Welcome to Chatakuin
FIVE OAKS HISTORIC SITE

SITE GUIDE

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FIVE OAKS HISTORIC SITE

For over 500 years, people, plants, and animals have gathered under the Five Oaks. These native Oregon White Oaks have witnessed historical change from Indigenous land stewardship to settler agriculture and urban growth. The trees are located in today's Hillsboro, Oregon, overlooking the Brookwood Parkway exit off Highway 26. Today, one enormous 500-year old Oak remains, surrounded by replanted, younger trees.

History, ecological science, and preservation come together at this site. These resources can be used to teach about how history is presented, Indigenous traditional ecological knowledge, Oregon's oak savannas, preservation and conservation movements, or community changes over time in the Tualatin Valley.

Table of Contents

3 Educator's Overview
4 Suggested Activities
5 Further Learning: Picture Books and Web Sources

Resources:
6 Where are the Five Oaks?
7 Interpretive Display
8 Interpretive Display Text (English)
10 Texto del letrero interpretativo (Spanish)
13 Interpretive Display Illustration by artist Aki Ruiz
14 Primary Source: 1971 Robert Benson Letter
15 Text Response Questions
16 Five Oaks Site Images
Five Oaks Historic Site Guide

Educator's Overview

Overview
This site guide contains resources for teaching about the Five Oaks Historic Site as a case study of environmental stewardship and historical changes in Oregon and the Tualatin Valley.

Connections
Use these resources to teach:
- How history is presented; compare the 1999 text to the 2022 text
- Indigenous traditional ecological knowledge; focus on cultural burns
- Oregon's natural habitats; focus on plants and animals of the oak savanna
- Preservation/conservation movements; compare to other conservation sites
- Community changes over time in the Tualatin Valley or Oregon; focus on people groups

Learning Outcomes
Students will be able to:
- Understand how human relationships with land and oak trees have changed over time
- Explain the importance of oak trees to Indigenous peoples and natural habitats in Oregon
- Describe events in local and Oregon history that took place at the Five Oaks Historic Site

Essential Questions
- What are the relationships between oak trees and humans?
- Why and how do people preserve natural places?

Credits
The Five Oaks Garden Club, Washington County Museum, and PacTrust built the pavilion in 1999. Five Oaks Museum created this panel, compiled these learning resources, and rededicated the site in 2022.

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Mural illustration by Aki Ruiz.
Science
Build or review background knowledge on oak trees
• Cover life cycle of a tree, parts of a tree, and/or parts of an ecosystem
• Could be a matching activity, drawing or poster project, or small group presentations
Scientific Illustration
• Scientific Illustration trains observation skills as it is about drawing the real details of an actual specimen, not making a beautiful artwork that looks like the emoji in our mind.
• Sample lesson: https://www.calacademy.org/educators/lesson-plans/introduction-to-scientific-sketching
Exploring Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) through Seasonal Rounds
• TEK is evolving knowledge acquired by Indigenous peoples through direct relationship with the environment over thousands of years
• Research and draw Kalapuya seasonal rounds that demonstrate Kalapuyan TEK
• Samples: https://fiveoaksmuseum.org/exhibit/seasonal-rounds/

Writing
Writing prompts, can expand into larger projects
• Personal writing about a significant tree or natural place in your life
• Descriptive writing about what the five senses experience in an oak savanna
• Persuasive writing to a landowner about preserving the oak trees on their land

Math
Percentages or Fractions
• For example: Oak savanna once covered 400,000 acres in the Willamette Valley. Today, 5 percent remains. How many acres of oak savanna are in the Willamette Valley today?
Measuring circumference of trees to determine age
• Use multiplication formula to estimate tree age based on species: https://www.treehugger.com/estimating-forest-trees-age-1343321

Research
Investigate oak savanna preservation today
• For example: Quamash Prairie or West Linn Oak Savanna
**Picture Books**

**Because of an Acorn** by Lola M. and Adam Schaefer

This book illustrates how each layer of an ecosystem is connected, starting from an oak tree acorn. Discuss to ensure students understand how each layer leads to the next, such as how a bird spreads seeds. Ideal for younger and ELL students to build background knowledge.

**The Forest of Fire** by Erik Ohlsen

This book reveals the relationship between forests and wildfire and the magic that can be held in plants. Discuss similarities and differences between forest and oak savanna, and where Indigenous people should be included. Ideal for younger learners.

**As An Oak Tree Grows** by G. Brian Karas

This beautifully illustrated book depicts industrialization and urbanization over the centuries from the perspective of an oak tree. Holds strong parallels with the Five Oaks historic site. Recommended ONLY for reading critically after previous Indigenous units due to inaccurate depiction of Indigenous peoples.

