For the third year in a row the Cowlitz Tribe displayed its commitment to the community by presenting funds to the Port of Ridgefield.

On a visit in late April to the port’s nearly completed buildings at Wisdom Ridge, then Cowlitz Tribe Chairman Phil Harju delivered a check for nearly $5,400 to port representatives.

When the Cowlitz Indian Reservation was taken into trust in 2010, tribal leaders recognized that local municipalities and schools would lose part of their tax base, so they pledged to voluntarily make it up to these entities – and have done so.

In 2019 the tribe presented the port with five years’ worth of lost tax revenue ($13,862), and last year donated $2,635 to make up lost taxes to the port for 2020.

“The Cowlitz tribe’s vision, leadership and commitment to a shared prosperity is evident by the generous donation the Cowlitz people made to the Port of Ridgefield and others,” said Port Commission Chair Scott Hughes.

Wisdom Ridge Buildings Complete!

The Port of Ridgefield completed construction on two industrial buildings comprising 43,200 square feet at the Wisdom Ridge industrial park at S. 11th Street. The port’s IT3 Innovation Center will take half of the north building’s 21,600 square feet and the Ridgefield School District will move its Center for Advanced Professional Studies to the other half. The port is in negotiations with several potential tenants for the south building of which can accommodate single or multi-tenant use.

In 2019 the port received $2 million for the project from the Washington State legislature and a combination $1 million grant from the Community Economic Revitalization Board. The total project costs, excluding land value, is $5.9 million.

Port CEO Brent Grening praised the work of staffer Ethan Perry, who managed the project.

“He did a great job bringing the project in on time and on budget.

For leasing information contact Ethan Perry at EPerry@PortRidgefield.org or call 360.887.3873.

Photo: West end of the south building.

Thank you Sandra Day

FOR YOUR YEARS OF SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY AS CITY COUNCILOR AND FRIEND TO THE PORT. GOOD LUCK IN ARIZONA!

Pictured from Left: Port CEO Brent Grening, Port Commissioners Bruce Wiseman & Scott Hughes, Cowlitz Tribe Chairman Phil Harju (with mask) and Port Commissioner Joe Melroy.
Tanna Engdahl is tribal elder and spiritual advisor to the Cowlitz Indian Tribe and all the other Indian tribes—some forgotten by the history books—which called this area home for thousands of years before European settlement. At each commission meeting Chairman Hughes now says this: “We'd like to acknowledge that our port meetings are being held on the ancestral lands of the people of the Lower Columbia River.”

In the 18th and 19th centuries, there were 42 trading areas that existed in the region, and whole names live on in the landscape today. Native speakers today, the language of the ancestors, who make up the Cowlitz Tribe, use, and encourage others to use, the term “people of the Lower Columbia River.”

This acknowledgment led to the idea of learning and sharing some information about those who came before us, and the significance of the indigenous peoples’ presence here to modern times in our community. Our focus is on our friends, the Cowlitz.

“For newcomers and even some old-timers, the historic arc of this place may not be known,” says Brent Grenning, Port of Ridgefield CEO. “It’s important for us to understand that there is a shared history with the original population that saw the benefits of this location and utilized it effectively as we do today for transportation, trade and commerce.”

Cowlitz Trade & Transportation
The rivers and streams in this region team with fish and wildlife, serving as a food source for people and the greater ecosystem. Additionally, these waterways provide for the efficient transportation of goods and people. This is not, however, an armistice for the modern world alone.

For the Native peoples, including the Cowlitz, whose ancestral lands encompassed a hugeswath of river and stream bank in what is today southwest Washington, these rivers and streams served the same purpose for centuries. Vigorous trade was carried out between various tribes in the region and beyond, with the flow of water and land canoes landing spots central to successful trade centers and settlements. The Cowlitz had large settlements throughout the region, one of the largest of which was at the site of present-day Fort Vancouver.

