

WASHINGTON INDIAN TRIBES TODAY

PRESERVING CULTURE,
ENRICHING PEOPLE,
SUSTAINING THE ENVIRONMENT
AND BUILDING COMMUNITY.

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**WASHINGTON
TRIBES**

Washington Indian Gaming Association
525 Pear Street SE
Olympia, WA 98501

WashingtonTribes.org

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TODAY'S TRIBES

Washington state is home to 29 federally recognized American Indian tribes and more than 300,000 American Indians and Alaska Natives. Tribes are located throughout the state—from Neah Bay on the Pacific Coast to Usk near the eastern state border. Tribal governmental and business enterprises are creating tens of thousands of jobs and investing billions of dollars in the state's economy.

In the Beginning

Native peoples inhabited North America long before European governments sent explorers to claim lands and resources. No one knows how many people inhabited North America before 1500, and estimates vary widely from 1.5 million to 20 million.

Representatives of European governments interacted with tribes in diplomacy, commerce, culture and war—acknowledging tribes' systems of social, cultural, economic and political governance. As the United States formed its Union, the founders continued to acknowledge the sovereignty of tribal nations, alongside states, foreign countries and the federal government, in the U.S. Constitution.

Native peoples and their governments retain fundamental political and treaty rights in their relationship with the U.S. government that are not derived from race or ethnicity. They are based on treaties and actions by the President or the Congress and confirmed by the U.S. Supreme Court. Tribal citizens are citizens of three sovereigns: their tribe, the United States and the state in which they reside.

What is Tribal Sovereignty?

Sovereignty is a legal term meaning the right of a people to self-govern within jurisdictional borders. Tribal sovereignty recognizes that American Indian tribes have the political status of nations and that Indian nations are located within the territorial boundaries of the United States. As sovereigns, tribal nations have a government-to-government relationship with the two other sovereign governing bodies in the U.S.—the federal and state governments.

Tribal, federal and state laws define governments' responsibilities, powers, limitations and obligations. Tribal sovereignty allows tribal nations autonomy to govern, exercise jurisdiction, and protect and enhance the health, safety and welfare of tribal citizens within tribal territory.

Annual Community and Economic Benefits of Tribes in Washington

Source: The Economic & Community Benefits of Tribes in Washington, Washington Indian Gaming Association (2025 Edition) washingtontribes.org/resources

29,421
Washington State Residents
Directly Employed by Tribes

\$1.9B
Wages and
Benefits Paid

\$1.5B
State and Local Tax
Revenue Generated

\$7.4B
Value Added to
the State Economy

"The Congress shall have the power to...regulate commerce with foreign nations, and among the states, and with the Indian tribes"

U.S. Constitution
Article 1, Section 8

LEARN MORE ABOUT TRIBES

National Congress of American Indians | ncai.org

National Museum of the American Indian | nmai.si.edu

Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission | nwifc.org

Since Time Immemorial: Tribal Sovereignty in Washington State (Curriculum Resources) | bit.ly/SinceTimeImmemorial

Washington Tribes | washingtontribes.org

Subscribe to the Washington Tribes Newsletter | <http://eepurl.com/hujR6T>

WASHINGTON'S NATIVE AMERICAN NATIONS

Washington: 29 Tribal Nations

Twenty-nine federally recognized American Indian tribes are located on reservations and other tribal lands throughout Washington state. Each tribal nation is different. Some reservations are just a few acres in size, while others span more than a million acres; some have a few hundred citizens, others have thousands of citizens; some have significant financial resources to finance government services, others have very limited funds. Because water provided a means of transportation and natural resources, reservations are often found along rivers, Puget Sound or the Washington coast. Only four tribes are in eastern Washington, and each relies on rivers.

Tribal Governments

Tribal governments determine their own governance structures, pass laws, enforce laws, exercise jurisdiction and deliver programs and services. Led by a body of elected officials, tribal governments are responsible for healthcare, education, housing, public safety, courts, transportation, natural resources, environment, culture and economic development. Tribal governments collaborate with state and local jurisdictions on a multitude of issues, from taxation to transportation improvements to natural resource management to emergency services.

