



wildsight

TEACH THE COLUMBIA

A Columbia River historical timeline

Guiding questions

What did the Columbia River Basin look like before Europeans arrived? Which Indigenous peoples are in the basin? How has the basin changed over time? What historical events, forces, and processes have contributed to that change?

Learning goals

Students will develop a better understanding of events that have shaped the Columbia River Basin over time and influenced the way things are today

Students will be able to visualize an approximate timeline of events and recognize overlaps and interconnections

Materials

Starter Major Event List (attached in appendix)

Preparation

- Have the **Major Events Slideshow** ready for presentation in Step 1 of the instructions.
- Print out a copy of the Starter Major Events List for each student.

Instructions

Time: 85 minutes

1. Present the **Major Events Slideshow** overviewing a selection of just twelve of many significant historical events (including some that are ongoing). Consult the Starter Major Events List in the appendix for suggested speaker notes and feel free to add your own. **10 mins**
2. Get students to start drawing out a historical timeline, beginning with the events from the Starter Major Event List in the appendix. Feel free to do this as a class, as partners, or in groups. **20 mins**
3. Encourage students to look for connections between the starter events, and use available

research tools (internet and any print resources you have) to identify up to five other relevant events/processes that could fit onto the timeline. Get students to add a short description for each of the events they find. **30 mins**

4. If the activity was not done as a whole class, go over the timeline together and discuss what extra events each group/partnership found, and read out their short descriptions. Encourage students to add to their own timelines and make changes as they listen to what other groups have done. **15 mins**
5. Facilitate a brief discussion around the following question: Which event(s) do you think were the most influential in the basin? Compare the reasons presented for different answers. **10 minutes**

Extensions

Learn about local Indigenous histories of the Columbia River Basin, through reading or hearing stories, talking to Indigenous education staff at your school, and inviting knowledge keepers into your classroom. Some online story resources to start with might include:

- **The Ktunaxa Creation Story** as shared online by the Ktunaxa Nation Council
- **Stories from the book Not Extinct: Keeping the Sinixt Way** by Marilyn James & Taress Alexis
- **The Heart of a River storybook** by Eileen Delehanty Pearkes and Nichola Lytle
- **Stsptekwle: In The Beginning...** as shared by School District 73
- **Original People: Chapter One** as shared by the Syilx Okanagan Nation

Explore the **Basin Climate Source** platform to consider how the climate in the Canadian portion of the Columbia Basin has changed, how it is expected to change in the future, what impacts this may cause, and what actions people are taking in response.

Curriculum links

Science 9

Social studies 10

Social studies 11

Earth Science 11

Environmental Science 11

Human Geography 12

Physical Geography 12

Appendix: Starter list of major events

Ongoing Indigenous presence: Indigenous inhabitation and stewardship prevailed for 10,000+ years before settlers arrived. Celilo Falls, near the present day location of The Dalles, Oregon, was one of the most popular fishing and trading areas for regional Indigenous peoples, and is one of the oldest inhabited communities in North America. Upstream in what is now northeast Washington, Kettle Falls was a similarly significant location for the upper portion of the watershed. The portion of the Columbia River Basin located in what is now Canada is the traditional and unceded territory of the Ktunaxa, Secwépemc, Sinixt, Syilx Okanagan, and Lheidli T'enneh Nations. In the portion of the Basin located in what is now the U.S., there are fifteen tribes with treaty rights and/or management authorities. Learn more at:

- **First Humans in the Basin**
- **Celilo Falls**
- **Kettle Falls**
- **Columbia Basin Map**

Arrival of Settlers: Europeans started arriving in the early as the 1800's (e.g. David Thompson in 1807, Lewis & Clark in 1805) and began exploring, capitalizing, and colonizing. David Thompson, an English explorer, mapped most of western Canada by canoe and on foot and led the first European party into the upper watershed. As other explorers and settlers arrived, the use of rivers began to change from traditional use by Indigenous peoples, such as travel and hunting, to more industrial use. Learn more at: <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/david-thompson>

Ongoing legal proceedings relating to Indigenous rights: Since the early days of settlement and colonization, the rights of Indigenous people and nations have been a subject of ongoing struggle. More recently, a number of legal events have shaped the way that Indigenous rights operate in Canada. These include enshrining "Aboriginal Rights" in Section 35 of Canada's 1982 Constitution, as well as several court cases that have clarified the meaning of these rights including the 1990 Sparrow Case, the 1996 Van der Peet case, and others. British Columbia is unique in some ways because there were very few treaties signed between Indigenous nations and the Crown and, as a result, most of the province remains unceded. In the U.S. portion of the Basin, there is also a very different legal framework and history concerning Indigenous rights. Learn more at: https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/land__rights/

