

Lewis & Clark



Bicentennial in Oregon

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Date: May 6, 2005

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Two Tribes to Commemorate 150th Anniversary of Treaty Signings in May and June

As the nation commemorates the Bicentennial of Lewis & Clark's Corps of Discovery, two confederated tribes within Oregon are making plans to observe the Sesquicentennial of their treaty signings – documents that ceded tribal lands to the U.S. government, and helped guide tribes' interactions with the federal government and the State of Oregon over the past 150 years.

Both treaties recognize the Warm Springs and Umatilla confederated tribes as distinct, sovereign nations with self-governing authority. Protecting and strengthening that sovereignty is still the highest priority today, and land reserved by the tribes is critical for exercising that self-governing authority.

Members of what are today the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation and the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation negotiated agreements in 1855, with both documents signed in June and ratified by Congress on March 8, 1859. The treaties created the Umatilla and Warm Springs reservations and reserved a number of rights for tribal members including the right to fish, hunt, gather foods and medicines, and pasture livestock on certain lands within their original homeland. The tribes' treaty signers retained a portion of these lands and reserved these exclusive rights in order to preserve elements of their lifestyle for future generations.

The 172,000-acre Umatilla reservation, located near Pendleton, is home today to members of the Umatilla, Walla Walla and Cayuse tribes, who ceded 6.4 million acres to the United States. They reserved just 510,000 acres near what is now Pendleton on which to live. Under the guidance of then Governor and Superintendent of Indian Affairs

for the Washington Territory, Isaac I. Stevens, and Joel Palmer, Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the Oregon Territory, these three tribes were originally destined to be relocated to the Yakama or Nez Perce Reservations, but the tribal treaty signers held out for their own reservation.

The Middle Oregon Treaty of 1855 was signed by the Wasco and Warm Springs bands ceding approximately 10 million acres to the U.S. government to make room for incoming settlers, reserving approximately 644,000 acres in Central Oregon. Later, a band of the Paiute tribe was moved to the Middle Oregon reservation. Today, these three distinct tribes occupy the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation, located 15 miles northwest of Madras. In commemorating the 150th Anniversary of the Treaty Signing, the Warm Springs Tribal Council is emphasizing the meaning of the treaty and of the ceded lands. The tribes maintain exclusive rights to hunt, fish and gather roots and berries in their usual- and accustomed- use lands within Oregon.

Warren “Rudy” Clements, public relations director for Warm Springs, states, “The Treaty of 1855 immortalized our identity with the land. The land we reserved was never owned by anyone; it was utilized by our people since time immemorial. That attachment to the land is of utmost importance to preserving our culture and way of life.”

Bobbie Conner, director of the Umatilla tribes’ Tamastlikt Cultural Institute, encourages better understanding of tribal culture during the national Lewis & Clark Bicentennial. “So far, it’s been all about Lewis and Clark. What about the tribal people and their homelands? The rest of the story is about the people who already inhabited this region. From our perspective, Lewis and Clark arrived in our homeland. It was not a wilderness, not a vast empty space; it was occupied and civilized,” said Conner.

The Oregon Heritage Commission has declared the treaty anniversaries as “events of statewide significance.” The Warm Springs tribe also is pursuing legislative initiatives that would encourage state and local governments to honor and support promises made in the 1855 Treaty.

Activities and exhibits commemorating these treaty anniversaries include:

- Exhibits and events at Tamastlikt Cultural Institute, including a new Living Cultural Village Exhibit opening May 27 – www.tamastlikt.com (541-966-9748)
- Exhibit and events at The Museum at Warm Springs: “Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow” opening June 23 and War Bonnet Parade and Reenactment of the Treaty signing on June 25 - www.warmsprings.biz/museum (541-553-3331)

Also visit Oregon’s official Lewis & Clark Bicentennial website – www.lcbo.net for information about other commemorative events.

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