

The Coast (Siletz) Reservation

By Robert Kentta, Cultural Resources Director

Amazingly enough, we are now in discussions with the Grand Ronde Tribal Council – after more than a year of them refusing to meet with us – and what do they want to discuss? Whether there was a Siletz Reservation at all before 1875 (the time of the second action aimed at reducing our reservation).

A number of years ago at a joint Tribal Council meeting, our Tribe laid out our historical research, proving our connections to our treaties, how our original reservation was created and why, its boundaries, etc. It was an attempt to educate them on our factual findings so they would be aware of them and to dispel any misinterpretations of our history.

Some of their group sat there quietly and at least one acted shocked at the difference in size between our respective original reservations, saying, “Geez, theirs was so big and ours so small.”

Generally, though, they responded quietly and thanked us for the information. Not long after, a letter was sent to us with Cheryle A. Kennedy’s signature stating that “they would vigorously defend their history.” We never were able to get a definition of what that meant, but now we have some inkling.

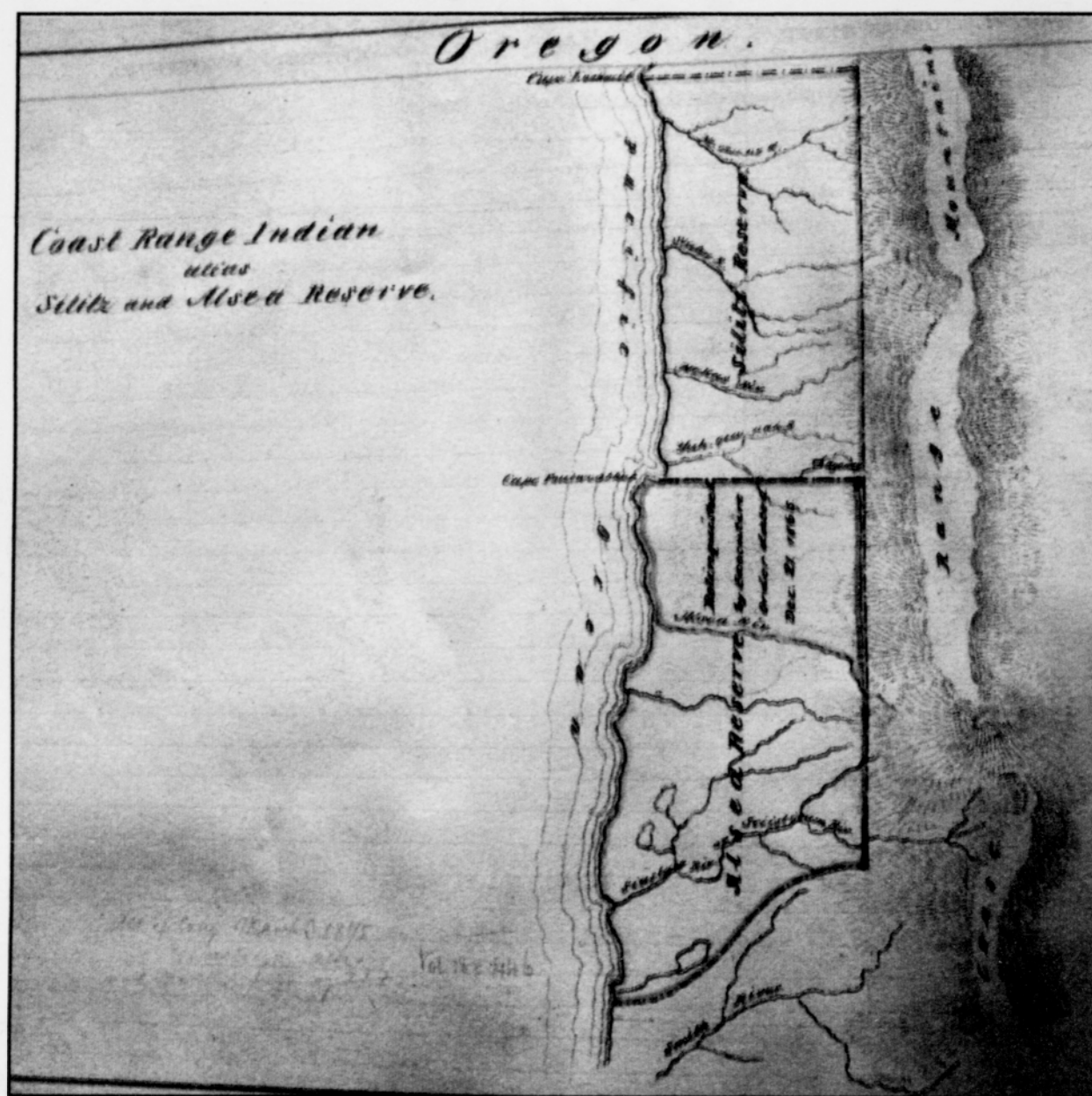
In a recent meeting between the Siletz Tribal Council and theirs, they were asked to defend maps purporting to describe the original Coast Reservation boundaries they had generated and published. The maps are not based upon any recognized sources or facts.

