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## **Sustainability: Keep up and Carry on**

Sustainability is a state of life that defines the values of a person's existence. It is the place where I was born; for me, it is the Umatilla Indian Reservation in the state of Oregon. It is the home of my grandparents who were of Cayuse and Nez Perce ancestry which are indigenous tribes of the Snake River and Columbia River region. They are the old people who spoke fluent Nez Perce and Cayuse language dialects and lived and dressed the traditional Indian lifestyle.

The old people lived here before the white people came; they depended on a subsistence economy and ranged millions of acres of land to collect food. In this, they were generally independent and self governing. They were happy in their Happy Hunting Grounds.

That tribal sovereignty came to an end with conquest by the white people. The Cayuse, Umatilla and Walla Walla tribes signed a treaty with the United States Government which created the Umatilla Indian Reservation, a new kind governmental agreement where an Indian Agent managed the tribe's business affairs. The tribal government had no voice or resources to make or enforce policy decisions. The tribes, as a result, lost their culture and land and were headed for extinction, not a Happy Hunting Ground.

The white people took all the land, timber and water. That was the tribe's happy hunting grounds. The Cayuse, Umatilla and Walla Walla people never had the opportunity to develop the natural resources of the Umatilla Indian Reservation to meet a goal of economic self sufficiency. The goal of the federal government was to build a modern American-style ranching and farming community but on their terms. The tribe's already owned 20,000 head of stock at the time of the 1855 Treaty.

Today, there are towns surrounding the Umatilla Indian Reservation. The tribes could not sustain the traditional cultures of their community because of the very different way the white people used the land and natural resources. The white people approach was to exploit the natural resources in order to make a living. This meant to cut the timber, till the land and dam and channel the waterways. If the Indians did not do this, then they did not deserve to own the land or resources. Many Indian sold what land they owned and as a result the tribe began the descent into poverty. This is what should not be sustained but can persist if conditions remain unchanged.

The tribes needed to restore their Happy Hunting Ground, which included the tribe's cultures. But in order to do this the tribes had to get back their sovereign authority. Without self-determination, the Happy Hunting Grounds could never be restored and sustained.

In 1949, tribal leaders and the people of the Umatilla Indian Reservation adopted a Constitution and Bylaws that had as one of its purposes to achieve a maximum degree of

self government. Other important federal legislation included the “War of Poverty,” and “Self Determination.” All of these laws transferred power to the tribes to manage their own affairs with undue interference from the outside. Now the tribes could make their own policies and plans to rebuild their tribal communities. The vision of the Happy Hunting Grounds is back on track.

It is this vision of the Happy Hunting Grounds that has to be sustainable for the Cayuse, Umatilla and Walla Walla people. In order to reach that state, organizational capacity and capabilities have to be built and the people have to have the will to support and participate in that strategy. There has to be outstanding leadership to bring the people along.

That is all. Antone.

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