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Little River Trading Post and Brownfield Activities in Fort Belknap

By Kermit Snow Jr, BTRP Compliance Officer

Wahey Neetine, hello my relatives. Well, it's been a busy year with summer conferences, meetings, and Brownfield Cleanups, keeping our Program very busy. The summer started for me in the first week of June, when the work started on the update of UST's at the former Kwik Stop, now known as the Little River Trading Post. We knew we had a lot of work to do since Island Mountain Development Group (IMDG) took over managing the convenience store. The tanks were over 30 years old, needed a new canopy, adding more dispensers, and a new design. With the help of Victoria

Flowers (Oneida Nation) and Oneida Engineering Solutions (OES) working with the IMDG team, and EnergySolutions out of Billings, the work started to take shape. First things first, they started on taking out probes, drop tubes, spill buckets, sumps, dispensers, draining any fuel left in tanks, and then started airing out tanks. While airing out tanks, the fun began, they started breaking concrete around dispensers and new tank site, working their way to the old tanks. It was great to see them start taking out the four tanks, three 10,000 gal. and one

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Little River Trading Post and Brownfield Activities in Fort Belknap

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4,000 gal. tank. When they removed the first tank completely, I was amazed at how good the tank looked. It looked as if it were still new, with no rust or any holes, after being in the ground for 35-37 years. That says that the cathodic protection was doing its job. They looked liked they can be used again, but unfortunately, you cannot reuse tanks once you pull them, they are retired for good. They then started excavating the site for the new tanks, drain pipes, and anchors holes for the new canopy. I got to see them pour concrete for the anchors and then the new pads for the dispensers. I then had to leave for a Region 8 RTOC meeting in Fort Duchesne, UT. and didn't get to see them set the new tanks, which I really wanted to see. I had been part of removals before, but never got to see when they set new tanks, but got to see some of it thru my phone while at meeting in Utah. When I returned, the crew were setting up and getting ready to pour for concrete for tank pads, dispensers, and asphalt for parking lot. I was then getting pre-

pared for another trip, but before I left, they had poured most of the concrete pads for the dispensers, with pillars for the canopy. When I returned from Chicago, I was pleasantly surprised to see the canopy up as I got closer to the store, it looked awesome. The week began with work on the UST concrete pad and got ready to lay asphalt for the parking lot. I then had to leave again for the Tribal Lands and Environment Forum (TLEF) in Minneapolis, MN. the next week. When I returned the following week, they prepared and laid asphalt for the parking lot. They also put in a new Automatic Tank Gauge (ATG) system (EVO 600) and a new POS system for the store. EnergiSystems, IMDG, and their subcontractors did a great job. When the gas station part of store opened up, we did have a few glitches, but worked with EnergiSystems to work out some of the bugs. I personally like the new ATG, as it is easier to work with, when doing monthly walkthrough inspections. I do know the community is

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Little River Trading Post and Brownfield Activities in Fort Belknap

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proud of what was accomplished with this project and will continue working on the store part now. It was great to work with Cassie Longtime Sleeping (Store Manager) and Ryan Beatty (Assistant Manager), as they got to see what is involved in putting in new tanks and dispensers and all that go with it.

Now that the LRTP Project is done, we could now focus on our Cleanup Projects, the Renovation Homes, Former Water Treatment Plant, and the Former Lodge Pole Elementary School. On these projects, we work with our Contractor Granite Peak and subcontractors Sullivan Brothers, Safe Tech, and ALM Consulting. We did finish the renovation of five burned homes for housing and made the area ready for construction and are continuing work on the other two projects, with the hope of getting them done before the real winter sets in. We could not go inside the elementary school, as they were abating for asbestos and lead,

but we did get to keep tabs on the progress at the Former Water Treatment Plant. It was going great and then Mother Nature stepped in with the cold winter, but they persevered through it and continued on. As of this writing, they had finished all the cutting and washing of the building. We did have one little mishap, while cutting the steel, a fire started, but they got it put out and continued their work. I believe it is now up to the Tribe after it gets signed off. Kudos to SafeTech on a job well done. We still have a ways to go, but are moving along good and looking forward to reaching the finish line. It all feels good when something you envisioned, comes through and it helps the community. I had been working on the UST Project at Little River Trading Post (old Kwik Stop) for a while and it is finally done. I now look forward on tackling the Old BOO's gas station to see how we can remedy that road block. It's always good when a project gets done and you get to move on to the next one(s).



Climate Warrior and Environmental Steward Retires

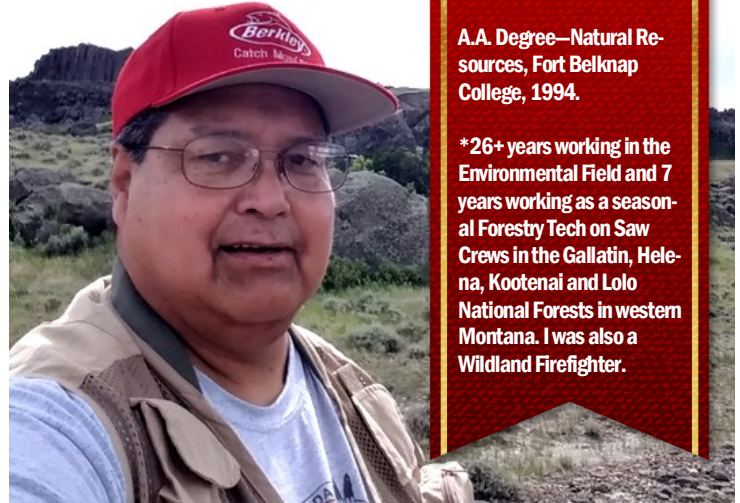
By Dennis Longknife, Jr., Former RMP Coordinator

Most of my work experience for the past 35 years, has been in the Forest and Environmental field. Early in my career I worked as a Forestry Tech and Coop Student, while pursuing my Environmental-Forest Degree. 1998-2006. After I graduated, I began working for our Environmental Protection Department for 26 + years working to protect our natural resources. I worked in various environmental positions during this time, WQ Technician, Water Quality Specialist, Wetland Specialist, Brownfields Compliance Officer, and NPS Coordinator. My passion was working in wetlands, performing wetland assessments and monitoring, reservation wide, for Native Plants, Migrating Waterfowl Surveys, Prairie Pothole studies, Soils identifications, Amphibians and Reptiles Surveys.

- Developed an Aquatic Resource Protection Ordinance (ARPO) for the Fort Belknap Indian Community, with the assistance of Environmental staff Morris "Davy" Belgard and Dan Kinsey, and received the Frank De-couteau Award from EPA Region 8, for the development of the ARPO, to protect our tribal community.
- Certified Wetland Delineator-Army Corps of Engineers
- Trained in Wetland Assessment-Wetland Training Institute
- Developed a Native Plant Herbarium and houses over 240 species
- Amphibian and Reptile Specimen Collection
- Developed an Amphibian Monitoring and Assessment Program
- Developed a Wetland Workplan and Quality Assurance Project Plan (QAPP)

From 2011 to 2015, I held several part-time positions within our tribes.

- From 2008-2012, I managed our Mosquito Abatement Program.
- In 2013, I developed a Noxious Weed Program and developed the "Noxious Weed Strategic Plan", with the help of the Center for Invasive Species Management Center in Bozeman, Montana
- From 2011-2013, I developed the Trails Program, and constructed 4 Hiking Trails in the Little Rocky Mountains, using our tribal members and Montana Conservation Crews.
- In 2014-2015, I was hired as a Compliance Officer for the Fort Belknap Indian Communities, Water Treatment Plant.



B.S. Degree—
Environmental Science w/
Forestry Option, Salish &
Kootenai College, 1997.

A.A. Degree—Natural Re-
sources, Fort Belknap
College, 1994.

*26+ years working in the
Environmental Field and 7
years working as a season-
al Forestry Tech on Saw
Crews in the Gallatin, Hele-
na, Kootenai and Lolo
National Forests in western
Montana. I was also a
Wildland Firefighter.

I was the Energy Director for our tribes from 2011-2013.

- During this time, I retrofitted energy efficient lighting into 10 tribal office buildings
- Trained 16 tribal members in energy efficient trainings in Solar Air Heaters, Geo-thermal and Earth/Clay building construction, with the help of Henry Red Cloud/Red Cloud Renewable Center.
- Installed 10 Solar Heating Panels in the communities
- Held 2 weatherization events and handed our energy efficient weather stripping and light bulbs.

From 2016-2024, Climate Change Coordinator for the Fort Belknap Indian Community.

