

In a nod to their ancestral homeland, the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde have named their 23-acre property beside Willamette Falls "Tumwata Village." Tumwata was a Native name for the falls.

The tribes announced the name and unveiled preliminary plans for the site Sept. 6.

"As a name, Tumwata Village represents the Grand Ronde Tribe's connection to the Falls as well as the sacred lands and practices of our ancestors," Grand Ronde Tribal Council Chairwoman Cheryl Kennedy stated in a news release. "As a place, Tumwata Village will be a welcoming one that provides public access to the falls, a chance to learn about our heritage and culture and an opportunity for new prosperity throughout the region."

The Tumwata property includes the site of the former Blue Heron Paper Co. mill near downtown Oregon City, which [the tribe purchased in 2019](#).

The tribe's main goal for the property is to "heal the land," Tribal Council Member Jon George told Pamplin Media Group.

"We want to restore the water's edge and create inlets for eels and salmon to rest," he said.

To this day, the Grand Ronde and other regional tribes fish at the falls for sustenance and ceremonial purposes.

According to the new plan, the tribes aim to ecologically restore the site, including bringing the water channels beneath the industrial area back to life and establishing a riparian habitat.

Initial plans include public plazas for walking and viewing the falls, tree-lined streets and native plants, George added.

As the falls were a center of commerce for Native people throughout the region and as far away as modern-day Canada, the tribe wants to return economic vitality to the area, George said.

While Tumwata Village plans are only in the preliminary phase, George said the village could include retail space, a hotel, housing and a large plank house for traditional Native ceremonies.

"This was the largest economic area west of the Mississippi," George said.

In addition to economic and environmental revitalization, the tribes see Tumwata Village as an opportunity for cultural restoration as well.

"Even though the Willamette Valley Treaty of 1855 resulted in the federal government forcibly removing the tribal populations from the Falls area to the Grand Ronde Reservation, the Grand Ronde Tribe's connection to the area has always persisted," the tribes' news release stated.

George said tribal heritage will be evident in everything from sidewalk designs to Native imagery on door handles. He also said he dreams of one day seeing canoes coming to shore at the plank house.

Earlier this year, it would no longer participate in planning for the Willamette Falls Legacy Project, which five regional tribes with ties to the falls, Metro, Clackamas County and Oregon City were collaborating on. These entities are still moving forward with their legacy project plans, which center on a riverwalk to the falls.

At the time of its withdrawal from the project, the Grand Ronde stated its frustration with a lack of progress.