Example critical lesson with 6th graders:

**Video**

**Prescription: Fire** by Nature Conservancy

In one minute, this animated video illustrates how controlled burns prevent wildfires. Be sure to point out that the video’s claim that small fires were “natural” in the past is an erasure of Indigenous people. Ideal for ELL and younger students.

Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dY3cfjruuqM

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**Web Sources**

**Restoring Fire: prescribed burn at Quamash Prairie reconnects land, culture, and habitat** by Cory Eldridge, Metro, 2020.

This news article reports on a prescribed burn by Grand Ronde members at Quamash Prairie, a site near Tigard, OR, and shares how burn boss Colby Drake reconnects to his Indigenous identity through scientific and ancestral knowledge. High school reading level.


**A rare patch of oak savanna is preserved in West Linn** by Yuxing Zheng, the Oregonian, 2009. Updated 2019.

This article pairs descriptive and expository writing on how local residents convinced a landowner to preserve an oak savanna in West Linn and restore it into a nature park. Compare this to the case of the Five Oaks historic site. Middle school reading level.


This technical report covers Indigenous relationships to oak trees from food to tools across Arizona, California, Oregon, and Washington, showing how oak savanna was essential habitat across the west. College reading level; focus on one section or one paragraph for middle grades.

Link: https://directives.sc.egov.usda.gov/OpenNonWebContent.aspx?content=25907.wba
Five Oaks Historic Site Guide

Where are the Five Oaks?

The Five Oaks Historic Site is a grove of five Oregon White Oak trees.

The site is located in Oregon’s Tualatin Valley. Also called Washington County, this valley is south of the Columbia River and west of the Willamette River. It makes up the northernmost section of the Willamette Valley.

Today, the site is located on the north side of Highway 26, near the Brookwood Parkway/Helvetia Road exit in Hillsboro. Here, the land is used for a mix of industrial purposes and agriculture. The site is surrounded by a business park, denoted in yellow on the map.

In this aerial view, notice the parking lots and business warehouses surrounding the Five Oaks Historic Site. Highway 26 is in the background.
Interpretive Display
As Far Back as Human Memory Goes
Kalapuyans have lived on this land since time immemorial.

Tualatin Kalapuyans (also called Atfalati) have always lived in the Tualatin Valley. Their winter villages were clustered around Wapato Lake (near present-day Gaston), a shallow lake filled with potato-like tubers. In the spring, they harvested camas bulbs from the vast sea of purple flowers covering the valley floor. Today, Kalapuya descendants belong to the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde.

How the Ground Came to Be
Oregon’s geology has been shifting for over 150 million years.

The land is always changing. The movement of tectonic plates created the Coast Range mountains. Volcanic lava flow formed the Cascade Mountains. Glacial floods shaped the Willamette Valley and the Tualatin Valley. The floods carried the layers of sand, silt, and gravel that we stand on today. Native-controlled fires enriched the soil for farming, which attracted settlers to the Tualatin Valley. Later, high tech companies used the sand to make silicon chips.

Farming Around the Five Oaks
Settlers changed the landscape of the Tualatin Valley into farms and cities.

To encourage European-Americans to settle in Oregon, the US government gave away Native land for free through the Donation Land Claim Act of 1850. Oregon Trail pioneers Alexander and Sarah Zachary claimed 640 acres, including the Five Oaks site. Later, the Berger family from Switzerland purchased part of the Zachary claim. They raised dairy cows and farmed hay around the Five Oaks.

Where Did the Oak Savannas Go?
Oak savannas are now endangered.

Oak savannas once covered millions of acres, but today are an endangered habitat. Over 95% of their original range has been destroyed. Indigenous peoples and environmental groups are restoring this important ecosystem through controlled burns, reintroduction of native species, and public education.
Some textual content that was previously extracted for this document:

Returning to Chatakuin
Return nutrients to the soil
Help oaks grow
Reduce insects
Remove underbrush
Prevent wildfires

Kalapuyans created oak savannas. Tualatin Kalapuyans named this group of trees Chatakuin, Place of the Heavy Stone. They were once part of an oak savanna. Every fall, Kalapuya people return to collect acorns and grind them with heavy stone bowls and pestles.

Kalapuyans engineered lush oak savannas through controlled burns and thoughtful harvesting. Controlled burns are important because they:

- Return nutrients to the soil
- Help oaks grow
- Reduce insects
- Remove underbrush
- Prevent wildfires

Oak Savanna Habitat
The oak savanna is home to over a thousand species of plants, animals, and insects.

Oak savannas are a human made habitat. Controlled burns give Oregon White Oaks (Quercus garryana) room to grow tall over native Red Fescue and Tussock grasses. Thick bark and deep roots help White Oaks survive fire. Their branches shelter birds, squirrels, and wasps.
Texto del letrero interpretativo

Bienvenidas a Chatakuin, el espacio histórico de Cinco Robles
Por más de 500 años personas, plantas y animales se han reunido bajo los cinco robles de Five Oaks. Hoy en día sólo queda un enorme roble de 500 años rodeado de árboles más jóvenes que han sido replantados.

