

**Proposal for The Construction of a Wovoka Cultural
Information Center (Museum) and Establishment of a Small
Parcel of Pine Grove, California as Sacred Site**

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(On behalf of the Yerington Paiute Tribe)

Statement

Wovoka (the "Woodcutter")--a.k.a. Jack Wilson--was founder of the 1890 Ghost Dance religion. A Northern Paiute (Numu), the prophet lived between 1856-1932 in Smith and Mason Valleys, Nevada. Wovoka died at the Yerington Paiute Colony and was buried at the Walker River Reservation. The Yerington Paiute Tribal Council, a federally-recognized tribe encompassing Wovoka's people, the Taboosi-eater Band of Smith and Mason Valleys Paiutes, voted on 10 July 2002 to pursue its intention of petitioning the federal government to declare a part of the Toyabe National Forest, where Wovoka received his Great Revelation on 1 January 1890 from God, as a Sacred Site. The Yerington Paiute Tribal Council furthermore voted to seek funding from various sources to construct and operate a museum or information center dedicated to their most famous son.

Background

Religious movements like the 1890 Ghost Dance result from divine inspiration. The world's most famous religions, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism were the result of these. In each instance, a people are faced by crisis, whose solution arrives in the form of divine inspiration to prophets or charismatic individuals. While Wovoka's 1890 ^{Ghost Dance} did not become a world-religion, more than a century later his name and teachings are known by anyone cognizant of Native American history.

We do not mean to propose the 1890 Ghost Dance religion as greater than other religious movements in Native North America. But Wovoka's religion, arguably, is the most widely known. Occurring as it did at the end of the 19th Century, the 1890 Ghost Dance, which, tragically, is linked with the Wounded Knee Massacre, received newspaper coverage. It also was vividly documented by photography, which became popular around the time of the Civil War. Wovoka himself was interviewed by a (former) journalist (turned ethnologist), James Mooney, and photographed as well. If only because "Wovoka and the Ghost

Dance" have become part and parcel of the cultural vocabulary associated with Native Americans (along with pow-wow, wampum, tomahawk, etc.), and hardly a book or encyclopedia lacks the two as entries, we feel compelled now to initiate these steps toward bringing special recognitions to this amazing figure and his remarkable teachings.

I. PINE GROVE, CALIFORNIA, A SACRED SITE

Among other gifts, we are heirs to a century of federal legislation concerning **historic landmarks**. Today these are called **cultural resources**. The Antiquities Act of 1906, for example, authorized the President to set aside properties and objects of historic value. This was followed by the Historic Sites Act of 1935, and National Historic Preservation Act of 1955. Amended in 1980 (P.L. 96-515, 12 December 1980), a new type of property" was defined: Traditional Cultural Property. These were defined as "properties" associated with traditional beliefs pertaining to community identity. National Register Bulletin 38, Guidelines for **Evaluating and Documenting Traditional Cultural Properties** contains the specifics on this. It provides guidance how to list these on the National Register of Historic Places.

Congress since then has also passed numerous laws affirming the cultural legacy of Native Americans: The Archaeological Resources Protection Act on 31 October 1979, the American Indian Religious Freedom Act (11 August 1978), and most recently the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (16 November 1990). Amended again on 30 October 1992, the National Historical Preservation Act of 1955 in section 106 and 110 are encouraged to preserve historic or cultural properties, especially when located on federal land. Since both the site of Wovoka's Great Revelation and this prophet's residence were on federal land, we, the Yerington Paiute Tribe, feel we are acting in strict accord with these important directions in federal policy.

Pine Grove, formerly a thriving gold mine community, is today a ghost town. It is found in Toyabe National Forest. When Pine Grove thrived, Northern Palutes found employment there. Wovoka himself worked for the David Wilson family, prosperous Mason Valley, Nevada, settlers who owned a gold mine. According to every source, in an unknown part of these mountains, on 1 January 1890, while

