A Passion to Protect

Protecting this site for future generations required the efforts of many individuals and organizations partnering together. After decades of effort, state, federal, tribal and local governments and agencies, along with scores of advocacy groups and citizens, pulled together to purchase these 62 acres for the people of Oregon in 2007.

Without assistance from the following groups, Iwetemlaykin State Heritage Site would never have come into being:

- The Nez Perce Tribe
- The Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation
- The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation
- The Oregon State Parks Trust
- The National Park Service

This small parcel of rolling grassland, a quiet oasis at the north end of Wallowa Lake, has witnessed great changes over the slow passage of time. The imperceptible retreat of glaciers and ice fields in the last Ice Age shaped the land. For thousands of years after that, this site was part of the homeland of the Nimíipuu (Nez Perce) Indians. And for the past century or so, its uses have been typically agricultural: hay, pasture and grazing.

The word Iwetemlaykin is Nez Perce for “at the edge of the lake.” It is pronounced ee-wet-TEMM-lye-kinn.
Iwetemlaykin is situated on a terminal moraine. Moraines are piles of debris deposited by glaciers as they move and melt, and terminal moraines form at the downhill end of glaciers. Wallowa Lake formed in the valley behind the moraines, after the glacier that deposited them retreated.

The steep canyons and jagged, rocky outcrops of the Wallowa Mountains paint a sharp, vivid backdrop to the landscape. But it is more than just a picturesque setting. Its natural abundance—plentiful game, healthy habitat for fish—has provided for its inhabitants for centuries. This place was home to the Nez Perce. Both local tradition and tribal memory confirm that this was once the site of a regionally important sockeye fishery. Then, as now, the land gives back.

In the 19th and 20th century, the land was used for cattle and horse grazing. Eventually, pasture grass was planted, displacing much of the native bunchgrass. The landscape is now a mixture of native and agricultural ground covers, with Ponderosa Pine, Cottonwood and Douglas-fir trees scattered about. Knight’s Pond, fed by Silver Lake Ditch, (one of two irrigation canals on the property), offers a shady respite for hikers.

In 1939, the Marr family acquired the property, and it remained in that family’s hands for several generations. They raised Hereford cattle, horses and planted for hay. Many local residents have fond memories of their experiences here when it operated as a ranch.

Wildflowers, lupine and rabbitbrush dot the hills in spring and summer. Wildflowers, lupine and rabbitbrush dot the hills in spring and summer.

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Watch for wildlife! This area is home to muledeer, fox, elk and a wide variety of raptor, upland game and songbird species.

The Trail
The 62-acre site offers short, scenic trails of varying difficulty. The entire trail system is less than a mile long, with initial steeper portions from the northeast and southeast trailheads.

Knight’s Pond

State Heritage Site boundary

South Main Street

Wallowa River

Old Chief Joseph Gravesite (National Park Service Site)

Parking

ADA Toilet

Trail

Trail with grade less than 6%, width 36”

Trail with grade greater than 6%, width 36”

Trail with grade greater than 6%, width 18”

State Heritage Site boundary

Old Chief Joseph Gravesite and Cemetery, to the south. The entire area is a sacred place to peoples of The Nez Perce Tribe, the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

Wildflowers, lupine and rabbitbrush dot the hills in spring and summer. Wildflowers, lupine and rabbitbrush dot the hills in spring and summer.

The property borders a Nez Perce National Historical Park, site of Old Chief Joseph Gravesite and Cemetery, to the south. The entire area is a sacred place to peoples of The Nez Perce Tribe, the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation.