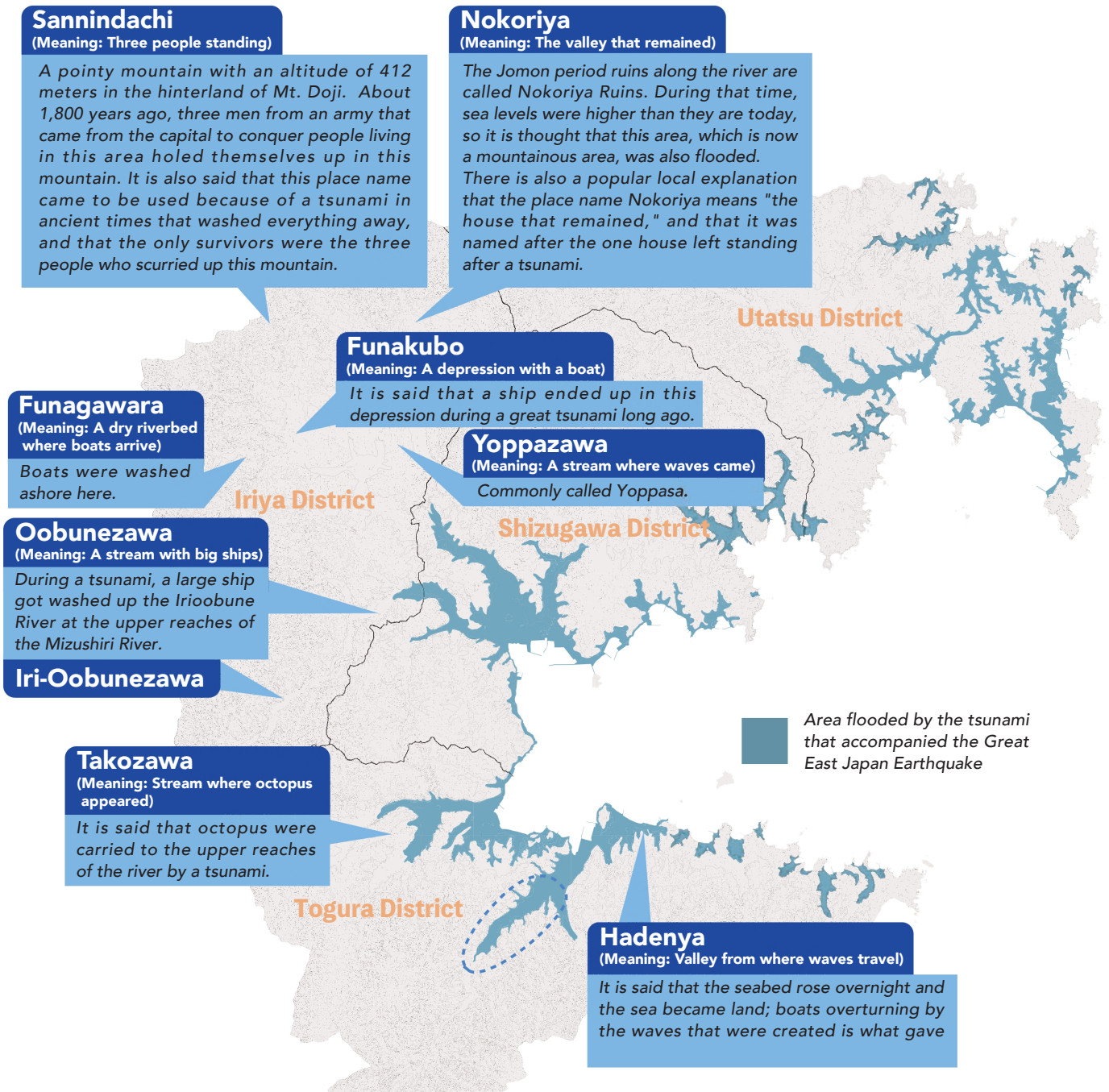
Understanding Tsunamis 8

Tsunamis and Place Names

The history of tsunamis communicated in place names



The land in the areas around Minamisanriku has a long history of human inhabitation. Inland areas are dotted with ruins from the Jomon period, and the Hiraizumi Fujiwara clan prospered later in the Heian period. Meanwhile, the area is sensitive to the movements of the Pacific Plate. It has been hit by many tsunamis since time immemorial.

Before the earthquake, the flatlands downstream of the river were highly populated. Before the mid-19th century, however, people had tended to live further inland. Here, they were kept alive thanks to high-quality water that springs from deep forests and the resources that can be found in satoyama undeveloped woodlands. In the past, there were no embankments. Downstream areas near river mouths were not suitable for inhabitation, and tsunamis reached places far from the coast by traveling up rivers. This can be understood from place names and legends that have survived to this day. The ancestors passed down place names associated with disasters as a way of helping later generations remember threats posed by nature even after a long time has passed.