

Idaho Council on Indian Affairs
Nez Perce Tribe Presentation
February 21, 2006

Introduction

Hello, I am Rebecca A. Miles and I am the Chairman of the Nez Perce Tribal Executive Committee which is the governing body of the Nez Perce Tribe. I am here today to present to you the modern face of the Nez Perce Tribe. The Nez Perce Tribe is federally recognized as a sovereign government with headquarters located in Lapwai, Idaho. There are approximately 3,300 Nez Perce Tribal members, two-thirds of whom live on or near the reservation.

Background/History

First, I would like to give you a little background about the Tribe. The name "Nez Perce" was given to us through an interpreter with the 1805 Lewis and Clark expedition. The French Canadians interpreted the meaning as "Pierced Nose." However this cultural practice was not common to the Nimi'ipuu, which is how we refer to ourselves. Nimi'ipuu means the "real people" or "we the people."

We Nimi'ipuu have been around since time immemorial. The traditional homeland of the Nimi'ipuu is North Central Idaho, including areas in Southeastern Washington, Northeastern Oregon with usual and accustomed areas in Western Montana and Wyoming. The Nimi'ipuu aboriginal territory was approximately 17 million acres or approximately 70 thousand square kilometers or 27 thousand square miles; including the Clearwater River Basin, the South and Middle forks of the Salmon River Basin and their tributaries. The present day reservation boundaries were established by the Treaty of 1863 and cover 750,000 acres. This treaty was one of three treaties entered into with the United States government. The other treaties were the original Treaty of 1855 as well as the Treaty of 1868. These treaties reserved rights that the Nez Perce Tribe have always possessed. These include the right to hunt, gather and graze livestock and the right to fish in all usual and accustomed places.

Government

As I mentioned earlier, I am the Chairman of the Nez Perce Tribal Executive Committee or NPTEC. NPTEC consists of nine members that are elected to three year terms by a vote of the Tribal membership each May known as the General Council. As is stated in the 1948 constitution adopted by the Nez Perce Tribe, it is the obligation of the NPTEC to protect the health and welfare of the Nez Perce people by protecting and preserving our treaty rights, our sovereign authority, and our culture.

Modern Structure

When most people think of American Indians and reservations, the images that come to mind are people living in an unsophisticated environs and Indian casinos. This is the furthest thing from the truth. The Nez Perce Tribe of today is a complex and varied governmental structure that has an impact and influence in a wide variety of areas in the states of Idaho,

Washington and Oregon. While we have adapted to the demands of modern society, we do so by using our past history and tradition as a guide.

Employment numbers

As the second largest employer in our region, the Nez Perce Tribe employs over 900 people at various locations across the reservation with over forty percent of those employees being non-Tribal members working alongside our Tribal members, all of which are Idaho voters.

Employment Impact

According to a 2000 study on the economic impact of the Nez Perce Tribe, the estimated community earnings and wage impact of the Tribe was \$54.537 million.

The estimated total employment effects was 3,028. These impacts included Tribal government operations, Tribal enterprises and tourism related to gaming.

The Tribal government operations alone accounted for 30.677 million in earnings and employment effects of 1,254, while the Tribal enterprises which include things such as Forest products, retail sales, land enterprises and gaming operations accounted for 15.7 million in earnings impacts and employment effects of 1,142.

While gaming and motor fuel sales have been an important economic tool to the Tribe and have also provided a huge economic benefit to our region, as was demonstrated by our reaction as well as the other Idaho Tribes to HCR 35 and Rep. Cannon's HB 661, these endeavors do not define us. These have been vital tools that are a means to an end. That end is to promote our economic development, self-sufficiency and Tribal government.

Governmental Departments

Education Department

With this in mind I would like to give you a true snapshot of the Nez Perce Tribe. The Nez Perce Tribe has an education program that provides services for youths and adults. The Indian Head Start program operated by the Tribe has received awards for its work preparing our youth for public school. It also provides services to adults who are trying to complete their educations through long distance learning, vocational programs or through the pursuit of higher education. Our students for success program also works with the youth on drug and alcohol prevention programs and encouraging academic achievement with the goal of fostering personal resiliency and capability for our youth to succeed in education, career, community service, and wellness.