- Completed the Climate Change Adaptation Plan, and was approved by tribal council action April 2023.
- Assisted in developing the Agricultural Resource Management Plan (ARMP), which was approved and adopted by the Fort Belknap Indian Community, Tribal Council 2019.
- Assisted in the Development of our Drought Management Plan, Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan, Fish and Wildlife Conservation Plan.
- Completed a 300-acre forest reduction project called the Little Rocky Forest Resilience Project, with the assistance of the Bureau of Indian Affairs Forestry Program.
- Completed a 3 year, Climate Education and Outreach project, by managing a Climate Forum and Exhibit, with the University of Montana's Environmental Studies Program, and the Aaniiih Nakoda College.
- Currently working on a 2 year, Native Plant-First Foods Project with the University of Montana Forestry Stud-

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Climate Warrior and Environmental Steward Retires

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ies Program, and a couple of our students from our Aaniiih Nakoda College, to assess the health and condition of our priority first foods, that our tribes use. I serve as the program mentor for the project.

The main task was to have community meetings and develop a RMP Plan to collect comments on how to protect the health and welfare of our community and infrastructure, from extreme weather events.

2024-2025 Relocation, Managed Retreat or Protect in Place (RMP) Coordinator.

I was our tribes' representative on the Montana Governor, Greg Gianforte's, Montana Invasive Species Council 2017-2028.

GIS Technician becomes FBIC Council Member

By Lonette Blackcrow, Administrative Assistant

We are delighted and sad to see go, one of our very own Environmental Department employees. Cody Shambo was voted onto the Fort Belknap Indian Community Council as the Mountain Gros-Ventre Representative. Cody has worked as our Geographic Information System (GIS) Technician for approximately 13 years. Good Luck in your new endeavors Cody!



New Tribal Representative for Fort Belknap Indian Community

By Megan Martin, Brownfields Environmental Technician

Hello all hope this information finds you all well and ready for the Holidays. My name is Megan Kirkaldie Martin an enrolled member of Fort Belknap Indian Community. April, of this year I was awarded the position of Brownfields Technician under the Brownfields Program in the Environmental Protection Department for FBIC. This position is something I'm proud to be a part of and love. Rejuvenating our community in such a positive and productive way leaving a better footprint is something we all can be proud of. The Brownfields Tribal Response Program as well as the E.P.D. thanks the community for engaging in our public meetings. It is greatly appreciated. Your thoughts and input matter.

On another note, don't want to brag but what the heck I have to, why not? The work group in my department is awesome! Everyone here has been so helpful since I started. Most have many years of service in this department and are very knowledgeable in their positions. It has been a great learning experience from them all though my transition from welder in the field driving truck to in the office working with computers completing tasks and whatever needed by my colleges.

Recently the position for the Montana Invasive Species Representative for FBIC opened. The Council requested this position to be taken on by someone in the EPD. I was interested instantly. From very young age I can remember having strong concerns and care for animals, plants and Mother Earth in general. Often wondered why recycling was not a part of everyday life? I still do think this way. With that in mind, the addition of growing up as a farm kid and my natural interests I feel confident I can represent our Tribe in a confident and earnest way. The M.I.S.C. Program deals with "All Things Invasive", Weeds, insects, Feral Swine (Pigs). The Program involves attend bi-monthly Zoom meetings, and also attend quarterly in-person meetings, 2 meetings are usually in Helena at the Capitol or at the DNRC Bldg., the other two meetings are usually selected in other places around the state during the summer and fall.

MISC goals are to keep, maintain and prevent spread to maintain weed-free areas or healthy land with low levels of weeds, conserve habitat while balancing conservation and use. Control infestations and restore habitat to degraded areas with weed problems.

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New Tribal Representative for Fort Belknap Indian Community

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Objectives are to prevent new infestations, detect and map small infestations, eradicate small infestations, educate the Tribal Community, map and control established infestations, Integrate weed management options, preventative and cultural control, physical or mechanical control, chemical control, and bio-

control. I look forward to Engage with new colleges and learning all I can to better service my community and Tribal to the fullest of my capabilities as the new MISC Representative. Thank you for you time in reading and Happy Holidays.

USDA Issues Second Economic Assistance Payment to Agricultural Producers

News Release | Release Date September 26, 2025

https://www.fsa.usda.gov/news-events/news/09-26-2025/usda-issues-second-economic-assistance-payment-agricultural-producers?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery

WASHINGTON, Sept. 26, 2025 – The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is issuing a second Emergency Commodity Assistance Program (ECAP) payment to eligible producers for the 2024 crop year. Of the authorized \$10 billion in ECAP assistance, USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) has already provided over \$8 billion in payments to eligible producers to mitigate the impacts of increased input costs and falling commodity prices. U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins made the announcement yesterday at the Ag Outlook Forum in Kansas City.

"Initial ECAP payments were factored by 85% to ensure that total program payments did not exceed \$10 billion in available funding. Since additional funds remain, FSA is issuing a second payment," said Deputy Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation Brooke Appleton. "As producers continue to face market volatility, these payments along with the entire suite of supplemental disaster assistance programs, will help producers navigate market uncertainty, pay down debt for the 2024 crop year, and secure financing for the next crop year."

Payments will automatically be made to eligible producers with approved ECAP applications who received an initial payment. Any application approved after Sept. 25, 2025, will receive one lump sum payment. Authorized by the American Relief Act, 2025, these economic relief payments are based on planted and prevented planted crop acres for eligible commodities for the 2024 crop year.

ECAP Payments

FSA is issuing a second payment ECAP equal to 14% of the gross ECAP payment to eligible producers, making the final payment factor 99%.

ECAP assistance is calculated using a flat payment rate for the eligible commodity multiplied by the eligi-

ble reported acres. Payments are based on acreage and not production. For acres reported as prevented planted, ECAP assistance is calculated at 50%.

Additional USDA Supplemental Disaster Assistance

In addition to the over \$8 billion in ECAP payments, USDA has issued more than \$1 billion in Emergency Livestock Relief Program (ELRP) assistance to livestock producers impacted by drought and federally managed lands wildfires in 2023 and 2024 with an additional \$1 billion in expected payments for livestock producers impacted by floods and non-federally managed land wildfires in 2023 and 2024 (ELRP 2023/2023 FW). Livestock producers have until Oct. 31, 2025, to apply for (ELRP 2023/2023 FW) assistance. Producers have also received over \$5.4 billion through Stage 1 of the Supplemental Disaster Relief Program for indemnified crop losses in 2023 and 2024. SDRP Stage 2 assistance for uncovered, quality, and shallow losses will be announced soon.

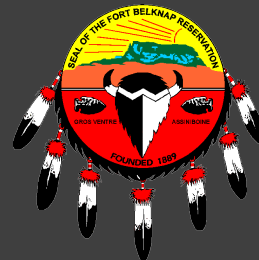
USDA's disaster recovery programs complement recently announced state block grant agreements in Florida, North Carolina, and Virginia totaling \$958 million in assistance to help agricultural producers with disaster recovery needs. USDA is working with 14 states on block grant agreements.

More Information

FSA helps America's farmers, ranchers and forest landowners invest in, improve, protect and expand their agricultural operations through the delivery of agricultural programs for all Americans. FSA implements agricultural policy, administers credit and loan programs, and manages conservation, commodity, disaster recovery and marketing programs through a national network of state and county offices and locally elected county committees. For more information, visit fsa.usda.gov.

Introducing the 2025 Fort Belknap Indian Community Council

<https://ftbelknap.org/council>



Council Member Contact Information



President

Randall Werk Sr.

Office: (406) 353-8344

Cell: (406) 399-3611

E-mail: randall.werk@ftbelknap.org

Gros-Ventre Rep

Blake Stiffarm

Office: (406) 353-8330

Cell: (406) 390-0206

E-mail: blake.stiffarm@ftbelknap.org



Vice-President

Alan Bigby

Office: (406) 353-8303

Cell: (406) 399-3614

E-mail: alan.bigby@ftbelknap.org

River Assiniboine Rep

Donald "Duck" Horn

Office: (406) 353-8311

Cell: (406) 399-1690

E-mail: donald.horn@ftbelknap.org



Assiniboine At Large

Josh Horn Sr.

