In a rare move, the Tulalip Tribes have appealed the federal government's recognition of the Snoqualmie Tribe.

The Tulalips argue, in papers filed last week, that they are the true successors of the Snoqualmie Tribe and that the Snoqualmie tribal members who pushed for recognition are merely a splinter group that has defied a government treaty more than 140 years old.

For 15 years, the Tulalip Tribes tried to block the Snoqualmies' recognition, fearing it would diminish federal money and resources, and possibly fishing territory. The Snoqualmies were granted recognition in August. The Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe submitted a similar appeal that was dismissed by the Board of Indian Appeals last week.

The Tulalip Tribes’ appeal includes testimony from tribal elders on the Tulalip Reservation and arguments on why the tribes say they are the true successors of the Snoqualmie Tribe. Tulalip leaders say Snoqualmie Chief Patkanim moved his tribe to the Tulalip Reservation after the signing of the Point Elliott Bay Treaty of 1855. "Somehow, they've got to define who the true Snoqualmies are," said Stan Jones, Tulalip tribal chairman. Jones said the government and courts have been ambivalent about the Snoqualmie Tribes' identity. Until recently, the Bureau of Indian Affairs maintained that the Snoqualmie Indians living in the valley did not make up the official tribe. A 1979 court ruling on fishing rights also affirmed that.

But current-day leaders of the Snoqualmies say they've always been a tribe and operated as one in the Snoqualmie Valley.

Jones expressed frustration with the BIA for "not listening" to Tulalip officials. He hoped the agency would take a closer look at documentation the Tulalip Tribes have submitted.

"If they really went through all of it, if they really listen to what the true story is, they would be toward the Tulalips," Jones said.

Jones said the Tulalip Tribes may resort to the courts as a last-ditch effort to reverse the Snoqualmies' recognition. It's a tactic one other tribe tried unsuccessfully.

In 1989, the Navajo Tribe in Arizona sued in an attempt to block recognition of the San Juan Southern Paiute Indians. The case was dismissed on grounds that the San Juan Paiutes gained sovereign immunity with their recognition. Sovereign immunity protects Native-American tribes from lawsuits.

The BIA never has reversed recognition, and Snoqualmie officials don't think it will happen now.
"We will prevail," said Mary Anne Hinzman, tribal council vice chairwoman.

The board will have 60 days to accept or dismiss the Tulalip appeal. The Snoqualmies will start receiving federal money and tribal benefits if the appeal is unsuccessful.

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