

# The Chiloquin Community and the Klamath Tribes

*A Basic Study Guide*

Prepared by the Sierra Service Project

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## Introduction

Chiloquin, Oregon is a small rural town located in south-central Oregon - an area known as the Klamath Basin. Just north of Klamath Lake, east of Agency Lake, and southeast of Crater Lake, Chiloquin is located at the convergence of the Williamson and Sprague Rivers in a lightly forested area. The town sits at an elevation of 4,200 feet and is a part of the Upper Klamath National Wildlife Refuge.

This summer (2018) will be Sierra Service Project's 6<sup>th</sup> consecutive year serving with the Chiloquin community, but our 8th year in total. Staff and volunteers are hosted by the Chiloquin United Methodist Church and Chiloquin High School gym and have been graciously welcomed by many facets of the local community.

The current population of the town of Chiloquin is 726 persons according to the 2016 census. Most of the residents of Chiloquin do not choose to live in Chiloquin out of comfort, but rather because it is somewhere they can afford. About half of the residents are Native American and most of these people are members of the Klamath Tribes. About 12% are veterans.

Chiloquin is a low-income community with an estimated per-capita income (income per person) of \$13,189, compared to a U.S. national average of \$29,829. Over 33% of the families in Chiloquin live below the poverty line. In fact, out of the largest 308 towns and places in Oregon, Chiloquin ranks 303<sup>rd</sup> in income, making it one of the lowest-income areas in the state.

Though there is a history of native oppression in the region, SSP will be serving people from all parts of the local community who seek assistance - both tribal and non-tribal members. This study guide is designed to help you better understand the community that you will be visiting and serving this summer.

## History

### *The Economic Impact of Logging*

The town of Chiloquin boomed with the lumber industry in 1910. Lumber became the economic lifeline of the town, providing jobs and drawing people to live in Chiloquin. In 1912, the railroad was extended north to reach Chiloquin and transport lumber and by 1941 the railroads were used to transport sheep and cattle as well.

After a number of fires and changes in ownership, in 1991 the lumber mill filed for bankruptcy. This followed the listing of the spotted owl as a threatened species in 1990, which restricted logging in the region. Protecting this aspect of the environment resulted in the downturn of the Chiloquin economy and took away a plethora of jobs in the community.

The fall of the logging industry has resulted in businesses closing, unemployment, and poverty in this community among other impacts. Walking around town today you can see many old buildings boarded up and no longer in use. Impacting both tribal and non-tribal members of the community alike, this economic state hinders individuals from sustaining lives comfortably without constant sources of income.

### *About the Klamath Tribes:*

The official name of the Tribe is “The Klamath Tribes,” which reflects the fact that three distinct indigenous groups - the Modoc, Klamath and Yahooskin - have come together into this federally recognized tribe. Although these groups traditionally occupied adjacent areas within and near the Klamath basin, they were distinct groups, speaking different languages, possessing differing cultures and occupying different traditional areas.

Prior to European contact, residents of this area lived off the abundant fish in the local rivers, by hunting and by gathering berries and root crops. The first European-American to visit the area is reported to be Peter Ogden Skeen, who was an employee of the Hudson Bay Company. Skeen was followed by trappers, missionaries, ranchers and farmers. Under pressure from the exploding white population, the Klamath Indians ceded the rights to 23 million acres of traditional land in exchange for the right to hunt and fish on the land in perpetuity and retention of a 1.8 million acre reservation.

The Modoc Indians were located in the high-desert region southeast of Klamath Lake. Author Cheewa James, herself a member of the Modoc Tribe of Oklahoma, has written in “Modoc: The Tribe That Refused to Die”:

*“...the Modocs’ culture, theology, and life had become perfectly tuned to their environment and the richness of the resources it provided them. Their nomadic patterns took them to the right places at the right times for their hunting, fishing, and food gathering activities. Then the last move of the year brought them back to the favored areas for building their winter homes and storing their winter food caches. Above all, the Modocs loved their land. It was, in every sense, their world.”*

The Modocs resisted their forced removal to the Klamath Reservation and fought the Modoc War with the US Army in 1872 - 1873. This war is famous for the resistance that the Modocs displayed in their successful evasion of the Americans for five months. After their capture, revolt leaders, notably Captain Jack and Schonchin John, were tried and hanged in nearby Fort Klamath. Our program is being housed in the United Methodist Church on Schonchin Street. Surviving Modocs were deported to Oklahoma. A generation later, in 1909, they were allowed to return to the Klamath Reservation.

With its very large land base of timberlands and its location along a major railroad, the Klamath Tribes were very successful in timber harvesting, cattle ranching and shipping. By the 1950’s, the Klamath Tribes was one of the wealthiest tribes in the U.S. and the only tribe at the time to pay for all of its services from the U.S. Government.

In 1954, however, the U.S. Congress passed the Klamath Termination Act over the objections of the Tribe and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. This Act removed federal recognition and protection of the tribe. Tragically, the 1.8 million acres of tribal land was deemed “excess” and removed from tribal ownership.

The Tribes continued a legal fight against termination and loss of tribal land. In 1974, the Federal Courts ruled that the Tribes retained treaty rights to hunt, fish and gather on its treaty-recognized lands. In 1986, Congress restored federal recognition to the Tribes, but did not restore ownership of the original reservation lands. The Tribes celebrate this event each August.

Despite the loss of its land base, the Tribes have attempted to rebuild the tribal economy. Part of this effort is the small Kla-Mo-Ya Casino, an amalgamation of the tribal names Klamath, Modoc, and Yahooskin, located just outside of Chiloquin. The casino opened in 1997.

## The Chiloquin Community Today

Today Chiloquin is the site of the administrative office of the Klamath Tribes. The majority of the jobs in Chiloquin are with the Tribes, which employs at least 250 persons. Outside of the tribe, the town of Chiloquin consists of only a few businesses: a hardware store, post office, book store, a small grocery store, a community center, and a liquor store.

Challenges facing the community include high unemployment rates, drug and alcohol addiction, teacher and administration retention in school, and lack of access to nutritious foods. Local health and dental services are only available to tribal members.

There is an elementary, middle and high school in Chiloquin. These schools have a difficult time attracting and retaining strong teachers and administrators. Currently, 80 percent of the students enrolled in high school qualify for free or reduced price school lunches. School performance is low. For example, only 27 percent of Grade 8 students meet the state's standards for reading proficiency.

The lack of access to food in this town poses a health issue. Only two stores in Chiloquin sell groceries, both of which have limited nutritious options. Most of what is sold is highly processed, and while you can find more nutritious options such as a gallon of milk, they are highly overpriced. This qualifies Chiloquin as a *food desert*, or a place which lacks access to nutritious food which is common in impoverished rural communities.

Chiloquin is an incorporated city with a functioning town government. Under the provision of the mayor, Joe Hobbs, the city of Chiloquin is working towards building a more sustainable future. One example of this is a summer program which provides activities as well as free lunches to students in efforts to nourish and eliminate the troubles youth get into when they are not in school. SSP will be continuing to work with this project this summer (2018).

Chiloquin Visions in Progress (CVIP) is a civic organization made up of concerned citizens working together to improve the quality of life in Chiloquin. One of CVIP's accomplishments was the building of the Community Center.

This summer, we are excited to continue to offer our services to both tribal and non-tribal residents in Chiloquin and the surrounding area.

For more information, please visit <http://chiloquin.com/chiloquin-home/chiloquin-history/>

**Resources:** United States Census Bureau (2016), [www.chiloquin.com](http://www.chiloquin.com)