

## NATIVE NEWS FROM ACROSS THE NATION

## FISH MYSTERY — Did the Name of Oregon Come From the Smelt-like Ooligan?

■ Tribal member David Lewis and his college partner Scott Byram could be onto something.

By Justin Phillips

Tribal member David Lewis is on the verge of making one of the biggest discoveries in the history of Oregon.

Lewis and Scott Byram, both University of Oregon students, are in the mix to find where Oregon got its name.

Lewis was born in Germany to Tribal member Gary Lewis and his wife Polly. The family moved to Italy a year later. David's grandmother is Tribal Elder Norma Lewis.

Gary and Polly also have a daughter, Patti Schmitt (Lewis).

Lewis graduated high school in the Salem area then worked in Northern California with different Tribes.

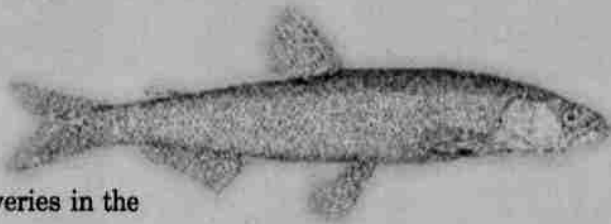
Lewis and Byram claim the word Oregon seems to come from the "ooligan," a word that described a small, smelt-like fish whose oil, or grease, continues to be very important to Native Americans.

If this turns out to be the case, we are the only state named after a fish.

Lewis said that American Indians from the east who traded with coastal Tribes, most likely Western Cree people from the Great Lakes area, did not use the "l" sound in their language.

They used "r" instead, turning "ooligan" into "oorigan."

Ooligan is known for their migrations to spawn in sandy beach areas. Dried ooligan and its oil were valuable trade items as a food condiment, medicine and canoe sealant. In the 1700's, ooligan "grease trails" ranged from Alaska to California, even crossing into the Rockies. These pathways carried ooligan to people speaking many languages, which researchers say resulted in at least 30 documented spellings and pronunciations of the word.



**Ooligan** — This smelt-like fish known as an "ooligan" was once an important part of the Northwest Native culture because of its many uses.

Previous research says "Oregon" might have derived from Spanish, French, or more southerly American Indian words.

Lewis said the Native Americans of the Northwest were known for their great wealth and ooligan oil was one of their most valued trade items.

Major Robert Rogers, a British army officer based in the Great Lakes area, explored the country to the west that he spelled "Ouragan" and "Ourigan."

Lewis and Byram predict that he picked up this name from his interactions with the Cree people in Central Canada, who had traveled by canoe to the West Coast for trading.

Lewis also found that the name Oregon first appeared in literature in 1778 when the explorer Jonathan Carver published *Travels through the Interior Part of North America*. Carver reported Native American accounts of a great river in the Northwest known as the River Oregon. The river is now known as the Columbia River.

"Because of the widespread trade and the great value on the ooligan grease throughout the region, ooligan was a common word in Chinook Jargon," said Lewis.

Tony Johnson, the Tribe's Language Specialist, thinks it might have derived from an earlier version of the language.

"Ulxan" was recorded locally for smelt



Photo by Justin Phillips

**College Project** — Tribal member David Lewis got people thinking about the origins of the name of the state of Oregon with his college project at the University of Oregon. Lewis and his partner Scott Byram believe that Oregon could be named after the small, oily fish that was once important to Northwest Indians.

utilizing universities as good training ground with professors who have the appropriate knowledge," said Lewis.

Lewis has also produced many publications and manuscripts.

He holds a Master of Arts in Anthropology and is working towards a Ph.D. in Anthropology.

His areas of specialization lie in cultural anthropology, cultural resources management, traditional cultural properties, Native American history and culture, international indigenous activism, indigenous sovereignty, Pacific Northwest history and cross-cultural communication.

"In setting out to investigate the meaning of Oregon, we found ourselves exploring new aspects of the history of pre-colonial indigenous cultures in the North American West," said Lewis. "In one sense a place-name study, this research also contributes to a redefinition of indigenous history, which has so often been dismally portrayed. Native peoples are now participants in writing history; and as these relationships continue to mature, a vast, multifaceted heritage will unfold."