Office: (406) 353-8332

Cell: (406) 399-7078

E-mail: josh.hornsr@ftbelknap.org

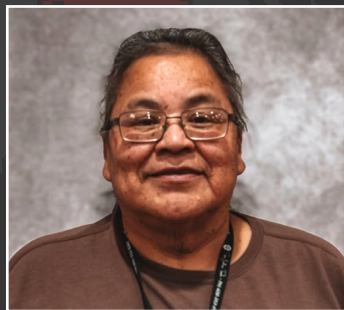
River Gros-Ventre Rep

Mike King II

Office: (406) 353-8472

Cell: (406) 399-3599

E-mail: mike.king@ftbelknap.org



Gros-Ventre At Large

Joan Johnson

Office: (406) 353-8304

Cell: (406) 399-4000

E-mail: jjohnson@ftbelknap.org

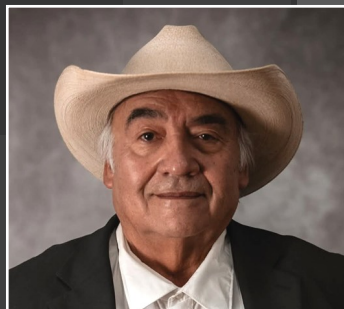
Mtn Assiniboine Rep

Tina Bierle

Office: (406) 353-8511

Cell: (406) 399-3605

E-mail: tina.bierle@ftbelknap.org



Assiniboine Rep

John Allen

Office: (406) 353-8444

Cell: (406) 399-2150

E-mail: john.allen@ftbelknap.org

Mtn Gros-Ventre Rep

Cody Shambo

Office: (406) 353-8302

Cell: (406) 399-3603

E-mail: cody.shambo@ftbelknap.org



Fort Belknap Indian Community

158 Tribal Way, Harlem, Montana 59526, United States
(406) 353-2205 or Fax: (406) 353-4541

Senate Confirms Usha-Maria Turner as EPA's Assistant Administrator for the Office of International and Tribal Affairs

Contact Information EPA Press Office (press@epa.gov) | October 7, 2025

<https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/senate-confirms-usha-maria-turner-epas-assistant-administrator-office-international>

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Senate has confirmed Usha-Maria Turner to serve as Assistant Administrator for the Office of International and Tribal Affairs (OITA) at U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA). Appointed by President Donald J. Trump, Turner will lead efforts to advance the agency's core mission of protecting human health and the environment and EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin's Powering the Great American Comeback initiative.

"I am extremely excited to have Usha Turner confirmed by the U.S. Senate to lead EPA's Office of International and Tribal Affairs. She is uniquely positioned to strengthen agency relationships with our tribal partners, along with advancing our priorities on a global stage. Looking forward to working with Usha in this new role," said EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin.

"I am truly honored to be able to serve in this important role as we continue to put America First, domestically and abroad and am grateful for the confidence and trust vested in me by President Trump and Administrator Zeldin. I look forward to bringing my environmental regulatory and policy experience to EPA as we continue to focus on our core mission of protecting human health the environment and, to furthering EPA's Federal Trust responsibility with Tribal Nations," said Assistant Administrator for the Office of International and Tribal Affairs Usha-Maria Turner.

OITA serves as the agency's lead on international and tribal environmental strategy. It fosters global partnerships to address cross-border pollution and promote U.S. environmental priorities abroad. Domestically, OITA upholds EPA's Federal Trust responsibility, empowering tribal nations to develop and manage their own environmental programs.

Prior to joining EPA, Turner was Vice President for External Affairs and Chief Sustainability Officer at Chesapeake Energy in Oklahoma City, where she oversaw government and regulatory relations across all levels, led community outreach and philanthropic initiatives, directed public affairs, and spearheaded the compa-

ny's sustainability strategy and stakeholder engagement.

With more than two decades of experience in the power sector across Oklahoma, Texas, and the Southwest Power Pool, Turner brings deep expertise in federal and environmental policy, infrastructure development, asset expansion, and regulatory compliance. Her public policy work has included engagement with EPA, U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.

Turner holds engineering degrees from Texas A&M University and brings a multinational, multicultural background and perspective to her leadership.

Here's what people are saying about Usha-Maria Turner's presidential appointment:

Senator John Boozman (R-AR): "Congratulations to Assistant Administrator Usha-Maria Turner. Her background and navigation of the confirmation process give me confidence she will help execute EPA's mission with greater transparency, efficiency and engagement among tribal groups and all stakeholders. I look forward to working together to make the agency a better partner for communities in Arkansas and nationwide."

Senator James Lankford (R-OK): "I want to congratulate Usha-Maria Turner on her nomination to the EPA. Her decades of experience in environmental policy and her commitment to improving the quality of life for communities across the country make her a strong addition to the agency. I look forward to working with her on issues that matter to Oklahomans and to all Americans."

Senator Markwayne Mullin (R-OK): "Usha has made Oklahoma proud through her long history and dedication to the energy security of this nation. She will be an incredible asset to President Trump and his team

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Senate Confirms Usha-Maria Turner as EPA's Assistant Administrator for the Office of International and Tribal Affairs

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as Assistant Administrator for the Environmental Protection Agency's Office of International and Tribal Affairs."

Representative Stephanie Bice (R-OK-05): "I'm incredibly excited to see that Oklahoma's own, Usha-Maria Turner has been appointed to serve as the Assistant Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency for the Office of International and Tribal Affairs. Usha brings decades of private-sector experience and knows how to navigate environmental regulations while working with tribes of all sizes in Oklahoma. I am confident that Usha will serve with distinction and help protect human health and the environment."

Former Oklahoma Secretary of Energy & Environment Kenneth Wagner: "I am grateful to the U.S. Senate for their advice and consent to confirm Usha Turner as Assistant Administrator for International and Tribal Affairs. She is exactly who we need leading the EPA's International and Tribal Programs. In Oklahoma she was a constant and consistent champion for common sense policy and solutions in a state where energy, tribes and tourism are its most important issues. Her knowledge and experience of working on some of the toughest regulatory challenges in the federal government, across multiple states, and Indian country

make her the perfect choice for this role. She is smart, capable, and has the ability to lead during this period of profound change. Her steady hand will be an asset for all Americans."

American Exploration & Production Council (AXPC) CEO Anne Bradbury: "AXPC strongly supports the confirmation of Usha-Maria Turner, an experienced leader committed to securing America's energy dominance through policies that balance environmental protection with economic growth. Under her leadership, the Office of International and Tribal Affairs is strongly positioned to work with tribal and international stakeholders to advance the interests of U.S. workers and industries."

USLNG Association (LNG Allies) President & CEO Fred Hutchison: "Usha-Maria Turner is the perfect choice to lead the EPA's Office of International and Tribal Affairs as the agency works to reduce the regulatory burden on U.S. businesses while meeting its statutory environmental protection mandates. In her former role with the U.S. natural gas industry, Usha interacted with international diplomats on dozens of occasions, and her skills and experience will be a tremendous asset as the EPA works with America's foreign partners and tribal nations to secure sound and sensible environmental policies."



Finding the Good News: MacKenzie Scott's Quiet Commitment Amidst the Noise

By Levi Rickert October 27, 2025

[https://nativenewsonline.net/opinion/finding-the-good-news-mackenzie-scott-s-quiet-commitment-amidst-the-noise#:~:text=The%20impact%20has%20been%20transformative,\(CDFIs\)%20across%20the%20country](https://nativenewsonline.net/opinion/finding-the-good-news-mackenzie-scott-s-quiet-commitment-amidst-the-noise#:~:text=The%20impact%20has%20been%20transformative,(CDFIs)%20across%20the%20country)

Opinion. It's an old complaint and one we hear sometimes at *Native News Online*: Journalists don't report the good news enough. We understand the sentiment. Day after day, our inboxes and news feeds are filled with the familiar drumbeat of struggles across Indian Country.

Out of a commitment to help improve Indigenous lives, we report on the devastating health disparities,

the alarming rates of suicide, the systemic poverty rooted in historical trauma and broken treaties. It's hard to ignore the gravity of these issues, and it is our job to report on them honestly.

But in our relentless pursuit of justice, we sometimes risk overlooking the moments of triumph and progress that deserve just as much attention.

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Finding the Good News: MacKenzie Scott's Quiet Commitment Amidst the Noise

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These are particularly challenging times. The federal government, once again, finds itself mired in a game of politics, and Indian Country is caught in the cross-fire. The ongoing government shutdown threatens to halt the delivery of essential services to tribal communities — services the federal government is obligated to provide by its trust and treaty responsibilities.

With a president more concerned about tearing down the White House East Wing, and the House Republicans not doing their job because they are on an extended furlough from Washington, D.C., our people face the very real possibility of food shortages, cuts to already underfunded health services, and strained public safety operations. It's a disgrace, a familiar cycle of federal inaction that leaves our communities bearing the heaviest burden.

