

The Land We Call Home

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There is so much history about the land that we live on and the people who have lived here for thousands of years. But too many of us know far too little of that history. Our League has formed a discussion group to learn more about the peoples and the cultures of this land. The League of Women Voters began more than 100 years ago, advocating education and good government policies, but many of us in our group realized we didn't know enough about local Tribal governments, how they connect with federal, state and local governments and the common goals between Tribal governments and the positions/policies of League of Women Voters. We would like to respectfully share what we've learned so far, limited by the best of our current understanding.

The Land We Live On

Many Native American Tribes live in Mendocino County. [Native Land Digital](#) is an Indigenous-led, not-for-profit organization that maintains a website that can help you discover on whose land your home sits.

We acknowledge that the land where we live and work is un-ceded territory of indigenous peoples since time began. This land is territory of Yuki, Cahto and Pomo. Other tribes were massacred and forcibly displaced from their homelands. These tribes include Wailacki, Nomlacki, Pit River and Concow.

We are surrounded by traditional, ancestral territory and current homeland of several indigenous nations including the Cahto Tribe of the Laytonville Rancheria, the Coyote Valley Band of Pomo Indians, the Guidiville Rancheria of California, the Hopland Band of Pomo Indians, the Manchester Band of Pomo Indians, the Pinoleville Pomo Nation, the Potter Valley Tribe of Pomo Indians, the Redwood Valley Little River Band of Pomo Indians/Redwood Valley Rancheria, the Round Valley Indian Tribes, the Sherwood Valley Band of Pomo Indians, and the Yokayo Rancheria.

The Roots of our Democracy

There is some evidence that when the delegates to the Constitutional Convention met in 1787 to debate what form of government the United States should have, there were no contemporary democracies in Europe from which they could draw inspiration, and the convention members may have borrowed from Native American nations. *Discover Magazine* author Cody Cottier wrote in the July, 2021 publication, [Did Native Americans Shape U.S. Democracy?](#):

The United States of America traces its political roots to the Declaration of Independence in 1776, but by then, democracy was old news in the so-called "New World." During the American Revolution, thousands of Native Americans already lived under a system of governance that embodied many of the same ideals espoused in Philadelphia at the time.

As the founding fathers began crafting a more perfect union from scratch, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy of what is now upstate New York carried on with the one it had been perfecting for centuries, grounded in an oral constitution known as the Great Law of Peace. Dating to perhaps as early as 1142, this charter is based on notions of unity, liberty and equality. It even provides for the separation of powers, and outlines impeachment procedures. Is it a coincidence that American democracy emerged in a land so long imbued with such principles?

Some scholars see these similarities to the U.S. Constitution as evidence that the Haudenosaunee (more commonly, but improperly, called the Iroquois) helped to mold the nascent American nation. Two hundred years later, in 1988, Congress itself passed a resolution acknowledging as much.

“The confederation of the original 13 colonies into one republic was influenced by the political system developed by the Iroquois Confederacy,” it reads, “as were many of the democratic principles which were incorporated into the Constitution itself.”

It certainly appears that Americans owe a debt not only to democratic Greece and Rome, but also to the people who inhabited the American Northeast long before Europeans arrived. Despite the influence Native Americans had over the establishment of the US government system, they themselves were excluded from the proclaimed democracy until June 2, 1924, when US congress passed the Indian Citizenship Act, granting citizenship to all Native Americans born in the territorial limits of the country. Previously, citizenship had been limited, depending on what percentage Native American ancestry a person had, whether they were veterans or, if they were women, whether they were married to a US citizen. Even with the passing of this citizenship bill, Native Americans were still prevented from participating in elections because the Constitution left it up to the states to decide who has the right to vote. After the passage of the 1924 citizenship bill, it still took over forty years for all fifty states to allow Native Americans to vote.

In 1975, the United States Congress enacted the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act. It contains some key points—both the “recognition of the right of tribes to self-governance, as reflected in the Constitution, treaties, Federal statute . . . ,” and the admission that the Federal bureaucracy had eroded tribal self-governance. The act was amended in 1994 as the Tribal Self-Governance Act. For centuries, relationships between Native American nations and the US were defined by hundreds of treaties that helped the US expand its territory, but resulted in broken promises.

Local Efforts

Back to Mendocino County—[Pinoleville Pomo Nation](#) has a beautiful publication which provides background on its history and culture.

From the website of the [Sherwood Valley Rancheria](#): “Sherwood Valley Rancheria is located within aboriginal homelands we have used and occupied since time immemorial. Our homeland extends from approximately the Hwy 101 corridor, through the Redwood Forests, on to the Coast. As the original stewards of this land we retain original usufructory rights to protect the land, air, water, and food sources upon our homeland. . . . Sherwood Valley is the successor in interest to ownership of the Mendocino Indian Reservation, established by Act of Congress on March 3, 1853. . . . The Sherwood Valley Rancheria Tribal Council, as representatives of individual tribal members, strives to promote and perpetuate the protection of natural resources for future generations.”

