

History of Place Names

Alagnak Wild River, Alaska



The Alagnak River is located in the Katmai National Park and Preserve in Alaska. The river begins at Kukaklek Lake. It empties into another river called the Kuichak River. *Alagnak* probably comes from the Yupik language. It is thought to mean “making mistakes” or, maybe, “wild raspberry.” Sometimes people call it Branch River because it has so many branches.

The Yupik People are from southern and central Alaska. For thousands of years, they traveled most of the summer. They carried lightweight portable homes with them as they traveled. In the winter, they built part of their homes underground. They used special seal or walrus intestines for windows. Today, the Yupik usually live in modern houses, but some choose to live in traditional houses.

Arapaho National Forest, Colorado



In the 1800s, the Arapaho People were great buffalo hunters. They lived across a large area of land. The southern border of their land stretched across New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Kansas. The northern border of their land was in Wyoming and South Dakota. Originally, the Arapaho named themselves *Inûna-ina*, meaning “our people.” Since then, they have been given many names by other Native Peoples and Europeans. Today, they call themselves Arapaho or Arapahoe.

In 1878, the Northern Arapaho moved to the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming. They share this reservation with the Eastern Shoshone. The Southern Arapaho live on the Cheyenne-Arapaho Reservation in Oklahoma. Like all Native Peoples, the Arapaho also live outside of the reservations. Today the Arapaho live in cities and towns across the United States. There might even be Arapaho or other Native Peoples in your school.

Caddo National Wildlife Refuge, Texas



The Caddo People were farmers and traders for more than a thousand years. They created a great pathway of trails across Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Arkansas. These trails helped them travel throughout their land. They also used the trails to trade with other Native Peoples and European settlers. The El Camino Real de las Tejas is a National Park Service trail. It follows some of the Caddo People’s trails. The name Caddo may come from the word

Kadohadacho, which means “real chiefs” in the Caddo language. The Caddo People no longer live on a reservation. Today, many Caddo citizens live in Oklahoma while others work or go to school in other areas of the United States. Even when they live away from their Native area or reservation, Native Peoples usually hold citizenship in both the United States and their own Native tribe or Nation.

Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge, Florida



Chassahowitzka means “hanging pumpkin place” in the Seminole language. The Seminole People speak two different languages, *Maskókí* and *Mikisúkí*. In the 1800s, the Muscogee People (also known as the Creek People) fought against the U.S. government to protect their land. The U.S. government used these wars to take large amounts of Muscogee land in Georgia and Alabama. After the wars, the Muscogee People were forced

to move to Oklahoma by the U.S. government. Some Muscogee took their families and fled south to Florida. In Florida, they joined other Native Peoples who lived there and became a new people called the Seminole. U.S. troops attacked the Seminole People in Florida many times, but the Seminole were never defeated. The original name for the Seminole is *yat’ siminoli*, which means “free people.”

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Chattahoochee National Forest, Georgia



The word *Chattahoochee* is thought to mean “red river,” “picture rocks,” or “marked rock” in the Lower Muscogee language. The term *picture rocks* may be connected to the ancient rock carvings in the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest. The ancient rock carvings are related to stories told by the Cherokee and Muscogee (Creek) peoples. These two groups lived nearby, but they were forced to move to Oklahoma by the U.S. government in the 1830s.

Most of the carvings on the rocks relate to Cherokee stories. The Cherokee People who live in Oklahoma today are known as the Cherokee Nation. The Cherokee People who escaped the forced move became the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians in North Carolina. Other Cherokee People have moved to places all over the world.

Currituck Banks Reserve, North Carolina



Currituck Banks Reserve is off the coast of North Carolina. This land was taken from Native Peoples in the 1600s, before the United States was a country. *Currituck* is believed to be from an Algonquin word that means “land of the wild goose.” Historians have learned about

life on the island from artifacts found in archaeological digs. Images of the artifacts can be viewed at **kiscrapbook.knottsislandonline.com/indianslarry.html**. This website also has drawings imagining what Native Peoples in the area may have been like.

Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument, New Mexico



Kasha-Katuwe means “white cliffs” in the Keresan language. These cliffs are tent-shaped rock forms that look like white tipis. The Keresan language is spoken by the People of Pueblo de Cochiti. The People of Pueblo de Cochiti still speak their ancient language. They also continue to care for the land and water in their area. Today, they are trying to clean up the polluted land behind the Cochiti Dam.

Conservation is very important to many Native Peoples across the United States and beyond. The Akwesasne Mohawk of New York, the Campo Kumeeyaay of California, the Leech Lake Ojibwe of Minnesota, and the Lummi Nation of Washington State are all working hard to protect the environment. It is important to many Native cultures to keep the environment healthy for future generations.

Missouri Breaks National Monument, Montana



The upper Missouri River is surrounded by valleys and ravines that are sometimes called “breaks.” These “breaks” are how the Missouri Breaks got its name. The Missouri River was named after the Native People who lived on the banks of the river. Most of the year they lived in earth-covered houses. Sometimes, in the summer, they lived in tipis. The word *Missouri* is from the group’s name. *Missouria* means “big canoe people” in the Siouan language.

