

From: [Ben King](#)
To: [California Water Commission](#)
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Subject: Background For Public Comment California Water Commission Meeting May 15, 2024 - The Salt Pomo and Crystal Salt Mine Stories
Date: Monday, May 13, 2024 4:20:34 PM
Attachments: [Excerpt From SA Barret 1908 Ethno-Geography of the Pomo and Neighboring Indians.pdf](#)

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Dear Chairman Swanson, Executive Director Yun, and Fellow California Water Commission Board Members,

As background for my public comment at the May 15, 2024 California Water Commission Meeting I would like to share the background of the Salt Pomo Tribe and some of the history regarding the presence of artesian saline springs in the Coast Range as a background for your consideration of water policy and water quality concerns for the Subbasins on the west side of the Sacramento Valley.

I would urge you to visit the site of the Salt Pomo Tribe at www.saltpomo.org which is the website of the Chh e ee Fokaa Band of Northeastern Pomo historically known as the Salt Pomo tribe.

The presence of artesian salt water which was present in the numerous saltwater springs has been known since time immemorial and was the source of the salt trade of the Northeastern Pomo tribe known as the Pomo Salt Tribe. The Salt Pomo tribe was located north of the present-day Stonyford and next to Snow Mountain. The Salt Pomo gathered salt from the salt springs in the present-day Salt Springs Valley in southern Glenn County. . Like most if not all the indigenous people's history in California, the history of the Salt Pomo people is a tragic one but is important and interesting to know that this tribe were ancient salt traders and collected the natural salt springs in the area. See the Attached excerpt from the 1908 publication of " The Ethno-Geography of the Pomo and Neighboring Indians" by S.A. Barret. The whole of the section regarding the Salt Pomo beginning on Page 239 is interesting but the reference to the salt deposits on Page 240 and the chemical results by a UC Berkeley Chemistry Professor on page 241 are very interesting from a hydro chemical perspective. There is also a Map from the Appendix of the 1908 Report included in the Attachment.

The history of the Salt Pomo people coincides with some of the earliest European settle history as detailed in John Bidwell's autobiography describing the discovery of the salt lake at present day Sites in Colusa County. In Justus Rogers History of Colusa County on Page 49 – Bidwell recounts: water so "...salty that neither ourselves nor our animals could drink it..". (Rogers Page 49) As referenced in the footnote of Page 49, this site which had become to be known as Salt Lake near the town of Sites became a commercial salt mine known as the Crystal Salt Company.

The early success of the Crystal Salt Company was celebrated in the April 30, 1892, edition of the Colusa Sun newspaper had the following account of a picnic at the salt mine for the ladies of Colusa – here is the excerpt from the newspaper edition :

On Monday, the Directors of the Crystal Salt Company moved the principal place of business to Colusa. Wells are being sunk, vats built, and other work done to develop the business. The works are three miles north of Sites. Water will be pumped into a lake covering some 10 to 16 acres and drawn off into vats after it has become almost strong enough to begin to form salt. In addition to the employment of solar heat in making the salt, the natural gas that is found in great abundance will be used. The solar heat will be put in operation first. The supply of gas is inexhaustible as well as the supply of water from 15 to 40 per cent salt; the sea being only 3 per cent. The salt when made is some 3 per cent, purer than any other salt known to commerce. The bittern, or the water left after it has quit making salt, has from 20 to 30 grains of iodine to the gallon. This is stronger in iodine than any known water. The iodine is freed from the other substances by distillation and the natural gas will furnish the fuel for that. The outlook for the company is splendid. The Colusa and Lake railroad took the Directors of the company out on a special Monday morning, and returned in the evening, and Superintendent Harrington took occasion to extend a free excursion to the ladies. A number went out and took provisions for a picnic. Mr. Peter Peterson on whose farm the works are located, and Mr. J. P. Rathbun the company's Superintendent, were on hand with conveyances and took most of the ladies over to the works, where a dinner was served which was enjoyed by all. The ladies request us to extend sincere thanks to Superintendent Harrington for the courtesy of the trip, and to Messrs. Peterson and Rathbun for the pleasure of the trip from Sites to the works. . The ladies were emphatic in praise of Peter Peterson Jr., who took so much pains to contribute to their pleasure.