Highways and roads we travel today also have a link to native commerce and culture. Tanna Engdahl is tribal elder and spiritual advisor to the Cowlitz. She explains the historic importance of her people’s past to White settlement in the region.

Before European contact, the Columbia River was like an aquatic Silk Road.”

Tanna Engdahl, Tribal Elder and Spiritual Advisor

“The rivers and streams were considered ‘highways and roads’ to the Native peoples of the Lower Columbia.” Engdahl says, “The rivers and streams served as a trade route and transportation system that allowed the Cowlitz and other native peoples to travel throughout the region.”

“Efficient routes established long ago by the Cowlitz and other native peoples allowed the direct ways to travel throughout the region. Today’s roadways often mirror those same paths,” Engdahl says. She notes that modern imaging technologies reveal patterns that indicate Indian routes under roadbeds and freeways.

One of the best-known historic foot, horse and later wagon paths of the Cowlitz was the Cowlitz Trail. “Today it’s better known as I-5,” says Mike Iyall, Cowlitz tribal historian and elder. Engdahl likens the economic health of these historic native territories in the region to being as grand and diverse as Istanbul.

“Before European contact, the Columbia River was like an aquatic Silk Road,” Engdahl says. “Based on road and trade routes, the Native world here did very well – even inland tribes established routes to trade with the coastal tribes – it was a powerful trade area.”

White explorers and settlers later enjoyed the beneficial trade and transportation provided by the powerful Cowlitz Tribe. “Imagine,” says Engdahl, “incoming settlers leaving Fort Vancouver, being paddled to the Cowlitz River by Cowlitz paddlers, north on the Cowlitz River to Cowiclt Landing near Toledo, where the river bends toward the east, and then travel overland to the Salish Sea, formally called Puget Sound.”

“Cowlitz Presence Catalyst for Clark County Development
In 1825, the presence of large Cowlitz settlements and the trade center in the area moved the Hudson’s Bay Company to establish Fort Vancouver nearly at the same location as the city of Vancouver.

Vigorous trade was carried out between various tribes in the region and beyond, with the flow of goods and people and the greater ecosystem. Additionally, these waterways served as a food source for fish and wildlife, serving as a food source for people and the greater ecosystem. Additionally, these waterways serve as a food source for fish and wildlife, serving as a food source for people and the greater ecosystem.

Vigorous trade was carried out between various tribes in the region and beyond, with the flow of goods and people.

A Return to Economic Strength
With land taken from them by the federal government and disease brought by White explorers and settlers decimating the Cowlitz Tribe, the tribe’s regional power and influence waned. Today, however, the tribe is once again a significant economic force in the region. The establishment of Iyall, Cowlitz tribal historian and elder. “We’re currently one of the largest employers in Clark County and Washington’s Indian tribes are the seventh-largest employer in the state,” says Iyall.

“We have high hopes that we’ll be a substantial force in the economy into the future.”

Today the Cowlitz provide over 1,500 jobs and more when the 14-story ilani hotel is completed, with additional business diversification slated in the future.

Cowlitz Tribe Logo, above. The Cowlitz logo incorporates a salmon to depict foundational First Food, and a link to native commerce and culture. The Alaskan Native language brought in the north by migrating peoples. The Alaskan Native language eventually disappeared but was still noted in the mid-20th century.

The Cowlitz tribe is one of the largest of which was at the site of present-day Fort Vancouver. “Imagine,” says Engdahl, “incoming settlers leaving Fort Vancouver, being paddled to the Cowlitz River by Cowlitz paddlers, north on the Cowlitz River to Cowiclt Landing near Toledo, where the river bends toward the east, and then travel overland to the Salish Sea, formally called Puget Sound.”

Cowlitz tribe at a glance
Who are they? The Cowlitz Tribe consists of two distinct groups the Salish-speaking Upper Cowlitz and the Salish-speaking Lower Cowlitz. The Kwakwaka’wakw Cowlitz (Mountain Cowlitz of the Willapa Hills) maintained an Alaskan Native language brought in from the north by migrating peoples. The Alaskan Native language eventually disappeared but was still noted in the mid-20th century.