But in the midst of this chaos, a quiet story of hope has been unfolding over the past few years, one that deserves to be told. I'm talking about the unparalleled philanthropic support that has flowed into Indian Country from one extraordinary individual: MacKenzie Scott.

Since her divorce \$38 billion settlement with her former husband, Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, Scott has donated more than \$19 billion to over 2,450 organizations.

For decades, Native-led organizations have existed on the financial margins of the philanthropic world. As a 2019 study showed, less than 0.5% of large foundation funding historically went to Native American nonprofits. It's a systemic underfunding that mirrors the federal government's chronic neglect. It has forced our community leaders to operate with a scarcity mindset, to constantly chase heavily si-

loed federal grants that often come with restrictive strings attached, stifling innovation and growth.

Since 2020, Scott has rewritten the entire playbook for how philanthropy can and should operate in Indian Country. She isn't operating like traditional foundations. She isn't demanding endless grant proposals, imposing reporting requirements, or dictating how her money must be spent. She is practicing trust-based giving, an approach that recognizes Native leaders know what their communities need better than anyone.

The impact has been transformative.

In December 2024, Scott made what is widely described as the largest private investment ever in Native financial institutions, awarding over \$103 million in unrestricted funding to 30 Native Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) across the country. This money, given without restrictions, empowers these institutions to expand access to affordable housing, small business loans, financial education, and clean energy projects. It's an investment in economic self-determination, an acknowledgment that our communities are best equipped to build their own prosperity. As one Indigenous finance expert told Tribal Business News. "There's never been anything like this—this much, this fast, this focused."

Her giving extends far beyond financial institutions. In September 2025, she made a landmark \$50 million gift to the Native Forward Scholars Fund, a move that will significantly increase scholarships for Native students pursuing higher education. The impact of her earlier gifts has already been seen at institutions like the Institute of American Indian Arts, which used its \$5 million grant to grow its endowment and attract new corporate partners. At Native Forward, her grants have enabled the organization to boost scholarships.

This isn't just about the money. It's about the ripple ef-

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MacKenzie Scott (Photo/
Elena Seibert, Instagram)

Circle Speaker

Finding the Good News: MacKenzie Scott's Quiet Commitment Amidst the Noise

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fect. When a prominent philanthropist like MacKenzie Scott provides a "seal of approval" with a major gift, it attracts other funders who may have previously overlooked Native organizations. It gives our institutions the stability to strengthen their endowments, retain staff with better pay and benefits, and build long-term capacity. It allows our leaders to focus on their mission, rather than being in a constant fundraising crisis mode.

In a moment where our reliance on a broken federal

system has become more evident, MacKenzie Scott's quiet generosity shines a spotlight on a more equitable, dignified way forward. She is proving that true allyship involves not just listening to Indigenous communities, but trusting them, empowering them, and giving them the tools to create their own futures.

It is a powerful example of good news, and one that Indian Country should celebrate and remember.

Thayék gde nwéndëmen - We are all related.

Trump Administration Delivers Second Stage of Crop Disaster Assistance for Farmers

Submitted by Juan Alvarez, juan.alvarez@usda.gov | December 1, 2025

USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) is delivering more than \$16 billion in total Congressionally approved [SDRP assistance](#). This is on top of over \$9.3 billion in Emergency Commodity Assistance Program ([ECAP assistance](#)) to over 560,000 row crop farmers and over \$705 million in Emergency Livestock Relief Program ([ELRP assistance](#)) to over 220,000 ranchers. Stage Two of SDRP covers eligible crop, tree, bush and vine losses that were not covered under Stage One program provisions, including non-indemnified (shallow loss), uncovered and quality losses. For Stage Two program details, including fact sheets, please visit fsa.usda.gov/sdrp.

The first stage, announced in July, remains available to producers who received an indemnity under crop insurance or the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) for eligible crop losses due to qualifying 2023 and 2024 natural disaster events. FSA county offices will begin accepting SDRP Stage Two applications on November 24, 2025. Producers have until April 30, 2026, to apply for both Stage One and Stage Two assistance. FSA is establishing block grants with Connecticut, Hawaii, Maine, and Massachusetts that cover crop losses; therefore, producers with losses on land physically located in these states are not eligible for SDRP program payments.

Since March 2025, USDA has supported U.S. farmers and ranchers with more than \$16 billion in supplemental disaster assistance mandated by Congress in

the American Relief Act, 2025 including \$9.3 billion through the Emergency Commodity Assistance Program, over \$1 billion through the Emergency Livestock Relief Program and, to date, more than \$5.7 billion in SDRP Stage One payments.

Milk and On-Farm Stored Crop Loss Assistance

The Milk Loss Program provides up to \$1.65 million in payments to eligible dairy operations for milk that was dumped or removed without compensation from the commercial milk market because of a qualifying natural disaster event in 2023 and/or 2024.

Producers who suffered losses of eligible harvested commodities while stored in on-farm structures in 2023 and/or 2024 due to a qualifying natural disaster event may be eligible for assistance through the On-Farm Stored Commodity Loss Program, which provides for up to \$5 million to impacted producers.

The enrollment period to apply for milk and on-farm stored commodity losses is Nov. 24, 2025, through Jan. 23, 2026. Information and fact sheets for both programs are available online at fsa.usda.gov/mlp for milk loss and fsa.usda.gov/ofscplp for on-farm stored commodity losses.



U.S. Department of Agriculture

Burned Homes Cleanup Project

September - October 2025



BEFORE



DURING



AFTER

Project Locations

1. Ralph Gray - 269 White Eagle, New Town
2. Cornbird - 249 Blackbird, New Town
3. Johnny Buckman - Hays
4. Doney/Emmanuel - 122 Moccasin, Hays
5. Ryan & Eva Walker - 191 Rte. 8, Lodge Pole

Project Background

The Fort Belnap Indian Community's Environmental Protection Department utilized federal 128(a) State and Tribal Response Program funding from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to complete environmental cleanup of five residential homes within the Fort Belnap Reservation that had been burned and abandoned. Due to their age, the homes were assumed to contain hazardous building materials including asbestos and lead-based paint.

Environmental Cleanup

Since the homes had previously burned, all burnt debris was considered regulated asbestos-containing materials (RACM) and required additional handling and disposal considerations. The demolition process was overseen by an accredited asbestos contractor/supervisor to ensure all materials were safely removed from each site. Following demolition, the sites were backfilled to grade with clean soil. Lastly, surface soil samples were collected to ensure the home sites were not impacted by lead-based paint. The soil samples confirmed lead was not present in soil at hazardous levels at the majority of the sites. One site, Burned Home #3, had some remaining elevated levels of lead in soil, but additional cleanup at that site is planned to help support future site redevelopment efforts.

Redevelopment Plans

The five home sites are ready for future redevelopment. The FBIC would like to place or build new homes on each property to provide additional housing opportunities for community members.

Fort Belnap Indian Community
Environmental Protection Department
656 Agency Main Street
Harlem, Montana 59526



Adrian Kulbeck
406-353-8411
adrian.kulbeck@ftbelnap.org

Renovation Homes Assessment & Cleanup Project

April - November 2025



107 Sioux Street



100 Sioux Street



104 Sioux Street



119 Sioux Street

Project Locations in Harlem, MT

1. 100 Sioux Street
2. 104 Sioux Street
3. 107 Sioux Street
4. 119 Sioux Street

Project Background

The Fort Belknap Indian Community's Environmental Protection Department partnered with the Fort Belknap Tribal Housing Authority to assess and cleanup four residential family homes within the Fort Belknap Reservation utilizing federal 128(a) State and Tribal Response Program funding from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and leveraged funds from the Housing Authority. Due to their age, the homes were suspected of containing hazardous building materials including asbestos and lead-based paint.

Environmental Assessment & Cleanup

Each home was assessed for hazardous materials by a certified building materials inspector. The assessments revealed asbestos-containing popcorn ceiling texture in each of the four homes. A certified abatement contractor abated the asbestos-containing ceiling systems, and clearance sampling was completed to ensure all asbestos-containing materials were removed from the homes. In a collaborative effort, two homes (100 and 119 Sioux Street) were cleaned up using federal 128(a) funds from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the other two homes (104 and 107 Sioux Street) were cleaned up using funding from the Housing Authority.

Redevelopment Plans

The Housing Authority plans to renovate the four assessed and abated homes with the goal of offering updated, safe family homes for community members by Spring 2026.

