



A People of Vision



MONTANA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION



PETITION TO RENAME JEFF DAVIS PEAK, JEFF DAVIS CREEK, AND JEFF DAVIS GULCH IN MONTANA

Montana is No Place to Honor White Supremacists: It’s Time for a More Inclusive and Accurate Telling of Montana’s History

“African slavery, as it exists in the United States, is a moral, a social, and a political blessing.”¹

—Jefferson Davis

SUMMARY

This petition seeks to rename three Montana geographic features: Jeff Davis Peak, Jeff Davis Creek, and Jeff Davis Gulch. All three were named after a white supremacist slave-owner and defender of slavery who declared war against the United States resulting in the deaths of three-quarters of a million Americans. Montana deserves better.

Rather than recognizing a white supremacist who attempted to tear this country apart, the proposed names will honor the people who helped bring us together and lift us up, as a state and as a people. These areas were first inhabited by Native Americans representing many tribal nations. We propose to honor the Native Americans to whom these lands retain great cultural significance, as well as the Chinese immigrants who have been largely unrecognized for their work in Montana.

¹ Compere, John. 2017. A reasonable resolution for Civil War slavery symbols, Abilene Reporter News, Oct. 17, 2017.

We propose:

- Renaming “Jeff Davis Peak” as “Three Eagles Peak” in honor of Salish Chief Three Eagles.
- Renaming “Jeff Davis Creek” as “Choos-wee Creek” to honor Chinese immigrants in Montana and the Salish people.
- Renaming “Jeff Davis Gulch” as “In-qu-qu-leet Gulch” to honor the Salish people who previously inhabited this area.

This petition is being submitted by the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, The Montana Racial Equity Project, Forward Montana Foundation, Montana Wilderness Association, Montana Human Rights Network, the Mai Wah Society, and The Wilderness Society, on behalf of our members and supporters, and all Montanans who reject place names that honor white supremacists.

BACKGROUND

A slave-owner, white supremacist, and ardent defender of slavery, Jefferson Davis is most well-known as President of the Confederacy—the states who declared war against the United States of America to defend slavery.

Jefferson Davis was a White Supremacist and Ardent Defender of Slavery

At the outset of the Civil War, nearly four million American men, women, and children lived in slavery—over one in ten Americans. Many lived under the most brutal and inhumane conditions imaginable. In some communities, more than two-thirds of the residents were enslaved.

A slave owner who owned 113 slaves,² Davis defended slavery throughout his life. After his inauguration as President of the Confederacy, Davis wrote:

We recognize the negro as God and God’s Book and God’s laws, in nature, tell us to recognize him. Our inferior, fitted expressly for servitude.³

Davis referred to African-Americans as “a lower caste,” “the servile race,” who were “stamped with inferiority.”

You too know, that among us, white men have an equality resulting from a presence of a lower caste, which cannot exist where white men fill the position here occupied by the servile race.⁴

² Johnson, Paul. 1997. *A History of the American People*. p. 452.

³ Lyman, Brian. 2019. ‘Where was the lord?’: On Jefferson Davis’ birthday, 9 slave testimonies. *Montgomery Advertiser*, June 3, 2019.

⁴ Coates, Ta-Nehisi. What this cruel war was over, *The Atlantic*, June 22, 0215.

Davis argued fervently that slavery in the Confederacy be recognized by law, and not be disturbed. His proposal to the United States prior to the outbreak of the Civil War stated:

“[P]roperty in slaves, recognized as such by the local law of any of the States of the Union, shall stand on the same footing in all constitutional and federal relations as any other species of property so recognized; and, like other property, shall not be subject to be divested or impaired by the local law of any other State...”⁵

The Confederate Constitution reflected Davis’ views and contained a provision prohibiting any law “impairing the right of property in negro slaves.”⁶ The document went on:

The citizens of each State shall be entitled to all the privileges and immunities of citizens in the several States; and shall have the right of transit and sojourn in any State of this Confederacy, with their slaves and other property; and the right of property in said slaves shall not be thereby impaired.⁷

Davis held tight to his defense of slavery until his death. Decades after his defeat in the Civil War, Davis wrote of his decision to defend slavery and engage in war against the United States:

It has been said that I should apply to the United States for a pardon. But repentance must precede the right of pardon, and I have not repented. If it were all to do over again, I would again do just as I did in 1861.⁸

Jefferson Davis was a Traitor Who Rebelled Against the United States

Prior to the Civil War, Davis served in the United States Senate. Once Mississippi seceded, Davis resigned in order to lead the south in war against the United States. The war Davis led resulted in 620,000-750,000 American soldiers being killed—to this day, more than any other war in American history.⁹ Until the Viet Nam War, the Civil War resulted in more American deaths than all other wars combined.