They were absolutely unable to defend them and pretty much ended up quoting from the 1855 Executive Order and other documents that confirm what we have always stated the boundaries to be, while relying on vague statements in correspondence, referring to the approximate average width of the original reservation.

They were supplied with concise recitations of historical facts directly refuting their position, but they ended the meeting by stating they didn’t believe either side had convinced the other of anything, the subject is complicated and difficult to understand, they needed another meeting to discuss it further – and needed time to prepare their position paper. We said we are ready anytime.

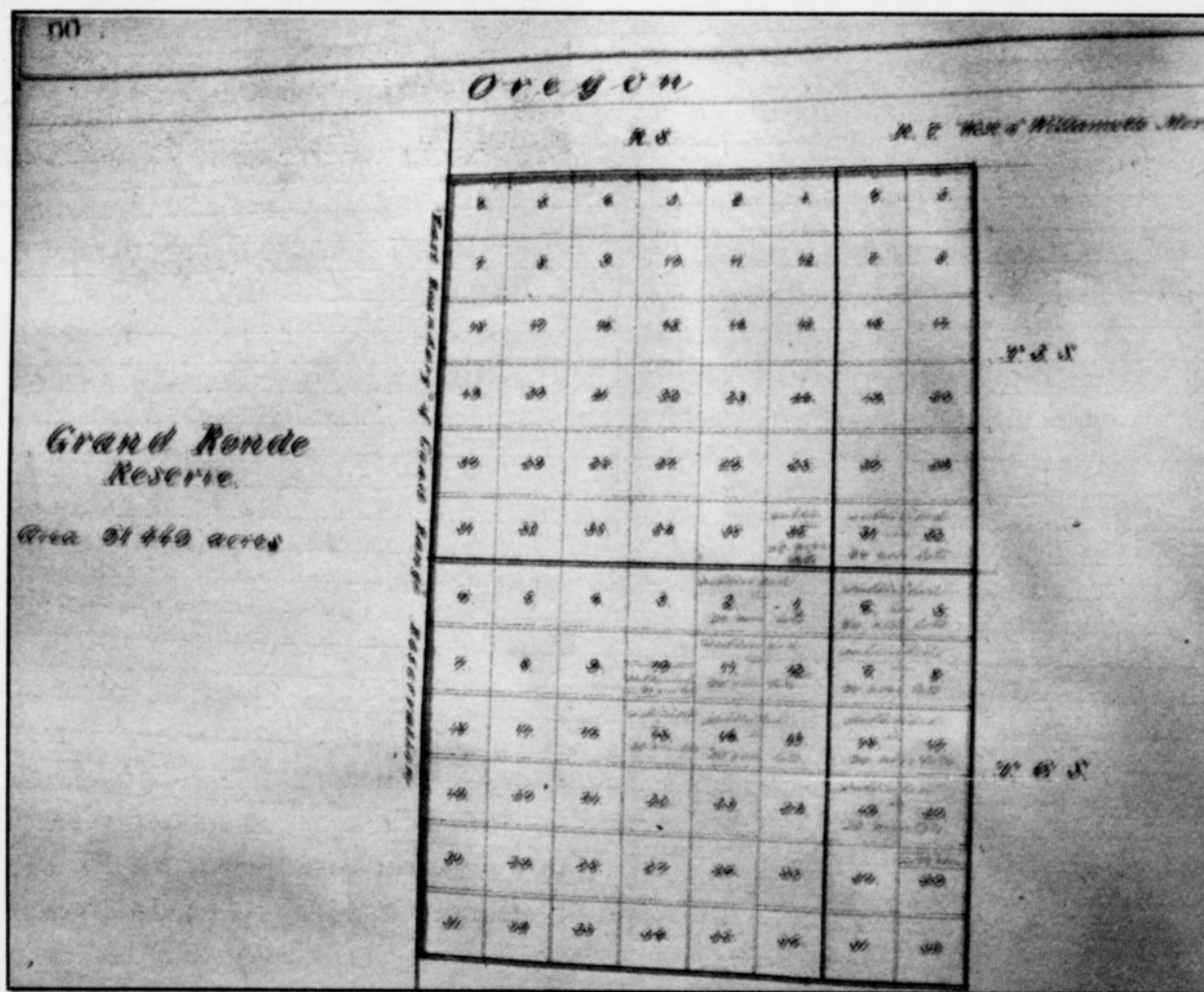
These issues and their position began with surreptitious, lightly threatening (and generally incorrect) statements in their newspaper articles, on their historical interpretive material and on things like the before-mentioned production and publishing of maps.