Stony creek it passes southward, along the low ridge separating Big and Little Stony creeks, for a distance of about four miles; and thence, turning westward, it runs along a secondary ridge on the northern slope of the divide south of Big Stony creek valley to the crest of the Coast Range at a point near the head of the south fork of Stony creek. To the east and south of this portion of the boundary lies the territory of the Southerly Wintun. The western boundary is the crest of the Coast Range, beyond which the Yuki territory extends over the greater part of the region drained by the headwaters of Eel river.

This small, detached Pomo area was surrounded on the north, east, and south by Wintun territory, while the Yuki bordered it on the west.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION.

The people speaking the Northeastern Pomo dialect thus lived in an isolated area consisting of the drainage basin of the upper headwaters of Big Stony creek, and were separated from the main Pomo area by Yuki and Wintun territory and the highest portion of the Coast Range mountains. The portion of the valley of Stony creek held by the Northeastern Pomo is from a quarter of a mile to three-quarters of a mile wide, and extends from the northern boundary of the area up nearly to the confluence of the south fork of Stony creek with the main stream. Low hills on the east separate this valley from the Sacramento valley, while on the west the Coast Range mountains rise very abruptly. Some of the highest peaks of this portion of the Coast Range are here: Snow Mt. and St. John Mt. The entire area is only sparsely wooded in the foot-hills, but there are considerable forests of pine on the higher mountains. Native grasses and flowering plants were formerly very abundant and these, together with the oaks, furnished vegetable foods, while game was plentiful in the mountains and fish were to be had at certain seasons in the streams.

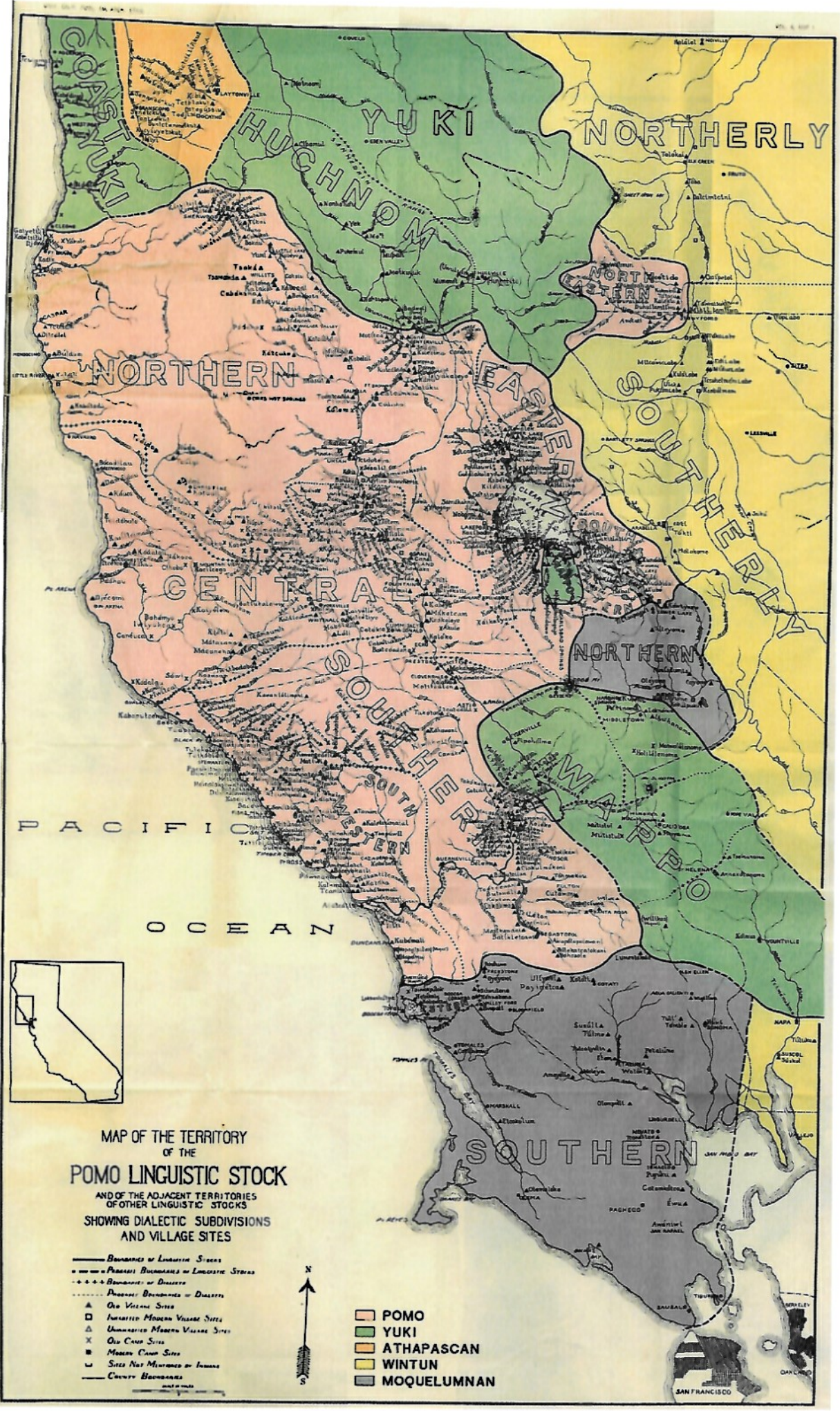
Salt Deposits.

