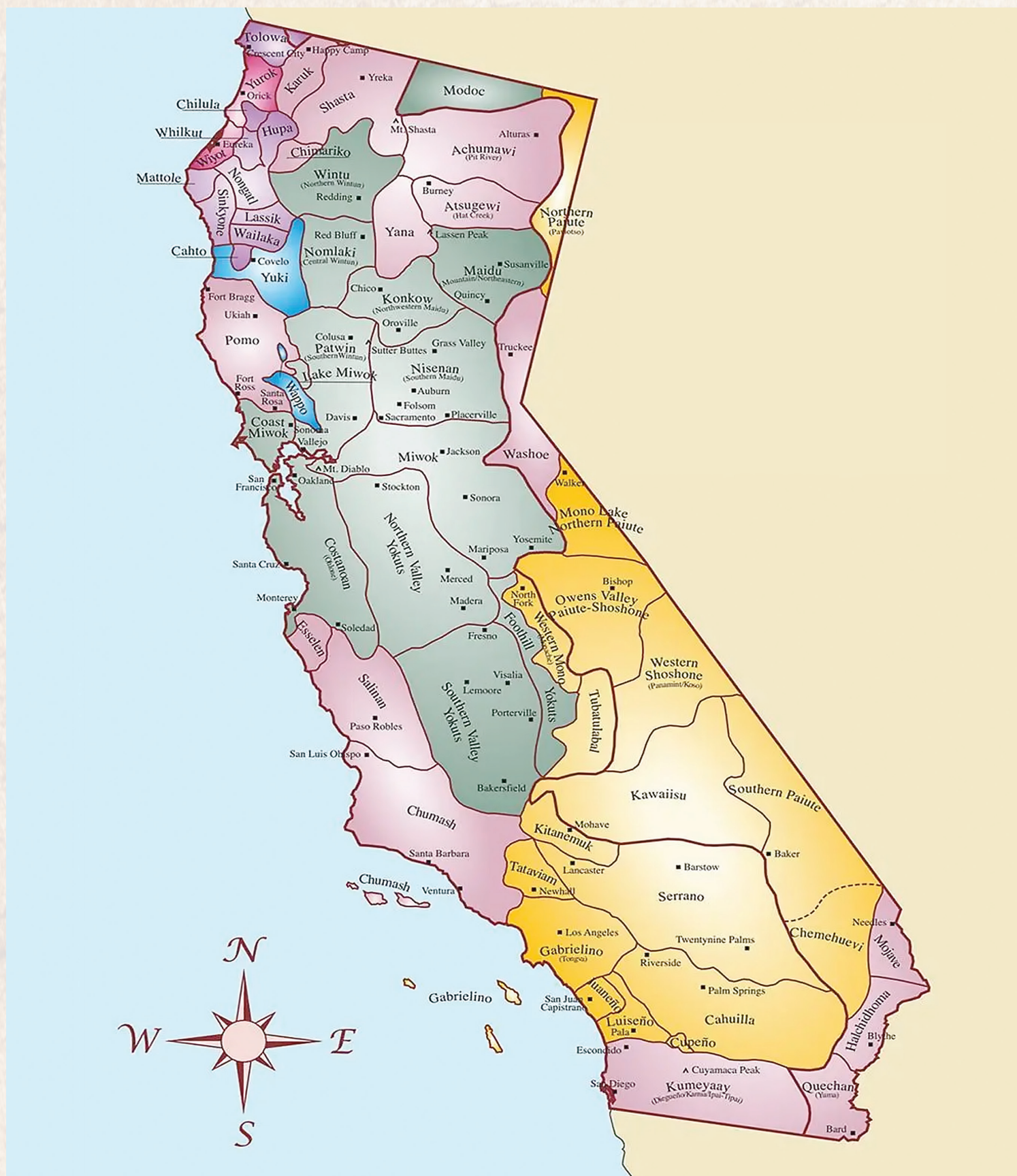


DISPLACING NATIVE PEOPLES: FLOODING & DAMS

The creation of the Oroville Dam and subsequent filling of Lake Oroville flooded the Konkow Maidu's ancestral lands and disrupted communities.



California Indian tribal territories prior to European contact. Courtesy Native Land Digital.

The Konkow Maidu's traditional territories ranged from northern Plumas County down to Table Mountain in Butte County, near Oroville. Also known as the Northwestern Maidu or Valley Maidu, their ancestors lived along the streams of the Feather River.

At contact, European colonizers brought diseases that decimated the population. During the Gold Rush, Maidu people faced concerted discrimination and violence, including an 1863 forced march away from their homes. In the 1960s, the creation of the Oroville Dam and Lake Oroville followed this pattern of displacement, disconnecting the tribe from their ancestral lands and disturbing sacred sites.

In an effort to salvage artifacts before the valley was flooded in the early 1960s, archaeologists began digging, though there were no cultural preservation

guidelines for archaeological sites at that time. One particular dig disturbed an historic Konkow Maidu burial site, unearthing 138 buried individuals and thousands of sacred objects. The dam still causes irregular water levels in the North Fork Feather River and in Lake Oroville, which erodes riverbanks and can cause cultural items and ancestral remains to appear and float to the water's surface.

"WHEN WE BURY OUR PEOPLE WE EXPECT THAT THEY ARE GOING TO HEAVEN. WHY SHOULD THEY BE DUG UP AGAIN TO FIND OUT HOW OLD THEY ARE? HOW CAN PEOPLE MANAGE TO THINK THAT'S RIGHT?"

– Patsy Seek, Past Chairwoman of the Konkow Valley Band of Maidu

Today, the Konkow Maidu's land protection and reclamation efforts have been stymied by the Department of Water Resources (DWR) and non-Indigenous residents. In the early 2000s, an assessment found that the Foreman Creek public recreational site had a high concentration of Maidu cultural sites. Maidu people asked for

protection of the sites, suggesting a variety of conservation approaches. The DWR acknowledged the need for a cultural protection plan and called for a temporary closure of Foreman Creek. This call was challenged by the local non-Maidu people and eventually dismissed. Foreman Creek remains open for public use today.

In addition, recent fires in Butte County, have exposed more sacred sites and cultural resources to the elements. Tribal members with cultural knowledge have formed monitoring teams to document this history and protect resources as clean-up plans continue.



Close up of a coil of briar roots (*Smilax californica*) collected in Enterprise, one of the towns that was destroyed and flooded by Lake Oroville in the 1960s with the dam's construction. Konkow Maidu weavers in the Chico and Oroville area have traditionally favored locally-harvested briar roots in their basketmaking practice, pairing the stiff, black-brown root with lighter-brown sedge roots to craft intricate basket designs. MSS 160 Dorothy M. Hill Collection, Meriam Library Special Collections, CSU Chico.