

Our Place in the World: The Citizen Potawatomi Nation

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ABSTRACT:

The Citizen Potawatomi Nation is a Federally Recognized Native American Tribe headquartered in Shawnee, Oklahoma. The legal description of the CPN's Traditional Jurisdictional Area defines an area spanning from "North of the Canadian River, South of the North Canadian River, East of the Indian Meridian, & West of the Seminole County Line." Originally, this area encompassed 900 square miles; however, through time and various governmental processes, the land actually owned and/or controlled by the Tribe was greatly reduced and developed into more of a checkerboard design. Through the use of ESRI's GIS software, they are able to visualize all governmental components on a single platform. This allows greater understanding by the Tribal leadership and more detailed tribal development and planning.

INTRODUCTION:

Retaining sovereignty can be a challenge for tribal governments who once held a contiguous land base, but as time passed, have been reduced to a "checkerboard-jurisdiction" of their lands. It is just this situation that the numerous Native American Tribes and Indian Nations within the State of Oklahoma deal with on a daily basis. The State of Oklahoma has a greater population of Native Americans per capita than any other state in the Union and is currently home to 38 different Tribal governments. Formerly known as "Indian Territory", the State of Oklahoma is unique in its political structure, and unlike most other states containing Native American Tribes, it does not have a true Reservation system. Not to

confuse you, we do have a federally recognized reservation in the State, the Osage Nation Reservation with it's Tribal Headquarters in Pawhuska, is also known as Osage County. With that exception, Traditional Jurisdictional Areas (TJAs) have almost become just another political boundary, crisscrossing with School Districts, Municipal Boundaries, and the like, important only to the Tribe or Tribes who originally inhabited the area. To get a firm grasp on their holdings and the World they now share, the Citizen Potawatomi Nation has incorporated the use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) into their governmental structure and services.

Hello, my name is Thomas Tollett, and I am the GIS Analyst for the Citizen Potawatomi Nation located in Shawnee, Oklahoma. Through the use of ESRI's GIS software, we are able to collect data from a wide range of sources, and display them on a single platform, something that until now, this Tribe has previously been unable to do. Almost every Tribal department receives information for a separate federal entity, and it seems that each Federal office uses a different format for information dissemination. Before I begin talking about the ways the Citizen Potawatomi Nation is using GIS, I would first like to give you a brief history of the Tribe.

The Potawatomi are among the wave of Algonquian-speaking people who occupied the Great Lakes region from prehistoric times through the early 1800s. Oral traditions explain that the ancient Potawatomi people were once part of an immense group that had traveled down the eastern shores of North America along the Atlantic Ocean. This large group, the Chippewa (Ojibwa), Ottawa (Odawa) and the Potawatomi all constituted a single tribe.

This larger group later split at Georgian Bay, Ontario, Canada and went their separate ways. Through early historic records, it has been confirmed that the Potawatomi were living in Michigan and had established an autonomous tribal identity at least 500 years ago. Scholars have

debated the origin and translation of the word 'Potawatomi' for many years. Nevertheless, the Potawatomi people firmly believe that the Chippewa applied the term to them, meaning 'the people of the place of the fire' since they retained the original council fire once shared by all three tribes.

The Citizen Potawatomi Nation Reservation is located in central Oklahoma, between the North Canadian River and Canadian Rivers, covering sections of three Oklahoma counties (Pottawatomie, Cleveland, and Oklahoma). The original reservation area was established by direct purchase of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, they were not merely assigned a land base. Headquartered in Shawnee, Oklahoma, the Citizen Potawatomi Nation is one of seven Potawatomi Tribes or "bands." The Citizen Potawatomi Nation is the largest group of Potawatomi descendants and is currently composed of more than 25,200 tribal members located in every state in the Union and five foreign countries. The Tribe obtained federal recognition in 1938 under the Thomas-Rogers Oklahoma Indian Welfare Act.

I was hired by the CPN in October of 2003 as a GIS & Environmental Specialist. Prior to that time, the tribe had employed a series of drafters and CAD operators to handle their mapping responsibilities, but had in the past few years discovered GIS, and wanted to move in that direction. Being fresh out of College with my only "real-world" experience being a year-long internship during my senior year, this was a great opportunity for me, and just the kind of challenge I was looking for. Actually being able to design, develop, and maintain a Tribal GIS from the ground up, I was very excited to get started.