Fort Belknap Indian Community
Environmental Protection Department
656 Agency Main Street
Harlem, Montana 59526



Adrian Kulbeck
406-353-8411
adrian.kulbeck@ftbelknap.org

2025 Brownfields Public Record

Fort Belknap Indian Community
Environmental Protection Department

SITE NAME	Old Agency Landfill	Old Agency Dump	Lodge Pole Community Hall	Peoples Creek Dipping Vat	Runway Homes
<i>Type of Site</i>	Abandoned Landfill	Abandoned Landfill	Abandoned Historic Building	Former Cattle Dipping Vat	Abandoned home's
<i>What Type of Response Action was Taken?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aug 2002 – Phase I ESA Final Report • Dec 2003 – Phase II ESA Final Report • Sept 2006 – Phase III Final Report (included further sampling activities) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sept 2003 – Phase I ESA Final Report • Targeted Brownfields Assessment (TBA) • March 2004 – Phase II ESA Final Report • April 2019 – FBIC Brownfields received a State of Montana DNRC Planning grant to be utilized in conducting further assessment of contamination of the Old Agency Dump. • 2nd Phase II ESA Scheduled for Summer/Fall 2020 postponed due to COVID-19 concerns. • April/May 2021 – 2nd Phase II ESA conducted. • September 2021 – 2nd Phase II ESA completed. • November 2021 – Phase II Report of Findings Completed. • November 2021 Analysis of Brownfields Cleanup Alternatives for Old Agency dump was completed. • August 2022 – Cleanup Grant secured. • June 2023 – Fort Belknap Indian Community • USEPA Brownfields Cleanup Project Work Plan Submitted & approved. • October 2023 – Fort Belknap QAPP was signed & approved. • ABCAs were developed for the Old Agency Dump site, Approved March 2024 • Community relation plans for each site were developed in January 2024 and approved in March 2024. • The Clearance SAP for the Old Agency Dump was approved October 2024. • Project was advertised twice in 2025, Bids came in overbudget & was pushed to 2026 due to weather/timing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jan 2007 – Final Report Phase I ESA (Lead and Asbestos survey included) • Dec 2007 – Final Phase II ESA Report • April 2008 – Phase III Report completed • Oct 2008 – Cleanup Process implemented • Dec 2010 – Cleanup activities & post sampling completed • April 2011 – Final Report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sept 2010 – Final Report-Phase I ESA complete. • Mar 3, 2010 – EPA Site Eligibility form complete and approved. • June 2011 – QAPP/Field Sampling Plan completed. • Aug 16, 2011 – Phase II ESA field sampling event completed. • Jan 2012-TBA – Phase II ESA Final Report. • June 2015 – Programmatic Quality Assurance Project Plan (QAPP), Sampling and Analysis Plan (SAP), and Correctable Action Plan (CAP) completed & approved. • Oct 12, 2015 – Cleanup of arsenic contaminated soils and confirmation sampling. • Dec 29, 2015 – Cleanup Verification Report. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • November 2020 – Phase II was completed on Runway Homes. • May 2024 – Workplan on Runway homes was approved. • May 2024 – Community relation plan for Runway homes was approved. • June 2024 – Final ABCA for Runway homes was approved. • June 2024 – Community meeting was held on Runway homes clean up. • July 2024 – Sampling Analysis Plan was approved. • August 2024 – Clean Up was completed on (31) Runway homes. • October 2024 – Clean Up Reporting on Runway homes project was completed.

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2025 Brownfields Public Record

(Continued from page #)

Fort Belknap Indian Community Environmental Protection Department

SITE NAME	Old Agency Landfill	Old Agency Dump	Lodge Pole Community Hall	Peoples Creek Dipping Vat	Runway Homes
<i>Date Action is Planned</i>	No Action Planned at this time.	2025-2026	Renovation for community hall	Oct 2015 – Cleanup of soils and confirmation sampling completed.	
<i>Name of Owner at Time of Clean-up</i>	Fort Belknap Indian Community	Fort Belknap Indian Community	Fort Belknap Indian Community	Fort Belknap Indian Community	Fort Belknap Indian Community
<i>Owner Address, City, State, Zip</i>	Fort Belknap Agency 656 Agency Main St. Harlem, MT 59526	Fort Belknap Agency 656 Agency Main St. Harlem, MT 59526	Fort Belknap Agency 656 Agency Main St. Harlem, MT 59526	Fort Belknap Agency 656 Agency Main St. Harlem, MT 59526	Fort Belknap Agency 656 Agency Main St. Harlem, MT 59526
<i>Latitude/Longitude</i>	N48.48283° W108.77411°	N48.47454° W108.78374°	N48.20606° W108.31975°	N48.155270° W108.302386°	8°29'05"N 108°46'47"W
<i>Legal Description</i>	T32N, R23E, SEC32	T31N, R23E, SEC6	T26N, R25E, SEC8	T29N, R25E, SEC 20	T31N R23E SEC32
<i>Are Institutional Controls (IC) needed at Site?</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes-Lead Based Paint Dust exceed cleanup levels	Yes	No
<i>Are ICs in Place?</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
<i>Type of Institutional Control (IC)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aug 2008 – Signage posted Sept 2009 – Tribal Resolution-notification requiring further sampling or soil removal before future use of site 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aug 2008 – Signage posted Sept 2009 – Tribal Resolution-notification requiring further sampling or soil removal before future use of site 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building locked and signage posted describing environmental concerns. Final Report provided to Transportation/ Planning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nov 2015 – Fencing completed and Signage placed at site. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A notice was sent out to the public to not take “Motorized vehicles” to be driven on the site. Site is open for FBIC programs to use.
<i>Summarize Nature of Contamination at Site</i>	DDD, DDE, DDT – Specific areas of landfill. Sampling in 2006 confirmed site does not warrant cleanup.	DDE, DDT, DEHP, PCB'S	Lead Based Paint dust remains. Asbestos-abated, DPH, EPH (diesel derivatives) – cleaned up.	Arsenic in soils	Lead Based Paint, Asbestos was abated
<i>Site Size in Acres</i>	5 acres	10 acres	<5	<2 acres	<5 acres

SITE NAME	Snake Butte Rock Quarry	Old Lodge Pole Elementary School	Old Sacred Heart Church	Old Agency Water Treatment Plant	Burned Homes Project	Assessment Homes
<i>Type of Site</i>	Rock Quarry Site	Abandoned School	Abandoned Historic Building	Abandoned Water Treatment Facility	House/debris pile's	House's
<i>What Type of Response Action was Taken?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> August 2002 – Phase I ESA conducted Dec 2003 – Phase II ESA Report (Brownfields Assessment Project) June 28, 2016 – START Contractor conducted Phase II ESA Sampling. August 22, 2016 – received Draft Phase II ESA – Snake Butte Quarry report for review/comment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> July 2019 TBA submitted to EPA Region 8 to conduct ESA. December 10-14, 2019, Weston Solutions, Inc., EPA Contractors, conduct Phase II ESA. March 2020 – Phase II ESA Completed. November 2021 Analysis of Brownfields Cleanup Alternatives for Old LP elementary school was completed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> July 2019 TBA submitted to EPA Region 8 to conduct ESA. December 10-14, 2019, Weston Solutions, Inc., EPA Contractors, conduct Phase II ESA. March 2020 – Phase II ESA Completed. November 2021 Analysis of Brownfields Cleanup Alternatives for Sacred Heart Church was completed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> July 2019 TBA – submitted to EPA Region 8 to conduct ESA. December 10-14, 2019 – Weston Solutions, Inc., EPA Contractors, conduct Phase II ESA. March 2020 – Phase II ESA Completed. November 2021 – Analysis of Brownfields Cleanup Alternatives (ABCA) for Old Agency Water Treatment plant was completed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work Plan – COMPLETE – Ina approved on 3/11/25 Community Outreach Plan – COMPLETE – Ina approved on 3/18/24. EPA approved on 3/19/24. ABCA – COMPLETE – Approved by EPA on 5/5/25 Clearance SAP – COMPLETE – Approved by EPA on 5/13/25 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> BMI SAP – COMPLETE – Approved by EPA on 5/13/25 Building Materials Investigation – COMPLETE – Report issued on 7/3/25 ABCA – COMPLETE – Approved on 9/30/25 Clearance SAP – COMPLETE – Approved on 9/30/25 Community Relations Plan – COMPLETE – Approved on 9/30/25

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2025 Brownfields Public Record

(Continued from page #)

