Protecting Our Sacred Sites

Various factors have combined to adversely effect important sites and resources along the river. Hydroelectric dams have greatly contributed to the destruction of the sites which were so common along the Columbia River. Despite this and other realities, we have worked together to find solutions to help assure that cultural resources along the river will continue for future generations. We have taken measures to try to restrain and monitor these adverse effects upon the resources.

Our group has been able to address many issues relating to site stabilization and protection along the river, one such important project is the “Petroglyph Canyon” site, which has been an area of much concern for some time. This particular project involved relocating petroglyphs which were moved just prior to the inundation of their original locations along the Columbia River.

Stewardship of the Land

Since the earliest of times our people, as the original inhabitants of this land, have assumed the responsibility of taking care of the land and ensures that the resources remained intact. Today, we share this land with a diversity of people and so we now also share in the responsibility of ensuring that the resources are protected, so that future generations can have the same opportunity that we have enjoyed. Generations before us have acted as stewards for the land, now we should all do our part to share in the responsibility, as well as the appreciation of our valued and indispensable resources.

Acknowledgments:


Photo Credits: Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon; Nez Perce National Historical Park, Spalding, ID; Dean & Associates Conservation Services; and the Museum of Arts and Culture, Spokane, WA.

This Brochure was developed by Wanapa koot koot Cultural Resource work group and Nakia Williamson-Cloud.
Comprised of the Nez Perce, Yakama, Umatilla, and Warm Springs, along with the Bonneville Power Administration and Corps of Engineers, Wanapa koot koot has continually worked to preserve, protect, and perpetuate the cultural resources along the lower Columbia River system. These efforts have been undertaken in several key areas which are integral to sustaining the many valued cultural resources along the river. Included in these are:

- Inventory of lands along the Columbia River
- Tribal Oral Histories
- Monitoring cultural resource sites
- Evaluation of sites for eligibility to the National Register of Historic Places
- Protection and Stabilization of cultural resources
- Repatriation of remains to appropriate Tribes

Through these efforts we have initiated important dialogue between the tribes and federal land managing agencies - on behalf of the land and the resources.

Consultation with the land managing agencies is an essential aspect of the regulations which implement Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. This law obligates federal agencies to consult with any Indian tribe “that attaches religious or cultural significance to historic properties that may be affected by an undertaking.”

What are Cultural Resources?
Cultural Resource are the elements which are necessary for the continuation of the culture and history of the tribes who inhabited this particular locale. Our people did not separate ourselves from the land, so we are also a part of those resources which are so important to protect. Burial sites, ancient habitation sites, sacred sites, and other cultural use areas are some of the places that are considered most vulnerable.

Cultural and Archaeological resources are protected by state and federal laws, some acts of destruction are felonies and carry with them punishments which include fines and prison terms. Some of the most notable laws protecting archaeological/cultural resources include:


Examples of Illegal Acts:
- Defacing a pictograph or petroglyph
- Using a tool to remove an artifact from the ground (A tool being any instrument, even a stick).
- Digging for bottles
- Removing any artifacts
- Digging or probing the ground for historic or prehistoric material
- Vandalizing historic buildings

The River People
Our people have lived along the rivers from the beginning of time, gathering sustenance from the land. Since the earliest of times, the Nez Perce, Yakama, Umatilla, and Warm Springs people have lived along the Columbia River and its tributaries; taking the salmon and eel from the churning rapids, harvesting the various root and berry crops from the slopes and mountains, and hunting the deer and elk which abounded in the plateaus and mountain meadows. Gathering the sacred foods according to the laws and teachings provided to us, was the way we lived upon this ancient land.

The land and the resources continue to shape the lives of our people who still depend upon the river and the land. Throughout this country there are many places which mark this ancient relationship, some of which have been created through natural processes, such as the Two Sisters. Still others have been placed here by our ancestors and serve as reminders to our people about our teachings and our enduring relationship with the land.

Belocating the petroglyphs to Temani Pesh-wa Trail at Columbia Hills State Park.
Photo courtesy of Dean and Associates Conservation Services.

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