

Alabama and Coushatta Tribes of Texas



Location: East Texas

Population: 1000

Date of Constitution: 1938

Key Facts: The federal government terminated its relationship with the tribe in 1954, and restored federal recognition in 1987

PREAMBLE

We, the Alabama and Coushatta Tribes of Texas, in order to organize for the common welfare of ourselves and our posterity and to insure domestic tranquility; to conserve and develop our natural resources; to form business and other organizations; to enjoy certain rights of home rule; to provide education in schools of higher learning, including vocational, trade, high schools, and colleges for our people, do ordain and establish this constitution according to the Act of Congress, dated June 18, 1934, known as the Indian Reorganization Act (48 Stat. 984).

ARTICLE I-TERRITORY

This Constitution shall apply to the territory within the present confines of the Alabama and Coushatta Reservation, and to any and all future additions of land acquired within or without said boundary lines by the Secretary of the Interior for the tribe or by the tribe, except as otherwise provided by law.

ARTICLE II-MEMBERSHIP

SECTION 1. The membership of the Alabama and Coushatta Tribes of Texas shall consist of:

- (a) All persons whose names appear, or are entitled to appear, on the official census roll of the Alabama and Coushatta Tribes of Texas as of June 1, 1936: Provided, that within three years from the adoption and approval of this Constitution and By-laws, additions and eliminations may be made in said roll by the Tribal Council, subject to the approval of the Secretary of the Interior.
- (b) All children born to any member of the Alabama and Coushatta Tribes of Texas, provided both parents are of all Indian blood, and are residents of the reservation at the time of the birth of said children.

- (c) All children born to any member of the tribe who is not a resident of the reservation at the time of the birth of said children may be admitted to membership by the Tribal Council under ordinances enacted by the Tribal Council which shall be subject to review by the Secretary of the Interior, provided such children reside on the reservation at the time they make application and both parents are of all Indian blood.

SECTION 2. Within one year after the adoption and approval of this Constitution and By-laws by the Secretary of the Interior, all nonresident members of the Alabama and Coushatta Tribes must give notice, by application or letter, of their desire to continue to be members of the tribe and participate in the tribal organization, or they shall lose their membership in the tribe. Notice of said adoption. Approval, and this time limit shall be given by mail or publication. Eligible nonresident members who for good and sufficient reason fail to give notice within the limit of time prescribed may be reinstated.

SECTION 3. Reinstatement. -Reinstatement of members upon written application shall be vested in a membership committee whose decision shall be subject to the approval of the Tribal Council.

SECTION 4. Adoption. -Requests for adoption of Indians into the membership of the tribe shall be made by written application to the membership committee who shall make recommendation to the Tribal Council. The decisions of the Tribal Council shall be subject to popular vote at the next annual election.

SECTION 5. Any Louisiana Coushatta Indian who marries a Coushatta or Alabama Indian living on the Alabama and Coushatta Reservation shall be a member of the tribe but no such person may vote in any tribal election unless he is 21 years of age or over and has maintained a continuous residence within the reservation for a period of one year immediately prior to the date of such election.

SECTION 6. Continuous absence from the jurisdictional boundaries of the Alabama and Coushatta Tribes of Texas for a period of five years shall operate to terminate membership in the tribe, unless the Tribal Council shall, upon notification and application from the nonresident member within said five-year period, extend the membership of such individual.

SECTION 7. The Tribal Council shall have power to promulgate ordinances, subject to review by the Secretary of the Interior governing future membership, including adoptions and the loss of membership.

SECTION 8. Nothing contained in this article shall be construed to deprive any Alabama or Coushatta Indian of any vested property right.

ARTICLE III-GOVERNING BODY

SECTION 1. The governing body under this constitution and by-laws shall be known as the Tribal Council, and shall be composed of seven members to be elected by the people.

SECTION 2. The councilmen shall be elected by the people for a period of three years, and all councilmen shall be eligible for re-election at the end of each term of office. The procedure of election shall be decided by the qualified voters in public assembly. At each election assembly a temporary election chairman and secretary shall be selected by the Tribal Council in power, under such rules and regulations as the Tribal Council may prescribe.

