

Klamath Tribes are seeing a brighter future

CHILOQUIN (AP) – Standing in the shadows of a dilapidated lumber mill, Jeff Mitchell picked up a piece of firewood from the pile on the cold concrete floor and held it in the sunlight.

“This is the tribes’ very first timber-based industry in over 50 years since termination,” said Mitchell, a member of the tribal council of the Klamath Tribes. “Five years from now we’re going to look back and say this is where it started.”

The Klamath Tribes were one of the wealthiest in the United States in 1954 when Congress terminated their tribal status.

Officially, the decision was supposed to assimilate Indian people into society, but tribes have long felt it was a grab of their valuable timber holdings.

The Klamath, Modoc and Yahooskin Band of Snake Indians, lumped together on a reservation after being driven from their native territories, lost nearly 900,000 acres (364,200 hectares) – a parcel that eventually was sold off for private timberlands and ranches, turned into rural subdivisions, and incorporated into two national forests.

With the reservation and their identity as Indians gone, many tribal members sank into poverty and left their homeland.

But in 1986, the tribes won restoration of their tribal status.

Now, 22 years later, they are on the verge of buying back a piece of their old reservation: 90,000 acres (36,422 hectares) of lodgepole pine known as the Mazama Tree Farm.

Edison Chiloquin, a descendant of the chief for whom the town is named, refused to cash the pay-off checks and burned a sacred fire until the government gave him 580 acres back.

They hope to revive the timber industry that once sustained them as part of a larger campaign to remove dams from the Klamath River to bring salmon back to their territories.

The Trust for Public Lands, a nonprofit land conservation organization, helped arrange an option for the Klamaths to buy

the 90,000 acres (36,422 hectares) from a holding company. The price has not been disclosed, but \$21 million the tribes hope to get from the federal government is expected to cover the bulk of it.

The Mazama is the biggest of 32 properties the trust is working to restore to Indian people.

It has been a long and bumpy road.

Mitchell grew up camping out with his dad at fire lookouts and guard stations, watching over the tribes’ forests in the 1950s.

“There used to be plenty of work around here then,” his dad, Ben Mitchell, said. “We never wanted for anything. Everything was here.”

When he wasn’t working for the tribal forestry program, Ben

Mitchell was working for his brother-in-law’s logging outfit, setting choker – wrapping the end of the steel cable around the log so it could be yarded up the hill to the landing – or hook tending on the landing where the logs were loaded onto trucks. When he wasn’t working, he hunted and fished on forests and creeks now blocked off by subdivisions.

All that changed when the tribes lost the only home they’d ever known.

Tribal members were paid off from the sales, given checks for thousands of dollars, more money than many had ever seen. Some bought cars, others got drunk.

A few, like Edison Chiloquin, a descendant of the chief for whom the town is named, re-

fused to cash the checks and burned a sacred fire until the government gave him 580 acres (235 hectares) back.

“We just didn’t have sense,” said Ben Mitchell. “Back then, everyone looked down upon him. But he was the only smart person in the bunch.”

Since then, the tribes’ hopes would surge and wane with each new development. Amid a water crisis, the Bush administration considered returning national forest lands that came from the reservation, but nothing came of it.

Other private parcels came up for sale, but were out of the tribes’ reach.

Still, they developed a formal plan for managing the forests they hoped to get back.

Hopi top leaders resigning amid political turmoil

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. (AP) – The two top leaders of the Hopi Tribe were planning to resign Dec. 31 in hopes of putting to rest what has been political chaos on the northern Arizona reservation.

Hopi Vice Chairman Todd Honyaoma Sr. announced last month that he would resign if it would restore peace to the Hopi people.

He said that he will make good on the promise and leave the position.

“I thought about it long and hard,” he said. “I may only have a year to go, but I think this is in the best interest of my family and my constituents that I get out.”

Chairman Ben Nuvamsa, who was sworn into office in March 2007 after a special election, announced his resignation during a Tribal Council meeting Monday.

“The fact of it is people are torn, families are torn apart, and it’s even gone into our kivas,” he said. “So I think that maybe if I took myself out of the equation, then maybe things will settle down.”

The Tribal Council was scheduled to meet this week (after deadline for this newspaper) to consider whether to accept

Nuvamsa and Honyaoma’s resignations.

If the resignations are accepted, it would leave a rare vacancy in the leadership posts.

The leaders’ terms were set to end in December 2009.

According to the Hopi constitution, those positions would have to be filled through an election. In the meantime, the tribal secretary would be next in command, followed by the tribal treasurer, but they would not have the authority to preside over Tribal Council meetings.

Nuvamsa, whose authorities as chairman were suspended in September, and Honyaoma had clashed for much of Nuvamsa’s time in office. The tangle led to a suspended appellate court, raised allegations of fraud and disrespect for traditional leaders and divided the Tribal Council.

Former council member Caleb Johnson, whose term ended last month, described the relationship between Nuvamsa and Honyaoma as a bad marriage now faced with divorce. Nuvamsa’s weakness, he said, was stubbornness, and Honyaoma’s was his lack of managerial experience.

“If both of these two people had put the interest of the tribe first and not tried to protect

their own turf, then I think something could have been worked out,” he said. “But that just didn’t happen.”

Nuvamsa said his time in office has been physically and emotionally exhausting.

He successfully fought an attempt by the Tribal Council to oust him over residency requirements.

The former U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs superintendent also had been charged criminally while in office and had warrants issued for his arrest. Some of those charges still are pending, but Nuvamsa has maintained he’s done nothing wrong.

Nuvamsa said he plans to revive a tribal consulting and training business he ran before he took his first political post with the Hopi Tribe as chairman.

Honyaoma, a heavy equipment operator and former council member, said he will focus on his family, a wife and three children in Hotevilla on Third Mesa.

“I feel relieved a little bit,” he said.

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Handcrafted flutes stolen

APACHE, Okla. (AP) – The son of a renowned Native American artist is hoping a set of handcrafted flutes that were stolen from him are returned.

Tim Tate Nevaquaya awoke on a recent morning to find his home in Apache had been vandalized and five flutes he had placed in his vehicle gone.

“When I found out they took these flutes, it’s just really upsetting,” Nevaquaya said. “They were really special instruments.”

The stolen flutes include a distinctive white pine flute Nevaquaya and his wife made while on a trip to Florida, which he said “really means a lot to me.”

Nevaquaya valued his four missing flutes at about \$1,100 and one belonging to his brother, Calvert, at \$1,000.

“That was his pride and

joy,” Nevaquaya said of the flute, which his brother played during concert performances. “That was something he never wanted to give up.”

The Nevaquayas are two of the four sons of Doc Tate Nevaquaya, a Comanche flutist who is considered one of the great Native American artists of his generation. He was named an Oklahoma Treasure by the Governor’s Arts Award in 1995. Doc Nevaquaya died the following year.

The brothers have carried on the flute-playing tradition and were slated to provide music for the Comanche Elders Day program in Lawton.

They have gotten instruments to perform with, but there are certain subtleties in tone and texture that separate a concert-quality flute from a standard creation, Tim Nevaquaya said.

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