



## SOCIAL SCIENCES

# Changing Land, Enduring People: Oregon Tribes and the Dawes Act

## ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDINGS

- Sovereignty

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will understand:

- why maps of traditional Native homelands are not exact
- the effects of US policies on Oregon Tribes, including the Dawes Act
- ways Tribes continue working for their rights and for the land today

## ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How did tribal lands change over time?
- What was the Dawes Act and how did it affect tribal lands and lifeways?

## REQUIRED TIME

- 35 minutes

## Overview

In this lesson, students will learn about government laws and policies that created significant loss of land and lifeways for Oregon's tribal Nations. Students will learn how Native people are working hard today to buy back their land and remedy the harm caused by these policies. Students will examine two maps showing Oregon tribal territories before and after federal policies to understand the significance of Tribes' loss of homelands. Students will read a summary of the Dawes act and learn the impact this policy had on tribal lands.

## Background for Teachers

This lesson is undergirded by three key historical phases that impacted Tribal land in Oregon:

**Phase 1 (Before 1859):** Tribes had extensive traditional territories covering all of Oregon.

**Phase 2 (1850s-1860s):** When Oregon became a state (1859), Tribes signed treaties with the federal government establishing reservations. Major treaties included the 1855 Treaty of Walla Walla (Umatilla, Walla Walla, Cayuse) and 1864 Treaty of Klamath Lake.

**Phase 3 (1887-1934):** The Dawes Act broke up reservation lands into individual parcels and sold "surplus" land to non-Native settlers. This caused massive additional land loss:

- Umatilla Reservation: Lost about 75% of reservation land
- Klamath Reservation: Lost about 90% of reservation land
- Many other Oregon Tribes lost 60-80% of their remaining reservation lands

**Today:** Tribes are actively working to reacquire ancestral lands through land purchases, legal actions, and partnerships. Examples include the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs purchasing ancestral lands, the Cow Creek Tribe buying back traditional territory and the Burns Paiute tribe also buying back land. In addition, Tribes are working with the forest service and other state and federal agencies to care for the rivers and land and to gain access for traditional practices. Examples of these can be found in the additional resources section of this lesson.

## STANDARDS

### Oregon Social Sciences Standards – Grade 3

**3.G.GR.1** Distinguish between physical, political, cultural, and thematic maps of Oregon and the United States.

**3.H.CH.2** Create a timeline of noteworthy events to better understand the historical and contemporary events of the local community or region.

**3.H.CP.6** Describe how the identity of the local community shaped its history and compare it to other communities in the region.

## KEY WORDS and IDEAS

- **Homelands:** A large area where Tribes lived and moved freely
- **Treaty:** An agreement between Tribes and the U.S. government
- **Reservation:** Land set aside for Tribes by treaties



## Considerations for Teachers

### Practices

While teaching this lesson, the following principles can help guide your decision-making and engagement with students.

- Focus on teaching the Essential Understandings through an analysis of how the Dawes act impacted tribal lands in Oregon.
- When sharing content with students, address the why, not just the what.
- Highlight the strengths of Oregon's Indigenous peoples today while also acknowledging their history and tradition.
- Ensure your teaching practices are accessible and appropriate for Native and non-Native students.
- Individual Oregon Tribes may have different traditions.
- Avoid generalizing across all Native American groups.

### Assessment

During this lesson, observe and listen to students during discussions and as they work to determine how their learning is progressing. Note their ability to discuss and describe regalia and its significance. Write down what you notice about what students say and do in relation to the success criteria. Engage students in conversation and review their notetakers. Look for insights into what they learned about regalia and its cultural importance. Use this formative information to provide feedback to students and plan next steps.

At the end of the lesson, provide students with an opportunity to reflect on their learning using the provided self-assessment. Students can indicate their level of learning in relation to specific success criteria. They can also write out an explanation of why they feel they are at that learning stage.

### Success Criteria

- I can explain why maps of traditional Native homelands are not exact
- I can explain at least one of the effects of US policies, including the Dawes Act, on Oregon Tribes

- I can describe ways tribes continue working for their rights and for the land today

**For the following activities, use the slide deck to support your implementation.**

## Lesson Activities

### Opening

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**Time: 10 minutes**

#### Step 1:

(Slide 3) Introduce students to the nine Federally recognized tribes of Oregon

#### Step 2:

(Slide 4) Show map of traditional Tribal territories. Ask students what they notice about the map.

