

# STARTED WATERS

A Native  
American  
perspective  
on Waldo Lake

BY CAMILLA MORTENSEN

The name “Waldo” is not poetic enough to describe the clear, pure water of this pristine lake high in the Cascades. Kayla Godowa-Tufti, of the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, whose ancestors once lived in the mountains and valleys around Waldo Lake, wonders what the native peoples of the area called the translucent waters.

Godowa-Tufti also wants to talk about why the Native American perspective has been excluded from the battle over Waldo.

Waldo was once known as one of the Virgin Lakes, and later as Pengra Lake, but what the native peoples called it is presumably lost. The diseases brought by the white settlers had ravaged the local tribes who hunted, fished and collected huckleberries around the lake at the time of its modern rediscovery in the mid-1800s.

A wilderness is an area ‘untamed by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain,’ according to the Wilderness Act of 1964. Native peoples had been visiting the lake to pick berries and hunt food for thousands of years before “wilderness” was a political or legal concept. “It has been told to us by our ancestors that we are to be caretakers of the land,” Godowa-Tufti says. Just as it has been the tradition of the Molalla people “to keep this water clean, free of pollutants and to treat this area with the ultimate respect because it is sacred.”

By a quirk of law, Waldo Lake is not in the Waldo Lake Wilderness or under federal protection, and a small group of users want not simply to “trim” the lake; they want to land planes and putter around the unspoiled waters with noisy and polluting motorboats.

Last fall, Godowa-Tufti came across an article about the efforts of timber heir Steven Stewart, a relative of Lane County Commissioner Lave Stewart, to lift a ban on motors on the lake. Curious, she began to research Waldo Lake. A Google

search quickly yielded the information that the modern-day discoverer of the lake was named Charlie Tufti, a Molalla Indian, Tufti, whose nickname in Chinook jargon was Kwiskwis (“double-striped little squirrel”), is Kayla Godowa-Tufti’s great-grandfather.

Godowa-Tufti realized that she and other family members who now live on the Warm Springs Reservation are the direct descendants not only of the people who had lived around Waldo for thousands of years, but also of the man who rediscovered the lake.

Charlie Tufti, together with his white adopted brother Frank Warner, also found Salt Creek Falls. Neither natural wonder is named for the Native American who knew the land, though Tufti Mountain near Hills Creek Reservoir in the Willamette National Forest bears his name. And back in 2001, when Oregon began to get rid of offensive geographic names, Squaw Butte, east of Oakridge, became Kwiskwis Butte.

Steven Stewart has argued that he has a cultural link to the lake, and banning motorboats would deprive him of his family tradition of motorboating to picnic and to pick wild huckleberries. In legal arguments in his 2009 battle against the ban Stewart’s attorney argued that a motorboat ban would not only deprive his client of his picnics but of his huckleberries as a food supplement.

They may merely be a supplement to Stewart, but huckleberries are a sacred food source to the Warm Springs people as well as a spiritual and cultural resource.

“This is not only an issue of water quality,” Godowa-Tufti says of the fight over the motor ban, but also an issue of a racist system that has allowed the Stewart family to have a sense of “entitlement,” “ownership” and to accumulate what Godowa-Tufti calls “intergenerational wealth due to white privilege.” Godowa-Tufti, age 22, divides her time between Warm Springs in Eastern Oregon and Eugene. She is not entirely new to environmental activism. In 2010 she co-organized a Native American protest against using the Columbia River to ship megaloads of oil extracting equipment to the Canadian tar sands.

She points to a map that shows the diversity of native groups and languages that once lived throughout Oregon. Her ancestor, Charlie Tufti, was Southern Molalla, often referred to as “Eugene Molalla,” she says. The Molalla inhabited Waldo Lake; the Cascade Range and surrounding areas for more than 8,000 years, according to Godowa-Tufti. Godowa-Tufti researched Charlie Tufti through the Lane County Historical Society. She found that he was orphaned as a child and raised by an aunt. But the whites wouldn’t let the native peoples hunt, fish and gather berries in the 1800s, and rather than let him starve, Tufti’s aunt traded him for a pan of flour and some pumpkins to the Stewart-Warners, a white family that raised him.

Tufti was an anomaly in that he was an Indian who had a homestead; in 1884 he was given legal claim to land near Oakridge. Native peoples were forbidden by the white settlers from owning land. A photo of Tufti with Warner shows him with a gun, something else forbidden to the natives by the white settlers seeking to drive the American Indians onto reservations. Stories about Tufti say he was respected for his hunting skills and generally accepted among the settlers.



