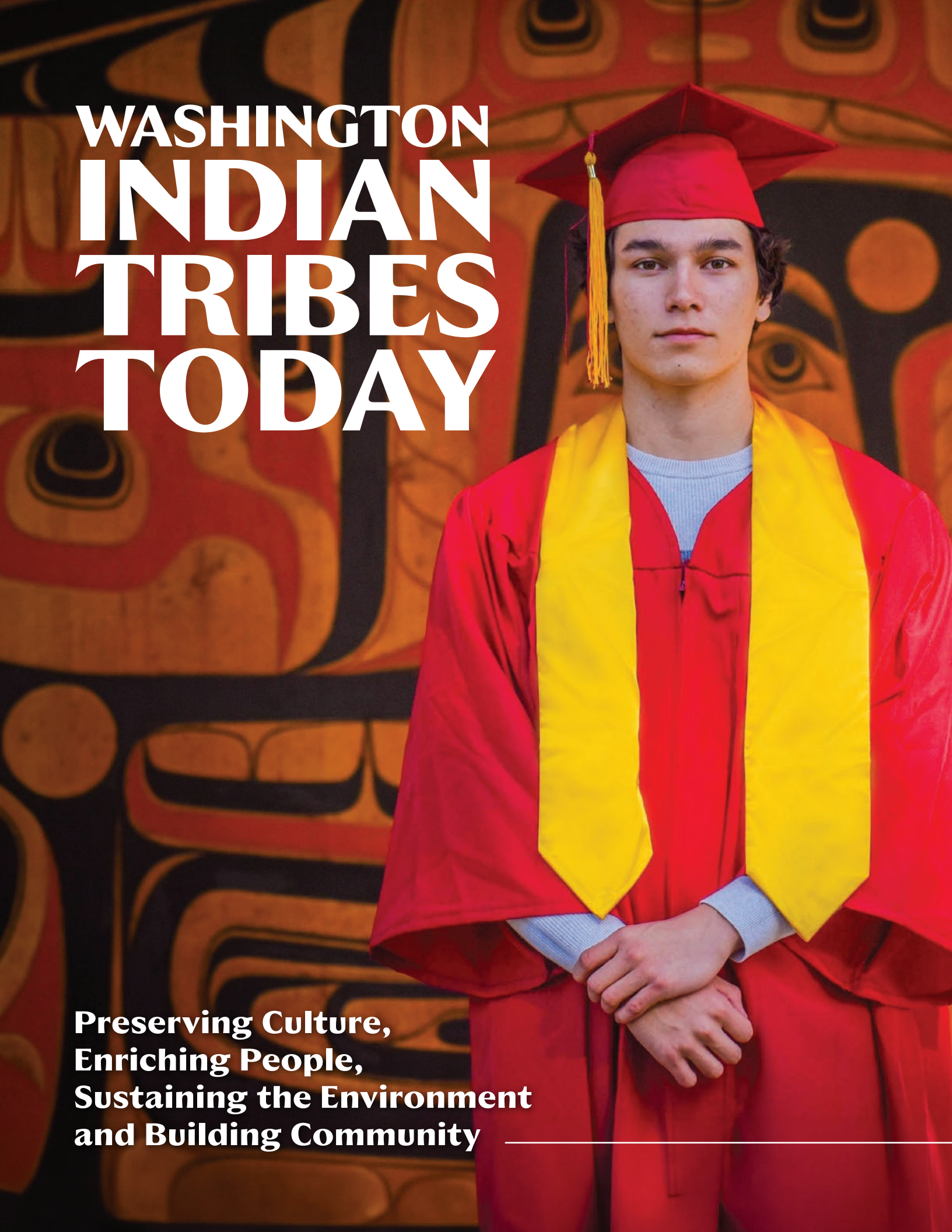
WASHINGTON INDIAN TRIBES TODAY



Preserving Culture, Enriching People, Sustaining the Environment and Building Community

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 government and business enterprises are creating tens of thousands of jobs and investing billions of dollars in the state's economy.

