



THINKING ABOUT TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY: A Resource Guide

“Decolonization is ... seeing the validity in the indigenous experience, knowing who benefits from how the history has played out and how we interact with each other, in a truthful and meaningful way today.”

— Penobscot Nation Ambassador Maulian Dana

At its core, defending sovereignty is defending democracy. The League of Women Voters of Maine has prepared the following resource guide in order to help facilitate an understanding of this connection and underscore the importance of self-governance. This list is far from an exhaustive collection of available resources — our goal is to encourage you to educate yourself about these important topics and the ongoing issues, with these resources serving as a basic foundation in your pursuit of knowledge and steps toward action.

Basing advocacy on League positions:

Neither the LWVME or LWVUS has positions that directly address tribal sovereignty or the rights of indigenous people. However, the principles and positions laid out in the [Diversity, Equity and Inclusion policy](#), as well as the Equality of Opportunity position, can be used to underpin action in this area. For example, from [Impact on Issues](#) on page 10: “The League of Women Voters believes every citizen should be protected in the right to vote; every person should have access to free public education that provides equal opportunity for all; and no person or group should suffer legal, economic, or administrative discrimination.” State and local Leagues are encouraged to seek member understanding and consensus when acting on national positions.

The history of tribes in Maine and the fight for tribal sovereignty:

1. The [Wabanaki Alliance](#) website provides a plethora of information about the coalition of four Maine tribes who are working to educate more people about the urgency of securing tribal sovereignty in Maine as well as some of the history behind the 1980 Maine Indian Land Claims Settlement Act and its context for the different tribes.
2. [Understanding Tribal Sovereignty](#) gives a more abstract definition of tribal sovereignty and the general historical practices that brought us to today’s circumstances.
3. The 2021 “[Lunch & Learn: Tribal Sovereignty and Efforts in the Maine Legislature](#)” webinar sponsored by Maine Conservation Voters features a discussion with Penobscot Nation Ambassador Maulian Dana and Passamaquoddy Tribal Citizen and Attorney Corey Hinton about the history of tribes in Maine, the 22 recommendations in LD 2094 that would amend the 1980 Maine Indian Land Claims Settlement Act, and the principles of equality that are embedded in the fight for tribal sovereignty.
4. [LD 2094](#) is the bill that resulted from the work of the [Maine Indian Claims Task Force](#) – consideration of the bill was delayed due to COVID-19 and then pushed to a future (not yet scheduled) legislative session, with 2022 likely to be the goal. In the meantime, advocacy efforts must continue to the fullest extent.
 - The [Portland Press Herald](#), [Mainebiz](#), and the [Bangor Daily News](#) all have informative articles about the bill and its recent developments, particularly the delay.
 - [LWVME’s draft testimony](#) can also shed more light on the bill and why it’s important to us.

Previous LWV webinars & conversations about Native American rights:

1. The 2020 “[Understanding and Partnering with Native American Communities](#)” webinar provides a short overview of the ways Native American rights have been spelled out (or not) in U.S. historical documents, a brief explanation of tribal sovereignty and tribal representation in government, as well as a discussion about recognizing historical trauma and the obstacles to relationship building.
2. The 2019 LWV-DownEast sponsored podcast, “[Penobscot Nation Ambassador Maulian Dana on Decolonizing Thanksgiving](#),” on WERU Radio features anecdotes and stories from Maulian Dana with a focus on the historical context of Thanksgiving as well as her work advocating for celebrating Indigenous Peoples Day in Maine, dismantling offensive mascots, and the institution (or lack thereof) of the 2001 Maine law requiring the teaching of Native American history and culture in public schools.
 - Includes several references to tribal rights advocate Donna Loring ~ for more information about her and her work, see [Donna Loring: Leader and Advocate](#) and/or [Donna M. Loring: A Penobscot Voice in Politics and Community](#).

Maine’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission:

1. This article, “[Truth and Reconciliation: The Findings on Wabanaki Child Welfare in the State of Maine](#),” touches on some of the history of abusive boarding schools, forced adoption, and other forms of family separation that Native Americans have been subject to as well as the work on the Maine Wabanaki-State Child Welfare Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which was formed by 5 Wabanaki chiefs and the former governor of Maine in 2012 to further investigate this historical trauma and work toward healing.
 - The 2015 report from the Commission (including personal accounts and findings) [can be found here](#).
2. This [2021 article](#) in the Portland Press Herald is written by some of the 2013-2015 commissioners and explains why their findings coincide with the urgency to pass LD 2094 and advocate for tribal sovereignty in Maine.

The history of voting rights for Native Americans:

1. [The State of Native American Voting Rights](#) and [Voting Rights for Native Americans](#) touch on the history of voting rights for Native Americans on the federal level as well as some of the laws and court cases that contributed to forced assimilation and the destruction of indigenous cultures.
2. [How the Native American Vote Continues to be Suppressed](#) discusses some of the ongoing forms of voting suppression, such as discrimination against nontraditional addresses, obstacles to voter registration, voter ID laws, inequitable access to in-person polling locations and vote-by-mail, as well as the possible remedies in the [2019 proposed Native American Voting Rights Act](#).
3. The National League of Women Voters [endorses](#) the Native American Voting Rights Act of 2019.
4. This [article](#) describes the history of tribal representation in the Maine state legislature and the Maine tribes' long fight against exclusion from government. Today, most Maine tribes have not been sending representatives to the legislature, asking instead for the state to respect tribal sovereignty — some of these dynamics are explained [here](#).

Land acknowledgements:

1. [A guide to indigenous land acknowledgements](#) helps lay out some of the important factors to consider when crafting a land acknowledgment and underscores why land acknowledgments must be accompanied with action in order to differ from performative, meaningless activism. The piece also emphasizes why indigenous community members should not be tasked with delivering any sort of “welcome” statement at these types of speaking events.
 - This [livestream](#) inspired the guide above and is a great resource on the topic.
2. Written in the context of Canada, [Beyond land acknowledgements](#) urges readers to ask the “hard questions about what needs to be done once we’re ‘aware of Indigenous presence.’” The piece pushes us to think deeper about the purpose of land acknowledgements and the shortcomings of some of the current methods of incorporating them into daily life today.
3. This college newspaper article, “[Does Bates Deserve a Land Acknowledgement?](#)”, also discusses some of the problems and tensions with creating a land acknowledgment for an institution that has yet to participate in dialogue and relationship building with indigenous communities in Maine.