The smallpox disease killed many of the Missouria just before Lewis and Clark visited their country in 1804. The Missouria People who survived joined with the Otoe. The Otoe had also survived a smallpox outbreak. The combined group was called the Otoe-Missouria. The U.S. government forced the Otoe-Missouria to move many times. The Otoe-Missouria finally ended up in Oklahoma, where many still live today. Some Otoe-Missouria live in other parts of the United States, including New Jersey, California, Hawaii, and Alaska.

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Natchez Trace Parkway, Mississippi, Alabama, and Tennessee



The people of the Natchez Nation were the ancestors of the “original” Muscogee (Creek) people. *W’Nahx’-Chee* means “fast warrior(s)” in the Natchez language. Natchez is pronounced Nah’-Chee, Nauche, or W’Nahx’-Chee. The Natchez Trace was originally a trail that ran through the lands of the ancient Natchez. The trail was more than 440 miles long. It started in what is now Natchez, Mississippi, and ended in Nashville, Tennessee.

The Natchez People are known for large mounds they built

out of earth. Some of these mounds are so large that they look like small pyramids. We don’t know all the reasons the Natchez built these mounds. Ancient artifacts show that some of the mounds were built for ceremonies. Other mounds were used as foundations for buildings. A list of these mounds can be found at [nps.gov/nr/travel/mounds/sitelist.htm](https://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/mounds/sitelist.htm). The Natchez disappeared hundreds of years ago, but many Native People from the South claim to be their descendants.

Shoshone National Forest, Wyoming



The Shoshone are a large group of Native Peoples whose languages are all related. The Comanche of Texas speak a language that is nearly the same as that of the Shoshone. *Shoshone* means “high-growing grasses.” Years ago, the Shoshone roamed most of the

western United States hunting buffalo and small game. They also collected wild plants and roots. Today, most of the Shoshone People live on reservations in California, Nevada, Oregon, Wyoming, and Idaho. Stories about the Shoshone are told today by several modern authors.

Yakima River Canyon, Oregon and Washington



The Yakima River and the canyon it runs through are named after the Yakama People. Some scholars believe *Yakama* means “a growing family” in the Sahaptin language. Other scholars believe it means “black bear.”

The Yakama, or Yakima, have lived in the same area for perhaps thousands of years. Years ago, they had a large territory near the Cascade Mountains and the Columbia River. As non-Indians moved into their homeland, the Yakama signed a number

of treaties with the U.S. government. Areas of their original land were taken and their territory grew smaller and smaller. Today, the Yakama still live near the Columbia River. After losing several special places, they live in a much smaller space than their ancestors did. They have kept a section of their homeland as a reservation. The Yakama are working to restore the fish populations in the Yakima River. The Yakama Nation operates fruit orchards and farms, cuts trees for lumber, and manages a casino and event center.

Yosemite National Park and Yosemite Wilderness, California



The name *Yosemite* comes from the Miwok People of California. The Southern Miwok called it *Yohhe’meti* and the Central Miwok called it *Yos e’meti*. Both words mean “those who kill.”

They must have thought the mountains or the people who lived there were very dangerous! The Miwok tell many stories about the Yosemite area. There are many groups of Miwok (also spelled Me-wuk) People still living in the same area in spite of difficult circumstances.

For nearly a hundred years the Miwok and other Peoples

of California were pushed from their homelands and forced to wander. From 1909 until after 1934, the U.S. government established very small reservations for about 74 of these California Native Peoples. They called the reservations “Rancherias.” Some of the Me-Wuk Rancherias near the Yosemite area are the Buena Vista Me-Wuk Rancheria, the Chicken Ranch Me-Wuk Rancheria, and the Jackson Rancheria. There are also the Sheep Ranch Rancheria, Shingle Springs Rancheria, and Tuolumne Rancheria. Some of the Miwok run hotels and casinos today. Also, many of these Native Peoples live and work in cities nearby.

Connections Between Native Peoples and Federal Lands and Waters

Make a detailed poster or brochure that explains the Native history related to a federal land or water location. To make your poster or brochure, start by completing the research steps below. Then use your research to share what you learned with your class!

RESEARCH

Step 1	Select a federal land or water location from the History of Place Names resource sheet.
Step 2	Go to recreation.gov to research: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the major land and water features at your chosen location, for example: beach/seashore, historic site, wilderness, river, forest, grassland, lake/reservoir, mountains, wetlands, trail the meaning of the federal land or water location's name
Step 3	Research the Native Peoples related to the location. Be sure to take notes on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the history of the Peoples' name the language the Peoples speak where the Peoples lived in the past where the Peoples live today an important element of the Peoples' culture three unique details about the Peoples' community, practices, or history
Step 4	Print out an image of the location.

MAKE YOUR POSTER OR BROCHURE

Step 1	Title your poster or brochure with the name of your chosen federal land or water location.
Step 2	Add the research details listed above about your location and the Native Peoples related to that location.
Step 3	Paste a printout or drawing of your chosen location to your poster or your brochure.