

Forward for “Intro to Indigenous Cultures of the Lower Columbia River” webinar

Thanks for watching this introductory webinar on Indigenous cultures of the Lower Columbia River. The intention of this presentation is to give volunteers and community members in and around the Ridgefield and Steigerwald Lake National Wildlife Refuges a little background on the rich and complex human history of this area. All of us that live in this Lower Columbia River region are living on the ancestral lands and territories of Chinookan and other indigenous peoples, and it is to those first peoples of this area we (people living in this area today) owe a debt of gratitude and respect. Gratitude for their tending and stewardship of the ecosystems that we are now a part of, and respect for the sovereignty of their descendants and relatives along the river who still have a deep connection and claim to this place.

In my excitement to share these thoughts with you, I forgot to acknowledge the contemporary Tribes and Nations who have ties to the Lower Columbia River Region. Our primary partner in the Plankhouse project is of course the Chinook Indian Nation, whose tribal center is based in Bay Center, WA. Their territory stretches from the mouth of the Columbia River and Willapa Bay to Kathlamet. Their tribe is composed of five bands of Chinookan Peoples, Cathlamet, Clatsop, Lower, Chinook, Wahkaikum, and Willapa. They were our partners in the archaeological excavation of the Cathlapotle village and have continued to be generous with their time and share their knowledge with us throughout the Plankhouse’s inception, construction, and continuing programs.

Due to the complexities of pre-contact Chinookan cultures, and the rapid changes along the river post contact, many other contemporary tribes also have members with Chinookan ancestry. To illustrate this, read these selections from the preface and chapter 1 of the book “Chinookan Peoples of the Columbia River”:

...Despite the devastating diseases, depopulation, and culture loss of the early contact era, Lower Chinookans— descendants of the people the first Euro-American explorers and settlers met—still live on the lower river. Chinook people below Longview, Washington, belong to the nonrecognized Chinook Tribe or are enrolled with federally recognized tribes at Shoalwater and Quinault. The Portland Basin peoples—Cascades, Clackamas, Multnomah—are mostly enrolled in the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde, though through the vagaries of treaty-making and extensive intermarriage, many (particularly Cascades) are enrolled at Yakama, Warm Springs, and Cowlitz. (Ames, Boyd, Johnson x)

This selection from chapter 1, Chinookan Peoples Today, outlines the tribes and bands ancestral territories and ties them together with the contemporary tribes:

In discussing the Chinook today, we would be remiss not to mention other Chinookan people of the Columbia River. The great nations of the Chinook people consisted



of linguistically and ethnically related groups who lived from the mouth of the Columbia River to the Five-Mile Rapids area east of The Dalles, Oregon. The easternmost Chinookans, the speakers of the Kiksht dialects, the Wasco, the Wishram, the Dog (Hood) Rivers, the Cascades, and others are still with us as well.

The north and south shores of the Columbia River were not always boundaries for Chinookan communities. European concepts used in treaty negotiations and later the division of the Oregon Territory, using the Columbia River as one of the boundaries, divided Chinookan-speaking people in ways wholly contrary to traditional sensibilities. Through these non-Chinookan sensibilities the Wishram and Cascades people were attached to the Yakama Reservation in Washington, while the Wasco and Dog River people were attached to the Warm Springs Reservation in Oregon. In both cases, Chinookans were placed on reservations with majority Sahaptin-speaking people, becoming minorities in the communities to which they were removed. These are the only Chinookans who have maintained unsevered treaty relationships with the US government. They have maintained a distinct identity within these communities through their spirituality, their songs and dances, their mythology, and their language.

This wealth of knowledge, like that in most Native communities, is in danger of being lost, and there are many individuals who should be commended for their efforts to preserve this history. The middle river Chinooks, the Multnomahs, the Clackamas, the Tumwaters, and others are likewise still with us. There are a great number of people from these areas who identify themselves as Chinookan, primarily the Lower Willamette River peoples of the Grand Ronde Reservation. The Cascades, Tumwaters (Willamette Falls), and Clackamas were parties to the Willamette Valley Treaty, which helped establish the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde (see ch. 15 in this volume). These Chinookans, along with more than 20 other bands of people attached to the Grand Ronde Reservation, had their trust relationship with the federal government terminated in 1954. In response to this blow, they organized to regain their status, and did so in 1983. The Chinookan people of the Grand Ronde are working to maintain their connections to the past. One of the primary connections for Columbia River Chinookans at Grand Ronde is the persistence of the community language, Chinuk Wawa. (Ames, Boyd, Johnson 17-18)

I hope you enjoy this presentation, and am happy to answer any questions or provide further resources about this topic.

Cheers,
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Works Cited

Ames, Ken, Robert Boyd, and Tony Johnson. *Chinookan Peoples of the Lower Columbia*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013. Print.