IN THE BEGINNING...

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

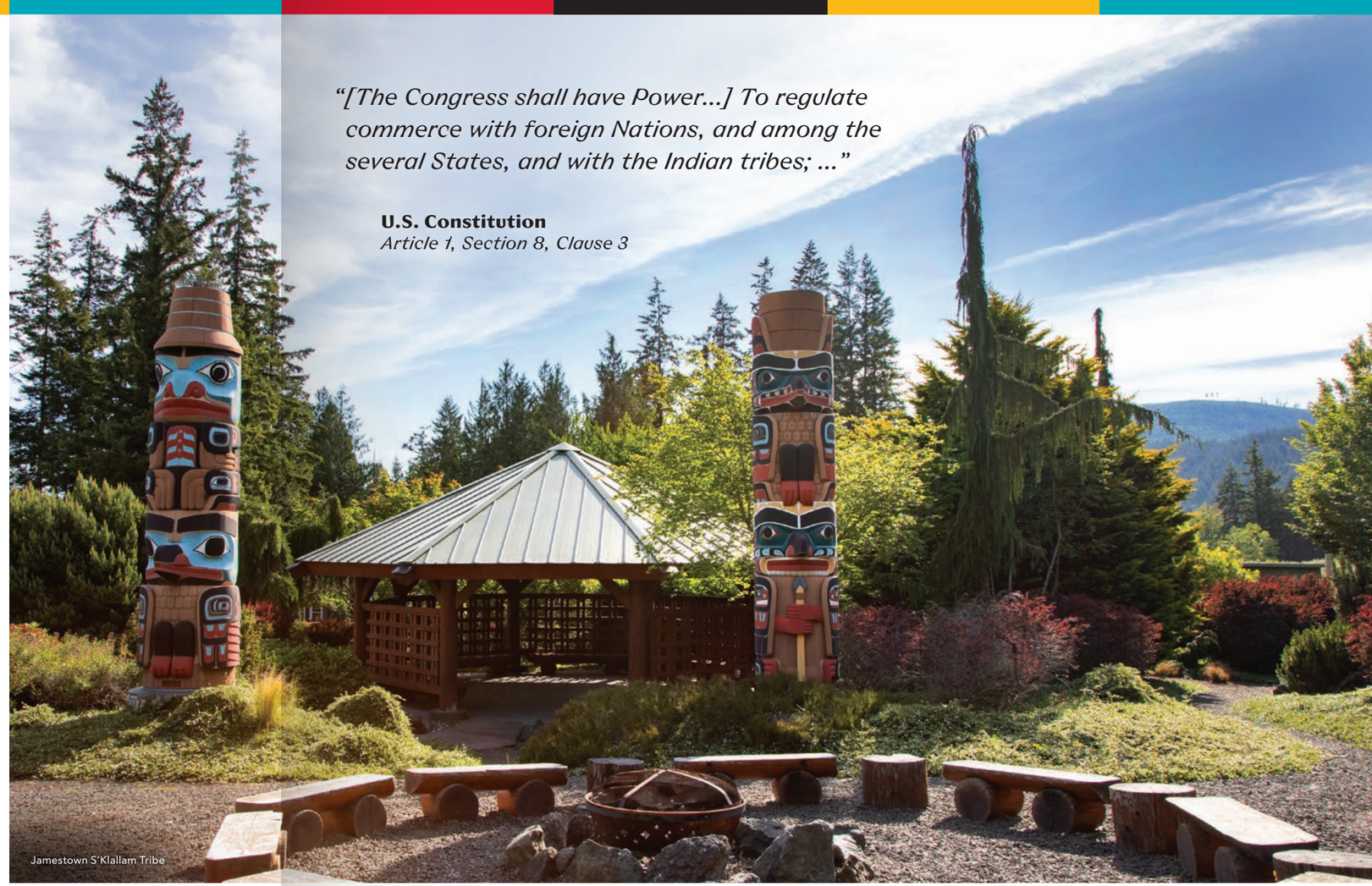
Representatives of European governments interacted with tribes in diplomacy, trade, culture and war. They acknowledged tribes' systems of social, cultural, economic and political governance. As the United States formed its Union, the founders continued to acknowledge the sovereignty of tribal nations,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