Explain: In Oregon, Tribes had large areas of land for their traditional activities. As states were forming, state and federal governments made agreements called treaties with Native American Tribes. These treaties recognize Oregon Tribes as sovereign Nations with their own land and governments. The treaties also recognized many tribal rights, such as the right to fish and hunt on traditional homelands. Yet the treaties ultimately took much of the land away from Tribes and later policies such as the Dawes Act also further reduced Native land.

#### Step 3:

(Slide 6) Explain to students that it's challenging to understand exactly how homeland borders changed for Oregon Tribes in the 1800's because maps were not very precise then. Share with students that this was because:

- Borders of Oregon Tribes' homelands changed frequently
- Everything changed when European American settlers came and wanted to land
- No one was good at making maps back then

Explain that they will be reading a handout that talks more about these reasons. When students are done reading, ask them to write a quick summary of their reading.

Provide students with the handout "Maps of Oregon Tribes' Homelands."

## Main Activity

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**Time: 20 minutes**

### Step 1:

Explain to students that in 1887, almost 30 years after Oregon became a state, the federal government passed the Dawes Act. Let students know that next they'll be reading about the Dawes Act and how it affected Tribes' way of life.

Have students read the handout about the Dawes Act (see below). Reading can be done individually, in pairs, or in a whole class setting. Ask students to write three things the Dawes Act did to Oregon Tribes.

### Step 2:

Facilitate a discussion about the reading. Ask: "What did the Dawes Act do to tribal lands?"

If needed, prompt students so that they understand that the Dawes Act tried to end Tribes' ways of living together and to take much of their remaining land.

### Step 3:

Provide land recovery examples. Say to students, "Today, Tribes are working hard to get their land back! For example, the Warm Springs Tribes, The Cow Creek Tribe and the Burns-Paiute Tribe have purchased land in their traditional territory. Tribes use money from their businesses and work with the government to buy back their ancestral lands."

Tribes also work with state and federal governments to care for the land, and get access for traditional hunting, fishing and gathering activities as well as cultural practices.

## Closing

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**Time: 5 minutes**

### Step 1:

Facilitate a discussion where you review the timeline: "Let's trace what happened: First, Tribes had large territories. Then they made treaties for reservations. Then the Dawes Act sold much of that land. Now Tribes are working to get land back."

What was the Dawes Act, and how did it change tribal lands?

What did the federal government do?

What could still be done on the circled allotment?

Pause here if the discussion is taking place over two days.

## Extension Activity

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**Time: 10 minutes**

**Land Loss Math:** Using simple fractions, have students calculate tribal land loss. Give students 10 blocks representing a reservation. Have them remove blocks to show Dawes Act losses (Umatilla: remove 7-8 blocks, Klamath: remove 9 blocks). Then discuss how many blocks tribes would need to buy back to return to their original size.

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## Additional Resources

- Grande Ronde 8<sup>th</sup> Grade lesson: [The Demise of Indian Land](#)
- Siletz Grade 11 Lesson: [Homelands to Homesteads](#)
- [THSH Presentation of the Dawes Allotment Act](#)
- Examples of Oregon Tribes working with the forest service and other state and federal agencies to care for the rivers and land and to gain access for traditional practices.
  - **Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (CRITFC)** The Nez Perce, Umatilla, Warm Springs, and Yakama tribes work together through CRITFC to provide biological research, fisheries management, and science

to support salmon restoration. [CRITFCOregon](#)

- **Umatilla River Restoration** The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation leads fish habitat restoration efforts in the Umatilla River Basin, working with federal agencies to restore salmon runs that had been extinct for over 70 years. [ColumbiacommunityconnectionEcotrust](#)
- **Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians** In 2024, a federal court lifted decades-old restrictions on the Siletz tribe's hunting, fishing, and gathering rights. [Oregon Siletz tribes have hunting and fishing rights restored under long-sought court ruling - OPB](#)
- **Coquille Indian Tribe Cooperative Management** The Coquille Indian Tribe has a cooperative management agreement with Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife covering Coos, Curry, Douglas, Jackson, and Lane counties. [Umatilla River Basin – Fish Habitat Restoration Efforts in the Umatilla River Basin](#)
- **Warm Springs Forest Research Partnerships** The Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs partners with US Forest Service researchers on river restoration projects. Forest Service scientist Steve Wondzell works with the tribe on the upper Middle Fork John Day River to plant streamside forests that provide shade for spring Chinook salmon.
- Additional information on the impact of the Dawes Act can be found at [Oregon History Project](#).