Fort Belknap Indian Community Environmental Protection Department

SITE NAME	Snake Butte Rock Quarry	Old Lodge Pole Elementary School	Old Sacred Heart Church	Old Agency Water Treatment Plant	Burned Homes Project	Assessment Homes
<i>What Type of Response Action was Taken? (Continued)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> August 30, 2016 – copy provided to Brownfields Environmental Technician & Environmental Compliance Officer. No additional assessment is recommended. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> August 2022 – Cleanup Grant secured. June 2023- Fort Belknap Indian Community USEPA Brownfields Cleanup Project Work Plan Submitted & Approved. October 2023 – Fort Belknap QAPP was signed & approved. Community relation plans for each site were developed in January 2024 and approved in March 2024. SAP Pre clean up meetings Project clearance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> August 2022 – Cleanup Grant secured. June 2023- Fort Belknap Indian Community USEPA Brownfields Cleanup Project Work Plan Submitted & Approved. October 2023 – Fort Belknap QAPP was signed & approved. ABCAs were developed for the Sacred Heart Church, Approved March 2024 Community relation plans for each site were developed in January 2024 and approved in March 2024. Clearance SAPs for the Sacred Heart Church Pre-cleanup meetings were held for Sacred Heart Church Public Meeting – 4/24/24 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> August 2022 – Cleanup Grant secured. June 2023 – Fort Belknap Indian Community USEPA Brownfields Cleanup Project Work plan was Submitted & Approved. August 2023 – Water Treatment site inspection was done. October 2023 – Fort Belknap QAPP was signed & approved. ABCAs were developed for the Water Treatment Plant, Approved March 2024 Community relation plan was developed in January 2024 and approved in March 2024. The Clearance SAP for the Water Treatment Plant was approved on 10/1/24. Pre-cleanup meetings were held for Water Treatment Plant Public Meeting – 4/24/24 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community Relations Plan – COMPLETE – Approved by EPA on 5/5/25 Public Meetings – COMPLETE – Held on 5/15/25 Cleanup – COMPLETE – Final Signoff on 10/1/25 Cleanup Oversight – COMPLETE – Final Signoff on 10/1/25 Cleanup Reporting – COMPLETE – Submitted on 10/23/25 Fact Sheet – 11/30/25 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public Meetings – COMPLETE – Held on 9/9/25 Cleanup – Scheduled for 11/3/25 Cleanup Oversight – Scheduled for 11/3/25 Cleanup Reporting – Expected 11/30/25 Fact Sheet – 11/30/25
<i>Date Action is Planned</i>	Spring 2017 Signage & fencing at site.	2023-2025	2023-2025	2023-2025	2025	2025
<i>Name of Owner at Time of Clean-up</i>	Fort Belknap Indian Community	Fort Belknap Indian Community	Fort Belknap Indian Community	Fort Belknap Indian Community	Fort Belknap Indian Community	Fort Belknap Indian Community
<i>Owner Address, City, State, Zip</i>	Fort Belknap Agency 656 Agency Main St. Harlem, MT 59526	Fort Belknap Agency 656 Agency Main St. Harlem, MT 59526	Fort Belknap Agency 656 Agency Main St. Harlem, MT 59526	Fort Belknap Agency 656 Agency Main St. Harlem, MT 59526	Fort Belknap Agency 656 Agency Main St. Harlem, MT 59526	Fort Belknap Agency 656 Agency Main St. Harlem, MT 59526
<i>Latitude/ Longitude</i>	N48.23445° W108.50179°	N 48.48428° W108.7722°	N48.4488° W108.65863°	N48.48428° W108.7722°	5 sites across reservation	108.7618695 48.4808838
<i>Legal Description</i>	T31N, R22E, SEC 35	T26N, R25E, Sec 5	T31N, R24E, Sec 18	T32N, R23E, Sec 32	Fort Belknap reservation	Section 32 Township 32 North, Range 23 East
<i>Are Institutional Controls (IC) Needed at Site?</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No

(Continued on page #)

SITE NAME	Snake Butte Rock Quarry	Old Lodge Pole Elementary School	Old Sacred Heart Church	Old Agency Water Treatment Plant	Burned Homes Project	Assessment Homes
Are ICs in Place?	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Type of Institutional Control (IC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Signage- Spring #1 (Alternate DW) & Springs #2 & #3 (Toluene Presence). Fencing-Spring #1 (Spring Box); Springs #2 & #3 (Perimeter); and 2-Tunnels (Remove Access). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building is locked up. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building boarded up. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building is not locked up/secured. August 2023- Building was locked up & secured 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> None
Summarize Nature of Contamination at Site	<p>Springs #2 & #3 indicate low levels of toluene, but due to no human contact, pathway is incomplete. Spring #1 indicates no exceedances above EPA Regional Screening Level (RSL). No contamination of surface soils or waste rock soil piles.</p>	<p>Lodge Pole Elementary School was built in 1957. <u>ACM</u> - Shop, Residence, North Addition, School Old Section Exterior, School Old Section Interior, School New Section. <u>LBP</u> - Shop Interior, Shop Exterior, School Residence Interior, School Residence Exterior, School Old Section. <u>Lead in Soils</u> - Around Shop and Residences. <u>PCB-Containing Ballasts</u> - School Old Section, School New Section. <u>Mercury Thermostat Switches</u> - Maintenance Garage and School Old Section. <u>Mold</u> - School Old Section. <u>Guano</u> - School Old Section. <u>Petroleum Hydrocarbons & Unknown Chemicals</u> - Several containers in Maintenance Garage.</p>	<p>Sacred Heart Catholic Church was built in 1931. <u>ACM</u> in Boiler Jacket in Basement. <u>LBP</u> on exterior door frame, door jam, window frame. <u>Guano</u></p>	<p>Agency Water Treatment Plant was built in 1973. <u>ACM</u> in Dry Wall Compound, in ceiling, walls throughout building, seam tape in north addition. <u>PCB-Containing Ballasts</u> <u>Guano</u> > 1 foot in interior throughout building. <u>Petroleum Hydrocarbons & Unknown Chemicals</u> 3-drum diallyl dimethylammonium chloride; 1-drum corrosive liquid coagulant; 1-drum unknown contents, labeled "mix-up"; and 1-drum overpacked (inside and outside facility).</p>	<p>Homes suspected to have been built in 1960s, BMI found Lead Based Paint & asbestos.</p>	<p>Homes suspected to have been built in 1960s, BMI found asbestos.</p>
Site Size in Acres	<800 acres	8.750 acres	10 acres	314.390 acres	5 acres	2 acres

2005 National Brownfields Conference

Submitted by: Sherry Bishop, Brownfields Coordinator

The Fort Belknap brownfields coordinator and environmental technician attended the 2005 National Brownfields Conference, held on November 2-4, 2005 in Denver, Colorado. This yearly event usually attracts over 4,000 participants interested in brownfields transactions and redevelopment, real estate funding and financing, economic development, community revitalization, smart growth, and related environmental topics. Each year the conference is hosted by one of EPA's 10 regions of the United States. Back in October 2001, (Fort Belknap Tribes first year of the brownfields program), the coordinator remembers being very nervous about flying to Chicago, Illinois. This was shortly after 911 and also the very first time of flying alone. Since then, traveling has gotten easier, and the coordinator says that once you've been to a big city, you've seen them all. The conferences that the Fort Belknap Brownfields staff attended have been held in Chicago, IL, Charlotte, NC, Portland, OR, St. Louis, MO, and Denver, CO to date. Brownfields 2006 is scheduled for Boston, MA.

This year, the Fort Belknap brownfields coordinator was invited by EPA to participate in the planning for the conference. Region 8 covering the states of

Montana, Colorado, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming, and Utah was able to provide input on the direction and themes of the conference, as well as plan for a series of sessions. The brownfields coordinator participated in the tribal workgroup that discussed what sessions would be most beneficial for tribes and discussions that focused on current brownfields issues with tribes.

The planning proved to be

session that the Fort Belknap staff attended, proved to be very informative.

The opening night of the reception was also unique to the conference. Some of the youth from the Denver Indian Resource Center gathered in the reception area, dressed fully in their dance attire and danced different dances, such as the women's fancy, men's traditional, and the round dance. The drummer announced each of the dancers and named the tribe that they represented and described each dance that they were to perform. He played the hand drum and sang as the dancers joined in with the songs. People were very receptive and were quite amazed, as many had never seen such a thing.

The Fort Belknap staff also participated in the conference's poster session. There were over 300 poster presenters at the conference and only two tribal poster presenters. Fort Belknap is proud to have been one of these presenters.



