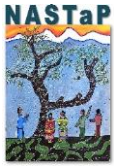


The Association for Native American Sacred Trees and Places

Since the mid 1500s when the Spanish first arrived in North America, writers have documented their observations as well as stories from Indigenous people of the Americas about their practice of shaping and modifying trees for spiritual, medicinal, nutritional, navigational, ceremonial, utilitarian, or other purposes. NASTaP's co-founder and President, Dr. James Jefferson, a Southern Ute born in 1933, was taught by his elders to recognize and interpret these trees. Other Native Americans have described similar practices throughout the United States and Canada. Notable contemporary documentation of these cultural traditions include those by NASTaP co-founder, John Wesley Anderson, Don and Diane Wells, Dennis Downs, Steve Houser, Linda Pelon, and Jimmy W. Arterberry. Dr. Jefferson's teachings, as well as these resources, provide the core of NASTaP's standards for recognizing and identifying Native American culturally modified trees (CMTs). We recognize that not all CMTs may be verified or authenticated by Native Americans, and that not all bent trees are CMTs. We offer these standards as a way to identify potential Native American CMTs with the understanding that ***the more indicators a tree exhibits, the more likely it is to be a Native American CMT.*** For more information see the resource list or visit www.nastap.org.

NASTaP's CMT Identification Standards

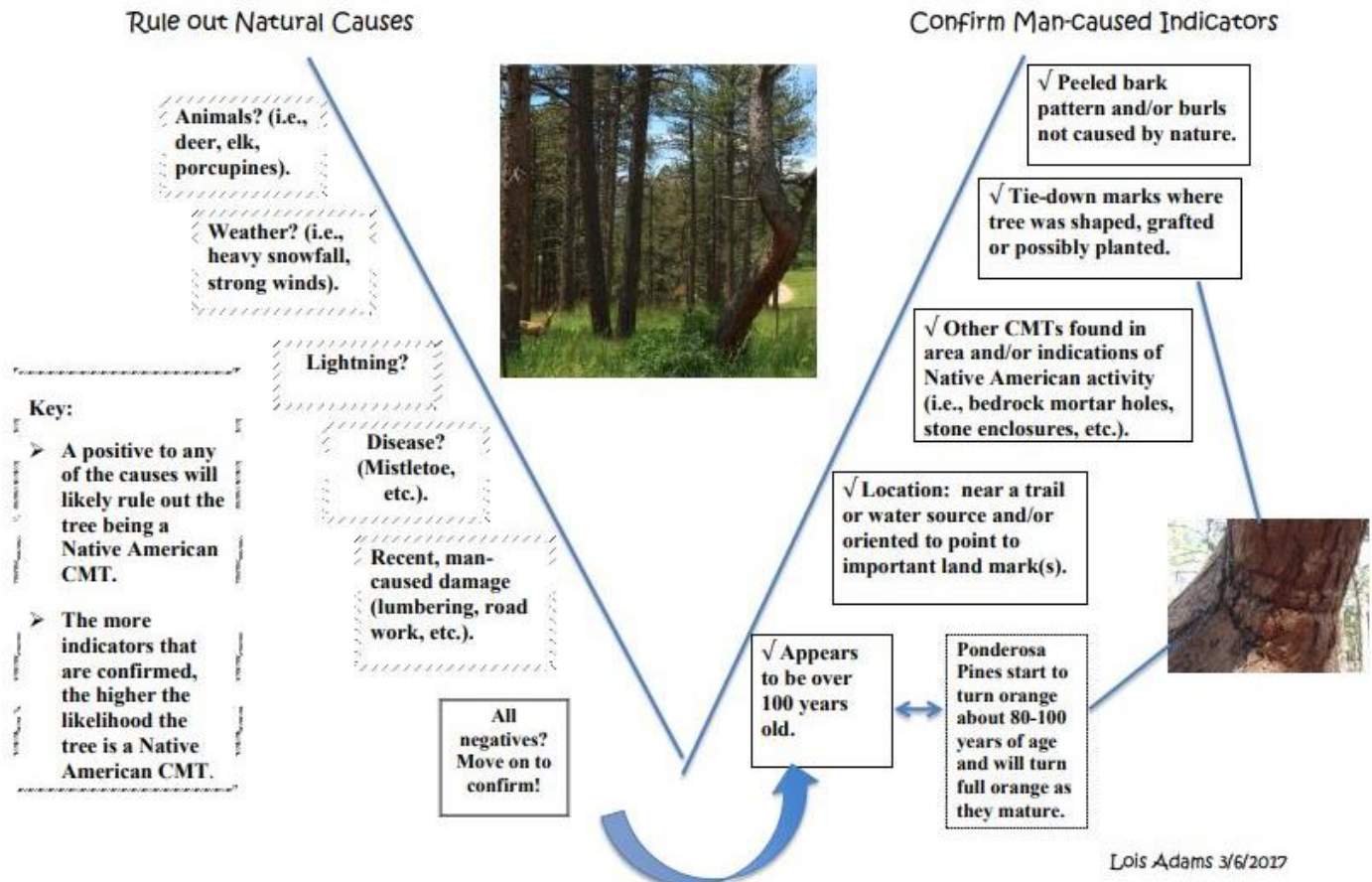
1. **Natural causes have been ruled out or are questionable.** Natural causes may include damage by animals, weather, lightning, disease, or non-Indigenous humans after the late 1860s.
2. **Age:** Usually, modifications would have been started before the late 1860s (although some may have been modified afterwards when Native Americans revisited the CMT).
3. **Distinctive shape:** The CMT will have a distinctive shape, including but not limited to bends, twists, fusions, intertwining, or other shapes that are not typical for that type of tree. Some shapes may be repeated in other trees or within the same tree, and certain tribes or families may have created "signature" shapes or modifications.
4. **Distinguishing features:** CMTs have one or more unique features not caused by nature. These may include, but are not limited to:
 - ♦ bark peels
 - ♦ braiding
 - ♦ pruning, cut branches
 - ♦ loops, geometrical shapes
 - ♦ framing other trees or sites
 - ♦ evidence of planting where that species is not normally found (e.g. cedar/juniper)
 - ♦ tie-down marks
 - ♦ introduced burning
 - ♦ split trunk or branches
 - ♦ rock or object insertion
 - ♦ primary trunk killed or cut off
 - ♦ fusing
 - ♦ grafting
 - ♦ girdling
 - ♦ cut or gouge marks
 - ♦ burls
5. **Location:** CMTs are often located near water sources, rock outcroppings, geographic features, landmarks, ley lines, vortexes or other high energy spots (detectible or felt by some), or other significant sites.
6. **Proximity to other cultural sites:** CMTs are often found where there are indications of Native American activities. These may include, but are not limited to:
 - ♦ campsites
 - ♦ stone features
 - ♦ old trails
 - ♦ artifacts
 - ♦ other modified trees
 - ♦ pueblos, cliff dwellings, pit houses
 - ♦ petroglyphs and pictographs
 - ♦ Indian mounds/burial sites
 - ♦ tool-making areas
 - ♦ moki steps
 - ♦ fire signal sites
 - ♦ medicine wheels
7. **Oral tradition or historic documentation:** There may be Native American culture, oral traditions, stories, or historical documentation that connect the CMT to Indigenous peoples and their cultural practices. These need not be oral traditions known by all tribes, clans, families, or tribal members, but may have been described by tribal elders or others with historic cultural knowledge.



The Association for Native American Sacred Trees and Places

NASTaP is grateful to John Wesley Anderson for providing permission for NASTaP to use the following CMT Verification Chart (V-Chart), which he developed in 2017 with Lois Adams.

Culturally Modified Tree (CMT) Verification Chart (V-Chart)



Suggested books:

- ♦ John Wesley Anderson
 - [Ute Prayer Trees of the Pikes Peak Region](#)
 - [Native American Prayer Trees of Colorado](#)
- ♦ Dennis Downs
 - [Native American Trail Marker Trees: Marking Paths through the Wilderness](#)
- ♦ Steve Houser, Linda Pelon , Jimmy W. Arterberry
 - [Comanche Marker Trees](#)
- ♦ Don and Diane Wells
 - [Mystery of the Trees: Native American Makers of a Cultural Way of Life That Soon May be Gone](#)
 - [Deciphering the Signs: Sacred Indian Trees, and Places](#)