And did you know there is an [InterTribal Sinkyone Wilderness Council](#), a Tribal non-profit consortium comprised of ten federally recognized Northern California Tribal Nations?

The InterTribal Sinkyone Wilderness Council’s commitment, in part, is for advocacy and education about the cultural responsibility to care for lands and waters. The League of Women Voters has a similar commitment.

The 10 Tribes in this consortium are:

- Cahto Tribe of Laytonville Rancheria
- Coyote Valley Band of Pomo Indians
- Hopland Band of Pomo Indians
- Pinoleville Pomo Nation
- Potter Valley Tribe
- Redwood Valley Little River Band of Pomo Indians
- Robinson Rancheria of Pomo Indians
- Round Valley Indian Tribes

Scotts Valley Band of Pomo Indians

Sherwood Valley Rancheria of Pomo Indians

You may have read about the consortium's Board Chairwoman, and tribal elder of the Coyote Valley Band of Pomo Indians, Priscilla Hunter. Chairwoman Hunter wrote [one of the Policy Papers](#) on the website of the Mendocino Trail Stewards (MTS). In that Policy Paper, Chairwoman Hunter explained that the InterTribal Sinkyone Wilderness Council had purchased 3,900 acres on the Mendocino Lost Coast "...in order to preserve the forest there and save it from a third clear-cut. Our view of a sustainable forest is a forest that sustains our culture, values and way of life, not one that is managed in order to be cut for profit ... In this time of climate change, it is time to preserve and protect the growth of redwoods on these lands, rather than cut them down in massive numbers, and let the forest heal for the benefit of future generations."

Chairwoman Hunter stated that the Coyote Band of Pomo Indians had initiated Government to Government Consultation with Cal-Fire and the Forest Manager of Jackson Demonstration State Forest; she explains: "Mother Earth is bleeding and barely breathing as the Rain Forests are cut down from here to the Amazon and up north to Alaska. Climate change is wreaking great damage on our local community with forest fires raging all around us due to drought. For the health of the forest and the critters within it, for the wellbeing of my people both spiritually and culturally, and for the fresh air and carbon sequestration that large redwoods provide, the coast redwoods in Jackson Demonstration State Forest should be protected. They should be allowed to grow to become ancient trees, sustained in a family circle of madrone oak trees, pepperwood trees and manzanita and huckleberry bushes."

Common Connections

Many tribes, bands and native peoples are our neighbors in Mendocino County. We all live on tribal land. During our discussions and research, we have realized that there are many goals shared by Tribal governments, other active groups in our community, and the League of Woman Voters. Below are [LWV positions](#) within the area of Natural Resources, promoting an environment beneficial to life through the protection and wise management of natural resources in the public interest:

Natural Resources: Promote the management of natural resources as interrelated parts of life-supporting ecosystems.

Resource Management: Promote resource conservation, stewardship and long-range planning, with the responsibility for managing natural resources shared by all levels of government.

Environmental Protection and Pollution Control: Preserve the physical, chemical and biological integrity of the ecosystem, with maximum protection of public health and the environment.

- **Air Quality.** Promote measures to reduce pollution from mobile and stationary sources.
- **Energy.** Support environmentally sound policies that reduce energy growth rates, emphasize energy conservation and encourage the use of renewable resources.
- **Land Use.** Promote policies that manage land as a finite resource and that incorporate principles of stewardship.
- **Climate Change.** Support climate goals and policies that are consistent with the best available climate science and that will ensure a stable climate system for future generations.

Similarly, here are positions within the area of [Government](#):

Public Participation: Promote public understanding and participation in decision making as essential elements of responsible and responsive management of our natural resources.

Citizen's Right to Know/Citizen Participation: The LWV believes that democratic government depends upon informed and active participation at all levels of government.

Invitation

This is just a beginning effort toward ongoing research and discussions, to learn more about, and better understand, local Tribal governments. We would greatly appreciate having you join us in this discussion group. Please get in touch with us at info@lwvmendo.org.

You can read about [favorite trails](#) and loops in the JDSF on the Trail Stewards website.

If you are interested in knowing more, these three books are part of a Mendocino College class on Northern California Tribal Customs and History:

[Ka'm-t'em: A Journey Toward Healing](#) ,by Dr. Kishan Lara-Cooper and Walter J. Lara Sr.

[We Are the Land: A History of Native California](#), by Damon B. Akins and William J. Bauer Jr.

[Abalone Tales: Collaborative Explorations of Sovereignty and Identity in Native California](#), by Les W. Field

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