chopping wood for the Wilsons, Wovoka met God face-to-face and was given a message of peace: of brotherhood between all Native Americans, peace between Native Americans and **taivos** or whites; and with ever-lasting life for all in the world-to-come. While the exact location of this **sacred site** is unknown, the Yerington Paiute Tribe expects to transport its Elders to Pine Grove, California, where in ways they decide upon, some approximate area of the site of the Great Revelation will be determined. The Yerington Paiute Tribe, then, will follow appropriate steps (e.g. Tribal Preservation Program: Heritage Preservation Services, National Park Service, 1848 C Street, NW, NC 200, Washington DC 20240) to have this "cultural property" declared a Sacred Site and listed the National Register of Historic Places. Possible sources of funding include, for example, "Save America's Treasure Grants." A committee will form to work with the Nevada and California State Historical Preservation Offices, and Federal Preservation Officer as well. It is expected that a marker will be placed on this Sacred Site. Wording to the effect will be: "On or near this sacred site, the founder of the 1890 Ghost Dance religion met God..." Additional use or "development" of this Sacred Site remains an open question. But if this does occur (e.g., bus tours for tourists, guided tours by Elders, recreated ghost dance ceremonies, etc.), these will strictly be tied to the construction of a Wovoka Cultural Information Center or Museum.

II. THE WOVOKA CULTURAL INFORMATION CENTER

In 1989, the Yerington Paiute Tribe observed the Centennial of Wovoka's Great Revelation. Among the results of this project, a biography collaboratively was written by Michael Hittman with the Tribe. All proceeds were donated to the Tribe. The University of Nebraska Press then issued a second edition, which today is an important part of tribal enterprise. In addition, the Wovoka Centennial Project also generated a poster for sale. This, too, has been part of tribal enterprise. Although the United States did not see fit to issue a commemorative stamp of the famous prophet, the Yerington Paiute Tribe did host a one-day spiritual gathering in 1989, which was attended by 1,000 people. Establishment of a Wovoka Cultural Information Center, therefore, seems a logical outgrowth of our heritage and modern-day survival. We, therefore, propose the following:

A. Selection of Appropriate Site

Two obvious possible choices are the Yerington Indian Colony, where Wovoka died; or Campbell Ranch,

In the first instance, the Yerington Indian Colony is today a federal colony or reservation, where Northern Paiutes live. The Tribal Elder Center is an important gathering place for tribal members. It stands close to where Wovoka lived, ca. 1920. One thought is that the Tribal Elder Center can be refurbished into the Wovoka Cultural Information Center. Besides the fact that this was the approximate area of Wovoka's domicile, a state marker honoring the 1890 Ghost Dance prophet was constructed during the Bicentennial. The marker as well as this building might well then qualify under National Landmark Preservation and Sacred Sites or Traditional Cultural Properties guidelines. Another strong reason for its locating there would be the proximity of this "Indian Museum" to the city of Yerington, a growing motor hub between rapidly expanding Las Vegas and Reno, and our neighboring state of California.

An equally viable argument, however, would be to locate the Wovoka Cultural Information Center on Campbell Ranch. Campbell Ranch was farmland purchased under the Indian Reorganization Act. Tribal Headquarters are located on Campbell Ranch. In addition, a brand health facility is found on this reservation, which is located approximately ten miles from the Yerington Indian Colony. Campbell Ranch also has expanding housing tracts for tribal members under HUD. If money cannot be obtained for construction of a new building to house the Wovoka Cultural Information Center, a case can be made to refurbish is the former day schoolhouse. In this unused building, the Yerington Paiute Tribal Council also met. So, if only for this reason, the landmark status of this property can be sought.

On whichever of these two locations the Wovoka Cultural Information Center is located, we note, finally, Executive Order 13007. Issued by President William Clinton (24 May 1996)), the "Accommodation of Sacred Sites (Section 1) specifically calls for "any specific, discrete, narrowly delineated location on Federal land that is identified by an Indian tribe, or Indian individual determined to be an appropriately authoritative representative of an Indian religions, as sacred by virtue of its established religious significance to..." (b.iii) be protected and set aside.

B. THE NOVOKA CULTURAL INFORMATION CENTER

Within this broadly conceived Center, these activities are envisioned:

1. Wovoka Photography Gallery

Because the Yerington Paiute Tribe owns the copyright on **Novoka and the 1890 Ghost Dance: A Sourcebook**, the 25 or so photographs from this biography can easily enough be scanned and enhanced into a high-speed computer. These will be enlarged, then matted and mounted centrally in the Wovoka Information Center.

