



# INDIAN COUNTRY TODAY

Digital. Indigenous. News.

## E-Weekly Newsletter - June 11, 2020



# Indian Country's COVID-19 syllabus

**Data, story summaries, lists of closures, resources**  
(As of June 10, 2020 11:45 am EDT)

### COVID-19 Tracker in the United States

**Total cases:** 2,018,875

**Total deaths:** 113,700

**Jurisdictions reporting cases:** 54

(50 states, District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, and US Virgin Islands)

**Cases confirmed in the Indian health system:** 9,223

**Total deaths in the Indian health system:** 365

(Confirmed by tribes, the Indian Health Service, state public health agencies or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

\*\*\* Report COVID-19 cases in your tribe on this [Google Form](#) \*\*\*

[Click here for stories that have been posted by Indian Country Today.](#)

Inside this week's  
issue of  
Indian Country Today

#Coronavirus  
Check out Indian  
Country Today's  
coverage of COVID-19

#Mashpee  
Massachusetts tribe gets  
a win in federal court  
regarding trust lands

#NativeVote20  
Native women in North  
Dakota win primaries  
for state legislature

# Mashpee Wampanoag ruling a 'win for all of Indian Country'

By Kolby KickingWoman

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*Supporters cheer Massachusetts tribe's victory in lawsuit against U.S. Interior Department over its reservation status*

Support is pouring in for the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe following a ruling in its favor in a lawsuit against the U.S. Interior Department.

On Friday evening, Judge Paul L. Friedman of the U.S. District Court in Washington, D.C., blocked the federal government from rescinding the Massachusetts tribe's reservation status, ordering the department to reexamine a decision that took the tribe's more than 300 acres out of trust.



In this May 29, 2014, photo, people stand in the lobby of the newly constructed Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe's Community Government Center in Mashpee, Massachusetts, on Cape Cod. (AP Photo/Stephan Savoia, File)

Massachusetts' two Democratic U.S. senators, Elizabeth Warren and Ed Markey, said in a joint statement that the ruling marks an important victory for the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe. But they said the fight is not finished, and they will continue to hold the Trump administration accountable.

"The Mashpee Wampanoag have a right to their ancestral homeland," the statement said. "We are glad that the Court acknowledged the importance of the arguments we made in the bicameral, bipartisan amicus brief we filed with our colleagues opposing the U.S. Department of the Interior's cruel actions."

The amicus brief submitted to the court was led by Rep. Deb Haaland, Laguna and Jemez Pueblo, and signed by more than 20 members of Congress from both sides of the aisle.

Haaland, a New Mexico Democrat, said the relationship between tribes and the federal government must be upheld and that the Interior Department had blatantly abused its power.

"Tribal sovereignty and the government-to-government relationship must be respected, but the Department of Interior clearly used a public health emergency to illegally move land out of trust," said Haaland in a [statement](#).

The Interior Department said in a brief statement Monday that it is examining Friedman's ruling.

"The Department is reviewing the decision and our options to proceed, and remains committed to upholding our trust responsibilities to Indian Country," the statement said.

[Read more here](#)

# North Dakota primary: 3 Native women 'using their voices to bring change'

By Aliyah Chavez

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*Legislative candidates Thomasina Mandan, Tracey Wilkie and Lisa Finley-DeVille, all Democrats, will advance to the general election*

Three Native women running for the North Dakota state Legislature will advance to the November election.

All three are Democrats: Thomasina Mandan, Mandan Hidatsa Arikara Nation, and Tracey Wilkie, Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, are running for state House seats. For state Senate, Lisa Finley-DeVille, Mandan Hidatsa Arikara Nation, ran unopposed in Tuesday's primary election.



Tracey Wilkie, Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa. (Photo by Karianna Photography)

"This is all a very powerful feeling," Wilkie told *Indian Country Today* on Election Day. "Knowing that there are two other Native women besides myself who are using their voices to bring change is very empowering."

All three candidates will face incumbents in November. In North Dakota, two Assembly candidates from each party advance to the general election in each district, while one advances in the Senate.

