

**VERMONT COMMISSION
ON
NATIVE AMERICAN AFFAIRS**



APPLICANT REVIEW AND DECISION

APPLICANT: Koasek Abenaki of the Koas Nation



The following review and decision is based upon the findings of the Vermont Commission on Native American Affairs and the expert review of a panel of three scholars; Dave Skinas, William Haviland, and Eloise Beil.

The Koasek Abenaki Tribe is a Medium sized tribe located in the upper Connecticut river valley, headquartered in Newbury, VT. The Koasek Abenaki have presented the Commission and Scholars with a lengthy narrative...

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853 (c)(1) A majority of the applicant's members currently reside in a specific geographical location within Vermont.

According to the Koasek's tribal rolls, the majority of the members reside in Vermont.

853 (c)(2) A substantial number of the applicant's members are related to each other by kinship and trace their ancestry to a kinship group through genealogy or other methods. Genealogical documents shall be limited to those that show descendency from identified Vermont or regional Native people.

Other than some members having the same last name, I did not see where kinship was established. I would suggest a sample of a family tree tracing a name to an ancestor. That would give a clear understanding to those who do not know what names are Abenaki names. (Or use a member who traces themselves to John Battist or Indian Joe for reference)

853 (c)(3) The applicant has a connection with Native American Indian tribes and bands that have historically inhabited Vermont.

There is substantial evidence of interaction between Koasek and the others Bands petitioning for state recognition. I have no doubt that historically natives have lived in that area of Vermont. (I would suggest the date that White Pine Association was established for timeline sake)

853 (c)(4) The applicant has historically maintained an organizational structure that exerts influence and authority over its members that is supported by documentation of the structure, membership criteria, the names and residential addresses of its members, and the methods by which the applicant conducts its affairs.

The band has included its constitution (which should show the date that it was accepted by members). It also includes the membership criteria. (I'm still uncomfortable with the use of DNA but that's just a personal opinion.)

853 (c)(5) The applicant has an enduring community presence within the boundaries of Vermont that is documented by archaeology, ethnography, physical anthropology, history, folklore, or any other applicable scholarly research and data.

The Connecticut River valley has been home to Natives peoples for over 11,000 years inhabiting areas near what is now modern day Newbury, VT, and south to the White River valley. There is archaeological evidence of Native villages throughout this area.

According to Abenaki Linguist Elie Joubert the inhabitants of the Connecticut and Ammonoosuc Rivers were known as Ahomonok, or people of the Eels or "quick campers".

There was evidence of totems, various animal bones, edible plants and medicines left abandoned during their short stays at some of these campgrounds. One of the main Ahomonok villages was called Koas, or the place of the pines.

Many items such as arrow heads, baskets for various uses including fishing were found at many of these camps. Wigwams and longhouses were traditional living quarters for the Native peoples of the area.

By 1100 A.D, There is evidence of corn and bean agriculture, staples that supported the Cowass village. State Archaeologist David Skinas and NH Archaeologist Richard Boisvert have indicated that there were fields for planting at the mission village of the Koas located on the VT side of the Connecticut River with the grinding stone and burial grounds 100 feet across the river on the New Hampshire side of the meadows.

There is recorded evidence that Newbury resident and Native John Battist later moved from the Newbury area to the upper Coos, Indicating that the Native peoples of Vermont settled in many different areas therefore creating kinship between tribes

To date the Indigenous peoples of the Connecticut River valley still make baskets, clothing, beading and other native crafts in the same way as their ancestors.

853 (c)(6)(A) The applicant is organized in part: to preserve, document, and promote its Native American Indian culture and history, and this purpose is reflected in its bylaws.

The Koasek have formed a non-profit organization called the White Pine Association, which is dedicated to the preservation of the history, culture, and language of the Abenaki people.

853 (c)(6)(B) The applicant is organized in part: to address the social, economic, political or cultural needs of the members with ongoing educational programs and activities.

The social and cultural programming of the Koasek primarily centers on Nawhila and it's auxiliary organization, the White Pines Association. Nawhila is a Native American cultural weekend and powwow.

853 (c)(7) The applicant can document traditions, customs, oral stories, and histories that signify the applicant's Native American heritage and connection to their historical homeland.

