

Shoshone Nation History and the GIDBANK as its Central Bank

History and Background of the Shoshone Nation

Shoshone

Group of closely related North American Indian peoples living in the Great Basin region of the U.S. Their language belongs to the Numic group of the Uto–Aztecan family. The Shoshone are usually divided into four groups: Western Shoshone, centered in eastern Nevada; Northern (mounted) Shoshone of northwestern Utah and southern Idaho; Wind River Shoshone in western Wyoming; and the Comanche, a relatively recent division related to the Wind River peoples, in western Texas. The Western Shoshone traditionally subsisted through hunting and gathering. The Northern Shoshone and Wind River Shoshone probably acquired horses by 1680 and adopted much of Plains Indian culture; they hunted buffalo, used tepees and skin clothing, and warred with other tribes. The Shoshone are closely related to the Ute, Paiute, Gosiute, and Bannock. Early 21st-century population estimates indicated some 19,000 individuals of Comanche descent and an additional 22,000 individuals of Western, Northern, or Wind River Shoshone descent.

Shoshone Indians span widely dispersed geographical and cultural areas. Eastern Shoshones live on the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming, Shoshone–Bannock tribes are at Fort Hall in Idaho, and Western Shoshones reside on reservations in Nevada. While the Shoshones' linguistic roots may have originated in the Great Basin of Utah and Nevada, archaeological evidence suggests a Shoshonean presence eight thousand years ago in the Bitterroot, Yellowstone, Absoroka, Wind River, and Bighorn Mountains.

Shoshones began migrating onto the Plains beginning around A.D. 1500, although the mountain Shoshones did not venture to the Plains. They acquired horses in the late 1600s and then split into Comanche and Eastern Shoshone divisions in the early 1700s. As Plains horse–and–buffalo cultures, they celebrated the Sun Dance and leadership that valued military prowess. Shoshones of eastern and northern Idaho occasionally hunted buffalo and other large game, but staples were fish and camas roots. Western Shoshones did not use horses, but hunted small game and harvested wild vegetables and nuts.

Shoshones in Idaho and Wyoming rapidly integrated into the European–American fur trade during the years from 1825 to 1845. The Fort Bridger Treaty of 1868 created the Wind River and Fort Hall Reservations. There are approximately 5,700 enrolled Eastern Shoshones at Wind River (with about 4,300 in residence) and about 4,500 Shoshone–Bannock people at Fort Hall. Most Shoshones are employed in ranching and farming.