



As wildfire practitioners and residents of Washington, it is our responsibility to recognize that fire has been used on the land here for thousands of years. As we work to build wildfire resilience in our state, partnerships with the Tribal Nations that have lived here since time immemorial are vital. In the Spring of 2025, WAFAC hosted a Tribal Engagement Training led by The Whitener Group, a Native-owned consultant group. The following guide provides a brief review of key concepts relevant to those who work in natural resources looking to further develop their engagement with Tribal Nations. This is just a starting point, we recommend everyone take the Whitener Group's Indian Country 101 course for more in depth learning.

Key Concepts

Tribal Sovereignty: Tribes are self-governing, sovereign entities that entered into nation-to-nation treaties with foreign governments. The foundation of tribal sovereignty, or the inherent right to self-governance, was established through **the Marshall Trilogy**, three major cases that form the framework of federal Indian Law.

Domestic Dependent Nations: At the same time as establishing tribal sovereignty, the Marshall Trilogy also defined tribes as “domestic dependent nations,” or sovereign within their territories but under the guardianship of the U.S. Federal Government, which has **federal trust responsibility** to protect sovereignty and treaty rights and provide essential services.

Recognition: Tribes can be recognized on a few different levels, by the federal government, state governments, both federal and state, or neither. There are 29 Federally Recognized Tribes in Washington with government-to-government relationships with the U.S.

Fish Wars: As a result of Washington State illegally regulating tribal fishing rights, a legal battle ensued that ultimately upheld treaty-reserved tribal rights to fishing in “all usual and accustomed places” through the **Boldt Decision** (US v. Washington). The court also determined that tribes have a right to 50% of the fish harvest. More broadly, the ruling has had far reaching implications for tribal sovereignty and Co-Management of natural resources by tribes and state agencies in Washington.

RESOURCES

[The Whitener Group: Indian Country 101](#)

An online tribal engagement training series designed for natural resource practitioners. The training provides foundational history and context as well as more specific information about working with tribes in Washington.

[Lessons Learned: Tribal Engagement in Washington State \(Spanish Version\)](#)

Lessons learned from the Whitener Group's Tribal Engagement Training for WAFAC.

[WAFAC Blog: Building Partnerships with Tribal Nations through Trust and Relationship](#)

Two WAFAC members share why taking the time to listen, learn, and build trust-based relationships with Tribal nations is critical to their fire adaptation work.

[Good Fire Podcast](#)

This podcast explores fire as a tool for ecological health and cultural empowerment used by Indigenous peoples around the world.

[Building Relational and Effective Partnerships with Indigenous Communities](#)

A webinar hosted by the Rising Voices Center for Indigenous and Earth Sciences.

[Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Fire Management](#)

A panel discussion about Indigenous place-based science and land tending practices.

[FISH WAR](#)

The newly released documentary follows Washington tribes' fight to exercise their treaty-reserved fishing rights and the court case that led to the Boldt Decision.

[The Collective Conservation of Indigenous Land is Everyone's Responsibility](#)

An article by Chyana Marie Sage for HuffPost featuring The Whitener Group.

[SAMHSA American Indian and Alaska Native Culture Card](#)

A guide to build cultural awareness.

Book Recommendations

- *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States* by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz
- *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States for Young People* by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, Debbie Reese, and Jean Mendoza
- *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer
- *As Long As the Grass Grows* by Dina Gilio-Whitaker
- *Native Nations* by Kathleen DuVal
- *Native Seattle* by Coll-Peter Thrush
- *Decolonizing Education* by Marie Battiste