



SOUTHERN SIERRA MIWUK NATION
SouthernSierraMiwukNation.org

AMERICAN INDIAN COUNCIL
OF MARIPOSA COUNTY, INC.

The Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation
Seeking Justice Since 1850

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Who We Are

We are the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation (SSMN), descendants of the Southern Sierra Miwuk people who had villages in the areas now known as Yosemite National Park and Mariposa County, and the immediate vicinity of Mariposa County, California. Because of the unique historical circumstances of our Tribe, we are not yet officially recognized by the Federal Government.

Our Participation in the Federal Acknowledgment Process

In 1982, we filed a petition with the Department of Interior seeking formal acknowledgment as a federally recognized Indian tribe. We were one of the first Indian groups to petition for federal acknowledgment. During the intervening 37 years, we have submitted thousands of pages of scholarly reports and supporting historical, anthropological and genealogical information to the Interior Office of Federal Acknowledgment (OFA) establishing the connection between the members of our Tribe and the historical Southern Sierra Miwuk people who signed treaties with the United States in 1851-52

On November 16, 2018, in the first formal review of our petition, the Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs issued a Proposed Finding in our case denying our existence as a distinct Indian community “at present” (defined by OFA as 1982 to 2011) under 25 CFR § 83.7(b). We are in the process of challenging the validity of this deeply flawed Proposed Finding, which conflicts with our history and our tribal programs, and our relationship with neighboring tribes, including federally recognized tribes, our relationship with the Yosemite National Park, our relationship with the tribal organization providing health services to our people, and our relationship with State and local governments—all of whom recognize the SSMN as a distinct Indian community.

After 37 years, and almost eight years of “active consideration” the Assistant Secretary issued a Proposed Finding on the basis of a single element of one of the seven mandatory criteria for federal acknowledgment, without addressing the historical context of our community in relation to the 1851-52 treaties and our more than century-long relationship with the National Park Service (NPS) and connection to Yosemite National

Park. This violates applicable federal regulations and precedent. In fact, three public comment letters submitted by former professional OFA staff members, one of whom was part of the 3-member team that reviewed the Proposed Finding, sharply question the transparency and fairness of the Proposed Finding and the OFA review process. (These and other public comment letters can be accessed at our website at www.southernsierramiwuknation.org.) These serious allegations by former OFA staff convince us that the Proposed Finding lacks the fundamental fairness and transparency required by this essential review process for establishing federal recognition.

Our History

Our relationship with the federal government began over 160 years ago. After the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo between the United States and Mexico and the discovery of gold in California, our ancestral lands were flooded with non-Indian miners, ranchers and settlers seeking to exploit our natural resources and take our lands. In fact, private militias funded by the State of California engaged in a campaign to drive us from our homelands through the systematic destruction of our villages and food stores, and, in many cases, vigilante murders and enslavement of our people. In an effort to end the violence, the United States signed treaties in 1851-52 with our ancestors, the Southern Sierra Miwuk, and neighboring tribes. In the treaties, our ancestors reserved tracts of land within our ancestral territory and the United States promised to protect their occupancy of those lands and provide them with other support. Unfortunately, the lands reserved in the treaties in exchange for cession of large areas of our ancestral homeland were never confirmed to our people and the treaty promises never fulfilled. The U.S. Senate, in response to opposition from senators of the new State of California (1850), opposed ratification of all 19 treaties negotiated by the federal treaty commissioners with California tribes throughout the state.

This massive breach of trust by the federal government left our people, along with many other California tribes, homeless in their native homelands and resulted in widespread starvation, illness, and the random killings, including women and children. Our people survived this period only by consolidating and sharing resources, by retreating to areas of refuge, and by maintaining our relationships with neighboring tribes. The Yosemite Valley, because of its relative isolation and site of a number of our ancestral villages, became our main place of refuge from the violence and depredations of non-Indians, and a place where we had access to traditional food sources. However, even this limited refuge was denied to us when the federal government took control of the Yosemite Valley and made it a National Park in 1905 under the jurisdiction of the NPS. Between 1900 and 1910, the Miwuk village sites in Yosemite were reduced to a single tent cabin village, where we continued to reside while we worked in the Park and were used in promoting the increasing tourism in the Park and special Park events. However, in 1969 the Park Service evicted us from our residences and destroyed our small village as part of a NPS fire-fighting exercise.

After our eviction from Yosemite National Park, we continued our efforts for fair treatment and recognition by the United States. In 1972, we established the American Indian Council of Mariposa County, a non-profit entity, which allowed us to compete for grants and initiate programs to advance the economic, social welfare, and education interests of our people. We also continued our cultural and religious practices, using the new policy protections accorded under the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978, by sponsoring and holding annual events in Yosemite National Park and other areas of cultural and religious significance to our people. And we worked with the NPS to establish the Indian Village of Ahwahnee in Yosemite Valley, on the site of one of our historic villages.

Our Present-Day Tribal Community and Its Relationship with the NPS and Others

Today, with the assistance of our elders, we continue our ceremonies and celebrations in Yosemite Valley, which include the Bear Dance ceremony attended by many tribes in California. Our Tribe administers a robust cultural monitoring program, we serve on the advisory board of the tribal organization that provides an Indian Health Service program to our people, we operate a behavioral health facility that services our members and the members of neighboring tribes, and we provide educational and social programs to serve our members. In addition, we continue to honor our tribal relations, both among our own people and with our surrounding tribal neighbors. We know, respect and care for our sacred places and our ancestral village areas in the Yosemite National Park and other areas of our ancestral lands.

Our Appeal for Support

We respectfully ask for your support in our effort to convince the Assistant Secretary to withdraw the Proposed Finding, recommence Active Consideration of our petition, and issue a new Proposed Finding consistent with the federal acknowledgment regulations. We are also preparing a response to the Proposed Finding, which requires expert consultants and legal assistance, costs that we have to support through fund-raising.

For further information on how you can submit your comments on the Proposed Finding and/or to make a donation in support of our recognition effort, please visit our tribal website at www.southernsierramiwuknation.org.