## Handout: 9 Federally Recognized Tribes in Oregon

Name: \_\_\_\_\_



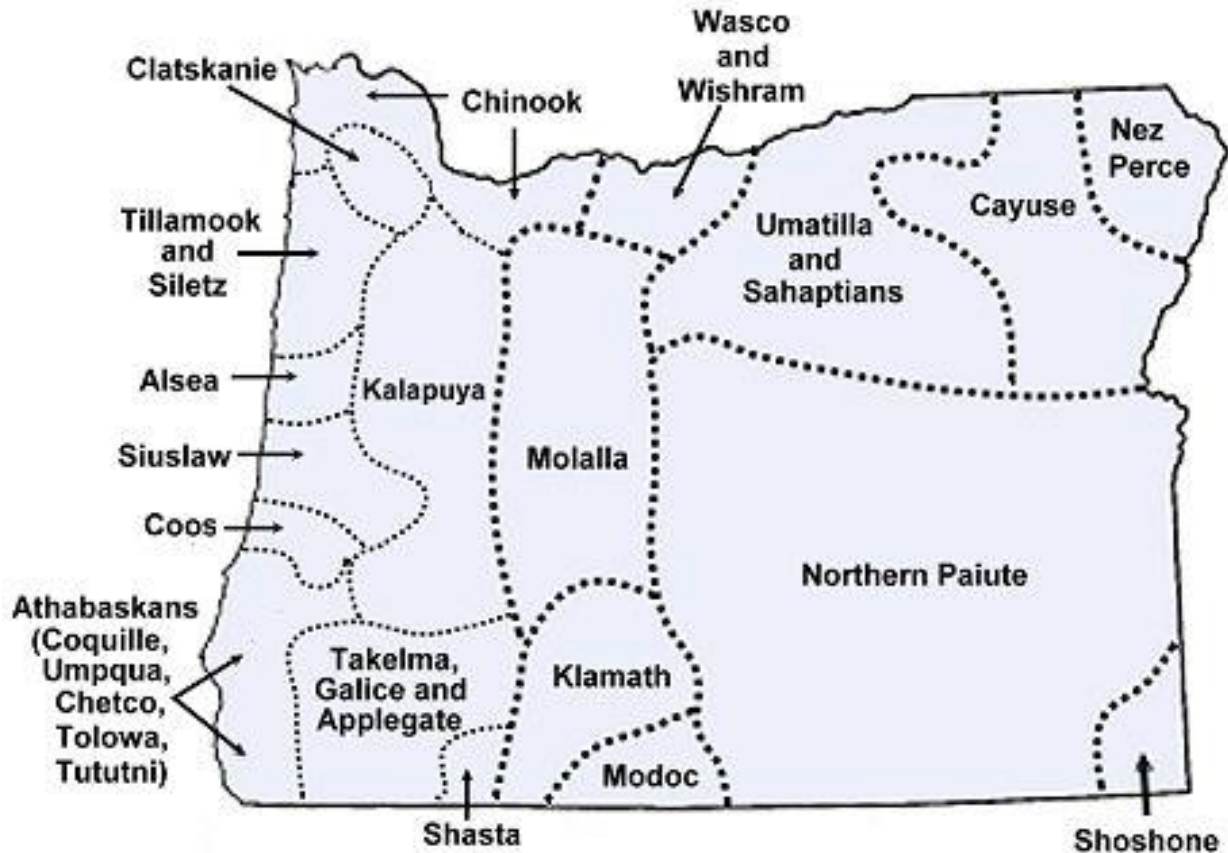
Can you find:

- The Confederated Tribe of the Grand Ronde?
- The Confederated Tribe of Siletz Indians?
- The Burns Paiute Tribe?



## Handout: Early Map of Oregon Tribal Lands

What do you notice in this map? How many Tribes are on the map?



