

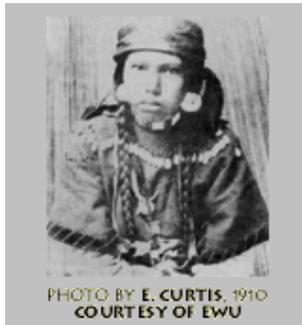
Keeping a Native Language Alive

by
Judith Sparrow
TOP Program Officer

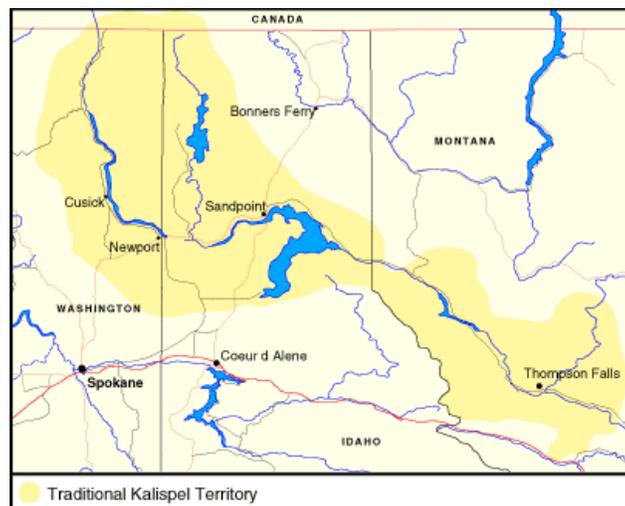
“By working together we are certain that we can improve the lives of our children and future generations while maintaining our unique cultural heritage.”

– Glen Nenema, Chairman, Kalispel Tribe of Indians

Like most Native American tribes, the Kalispel Indians originally inhabited a much larger area than they do now. When they first came into contact with European and American explorers at the beginning of the 19th century, the tribe was 3,000 strong – semi-nomadic hunters, diggers, and fisherman. Their traditional homeland covered a 200-mile stretch of mountains and forest along the Pend Oreille River in what is now Montana, Idaho, and eastern Washington. This land and river included all of the resources that the Kalispel tribe needed to sustain their way of life.



Now, fast forward one hundred plus years. The tribe finds itself not only addressing immediate crises, such as rampant alcohol abuse, substandard housing and poor economic conditions, but also, on a positive note, they are beginning to develop strategies to support the long-term educational development of the members. Education remains key. Because of its working relationship with other tribes in the region, the Kalispel tribe created the Camas Institute to develop and coordinate tribal education projects and establish partnerships with local school systems, institutions of higher education, and other nonprofit and social service organizations.



The tribe understands that their work has just begun and looks to the TOP-funded project to help in their efforts. They envision using broadband digital network technology to actively engage all tribal members in preserving and sustaining the living culture, history, and language of the

Kalispel Tribe of Indians. They are going to provide all tribal member with ready access to the appropriate technical resources, and create a Tribal Access Center Network (TAC-NET).

According to John Beck of the Camas Institute, “the Technology Access Center at the Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture will be a hub of information for the variety of people who visit the museum.” Visitors range from elementary school children to high school and college students to tribal elders and scientists.

While this project will target members of the Kalispel, it will also actively engage members of other Plateau Indian tribes, particularly members of the Spokane, Flathead, and Coeur d’Alene Tribes who speak similar dialects of the Salish language. TAC-NET also hopes to engage non-Indians living in Spokane and the communities surrounding the Kalispel reservation.

TACs will be established at multiple sites throughout the reservation and in the Spokane, Washington, area. Partners include the public school district, the Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture, the Spokane Urban Indian Center, and the Healing Lodge of the Seven Nations. Each center will provide participants authentic training experiences in using information technology, particularly communication using the Salish language.