

**NORTH FORK RANCHERIA OF MONO INDIANS:  
A BRIEF HISTORY OF ANCESTRAL TIES TO LANDS AROUND PROPOSED GAMING SITE**

The North Fork Rancheria of Mono Indians (Tribe) has proposed building a destination resort casino and hotel in an unincorporated area of Madera County just north of the City of Madera. Historical and ethnographic records demonstrate that the Tribe and its ancestors have used and occupied lands in the vicinity of the City of Madera and the project site from pre-contact times to the present.

**Tribe.** The Tribe is comprised primarily of Northfork Mono, a label given them by an ethnographer in the 1910s to describe people then living along and north of the San Joaquin River. By the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, non-Native acquisition of lands in the San Joaquin Valley, both on the flat plain and the surrounding foothills, had resulted in Tribal citizens concentrating around the town of North Fork near the Sierra National Forest. This is how the Tribe became known as the North Fork Band or North Fork Mono. However, ancestors of the Tribe also include members of Yokut and Miwok linguistic groups. Further, the town of North Fork is only one place among many of significance to the Tribe, as their use and occupancy of lands in the San Joaquin Valley, and around the City of Madera in particular, is extensive.

**Pre-Contact.** The Northfork Mono, as well as other California Indian tribes indigenous to Madera and Fresno Counties, made their homes in the friendlier climates of the foothills but used the Valley floor—which was not conducive to year-round habitation—for its resources: to hunt big-game, fish, gather reeds for basket making, and for ceremonies and trade. In the San Joaquin Valley, tribal groups used and occupied overlapping territories, and access to specific regions was regulated by protocols determined by a complex interdependent system of social, political, and economic ties between groups. The Northfork Mono were key players in this regional complex.

**Contact Era.** The arrival of non-Natives in the San Joaquin Valley, as early as the 1810s, thoroughly disrupted aboriginal life there, as these incursions pushed Native peoples further into the foothills and mountains, in order to flee from the kidnapping, violence, and disease which decimated their populations. With the 1849 California Gold Rush, tensions between Native peoples and miners as well as settlers escalated rapidly in the San Joaquin Valley, and culminated in the Mariposa Indian War of 1850-51. In response the federal government sent three treaty commissioners to California to negotiate treaties with San Joaquin and other Native peoples for peace and the cession of land in exchange for the establishment of reservations.

**Reservation Period.** The interests of the Northfork Mono were represented directly in the ensuing treaty negotiations by trusted chiefs of neighboring Mono and non-Mono tribes with whom they had kinship and socio-political ties. The April 29, 1851, treaty expressly provided that the ancestors of the Tribe were intended beneficiaries of the treaty. This and two other treaties reserved adjacent tracts of Native lands on the Valley floor where the present-day City of Madera is located.

The lands reserved in these treaties were quickly overrun by settlers, ranchers, miners and, later, farmers, leaving only a series of small “Indian farms” operating over a large area. One of these, the Fresno River Farm, was located in the immediate vicinity of the present-day City of Madera and later became the headquarters for the entire reservation. Although Congress eventually refused to ratify the treaties based on objections from the California Legislature, by 1854 the Fresno River Farm or Reservation was viewed as one of the five reservations authorized by Congress a year earlier. In 1856, the Indian Agent for the Fresno River Reservation identified a significant number of ancestors of the Tribe who lived on, visited, and recognized the Reservation as their home and headquarters. At the same time, most Native people, including ancestors of the Tribe, integrated the Reservation into their yearly subsistence cycle, spending part of the year on reservation lands cultivating crops and collecting treaty-stipulated goods, and part of the year off reservation grounds hunting, gathering, and fishing. Operation of the Reservation was plagued with problems, however, and in 1860 the Reservation was closed. The Tribe’s ancestors subsequently integrated into the mining, lumber, ranching, and agricultural economies, thereby adapting their use and occupancy of the Valley floor and foothills to supply their subsistence in new ways.

**Land Acquisitions.** Beginning in the 1890’s, the federal government made a limited number of land allotments to Native people. Because very few public domain lands were available, the government turned to the National Forests for lands that could become Indian allotments. Consequently, most lands allotted to Tribal ancestors were in the Sierra National Forest, although some were within approximately 18 miles of the City of Madera. In 1903, a Presbyterian Mission was established in the town of North Fork. Native parents began sending their children to be educated and sheltered at the Mission while continuing their migratory patterns by working as migrant workers on farms and logging operations in the San Joaquin Valley. In 1916, at the urging of the Mission, the Federal Government purchased the 80-acre North Fork Rancheria next to the Mission to provide shelter to families whose children were attending the Mission. The rocky soil and precipitous landscape were unsuitable for farming, however, and the Rancheria never was able to support more than a few families.

**Termination and Restoration.** In 1961, the federal government terminated the Tribe’s federally recognized status and transferred the Rancheria land to fee for the lone resident then living on the Rancheria. The Tribe’s status as a federally recognized Indian tribe was restored in 1983 under a court-approved settlement. Four years later, the lands within the Rancheria boundaries were restored as “Indian Country.” The Tribe subsequently elected a governing body and later adopted a constitution in 1996. Today, the Tribe is among the larger tribes in California with 1376 tribal citizens whose ancestors have used, occupied, and accessed the lands surrounding the City of Madera throughout history and up to the present.