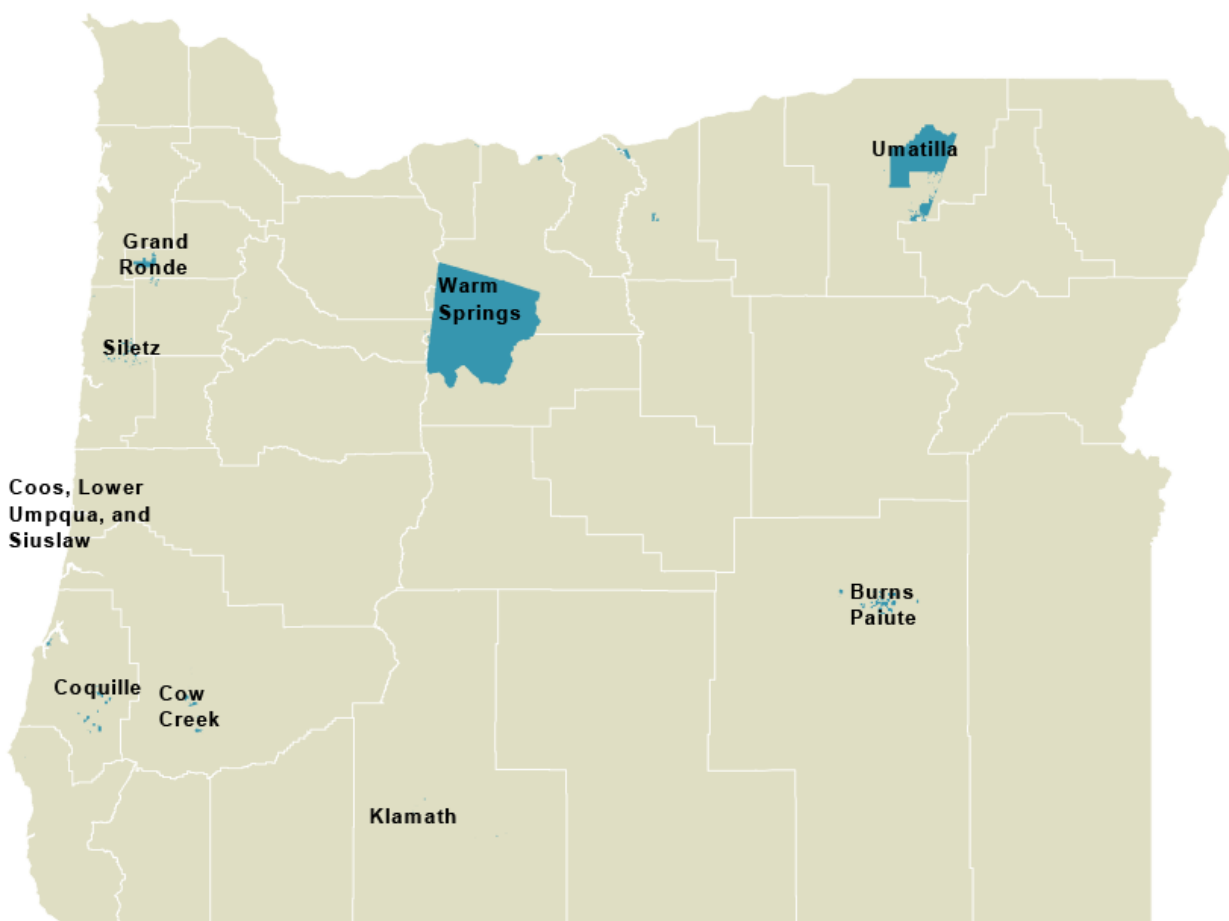
Map from: <https://www.native-languages.org/maps.htm>

### Information:

- Traditional Native American borders were not set like US states
- As the modern US formed, they often agreed to tribal land boundaries and then made laws that took the land from the tribes
- There is no map from before European contact- why do you think this is the case?

## Handout: Current Map of Oregon Tribal Lands

What do you notice in this map? How many Tribes are on the map?




Map source: <https://www.nwcphp.org/docs/tribes-toolkit/tribal/oregon.html>

## Handout: Newspaper Advertisement

# INDIAN LAND FOR SALE

**GET A HOME**  
OF  
**YOUR OWN**

**EASY PAYMENTS**



**PERFECT TITLE**

**POSSESSION**  
WITHIN  
**THIRTY DAYS**

## FINE LANDS IN THE WEST

IRRIGATED      GRAZING      AGRICULTURAL  
IRRIGABLE      DRY FARMING

IN 1910 THE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR SOLD UNDER SEALED BIDS ALLOTTED INDIAN LAND AS FOLLOWS:

State	Acres	Average Price per Acre	State	Acres	Average Price per Acre
Colorado	5,211.21	\$7.27	Oklahoma	54,664.00	\$19.14
Idaho	17,013.00	24.85	Oregon	1,020.00	15.43
Kansas	1,684.50	33.45	South Dakota	120,445.00	16.53
Montana	11,034.00	9.86	Washington	4,879.00	41.37
Nebraska	5,641.00	36.65	Wisconsin	1,069.00	17.00
North Dakota	22,610.70	9.93	Wyoming	865.00	20.64