The war Davis pursued was based on slavery, and the government he ran defended slavery:

⁵ “Compromise Proposal” of Jefferson Davis, 1860. Available at <http://www.civilwarcauses.org/comp.htm#Jefferson%20Davis%20of%20Mississippi>.

⁶ Constitution of the Confederate States, March 11, 1861, available at https://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/csa_csa.asp.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ Kilgore, Ed. 2019. Celebrate racism! It’s Jefferson Davis’s birthday in Alabama, *New York Magazine*, June 3, 2019.

⁹ U.S. Civil War Took Bigger Toll Than Previously Estimated, New Analysis Suggests. *Science Daily*. September 22, 2011.

We recognize the fact of the inferiority stamped upon [African-Americans] by the Creator, and from the cradle to the grave, our Government, as a civil institution, marks that inferiority.¹⁰

In his famous “Cornerstone Speech,” Davis’ vice president, Alexander Stephens, argued that a “cornerstone” of the Confederate government “rests upon the great truth, that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery—subordination to the superior race—is his natural and normal condition.” The new government, Stephens argued, “is the first, in the history of the world, based upon this great physical, philosophical, and moral truth.”¹¹

When the United States rightfully refused to accede to the South’s demands, Davis joined the South in declaring war, stating:

The time for compromise has now passed, and the South is determined to maintain her position, and make all who oppose her smell Southern powder and feel Southern steel.¹²

Of course, the “all who oppose her” were the United States of America, and those who were to “smell Southern powder and feel Southern steel” were the men and boys of the United States who defended the United States against the southern rebels. Davis and the traitorous South fought viciously against the United States, as Davis argued that “the war...must go on till the last man of this generation falls in his tracks...unless you acknowledge our right to self-government.”¹³

Davis was rightfully imprisoned for treason, and it took a Presidential pardon to free him. As with his continued defense of slavery, and despite the bloodshed he caused defending slavery, Davis remained unrepentant after the war, proclaiming:

Nothing fills me with deeper sadness than to see a Southern man apologizing for the defense we made of our inheritance. Our cause was so just, so sacred, that had I known all that has come to pass, had I known what was to be inflicted upon me, all that my country was to suffer, all that our posterity was to endure, I would do it all over again.¹⁴

¹⁰ The Papers of Jefferson Davis, Volume 6, pp. 277–84. Transcribed from the Congressional Globe, 36th Congress, 1st Session, pp. 916–18.

¹¹ Dotinga, Randy. 2015. The famous 1861 ‘Cornerstone Speech’ that aimed for hard truths about the Confederate battle flag, *Christian Science Monitor*, July 8, 2015.

¹² <https://quotes.thefamouspeople.com/jefferson-davis-1795.php>

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ *Id.*

Montana deserves better than to have three geographic features named in recognition of a white supremacist who, in his defense of slavery, led to the deaths of three-quarters of a million Americans.

PROPOSED NAMES

We propose renaming “Jeff Davis Peak” as “Three Eagles Peak”, in honor of Salish Chief Three Eagles. We propose renaming “Jeff Davis Creek” as “Choos-wee Creek” to honor Chinese immigrants in Montana and the Salish people. We propose renaming “Jeff Davis Gulch” as “In-qu-qu-leet Gulch” to honor the Salish people who historically inhabited this area.

Prior to suffering a dramatic reduction in population following the introduction of horses, non-native diseases including smallpox, and firearms, and a rise in inter-tribal conflict, the Salish were organized in about half a dozen large bands, each based in a discreet area and with its own leadership. One band was based in and around *Čtmíšé* (Cottonwoods Above the Water, which is the Helena area) and another at *Sk^wumcné Sewtk^ws* (Pocket Gopher's Waters, which is the Big Hole River). These areas continue to be of great cultural importance to the Salish and Kalispel people today. The proposed names honor the Salish and Kalispel people, and “Choos-wee Creek” honors as well the Chinese immigrants who played an important role in Montana’s history.

