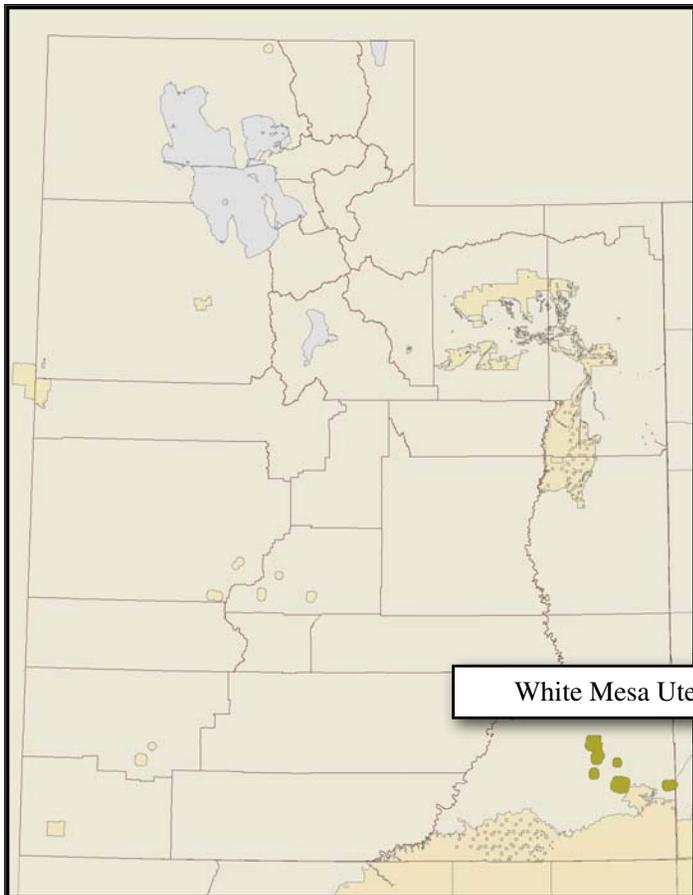


White Mesa Ute Council Profile

Prepared for the:
**Dixie, Fishlake & Manti-La Sal National Forests
Forest Plan Revision
Social and Economic Assessment**

Prepared by:
Utah Governor's Office of Planning and Budget
with assistance from:
Utah State University College of Natural Resources
Utah Division of Indian Affairs



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WHITE MESA UTE COUNCIL—OVERVIEW



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Governance

Tribal Council—seven
member board. One of
these members on the Tribal
Council in Towaoc, Colorado
where the tribal headquarters
is located.

Current Issues

Tribal Land

Approximately 15,000 acres

The homeland of the Ute Indian tribe stretched across a majority of eastern Utah and extended across the majority of Colorado. The San Juan River was their furthest extent south and the traditional dividing line between the Utes and the Navajo. The Southern Utes shared the southeast corner of Utah with a small group of Paiutes—San Juan Band. The Ute tribe has common language roots with the Paiute, indicating shared ancestors, but their culture evolved differently over the centuries. While the Paiutes developed a desert culture, Ute culture was more closely tied to the plains and to livestock for sustenance and Utes became horse-owners after contact with the Spaniards.

Numerous explorers passed through this area and eventually created the Spanish Trail, which expedited trade, but also was used for slave and horse trading. This contact led to a lot of intertribal warfare between the Navajo, Utes, and Paiutes and the tribes often pillaged one another for slaves to trade for goods. When agricultural settlers and miners entered the area and began competing for land, the Utes did not want to be moved to a reservation and forced to farm. Eventually, competition with cattle companies for grazing lands in the late 1800s pushed them out of many parts of their homeland. After retreating to Allen Canyon, the tribe eventually moved to White Mesa, about 12 miles south of Blanding, to begin farming, and be closer to settlements.

The White Mesa group is a part of the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, which has a reservation in Towaoc, Colorado. The isolation of the group from their headquarters has been a hindrance to progress. The designation of White Mesa became an important social and unifying symbol for modern Utes in southeastern Utah. The White Mesa Ute Council, a community organization, was started in 1978, to help provide social services. Many White Mesa Utes are currently employed in education, service, and a cattle company at White Mesa or in farming and a local casino in Towaoc. The tribe was able to purchase back some traditional grazing areas on north Elk Ridge, a satisfying achievement. They also successfully fought a proposal to store uranium tailings at White Mesa, fearing groundwater contamination.

Today the tribe has about 380 members. White Mesa has been designated as a voting precinct by San Juan County after three years of planning over 75% of the community members vote in the elections. One of the primary celebrations of the Utes, The Bear Dance, originated in this region and is held every year at White Mesa.

A History of Utah American Indians (2000). Ed. Forrest S. Cuch. Utah State University Press, Logan Utah
<http://dced.utah.gov/indian/Today/whitemesa.html>