**FOR THE YEAR 1911 IT IS ESTIMATED THAT 350,000 ACRES WILL BE OFFERED FOR SALE**

For information as to the character of the land write for booklet, "INDIAN LANDS FOR SALE," to the Superintendent U. S. Indian School at any one of the following places:

CALIFORNIA: Alameda, Colusa, Fresno, Humboldt, Lodi, Marysville, Orland, Sacramento, Yuba.	MINNESOTA: Duluth, Moorhead, Rice Lake, St. Paul, Wadena.	SOUTH DAKOTA: Fort Totten, Fort Yates, OGLALA: Aberdeen, Cantonville, Edinburg, Fort Pierre, Hanksville, Sioux Falls, Tabor.	OKLAHOMA:—See Saw and Fire Agency Cherokee, Muskogee, Pawnee, Seminole, Tulsa, Wagon Wheel, Watt.	SOUTH DAKOTA: Cherokee Agency, Green Creek, Grandview, Lower Brule, Rosebud, Sioux Falls, Sioux.	WASHINGTON: Fort Simcoe, Fort Stevens, Tulsa, Tulsa, Wagon Wheel, Watt.
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**WALTER L. FISHER,**  
Secretary of the Interior

**ROBERT G. VALENTINE,**  
Commissioner of Indian Affairs

Image source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Indian\\_Land\\_for\\_Sale.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Indian_Land_for_Sale.jpg)

## Handout: Student Reading – Maps of Oregon Tribal Homelands

**Name:**

**Directions:** Read the text and then summarize it below.

### Why are older maps of American Tribes' homelands not accurate?

**Tribal borders changed a lot.** Native American Tribes did not have fixed borders like states do today. Tribes that were friends often shared land with each other. When Tribes were fighting, they would push each other's borders back and forth many times each year. Some Tribes moved around with the seasons. In Oregon, many Tribes had winter houses they returned to each year, but they traveled to different places in the spring and summer.

### Everything changed when European American settlers came to Oregon.

European diseases killed many Native peoples in Oregon. Some villages lost 9 out of every 10 people. Whole areas became empty because people died or left to join other Tribes. Some Tribes joined together. Other Tribes moved into empty areas. As more Europeans came to live in North America, the US government made acts and laws that pushed Native American Tribes off their land. Most Native Americans today do not live where their ancestors once lived.

**No one made good maps back then.** Native American Tribes did not usually draw maps the way Europeans did. The Europeans who first made maps did not know much about Native American languages or Tribes. The best maps we have today are guesses made by comparing old European maps with Native American stories and letters from early settlers.

**What are the main ideas in the text? Summarize them in your own words.**

(Text adapted from: <https://www.native-languages.org/maps.html> )



## Handout: The Dawes Act and Tribal Land Loss

In 1887, the United States government passed a law called the Dawes Act. This law went back on the treaty agreements with Native American Tribes that made their reservations.

Before the Dawes Act, Tribes owned their reservation land together as a group. The whole Tribe shared the land.

The government wanted to change how the Tribes lived on the land. The government wanted the land to be farmed in the European style, or mined or logged. The Dawes Act said that members of the Tribes needed to apply to the US government to claim the land and become individual owners of small pieces - even if they were living there already. Many Native Americans in Oregon did not want to live separately or farm in the European style. Others did not know about the Dawes Act.

All of the land that Native Americans did not claim, the government sold to settlers to farm or mine or log the land. This meant many Native Americans in Oregon were moved off of land they and their family had been living on for generations.

As a result, Tribes lost most of their reservation land. For example,

- The Umatilla tribes lost about 75% of their reservation. If you lost 75% of your cookies it would be like if you had four cookies, but only get to eat one!
- The Klamath Tribes lost about 90% of their reservation. That is like if you had 40 french fries (a whole container) you only get to eat 4!

Many Oregon Tribes lost between 60% and 80% of their reservation lands because of the Dawes Act.

Today, Oregon Tribes are working hard to buy back their ancestral homelands. They are making partnerships with state and federal agencies to care for the land and use them for traditional practices. Tribes use money from tribal businesses and work with governments to purchase land that once belonged to their ancestors.

**Write three results of the Dawes Act:**





## Student Self-Assessment

**Name:**

**Directions:** Read the lesson success criteria in the first column. Then decide, did I meet these criteria? Choose Not Yet or Yes.

If you chose Not Yet, share one thing you can do to meet the criteria.

If you chose Yes, share what you did well to meet that criterion.

Success Criteria	Not Yet	Yes
		
I can explain effects of the Dawes Act on Oregon Tribes.		
I can describe how Tribes today are working to get their land back.		