Three Eagles Peak

We propose renaming “Jeff Davis Peak” as “Three Eagles Peak”, in honor of Salish Chief Three Eagles. Three Eagles is the English translation of *Četl Sqéymí*, who became head chief of the Salish in the 1790s. In September 1805, Salish scouts spotted an approaching group of strangers. It was the Lewis and Clark expedition. Chief Three Eagles met with his elders and warriors to discuss the situation and evaluate whether the strangers presented a threat to the people. He decided they did not, and instructed his warriors to do no harm.



Instead, Lewis and Clark were welcomed into the Salish camp at *Kʷitl Pʷp̓l̓m* (Big Open — Ross's Hole), and given gifts of food, horses, and material items. It is the encounter depicted in Charlie Russell's masterpiece, "Lewis and Clark Meeting the Flatheads," the mural on the wall in the Montana House of Representatives. Chief Three Eagle's decision, described in numerous tribal accounts and reflected in the expedition's journals, set the precedent for Salish policy toward non-Indians ever since: a steadfast commitment to peace, and an equally resolute insistence on tribal sovereignty, rights, and justice. That approach was famously adhered to by Chief Three Eagle's successors as Salish head chief throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It continues to be followed today by leaders of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes.

Choos-wee Creek

Diversity characterized Montana's early population. The mining boom attracted settlers from all over the nation and several foreign countries...a substantial minority...were Chinese, and in 1870 they constituted nearly ten percent of Montana's population.

- Historian John Wunder

We propose renaming "Jeff Davis Creek" as "Choos-wee Creek" to honor both the Chinese immigrants who built Montana mines and industry and the Salish people. Choos-wee is an Anglicized phonetic spelling of *Čuswí*, the Salish word for Chinese people. The name is proposed in recognition of the Chinese community along this stream in the late nineteenth century, while at the same time reflecting the area as a part of the territory of the *Séliš* (Salish or "Flathead") nation reaching back to time immemorial. The word *čuswí* refers to the single long braid or "queue" that many Chinese people had at that time.

Chinese immigrants played an incredibly important role in developing and working in Montana's mines and industry. By 1870, ten percent of Montana's population were Chinese, who performed years of backbreaking work developing Montana's mines. The Chinese in Montana suffered intense racism, including beatings and hangings; boycotts of Chinese-owned businesses; state laws taxing Chinese businesses, prohibiting Chinese immigrants from owning mines, and prohibiting interracial marriage, in addition to Federal laws targeting Chinese immigrants and laborers.

According to the Forest Service and University of Montana, the Chinese role in mining in Beaverhead County was the most significant in Montana.¹⁵ According to Montana historian John Wunder, "Diversity characterized Montana's early population. The mining boom attracted settlers from all over the nation and several foreign countries...a substantial minority...were Chinese, and in 1870 they constituted nearly ten percent of Montana's population."¹⁶

The Mai Wah Society and Mai Wah Museum in Butte celebrate the role of Chinese immigrants in Montana. "Choos-wee Creek" recognizes the important, and largely forgotten, role Chinese immigrants played in building Montana, as well as the Salish people who historically inhabited the area.

In-qu-qu-leet Gulch

We propose renaming "Jeff Davis Gulch" as "In-qu-qu-leet Gulch." In-qu-qu-leet is a rough phonetic rendering of the Salish word *Nq^wq^wli?t*, meaning Place of Lodgepole Pine (*Pinus contorta*). The lodgepole pine is a tree of great importance in the traditional way of life of the *Séliš* (Salish or "Flathead") and *Qlispé* (Kalispel or "Pend d'Oreille") people, including for food (the cambium layer of the bark), light rope or twine (made from bark strips), medicine, and tipi poles. The area in which the gulch is located has always been well known to the Salish for its abundance of lodgepole. Not far from the gulch is a place called *Snčt'qeyq'eymtn*, meaning Place Where Tipi Poles Are Harvested. More generally, there is extensive documentation in both oral histories and the written record of Salish people continuing to use the Helena area passes during the horse era, including nearby Mullan Pass, and of large encampments in the Helena area during movements to and from buffalo hunts.

PETITIONERS

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¹⁵ Chinese Pioneers on Your National Forests. U.S. Forest Service and University of Montana.

¹⁶ Wunder, John. 1980. Law and Chinese in frontier Montana, *Montana the Magazine of Western History*, 30:3, p. 18-31, summer, 1980.