

General Information

General Information About the White Earth Reservation

Location

The White Earth Reservation is located in the northwestern Minnesota counties of Mahnomen, Becker, and Clearwater. The reservation is located 68 miles from Fargo and 225 miles from Minneapolis/St. Paul. Tribal headquarters are in White Earth, Minnesota.

The White Earth Reservation, in northwestern Minnesota, is named for the white clay at White Earth Village. Never the historic homeland of any Ojibwe group, it became a reservation in 1867 in a treaty with the Mississippi Band of Ojibwe. It was to be the home of all of the Ojibwe in the state. The reservation was the size of a full county, 36 townships square, although divided among the three state counties of Mahnomen, Clearwater, and Becker. The land is typical of central Minnesota. Indian communities include White Earth, Pine Point/Ponsford, Naytahwaush, Elbow Lake, Beaulieu, Rice Lake, and Ebro. Other villages were built along the railroad track running south to north in the western part of the reservation, Callaway, Ogema, Waubun, and Mahnomen.

Historical Overview

With the 1867 Treaty, great pressure was put on the bands to get them to move. Mississippi Band members from Gull Lake were the first group to come and settle around White Earth Village in 1868. The 1920 census reflected those who had settled in White Earth: 4856 were from the Mississippi Band including 1,308 from Mille Lacs, the Pillager Bands had 1,218, Pembina Band 472, and 113 had come from Fond du Lac of the Superior Band.

The different bands tended to settle in different areas of the reservation. Mille Lacs Lake members moved to the northeastern part of the reservation, around Naytahwaush and Beaulieu. Pillager Band members settled around Pine Point in the southeast. After 1873, Pembina Band members from the Red River Valley moved into a township on the western side of the reservation. A community of half-breeds, with a greater interest in taking up European ways, concentrated in the Village of White Earth where the government agency was located. These various groups of Indians, with their different backgrounds and cultures, continue to add a diversity of interests to the reservation today.

The Dawes Act of 1887, Nelson Act of 1889 along with the subsequent Rice Commission negotiations and the two Clapp Amendments, 1904 and 1906, enabled the rapid division of the reservation into individually held parcels, allowing individuals to sell their lands and with many schemes to defraud. The timber was sold and cut and much of the land quickly passed into non-Indian ownership. In the decades since, there were several commissions and court actions to find out what happened.

Four townships in the northeast corner also diminished the White Earth Reservation by the Nelson Act. The implications for hunting and fishing rights have had several court challenges. For the loss of the four townships, the agreement was to allow White Earth to trap and rice within the Tamarac National Wildlife Refuge. Tribal land holdings were increased by over 28,000 acres of sub-marginal land, acquired by the federal government during the depression, and transferred to White Earth by 1975. The White Earth Land Settlement Act (WELSA) required transferring 10,000 acres of state/county held land to the Tribe that occurred in the 1990's. White Earth has relatively very little allotted land still remaining in trust, reflecting the destructive land-grabbing history of the reservation. Today only 8%, or approximately 63,000 acres are tribally owned/managed.

The White Earth Tribal Council is the governing body and the Tribe is a member of the MCT. The Tribal Council consists of five members: Tribal Chair, Secretary/Treasurer, and three District Representatives.

Current Characteristics

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the total population of the White Earth Reservation and off Trust land is 9,192 people, an increase of 5% over the 1990 U.S. Census.

American Indians living on the reservation are widely disbursed among a number of rural communities, the largest of which are the communities of White Earth, which has historically served as the center of the reservation. The White Earth Reservation includes five incorporated cities and five major villages. The incorporated cities are the cities of Mahnommen (pop. 1,202), Waubun (pop. 403), Bejou (pop. 94), Ogema (pop. 143), and Callaway (pop. 200). The villages, which are predominately Native American, are: White Earth (pop. 424), Naytahwaush (pop. 583), Pine Point (pop. 337), Rice Lake (pop. 226) and Elbow Lake (pop. 104).

White Earth Band of Minnesota Chippewa had a total enrollment of 20,908 as of 03/06/96.

Land Ownership. The Reservation is a mixture of private, county, state, federal and tribal land holdings. Table 3 lists the acreages and percent of land ownership within the original boundaries of the Reservation.

Ownership	Acres	Percent
Private	522,108	62.36
County	123,925	14.80
Tribal	76,955	9.19
State of Minnesota	63,992	7.62
United States of America	36,992	4.42
Trust Fund Land	13,453	1.61