SECTION 3. The officers of the Tribal Council shall be the Chairman, Vice-Chairman, the Secretary, and the Treasurer, who shall be selected by the Tribal Council from its own membership at the first meeting of the newly elected council. The officers shall serve until the next regular election.

SECTION 4. The Tribal Council shall be elected on the third Wednesday of June every three years. The Tribal Council elected on the third Wednesday of June 1936, with the understanding of the qualified voters that it was elected according to the terms of this constitution and was to serve for three years, shall serve until their successors are elected on the third Wednesday of June 1939. Said Tribal Council shall have all the rights and powers and shall be subject to the limitations and restrictions provided for the Tribal Council in this constitution and by-laws. Thirty days' notice of every regular election of councilmen, beginning in 1939, shall be given by the Tribal Council. Each Tribal Council elected under this Constitution shall take office immediately after its election.

SECTION 5. The Tribal Council shall have authority to appoint subordinate officers, boards, and committees.

ARTICLE IV-POWERS

SECTION 1. Enumerated Powers. -The Tribal Council shall exercise the following powers, subject to any limitations imposed by the Constitution or statutes of the United States, and subject further to all express restrictions upon such powers contained in this constitution and the attached by-laws.

- (a) To negotiate with the Federal, State, and local governments on behalf of the tribe, and to advise and consult with the representatives of the Interior Department on all activities of the Department that may affect the Alabama and Coushatta Tribes.
- (b) To employ counsel for the protection and advancement of the rights of the tribe and its members, the choice of counsel and fixing of fees to be subject to approval of the Secretary of the Interior.
- (c) To approve or veto any sale, disposition, lease, or encumbrance of tribal lands, interests in lands or other tribal assets, which may be authorized or executed by the Secretary of the Interior, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, or any other qualified official or agency of government: Provided, that no reservation lands shall ever be leased for a period exceeding ten years, sold, or encumbered, except for governmental purposes.
- (d) To advise the Secretary of the Interior with regard to all appropriation estimates or Federal projects for the benefit of the tribe prior to the submission of such estimates to the Bureau of the Budget, and to Congress.

- (e) To make assignments of tribal land to members of the tribe and to regulate the cutting of timber.
- (f) To manage all economic affairs and enterprises of the tribe in accordance with the terms of a charter which may be issued to the tribe by the Secretary of the Interior.
- (g) To appropriate for public purposes of the Alabama and Coushatta Tribes of Texas available funds within the exclusive control of the tribe and, subject to review by the Secretary of the Interior, any other available tribal funds.
- (h) To levy assessments upon members of the tribe and to require performance of reservation labor in lieu thereof, and to levy assessments or license fees, subject to review by the Secretary of the Interior, upon nonmembers doing business with the reservation: Provided, however, that any such assessment upon members of the tribe shall have the approval of the eligible voters of the tribe, at a special election, in which at least 30 per cent of the eligible voters shall vote.
- (i) To purchase lands of members of the tribe for public purposes, under condemnation proceedings in courts of competent jurisdiction.
- (j) To safeguard and promote the peace, safety, morals, and general welfare of the tribe by regulation the conduct of trade and the use and disposition of property upon the reservation: Provided, That any ordinance directly affecting nonmembers of the tribe shall be subject to review by the Secretary of the Interior: And provided further, That nonrestricted property of members which was obtained outside of any help or assistance of the Government or the tribe may be disposed of without restrictions.
- (k) To regulate the inheritance of property, real and personal, within the territory of the Alabama and Coushatta Indian Reservation, subject to review by the Secretary of the Interior.
- (l) To regulate the manner of making nominations for tribal offices and of holding elections.
- (m) To adopt resolutions regulating the procedure of the Tribal Council itself and of other tribal agencies and tribal officials.
- (n) To encourage and foster the arts, crafts, traditions and culture of the Alabama and Coushatta Tribes.
- (o) To charter subordinate organizations for economic purposes and to regulate the activities of co-operative associations of members of the tribe under ordinances which shall be subject to review by the Secretary of the Interior and preserve the property, wild life, and natural resources of the tribe
- (q) To delegate to subordinate boards, or tribal officials, or to cooperative associations which are open to all members of the tribe, any of the foregoing powers, reserving the right to review any actions taken by virtue of such delegated powers.