Native people and their governments retain fundamental political and treaty rights in their relationship with the U.S. government. These rights are not derived from race or ethnicity. They are based on treaties and actions by the President or 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 legal boundaries. Tribal sovereignty recognizes that American Indian tribes have the political status of nations. Indian nations are located within the territorial boundaries of the United States. 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 legal authority, and protect and enhance the health, safety and welfare of tribal citizens within tribal territory.



"[The Congress shall have Power...] To regulate commerce with foreign Nations, and among the several States, and with the Indian tribes; ..."

U.S. Constitution
Article 1, Section 8, Clause 3

Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe



ANNUAL COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF TRIBES IN WASHINGTON

29,421
Washington Residents 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

Source: The Economic & Community Benefits of Tribes in Washington, Amy Besaw Medford and Jonathan B. Taylor (Washington Indian Gaming Association, 2025)
washingtontribes.org/resources

◂ **Photo:** Makah Museum
Cover: Kah-Ty Natrall, Squamish First Nations/Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe/Suquamish Tribe

Preserving Culture

TRIBES IN WASHINGTON STATE ARE COMMITTED TO ENHANCING AND PRESERVING THEIR RICH AND VIBRANT CULTURES.

American Indian culture has flourished in our region for thousands of years. It has endured despite past failed efforts by the U.S. government to "assimilate" Native Americans 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. This benefits American Indians and non-Indians alike. Tribes invest 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.

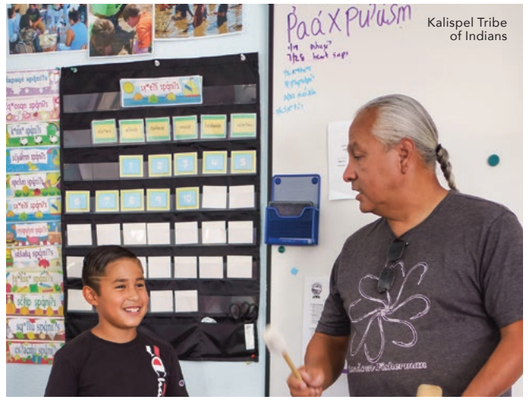


Canoe Journey

Canoe Journey

Canoe families from tribes across the Pacific Northwest and beyond participate in the annual Canoe Journey, an intertribal celebration of heritage and culture. Each summer, canoe families travel from their home territories, paddling ancestral waterways to a designated host nation. They visit other tribal nations along the way, sharing gifts, traditional prayers, drumming, songs, dancing, food and more.

Canoe Journey is a revival of the traditional method of transportation and a significant cultural experience for participants. It is also one of the largest traditional gatherings of Indigenous people in the world. Host tribes welcome more than 100 canoe families and up to 15,000 people each year.



Kalispel Tribe of Indians

Revitalizing Tribal Languages

Language is at the heart of tribal identity. Many tribes in Washington are offering tribal language programs to counter historical efforts to erase Indigenous cultures and identities.

For example, the Kalispel Tribe of Indians developed the Kalispel Language Program to reclaim and preserve their Salish language and create a new generation of native language speakers. The program includes a curriculum for all ages. Learning resources include workbooks, songbooks, language software and the Kalispel Language Immersion School for grades K-5. Salish is also taught to junior high and high school students in the area.



Salmon: A Symbol of Tribal Culture

Salmon play an important role in the region's ecosystem. They provide nutrients to rivers, feed wildlife and enrich forests. They are also an integral part of Native American culture and tradition. Fishing is still a culturally preferred livelihood for many American Indians in Washington and an essential aspect of their nutritional health and culture.

