South Carolina State Tribes Finally Recognized

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State recognition was recently granted to several state tribes and nations. This was the result of several years of hard work by the Office of the State Archaeologist, the Commission for Minority Affairs (CFMA), and several South Carolina tribes and nations who worked together on the Governors Ad Hoc Committee on Native American Affairs. Their recommended changes to the enabling act of the Commission for Minority Affairs to permit the recognition of and assistance to State Tribes, Groups and Special Interest Organizations was signed into law by Governor Sanford in 2003. The regulations governing the process were signed on September 24, 2004. The newly founded State Recognition Advisory Committee of the CFMA met for the first time shortly thereafter to take up the implementation of the recognition regulations. The committee was comprised of Ms. Janey Davis, Director of CFMA, Dr. Jonathan Leader, SC State Archaeologist, and Dr. Blair Rudes, distinguished linguist of American Indian languages at UNC-Charlotte. Several organizations went through the rigorous process and were carefully vetted. The first two successful tribes to receive state recognition were the Waccamaw Tribe and the Pee Dee Tribe of Upper South Carolina. The Eastern Cherokee, Southern Iroquois and United Tribes of South Carolina (ECSIUT) and the Wassmassaw Tribe of Varnertown were recognized as Groups. This designation is only somewhat less stringent than that required for state tribe recognition.

As was reported by The State newspaper, Chief Hatcher of the Waccamaw thanked the commissioners and stated that state recognition helped his tribal members because “… it legitimized, who they’ve always been and who they’ve always been told they couldn’t be.” Dr. Will Goins, CEO of the ECSIUT, commented “It is the most significant thing South Carolina has done for Native American Indian people in 300 years.” Chief Carolyn Chavis Bolton of the Pee Dee Indian Tribe simply said, “I don’t have to prove who I am anymore.”

In future issues of Legacy, the Office of the State Archaeologist will provide the names of the tribes, nations, groups, and organizations that have achieved state recognition as they journey through the regulatory cycle.