Indian Lands

Indian land ownership is complex and includes lands held in fee and in trust. Reservation boundaries are established by treaty, executive order or an act of Congress, but tribes have jurisdiction over a broader category of land defined in federal law as "Indian country." Indian country includes all land within reservation boundaries and land held in trust for the tribe or one or more of its members outside of the reservation.

Federally Recognized Tribes

A federally recognized tribe is an American Indian or Alaska Native tribal entity that has a government-to-government relationship with the United States, with the responsibilities, powers, limitations and obligations attached to that designation, and is eligible for funding and services from the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs. Many tribes were recognized as legal entities through treaties, acts of Congress, executive orders or federal court decisions. The process of attaining federal recognition is long, complex and highly stringent.



Squaxin Island Tribe

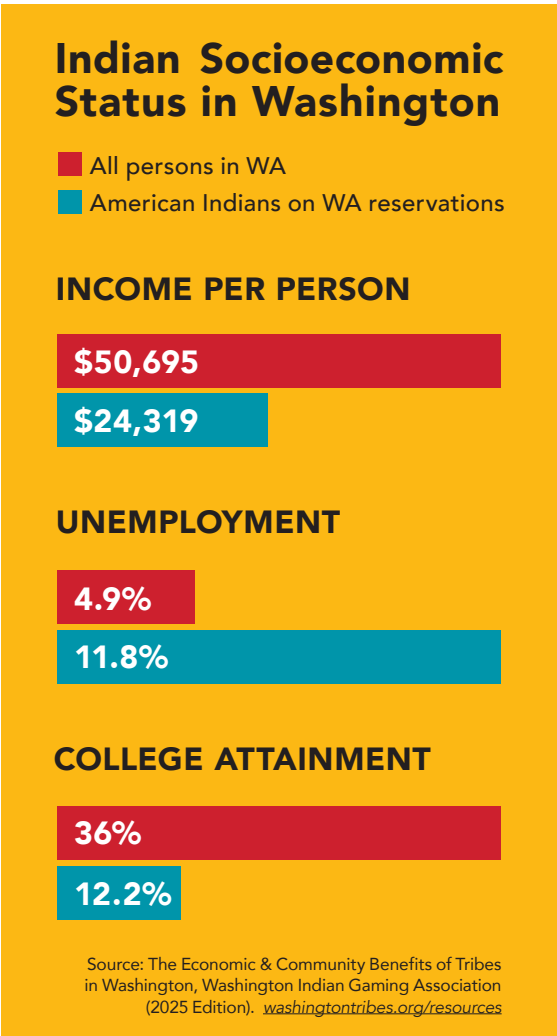
CONFRONTING CHALLENGES

The relationship between tribal nations and the U.S. government has evolved throughout history. Early policies left a legacy of challenges (fragmented and marginalized land rights, isolation of many Indian reservations, loss of culture and language, limits on the ability to raise revenue via taxation and development limitations on trust land) that continue to affect American Indian communities today. These policies made economic development in Indian country very difficult, limiting income sources largely to federal grants and extraction of local resources. Before the early 1990s, most tribal governments struggled to pay for essential services.

While much progress was made in the late 20th and early 21st century, the challenges facing American Indian communities continue to be significant. Tribal investments have helped Indian communities recover from long-lasting hardships, yet much still needs to be done. On reservations, many of which are in geographically isolated areas far from economic, education and health centers, poverty and unemployment rates remain very high.

Tribal Contributions Under Gaming Compact

The Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (IGRA) confirmed the rights of tribes to conduct gaming on Indian lands. (Tribes have always had gaming—see the FAQ on page 8 to learn more.) IGRA required states and tribes to enter into compacts for certain types of gaming. Under these compacts, tribes reimburse the state for the costs of regulating Indian gaming and gaming tribes agree to contribute to communities and nonprofits.



CARING FOR COMMUNITIES

Washington’s tribal governments are making investments and charitable contributions that improve people’s lives and support neighboring local governments. Over the past decade, thousands of organizations—from school districts to local first responder agencies to food banks to performing arts organizations—have received millions from the tribes.

“Tribes are running business enterprises, not to maximize profits, but to benefit communities. Gaming opens the door to possibilities.”

W. Ron Allen
Chairman, Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe



In March 2022 the Cowlitz Indian Tribe gifted a \$700,000 fire engine to the Clark-Cowlitz Fire Rescue Station 23 in La Center. The new engine replaced part of the station’s aging fleet and will respond to emergencies in La Center and throughout the Cowlitz Indian Reservation.