Salmon need good quality habitat. Harvest limits 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 must be just as tough when it comes to salmon recovery and harvest.

The Boldt Decision: Affirming Treaty Rights & Tribal Sovereignty

On February 12, 1974, a historic ruling affirmed tribal treaty fishing rights and had an enduring and far-reaching impact on tribal sovereignty.

Treaties between Native American tribes and European settlers, signed in the mid-1800s, guaranteed tribal nations their off-reservation hunting, fishing and gathering rights. But for decades, Washington state did not honor that promise. By the 1960s, game wardens and local authorities were assaulting and arresting Native Americans for fishing off-reservation.

To defend and exercise their treaty fishing rights, tribal fishermen and Native and non-Native activists began a series of demonstrations and protests, known as the Fish Wars. The culminating event—a violent incident in which demonstrators were gassed, assaulted and jailed by police—shocked the nation and ultimately led to a trial and the historic ruling known as the Boldt Decision.

Judge George Boldt's ruling affirmed tribes' treaty fishing rights and divided the Puget Sound salmon catch 50-50 between tribes and non-Natives. While the focus was on tribal fishing rights, the decision's affirmation of tribal sovereignty and jurisdiction had a transformative impact on tribes that extends to this day.

Billy Frank Jr., Nisqually tribal member, environmental leader and treaty rights advocate whose activism paved the way for the Boldt Decision.

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 tribes have a few hundred citizens, others have thousands. 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, make and enforce laws, and deliver programs and services. Led by elected officials, tribal governments provide services like:

- Healthcare
- Education
- Housing
- Public safety
- Courts
- Transportation
- Natural resources
- Environment
- Culture
- Economic development

Tribal governments also work with state and local jurisdictions on a variety of issues from taxation to transportation improvements to natural resource management to emergency services.


Quileute Tribe

Indian Land

Indian land ownership is complex. Some land is owned outright. Other land is held in trust by the federal government for a tribe or tribal citizen. Reservation boundaries are set by treaty, executive order or an act of Congress. But tribal authority can extend over a broader category of land defined in federal law as "Indian Country." Indian Country includes all land within reservation boundaries. It also includes land held in trust.


Yakama Indian Nation

Federal Recognition

A federally recognized tribe is an American Indian or Alaska Native tribe that has a government-to-government relationship with the United States. This status gives tribes certain rights and responsibilities. It also makes tribes eligible for some funding and services from the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs. Tribes can be federally recognized through treaties, acts of Congress, executive orders or federal court decisions. The process to become a federally recognized tribe is long, complex and extremely strict.


Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe

THE TRIBES OF WASHINGTON



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 *bit.ly/SinceTimeImmemorial*
Washington Tribes *washingtontribes.org*
Subscribe to the Washington Tribes Newsletter *eepurl.com/hujR6T*
New for 2026! Suquamish Tribe Since Time Immemorial Curriculum *suquamish.nsn.us/sstic-home*

WASHINGTON TRIBES

Federally Recognized Tribes in Washington

Chehalis Tribe chehalistribe.org
Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation colvilletribes.com
Cowlitz Indian Tribe cowlitz.org
Hoh Tribe hohtribe-nsn.org
Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe jamestowntribe.org
Kalispel Tribe of Indians kalispeltribe.com
Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe elwha.org
Lummi Nation lummi-nsn.gov
Makah Tribe makah.com
Muckleshoot Indian Tribe muckleshoot.nsn.us
Nisqually Indian Tribe www.nisqually-nsn.gov
Nooksack Indian Tribe nooksacktribe.org
Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe pgst.nsn.us
Puyallup Tribe of Indians puyallup-tribe.com
Quileute Tribe quileutenation.org
Quinault Indian Nation quinaultindiannation.com
Samish Indian Nation samishtribe.nsn.us
Sauk-Suiattle Indian Tribe sauk-suiattle.com
Shoalwater Bay Indian Tribe shoalwaterbay-nsn.gov
Skokomish Indian Tribe skokomish.org
Snoqualmie snoqualmietribe.us
Spokane Tribe of Indians spokanetribe.com
Squaxin Island Tribe squaxinisland.org
Stillaguamish Tribe of Indians stillaguamish.com
Suquamish Tribe suquamish.nsn.us
Swinomish Indian Tribal Community swinomish.org
Tulalip Tribes tulaliptribes-nsn.gov
Upper Skagit Indian Tribe upperskagittribe-nsn.gov
Confederated Tribes of the Yakama Nation yakama.com

