

Federal Recognition of Indian Tribes: The Administrative Process

Federal recognition (sometimes called *federal acknowledgment*) is a term of art formalizing a relationship between the United States and a recognized Indian Tribe, through which the Tribe becomes “eligible for the special programs and services provided by the United States to Indians because of their status as Indians.”¹ Federal recognition engenders certain rights and protections for the recognized Tribe. There are currently **575** federally recognized Tribes.²

Under current federal law,³ a group of Indians may obtain federal recognition in **three** ways:



Executive Administrative Process



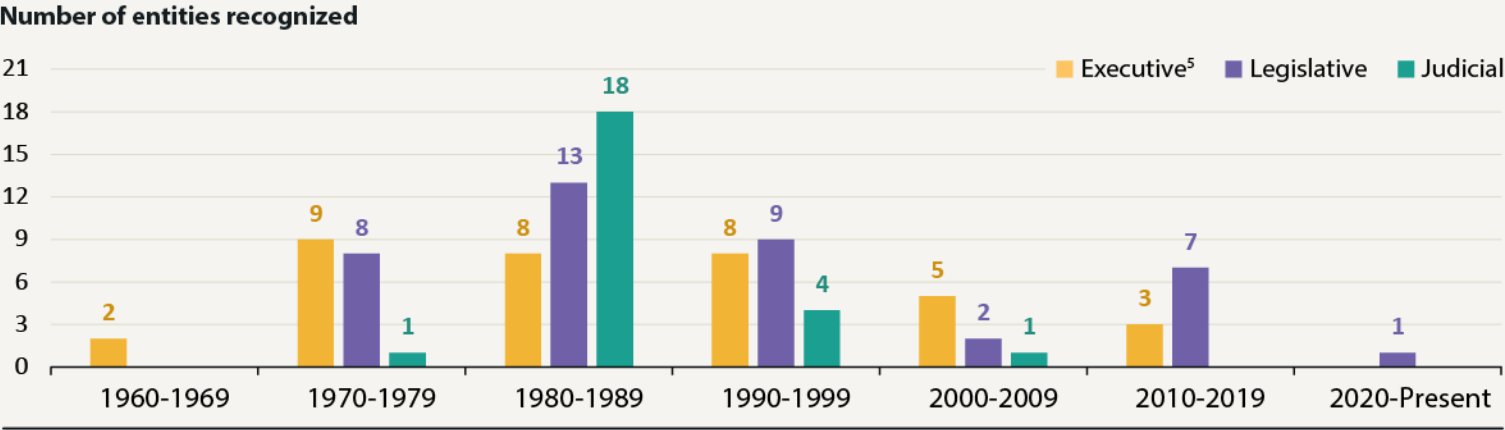
Legislative Act of Congress



Judicial Court Decision

The judicial route is now considered generally inaccessible, with courts deferring to executive and legislative determinations.⁴

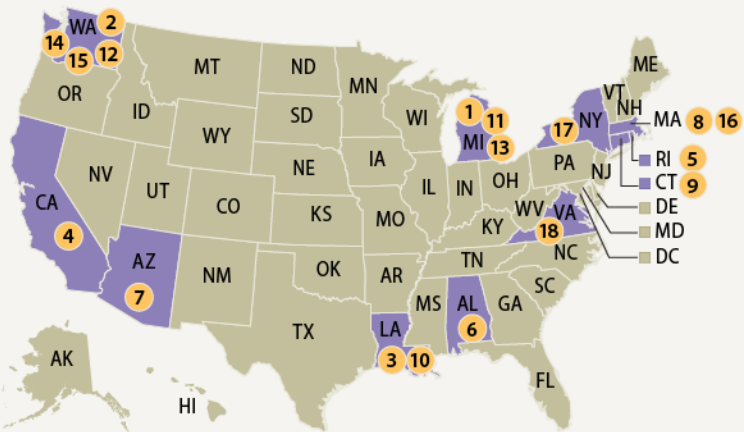
Indian Tribal Entities Federally Recognized, Restored, or Reaffirmed Since 1960



