

Why We Are Now Called the Séliš-Qlispé Culture Committee

2022

In the mid-1970s, the Tribal Council of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes established two Culture Committees: the Flathead Culture Committee, based in St. Ignatius, and the Kootenai Culture Committee, based in Elmo. This historic step helped restore tribal cultures to the heart of tribal government, and helped restore the elders to their traditional role as advisors to our leaders.

The Flathead Culture Committee is now called the Séliš-Qlispé Culture Committee. (See csktsalish.org for proper pronunciation of the words *Séliš* and *Qlispé*.) This brief paper explains why the Committee has adopted this new name. The story is rooted in our history, and reflects the gradual, steady strengthening of our efforts to revitalize our culture and language.

Our mission is the protection, preservation, and perpetuation of the culture and language of our people. Our staff is given guidance and direction by the Séliš-Qlispé Elders Cultural Advisory Council, whose members also serve as direct cultural advisors to the Chairperson and the Tribal Council.

For more than four decades, the Tribal Council has supported the Committees out of an understanding of the importance of cultural continuance to the overall well-being and sovereignty of the tribes. As a result, the wisdom and cultural values of the elders have helped guide the development of CSKT policies and programs during this important period of tribal history, as we have rebuilt our governing capacity.

The Flathead Culture Committee's original name was in part an accommodation of the English name by which the tribe (along with the reservation itself and many place-names) had been known since the early 1800s. Oral histories and archival records provide numerous different explanations for the origin of the term "Flathead." What we do know with certainty from our elders is that our own name for the nation that came to be called "Flathead" is *Séliš*. *Séliš* is pronounced SEH-leesh. In English this word is usually written as "Salish," or sometimes "Selish." We have also been called the Bitterroot Salish, because the Bitterroot Valley has always been a cherished part of our homeland, which reaches from the Bitterroot Mountains in the west to the Yellowstone and upper Missouri drainages east of the Continental Divide.

The Culture Committee came to realize that the name "Flathead" conflicted with our core mission of teaching young people knowledge of our true culture, language, and history. In the mid-1990s, the Committee therefore changed its name to the Salish Culture Committee.

But the new name did not address another problem: the continuing omission of one of the two tribes that our Committee represents, the *Qłispé*. *Qłispe* (roughly pronounced KAH-lee-speh) has been Anglicized (rendered in English) as Kalispel. Tribal territories extend from the uppermost reaches of the Flathead drainage system, through Flathead Lake, all the way downstream to the Pend Oreille River in what is now eastern Washington. Before the impacts of epidemics and other changes beginning in the 1700s, the overall Qłispé population was much larger, and was therefore organized in a complex organization of tribes, divisions, and bands, each based in certain areas. The evidence indicates that there were at least distinct 27 bands and possibly close to 50.

Some Qłispé bands were based in more upstream areas, including the area of what is now the Flathead Reservation. Other bands were located in more downstream areas, around the lower Clark Fork, Lake Pend Oreille, and the Pend Oreille River. Non-Indians therefore often referred to us by the terms “Upper Kalispel” and “Lower Kalispel.” In the early 1800s, French-speaking fur trappers and traders began calling the Kalispel the “Pend d’Oreille,” meaning Earring or Hanging from the Ear, referring to the round shell earrings worn by *Qłispé* men and women. They also sometimes called the upstream people the “Upper Pend d’Oreille,” and the downstream people the “Lower Pend d’Oreille.” Over time, it became common for English speakers to call the upstream people Pend d’Oreille, and the downstream people Kalispel. This was reflected in the naming of the Kalispel Reservation when President Wilson established it by executive order in 1914. But the “Pend d’Oreille” and “Kalispel” are really all members of a single Indigenous nation, the *Qłispe*.

In order to acknowledge both of the tribes represented by the Committee, in the early 2000s, we adopted the name Salish-Pend d’Oreille Culture Committee.

But in 2016, we confronted the problem that was also perpetuated in this name. Salish-Pend d’Oreille are the terms that English speakers use for us. As part of our efforts to foster pride in who we really are, and to bring the Salish language into our daily lives whenever and wherever we can, we have decided to embrace our own names. The elders therefore approved the official adoption of the name Séliš-Qłispé Culture Committee.

People who are unfamiliar with the Salish language can say Salish-Kalispel Culture Committee, but we encourage people to learn our true names. Please go to the following website to hear and learn the correct pronunciation of Séliš-Qłispé Culture Committee: www.csktsalish.org

Lemlmtš pes ya? — thank you everyone!