Sprawling across a million acres in northeast Washington is the Colville Reservation—larger than Rhode Island. Home to eleven tribes, it is named for Fort Colville, a British outpost established in the 1820s. (Who are the Colville Indians?, Colville Tribal Museum, Grand Coulee, Washington). It was created in 1872 and fully populated by the 1880s.

The first tribes were the Nespelem, San Poil, Okanogan, and Lake nations. They were soon joined by others—the Wenatchee, Entiat, Chelan, Methow, Moses-Columbia, and Palouse—making up the original ten bands. Arriving later was Chief Joseph’s Band of the Nez Percé, following his people’s unsuccessful attempt to flee to Canada. Because of the large number of bands on the reservation, the federal government started referring to all eleven tribes simply as the Colville Indians (“What is the History of the Native People of this Region?” in Grand Coulee Dam Area Visitors Guide, The Star Newspaper, Grand Coulee, Washington). Today those individuals whose ancestry is rooted in multiple bands simply call themselves “Colville”.

The flag representing the Colville Indians is a complex and elaborate banner-like design. A handmade copy of the flag flies over the entrance to the Colville Confederated Tribe’s Museum in Grand Coulee, Washington. It has a red background. Close to the top edge of the flag is a yellow band bordered above by a green stripe and below by a blue stripe. On the yellow band appears “COLVILLE CONFEDERATED TRIBES” in blue. Below the band a yellow disk recalls the tribal
shield used by warriors. This, too, has narrow borders, the inner blue and the outer green. In the center of the disk is a map of the reservation in black. Below this disk and overlapping its lower portion is a wolf, facing left and standing upon a green grassy mound. The wolf, baying at the moon, is shown in natural colors. On the flag at the museum, the wolf is made from actual fur, possibly wolf or coyote. This use of appliquéd fur appears unique among Native American flags, and is quite possibly the only such flag in existence.

Below the wolf runs a yellow band with a geometric pattern in blue, green, and black. Flanking the disk and wolf appear two lances in yellow. The lance on the left bears five large white-and-black eagle feathers extending leftward. The lance on the right bears six similar feathers, extending rightward. On each feather is the name of one of the bands on the reservation, in all capital letters. Thus on the left feathers, starting at the top, are the Moses-Columbia, the Palouse, the Okanogan, the Entiat, the Chelan, and the Methow; on the right feathers are Nez Percé, Wenatchee, Nespelem, Colville, San Poil, and Lake. (This addition of the names and the real fur are likely peculiar to the handmade flag and not found on regular copies of the flag.)

The flag's design was altered for commercial manufacture in 1996, with one major addition and many subtle changes. The major addition is a broad light blue stripe crossing slightly above the base of the flag but not reaching either edge. It contains a number of complex geometrical elements in green, red, and black on yellow. This new stripe may signify the bridge at Grand Coulee Dam, the major entrance from the south and a gateway for tourism, a major economic boon to the town of Grand Coulee and the entire reservation.

The yellow stripe across the top of the flag is now equal in length to the new "bridge" stripe; its green and blue edges have been replaced by band of light blue over light green just below it; the lettering on that stripe is now red. The wolf is now white, yellow, and black; the grass has a black base; the blue and green throughout have been changed to light blue and light green. The feathers with the names of the individual tribes have been enlarged and the names of the tribes are now printed in light blue, edged in white.