

# Crow Indians face death to put affairs in order

**BY ELLEN WULFHORST**  
REUTERS

CROW AGENCY, Montana — A team of law students which recently descended on the Crow Indian Reservation in the American West to help tribal members write property wills, were cautioned in advance by their professors to be culturally sensitive.

Do not say the words “death,” “dying” or even “will,” they were told.

“It’s really tough to do a will without saying death,” conceded the architect of the Tribal Wills Project, University of Denver’s Sturm College of Law Professor Lucy Marsh.

Nevertheless, the week-long effort produced more than a hundred wills among the Crow Indians in southeastern Montana who traditionally shun the practice of deciding how to pass on their property.

“Us as Crows, the older ones, they don’t talk too much about death. Just to get them to come through the door is something else,” said Kenny Shane, a former tribal official, as the wills project kicked off last month at the Little Big Horn College in Crow Agency, the reserva-

tion’s headquarters.

“I know it’s 2016 in the rest of the world, but we still have our ways that we follow here,” Shane said.

Crows are raised not to talk about death or even wear the color black, he said.

If there is no will, the property of many deceased Indians goes to the eldest child or grandchild under U.S. federal “single-heir” law, shutting out other members of what could be a large or extended family.

Even so, many Indians avoid writing wills, tribal members said.

“People are afraid to do wills because once they do them, they feel that they’re going die soon,” said Jerome Hugs Sr., who arrived at Crow Agency with his wife to write their wills.

Jerome and Dora Hugs are among the more than 13,000 enrolled tribal members who live on the Crow Reservation, established along with other Indian reservations in the mid-19th century. Today there are more than 300 reservations in the United States.

At about 3,565 square miles, the Crow reservation of grassland and picturesque mountain ranges is roughly as big as the island nation of



ELLEN WULFHORST | REUTERS

Burton Pretty On Top Sr., a member of America’s Crow Indian Tribe in Crow Agency, Montana, joined other tribal members recently in a project to help Native Americans write their wills.

Cyprus. One of its major industries is coal mining, along with grazing, farming and oil and gas extraction.

Reservation land was allotted to tribal members in plots typically ranging from 40 to 160 acres under 19th century laws.

As those allotments were divided and redivided over generations, hundreds of family members now share small plots.

The dividing process is

known as fractionization, which the single-heir law was designed to address. By and large, Indians cannot sell or leave their land to non-natives.

The single-heir law, enacted a dozen years ago, created a need for Indians to write wills so they, and not the government, can decide who gets their land, according to Marsh.

The 20 law students offered to help write property wills

on the Crow Reservation for the first time last month. Previous Tribal Wills Projects have been conducted among the Ute and Navajo Indians in the U.S. Southwest.

From those earlier ventures, students were trained to be conscious of traditional beliefs, such as not saying aloud the names of dead people, using the word “pass” instead of “die” and not wearing black clothes.

“That was kind of a challenge, professional attire without a lot of black,” said law student Lanna Giauque. “Half my professional wardrobe is black.”

The students need not have worried too much. The Crows who arrived to write wills said they could put aside traditional beliefs with little or no hesitation.

“I know it’s practical to do this, to rest in peace,” said Hugs, although he said making a will seemed like disturbing the natural process.

“If you see a small tree out there, you leave it out there,” he said. “You let nature grow by itself and die, and you don’t mess with it.”

Wilma Stands, a tribal elder at 78, and her 81-year-old husband Lawrence Stands, said they had no time

for tradition or superstition about death.

“When it comes, it comes. There’s nothing we can do,” Wilma Stands said. “You never know what’s going to happen.”

Key to the project, which was advertised in the local newspaper and spread by word of mouth, was the price, said Burton Pretty On Top Sr., also a tribal elder.

“They said that the service would be free, which is most important for us,” he said, smiling out from under the brim of a white cowboy hat.

The Crows’ ancestors hunted bison on America’s Great Plains, on territory that once stretched across three states.

Several Crow served as scouts for Lt. Col. George Custer, who lost the Battle of the Little Bighorn, known as Custer’s Last Stand, in 1876.