In the application they have provided the traditions they follow, they also listed customs they still practice today, using white suckers for fertilizer. The Koasek oral stories focus around the 17th and 18th centuries in the viable Indian community.

853 (c)(8) The applicant has not been recognized as a tribe in any other state, province, or nation.

The Koasek have not been recognized by any state or federal governments.

853 (c)(9)(A) Submission of letters, statements, and documents from: municipal, state, or federal authorities that document the applicant's history of tribe-related business and activities.

The Koasek have many supporting letters from state and federal officials: Dave Skinas, USDA; Catherine Brooks, VT Cultural Heritage Coordinator; VT Senator Hinda Miller; Suzy Chaffee, US Native American Olympic Team Foundation; and Governor-Elect Peter Shumlin.

853 (c)(9)(B) Submission of letters, statements, and documents from: tribes in and outside Vermont that attest to the Native American Indian heritage of the applicant.

The Koasek have many supporting letters from other tribes such as the Elnu Abenaki Tribe, the Nulhegan Abenaki Tribe, and the Vermont Indigenous Alliance.



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December 21, 2010

Subject: Review of the Koasek Traditional Band of the Koas Abenaki Nation's
Application for State Recognition

To: Luke Willard, Chair of the Vermont Commission on Native American Affairs

Dear Chairman Willard and Commissioners:

I am pleased to tell you that the applicant has met all of the requirements set forth in S.222 for recognition as an Abenaki Tribe residing in the State of Vermont. Below I present you with my response to each of the criteria as follows:

§ 853 (c) (1) A majority of the applicant's members currently reside in a specific geographic location within Vermont.

This criterion has been met. The majority of the applicant's citizens (58.3%) reside within the Koasek ancestral homelands of Vermont based in Newbury and surrounding towns.

§ 853 (c) (2) A substantial number of the applicant's members are related to each other by kinship and trace their ancestry to a kinship group through genealogy or other methods. Genealogical documents shall be limited to those that show a descendency from identified Vermont or regional native people.

The genealogical data appears to be accurate and adequately documents Koasek kinship of several core families over time (Dean, Ramo, Shawney, Millette, Lemay and others) and shows descendency from authentic native ancestors in Vermont and the region. The National Geographic Genographic DNA Project adds another dimension of Native American ancestry that has been confirmed in the Koasek population. It is my opinion that the applicant has met the requirements of criterion § 853 (c) (2).

§ 853 (c) (3) The applicant has a connection with Native American Indian tribes and bands that have historically inhabited Vermont.

The ancient village of Cowass and its inhabitants have been referred to during historic times by early settlers, their descendants and are best documented by Colin Calloway of Dartmouth College in his book The Western Abenakis of Vermont. There are several references in this section of the application that discusses ties with Abenaki bands to the south (El Nu) and north (Nulhegan) of the Cowass homeland and especially to the Missisquoi tribe to the west. The material presented by the applicant is relative and meets the requirement of this criterion.

§ 853 (c) (4) The applicant has historically maintained an organizational structure that exerts influence and authority over its members that is supported by documentation of the structure, membership criteria, the names and residential addresses of its members, and the methods by which the applicant conducts its affairs.

As with many other tribes in the United States, the Koasek tribal structure was modified to comply with the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 and is now composed of a Chief, Tribal Council and Band of Elders. During historic times the core families at Koasek dealt with concerns of individuals and individual families through consensus. While less formal than the Chief/ Tribal Council/Band of Elders structure it addressed and resolved problems that affected Koasek families through close communication, discussion and if needed meetings to determine appropriate actions to resolve the concern at hand.

The Koasek constitution formalizes the organizational structure that governs its people. The membership criterion that must be met by prospective Koasek citizens is rigorous and carefully reviewed by the Tribal Council. The Tribal Rolls presented with this application is sufficient. This criterion has been met.

§ 853 (c) (5) The applicant has an enduring community presence within the boundaries of Vermont that is documented by archaeology, ethnography, physical anthropology, history, folklore, or any other applicable scholarly research and data.

