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AMERICAN INDIANS OF THE EASTERN SHORE, by Chief Sewell "Winterhawk" Fitzhugh, 6 August 2003

As part of its important and popular "Oral History" series, the South Dorchester Folk Museum presents Chief Sewell "Winterhawk" Fitzhugh's talk on the customs, traditions and history of Native Americans of the Eastern Shore of Maryland. Mr Fitzhugh is Chief of the Nause-Waiwash that includes remnants of the Choptank, Nanticoke, Pocomoke and Monie tribes. He appears in traditional tribal dress.

The historical perspective of the trials and tribulations of Native Americans on the Eastern Shore will be of particular interest to persons attuned to the history of this area and its people. As European settlers began to make life difficult for Native American people in Dorchester, the tribe found it easier to leave the higher ground coveted by farmers and moved to the marshy lowlands of South Dorchester. In effect, the area now covered by the Refuge is referred to by many Native Americans as "our homeland". Just the derivation of the term Nause-Waiwash is extremely interesting, the name having evolved from two Native American villages in Dorchester. Waiwash was near what is known as Secretary today. Nause was located in the region of Elliott Island where the Chief makes his home today.

By cleverly dealing with government restrictions legislated by the Indian Removal Act of 1830 requiring Native Americans to move west of the Mississippi River, the Nause-Waiwash managed to remain and retain occupation of lands along the East Coast, a formidable task at the time. Presently, Chief Winterhawk estimates that there are about 5,000 Native American people living on Maryland's Eastern Shore. The Nause-Waiwash Band has about 200 official members. The Nause-Waiwash have recently been heavily involved in the process of restoring the old Hughes Chapel II, located a few miles east of the Blackwater, NWR visitor center. The structure will be used as a longhouse where the tribe can gather for seasonal events as well as serving as a place for other educational programs, social gatherings and celebrations.

Chief Fitzhugh is a recognized American Indian consultant both locally and on the national scene. He is a member of various Societies, Councils and Cultural Organizations.



Chief Fitzhugh in Native Dress