The victors were Sioux and Arapaho Indians, whose leaders included the warrior Crazy Horse and Chief Sitting Bull.

The site of the famous battle, fought in the effort to force Indians onto reservations as white settlers moved westward, is now a monument on the Crow Reservation.

## Yellow fever outbreak faces vaccine shortage

**BY BEN HIRSCHLER**  
REUTERS

LONDON — The worst yellow fever outbreak in decades, which has killed 325 people in Angola and spread as far as China, has prompted the World Health Organization to draw up plans to eke out vaccine supplies by using one-fifth of the normal dose.

Alejandro Costa, team leader for emergency vaccination and stockpiles, said an expert meeting would consider the plan next week, paving the way for the WHO to advise countries to shift to the lower dose on an emergency basis if necessary.

Fears of a wider outbreak of the mosquito-borne disease were fueled this week by the confirmation of locally transmitted yellow fever in Kinshasa, capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

A major outbreak in the city would leave health care authorities with little choice but to cut the dose per patient.

“If we have to vaccinate Kinshasa, that would be a trigger,” Costa said in a telephone interview on Thursday. “We don’t have enough vaccine. Kinshasa has a population of 12 million to 14 million people, and we only have today around 6 million doses.”

Concerns about limited vaccine supplies have been building for some time, with independent medics calling for low-dose use in an article The Lancet journal in April.

Limited scientific research suggests a one-fifth dose works as well as the full dose, although it is not

clear if it lasts as long. Studies to date also have only involved adults, so it is uncertain how well children would be protected.

The current outbreak of yellow fever was first detected in Angola in late December 2015 and has since spread into DRC, Congo-Brazzaville, Kenya and Sao Tome, as well as to China, which has close commercial ties with oil-rich Angola.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies called on Wednesday for an immediate scale-up in response, warning that limited vaccine supplies and other problems could turn Angola’s epidemic into a larger crisis.

While the population in the Angolan capital of Luanda is now almost completely vaccinated, this has depleted the world’s emergency stockpile of vaccines, and a slow vaccination campaign has allowed the virus to spread elsewhere.

Yellow fever is transmitted by the same mosquitoes that spread the Zika and dengue viruses, although it is a much more serious disease. The “yellow” in the name refers to the jaundice that affects some patients.

Although about 6 million vaccine doses are kept in reserve for emergencies, there is no quick way to boost production when there is a spike in demand, as at present.

Manufacturers, including the Institut Pasteur, government factories in Brazil and Russia, and French drug-maker Sanofi, use a time-consuming method involving sterile chicken eggs.

## Nuisance

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Know the risk

EEE is rare but deadly. In fact, because of the high mortality rate, it’s considered to be one of the most serious mosquito-borne illnesses in the country. From 2004-2013, an average of eight human cases of EEE were reported annually throughout the U.S., according to data collected by the CDC. In 40 percent of those cases, the disease was fatal.

Occurring in the eastern half of the U.S., EEE causes illness in humans, horses and some bird species. Many people infected with EEE will have no obvious symptoms, according to the CDC, but those who do develop illness experience a range of symptoms, including high fever, sore neck, headache, lack of energy and inflammation of the brain, which can lead to coma or death.

West Nile virus, which occurs throughout the U.S., is more common than EEE. Last year, 2,060 human cases of West Nile virus were reported nationwide, and about 6 percent of the cases were fatal, resulting in 119 deaths.

The majority of people infected with West Nile virus don’t show any symptoms. A mild West Nile virus infection can cause fever, headache and body aches, often with a skin rash and swollen lymph glands. In serious cases, the virus can manifest into neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions, paralysis and death, according to the CDC.

There are no vaccines for EEE or West Nile virus, and there is no specific treatment for either illness, according to the CDC.

Both illnesses are “best prevented by avoiding exposure to mosquitoes,” according to the Maine Division of Infectious Disease, which provides a wealth of infor-

mation on mosquito-borne illnesses through the state website, maine.gov.

