

The Centennial Accord

by Brady Rossnagle, ESA/OAS

In 1989, leaders from federally recognized tribes and the State of Washington developed and signed the [Centennial Accord](#). This formal government-to-government agreement was the first of its kind in the nation. After becoming federally recognized, three additional tribes later signed the Accord: Snoqualmie (2002), Samish (2002) and Cowlitz (2003). In 2004, three out of state tribes (Warm Springs, Umatilla and Nez Perce) with treaty rights within Washington State, also became parties to the agreement.

The Centennial Accord was “intended to build trust and confidence among the parties in the government-to-government relationship by outlining the process for implementing the policy.” The Accord “illustrates the commitment by the parties to implementation of the government-to-government relationship” ...that “respects the sovereign status of the parties, enhances and improves communications between them, and facilitates the resolution of issues.”

In a May 30, 2017 [Tribal Tribune](#) article, Mel Tonasket (Colville Tribes) flashed back three decades, when he was meeting with fellow coastal tribal leaders Joe Delacruz (Quinault Nation) and Ron Allen (Jamestown S’Klallam). “We thought wouldn’t it be nice if we didn’t have to always go through the beginning process each time of: Who’s got the most sovereignty? Which is the most important in governance, state or tribes? Who’s the toughest? Who has the most attorneys? Then you go to the next issue and we’re all working together.” Tonasket recalls sharing ideas for the document for a couple hours with Delacruz and Allen, who wrote them down on a laptop. They brought a draft to Dick Thompson, chief of staff to then Governor Booth Gardner, and they both liked it. After the Accord was finalized, recalled Tonasket, “From that time on, we started to work better.”

For a complete history of the impact of the Centennial Accord on government-to-government relations between tribes and the State of Washington, see [this article](#) (copyright 2018 by The Evergreen State College), written by Barbara Leigh Smith, Director of the Enduring Legacies Native Cases Initiative and a retired faculty and former provost at The Evergreen State College.

The DSHS policy to implement the Centennial Accord is [DSHS Administrative Policy 7.01](#). In 2012, the terms of the Accord were incorporated into law ([RCW 43.376](#)).

In the 31 years since the Accord was signed, Tribal Chairs, the Governor, and tribal and state leadership have met annually to discuss shared concerns. Meeting topics vary each year and have included: environmental and natural resources, early learning, health care, social services, taxation, gaming, licensing, traffic safety, broadband internet availability and others. This year’s Centennial Accord meeting will be held virtually on November 19, 2020.



2015 Centennial Accord 25th Anniversary



2018 Centennial Accord, Suquamish Tribe