



TRIBAL BUSINESS HIGHLIGHTS

Written by Crystal Bass, Tribal Administrative Director in partnership with relevant departments and programs

INTRODUCTION TO THE DIVISION OF CULTURE



**Jerry Meninick,
Deputy Director of
Culture**

Tribal Council formally created the Division of Culture under Resolution T-31-16 to ensure the preservation, protection, and perpetuation of Yakama cultural heritage, languages, and natural resources. The Division brings together the **Na Mi Ta Man-Wit Nak Nu Wit** (Cultural Resources Program) and **Ichishk'iin sinwit** (Yakama Language Program) under the Deputy Director of Culture who reports to the Culture Committee.

Jerry comes from the Palouse bands and descends from **Wanapum, Skiin, Nawawi, Nisxt, and Qmil** bands. His broad experience includes providing for his people as a traditional fisherman on the **Nchi'Wana** (Columbia River), then as U.S. Forest Service employee on the Pacific Crest Trail. Jerry also worked as a timber sales monitor for the Yakama Nation before serving on Tribal Council.

As an elected member of the Council, he has served as Chairman of several committees, including Legislative, Fish & Wildlife, and Law & Order. He was also part of the Executive Committee. Most importantly, Jerry served as Tribal Chairman from 1992-1994 and again from 1996-2004. In total, he has dedicated 20 years to serving the people of the Yakama Nation.

Prior to his current role, Jerry worked at Heritage University as the Tribal Liaison and Counselor. At Heritage, he compiled research for the Native American Studies curriculum.

Cultural Resources Program (CRP)

CRP protects and preserves cultural resources within the Yakama Reservation, Ceded Lands, and Usual and Accustomed areas to the fullest extent of the law. Staffed by 12 cultural specialists and archaeologists, the program ensures compliance with the Treaty of 1855 and serves as the primary point of contact for outside agencies. CRP also administers the Atlas of Cultural Places.

2024 HIGHLIGHTS

- **Archaeological surveys and studies:** Conducted across the Reservation Ceded Lands, and Yakima Training Center.
- **Agency Coordination:** Reviewed federal and state projects in 64 cities and 18 counties involving agencies like Bonneville Power, Army Corps of Engineers, WA Dept. of Ecology, DNR, and many more.
- **Public Outreach:** Participated in Yakama Wilderness Camp and partnered with **Wak'ishwi** (Yakama Nation Diabetes Program) to raise awareness of the importance protecting pictographs and petroglyphs along the Columbia River.



- **Land Repatriation:** Ongoing work to return 500 acres of land in Washington to Yakama Nation.

LANGUAGE PROGRAM

The **Ichishkíin** language is part of the Sahaptian language family, which spans across what is currently the Pacific Northwest. There are many dialects and variations under "Yakama Ichishkíin" stemming from the tribes, bands, and families that comprise the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation.

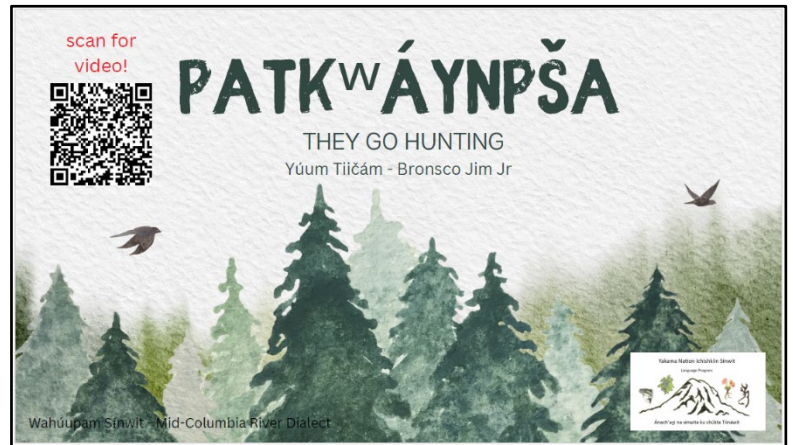
In 2003, the Yakama Language Program was established to preserve **Ichishkíin** for current and future generations. The small but mighty staff of six coordinate class at schools, libraries, and community centers, and provide language resources for Tribal programs, employees, and families.