My first couple of months was spent going through existing data that the Tribe had received from contractors, government offices, and inter-tribal organizations, as well as searching for new sources of geospatial data. As I mentioned previously, the State of Oklahoma lacks an "Indian Reservation" designation for most of the state, so while it is

difficult for the American Indian Tribes & Nations to establish jurisdiction across their TJAs, most of the basic geospatial information they need is available from various State departments and agencies. Transportation systems (roads, railroads, bridges, etc), political boundaries (House of Representative, Senate, & County Commissioner Districts), public school districts, municipal boundaries and a variety of other information that a Tribal government might find desirable are readily available if you know where to look. After collecting the data on a state or county level, all the GIS person has to do is to extract the information that is relevant to their Tribal boundary. After my data mining exercises, I created a list of the data I had found, and circulated it among the Tribal departments. This gave the other departments a chance to better understand what I was doing and what could be accomplished with GIS, in addition to letting me gain more insight on what kinds of information I was lacking, and might be useful to have on hand.

At first, I began developing maps to illustrate the location, shape and size of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation in relation to the State, local, and county governments around our geographic area. Some other maps had been made previously by different Federal and Inter-tribal groups, but none I found had matched up to the legal description of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation that I had found on a copy of the original treaty. Soon, I was receiving requests for more specific maps, and questions on the functionality and possibility of projects, from different Tribal departments. To date, I have worked with a number of our Tribal departments on geospatial projects and have several more projects in the works. Below, I would like to give a brief synopsis of the GIS work being done or slated for the near future within some of the CPN's Governmental departments and services.

1. CPN Office of Environmental Protection:

- a. Creation and continued development of functional GIS database for the Citizen Potawatomi Nation.
 - b. Location of Sampling sites, Environmental Hazards, site recon/planning
 - c. Re-Districting of an Inter-tribal organization known as Oklahoma Tribal Conservation Advisory Council (OTCAC) to facilitate greater understanding, and easier travel among its members.
 - d. Work with an Inter-tribal water quality task force to map watersheds and Tribal boundaries in Oklahoma in order to develop a Water Advisory Board to assist Tribes in their pursuit to gain "Treatment as a State" status from the Federal government.
2. Real Estate Services – Mapping and geodatabase creation of all Tribal Trust and Fee-simple land parcels (still on-going). Development of this data will also aid numerous other Tribal entities (i.e. the CPN Tribal Police Department in establishing jurisdiction, the CPN Emergency Management Department in disaster mitigation, planning, & recovery, and Tribal Leadership in facilitating greater planning & development for the Tribe's future.
 3. Indian Reservation Roads Program- Inventory creation, development and management of the roads included in the CPN's IRR Program.
 4. Office of Self Governance – Creation of a series of maps and aerial photos to better relay the Tribe's location, size, and impact area to assist in the grant application process.
 5. CPN's Cultural Heritage Department – Maintenance of geospatial data in relation to the original Individual allotments, creation of Tribal Family Allotment maps for the membership, and creation of maps and aerial photos to facilitate and accompany cultural/historical research.

There are numerous ways a Native American Tribe can benefit from the use of Geographic Information Systems; I hope this paper has given you greater insight into how the Citizen Potawatomi Nation is using ESRI's

GIS Technology and possibly given you a few ideas on how to incorporate GIS into your government.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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Biography:

Thomas E. Tollett holds an Associates Degree in Biological Science from Carl Albert State College in Poteau, OK, Graduated with Honors from East Central University in Ada, OK with a B.S. in Cartography (GIS emphasis) & a minor in Biology in 2002, and is currently a graduate student at the University of Oklahoma pursuing a Masters Degree in Public Administration. He has been employed with the Citizen Potawatomi since October 2003, is member of the Oklahoma Floodplain Managers Association, American Society for Public Administration, and sits on the Steering Committee for the Oklahoma Chapter of the South Central Arc Users Group (SCAUG).