Caring for Communities

Washington's tribal governments are making investments and charitable contributions that improve tribal citizens' 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

TRIBAL COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTIONS

$9.6M
Donated to Charitable Organizations

$6.5M
Granted to Government, Fire and Police

$2.3M
Provided to Problem Gambling Programs

$1.3M
Given to Smoking Cessation Programs

Source: The Economic & Community Benefits of Tribes in Washington *washingtontribes.org/resources*

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. For example, in 2025, the Cowlitz Indian Tribe donated $3.9 million to nonprofits providing food assistance, social services, medical care, educational programs and other community resources.

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.



In 2024, the Stillaguamish Tribe of Indians donated nearly half a million dollars to three local fire districts, providing support for critical emergency services in Island, Skagit and Snohomish counties.

Enriching People

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. Washington's tribal governments are making investments and charitable contributions that improve people's lives and support neighboring local governments.

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 $1.4 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.

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, communication 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 public, as well as tribal members.

Public Safety

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

Economic Development

Tribes invest hundreds of millions of dollars into a wide variety of tribal-owned businesses. These businesses include 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 government functions.

ENRICHING PEOPLE EXAMPLES



The Suquamish Tribe acquired Kitsap OBGYN in 2025, preserving critical access to care for expecting mothers in Kitsap County.



The Yakama Indian Nation's Yakama Forest Products provides hundreds of meaningful and skilled jobs to tribal and non-tribal community members.

Confronting Challenges

The relationship between tribal nations and the U.S. government has evolved over time. Early federal policies created problems that still affect American Indian communities today. These challenges include:

- Fragmented and marginalized land rights
- Isolation of many Indian reservations
- Loss of culture and language
- Limits on the ability to raise revenue via taxes
- Development limitations on trust land

These policies made economic development in Indian Country very difficult. Until recently, tribal income was limited largely to federal grants and use of local resources. Before the early 1990s, most tribal governments struggled to pay for essential services.

Tribes made much progress in the late 20th and early 21st century. Tribal investments have helped Indian communities begin to recover from long-lasting hardships. Still, American Indian communities continue to face significant challenges. On reservations, poverty and unemployment rates remain very high. Many tribes are in geographically isolated areas far from economic, education and health centers.

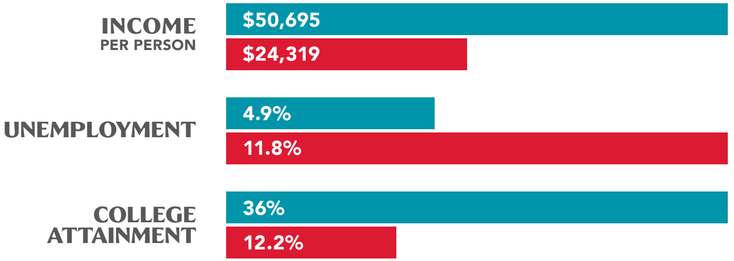
Tribal Gaming Compacts

In 1988, the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act confirmed the rights of tribes to conduct gaming on Indian lands and required states and tribes to enter carefully negotiated compacts for certain types of gaming. Over the last 30 years, tribal government gaming in Washington has helped tribes regain their self-reliance, create opportunities and lift people out of poverty.

INDIAN SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS IN WASHINGTON

Source: The Economic & Community Benefits of Tribes in Washington, Amy Besaw Medford and Jonathan B. Taylor (Washington Indian Gaming Association, 2025) *washingtontribes.org/resources*





Sustaining the Environment & 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.