But this has been escalating and the rhetoric elevating to the point of, at the recent meeting, an overt (but weak and factually bankrupt) attempt to bring our sovereign right to our original reservation history into question (see Grand Ronde amicus brief in support of the State of Oregon’s position regarding our appeal of the Grand Ronde ceremonial hunt rule, articles in the Grand Ronde newspaper *Smoke Signals* in 2009 and 2010, and more recently the Winter 2010-2011 issue of *Oregon Historical Quarterly* in which David Lewis of Grand



Courtesy photos from Brady Smith

The Coast (Siletz) Reservation (above) and the Grand Ronde Reservation (below)



Ronde and I were asked to submit dueling articles on the subject).

This article is an effort to bring this update to our membership and encourage each of you to read all you can on the subject, especially Charles Wilkinson’s history of our people, and be prepared to assist in the defense of our homelands, original Siletz Reservation, our Tribal sovereignty and our people’s rights as Siletz Indians.

Read the material and you will see who is relying on facts and reasonable representation of them. Ours is clearly the reasonable and logical version of history, supportable by solid facts from primary sources.

The treaties signed by our ancestors in 1853-1855 set out the process for our reservation to be established by presidential order (aka an Executive Order).

The seven ratified treaties of the Rogue Valley, mid-Rogue region, Umpqua Valley and Willamette Valley (six that ceded lands and one a supplementary treaty, gaining consent of the Tribes already on the Table Rock Temporary Reservation to have the mid-Rogue and others confederated with them) stated that the Tribes signing the treaty agreed to cede all of their lands described in the treaty and established a temporary reservation within the ceded area (or right to remain within the ceded lands generally) until a permanent reservation was established.

Federal policy regarding Tribes in the west was still formulating and the decision was made to continue the policy in Oregon that already had been approved for California (which never was fully implemented and resulted in disaster and the “rancheria system” for survivors) of

confederating the many Tribes and bands of Western Oregon upon one reservation instead of allowing the many Tribes and bands to maintain many separate and individual Tribal reservations.

In April 1855, Superintendent of Indian Affairs for Oregon Joel Palmer sent his recommendation to establish the Coast (Siletz) Reservation. His maps were separated from his letter during the ocean voyage to Washington, D.C., and were lost for months. When they were reunited at the Commissioner of Indian Affairs office in Washington, a flurry of correspondence ensued that resulted in President Franklin Pierce signing our reservation into existence on Nov. 9, 1855. This included approximately 1.1 million acres of Tribal homeland, almost one-third of the Oregon Coast, more than 100 miles long from north to south.

The kink in the plan came when it became obvious it was going to be difficult to deliver enough supplies to feed, clothe and otherwise provide basic necessities for the approximately 5,000 Western Oregon Indians slated to occupy the Coast (Siletz) Reservation.

Palmer’s solution was to purchase some Donation Land Claims from early settlers in the south fork of the Yamhill watershed and use that area as a staging ground (encampment) for the Tribes being removed to the new reservation. The plan was revised into a recommendation to have the encampment added to the reservation just established (our reservation), but when the matter was fully considered, another reservation – separate but adjacent and sharing a boundary – was established by Order of President James Buchanan on June 30, 1857.

The order stated this was to be considered primarily in fulfillment of the Willamette Treaty, which also makes the distinction that the Grand Ronde was being established as “a” reservation for specific Tribes – rather than an extension of our reservation, the Coast (Siletz) Reservation.

Subsequently, our reservation had parts opened to settlement (1865 ca. 200,000 acres – severing the reservation into two parts – and 1875, approximately 700,000 acres, taking the remaining southern portion and the northern half of the northern portion). During all of that time, the Indian Department was adamant that the Grand Ronde agent’s jurisdiction did not extend to the coast.

One of the most direct examples of this were the responses to a complaint by the Siletz agent that the Grand Ronde agent was attempting to interfere in the affairs on the north end of the Siletz (Coast) Reservation. The acting commissioner of Indian Affairs wrote to both agents that the 1857 Executive Order established the Grand Ronde agent’s jurisdiction – and needed to be adhered to – and the Grand Ronde agent’s authority ended at the western boundary of the 8th range of townships west of the Willamette Meridian.

See Siletz Reservation on next page.