Among the foot-hills of Colusa and Glenn counties are several large seepages where salt-bearing water evaporates and leaves the salt crystallized upon the surface. The best known and probably the largest of these seepages and salt-beds, as the surfaces

upon which the salt crystallizes are called, is the one in what is known as Salt-spring valley about three and one-half miles north of the town of Stonyford and about a mile west of Big Stony creek. This salt-bed is situated on the northeast side of a very narrow valley and is surrounded on the east and south by low brush covered hills from which at many points brackish water seeps into the earth of the salt-bed. This earth, which covers about three-quarters of an acre, is, when dry, a dirty white in color and of the fineness of chalk dust, and forms a layer, reaching a depth of about three and one-half feet near the middle of the bed, over the ordinary black soil common in the vicinity. During the rainy season the salt does not crystallize, but during the summer months it forms a white coat, very much resembling snow, over the entire surface of the bed, and reaches sometimes a depth of three or four inches. It is then that it is gathered by the Indians and stored either in the crude state or after refining, which consists in dissolving the crude material in water from which it re-crystallizes upon evaporation of the water, leaving a finely-divided, white salt which is very palatable.²⁰⁸

It seems that the people speaking the Northeastern Pomo dialect exercised, or at least attempted to exercise, full property rights in respect to the salt at this particular place, and made it an article of trade with their neighbors, at least at times, though there are differences of opinion as to how they sold it. They themselves say that they sometimes sold the refined salt and that at other times they required a payment for the privilege of gathering the crude material from the salt-bed. Some of the Pomo from the Clear lake and upper Russian river region say they were not required to buy the crude salt, but at the same time

²⁰⁸ Dr. W. C. Morgan of the Department of Chemistry of the University of California has made an analysis of the salt refined by the Indians from crude material obtained at the deposit in Salt-spring valley, and finds that it contains 28% of insoluble material. Of the soluble material 99.2% is sodium chloride, thus showing the soluble portion to be more pure than the ordinary salt of commerce. The refining process removes a large percentage of insoluble material from the crude salt, but the process, as this analysis shows, is inadequate to thorough purification. As before stated, the refined product is very palatable, and is white notwithstanding the fact that 28% of it is extraneous material. This latter fact is probably due to the circumstance that the surface of the seepage is a finely-divided white earth. The refined salt is not perceptibly affected by damp weather because of its almost total lack of magnesium chloride.

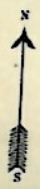


MAP OF THE TERRITORY
OF THE
POMO LINGUISTIC STOCK
AND OF THE ADJACENT TERRITORIES
OF OTHER LINGUISTIC STOCKS

SHOWING DIALECTIC SUBDIVISIONS
AND VILLAGE SITES

- Boundaries of Linguistic Stocks
- - - - - Proposed Boundaries of Linguistic Stocks
- Boundaries of Dialects
- Proposed Boundaries of Dialects
- ▲ Old Village Sites
- ◻ Unmarked Modern Village Sites
- ◻ Unmarked Modern Village Sites
- × Old Camp Sites
- ◻ Modern Camp Sites
- ◻ Sites Not Mentioned by Indians
- County Boundaries

- ◻ POMO
- ◻ YUKI
- ◻ ATHAPASCAN
- ◻ WINTUN
- ◻ MOQUELUMNAN



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