2. Northern Paiute Translation of the Great Revelation

Dr. Hittman, whom the Yerington Paiute Tribe has asked to develop this project, had completed a translation of the vision Wovoka dictated to James Mooney. Realized in collaboration with Yerington Paiute Tribe Elders, this "back translation" in some manner as yet to be determined by the Tribal Council can be presented in the Wovoka Information Center (e.g., calligraphy, as an entrance marker, etc.). Visitors to the Wovoka Cultural Information Center, therefore, will be able to read this approximation of the exact words of this prophet's meeting with God in Northern Paiute.

3. Interactive Learning

Cultural Resources are defined as any real or personal properties appertaining to Native American life ways. Through the miracle of CD-Rom, we expect visitors to be able to listen actual words spoken by Northern Paiute elders who knew Wovoka. This body of material exists in two forms: (1) Tapes (for sale by Special Collections, University of Nevada Libraries (Reno) that were either donated (e.g., Peg Wheat Collection) or part of the University of Nevada's Oral History Project; and (2) ethnographic fieldwork of Dr. Michael Hittman. His interviews between 1965-1989 can, with funding, be transferred from audiotape to CD-Rom. Both sources not only will allow visitors to listen to accounts of the life and teachings of the 1890 Ghost Dance prophet (photographs of these elders do exist and with permissions can be mounted),

but will also **return** cultural properties to their rightful owner, i.e., the Yerington Paiute Tribe. In so doing, they become sources of and for cultural continuity or heritage.

4. Repatriation

While the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act mandates return of objects with known cultural patrimony held in federally-funded repositories, the Nevada State Museum (Carson City) has made known its intention of returning items that were once owned by the 1890 Ghost Dance. As a national figure, Wovoka received these gifts (e.g., buckskin suit, gloves) from Native American followers throughout the United States and Canada. These were obtained by Clark Guild and donated to the Nevada State Museum and kept there safely since the 1930s. Our Elders have seen these. The Nevada Historical Society has even put them on display these. In association, then, with the Wovoka Cultural Information Center, the Yerington Paiute Tribe therefore expects to send a delegation to the Nevada State Museum to identify and **bring these items home**. Wovoka's belongings, of course, will be displayed in this building dedicated to his memory according to contemporary museum standards

5. Video Monitors

Many videos exist about the 1890 Ghost Dance religion. The Nevada Historical Society, for example, recently (1998) sponsored a one-day, public forum called "Wovoka's Living Descendants." This four-and-one-half hour forum was videotaped and can be played along with others on separate monitor in the Wovoka Cultural Information Center.

6. Library/Visiting Scholars Room

We also envision a research Center for scholars and interested people who wish to familiarize them with the vast literature on Wovoka and the 1890 Ghost Dance. Purchase of these (books, journal articles, etc.) will have to be separately funded and catalogued. We expect to take steps to interface with the American Indian Library Project, the Nevada Museum Association, and other professional bodies in the growing area of Tribal Libraries, Archives and Museums.

7. Gift Store

Like other modern-day Indian corporations, the Yerington Paiute Tribe today has numerous enterprises. Joining our Smoke Shops, Dairy Queen, Convenience Store, and Alfalfa Grounds will be the gift shop attached to the Wovoka Cultural Information Center. Tribal publications, posters, tapes, etc. can be sold here, as well as Wovoka memorabilia.

8. Meditation Area

Because the 1890 Ghost Dance was a religious movement, however, we declare our intention not to commercialize Wovoka's legacy. In this regard, we propose the following: that a part of the Wovoka Cultural Resource Center be devoted to spirituality. This can include a meditation area, listening Center for spiritual music, a ceremonial dance and drum Center, etc. Once again, these details are left to the Yerington Paiute Tribe, in collaboration with its Elders. Discussions with Dr. Hittman were also held regarding an annual conference on Wovoka's legacy.

Conclusion

In proposing this idea, we have been encouraged by discussions with other Indian cultural museums in this area, particularly Pyramid Lake Museum. First and foremost, we treasure the heritage of Wovoka. A Wovoka Cultural Information Center, therefore, will be a tribal archive dedicated to the memory of our most important historic figure to date. Along with the Sacred Site of Pine Grove, this project will preserve this important part of our cultural heritage. While we treasure the memory of Wovoka in and of itself, we also understand the importance of tourism in the modern-world. Bringing tourists to visit the Wovoka Cultural Information Center, an exciting Center dedicated to his memory, will be educational as well as a part of enterprise. We anticipate working closely with tourism and state museums, as well as other Indian Museums.