Tribes Acknowledged Through the 25 C.F.R. Part 83 Administrative Process

- Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa & Chippewa Indians**
Michigan - Aug. 2, 1980
- Jamestown Clallam Tribe**
Feb. 10, 1981- Washington
- Tunica-Biloxi Indian Tribe**
Louisiana - Sept. 25, 1981
- Death Valley Timbi Sha Shoshone Band**
Jan. 3, 1983 - California
- Narragansett Indian Tribe**
Rhode Island - Apr. 11, 1983
- Poarch Band of Creeks**
Aug. 10, 1984 - Alabama
- San Juan Southern Paiute Tribe**
Arizona - Mar. 28, 1984
- Wampanoag Tribal Council of Gay Head**
Apr. 11, 1987 - Massachusetts
- Mohegan Indian Tribe**
Connecticut - Mar. 14, 1994
- Jena Band of Choctaws**
Aug. 29, 1995 - Louisiana
- Huron Potawatomi Inc.**
Michigan - Mar. 17, 1996
- Samish Indian Tribe**
Apr. 26, 1996 - Washington
- Match-E-Be-Nash-She-Wish Band of Pottawatomi Indians**
Michigan - Aug. 23, 1999
- Snoqualmie Indian Tribe**
Oct. 6, 1999 - Washington
- Cowlitz Tribe of Indians**
Washington - Jan. 4, 2000
- Mashpee Wampanoag**
Feb. 15, 2007 - Massachusetts
- Shinnecock Indian Nation**
New York - Oct. 10, 2010
- Pamunkey Indian Tribe**
Jan. 28, 2016 - Virginia

- Under procedures set out in **25 C.F.R. Part 83**, the Secretary of the Interior may extend federal recognition to a Tribe. Under these regulations, a Tribe seeking federal recognition generally must prove, among other things, that it
- has existed as a Native American/American Indian entity since 1900;
 - comprises individuals descended from a historic Indian Tribe, most of whom are not also members of another federally recognized Tribe;
 - can satisfy certain community and identity criteria, such as maintaining a level of authority or influence over its members; and
 - has not had a relationship with the United States expressly terminated or prohibited by Congress.



List of Tribes acknowledged through 25 C.F.R. Part 83 obtained from the Department of the Interior, Office of Federal Acknowledgment. In some cases, these names may not reflect current tribal names. Dates reflect the source's assessment of when the federal acknowledgment became legally effective.

Denied Petitions

In 2025, a new rule provided groups who had been denied recognition under Part 83 a limited opportunity to try again. By the later of March 21, 2030, or five years from the original date of denial, a denied group may request to re-petition for recognition if new evidence or changed Part 83 regulations would address the reasons for the denial. Prior to this rule, Part 83 prohibited such re-petitions.⁶

Sources: This information was compiled by CRS based on searches for notices published in the *Federal Register* and searches for legislation and agency documents on Congress.gov, Lexis+, and ProQuest Congressional for variations of the terms *Indian*, *tribe*, *federal*, *recognize*, *Indian Reorganization Act*, *Act of June 18, 1934*. Other search strategies may yield different results.

¹ Indian Entities Recognized by and Eligible to Receive Services from the United States Bureau of Indian Affairs, 91 Fed. Reg. 4102 (Jan. 30, 2026).
² See CRS Report R48888, *The Federal Recognition of Tribes: Frequently Asked Questions*, by Mariel J. Murray, Mainon A. Schwartz, and Laura Deal (2026).
³ Pub. L. No. 103-454, § 103(3), 108 Stat. 4791 (1994).
⁴ Wyandot Nation v. United States, 858 F.3d 1392, 1401-02 (Fed. Cir. 2017).
⁵ This includes any recognition-related action taken by the Department of the Interior (DOI) or a DOI official, including but not limited to determinations under 25 C.F.R. Part 83.
⁶ 90 Fed. Reg. 3627 (Jan. 15, 2025); 90 Fed. Reg. 9515 (Feb. 13, 2025).

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