Fire, Police and Government Support

Tribes’ investments in public safety boost community resources and enable local governments and public safety providers to better serve community members. Tribes work closely with local governments, emergency responders and other community groups.

Tribal Community Contributions in 2023

Source: The Economic & Community Benefits of Tribes in Washington, Washington Indian Gaming Association (2025 Edition). washingtontribes.org/resources

\$9.6M

Donated to Charitable Organizations

\$6.5M

Granted to Government, Fire and Police

\$1.3M

Given to Smoking Cessation Programs

\$2.3M

Provided to Problem Gambling Programs

Charitable Giving

Gaming tribes agree under compacts with the state to contribute to communities and nonprofits. Many tribes also go above and beyond these agreements to provide additional support to the community, particularly in times of need, such as the COVID pandemic. For example, in November 2020 the Stillaguamish Tribe of Indians donated \$600,000 to two food banks in the nearby communities of Arlington and Stanwood.

SUSTAINING THE ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Tribal environmental and natural resource programs play a critical role in efforts to restore and protect important cultural and natural resources. Tribal governments employ experts and scientists in all disciplines. Their work includes watershed planning, water quality programs, environmental education, environmental assessments, salmon recovery programs and more.

Tribal natural resource programs play an important role in balancing the sustainable harvest of salmon, game, timber and other resources with environmental restoration and the protection of sensitive species and habitats.

Washington’s rich natural resources provide thousands of jobs for tribal members and non-tribal members alike. Tribes are committed to making investments in smart natural resource management practices so that resources can thrive and be available to all for future generations.

Tribal governments, in collaboration with state and federal agencies and conservation interests, are working to restore fish and wildlife habitat. For example, the Nisqually estuary was restored in 2009 by removing dikes and reconnecting 762 acres with Puget Sound. This is the largest estuary restoration project in the Pacific Northwest and an important step in the recovery of Puget Sound. The refuge was renamed in honor of Billy Frank Jr., a Nisqually tribal citizen, environmental leader, and treaty rights activist. Tribes with reservations on and near major rivers are also involved in collaborative efforts to restore estuaries.

In the central and eastern part of the state, tribes are vital to wildfire mitigation and forest management efforts, bringing knowledge and expertise based on thousands of years of experience. For example, the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation’s fire management program uses proactive measures to protect the forests on their 1.4-million-acre reservation. These measures include mechanical treatments, forest health treatments, targeted planting and prescribed fires.

WILL 100-POUND SALMON RETURN?

Legend has it that mighty salmon weighing as much as 100 pounds returned to spawn on the Elwha River. Salmon returning from the ocean had to be big and strong to swim up the fast-moving river to spawning areas. In the early 1900s, two dams were built on the river. The dams fueled economic growth but blocked salmon migration and flooded the historic homelands and cultural sites of the Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe. After two decades of planning, the largest dam removal in U.S. history began in 2011. Today, the Elwha River once again flows freely from its headwaters in the Olympic Mountains to the Strait of Juan de Fuca. And salmon and other fish and wildlife are returning!



SEE ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP IN ACTION:

- Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge**
bit.ly/BillyFrankJrNNWR

Colville Forest Management
bit.ly/WSU_ColvilleForestManagement

Elwha Dam Restoration
bit.ly/SeattleTimesElwha

Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe Jimmycomelately Creek Restoration
bit.ly/JamestownJimmycomelately
- Middle Fork Nooksack River Fish Passage Project**
bit.ly/NooksackFishPassage

Skagit River skagitcoop.org

Swinomish Climate Change Initiative
swinomish-climate.com

Quinalt Indian Nation Climate Change and Blueback Salmon Video
bit.ly/QuinaltNationBlueback

Yakama Nation – Forests and Fire Management bit.ly/YakamaFire

PRESERVING CULTURE

ENRICHING PEOPLE



Tribes in Washington state place a high priority on enhancing and preserving their rich and vibrant cultures.

Thriving tribal communities with arts and culture are critically important. American Indian culture has flourished in our region for thousands of years, despite past failed efforts by the U.S. government to “assimilate” American Indians into the general population by stripping away their cultural identity. American Indian children were sent to government boarding schools and forbidden to speak their native language, wear traditional clothes or practice their religions.