2005 National Brownfields Conference
Sherry Bishop and Robert Azure posing with
their display booth at the Denver convention
center.

very beneficial for tribes to come together and learn from one another. Sessions were planned though out the conference and were not overlapped as they have been in the past. Several key speakers from other tribal brownfields programs made up panelists during the sessions and presented their program activities and accomplishments of their programs. Handouts and program materials were provided at each session. There were over 200 sessions to choose from and each and every

*"Bridging our
differences builds a
strong foundation
for progress."*

DEQ Announces Approval of Montana's Regional Haze State Implementation Plan

By Madison McGeffers | December 1, 2025

The Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) announces that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has issued its final approval of Montana's regional haze State Implementation Plan (SIP) submitted on August 10, 2022. The approval affirms Montana's long-term strategy to improve visibility in national parks and wilderness areas in accordance with the federal Clean Air Act (CAA) and EPA's Regional Haze Rule.

"Montanans care deeply about clean air and the iconic views that define our state," said DEQ Director Sonja Nowakowski. "EPA's final approval reflects the strong, science-based work undertaken by DEQ staff to ensure air quality and visibility in our national parks and wilderness areas "

"Montana's commitment to addressing regional haze is a testament to their hard work in safeguarding

Montana's natural beauty and wilderness areas," said EPA Regional Administrator Cyrus Western. "Approving this plan reinforces our shared goal of ensuring clean air for every American by working collaboratively with state partners to advance these efforts."

Montana's 2022 SIP submission outlines the state's approach to ensuring reasonable progress toward preventing future and remedying existing visibility impairment—commonly known as regional haze. The plan fulfills all applicable requirements for the second phase of the regional haze program, including updated long-term strategies and emissions assessments.

Additional information about Montana's regional haze program and SIP submissions can be found at deq.mt.gov.



Benefits of Rotational Grazing

Submitted by Shelby Main, Nonpoint Source Pollution Coordinator

Interview with Vincent Fortin Sr.; Rockin VF Ranch, Hays, Montana; First generation rancher; Fort Belknap Indian Community.

Question: *How do you ensure your ranching practices protect the land and water sources on and around your property?*

Answer: Yearly maintenance, not over stocking or over grazing. Mostly keeping up on maintenance.

Question: *What specific strategies do you use to conserve water in your daily operations?*

Answer: Not over stocking the fields, recently I've been trying to build up a reservoir.

Question: *Building a reservoir for water harvesting?*

Answer: Yes I guess you can say that.

Question: *Can you describe the nonpoint source pollution challenges you face and how you address them?*

Answer: Yes, there are several factors that contribute to pollution throughout the leases. Road crossing, plugged culverts or just places that can use a culvert, or a road to cross the creeks for easier access.



Vince and his kids riding horses together

Question: *What preventative measures have you implemented to minimize environmental impact?*

Answer: Maintaining rotational grazing, making sure I am not over stocking, and especially over grazing the pastures, that way the ground can regenerate forage for the next year.

Question: *How do you manage grazing rotation to maintain the health of your pastures and prevent overgrazing?*

Answer: I make sure I am not over stocking the pastures,

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Benefits of Rotational Grazing

(Continued from page 19)

like not putting too much numbers in the field, you know like how many animals that field can sustain (how many animals can eat/water there).



Vince on his horse "Gus"

Question: What factors do you consider when planning your grazing schedule?

Answer: I base my grazing schedules on how the tribe operates- The Tribe has 6 month leases in their grazing units. Beginning on May 15th and ending on November 15th every year.

Question: How have family cultural values shaped your approach to ranching and land management?

Answer: Family, well they have everything to do with it. They are why I do it, family is who I do it for. Every year we have at least one thing to look forward to, you know, like branding. If we don't get together for anything else, at least we know our family branding is around the same time every year and we know everyone is going to be there, at least. It gives a sense of hope.

Question: What traditions or values are most important to your family's ranching legacy?

Answer: Well, all of it really, it makes a person honest, helps build work ethic, like showing up for work, integrity, self respect, self esteem, being a good neighbor, helping out any way you can, it like taking the high road, and if there is no high road then hell you got to make one.

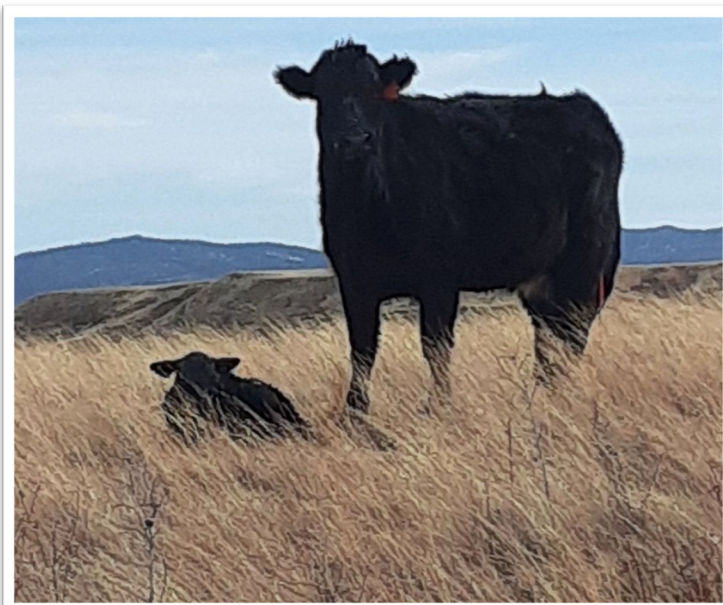
Question: What does stewardship mean to you, and how do you put it into practice on your ranch?

Answer: Stewardship? Well it means everything to me. It's like preparing for my kids, it's like the way my grandpa taught me to never borrow from anyone and if I have no choice but to borrow from someone, to give it back the same way I took it. I guess having to lease from the tribe I am pretty much borrowing the land I lease so I like to make sure I take extra good care of the place. If there are little things I can do to make it better, I do it. Sometimes

those small little changes have a big impact on the land or the water.

Question: Can you share any examples of successful stewardship projects or initiatives you've undertaken?

Answer: I'd like to think so, I am you can probably answer that better than I can for myself you know.



A cow/calf pair born and raised in Fort Belknap

Question: What environmental issues do ranchers face, and what support is available to you?

Answer: Well drought, that's a big issue we face. The water is sometimes hard to come by, especially when it's a dry year. As far as support goes I guess I don't know much support available to ranchers. I guess there is FSA, USDA and the little incentives they give for like when it's a bad year and say losing animals to the cold, or things like that, a type of insurance I suppose.

Question: What issues do you find most exhausting and do these issues ever get resolved?

Answer: Crossing permits, those are exhausting and come with a lot of unnecessary paperwork and almost like, hidden fees. The crossing permit fees can throw a whole operation off if you don't know about them. Not paying a permit fee will cause your whole lease to go into a delinquent status and cost a guy the farm, they just throw everything off because of a few dollars you can lose your entire years lease.

Question: Do you currently or have you in the past dealt with neighboring issues that may contribute to the ability to control the nonpoint sources of pollution within your operations?

(Continued on page 21)

Benefits of Rotational Grazing

(Continued from page 20)

Answer: Not too much neighboring issues, maybe a bull or two crossing the fence and getting in with my cows but that's a given. Sometimes the maintenance in some leases, the fence needs more work than others.

Question: *Do you ever have issues with wild life?*

Answer: Prairie Dogs, those things are an issue every year and they are just getting worse. They can tear up an entire grazing field in a few short years. I mean they eat the grass down to the dirt, and when that happens the grass don't grow back usually. With that happening and getting worse, I don't understand why we have to keep them around, I mean they defeat the whole purpose in rotational grazing. If you don't rotate your cattle, or horses, the grass gets grazed to the dirt and we just get kicked off the leases for over grazing. So, ya prairie dogs are a big issue here in Fort Belknap.

Question: *Are you willing to work with the nonpoint source program and begin a mini project, and pilot a demonstration site where we would be able to measure the outcome of whatever technique we decide is best to start with. There is rainwater harvesting, including runoff or a water catchment, like the reservoir you mentioned?*

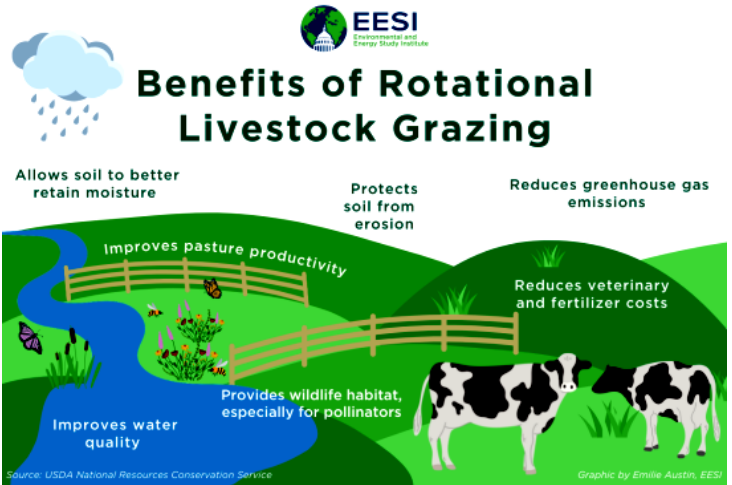
Answer: Yes, I would be willing to do something like that.

