

Tribe broadly represented at conference

By Ron Karten

Smoke Signals staff writer

Calling the Grand Ronde Tribe and its predecessor Tribes "stewards of the Willamette Valley," Tribal member and Tribal Cultural Resources Manager David Lewis joined some 50 Northwest environmental leaders for a conference called "Confluences: Water and Justice," a three-day event held March 26-28 at the University of Portland.

The event included a river cruise lecture on the Willamette.

Lewis described how Oregon's rivers were used as "a system for trade," including shells, furs, fish, mats, armor and camas bulbs.

The Chinuk wawa trade language, he said, was developed for just this purpose and used extensively at such trading sites as The Dalles, Willamette Falls, Cascade Locks and the riverside enclave now called Champoeg State Park.

He described how European land claims and the federal "colonization" of the West "eliminated aboriginal land claims west of the Cascades," as they did to aboriginals everywhere.

"With the most productive soils in the world" and vast stretches of land already in grasses not needing to be cleared, the Willamette Valley was considered "an Eden" by Europeans looking for farmland.

In service to the needs of U.S. settlers, the federal government, with the help of religious orders, tried to "educate Indians away from their culture," attachment to the land and the rivers with tragic results.

Lewis described 19 treaties Indian agents agreed to with Indians, though none were ultimately ratified by Congress because they failed to sever the Indian attachment to the land.