SECTION 2. Any resolution or ordinance, which by the terms of this constitution is subject to review by the Secretary of the Interior, shall be presented to the Superintendent of the Alabama and Coushatta Tribes who shall, within 15 days thereafter, approve or disapprove the same. If the Superintendent shall approve any ordinance or resolution it shall thereupon become effective, but the Superintendent shall transmit a copy of the same, bearing his

endorsement, to the Secretary of the Interior who may within 90 days from the date of enactment, approve the same in writing.

If the Superintendent shall refuse to approve any resolution or ordinance submitted to him, within 15 days after its enactment, he shall advise the Tribal Council of his reasons therefor. If these reasons appear to the Council insufficient it may, by a majority vote, refer the ordinance or resolution to the Secretary of the Interior who may, within 90 days from the date of its enactment, approve the same in writing, whereupon the said ordinance or resolution shall become effective.

SECTION 3. Future Powers. -The Tribal Council may exercise such further powers as may in the future be delegated to the tribe by the Secretary of the Interior, or by any duly authorized official or agency of the State or Federal Government or by members of the tribe.

SECTION 4. Reserved Powers. -Any rights and powers heretofore vested in the Alabama and Coushatta Tribes of Texas, but not expressly referred to in this constitution, shall not be abridged by this article, but may be exercised by the people of the tribe through the adoption of appropriate by-laws and constitutional amendments.

ARTICLE V-ELECTIONS

SECTION 1. All recognized members of the Alabama and Coushatta Tribes, 21 years of age and over, who have maintained continuous residence within the reservation for a period of six months immediately prior to the date of election, shall be qualified voters.

SECTION 2. Any person elected to office shall be not less than 25 years of age, a member of the Alabama and Coushatta Tribes and a bona fide resident of the reservation for not less than one year preceding the date of election: Provided, however, that the requirement of residence as to any particular candidate may be voided by consent of a majority of the qualified voters of the Alabama and Coushatta Tribes at any election assembly.

- (a) All Louisiana Coushatta Indians who marry Alabamas or Coushattas living on the Alabama and Coushatta Reservation, may be elected to office provided they are 25 years of age or more, and have lived on the reservation continuously for a period of three years preceding the date of election.

SECTION 3. No Federal Government employee under Civil Service shall be eligible to hold office in the Tribal Council.

ARTICLE VI-REMOVAL

SECTION 1. The Tribal Council may by an affirmative vote of five members expel any member for neglect of duty or gross misconduct. Before any vote for expulsion is taken on the matter, such member shall be given an opportunity to answer any and all charges at a designated Council meeting; the decision of the Tribal Council shall be final.

SECTION 2. The Tribal Council shall have power to fill vacancies created by reason of death, removal from office, resignation, or otherwise until the next regular election.

ARTICLE VII-REFERENDUM

SECTION 1. Any action of the Tribal Council under any of the enumerated powers lodged in the Tribal Council by this constitution and by-laws shall be subject to a referendum vote of the people upon a written petition signed by not less than 25 per cent of the total number of votes cast in the last election.

ARTICLE VIII-LAND

SECTION 1. Tribal lands of the Alabama and Coushatta Tribes and all lands which may hereafter be acquired by the tribe or by the United States in trust for the tribe shall be held as tribal lands, and no part of such lands shall be mortgaged or sold.

SECTION 2. The Tribal Council may consolidate inherited land holdings by purchase, exchange, gift, or voluntary relinquishment, and may reassign such land in the public interest.

SECTION 3. Tribal lands shall not be allotted to individual Indians, but such tribal lands as are not required for school, Agency, or other administrative use may be assigned by the Tribal Council to members of the Alabama and Coushatta Tribes, or may be leased or otherwise used by the tribe as hereinafter provided for.

SECTION 4. Tribal lands may be leased by the Tribal Council with the approval of the Secretary of the Interior or his authorized agent in accordance with law. Preference shall be given, first, to Indian cooperative associations, and second, to individual Indians who are members of the Alabama and Coushatta Tribes. No lease of tribal lands to a nonmember shall be made by the Tribal Council unless it shall appear that no Indian cooperative association or individual member of the tribe is able and willing to use the land and to pay a reasonable fee for such use.

