



THE HARVARD PROJECT ON AMERICAN INDIAN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

John F. Kennedy School of Government • Harvard University

HONORING NATIONS: 2006 HONOREE

Cultural Education and Revitalization Program Makah Cultural and Research Center Makah Nation

Contact:
PO Box 160
Neah Bay, WA 98357
Phone: 360-645-2711
Fax: 360-645-2656

As the westernmost Indian reservation in the lower 48 states, the Makah Reservation was established by the 1855 Treaty of Neah Bay. Historically, the Makah lived in large, extended family longhouses organized in coastal villages and drew their sustenance in large part from the sea. First contact between Makah people and non-natives began in the 1790s with devastating and long-lasting effects. The Makah were not only besieged by disease and epidemics that resulted in great population loss, but eventually their language fluency and culture were greatly diminished by the establishment of Bureau of Indian Affairs' schools. But in the 1970s, the nation turned a potential crisis to its advantage through the establishment of the Makah Cultural Education and Revitalization Program. It serves as a hub of the community, as well as steward of a world-class museum collection. By claiming and caring for the treasures of its ancestors, the Makah Nation ensures the cultural viability of its people.

In the winter of 1970, weather and erosion uncovered a significant Makah cultural site, the Village of Odette. The village had been buried by a catastrophic mudslide 250 years earlier. Unfortunately, the site's exposure led to active interest by outsiders, including archeologists from Washington State University, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the U.S. Park Service. To protect its cultural contributions from looting and further erosion, the Makah Nation undertook an official excavation effort. This crystallized the need to consider and implement strategies for preserving culture through strategic assertions of sovereignty. Placing great value on traditions and homelands, the Makah Nation found itself in the not-so-unique position of protecting and preserving land, heirlooms, and culture, while balancing the need to foster economic opportunities and development.

The Nation inserted tribal citizens in the ongoing excavation process and claimed the entire collection at the Village of Ozette as a national treasure. It took the lead in the excavation of over 55,000 objects and artifacts from the site materials that related to all aspects of ancient tribal life, including tools, clothing, art, caches of heirlooms, and ancestral remains. Significantly, the tribe's involvement made it possible for the materials to be removed in a manner that both enriched contemporary Makah community and respected the lifeways of its forebears. For example, entire longhouses were moved intact, and articles found in those longhouses were stored with the same longhouses after relocation.

The Makah Nation's assertion of sovereignty over the excavation was not its only response to the situation. The Nation decided to develop a strategy for protecting all of its cultural

resources from its material artifacts to its intellectual property that would also promote community sustainability, cultural viability, and economic development. Three important aspects of this strategy were: 1) partnerships to gain necessary expertise; 2) efforts to strengthen the legitimacy of the tribe's activities; and 3) an understanding that even not-for-profit tribal enterprises can contribute to the Nation's economy.

In 1979, the Makah Cultural and Research Center (MCRC) was founded as a place for renewing and preserving cultural traditions. It was chartered through the state by the tribal council as a not-for-profit 501(c) 3 tribal enterprise. The MCRC has four main divisions: the Tribal Historic Preservation Office; the Makah Language Program; the Library, Archives, and Education Department; and the Collections Department. The latter houses the world-class collection from the excavation of the Village of Ozette. The four divisions ensure protection of cultural and historic properties on and near the Makah Indian reservation; promote learning, use and fluency of the Makah language; archive important cultural documents, photographs, and recordings; and educate tribal citizens and the general public. The storage facility is 8,100 square feet and is the largest archaeological repository in the State of Washington. The MCRC uses traditional Makah values and language to store, access, and analyze its collection. The museum serves as the centerpiece for all the MCRC efforts, displaying Makah treasures, chronicling its history, and hiring only tribal citizens as staff all of whom are required to be fluent readers and writers in the Makah language.

The partnerships and working relations fostered by the MCRC with schools, other governments, and private individuals are noteworthy. The Nation maintains a professional working relationship with the scientific community in collaborative efforts that developed during the eleven years of the excavation of the Ozette site and, in many cases, have extended through to the present. Local partnerships with schools, government entities, and resource developers are also strong. The MCRC has fostered strong relations with at least ten agencies who consult with the Nation on proposed projects, both on and off the reservation. The U.S. Coast Guard regularly confers with the MCRC, recognizing existing treaty rights and the authority of the Nation. Timber companies voluntarily consult with the MCRC for ideal logging areas and the placement of roads so as not to disturb culturally significant sites, and local contractors and developers routinely make the MCRC their first stop before any planned construction begins. Additionally, MCRC has a special language teacher certification program in partnership with the Washington State Office of Public Instruction. Maintaining a professional network and communications with federal, state, and local governments, as well as other entities ensures the longevity and legitimacy of the MCRC.

The Makah Nation's success in meeting the broad goals it set for itself in the face of the Ozette Village crisis is clear. It has undisputed authority over the recovered artifacts and the archeological site. It has established and sustained the MCRC. In turn, the MCRC's outreach and activities including traditional dances, canoe journeys, exhibits, research, workshops and courses, consulting relationships, etc. maintain and promote the Nation's heritage and language. Ancestral songs continue to pass down to future generations, and new songs are composed to commemorate important contemporary events. The once-threatened art of traditional storytelling is being rejuvenated through training programs developed from archival materials. Even the Makahs' tradition of whale hunting has been renewed through Center's work: artifacts from the MCRC collection supported the Nation's legal assertions about its right to hunt, exhibits promoted understanding about the central role of whale hunting in Makah culture, and in 1995, the Nation was able to undertake an historic whale hunt. Significantly, the MCRC has been able to fulfill its mission of cultural protection and revitalization while at the same time strengthening the Makah economy by attracting

thousands of visitors and researchers each year.

The Makah Cultural Education and Revitalization Program demonstrates that strategic assertions of sovereignty can invigorate culture, and that tribally controlled museums and related cultural institutions can actively enhance cultural knowledge, making it useful and relevant in tribal citizens' lives. In so doing, Native nations perpetuate their cultures and, ultimately, strengthen their practical sovereignty.

Lessons:

- When a nation has sovereignty over its cultural resources, it is in a better position to ensure the protection and continuity of its culture.
- Together with tribal government corporations and citizen-owned businesses, tribal non-profits can make a significant impact on the employment prospects, income, and wellbeing of a nation's citizens.
- Strong partnerships with non-tribal governments and organizations can enhance external perceptions of the tribe, its goals, and its activities.

79 John F. Kennedy Street • Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138
telephone: (617) 495-1480 • facsimile: (617) 496-3900
website: www.hks.harvard.edu/hpaied