result, uneven-aged management is the preferred silvicultural system. Harvests include a mix of single tree, group selection and small patch cutting practices that produce an uneven-aged structure. Some of the specific tribal desires that are incorporated into current silvicultural systems include the following:

- Maintain long-term ecosystem productivity and function.
- Consider all values of the forest during all levels of the decision-making process. Although the Yakama nation depends on the forest for most of its annual income, management decisions will not be based on monetary value alone.
- Maintain a natural appearance in the forest.
- Maintain large diameter trees.
- Maintain stands that contain diversity in species, size class, and structure.
- Prohibit the use of pesticides and herbicides.

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the long run, irrigation benefited non-Indians the most, for they gained access to and even control of land and water through the purchase and lease of Indian allotments.

Fences, farms and ranches are a living testimony to the effectiveness of the Allotment Act. As a person drives through the valley, he can consider the landscape of the past. When the road begins to wind upward, leaving the valley floor

behind, the world of the desert roots comes into view. It is a garden of wild foods. This area persists up to, and even a little past, the Mill Creek Guard Station, where the road begins to enter the Yakama Forest. The area where desert and forest meet has been used by Yakamas for untold centuries. It remains important today, and in terms of traditionally-valued plants and



animals, cannot be easily matched by any other portion of the forest.

Removal to the reservation, white settlement patterns, and federal law profoundly changed the land, and the Yakama Peoples' relationship to the land; but as the 20th century dawned, these same factors were profoundly changing another great source of spiritual and cultural nourishment to the Yakama: water, in particular, Nch' i-wana, the Columbia River.

The Nch' i-wana was the lifeline of the Yakama People in the past, and still is. The watershed of the Nch' i-wana is a vast network of resources that housed, fed and clothed the people of the Fourteen Tribes and Bands. Stretched along the life line were places of residence with all the associated qualities that endear the landscape to the people. Villages, "winter residences," were characterized with play areas, gathering areas, and

communal houses, or long houses, and were associated with nearby internment of the ancestors.

The development of hydroelectric and other major system uses of the Nch' i-wana began a disruption of the food chain that was largely unanticipated. Neither the federal government nor the Native American leaders were prepared for the massive reduction in productivity of the Nch' i-wana watershed. Loss of fisheries habitat quickly began to cripple the traditional lifeways of Yakama Peoples as access to and productivity of their fisheries plummeted.

The entire Nch' i-wana watershed, with all its vast spawning habitats played a role in the production of the salmonids that passed through the Yakama Nation's traditional fishing grounds. In this sense, the blockage of salmon by the Grand Coulee Dam, the plowing of a stream

adjacent to Arrow Lake in British Columbia, the over-fishing of Redfish Lake in the hinterland of what is now Idaho, all had their contributions toward destroying the viable fisheries of the traditional fishing sites of the main stem, that now lie as dormant as archaeological ruins.

## INTO THE FUTURE

The Yakama Indian Nation is considered a treaty nation made up of 14 tribes that signed the treaty of 1855 at the Walla Walla treaty grounds. The treaty reserved an original portion of their homeland totaling 1.3 million acres. The nation ceded over 12 million acres during those peaceful negotiations and provided treaty rights on those ceded lands outside the reservation. Among treaty provisions are the right to fish, hunt and gather at all the usual and accustomed places on the reservation and ceded area.

The Yakama Indian Nation rejected the Indian Reorganization Act of 1933, called the Wheeler-Howard Act, which returned unallotted lands on the reservations back to the tribes in the disastrous wake of the Allotment Act, and appropriated development funds for tribes that reorganized their governments along corporate lines. Instead of reorganizing on a corporate model, in 1933, the tribe elected to restore their Indian leadership, which had been decimated by warfare. A representative was selected from each of the 14 original bands and tribes of the Yakama confederation, and the government was formally established in 1944. Governmental affairs are run through a committee system which reports directly to the tribal council. A general council, comprised of all enrolled tribal members over the age of 18 years, elects the members of the council to represent the Yakama Nation.

The general council conducts annual meetings, usually the last week of November. Tribal protocol may delay the meeting by a tribal member's death or inclement weather. Major Yakama Indian Nation issues are addressed and



acted on. Tribal council members are elected at the general council meeting. Of the 14-member tribal council, seven members are elected every second year at the general council, and serve four-year terms. Tribal council members are appointed to committees, of which there are eight standing committees and seven special committees. Legislation passed by the general council is in resolution form that is passed and approved by the total membership. These legislative acts are laws of the Yakama Indian Nation. For instance, in 1994, the symbolic spelling of the tribe was changed by Resolution T-053-94 from "Yakima," in order to reflect the name originally used in treaty negotiations: "Yakama."

The Yakama Nation is now pursuing a strategic plan, "...a comprehensive approach to job creation and prosperity for the Yakama Indian nation and its people in the 21st century." Bringing together the vision of the elders and the vigor of the youth the strategic plan represents an effort to coordinate and integrate a plan of action for the reservation. A score of different projects designed to expand existing projects or to start new endeavors will provide jobs and revenues in a variety of fields categorized into agriculture, natural resources, industrial development, recreational tourism and human resources.