Change Dead Indian Creek to Latgawa Creek: stream; 9.8 mi. long; heads in the Cascades Siskiyou National Monument (Bureau of Land Management), 3.7 mi. W of Howard Lake at 42°13’17”N, 122°29’08”W, flows NNE through Owens Prairie and into Rogue River National Forest, then N to enter South Fork Little Butte Creek; the name derives from a Takelma word meaning “upland water source” or “people of the upland” and is associated with nearby Camp Latgawa; Tps37&38N, R3E, Willamette Meridian; Jackson County, Oregon; 42°20’18”N, 122°27’10”W; USGS map – Robinson Butte 1:24,000 (mouth); Not: Dead Indian Creek.

Proposal: to change a name considered offensive
Map: USGS Robinson Butte 1:24,000 (mouth)
Proponent: Alice Knotts; San Diego, CA
Administrative area: Rogue River National Forest / Cascades Siskiyou National Monument
Previous BGN Action: None
Names associated with feature:
GNIS: Dead Indian Creek (FID 1140701)
Local Usage: None found
Case Summary: This proposal is the first of three to change the names of a stream, a summit, and a spring in Jackson County that currently include the words “Dead Indian.” The first is to change the name of Dead Indian Creek, a 9.8-mile-long tributary of South Fork Little Butte Creek. The stream heads within the Cascades Siskiyou National Monument, managed by the Bureau of Land Management, and then flows north into the Rogue River National Forest. The name Dead Indian Creek has appeared on USGS maps since 1891 and continued to be labeled at recently as 2017. It was also shown on the 1980 Oregon Water Resources Department map of the Rogue Drainage Basin. The latter map also shows Dead Indian Canal and Dead Indian Dam, but these names are not listed in GNIS, nor is the dam recorded in the National Inventory of Dams. A list of Jackson County locations compiled by the Gold Hill Historical Society (date unknown, but likely around 2010) recorded the locations of Dead Indian Creek and Dead Indian Mountain (q.v.) as “Jackson/Klamath Co. lines,” noting that the names dated from 1854 and referred to “the death of two [Rogue River] Indians.”
Local history suggests the name refers to a conflict between rival groups of Shasta and Latgawa Indians, which resulted in the death of at least one individual. According to the proponent, “Since 1953, the story of the Dead Indian has been told around campfires at night and the legend carried forward.” The proposed replacement name is associated with that of a Methodist Church camp that was established close to the mouth of the stream area in 1953 on the site of the Dead Indian Soda Springs Resort and Forest Camp. The proposal states, “Leaders of the camp, especially Marjorie Knotts, engaged campers in becoming more sensitive to the Native American heritage of the area by bringing in leaders such as Thomas Doty, the storyteller par excellence of Latgawa traditions. She conducted research on the early Native American name for this area in the 1980s. She sought advice and met with members of tribes, with people who knew the old languages and with faculty at Southern Oregon University. Her passion was to find a more appropriate name than ‘Dead Indian Soda Springs Camp.’ [Despite opposition from some of the camp’s leaders] she led the official name change of the camp in 1983. Over the years, thousands of English-speaking people who have been to the camp have become accustomed to using that name.” The word Latgawa is from the Takelma language and means “upland water source” or “people of the upland.” The proponent further states “the large geographic area by Mt. McLaughlin that extends from the Cascade summit west and includes tributaries of the Rogue River has been called the ‘Dead Indian Area.’ . . . but the name does not fit well in today’s culture.” Finally, “The Latgawa people who lived in the area are now almost invisible if not gone. After
extensive Rogue Valley wars, they were removed in the 1850s to the Grande Ronde Reservation and the Siletz Reservation.”
These proposals were submitted by the Oregon Board on Geographic Names (OGNB) on behalf of a resident of San Diego, who was a long-time resident of the Rogue Valley and Methodist pastor at Camp Latgawa. In addition to the three “Dead Indian” name changes, three additional proposals would apply the new name Latgawa Pinnacles to an unnamed cliff in the vicinity, and the new commemorative names Marjorie Falls and Knotts Bluff to nearby a waterfall and cliff, respectively.
In 2019, the BGN received proposals to change the three “racist, outdated and offensive” names from “Dead Indian” to “Chiloquin,” a word that was intended to recognize the Chiloquin and Klamath people who have long inhabited southern Oregon. However, upon learning that the OGNB was already considering the “Latgawa” proposals, the proponent withdrew the “Chiloquin” names. The U.S. Forest Service recommends approval of this change.