Lewis has spent a lot of his time studying and reading history. Lewis and Byram should serve as examples of the adage — you can do anything.

One of our own Tribal members is involved in something unique and meaningful. He is on the verge of changing the history of Oregon, maybe forever. ■

or candlefish and was a common word in regional Chinuk-wawa (Jargon)," said Johnson. "The source of the word itself may well be the Chinookan languages of the Columbia River."

Lewis and Byram have spent countless hours into every bit of information they could find on the subject matter of ooligan.

"I think we've taken a lead on this subject matter," said Lewis. "It's really amazing to see how people have changed their minds in terms of what Oregon means. I've never really thought about it in that way. I knew it would be politically important because Oregon is a big word. Even if they don't believe in the ooligan origin, they've definitely changed their mind about thinking it came from somewhere else."

When asked what he wanted to do after graduating from college, he was quick to say, "I hope to work for Grand Ronde someday, perhaps in Cultural Resources."

Lewis has also initiated a program at the U of O to train people in Native research.

"I would like to see more of the Tribes

## Department of the Interior's New Head Ordered to Stand Trial

SPOKANE, WA. (AP) — Interior Secretary Gale Norton will meet next month with American Indian leaders to begin discussions on a plan to reorganize agencies that manage millions of dollars in royalties and rents from Indian lands.

J. Steven Griles, an Interior Deputy Director, told the National Congress of American Indians meeting in Spokane that Norton would begin the legally mandated consultations in Albuquerque, N.M., in December.

Griles' announcement came hours before a judge ordered Norton to stand trial on contempt charges. It was not immediately known whether the development would alter Norton's plans to meet with Indian leaders.

U.S. District Judge Royce Lamberth set a trial date for early December for Norton and Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs Neal McCaleb to show why they shouldn't be held in contempt of court for allegedly violating court orders and misleading the judge about the status of royalties.

Norton announced earlier this month the formation of the new Bureau of Indian Trusts Assets Management to oversee the accounting of \$500 million a year in historically mismanaged royalties from Indian land.

The Interior secretary is the top administration official for Indian affairs and serves as trustee for the royalty revenues.

The new bureau was created under the threat of contempt of court citations against Norton and nearly 40 other past and present officials for their failure to reform the trust fund, which manages mining, grazing, logging and other royalties from Indian land.

Tribal leaders attending the annual conference here criticized the Interior Department for failing to consult them before deciding to reorganize the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA).

"We have found that we cannot trust our trustee," said Keith Harper, an attorney representing 300,000 Indians in a class-action lawsuit against Norton, to the audience. Harper's clients have

proposed court-ordered receivership.

The lawsuit claims more than \$10 billion has been squandered through over a century of mismanaging the trust fund.

Lamberth has ordered the Interior Department to find out how much it owes the Indians and to fix its accounting system.

Lamberth last month threatened Interior with contempt of court, prompting Norton to move trust fund management from the BIA into the new, separate bureau.

The BIA has tried for years to account for money that was lost, stolen or never collected in individual accounts dating back more than a century.

Indian leaders accused Norton of unilaterally making the decision to change the most powerful government body in Indian Country.

"It seems like Secretary Norton is the Grinch that stole consultation," said Tex Hall, a North Dakota Tribal Chairman who was elected to the Presidency of NCAI while in Spokane. "The United

States has not lived up to its obligations."

Tribal leaders from across the nation stood in line at microphones to criticize Norton and Interior officials for neglecting to ask their opinions of the reorganization plan.

"One hundred fifty years of mismanaged trusts and we have less than a month to prepare for this," said Gregg Bourland, Chairman of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe.

Norton's decision to reorganize the bureau came shortly after an independent report was completed detailing the problems with the current system of managing Indian accounts, said Bourland.

Griles said all but five pages of the report — which were ordered sealed by the district court — have been made public on the department's Web site.

— ON THE NET —

NCAI: [www.ncai.org](http://www.ncai.org)  
Interior Department: [www.doi.gov](http://www.doi.gov)