



# CHINOOK



# OBSERVER

## PUD digs at Chinook burial site

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**PUD officials say they had the right to do work at a site where there are Chinook Indian remains, but tribal and government officials say they should have asked first.**

CHINOOK — State and tribal officials are investigating after the Pacific County Public Utilities District No. 2 dug in an area that is known to contain Chinook Indian remains.

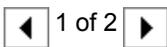
On Dec. 29, Scott Tucker, superintendent of the Lewis and Clark National Historical Park, learned that PUD replaced two failing power poles at the Middle Village/Station Camp unit of the park.

Located on U.S. Highway 101 near the old McGowan church, the site was once a thriving Chinook trade village, and also briefly served as a base-camp for the Lewis and Clark expedition. Archaeologists have found thousands of Native and European artifacts there, and confirmed the ground likely holds the remains of many Chinook Indians.

In late December, the PUD replaced this power pole at Middle Village, the site of a former Chinook village where experts believe the remains of many Chinook Indians are buried close to the surface.

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### No shovels in the ground

The Washington State Historical Society currently owns Middle Village, but the National Park Service manages it, and will take ownership in March.

Out of respect for the remains, NPS enforces a strict “no-dig policy” at the site. NPS workers don’t even pull out invasive weeds at the site — they cut them to avoid disturbing the ground.

“We don’t want to put another shovel in the ground ever because of the known archaeological resources on the property,” Tucker said on Jan. 15.

PUD did not contact the Chinook Indian Nation or NPS before doing the work, which involved pulling out two old poles that were buried to a depth of roughly six feet, placing new poles in the holes, and filling the earth back in. At least one of the poles is located

“in the direct vicinity of the human remains,” Tucker said. The second pole is very near the property line that divides Middle Village and attorney Bill Garvin’s neighboring property. The village probably wasn’t confined to the boundaries of the modern park, so even if the second hole is on private property, the work may have disturbed ground where Chinook ancestors are resting.

“Somebody did it, and it greatly concerns the tribe,” Chinook Indian Nation Chairman Tony Johnson said on Jan. 18. “... There is grave concern with any compacting out there, given that remains [discovered in 2005] were so close to the surface.”

### **Emergency work**

“One [pole] was leaning over, ready to fall down,” PUD General Manager Doug Miller said on Jan. 19. Miller said the average PUD pole is about 17 years old when it’s replaced, but the two replaced poles were roughly 40 to 50 years old. Though the PUD had known for at least 20 years that the two poles were approaching the end of their life spans, Miller described the recent replacements as “emergency” work — a pole failure would have caused a power outage, and might have damaged equipment or created potentially serious safety issues.

“We didn’t have time to call anybody. The electricity was going out. We had to replace it,” Miller said.

Miller said the PUD has an easement that allows workers to maintain the poles, and an obligation to prevent power outages. Miller said he is not aware of any legal agreement that requires PUD to give notice or seek approval from the tribe, state or NPS before working on the poles.

“There’s no notification. We have no agreement with anyone regarding that area. I have never received anything in writing,” Miller said. “They have not sent anything to us regarding sensitivity.”

### **Well-publicized finds**

The site’s significance has been well-documented in state, local and tribal records, and Miller acknowledged that PUD workers previously encountered remains while working there.

In early 2005, preparatory work for the planned “Station Camp” park came to a halt when workers discovered the remains of a collapsed plank house. Archaeologists later confirmed the presence of Chinook remains and other significant finds.

According to the NPS website, “More than 10,000 artifacts were uncovered, including trade beads, plates, cups, musket balls, arrowheads, Indian fish net weights and ceremonial items.”

Eventually, the park was renamed “Middle Village/Station Camp,” the remains were re-interred under tribal supervision, and members of the tribe helped design displays that highlighted Chinook culture. In 2011, PUD workers began an effort to move Middle Village power lines underground.

“But that project has been held up because as we were digging that, it unearthed some bones,” Miller said, adding that the project stalled out because of unresolved design and engineering questions. In Miller’s opinion, the recent conflict could have been prevented if the authorities that manage the park had been more responsive to PUD efforts to complete the project.

According to Tucker and Johnson, an archaeologist and Chinook representatives came to observe the PUD’s work after the 2011 discovery.

“We do know that the PUD was aware of the sensitive archaeological location,” Tucker said.

Miller, who has been general manager since 1994, said he had occasionally spoken with former Chinook Chairman Ray Gardner, who passed away in February 2015, but had no recollection of ever working directly with the tribe.

"I am not aware that we've communicated with the tribe in the past," Miller said. "If there was a tribe member there, I have not heard that."

### **A tragic past, a living culture**

Last week, tarps and stones covered the mounds of earth at the base of the two new poles, and sets of tire tracks cut through the surrounding grass.

For the Chinook, this place is part of a long and sometimes tragic history, but it is also a vital part of a very real, and living culture.

"It's very important for people to know that this is not some ancient history, or some mysterious place or mysterious individuals," Johnson said. "At least two of my dad's relatives are known to be buried there."

Johnson explained that the recent digging — and compacting of the earth caused by utility truck traffic — is particularly upsetting because the people who died at Middle Village were buried close to the surface, out of necessity.

"We do not bury near our towns," Johnson said. "This was a town for many hundreds of years before it would have ever been considered to be a place to bury or leave people."

After Europeans arrived on the Peninsula, "Our lack of immunity to foreign disease absolutely decimated our people. People lived in that town through many epidemics," Johnson said. The once-vibrant society collapsed, and the remaining survivors were unable to give their loved ones proper burial rites.

"My belief is that people treat a place differently when they realize it's the final resting place of human beings," Johnson said.

### **No communication between PUD, tribe**

Between Dec. 29 and Jan. 7, Tucker alerted Johnson, the PUD, the Historical Society and the Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP).

Johnson, two archaeologists and other officials visited the site within days. The Historical Society appointed Tucker to lead the government's response and DAHP quickly opened an investigation. The PUD was the last agency to respond. Miller said after Tucker called him on Jan. 7, he called back "about a half a dozen times," but hung up without leaving a message. The two finally spoke by phone on Jan. 19, as the Chinook Observer approached its print deadline.

Miller acknowledged that he has not called the tribe, and doesn't see any need to do so right now. Instead, he said, he would wait for state and NPS officials to tell him what PUD needs to do to address the situation.

"I don't have any plans [to speak directly with the tribe] right now. No. My understanding is somebody will be getting back to me, since I don't have any contact with these people," Miller said. "I'm not aware who is in charge of the tribe now."

### **A collaborative response**

Tucker said officials are still investigating, so it's too soon to say whether the PUD work violated any agreements or policies, or violated state laws that protect historical and archaeological sites. The DAHP investigation will help determine whether remains were disturbed, and what must be done to address the recent incident, Tucker said.

Johnson said the tribe has very good relationships with Tucker, the historical society and DAHP, and he has "total confidence" in Tucker's ability to handle the situation.

However, he noted that Chinook members should lead the response, because only the tribe fully understands the relevant history and cultural practices.

“I am absolutely certain that everybody would defer to the Chinook, and I have full expectation that everyone would defer to the Chinook,” Johnson said.

Right now, he added, the “pressing need is communication that assures that tomorrow or the next day when nobody is looking, it doesn’t happen again.”