Today, tribes in Washington are working to ensure native culture continues to be an integral part of our regional identity, for the benefit of American Indians and non-Indians alike. This is achieved by investing in museums, art and cultural centers, elder programs, school programs, song and dance, language programs, carving and weaving, traditional foods and medicine programs, and other tribal community building efforts.

Canoe Journey

Canoe Journey is a celebrated cultural tradition in the Pacific Northwest and a revival of a traditional method of transportation. Host tribes welcome as many as 100 canoes and 15,000 people for a weeklong celebration. Participants learn traditional canoe carving and decorating and learn to work together as a “canoe family.” Canoe families take turns telling stories, singing, drumming and performing dances. All Canoe Journey activities are family-friendly and drug- and alcohol-free. Each year, a different nation hosts Canoe Journey. Depending on distance, the trip can take up to a month.

Salmon: A Symbol of Tribal Culture

Salmon play an important role in the region’s ecosystem. Salmon return from the ocean providing nutrients to rivers, feeding wildlife and enriching forests. Salmon have shaped the lives of American Indians, influencing their cultures, interactions with other tribes, fishing technologies and religions. Salmon are an integral part of religion, culture and sustenance.

Salmon need good quality habitat. Harvest reductions are only effective if there are equally strong efforts to restore salmon habitat. Salmon are tough. Despite dams, pollution, predators, climate change and many more challenges, they never stop trying to return home. Tribes have to be just as tough when it comes to the salmon recovery and the return to sustainable levels.

Fishing is still a culturally preferred livelihood for many American Indians and an essential aspect of their nutritional health and culture.



All Washingtonians aspire to the same basic things—safe communities, excellent schools, decent jobs, clean air and water, good health, and roads and transit that make travel easy. We want our kids to have more opportunities than were given to us. And we value a culture where neighbors help neighbors.

Education

Tribal governments build and operate early learning centers, schools, libraries and youth activity facilities. Most tribes provide substantial financial support to college students. The investment is paying off—high school graduation rates are improving and the number of tribal citizens attending college is increasing.



Since 2008, the Washington Indian Gaming Association Scholarship Program has awarded more than \$1.2 million to help Native American and Alaska Native students pursue higher education.

Healthcare

Tribal governments are expanding medical, dental, behavioral health and wellness care facilities for tribal citizens. Some of the facilities, especially in rural areas, are open to the public.



The Kalispel Tribe of Indians' Camas Center for Community Wellness supports the health and social needs of its citizens and the greater community. The Center offers medical, chiropractic, dental and behavioral health services for people in Pend Oreille County—native and non-native alike.

Housing

Providing adequate housing, especially for low-income families and the elderly, is a priority for Washington’s tribes. Tribes are constructing new affordable homes and apartments throughout the state.

Roads, Transportation and Utilities

Tribes are building roads, sidewalks, bridges, communications networks, transit, electric power companies—even small hydroelectric-generating plants. Most of the projects are done in collaboration with local governments, or the state, and are intended to benefit the general public, as well as tribal members.

Public Safety

Tribes invest in public safety, emergency services, and disaster preparedness and response to protect all citizens, property and natural resources. Tribal governments pay for critical services like police, courts, emergency medical response and fire departments.



In 2021, the Shoalwater Bay Tribe partnered with Washington’s Emergency Management Division and FEMA to construct a tsunami evacuation tower to keep the community safe in the event of earthquake and tsunami.

Economic Development

Tribes invest hundreds of millions of dollars in hotels, restaurants, entertainment venues, tourist attractions, retail, forest products, fisheries, agriculture, ranching, real estate development, manufacturing, aquaculture and more. In tribal communities where the ability to generate tax revenues is limited, these enterprises take the place of a sufficient tax base to support tribal governmental functions.