Shoo, fly

Mosquito season in Maine stretches from June to October, in theory, but these noisy pests can pop up during other times of the year. Overwintering female mosquitoes can appear during the spring, fall and occasionally during the winter, according to a fact sheet on mosquitoes provided online by the University of Maine Cooperative Extension pest management office.

In Maine, there’s no escaping mosquitoes entirely. But there are plenty of ways to repel and evade them.

One method to avoid being bitten is simply covering your skin with thick clothing — for example, wearing pants instead of shorts. Or you can wear bug netting, which may be a more comfortable option for a hot summer day. Bug-net hats, jackets and pants are sold at outfitters throughout Maine.

Usually people who are planning to spend time outdoors during the summer in Maine will use insect repellent of some sort. There are many varieties on the market. Some insect repellent contains chemicals such as DEET, while others are made of entirely natural ingredients and must be applied more often in order to remain effective. Be sure to read the instructions for any insect repellent you purchase before use.

Also, beware of “novelty approaches to mosquito control,” such as bug zappers and noise makers, the University of Maine Cooperative of Extension warns. Some of these products are expensive and have little scientific evidence to support that they’re effective in repelling mosquitoes.

“If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is,” Dill said.

At home or camp, people often burn wicks containing pyrethrum or citronella can-

dles to repel mosquitoes. These tools may provide some relief in limited areas, provided there’s no wind, according to the UMaine Cooperative Extension.

It’s also important to keep mosquitoes from sneaking indoors by installing and maintaining tight-fitting window and door screens and keeping outdoor lighting to a minimum. You can also treat screens and tents with certain pesticides, such as permethrin.

Maine is home to roughly 40 species of mosquitos, and less than half of those species bite humans. The other species opt to bite other types of animals, such as birds and reptiles.

Here’s another neat fact: Only female mosquitoes bite, and they’re capable of biting more than once. Mosquitoes — males and females — feed on nectar for sustenance, but females need the iron and protein in blood to produce eggs, according to the Prairie Research Institute.

Mosquitoes breed in standing water, while black flies — Maine’s other notorious pest — breed in flowing water.

“It doesn’t take much water. A couple tablespoons of water can grow some mosquitoes,” Dill said. “The best thing you can do — we tell people all the time — is to make sure you disrupt any standing water. Make sure your gutters aren’t clogged up, that the bucket sitting beside your shed isn’t full of rain water.”

Bird baths are other hot spots for mosquito breeding. To prevent this, simply rinse out your bird bathes once per week, Dill said.

Also, spread the word to your neighbors, he added. If you’re the only one in your neighborhood eliminating mosquito breeding areas, it won’t make much of a difference.

A new threat

Earlier this year, the World Health Organization

declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern because of the mosquito-borne Zika virus, which typically causes a mild illness including fever, rash, joint pain and conjunctivitis, but if contracted during pregnancy it can cause a serious birth defect called microcephaly, as well as other severe fetal brain defects.

Zika isn’t new. Since the 1950s, outbreaks of Zika have been reported in Africa, Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands. But now, it appears to be spreading, according to the CDC.

In May 2015, the first case of Zika virus infection was confirmed in Brazil. Since then, local transmission has been reported in several other countries and territories, including Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands and American Samoa.

“Everyone is concerned about the Zika virus and the mosquito’s transmission of it,” Dill said. “Right at the moment, two species [of mosquitoes] are known to be vectors of the virus, and we do not have either one of them established in Maine.”

So far, no locally transmitted Zika cases have been reported in the continental United States, but 618 cases have been reported in returning travelers, according to the CDC. Earlier this month, the CDC confirmed the first case of a baby being born with Zika-related birth defects in the continental United States, according to a June 2 Washington Post story.

“We don’t believe it’s here [in Maine], but it never hurts to look,” Dill said. “You never know what’s moving northward and where you’ll find it.”

To learn more about protecting yourself from mosquitoes and mosquito-borne illnesses, visit the Maine Division of Infectious Disease website at [maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/infectious-disease/epi/vector-borne/](http://maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/infectious-disease/epi/vector-borne/).