Hasta donde se remonta la memoria humana
La población Kalapuya ha vivido en este territorio desde un tiempo inmemorial.

La población Tualatin Kalapuya (también llamada Atfalati) siempre ha vivido en el valle del Tualatin. Sus poblados de invierno se agrupaban entorno al lago Wapato (cerca de la actual Gastón), un lago poco profundo con abundantes tubérculos parecidos a la papa. En primavera cosechaban los bulbos de camas del vasto mar de flores moradas que cubría el suelo del valle. Hoy en día, la descendencia de la población Kalapuya forma parte de las Tribus Confederadas de Grand Ronde.

Cómo se originó el suelo
La geología de Oregón ha estado cambiando durante 150 millones de años.

La tierra siempre cambia. El movimiento de placas tectónicas creó las montañas de la Cordillera Costera. Los flujos de lava volcánica formaron las Montañas Cascade. Las inundaciones de los flujos glaciares formaron el valle de Willamette y el de Tualatin. Las inundaciones arrastraron las capas de arena, limo, y grava sobre las que nos paramos hoy. Incendios controlados por gentes indígenas enriquecieron el suelo para que pudiera ararse, lo que atrajo a colonos al valle de Tualatin. Más tarde, empresas de alta tecnología usaron la arena para hacer chips de silicona.

La agricultura en torno a los Cinco Robles
Los colonos cambiaron el paisaje del valle de Tualatin convirtiéndolo en granjas y ciudades.

Para animar a personas de origen europeo a establecerse en Oregón, el gobierno de los Estados Unidos les regaló tierras de los nativos a través de la Ley de Reclamación de Tierras por Donación en 1850. Alexander y Sarah Zachary, pioneros que llegaron al territorio por el Camino de Oregón, reclamaron 640 acres, incluido el emplazamiento de Cinco Robles. Más tarde, la familia suiza Berger compró parte del terreno de Zachary, y crio vacas lecheras y cultivó heno alrededor de Cinco Robles.
¿Cuándo desaparecieron las sabanas de robles?
Hoy en día las sabanas de robles están en peligro.

En su día, estas sabanas cubrieron millones de acres, pero hoy son un hábitat en peligro. Más del 95% de su cobertura original ha sido destruido. Los pueblos originarios y grupos medioambientales están restaurando este importante ecosistema a través de incendios controlados, la reintroducción de especies nativas, y la educación pública.

Reclamando el territorio de Oregón
Los colonos de origen británico y estadounidense usaron el espacio de Cinco Robles para establecer su control del territorio.

A principios de la década de 1800 los Estados Unidos y Gran Bretaña no estaban de acuerdo acerca de quién tenía control del territorio de Oregón (que hoy abarca los estados de Washington, Idaho y Oregón.) Los tramperos británicos de la Compañía de la Bahía de Hudson comerciaron con pieles de castor debajo de los Cinco Robles. En 1845, colonos estadounidenses escogieron este lugar para celebrar, con salvas y plegarias, la primera fiesta del cuatro de julio en el territorio de Oregón. Después de establecer la autoridad de los Estados Unidos en la región, estas familias de colonos mantuvieron sesiones judiciales a la sombra de los robles.

Preservar los Cinco Robles
Mucha gente ha protegido el lugar durante años.

Durante décadas, la familia Berger cultivó cuidadosamente alrededor de estos históricos árboles. En la década de 1930 el Cuerpo Civil de Conservación construyó la autopista Sunset justo al lado de los Cinco Robles. El Club de Jardinería de Cinco Robles animó más tarde a otros propietarios del lugar, desde sucursales de venta de carros a parques de negocios, a preservar los árboles. A lo largo de los años, cuatro de los cinco robles originales cayeron y han sido replantados.
Retorno a Chatakuin
Los Kalapuya crearon sabanas de robles.

El pueblo Tualatin Kalapuya llamaba a estos árboles Chatakuin, Lugar de la Piedra Pesada. En su día formaron parte de una sabana de robles. Cada otoño, miembros de la población Kalapuya regresan a recoger bellotas y las muelen con pesados metates y manos.

La gente Kalapuya diseñó exuberantes sabanas de roble mediante quemas controladas y cosechas cuidadas. Los incendios controlados son importantes porque:
- Devuelven nutrientes al suelo
- Ayudan a crecer a los robles
- Reducen los insectos
- Previenen los incendios forestales

El hábitat de la sabana del roble
La sabana de roble sirve de hogar a más de mil especies de plantas, animales e insectos.