In 2018, Ruth Buffalo, Mandan Hidatsa Arikara Nation, was the only Native woman seeking a seat in the North Dakota House. When she was elected, Buffalo became the first Native Democratic woman to serve in the state's Legislature.

North Dakota Republicans control both houses of the Legislature. They have 37 Senate seats to Democrats' 10, and 79 House seats to Democrats' 15.

North Dakota's primary marked the first statewide election since two tribes earlier this year reached a landmark agreement with the state over voter identification requirements. However, this election was unusual in that all 53 counties in the state chose to avoid in-person voting due to the coronavirus.

In Georgia on Tuesday, voters endured heat, pouring rain and waits as long as five hours to cast ballots in that state's primary, demonstrating a fierce desire to participate in the democratic process while raising questions about the emerging battleground state's ability to manage elections in November when the White House is at stake. ([Read more here](#))



# Our tomorrow is now.



It is time for the 2020 Census and we need to participate now. Our children are counting on us as it helps shape the future of our communities. Census data is used for programs and grants that are important for all American Indians and Alaska Natives.

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**2020CENSUS.GOV**

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# Choctaw, Cherokee man paralyzed in fall from bridge during Oklahoma protest

Ken Miller  
Associated Press

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*'The doctors think that when the swelling goes down it will relieve the pressure' in the spine and allow Ryan to regain use of his legs and fully recover*

OKLAHOMA CITY — An Oklahoma man who was paralyzed from the waist down in a fall from a bridge when a truck drove through a crowd of protesters in Tulsa is improving, his brother said Wednesday.

Ryan Knight, 33, is hospitalized in stable condition and is regaining use of his hands and arms, but still cannot move his legs after suffering broken vertebra in his neck and back, and a fractured pelvis and shoulder blade, Randy Knight told The Associated Press.



In this May 31, 2020, file photo, people attend to a man who fell off an overpass on Interstate 244 in Tulsa, Okla., when a truck pulling a horse trailer drove through a group of protesters blocking the highway during a protest march for George Floyd. The Oklahoma man who was paralyzed from the waist down in the fall is improving, his brother said Wednesday, June 10. (Mike Simons/Tulsa World via AP, File)

Ryan Knight, who lives in Tulsa, fell at least 20 feet from an interstate overpass on May 31 as a truck pulling a horse trailer drove through the crowd protesting the death of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police, according to Randy Knight.

Randy Knight said his brother has regained some use of his arms and hands and doctors are hopeful there is no permanent spinal injury.

"The doctors think that when the swelling goes down it will relieve the pressure" in the spine and allow Ryan to regain use of his legs and fully recover, he said.

The driver of the truck was questioned but not arrested, as the investigation is weeks from being completed, said Oklahoma Highway Patrol spokesperson Sarah Stewart. Stewart said no further information would be released at this time, including the driver's explanation as to why he drove through the crowd.

"Part of the investigation is whether (the fall) is related to that truck with the horse trailer that drove through that crowd. I do know that it happened right the same time, but we don't know that it was related yet," Stewart said. ([Read more here](#))

# Eastern Cherokee extend office closures after COVID-19 spike

By Joseph Martin

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*The tribe was slated to reopen programs this week but has pushed back the date to June 22 because of a recent increase in virus cases*

The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians has experienced a spike in confirmed coronavirus cases since it began its phased reopening May 8.

At that time, the tribe had nine confirmed cases of COVID-19. As of Monday morning, it had 43.

The tribe was previously slated to open Monday but was notified that three employees at Qualla Boundary Head Start and Early Head Start tested positive for the virus, Principal Chief Richard Sneed said in a statement. The Head Start programs are considered nonessential and have been closed, along with tribal programs, due to the pandemic.