There are many Koasek archeological sites recorded in the Vermont Archeological Inventory, most of which are located along the Connecticut River at the Oxbow of Newbury (Koasek village and Jesuit mission), in Bradford, Fairlee, Ryegate and Barnet. The Jesuit Missionary Joseph Aubery's map of 1713 depicts the Indian Village at Koas. Haviland and Power discusses some of these sites in The Original Vermonters and Calloway's The Western Abenakis of Vermont describes the fluidity of the remnant Koasek population who persevered in place after colonial settlement. There is ample evidence of material culture that is attributed to the Koasek homeland (i.e. ash splint fish trap, Indian doll, deer skin painting). The information provided by the applicant meets the requirements of criterion § 853 (c) (5.)

§ 853 (c) (6) The applicant is organized in part: (A) To preserve, document, and promote its Native American Indian culture and history, and this purpose is reflected in its bylaws.

The Koasek constitution provides adequate detail on how its citizens are governed. The application to obtain Koasek tribal membership is detailed and requires sufficient proof of descendency from a legitimate Abenaki or other Native American lineage. The applicant has fully met the requirements of this most important criterion.

§ 853 (c) (6) (B) To address the social, economic, political or cultural needs of the members with ongoing educational programs and activities.

The White Pines Association is the main Koasek entity that addresses the social and cultural needs of its members with ongoing educational programs and events. The Koasek language revival project is a commendable effort that will save their language for future generations before it is lost forever. Also commendable is that the Koasek are sharing the benefits of this project with their Missisquoi, Nulhegan and El Nu Abenaki allies by providing them with a full copy of the 50 CD set of their language. The White Pines Association curriculum development plan will serve to improve the education of native and non-native children on Koasek history and presence in to modern times. The NAWIHLA annual event is also noteworthy in that it celebrates Koasek culture for all to observe and appreciate. I especially like the Snow Snake contest. I believe the applicant has fully met the requirements of criterion § 853 (c) (6) (B).

§ 853 (c) (7) The applicant can document traditions, customs, oral stories, and histories that signify the applicant's Native American heritage and connection to their historical homeland.

The Koasek have a rich oral history that tells about catching fish to use as fertilizer in their gardens, using a milk crate like the ash splint fish trap to catch fish, generation after generation returning to favored hunting places, snowshoe making and the revival of growing the Green Family corn and practicing traditional Koasek agricultural techniques. They have also saved their language from extinction. The requirements of this criterion have been fully met.

§ 853 (c) (8) The applicant has not been recognized as a tribe in any other state, province, or nation.

The Koasek have not been recognized in any other state, province or country which satisfies this criterion.

§ 853 (c) (9) Submission of letters, statements, and documents from:(A) Municipal, state, or federal authorities that document the applicant's history of tribe-related business and activities.

There are letters of support from Vermont legislators, the out-going lieutenant governor, the governor-elect and the Nulhegan, El Nu and Missisquoi (en route) bands. The New Hampshire Division of Historic Resources and the U.S.D.A. Natural Resources Conservation Service continues to collaborate with the Koasek to locate the elusive remains of the Koas village and Jesuit Mission at the Oxbow in Newbury. The applicant has met this criterion.

§ 853 (c) (9) (B) Tribes in and outside Vermont that attest to the Native American Indian heritage of the applicant.

The Koasek have a long standing relationship with the Missisquoi and Nulhegan tribes and developed more recent ties with the El Nu band of Vermont. The Koasek also received an offering from the Mohawk at their NAWIHLA celebration a few years ago. I believe the applicant has fulfilled the requirements of this criterion.

In conclusion, it is my opinion that the Koasek Traditional Band of the Koas Abenaki Nation has met the requirements for all of the criteria established in S.222, and that the Vermont Commission on Native American Affairs should recommend the Koasek Traditional Band for recognition by the legislature.

I am humbled to have been asked by the Koasek Traditional Band to review their application for state recognition. The plethora of information provided in the application documents the enduring relationship that the Koasek citizens have maintained and continue to nurture within their ancestral homeland, among themselves and with their native and non-native neighbors.

I am privileged to have access to all of this enlightening information and will eagerly comply with the request by the Koasek leadership to keep confidential all of the tribal names, addresses and especially their genealogies. It is my sincere hope that this personal identity information, that had to be shared with the panelists according to S.222, will remain protected and not get into the hands of those that seek to do harm to Vermont's authentic and historically verifiable Abenaki tribes.