LEARN ABOUT TRIBES ONLINE

Kalispel Tribe Salish Curriculum
kalispeltribe.com/our-language/curriculum

Puyallup Tribal Language Program
www.puyalluptriballanguage.org

Quileute Language
quileutenation.org/quileute-language

Burke Museum Native American Heritage Resource Packet
bit.ly/NativeAmericanResourcePacket

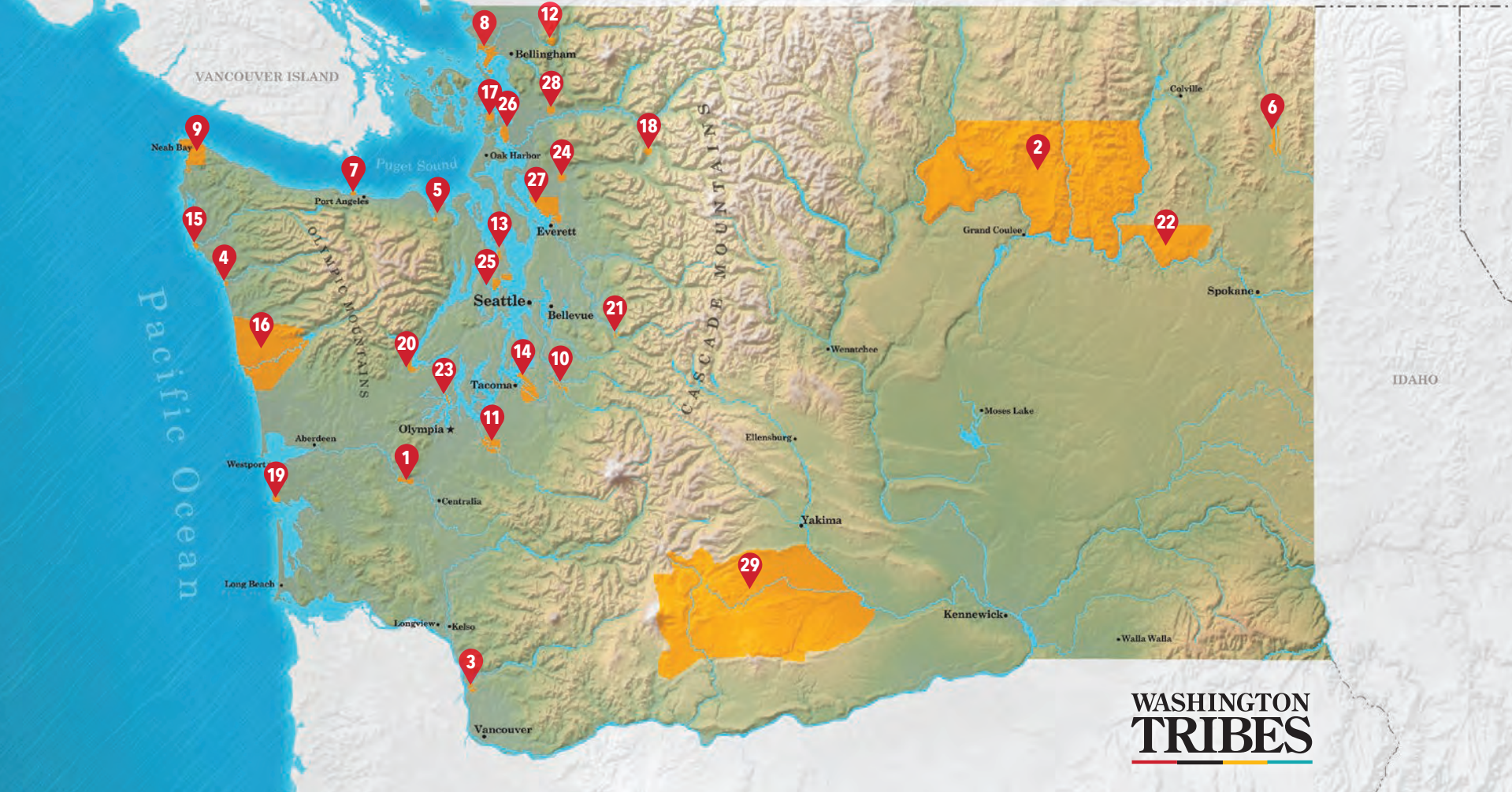
Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge



Squaxin Island Tribal Garden

THE TRIBES OF WASHINGTON

To request a free poster-size print, visit: bit.ly/WashingtonTribesPoster



WASHINGTON
TRIBES

1. **Chehalis** www.chehalistribe.org
2. **Colville** colvilletribes.com
3. **Cowlitz** cowlitz.org
4. **Hoh** hohtribe-nsn.org
5. **Jamestown S’Klallam** jamestowntribe.org
6. **Kalispel** kalispeltribe.com
7. **Lower Elwha Klallam** elwha.org
8. **Lummi** lummi-nsn.gov
9. **Makah** makah.com
10. **Muckleshoot** muckleshoot.nsn.us