- Staff have created and continue to improve materials for home and classroom use including flashcards, posters, worksheets, and videos. Check them out on the program's website: www.yakamalanguage.org
- Watch "Word of the Day" videos, staff interviews, and more on YouTube at: youtube.com/@YakamaNationLanguageProgram
- Download **Náami Sínwít**, the Ichishkíin app to your Smartphone free of charge. Look for it in the Apple App Store or Google Play Store.
- Stay updated on classes and events by following [@yakamalanguage](https://www.facebook.com/yakamalanguage) on Facebook and Instagram.

2024 HIGHLIGHTS

- Partnered with seven school districts to expand learning opportunities.

- Ongoing translation support for General Council.
- Produced over 534 "Word of the Day" videos on social media.



- Supported continuing education credits language courses offered at the YVCC Learning Center in Toppenish through Salish Kootenai College.
- Translation support for General Council.
- Increased language visibility through place-naming projects including programs, buildings, and land:
 - The former Prosser Hatchery will be renamed **Táptap** on October 3, 2025.
 - The Cle Elum Fish passage is now called **Łl'lám**.
 - Springwood Ranch in Kittitas County was renamed **Kláláa Tkwinat** on May 2, 2025.



Language Classes

- **Baby Language Meetups** held Mondays from 3-4 p.m. at the **Ttáwaxt Birth Justice Center** on Campbell Farm.
- **Goldendale Community Language Class** held Wednesdays from 6:30-7:30 p.m. at the Georgeville Community Center in Goldendale. (These will resume in October.)
- **Yakima Valley Libraries Ichishkíin Program** hosted at two branches. Classes are held on the first Thursday of the month from 4:30-5:30 p.m. at the Central Library in downtown Yakima and on the third Thursday of the month from 4:30-5:30 p.m. at the Toppenish Library.

CULTURAL ARCHIVE

The Division of Culture is developing a Cultural Archive that houses all collective materials, intellectual property, and historical documents associated with Yakama heritage and language. The Division is also working to identify and reclaim cultural resources.

The office has spent countless hours indexing and researching Yakama Nation lands, legends, and place names separating information into prehistorical and post-occupation eras by region to highlight the history and contributions of tribes and bands across the Pacific Northwest.

Plans for the coming year include creating educational videos about the land's history, people, language, and legends.

Audit Update

Audit

The FY 2022 audit was successfully submitted to the Federal Clearinghouse on July 10, 2025. The FY 2023 audit is underway. Our objective is to complete both FY 2023 and FY 2024 audits and return to a regular audit schedule by the beginning of the new year. The Finance and Accounting team has played a pivotal role in leading the multi-year audit preparation and clean-up process. This effort has required close coordination with the Finance Officer to ensure that financial operations remain aligned and responsive to evolving audit requirements. Their leadership has been instrumental in balancing the technical demands of the audit with the strategic oversight needed to maintain momentum across departments.

However, several key challenges have emerged throughout this process. Primary among them is the need for agility in managing adjustments, correcting transactions, and responding to shifting internal deadlines. The sheer volume of work has placed considerable pressure on the inter-departmental team, requiring careful prioritization and resource allocation to maintain accuracy and timeliness. These demands have been further compounded by the transition to new financial and timekeeping systems, which are still undergoing evaluation to determine how best to integrate them into existing workflows.

As the Yakama Nation continues to navigate these changes, there is a strong focus on implementing best business practices and reinforcing internal controls. This includes establishing clear segregation of duties to enhance transparency and reduce risk, as well as refining procedures to ensure compliance and accountability. The ultimate goal is to build a more resilient financial infrastructure that supports both operational efficiency and long-term audit readiness.

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**Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation
PO Box 151
Toppenish, WA 98948**

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