KAYLA GODOWA-TUFTI WITH A TRADITIONAL BEADED BAG AND AN EAGLE FEATHER THAT IS HELD IN THE RIGHT HAND WHEN PRAYING TO THE CREATOR IN THE LONGHOUSE RELIGION

PHOTO BY TEARSK BEDONTHA

But Lane County Historical documents also tell of incidents such as the time when Tufti, who kept his long braids but wore “the clothing of the white man,” went to a store in Pleasant Hill, where another man said within earshot, “thought all them varmints was supposed to be caged up on reservations ... dirty, thievin’, murderin’ skunks. Scare the women-folk clean to hell.”

The documents say Tufti was under pressure to move to the reservation, and in 1889 Tufti sold his land and later moved to the Warm Springs reservation where he served as chief.

“As much as people would like to ignore the white/Indian relations,” Godowa-Tufti says, “it is important to understand this history in order to understand where we are today.”

When the Forest Service did its environmental assessment of the effects the ban would have on Waldo Lake, it did try to take Native Americans into account. In a section labeled “Direct and Indirect Effects to Environmental Justice,” the agency discussed briefly whether “Native American/Indian rights (e.g. hunting, gathering, religious) recognized by the federal government,” would be reduced.

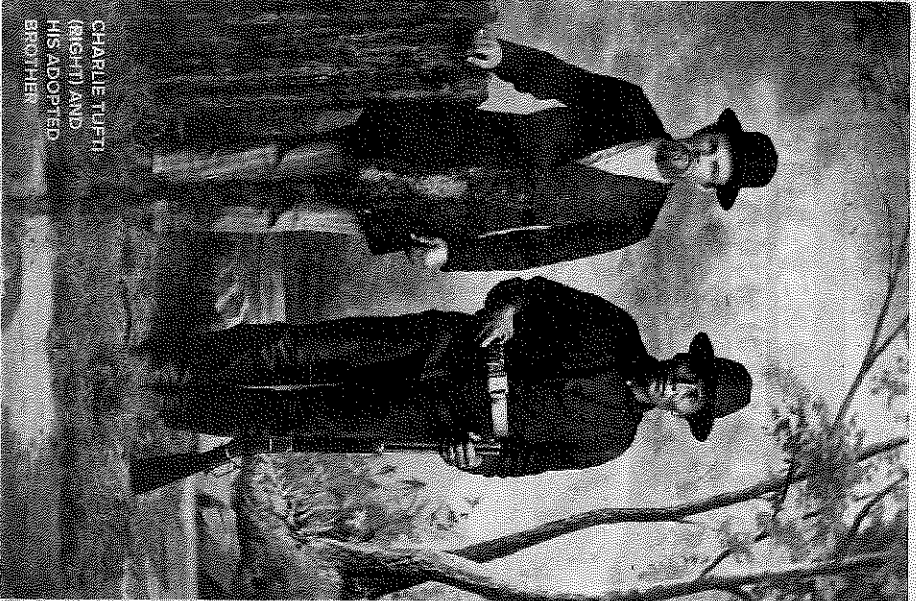
Godowa-Tufti doesn’t restrict her comments on Waldo to issues of social and environmental justice; she focuses on the science as well. Motorboats bring pollution into the lake’s uniquely blue waters and float planes can introduce invasive species, she says.

In the end, the Forest Service’s decision to return the lake to a “semi-primitive, non-motorized” state was not so much overturned as disregarded — the courts decided the lake was a state and not a federal issue. So the Oregon State Marine Board was next to ban the motors threatening Waldo Lake’s spectacular water.

“The chemistry and biology of the water in Waldo Lake are exceptional and clearly classify the lake as ultraoligotrophic,” Godowa-Tufti says in her written comments to the Marine Board. In other words, the lake high in the mountains in a small watershed is low in plant nutrients and full of oxygen. Paddle a canoe or kayak out into its water and you can see down into the remarkably blue waters for hundreds of feet.

A long-term study of the lake’s water shows it is home to “unique species never identified before, including phytoplankton and zooplankton and highly productive deepwater bryophytes, particularly liverworts.”

The study also says the clarity of the lake is worsening. Godowa-Tufti says, “If we do not recognize the importance of our water and protect it, we are destroying a vital life source and a place of unexplainable beauty.” **EW**



CHARLIE TUFTI (RIGHT) AND HIS ADOPTED BROTHER

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