SECTION 5. In any assignment of tribal lands which are now owned by the tribe or which may hereafter be acquired for the tribe by the United States or purchased by the tribe out of tribal funds, or which may be designated for the use of the tribe, preference shall be given, first, to heads of families which are entirely landless; and second, to heads of families who have already received assignments consisting of less than an economic unit of agricultural land or other land or interests in land of equal value, such economic unit to be determined by ordinances of the Tribal Council, which shall be subject to review by the Secretary of the Interior or his designated representative. Assignments made under this section shall be known as standard assignments.

The Tribal Council may, if it sees fit, charge an assignee a fee according to a scale adopted by the Council but not to exceed \$5.00, on approval of an assignment made under this section.

SECTION 6. If any person holding a standard assignment of land shall for a period of two years fail to use the land so assigned or shall use the land for any unlawful purpose, his

assignment may be canceled by the Tribal Council after due notice and opportunity to be heard. Such land may then be available for reassignment.

Upon the death of any Indian holding a standard assignment his- heirs or other individuals designated by him by, written request shall have preference in the reassignment of the land provided such persons are eligible to receive a standard assignment.

SECTION 7. Any member of the Alabama and Coushatta Tribes who owns a piece of land or any share in heirship land or any deeded land, may, with the approval of the Secretary of the Interior, voluntarily transfer his interest in such land to the tribe, receiving in return therefor an assignment in the same land or other land of equal value, or he may receive a proportionate share in a unit of agricultural, grazing or other land, or a certificate of interest representing its current market value.

Assignments made under this section shall be known as exchange assignments.

SECTION 8. Upon the death of a holder of an exchange assignment, the land shall be reassigned by the Tribal Council to his heirs or devisees, subject to the following conditions:

- (a) Such lands may not be reassigned to any heir or devisee who already owns or holds more than an economic unit of land. Such economic unit of land shall be determined by the Tribal Council.
- (b) Such lands may not be reassigned to any heir or devisee who is not a member of the Alabama and Coushatta Tribes except that, a life assignment may be made to the surviving spouse or child of the holder of such assignment, provided the spouse is a full-blood Indian.
- (c) Such land may not be subdivided into units too small for practical use. The Tribal Council shall determine the practical subdivision of the land in each case. If the land cannot be properly subdivided, the Tribal Council may issue to each heir or devisee a proportionate share in other lands or other interests in land of equal value.
- (d) If there are no eligible heirs or devisees of the decedent, the land shall be eligible for reassignment, the same as other tribal lands.

SECTION 9. Improvements of any character made upon assigned land may be willed to and inherited by members of the Alabama and Coushatta Tribes. When improvements are not possible of fair division, the Tribal Council shall dispose of them under such regulations as it may provide for the benefit of the heirs. No permanent improvements may be removed from any tribal or assigned land without the consent of the Tribal Council.

SECTION 10. No member of the Alabama and Coushatta Tribes may use or occupy tribal lands except under an assignment or lease.

SECTION 11. Unassigned land shall be managed by the Tribal Council for the benefit of the members of the entire tribe, subject to regulations of the Secretary of the Interior issued in accordance with section 6 of the Act of June 18, 1934 (48 Stat. 984).

SECTION 12. Available tribal funds may be used, with the consent of the Secretary of the Interior, to acquire land for the Alabama and Coushatta Tribes.

SECTION 13. The right to determine the amount of land and make assignment to each lawful assignee shall vest in the Tribal Council, whose decision shall be subject to the final approval of a Board of Review, consisting of the Superintendent of the Agency as chairman, and two members of the Alabama- and Coushatta Tribes at large to be selected by the Tribal Council. The economic needs of the individual, with due regard to land availability and limitation, together with the principles of justice and equity shall be the basic factors affecting the decision in land assignments of both the Tribal Council and the Board of Review. The decision of the Board of Review, as heretofore outlined, shall be final.