## Fossils may settle debate over ‘Hobbit’ people’s ancestry

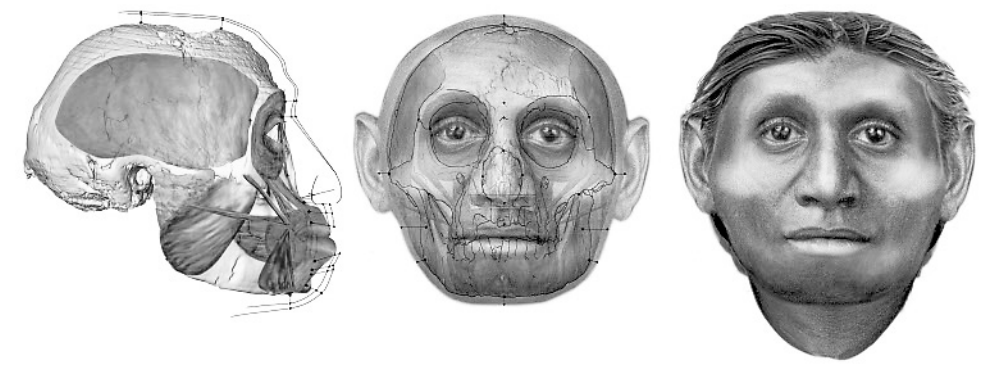
**BY WILL DUNHAM**  
REUTERS

WASHINGTON — Fossils unearthed on the Indonesian island of Flores may resolve one of the most intriguing mysteries in anthropology: the ancestry of the extraordinary diminutive human species dubbed the “Hobbit.”

Scientists on Wednesday described bone fragments and teeth about 700,000 years old retrieved from an ancient river bed that appear to belong to the extinct Hobbit species, previously known only from fossils and stone tools from a Flores cave ranging from 190,000 to 50,000 years old.

The species, called Homo floresiensis, stood about 3½ feet tall, possessing a small, chimpanzee-sized brain.

The new fossils “strong-



An Artist’s illustration shows the head of the diminutive extinct human species Homo floresiensis, better known as the “Hobbit,” from fossils unearthed on the Indonesian island of Flores. Newly discovered fossils indicate that these tiny people evolved from a big-bodied extinct human species called Homo erectus, which first arose in Africa and later spread to Asia.

ly suggest” the Hobbit evolved from large-bodied, large-brained members of the extinct human species Homo erectus living in Asia, according to palaeo-anthropologist Yousuke Kaifu of the National Mu-

seum of Nature and Science in Tokyo.

Homo erectus, which first appeared in Africa roughly 1.9 million years ago, is known from numerous fossils 1.5 million to 150,000 years old from Java,

an Indonesian island west of Flores, and the new Flores fossils bear similarities to those, according to paleontologist Gerrit van den Bergh of Australia’s University of Wollongong.

The fossils included four

adult and two baby teeth, a piece of jawbone and a cranial fragment from two children and either one or two adults who may have died in a volcanic eruption. They were dug up during excavations in grasslands nearly 45 miles east of the cave where the first Hobbit bones were discovered in 2003.

The jawbone’s size suggested the individual was even a bit smaller than the later cave remains.

Previously discovered stone tools suggest the Hobbit’s big-bodied ancestors reached Flores a million years ago, indicating the species shrank during 300,000 years of evolution.

“It now appears that the Flores ‘Hobbit’ is indeed a dwarfed Homo erectus,” archaeologist Adam Brumm of Australia’s Griffith University said.

The research was published in the journal Nature.

Size reduction that occurs over many generations of larger mammal species, such as elephants, that somehow reach a new island habitat is called the “island rule,” driven by limited food resources on islands.

Brumm said the 700,000-year-old fossils rule out claims by some scientists that the Hobbit was a member of our species with a medical condition causing small size. Homo sapiens first appeared in Africa about 200,000 years ago.

Characteristics of the fossils also do not support the idea the Hobbit evolved from even more ancient members of the human family tree such as Homo habilis or Australopithecus, the researchers said.