1846: Treaty of Oregon: The U.S. and Great Britain drew an international border on the 49th parallel via the Treaty of Oregon. This border split up Indigenous communities and lands and created a border that is artificial to rivers like the Columbia and other features of the natural world like wildlife. Learn more at: <https://www.nwcouncil.org/reports/columbia-river-history/treatyoforegon>

1933-1942: Grand Coulee Dam construction: Flood control (to facilitate development in flood plains), irrigation, and hydropower became very important for settlers. They started to heavily develop rivers like the Columbia with dams and other structures. These actions escalated to support the growing settler populations of both Canada and the U.S. Built between 1933 and 1942, Grand Coulee Dam was the third of fourteen dams built on the main stem of the Columbia. When completed, it blocked salmon from returning to the upper watershed. Learn more at: <https://www.nwcouncil.org/reports/columbia-river-history/grandcouleehistory>

1964: Columbia River Treaty Ratification: The Treaty was negotiated in wake of the 1948 flood which overwhelmed inadequate flood dikes to destroy Vanport, Oregon with additional flooding in upstream communities. It was almost not ratified by Canada, but was eventually confirmed in 1964. Four treaty dams eventually result from this, three of which are in Canada. Learn more at: <https://www.nwcouncil.org/reports/columbia-river-history/columbiarivertreaty>

1973: Completion of the final Columbia River Treaty dam : Construction of the Mica Dam was completed in 1973, following two other Canadian treaty dams (Hugh-Keenleyside and Duncan) as well as the Libby Dam in the U.S., which was authorized by the treaty but is operated separately. Many rural communities and ecosystems were displaced or destroyed to make way for the reservoirs created by these dams. Learn more at: <https://engage.gov.bc.ca/columbiarivertreaty/the-treaty/>

1995: Creation of the Columbia Basin Trust: Following the ratification of the Columbia River Treaty dams, the Province of B.C. agreed to sell the first thirty years of extra electricity (the “downstream power benefits”) created as a result of the treaty dams to a consortium of U.S. utilities for an upfront cash payment. Starting in 1994, the downstream benefits would be returned to British Columbia in the form of electricity (not cash), which the Province could use or sell on the open market, resulting in much higher revenues than before. Residents of the Canadian Columbia Basin were adamant that some of these new benefits should go to the region most negatively affected by the construction and operation of the treaty dams. After much dialog and negotiation, the Columbia Basin Trust was created in response to this demand. Learn more at: <https://25years.ourtrust.org/chapter-2/>

2018: Start of negotiations to modernize the Columbia River Treaty: In 2018, Canada and the U.S. began negotiations to modernize the now nearly 60 year old Columbia River Treaty. Learn more at:

- <https://www.nwcouncil.org/reports/columbia-river-history/columbiarivertreaty#future>
- <https://engage.gov.bc.ca/columbiarivertreaty>

2019: Salmon Letter of Agreement: The Syilx Okanagan, Ktunaxa, and Secwepemc Nations and the Governments of British Columbia and Canada signed an agreement to work together in assessing the feasibility of reintroducing salmon to the Canadian Columbia River Basin. Learn more at: <https://columbiariversalmon.ca/>

2021: Supreme Court Desautel Ruling:

After three prior rounds in the B.C. court system,

the Supreme Court of Canada rules in favour of Rik Desautel, a Sinixt man from the Colville Reservation in present day Washington State. In 1956, Canada declared the Sinixt “extinct” even though many were still living on both sides of the U.S.-Canada border. The Supreme Court’s ruling affirms that Aboriginal Rights protected under Section 35 of Canada’s constitution do not stop at the international border and will help the Sinixt, and other Indigenous nations, reunite with more of their traditional territories. Learn more at: <https://nationalpost.com/news/rights-beyond-borders-big-questions-were-triggered-when-an-indigenous-american-shot-an-elk-in-canada>

Ongoing climate change and climate action:

Ongoing climate change fueled by human activities is disrupting every facet of the natural world with many negative consequences for human and ecological communities. People are working hard to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and build resilience to safeguard the future. Learn more at:

- <https://basinclimatesource.ca/>
- <https://ourtrust.org/grants-and-programs-directory/climate-action-program/climate-action-in-the-columbia-basin/>