

## Native Names workshop hopes to bring lost, or nearly lost, Indian history back to life

By Ron Karten

*Smoke Signals staff writer*

The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde hosted Tribes from across Oregon and Washington on Wednesday, March 12, to collect Native place names from across the Northwest.

By their example, they hope to encourage Tribes from across the country and aboriginals from around the world to also participate in the project by submitting Native place names.

In 2005, the U.S. Geological Survey awarded the Coeur d'Alene Tribe a grant to jumpstart what it called "The Native Names Project."

And Coeur d'Alene Geographic Information Systems Manager Frank Roberts helped open the Grand Ronde workshop.

The workshop encouraged participation by providing an interactive Web site for the information, and showing the system being used to catalogue all the information.

The workshop also described the process for changing names that aboriginal Native Americans consider offensive.

Currently, for example, more than 80 place names in Oregon use the word "squaw," according to Volker Mell, the Grand Ronde Tribe's GIS coordinator.

The project is particularly beneficial for aboriginal culture experts. In Grand Ronde, it is the Cultural Resources Department. As Cultural Protection Coordinator, Tribal member Eirik Thorsgard oversees identification and stewardship of oral traditions, archeological sites and gathering areas.

"Place names tie all three together," Thorsgard said. "It also benefits the language program here to use original languages in regards to specific locations."

"It showed us how to organize the data, and that there's a national effort on behalf of some Tribes to

share this information."

"One of the most important things about this project is preserving the individual stories and pronunciations of the places," says the project description on a federal GIS Web site (<http://gis.cdatribe-nsn.gov/Native-Names/ProjectDescription.aspx>).

"On many reservations across the United States it is the unfortunate truth that only a handful of the people know the Native geographic names. The goal of this project is to collect these place names before they disappear forever."

"With the help of this conference," said Tribal Cultural Resources Manager David Lewis, "we are able to plug into another effort going on. They're actually doing a lot of the work for us, and we will be able to fill in any questions."

A number of Tribes are creating their own place names maps, Lewis said. "We're not ahead of the game, but we're with the beginning Tribes on the project," he said.

To see how far the project has progressed, find the U.S. Geological Survey's national map at <http://nationalmap.gov> and from there, go to "Viewer," go to "Geographic Names," and click on both "Native Names" check boxes.

You won't find much yet, Mell said, because to date only six Tribes are participating.

"We should be able to put points and layers of information on Google maps that have our history, and give a whole new depth to Google," Lewis said.

The map also has the capability to add additional information, Mell said.

"You can have an audio for pronunciation, and you can put videos in there, too," he said.

"It looks like a real positive thing for our area," Lewis added. "To self-define our own territory and land. It's an important part of our sover-



Photo by Evan Schneider of the Oregon Historical Society

**Tribal Elder Don Day, left, and Tribal Cultural Resources Manager David Lewis examine a U.S. Geological Survey site that allows Tribes to input Native geographic names on a map of the country. A workshop held in Grand Ronde on March 12 sought to collect Native place names from across the Northwest.**

eighty. For the last 150 years or so, the Tribes have been basically told what their relationship is with the government, but seldom have the Tribes been able to self-define their traditional homelands."

The Coeur d'Alene Tribe, with its grant, "have done the legwork on how this data is organized," Lewis said.

The Grand Ronde Tribe has another level of work to do.

"We've got to get all of the names written down in one place first, and then figure out what we can share with the public," Thorsgard said.

Excluded from public dissemination, for the protection of the sites, will be information about villages, burials or traditional Native spiritual places.

In trying to compile all of the data for every geographic location — including the Willamette Valley, Columbia River, Umpqua Basin and Rogue Valley — Tribal cultural departments have their hands full, Thorsgard said.

"Each area has its own problems," he said. "Along the Columbia River,

sites may have as many as five languages."

Names could be Clackamas, Multnomah, Chinuk Wawa, English, languages once used by plateau Tribes and even the language for the Kalapuyans, all extinct except for a few fragments here and there.

"Sometimes," Thorsgard said, "there may be many, many more languages than those we know. And then we have to try to figure out how to put all this information on a map."

"We have place names that we can't pin down because somebody recorded, say, a Kalapuya Elder speaking about a place but (anthropologists and others) never asked specifically where it was. It is important to note that the only surviving language is Chinuk Wawa. The other languages are gone. They don't exist anymore."

"We probably should have started our part five to eight years ago," Thorsgard said, "but the department hasn't had the resources to do it until now." ■

## Easter egg hunt at Tribal housing



Photos by Michelle Alaimo

**Children take off to grab Easter eggs during the Easter Egg Hunt at family housing on Saturday, March 22. Right, Tribal member Joshua Roberts, 10, opens a plastic egg to see if there's candy or a ticket inside after he filled a basket with eggs. Finding an egg with a ticket inside meant the Easter egg hunter received an additional prize.**

