

Indian Reservation

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Description and Benefit:

The Wind River Reservation is home to over 5,000 Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho Indians. Spanning 2,268,008 million acres in west-central Wyoming's Wind River Basin, it is the third-largest Indian reservation in the country. Learn about the history and the economy of one of the poorest areas of the United States.

History

The only U.S. reservation where Native Americans were able to choose where they wanted to live, Wind River was established by Chief Washakie for the Shoshone people. In 1863, he negotiated the Fort Bridger Treaty with the federal government, establishing 44 million acres of land for his tribe. The second Treaty of Fort Bridger in 1868 pared down the land to less than 2.8 million acres. After General Custer's defeat, the Northern Arapaho migrated south because they were offered a reservation in central Wyoming. The government reneged on this promise and forced the Arapaho people onto the Shoshone Reservation in 1876. The two tribes were traditional enemies who had fought each other almost continually throughout the 1800s. Their acrimonious relationship hindered reservation governance for more than a century.

Between 1900 and 1938 the tribes suffered extreme hardship. Off-reservation hunting prohibitions, minimal government and outside investment, meager rationing and tuberculosis and measles epidemics ravaged the population. After 1938, the tribes received a multi-million settlement for lands ceded north of Wind River. Oil, gas and uranium mining leases were reactivated and the Indians were allowed to expand cattle ranching operations. When effective treatment for TB became available, health improved markedly. During this time, the Eastern Shoshone and Arapaho began to interact more productively, though ambivalence about their forced arrangement and prejudice remains.

Though the Eastern Shoshone and the Arapaho still jointly rule the Wind River Reservation, each retains a separate identity, culture and tribal government.

Economy

The reservation has extensive oil and natural gas fields and water rights on the Wind River. Since the beginning of the 20th century, tribes have jointly leased land for grazing and crop cultivation. Other sources of income include construction, fisheries, gaming, mining and tourism. As on many reservations, low incomes, high unemployment and high poverty rates are a chronic problem. An in-depth census of households was conducted on the reservation in 1987 and again in 1998 to analyze the area's poverty.

Survey findings include:

- Job opportunities have not increased to employ rising numbers of Indians with increasing levels of education. For example, more than 20 percent of families with a head of household who has at least four years of college remain below the poverty line.
- The 1998 WINDS-2 study found that among 18-54 year old Indians living on the reservation, 54 percent were unemployed. Of these, 94 percent wanted to work. Of the 46 percent of employed Indian adults living on Wind River, more than half were working for the government.
- American Indian couples earn \$71 for every \$100 earned by all U.S. married couples.
- Between 1979 and 1989 the percentage of American Indian families below the poverty level rose to 27 percent, while the poverty rate for all U.S. families was around 13 to 14 percent.

Source: "Residential and Household Poverty of American Indians on the Wind River Indian Reservation," Judith Antell, Audie Blevins, Katherine Jensen and Garth Massey, Department of Sociology, University of Wyoming. Findings taken from the Wind River Indians Needs Determination Surveys, 1987 and 1998, commissioned by the Business Councils of the Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho tribes, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Indian Health Service, various Wyoming state agencies, the University of Wyoming and Johns Hopkins University.

Wind River Valley is home to one of the largest Indian reservations in the country with more than 2.2 million acres. Unlike other reservations in the United States, the Wind River Indian Reservation was chosen by the Eastern Shoshone. The valley served as the tribe's winter home and ancestral hunting grounds for years before it became a reservation and when it became clear that the whites would require the Indians to live on a reservations, the tribe was able to negotiate that the Wind River Valley would remain the tribe's permanent home. Today the Shoshone and the Arapaho share the land and govern the Wind River Reservation jointly.

The reservation has one tribal college. The supercomputing center would collaborate with the tribal college through education initiatives, internships for Native American students at the center and future job placement. Longterm, the tribal college could make use of the supercomputing facilities for research projects on the reservation (for example impacts of climate change on Native lands).

UCAR/NCAR's role:

The supercomputing center would collaborate with the tribal college through education initiatives, internships for Native American students at the center and future job placement.

External roles:

Collaboration with the reservation government.

Research Conducted:

Background on the college

The Wind River Tribal College was chartered by the Northern Arapaho Business Council in September 1997 and opened its doors to students in the fall of 2000. For its first five years, teachers from the Central Wyoming College and other institutions offered classes through the Tribal College. The WRTC hired its own staff in 2005 marking a big step forward for the college. The college has an articulation agreement with the University of Wyoming so that students and graduates of the WRTC can transfer their class credits to the state university.

WRTC currently offers Associates of Arts degrees in Northern Arapaho Studies, General Studies and Elementary Education. The school offers freshman and sophomore courses in American Indian Studies, Anthropology, Art & Literature, Business, Environmental Studies, Math, the sciences and Social Work. WRTC has a comprehensive course in Eastern Shoshone language and cultural studies.

Marlin Spoonhunter was elevated to the college Presidency in March 2005. He earned a Master of Education in Adult Education and an Administrative Endorsement in Administrative Leadership from Montana State University, Bozeman, Montana. The many full-time and adjunct faculty members have Doctorate and Masters Degrees from universities and colleges around the country. The campus is located at the Northern Arapaho Tribal complex in Ethete, Wyoming. Classes are offered at St. Stephens Indian School, at Arapahoe School, and at Ft. Washakie.

The vision of the Wind River Tribal College is to prepare students and communities academically, vocationally, technically and culturally to become self-sufficient while maintaining balance in our changing world. The mission of the Wind River Tribal College is to preserve, continue and protect Tribal self-determination, language and culture.

The college provides education, innovative programs, services, and activities to create an environment of learning and success. It operates a post-secondary institution on the Reservation that includes educational, vocational, cultural and technical programs, taught by skilled and knowledgeable personnel. The Tribal College prepares students to be self-sufficient in a rapidly changing world by providing opportunities for people to become productive members within families, communities, and Tribes through economic development on the Wind River Indian Reservation. The Tribal College sustains the sovereignty of Northern Arapaho and Eastern Shoshone Tribes by facilitating language and cultural revitalization.

For More Information:

Tribal College Web Site: <http://www.wrtribalcollege.com/>

Wind River Reservation: <http://www.wind-river.org/info/wrindianreservation.php>