

1 How the first people of Washington governed themselves

In the long march of history, “Washington” is a recent creation. For thousands of years before white settlers came, native people lived in this part of the world without creating the boundaries that define our state today.

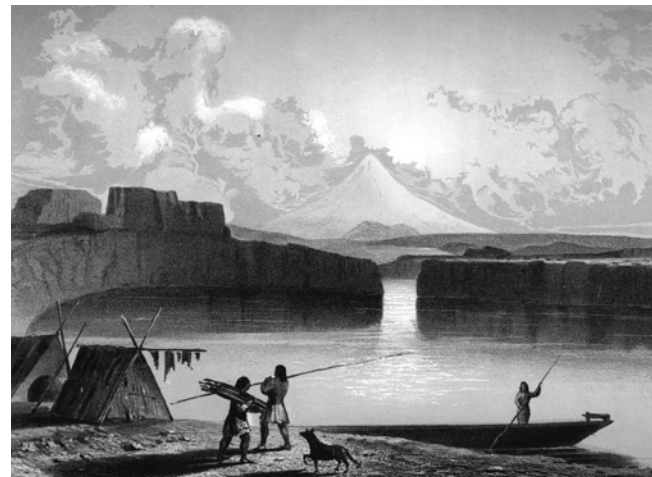
The pattern of their lives was shaped by the natural world – by where the rivers flowed, where the berries grew, and where the best fishing spots were located. Washington’s first people didn’t plant crops or build factories; they fished, hunted, and gathered wild plants for food. They made their homes, their clothing, and everything else they needed from the materials that nature provided.

They knew how to harvest fish without harming future fish runs. They knew how to burn prairie lands to keep them open, so that the camas plant whose roots they ate would flourish.

They managed the natural world, but they also considered themselves part of it.

During the spring and summer, they often traveled and built summer camps where the best berries or the best hunting was. In the winter, they returned to their winter houses or longhouses, where they spent more time indoors, making baskets, clothing, and other necessities, and telling stories around the fire.

“Indians Fishing at The Dalles,” 1854, from a report published with the results of a railroad survey for the Northern Pacific Railroad.



drawing courtesy Governor's Mansion Foundation