"The Tribes refused to go," he

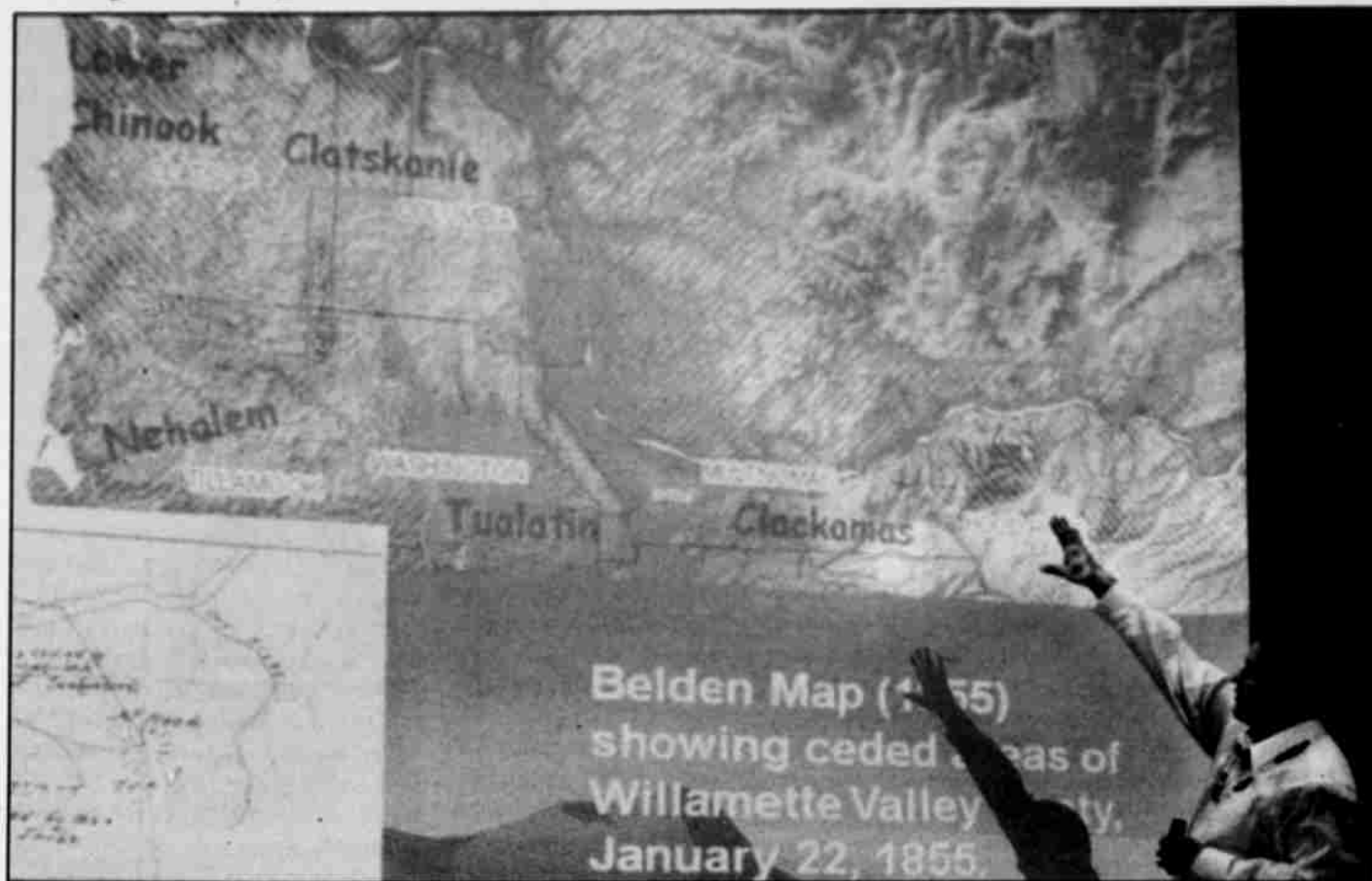


Photo by Ron Karten

Tribal member and Tribal Cultural Resources Manager David Lewis spoke during "Confluences: Water and Justice," a three-day event held March 26-28 at the University of Portland.

said.

In the 100 years from 1855, when the treaties with the federal government began to be ratified, to 1954, when the federal government terminated 63 Oregon Tribes, American aboriginals went from owning all of the land to almost none of it, he said.

Today, however, as Lewis demonstrated in Portland at the end of March, Indians remain on the land and they are again becoming leading stewards in the Willamette Valley.

He noted the Tribe's seven-year

project tracking lamprey, Tribal agreements with state and federal agencies that are returning some Tribal sovereignty over the land and waterways, and the habitat work that the Tribe has done resulting in ever greater numbers of fish returning to reservation waterways like Agency Creek.

The conference also included sessions describing the history and status of environmental toxins, water and ethics, water and law, stream restoration above the dams, Intel Corp.'s use of water and Klamath Basin issues, among many.

"The way we use water," said keynote speaker Maude Barlow, chairperson of the Council of Canadians and senior water adviser to the United Nations, "is the most powerful symbol of inequality in our world."

On the last morning of the conference, the Grand Ronde Canoe Family, led by Tribal member and Cultural Resources Language and Cultural Specialist Bobby Mercier, performed a greeting ceremony.

The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde supported the event with a \$5,000 contribution. ■

Kitzhaber said briefing was very helpful

CANDIDATES continued
from page 8

"There were remains recovered near the Sandy River," Leno said. "The Warm Springs were there and our cultural people showed up and were told they couldn't stay until the Warm Springs said they would say they invited them. ... That's just not correct. We want to be involved along that river for cultural aspects."

"If we had not been terminated, we would have been at the table," Tribal Council member Val Sheker said. "We're not the only Tribe that is constantly fighting to be acknowledged."

Tribal Council member Wink Soderberg added that the Grand Ronde have actual villages in the west end of the Gorge where Tribal ancestors lived.

Kitzhaber said the briefing was very helpful and that he would contact the Tribe when he reached a decision on the issue.

Kitzhaber also said he would support insertion of Native American Tribal history in Oregon into state history books, as well as adding a

full-time Indian Education Specialist to the state Department of Public Instruction.

"I would be supportive of that," he said. "It is extraordinarily sensible."

Kitzhaber also reminded Tribal Council that during his two terms as governor, he signed the executive order that established government-to-government relations between the state and nine federally recognized Tribes and that he signed the compact that established the one casino per Tribe on reservation land policy.

"I'm concerned about a casino in the Gorge," he said, adding that he called Department of Interior staff to tell them that if he is re-elected governor, he will not support approval of the Warm Springs' proposal to build a new casino at Cascade Locks.

Before each candidate left, Tribal Public Affairs Director Siobhan Taylor gifted Dudley with a beaded Tribal necklace and gifted Kitzhaber with a medicine bag.

Martin told both candidates that the Confederated Tribes of Grand



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

Tribal Attorney Rob Greene, middle, goes over information concerning the Tribe's desire to be added as a consulting Tribe to the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Act with Democratic gubernatorial candidate John Kitzhaber as Tribal Council member Valorie Sheker looks on during a meeting on Wednesday, March 31.

Ronde will financially support its friends seeking the state's highest office, but might not necessarily

endorse any candidate, especially in the primary phase of the election. ■