Territory of Cowlitz ancestral lands and settlements dating to at least 900 years ago encompassed a vast area that extended from the Columbia River near Portland and Vancouver, north to the southern end of Puget Sound. The Lower Cowlitz occupied numerous villages along the Cowlitz River, and all major river systems that drained into the Columbia in what is now southwest Washington.

Trading area of Cowlitz goods followed river systems into Canada, and overland to southern states and into the mid-continent.

Population of the tribe was estimated to be as high as 3,200-4,000 strong, at the time of European contact in the early 1800s. Several hundred more settlers killed many; by the early 1900s the population was only 600. Today there are approximately 4,300 tribal members, two-thirds of whom are in Washington State, the remainder are spread across the nation and in Canada.

Federal recognition was denied until 1970 when the U.S. government signed a treaty with the Cowlitz Tribe. In 1975 the tribe received federal recognition, which the Cowlitz Tribe received.

Reparations were made after World War II when the Indian Claims Commission awarded the Cowlitz $2.5 million for about $30,000 an acre, about 90 cents an acre. According to the Cowlitz, the tribe was worth about $30,000 an acre, but the sum was “graciously accepted by the tribe. Although proof of many more acres of Cowlitz territory under dispute from the Cowlitz tribe’s reservation treaty notes from the 1850s, the tribe was denied further recompense.

Reservation status was awarded in November of 2015. The Cowlitz received the 156 acres of reservation land. The Band Cowlitz Reservation is one of the largest in Washington State.

Additional resources for more information about the Cowlitz tribe
Falls Tales of the Cowlitz Salish, Thelma Adamson, Editor.
Legends of the Cowlitz Indian Tribe, by Ray Wells.
PORT’S WATERFRONT PROPERTY DEVELOPMENT PATH

Our port commissioners and staff are routinely asked: When is the port going to develop its waterfront property?

It may not be evident that the current activities of the port are laying the groundwork for future development of its 41-acre tract on the banks of Lake River. The Pioneer Street Rail Overpass project, coming to completion this fall, will ensure safe and predictable passage between Downtown Ridgefield and the waterfront – critical for anyone contemplating an investment there. We’re also working with the City of Ridgefield on the addition of a pedestrian/bike overpass at Division Street for safe and direct passage for those approaching the waterfront at the city’s north end.

But what comes next? From the port’s perspective, waterfronts are special places – rarely do you get the opportunity to reimagine an entire waterfront with your community.

The port commission remains committed to keeping the waterfront in public ownership – not only does this give the public a voice for what happens at the waterfront, it ensures that the public will always have access to it. Because Ridgefield is growing rapidly and the market for commercial waterfront property is evolving quickly as well, the commission and community must take great care in planning and developing the waterfront.

The waterfront is zoned for mixed-use development. This means a mix of retail, restaurants, commercial and employment activities including lodging are allowed. Fifteen percent has already been set as open area. Housing may, at commission discretion be allowed, but by covenant cannot be at ground level.

The community wants and deserves a great waterfront – a place to come, maybe work, but just as importantly relax and enjoy Ridgefield’s NW lifestyle. As the port completes some of its other projects and begins raising the capital needed for a large development project, the waterfront will come forward. As it does, the port will engage the public in the process of determining the right path for waterfront redevelopment.

"...rarely do you get the opportunity to reimagine an entire waterfront with your community."

PORT BRINGS BIG INVESTMENT $$$ TO COMMUNITY

Here are a five and 24 year look at the grant dollars the Port of Ridgefield has secured, and has or will invest for projects with significant community benefit.

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Find it on our website, around town and in the Reflector newspaper on the 2nd Wednesday of January, April, July & October.

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111 West Division St, Ridgefield, WA 98642
360.887.3873
portridgefield.org

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