Las sabanas de robles son hábitats creados por las personas. Las quemas controladas dan a los robles blancos de Oregón (Quercus garryana) espacio para crecer por encima de los pastos nativos de festuca roja y de hierba de tussok. Su gruesa corteza y raíces profundas ayudan a los robles blancos a sobrevivir al fuego. Sus ramas albergan aves, ardillas y avispas.
ILLUSTRATION

This illustration was created by artist Aki Ruiz in 2022 for the Five Oaks historic site interpretive display.

What can you find in the image?

the Five Oaks
mortar and pestle
controlled burn
western grey squirrel
wasp gall
camas flower
camas bulbs
red tailed hawk
silicon chip
acorns
dairy cows
oak seedling
drip torch
bumblebees
In the 1970s, the Berger family sold a part of their hay farm, including the Five Oaks site, to a car dealership called Riviera Motors. Local historian Robert Benson wrote a letter asking Riviera Motors to preserve the Five Oaks.

Riviera Motors, Inc.
1605 SW Front Avenue
Portland 97201

September 27, 1971

Gentlemen:

One of your officers, Mr. Ovale I think, was quoted in the press as saying "no problem" in the fact that the Five Oaks tract along the Sunset Highway in West Union is prime agricultural land. Your Volkswagen installation on this acreage, while welcome from many points of view, forms an entering wedge for the destruction of one of Oregon's very few areas of highly productive soil. There are people who do not look on this as "no problem."

Nobody in your organization seems to have made any public comment about the presence, on this tract, of an outstanding historic site. The Five Oaks were the gathering-place of the earliest independent farming community of Americans in the West. We hope you recognize that a first-class historic site of this importance cannot be obliterated without loss to the state and community.

The Five Oaks are described on the inside cover, and also on Page 5, of the Pioneer Landmarks booklet which we enclose.

A similar historic site near Hillsboro was slated for prompt bulldozing to make way for a run-of-the-mill development. Wiser heads prevailed. A landscape designer was hired. His plans make it clear that the historic trees, if left standing as a center of attraction, will pay the developers many times over for the small space they occupy. See paragraph C 11 on Page 10 of the booklet.

In the case of the Five Oaks, both the original group (now much battered) and the graceful junior group should be considered. There is need of space enough to bear witness to the picnics, revivals, court sessions and horse races that took place here.

An industrial park certainly needs landscaping, as all will agree. Why not work with, not against, what history has handed down to you? Favorable publicity will be generated that no amount of anonymous commercial plantings could ever match.

Sincerely yours,

Robert L. Benson
Response Questions

Display Text

Oak Savanna
- What is an oak savanna and why is it an important habitat?
- How and why did Kalapuyans create oak savannas?
- What is the current status of Oregon's oak savannas?

Gathering Place
- How did Kalapuyans gather around the Five Oaks site?
- How did early settlers gather around the Five Oaks site?

Preservation
- What are the dangers to oak trees and why are there so many fewer today?
- How have people preserved the Five Oaks?

Primary Source
- Whose perspective is this primary source written from?
- Who is the audience? (who is it written for?)
- What did the writer think was most important for the audience to know?
- What persuasive arguments for preservation did the writer use?
- What perspectives or information are missing from this source?

Historic Images
- Which tree is the surviving ancient oak today?
- How was the land around the oak trees changed from 1925 to today?
- How has photography changed over the years?
- What types of media sources were these images published in?
- How was the signage changed?

In a 1981 journal article, Robert "Bob" Benson gave an update on the results of this letter. What do you think about his opinion?

Riviera Motors responded by naming their development “Five Oaks Industrial Park” and agreeing to preserve the trees. “This is about the best you can expect,” says Bob, who feels that a sensible society would have turned the area into a state park.

Knowing Home: Studies for Possible Portland, Rain Umbrella, 1981.
Five Oaks Site Images

The colorful dots identify each of the five trees. Follow the pink dot to see how today’s oak grew over time.

The first known image of the Five Oaks, circa 1925

Five Oaks in the 1940s
Five Oaks in the 1960s. Two of the oaks have fallen in storms and one is a snag. Notice the "Junior Oaks" in the background.

The "Junior Oaks" in the 1960s. This image has often been used to represent the Five Oaks, but they are not the original Five Oaks. Notice the three surviving original Five Oaks in the background.
Five Oaks in the 1970s. One more oak has fallen in a storm. Notice the "Junior Oaks" in the background.

Berger family farm in the 1970s.
Five Oaks in the early 1990s. Notice the electricity transmission tower in the background.

Pavilion dedication ceremony.
The Oregonian newspaper, 1999.
Five Oaks circa 2010.
Notice the three younger replanted oaks.

Five Oaks in 2021.
The snag has fallen and a fourth young oak replanted.
The 1999 historic sign, photographed in 2021.

The new 2022 historic sign.