11. **Nisqually** www.nisqually-nsn.gov
12. **Nooksack** nooksacktribe.org
13. **Port Gamble S’Klallam** pgst.nsn.us
14. **Puyallup** puyallup-tribe.com
15. **Quileute** quileutenation.org
16. **Quinault** quinaultindiannation.com
17. **Samish** samishtribe.nsn.us
18. **Sauk-Suiattle** sauk-suiattle.com
19. **Shoalwater Bay** shoalwaterbay-nsn.gov
20. **Skokomish** skokomish.org

21. **Snoqualmie** snoqualmietribe.us
22. **Spokane** spokanetribe.com
23. **Squaxin Island** squaxinisoland.org
24. **Stillaguamish** stillaguamish.com
25. **Suquamish** suquamish.nsn.us
26. **Swinomish** swinomish.org
27. **Tulalip** tulaliptribes-nsn.gov
28. **Upper Skagit** upperskagittribe-nsn.gov
29. **Yakama** yakama.com

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Does the United States still make treaties with Indian tribes?

No. There were 370 treaties signed by the U.S. government and American Indian Tribes between 1778 and 1871.

Did treaties grant Native Americans special rights?

Treaties represented a contractual acknowledgment of certain rights already held, and to be retained, by tribal governments and their people. Tribes relinquished some rights (land) in exchange for retaining others (hunting and fishing, including outside reservations). Indian treaties have the same status as treaties with foreign nations, and because they are made under the U.S. Constitution they take precedence over any conflicting state law.

Who’s eligible for tribal citizenship?

Federally recognized tribal governments set their own enrollment eligibility requirements.

What is Indian Country?

Indian Country is land under the jurisdiction of tribal governments and the federal government. Federal law describes Indian Country as “all land within the limits of any Indian reservation,” “all dependent Indian communities within the borders of the United States” and “all Indian allotments, the Indian titles to which have not been extinguished.” Indian Country includes all lands within reservation boundaries as well as off-reservation land owned by the U.S. in trust for tribes and individual Indians. (18 U.S. Code § 1151)

How do tribal citizens govern themselves?

Most tribes are governed by an elected body—usually a tribal council, typically led by a Chairperson or President.

Do Native Americans pay taxes?

Yes, American Indians pay most of the same taxes as every other citizen. American Indians pay federal income taxes and state sales tax on goods purchased off the reservation. The big tax difference is on income an American Indian may receive directly from a treaty or trust resource such as fish or timber. That income is not taxable.

Is it disrespectful to call Native Americans “Indians”?

The term “Indian Tribe” appears in the U.S. Constitution. “Indian” is not a derogatory term. Many American Indians refer to themselves as Indians, or American Indians or in Alaska as Alaska Natives. Different words and word combinations have been used over the years. Native American is very common. Some Indians prefer to be identified with their tribe, e.g., Tulalip.

Why do tribes get to have casinos?

Tribal gaming has taken place since before recorded history. In the 1970s and 1980s, several Indian tribes established bingo operations to raise revenue to fund tribal government operations. Tribal and state government were at odds over whether tribal governments had the authority to conduct gaming outside of state regulation. The issue was resolved in 1987 when the U.S. Supreme

Court confirmed the inherent authority (sovereignty) of tribal governments to establish and regulate gaming operations independent of state regulation, provided that the state in question permits some form of gaming (California v. Cabazon Band of Mission Indians, 480 U.S. 202, 1987). The issue ultimately led to the passage of the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act of 1988, which provides the framework that presently governs Indian gaming.

What’s an example of a traditional tribal game?

Stick games, also called hand games or Slahal, is a Native American guessing game that predates recorded history and was a traditional form of trade, landholding and social networking. Hand-game bones and counting sticks have been identified in ancient anthropological digs. Oral tradition tells us that people originally learned hand games from animals.

LEARN MORE ABOUT TRIBAL GAMING

Washington Indian
Gaming Association
washingtonindiangaming.org

Washington State
Gambling Commission
wsgc.wa.gov/tribal-partnerships