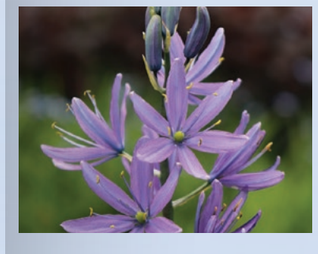
Washington's rich natural resources provide thousands of jobs for tribal members and non-tribal members alike. Tribes are committed to making investments in smart natural resource management practices so that resources can thrive and be available to all for future generations.

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 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. 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.









Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe: Olympic Cougar Project

Since 2018, the Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe has led the Olympic Cougar Project, a partnership with the nonprofit Panthera and five other Washington tribes to better understand the health of the cougar population on the Olympic Peninsula.

Using digital tracking technology, researchers have followed more than 100 cougars' movements over time. They have found that cougars on the peninsula are isolated from the rest of the state's cougar population due to barriers like I-5 and the Columbia River. Project data will help the tribe and its partners advocate for more connected habitats and ultimately support a healthier peninsula ecosystem.

Camas Flowers

Every spring, fields across the Pacific Northwest erupt in swaths of violet-blue as camas flowers bloom. Camas has long been a culturally and economically important resource for many tribes in the Pacific Northwest. It has been harvested, traded and used in traditional ceremonies for generations. Its spring bloom was known as a marker of changing seasons.

Though camas may not be a daily staple today, it remains deeply meaningful. It connects people to the land, their ancestors and the seasons. Today, tribes are restoring camas meadows, protecting harvesting areas and teaching traditional digging and cooking techniques to the next generation. This work is part of a broader effort to revitalize traditional food and cultural practices.

Swinomish Tribe: Building Clam Gardens

The Swinomish Indian Tribal Community is reviving an Indigenous practice that is 3,500 years old—building clam gardens to enhance shellfish production. Clam gardens are created by constructing knee-high rock walls where the ocean meets the land between high and low tides. This extends the gently sloping habitat where clams and other shellfish thrive. By rebuilding these traditional structures, the tribe is increasing food security, fostering biodiversity and helping counteract ocean acidification caused by climate change.

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

Quinault Indian Nation Climate Change and Blueback Salmon Video
bit.ly/QuinaultNationBlueback

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

Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation

Frequently Asked Questions about Tribes

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 gave up 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 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 governments 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 now governs Indian gaming.

WHAT'S AN EXAMPLE OF A TRADITIONAL TRIBAL GAME?

Stick game, also called hand game 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.

WHAT IS TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Sovereignty means a nation's right to make and follow its own laws. As self-governing nations, tribes establish and operate their own government systems, create their own laws, run their own police and courts and decide who is a tribal citizen. When tribes control their own decisions, Indian people have more opportunities to thrive. In the past, federal policies cut tribes off from their culture and language and restricted their income. Self-governance puts decision-making back where it belongs—with tribal nations. Tribal self-sufficiency leads to stronger businesses, better healthcare, improved housing, safer communities and better care for lands and waters—which benefits all Washingtonians, not just tribes.

WHAT ARE LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS?

A land acknowledgment is a formal statement that recognizes Indigenous people as original stewards of the lands where an event or organization is located. You may have heard a land acknowledgment before a public meeting or performance or displayed on a website or publication. These statements typically name the tribes or nations who have lived on and cared for the land since time immemorial.

HOW DO TRIBAL GOVERNMENTS USE BUSINESS REVENUE?

Tribal governments use business revenue to fund schools, housing programs, health clinics, environmental rehabilitation, infrastructure, law enforcement, firefighting and other public services that benefit all Washingtonians.

WASHINGTON TRIBES

Learn more about Washington Tribes in our newsletter!

WashingtonTribes.org

Washington Tribes is a public education initiative sponsored by the Washington Indian Gaming Association.