

OREGON

Oregon Department of Forestry

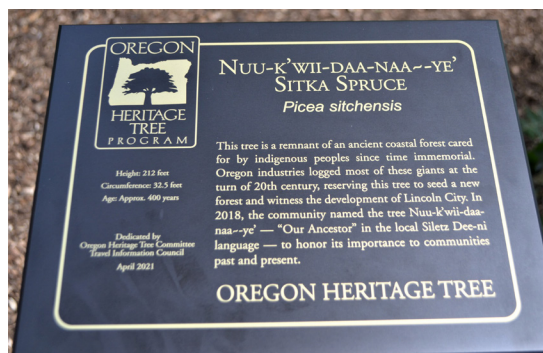
Spurred by the observations of a high schooler that the language on a state Heritage Tree plaque was dated and insensitive, the Oregon Heritage Tree committee (HTC) has undertaken an intensive analysis of its Heritage Tree line-up. Over the past year, the HTC has been reviewing its signage texts, has introduced a new award program to recognize Tree Heroes, and has taken steps to increase the number of stories and histories of underrepresented people and groups told by Oregon's Heritage Trees.

Oregon's Heritage Tree Program is the oldest of its type in the United States, having been initiated in the early 1990s by a renowned Oregon storyteller, amateur historian, and tree lover. Today the Oregon Heritage Tree Committee (HTC) includes tree advocates, arborists, historians, documentary filmmakers, foresters, and educators. Each member is committed to honoring trees that reflect Oregon's cultural, socio-economic, and environmental history from the perspective of all peoples, cultures, and groups that have lived and currently live in Oregon.

Last year, the Oregon Travel Information Council received an email from a teenager who had visited the giant spruce of Cape Perpetua, an Oregon State Heritage Tree. Their thoughtful email pointed out that the tree's plaque used Christopher Columbus' North American landing as an age indicator for the tree. The email further explained that this was insensitive, especially since the plaque continued to convey Indigenous history but didn't acknowledge the great harm Columbus did to Indigenous people. Every HTC member was appreciative of the gentle but clearly communicated "Calling In" this email expressed.

These observations not only motivated the HTC to change this tree's plaque, but also to review the text copy on all the state's heritage tree plaques and, when necessary, improve those few with insensitive wording. Also, the HTC looked carefully at the groups and people whose stories are told by the state's heritage trees. They realized that relatively few non-white groups and people were represented, despite their significant influence and impact on Oregon's history. This awareness has prompted the HTC to revamp its Heritage Tree nomination form to make it easier for non-white and under-represented groups to nominate trees for consideration. The form also explicitly encourages the inclusion of trees that represent historic and cultural ways of life, rather than the achievements of individuals. To build awareness of the people who promote the importance of Heritage Trees in their communities, the HTC also introduced the Tree Hero Award. The Oregon Travel Information Council, which supports the HTC,

will also be updating its website and the histories of the state's most cherished trees to reflect increased cultural sensitivity.



In August 2021, in a moving ceremony with city residents and local tribal members, the HTC inducted the first Oregon Heritage Tree with an Indigenous name. Nuuk'wii-daa-naa--ye', (pronounced "Noo Kwee DAH Nah Yay," and meaning "Our Ancestor" in the Siletz language), is a giant [400-year-old Sitka spruce tree](#) in the coastal town of Lincoln City, OR. The Oregon HTC still has a lot of work to do but looks to a bright future when more Heritage Trees reflecting the history and diversity of all Oregon's residents are inducted into the program.



(Above) Heritage Tree plaque for Nuuk'wii-daa-naa--ye'. Photo: A. VonDomitz, OTIC

(Left) Lincoln City community and local tribal members celebrating the induction of the Heritage Tree Nuuk'wii-daa-naa--ye' in August 2021. Photo: A. VonDomitz, OTIC