



## **The Story of the People**

The Maidu people relied, almost entirely, upon their landscape to provide them with the resources they needed. Acorns were a major crop along with various grass seeds, bulbs, and numerous greens. The landscape was carefully tended through multiple generations to ensure sustainable harvests and somewhat predictable crop locations. Meat came from most any source available, but absolutely not from frogs, lizards, snakes, buzzards, and owls, as these creatures were taboo for various reasons. Some obsidian was brought into Maidu country for the manufacture of tools such as projectile points and knives, but local chert and basalt were also commonly used.

Times changed very quickly for the Maidu. In the early 1850's, thousands of settlers and gold seekers used the trail through Big Meadow to access the gold fields. Many stopped and stayed. Camps and towns sprang up in every corner of Maidu territory. Grasses vital to Maidu subsistence were cut for hay. Trees were cut for fuel and construction. Oak groves tended for centuries were wiped out. Multi-generational relationships between people and the land were severed. Bulb fields were plowed up and streams diverted and polluted killing the fish. Springs were laid claim to by the new people and even the deer, unfamiliar with rifles, were decimated, as they were necessary to the hordes of gold seekers who brought no beef. In short, during this time, the Maidu were starving.

Prior to the coming of the whites, the Maidu were free of many diseases such as the common cold, tuberculosis, measles, cholera, and smallpox. Some of these diseases regularly ravaged white populations. Among the Maidu, who had absolutely no antibodies and thus no immunity to these illnesses, the affect was devastating. Entire villages were wiped-out and lineages ended. The 1850's were terrible times in this land.

Maidu attempted to withdraw entirely from the whites. However, this tactic proved futile. In order to acquire food and resources, the Maidu began to work for the whites on ranches, in mining, and in whatever other menial labor they might be granted. Until late in the twentieth century, nearly every town had a district where 'Indians' lived. In Chester one such place was near Gould Swamp.

Not all Maidu chose to live in villages near towns. In canyons and obscure meadows or out of the way places within the major valleys, the Maidu continued to live autonomously. Even in Indian towns the Maidu remained fairly autonomous so long as they were "well behaved."

### **Life in Balance: Conservation efforts of the Maidu Summit Consortium**

These lands represent a unique opportunity for the Maidu to interact with the land according to their freely exercised traditional landscape perspective. The chance to dedicate sizeable portions of land to the demonstration of a landscape management methodology and philosophy that was created within that same landscape over untold amounts of time is extremely rare and will make these lands unique in the northern Sierra Nevada Mountains. Educational and cultural exchange opportunities abound.

The Maidu of the past were almost completely dependent upon this land in meeting their resource needs. For the reason of this dependence, Maidu management of the ecosystem naturally embraces maximum ecosystem diversity. For example, historic Maidu burning of the forest floor and meadowlands induced rapid nutrient recycling while also eliminating growth inhibiting debris and diseases. In this way a greater variety, quantity, and quality of plant life was created. Currently many forests are virtually devoid of plants in the understory. A well-functioning ecosystem that includes plants in the forest understory will create more forage for browsing wildlife, seed eaters, and all other affected members of the food chain.

Maidu traditional ecology also naturally embraces maximum understanding of all ecosystem components. Part of this understanding is in knowing how to care for plants in order to maintain and even enhance plant vigor and productivity. Each plant is considered and management is adapted to meet its needs. The Maidu were an integral part of this landscape. Generations of Maidu traditional ecology implementation helped to shape the ecosystem and create the condition commonly referred to as 'pre-contact.' For this reason, any genuine effort at restoring the ecosystem must include the Maidu and their unique forms of ecosystem management.

As modern land managers are learning, in order to live in this landscape, it is necessary to minimize catastrophic fire risk. The Maidu, living in this landscape for untold generations, have long been aware of this fact. Maidu land management techniques incorporated fire as a tool and human-induced, moderate-heat, landscape-level fires were common. In this way, catastrophic fire risk was minimal in the Maidu-affected landscape. Favoring of fire resistant tree species as well as burning of various brush and plant species at different times during the year further helped to minimize fire risk.

The Maidu Summit Consortium also recognizes the importance of long-term analysis of the effects of traditional ecology upon the ecosystem as a means of making these lands places of education and learning. Baseline data will be collected before each project action—before alteration of the existing condition in order to maximize learning opportunities. Baseline data will include but will not be limited to plant species present, wildlife present, and human needs. Parameters for measuring present condition will include frequency of populations (plant and animal), and vigor (reproduction including potential for perpetuation and growth). Parameters will be measured against ecosystem needs and sustainability of integrity of maximum diversity including human needs.