Social Services Department

The Nez Perce Tribe has a Social Services Program that is responsible for providing services to our senior citizens, children and the needy.

The services include a children's home to provide temporary shelter to kids suffering

from neglect or abuse, a senior citizens residence as well as services to homes of some of the elders, monetary assistance through TANF programs and commodity food distributions.

Fisheries Department

The Nez Perce Tribe operates a fisheries program that is second to none in the United States. The program has grown from under 10 employees in the mid 80's to the 160 employees that it currently has now. The program is responsible for providing technical, scientific and policy analysis to the Tribe as the Tribe works towards anadromous, resident fish recovery and restoration actions in our Treaty reserved areas. The Tribe operates several hatcheries that have been recognized nationwide for their success in helping preserve runs of fish from salmon to the lamprey.

The fisheries program consists of several divisions that include a

- watershed division,
- production division,
- research division,
- harvest division
- as well as a fisheries enforcement division.

The watershed division works to protect and restore watersheds and fisheries habitat to the rivers and streams that support the historical, cultural, and economic practices of the Tribe with an emphasis on strategies that rely on natural fish production and healthy river ecosystems to achieve this goal.

The production and research divisions assist in restoring the historic fish species, stocks, and populations to a healthy abundance.

The harvest division helps develop and implement a harvest monitoring program that incorporates treaty fishing rights, as guaranteed under the Treaty of 1855, with allocation and conservation issues to maximize the Nez Perce Tribe fishing opportunities in our reservation and at all usual and accustomed fishing areas.

Natural Resources Department

The Nez Perce Tribe has an extensive natural resource program that consists of a:

- bio-control department,
- cultural resources department,
- environmental restoration and waste management department,
- fire management department,
- forestry department,
- land services department,
- wildlife department and
- water resources department.

These departments are designed to promote, protect, and perpetuate the utilization and sustainability of the Tribe's invaluable treaty rights, natural resources and cultural resources necessary to the Nez Perce way of life.

The Bio-control program has been working on cutting edge research to use natural methods such as the use of insects to control the spread of noxious weeds without the use of harmful pesticides.

The cultural resources department focuses on preservation protection for ancient historic sites and cultural properties on and off Tribal lands and has worked extensively with such groups as the Smithsonian Institute on a variety of important archaeological projects such as remains repatriation.

The environmental restoration and waste management department has the goal of implementing our traditional beliefs of stewardship, restoration, and remediation on the land around us. Of note is our work with the government on cleanup of the Hanford Nuclear Reservation.

The program also publishes a newspaper, the Ta'c Titooqan, provides a summer educational program that works with middle school youth on math and science, and works with the Department of Homeland Security on projects vital to the protection of individuals within the reservation.

The fire management works on aiding in the fighting for our area forests and even provided workers for the cleanup in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

The Forestry Program provides forest management expertise and wildland fire protection to promote a healthy ecosystem; produce forest products and income; and provide educational and informational services to meet the goals of the Nez Perce People, Tribe and other owners of Trust lands within the Nez Perce Reservation.

The Land Services Program is responsible for writing Conservation Plans of Operations for all agriculture leases, based on owner input and wise land use practices.

It provides technical assistance at landowners requests, such as field and boundary maps, field inventories, and compliance investigations.

It also runs a GIS Program that provides services to all Tribal programs on map production, database design, data storage and retrieval, and analysis of spatial information.

The purpose of the Wildlife program is to develop and sustain a Wildlife Management Program that addresses the on Reservation and Treaty Territory Wildlife Management concerns of the Nez Perce Tribe. These have included work on wolf reintroduction in the state of Idaho, work on protection of big horn sheep and elk as well as the protection of several bird species.

Water Resources Department

The water resources department works to provide water resources management services to the Tribe that ensures the protection, enhancement, and development of the Tribe's water resources both surface and groundwater.

Health Center and Law Enforcement

In addition to the above, the Nez Perce Tribe also operates a health center, Nimi'ipuu Health, and has its own law enforcement department.

Conclusion

As you can see, the Nez Perce Tribe has evolved into an extensive modern government as we have adapted to meet the demands of an ever changing society with the goal of being a functioning part of the world around us, while at the same time preserving what is important to us.