
Siletz Government Overview

The Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians includes descendants of dozens of Native American Tribes and bands whose ancestral territories spanned Western Oregon, from just across the California border up to Southwest Washington and from the summit of the Cascade Mountains to the Pacific Ocean. The Tribes spoke languages from 10 different language families, with many varying dialects. Devastated by diseases introduced by white explorers and traders, the Tribes faced increasing encroachment by European and American settlers and commercial interests on their homelands beginning in the early to mid 1800s. The new arrivals overused the land and resources that the Tribes depended on and violently dispossessed Native people from their homes.

Through treaties negotiated under threats of force and, in some instances, after outright war, the Western Oregon Tribes and bands were relocated in the 1850s to the Coast (Siletz) Reservation and what would later become the adjoining Grand Ronde Reservation. Established by executive order in 1855, the Coast (Siletz) Reservation originally consisted of 1.1 million acres, representing a third of the entire Oregon coastline. Over time, the U.S. government, often illegally, reduced the size of the reservation and slashed services it had promised to provide to Tribal members. In 1954, the U.S. government passed legislation ending federal recognition of the Tribe all together, attempting to evade its responsibilities as defined in treaties. After more than two decades of legal efforts, the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians regained its federal recognition in 1977. Further action by Congress in 1980 restored a small amount of land to the Tribe. Since then, the Tribe has sought to continue to increase its land base, but total Tribal holdings remain a fraction of the original acreage originally promised to Siletz people.

The Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians has its headquarters in the present-day city of Siletz, Oregon, and has jurisdiction over approximately 4,700 acres, or 7.4 square miles of reservation and off-reservation trust lands in Lincoln County, as well as over 15,000 acres of timberland. As of 2022, the Tribe has over 5,500 enrolled members and provides services to members through an 11-county area served by the Tribal headquarters in Siletz as well as satellite offices in Eugene, Portland, and Salem.

The constitution of the Tribe was ratified by members in 1979 and established a democratic form of government led by an elected Tribal Council. The Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians Constitution adopted some features of the U.S. and Oregon constitutions—such as separation of powers and the use of initiative and referendum—with some additions and modifications. The constitution specifies that the mission of the Tribe is to protect Tribal identity; affirm and exercise Tribal sovereignty; sustain Tribal history, culture, and the general welfare of the Tribal membership; promote the Tribe's self-sufficiency; and direct the Tribe's government-to-government relationships with other local, state, and federal entities.

Siletz Government Overview *(Continued)*

Members of the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians are citizens of the United States and the Tribe, as well as citizens of Oregon or other states they currently reside in. Tribal members have all privileges and responsibilities of any other U.S. citizen, including paying federal income taxes. The Tribe's constitution determines citizenship requirements for its members.

All Tribal members over the age of 18 constitute the Siletz General Council, which has the power to elect members of the Siletz Tribal Council, amend the constitution, and bring forward issues through initiative and referendum. Thus, it exercises some components of legislative power.

The Siletz Tribal Council performs both legislative and executive functions. The Council consists of nine members elected to three-year terms. Once the Tribal Council is elected, it in turn elects a chair, vice-chair, secretary, and treasurer. The Tribal Council represents the Tribe in negotiations with the Oregon and U.S. governments and oversees and makes decisions regarding the Tribe's lands and other assets. Rules and decisions by the Tribal Council are recorded and enforced through Tribal ordinances.

The Tribal Council appoints members of the Siletz Tribal Court, which performs a judicial function for the Tribe. The court is comprised of judges and court staff overseeing, interpreting, and resolving disputes over various aspects of Tribal law. The court has the authority to review and overturn Tribal legislative and executive actions for violations of the Tribal constitution or of the Federal Indian Civil Rights Act of 1968. It also oversees legal issues related to family, employment, and gaming (as the Tribe owns and operates the Chinook Winds Casino in Lincoln City, Oregon).

Sources

Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians. (n.d.). Tribal government. <https://www.ctsi.nsn.us/tribal-government>

Wilkinson, C. (2010). *The people are dancing again: The history of the Siletz Tribe of Western Oregon*. University of Washington Press.