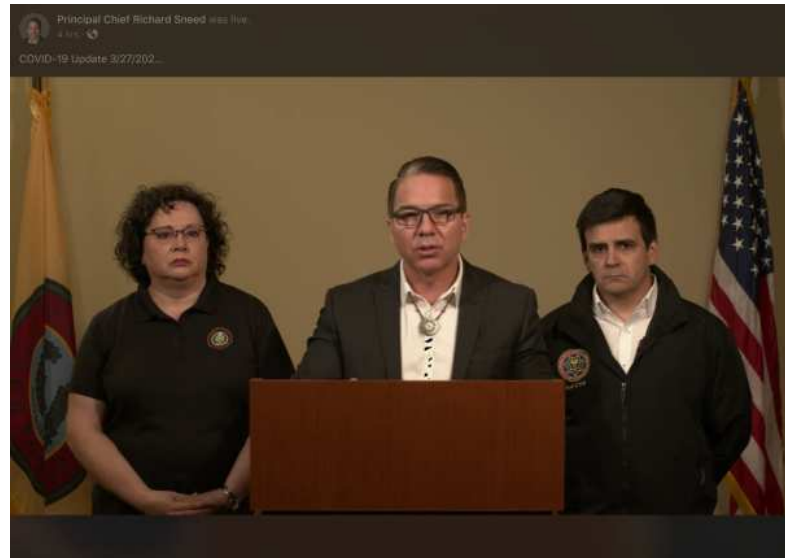
"Many of our employees rely on (the two Head Start programs), the Cherokee Youth Center and the recreation department day camps for childcare, and the continued closure of these programs and offices creates a hardship for our employees," he said.

Sneed said because of that hardship, the tribe would reopen June 22. The date change also applies to the tribal newspaper, the Qualla Boundary Public Library, the youth center and other tribal programs. The tribe's two casinos in North Carolina reopened in a limited capacity May 28.

"Once people start testing more, cases are identified," said Vickie Bradley, secretary of the tribal Public Health and Human Services division, who cited "community transmission."

The division reported May 28 that two who tested positive at the Cherokee Indian Hospital Authority's testing site had attended gatherings at the Cherokee Fair Grounds and at a church.

The division began contact tracings and notifying anyone who may have come in contact with the individuals. One of those who tested positive had been hospitalized. Bradley didn't have information on the person's identity or status. ([Read more here](#))



On March 27 Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians Principal Chief Richard Sneed announced the first case of COVID-19 in a part-time resident on the tribe's land, while Secretary of Public Health and Human Services Vickie Bradley and CEO of the Cherokee Indian Hospital Authority Casey Cooper join the chief in a press conference. (Video screen shot from Principal Chief Sneed's Facebook page)

**SAN CARLOS HOUSING AUTHORITY**  
**Is accepting applications for a**  
**Finance Manager**

Applications can be picked up at  
The Housing Authority Office

Applications can be emailed by contacting  
[cstevens@scazha.org](mailto:cstevens@scazha.org)

Closing date for the position is July 2, 2020

**As Montana opens for  
tourism ... tribes take a  
different course based on the  
value of elders**

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Kathleen McLaughlin  
Kaiser Health News



Ninepipe National Wildlife Reserve in Charlo, Montana. The reserve is located in the lands of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribal Nation. (Indian Country Today photo)

*'When an elder dies, there's a whole history ... It's like the library burning down'*

As Montana plows forward with its reopening, including throwing open the doors to tourism this month, the outlook is starkly different for members of the state's tribal nations, which have approached the coronavirus with greater caution and stricter controls.

Native people make up nearly 7 percent of Montana's population of roughly 1 million, protective attitudes toward elders and cultural heritage have shaped a pandemic response around defending the most vulnerable rather than prioritizing economics. Tribal leaders across the state say reservation shutdowns and stay-at-home orders will continue for now, as widespread, proactive testing for the virus on reservations gets underway.

"For the most part, in general, wider society has put more value on the young, not so much on elderly and the information and experience and knowledge," said Sharon Stewart-Peregoy, a Democratic state legislator and member of the Crow Nation. "Whereas with tribes, the acknowledgment and respect of elders as the carriers of the cultures has always been there."