With Enduring Respect,


David Skinas
Archeologist

1/3/11

To whom it may concern:

I have reviewed the application for Vermont state recognition of the Koasek Traditional Band of the Koas Abenaki Nation with great interest. They have obviously put a great deal of work into it, and I commend them for that. That said, I did have some difficulty with its organization. Specifically, some points were not clear in the early part; issues of how many chiefs or council members, for example. On the other hand, questions that arose early were answered by the time I had finished. I do think, though, that the document could profit from tighter organization and editorial work.

With respect to substance: no serious scholar would now dispute the existence of a Koasek village at Newbury, and its link to earlier inhabitants of the upper Connecticut valley (see Haviland and Power 1994:157, 158). Similarly, the persistence of the native population in the area through the 17th and 18th centuries is clear (see Haviland and Power 1994: 228, 229, 230, 233; 235-6, 238, 239, 241-2, 245). As the document states, the issue is the continued presence of native people over the two centuries following. In my opinion, evidence is sufficient to show a continuous Indian presence in the Koas region in the 19th and 20th centuries. It suggests a situation of which I have firsthand knowledge in the Missisquoi region of Vermont as well as coastal Maine (Mount Desert Island/Penobscot Bay); in both places descendants of the original native families continued to frequent their old home territories (see for example Haviland 2009: *At the Place of the Lobsters and Crabs: Deer Isle, Maine and Indian People 1605-2005*). Thus the Koasek situation is not at all out of the ordinary. All these groups followed similar strategies.

Looking over the tribal rolls, I note that some families have origins elsewhere (for example Swanton or Middlebury). This does not surprise me, as kinship, rather than locality, was the organizational basis for native society. Thus, individuals and even families could move from one group to another, based on kinship ties. We see a lot of this in Maine over the past 400 years, as Penobscots joined Passamaquoddy communities, and vice versa.

I think the applicants would do well to emphasize the kin-ordered basis of native societies, given the bias of European Americans to think of societies as territorial based. In the same vein, the state authorities need to understand that sovereignty traditionally was vested in the family band. The tribe in effect was a consensual alliance of those families residing in a particular region. I was pleased to see in the application that the present organization of the Koasek Traditional Band retains an element of this in the emphasis on consensus and the importance of social occasions apart from formal council meetings for taking care of business (pp. 22-3, 41 47). This is another bit of continuity with the past.

Note, too, that it was traditional practice among northeastern tribes (Abenakis included) to adopt "outsiders" (from other tribes/bands) to offset population loss from natural and man-made disasters. This is why the Penobscots spoke an eastern Abenaki dialect; following the epidemic of 1616 that wiped out 90% of the local Etchemin population, the survivors encouraged their old Abenaki allies

from the Mawooshen confederacy to join them in the Penobscot region. Eventually—especially after the massacre at Norridgewock—Abenakis outnumbered the Etchemins and their language came to dominate.

I found the genealogical material tough to wade through, but did pick up on the Indian connections. It would help the reader to start with known Indian ancestors and trace their lines directly to living descendants, retaining the full genealogies as “back up” for those who wish to see all the raw data.

From the material provided it appears that the Koasek Abenaki of the Koas take seriously the issue of Indian identity.

The letters of support for the application are important. While I would not downplay the importance of any of them, those that impress me most are the ones from David Skinas and Ellen Lutz, both of whom I know (or knew, in the case of Ellen, who is now deceased) and respect as solid scholars (but the last part of Ellen’s piece was not included in the material sent me). In the same category as the support from these scholars is that of the Vermont Indigenous Alliance.

In addition to these general comments, I have penciled in more specific comments in the manuscript itself, which I return herewith.

I appreciate having had the chance to review this document, and hope that my comments are helpful. If there are any questions, please don’t hesitate to ask me. Meanwhile, I wish all parties success with this process, so appropriate in the year in which the United States (finally!) has endorsed the United Nations resolution on the rights of indigenous people.

William A. Haviland

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PS. I include a brief biography of myself, for those who need to know my background.