ARTICLE IX - AMENDMENTS

This Constitution and By-laws may be amended by a majority vote of the qualified voters of the Alabama and Coushatta Tribes voting at an election called for that purpose by the Secretary of the Interior, provided at least 30 per cent of those entitled to vote shall vote in such election, but no amendment shall become effective until it shall have been approved by the Secretary of the Interior. It shall be the duty of the secretary of the Interior to call an election on any proposed amendment, upon receipt of a written resolution of the Tribal Council, signed by at least a majority of the membership of the Tribal Council.

BY-LAWS OF THE ALABAMA AND COUSHATTA TRIBES OF TEXAS

ARTICLE I-DUTIES OFFICERS

SECTION 1. The duties of the officers of the Tribal Council shall be as follows:

- (a) The Chairman of the Tribal Council shall preside at all meetings of the Council. He shall also be the presiding officer at any public assembly meeting which may be duly called in accordance with the constitution. He shall at all times have general supervision of the affairs of the Tribal Council and such matters as naturally pertain to the general welfare of the community. It shall also be the duty of the Chairman to countersign all checks drawn against funds of the organization by the Treasurer.
- (b) The Vice-Chairman shall preside at all meetings of the Tribal Council in the absence of the Chairman and shall act in his stead in all matters pertaining to the office of Chairman.
- (c) The Secretary shall keep an accurate record of all proceedings of the Tribal Council and furnish copies thereof to the Superintendent and the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. He shall be responsible for the prompt and efficient handling of all correspondence pertaining to the business of the tribal organization. All official records of the tribal Secretary shall be open to inspection by the members of the tribe at all times.
- (d) The Treasurer shall be the custodian of all funds in possession of the tribe from any source. He shall be under bond to a surety company of recognized standing in an amount to be determined by the Tribal Council, such surety company and bond to be approved by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. He shall keep an

accurate record of all funds and shall disburse the same in accordance with the vote of the Tribal Council and as designated by this constitution and bylaws. The books of the Treasurer shall be open to audit and examination by the duly authorized officers of the Secretary of the Interior at all times and shall be open to inspection by members of the Tribal Council and its officers.

SECTION 2. The subordinate officers, boards, and committees of the Tribal Council shall perform such duties as the Tribal Council shall, by resolution from time to time, provide.

ARTICLE II - OATH

SECTION 1. All officers when elected shall be duly installed and subscribe to an oath of office to support the Constitution of the United States and this constitution. Such officers may be sworn in by any officer qualified to administer an oath.

ARTICLE III-SALARIES AND EXPENDITURES of TRIBAL FUNDS

SECTION 1. The expenditure of funds belonging to the Tribe must first be approved by a majority vote of the Tribal Council at a regular stated meeting.

SECTION 2. The members of the Tribal Council, boards, and committees shall be paid for services rendered in the interest of the community welfare from funds within the exclusive control of the tribe when previously authorized by the Tribal Council.

SECTION 3. All salaries proposed by the Tribal Council for tribal officials to be paid from funds within the exclusive control of the tribe must be approved by the tribe at a popular referendum.

ARTICLE IV - MEETINGS

SECTION 1. Stated meeting shall be held the first Tuesday of January, April, July, and October, and at such other times as the Tribal Council shall by resolution provide. Called meetings shall be held at the discretion of the Chairman or upon request of three members of the Council. Three days' written notice shall be given to all council members: Provided, however, that emergency meetings may be called at any time.

SECTION 2. Five members shall constitute: a quorum.

SECTION 3. The Tribal Council shall set forth such rules of order for its meetings as it desires.

SECTION 4. Council meetings, with the exception of executive sessions, shall be public to the tribe.

ARTICLE V - COOPERATION

SECTION 1. The Tribal Council shall work in very close cooperation with the Indian Service, the Texas State Board of Control, and various departments of the State of Texas in matters of charity, education, recreation, social work, and public health, and in land assignments and agricultural work with the Superintendent of the reservation.

ARTICLE VI - ADOPTION OF CONSTITUTION AND BY-LAWS

This constitution and by-laws, when ratified by a majority vote of the qualified voters of the Alabama and Coushatta Tribes, voting at a special election called for the purpose by the Secretary of the Interior, provided at least 30 per cent of those entitled to vote shall vote in such election, shall be submitted to the Secretary of the Interior, and if approved, shall be effective from the date of approval.