**[Read more here](#)**

# Freeing Sk'aliCh'elh-tanaut

By Joaquin Estus

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*Two Lummi women are working to free a killer whale free before Tokitae's mother dies*

It's been 50 years since the orca known as Sk'aliCh'elh-tanaut, or Tokitae, swam in the ocean.

Two Lummi women of Washington and a legal rights group are joining forces to set the killer whale free before Tokitae's mother dies.

**The Earth Law Center** is a non-profit that advocates for establishing legal rights for ecosystems. It will be representing Lummi tribal members Tah-Mahs (Ellie Kinley) and Squil-le-he-le (Raynell Morris) in the effort.

In 1970, Tokitae was captured in the Salish Sea,

protected waters off British Columbia and Washington state, and moved to the Miami Seaquarium, where she's lived ever since. There, she's called Lolita.

Morris is director of the Lummi Nation's sovereignty, treaty and protection office. She said laws in other countries about holding orcas captive are changing, and someday they may change in the United States too. But she said Tokitae, who is an estimated age 56, urgently needs to be freed if she's to see and spend time with her aging mother.

"She doesn't have time to wait much longer for her mom to be able to receive her," Morris said.

"The way we look at it is what's happening to our Salish Sea, what's happening to salmon, what's happening to qw'e lh'ol me chen (the orca) is happening to us in our community. Until we're made whole, there's always that loss, that emptiness. We feel it. She feels it," Morris said.

Lummi ties to orca run deep. Terri Gobin, Tulalip, is chairperson of the nearby **Tulalip Tribes**. At an event last year she said the word for orca in the Lummi language is qwe'lh'ol'mechen, which means "our relations under the water."

[Read more here](#)



The Lummi Nation's Orca Tokitae totem pole depicts a killer whale, salmon, and seals. The 16-foot cedar pole was carved by brothers Jewell and Douglas James, Lummi. Here it's shown on the road in 2018 to the Miami Seaquarium, where Tokitae performs. In 2019 it was brought back to Bellingham, Washington. (Photo by Nancy Bleck, Slanay Sp'ak'wus, courtesy of the Lhaq'temish Foundation)



# Father, son die from COVID-19 within days of each other

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## PORTRAITS FROM THE PANDEMIC

The new coronavirus took 52-year-old Bruce "J.R." Damon Spotted Bear Jr. on April 17, 2020. Less than two weeks later, it took his dad.

Bruce "Duke" Damon Spotted Bear Sr. died on April 28, 2020, the day of his son's funeral. He was 77 and died not knowing his son had lost his life 11 days before.

The two Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation citizens lived on a ranch near Pryor, Montana, and became ill around the same time, according to the [\*Billings Gazette\*](#). Both were admitted to a hospital and placed on ventilators.



Bruce "Duke" Damon Spotted Bear Sr., left, and Bruce "J.R." Damon Spotted Bear Jr. died from COVID-19 less than two weeks apart. (Photo courtesy of St. Charles Parish, Facebook)

"On this National Day of Lament and Mourning for those who have fallen from COVID-19, we remember our own Bruce Spotted Bear Sr., and Bruce Spotted Bear Jr.," read a June 1 [Facebook post](#) by St. Charles Catholic Church in Pryor.

The elder Spotted Bear was a skilled horseman and enjoyed team roping at rodeos and training race horses, according to his [obituary](#). During Crow Fair and rodeos, he donated his time and horse trailers, according to the *Billings Gazette*. He met his future wife, Myrna, while attending Haskell Indian School in 1965. Spotted Bear was a bus driver and maintenance man for thirty years at St. Charles Mission School.

J.R. Spotted Bear worked at Shipton's Big R, a retail farm and ranch store, "where most folks could find him because he was a hard worker, who was always working," read his obituary. He enjoyed the outdoors and spending time in the mountains with family.

The younger Spotted Bear also had a skill for beading and sewing.

"He made a lot of items for his family and friends, such as elk tooth dresses, belts, moccasins and leggings," read his obituary.

"Anyone that knew him, knew him to be a kind person."

# Thanks For Reading!

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