

Tribal Government

Nations within a Nation



PDX First Tribal Nations Summit¹

Native American tribes are sometimes referred to as “nations within a nation”. This is because the United States Constitution considers tribes separate, **sovereign** governments. **Tribal sovereignty** means tribes have the inherent right to self-govern through their own authority, laws, and government structure. **Federally recognized tribes** hold a **government-to-government** relationship with federal, state, and local governments. This relationship has been defined by **federal treaties**. Grand Ronde has **7 treaties** that have been ratified by Congress. There are over 570 federally recognized tribes in the United States. **The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde** is a federally recognized tribe and one of the nine federally recognized tribes in Oregon.

¹ Photo by Timothy J. Gonzalez/Smoke Signals

Sovereign Power

As a sovereign nation, The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde is responsible for creating and maintaining its own government structure. This entails developing laws and regulations regarding tribal citizenship, the election process for tribal council, economic development, services provided for tribal members, upholding the tribe’s constitution, and much more.

Tribal Government Structure

The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde has a tribal council that holds legislative power, meaning they can make, alter or repeal laws. The Grand Ronde Tribal Council consists of 9 members who are elected by the tribal membership and serve three year terms. There is no limit on how many terms a council member can serve. There is a chairperson, vice chair, secretary and six other members who make up the Grand Ronde Tribal Council.



Tribal Council member Jack Giffen Jr. with Governor Kate Brown at the Tribal-State Government Summit²

² Photo by Timothy J. Gonzalez/Smoke Signals



New Tribal Court Chief Judge Cynthia Kaufman Noble, right, shakes hands with Employee Relations Specialist Sean Barton as Employee Relations Coordinator Linda Warren looks on during a meet and greet held in Tribal Court on Friday, Aug. 16.³

Tribal Court

The tribal court's job is to interpret the tribe's laws and constitution in resolving disputes.

The court is also responsible for providing tribal members and others access to information about tribal laws, court rules, and procedures. There is one Chief Judge and three Appellate Court Judges that sit on the tribal court. The tribal court has the power to exercise all judicial authority of the tribe. The tribal court has the power to process a variety of cases including child abuse and neglect, divorce, name change, termination of parental rights, emancipation, adoption, guardianship, enrollment, housing, fish and wildlife and gaming commission decisions, as well as small claims cases, handgun permits and much more.

³ Photo by Timothy J. Gonzalez/Smoke Signals