Question: *We can see how maybe creating a buffer zone and an exclusion fence and measure the outcome from adding that to what you've been working on.*

Answer: Ya, we can try that.

Question: *In closing is there anything you'd like to add or say about ranching that you want new or upcoming ranchers to know when starting out?*

Answer: Ya, I guess I'd like them to know that it's a lot of work, there isn't much money in it; a lot of times you barley break even when it comes to money. But if you love what you do, it isn't work at all. If you ever have questions or want to learn, don't ever be afraid to ask someone. You have to learn about rotational grazing, so you can keep your animals fed. Learn all you can, ask all the questions you need to so you understand what you'll need before you need it. Know what you're lacking or if you don't know about forage to cattle ratio, learn about it. Learn what it is and how to break it down so you don't have to stress about feeding your animals. If you have too many animals in one field you'll have issues. Find all the ways you can to keep your animals in good shape, fed, watered, and you'll be set. Your kids will be mounted good and they won't have to go through all that (trial & error) just to get on and ride a horse. You do it right and get things ready ahead of time, your kids will be good and won't need to worry about much. You'll already have them set up long after you're gone.



Rotational livestock grazing is a sustainable practice that involves frequently rotating livestock to different portions of a pasture to minimize overgrazing. This practice can look different across farms and ranches depending on how often livestock are moved and the number of grazing areas. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), simple rotational grazing involves “a few pastures that livestock are rotated through” whereas management-intensive rotational grazing “is when livestock graze on small areas of pasture, or paddocks, for a very short period of time, rotating frequently from one to another to maximize forage regrowth.” Management-intensive grazing systems often offer additional environmental and climate benefits, but involve more management, monitoring, and higher initial costs compared to simple rotational grazing systems.

The following programs within the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service provide technical and financial assistance to help ranchers implement rotational livestock grazing:

- The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) helps farmers and agricultural producers maintain, improve, or adopt new conservation practices, such as rotational livestock grazing.
- The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) provides financial and technical assistance for projects that address natural resource concerns and provide environmental benefits, including rotational livestock grazing.
- The Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) brings together key stakeholders like conservation organizations and state agencies to achieve shared conservation goals, such as helping agricultural producers adopt rotational livestock grazing.
- The Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI) provides technical assistance on conservation grazing practices, including rotational livestock grazing.

AS AN AG PRODUCER, HOW I CAN HELP THE PEOPLES CREEK WATERSHED?

WHAT IMPACTS?

Contamination of surface water from farming and grazing:

- bacterial contamination
- nutrient over-enrichment
- soil erosion from pastures
- fertilizer, manure, and urine on nitrogen cycling

DID YOU KNOW?

-Having a water tank for cattle reduces the amount of time that cattle spend in the stream by as much as 75%

- Buffers have a positive effect on soil and wildlife resources. They can remove up to 70% or more sediment

WHERE IS THE PEOPLES CREEK WATERSHED?

The Peoples Creek Watershed encompasses approximately 454,585 acres and almost 70% of the watershed lies within the Fort Belknap Reservation boundary.

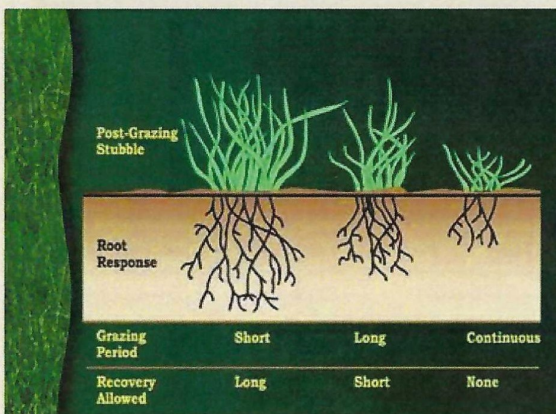
A Peoples Creek Watershed Plan was Recently Completed by the Environmental Department!

BUFFER / FILTER STRIPS

Areas of permanent vegetation within and between agricultural fields and the water. They slow and filter storm runoff while helping to hold soil in place.



Photo source: USDA NRCS



AS AN AG PRODUCER, HOW I CAN HELP THE PEOPLES CREEK WATERSHED?

PREVENT OVERSTOCKING

Pastures should not be overstocked. If a pasture is overgrazed, runoff of water and nutrients is likely. There is also the risk that contaminated water could leach through the soil and reach groundwater.

FENCING

Subdivide the pasture with fencing to better control where/how often the animals graze. This will reduce the excessive accumulation of manure nutrients in certain areas like shaded loafing areas.

**A WATERSHED
PLAN WAS
COMPLETED!
WANT TO LEARN
MORE?
CONTACT US**

FBIC Environmental
Department
(406) 353-8384
656 Agency Main St
Harlem, MT



STREAM/CREEK BUFFER

Have pastures more than 150 feet from surface water and 50 feet from water wells. If this is not feasible, they should only have limited access. **If there is fencing, do not cut the fence!**

OTHER WATER SOURCES

Add other water sources. Placing water tanks away from streams will help keep livestock from streambanks and riparian areas.

ROTATE WATER & FEEDING

Rotate water tanks and feeding areas, especially during heavy rains. This will prevent accumulation of manure/spent feed that could move into nearby surface water.



Photo source: Boswell 2009, Montana State University

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SEPTIC SYSTEM MAINTENANCE AND BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

WHAT IS A SEPTIC SYSTEM AND HOW DOES IT WORK?

A septic system is located underground and receives waste water from a home's plumbing facilities (bathrooms, laundry, kitchen) where it is treated and then released to the soil underground. Many rural homes on the Reservation have septic systems. A schematic of a general septic system is shown below.

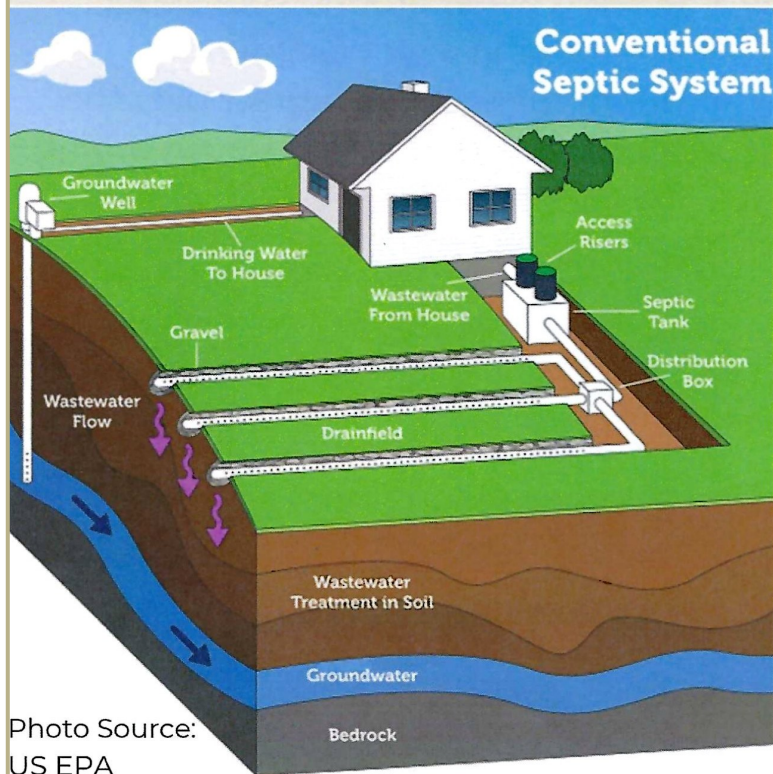


Photo Source:
US EPA

Solids are separated from the liquids and settle in the tank which is water tight. Any liquid from the system discharges through the drain field, where it is naturally treated by microbes in the soil.

HOW DO I KNOW IF I HAVE A SEPTIC SYSTEM AT HOME?

Here are a few signs indicating that you likely have a septic system:

- You do not receive a sewer bill.
- Your water is supplied by a well.
- You live in a rural area.
- Your neighbors have a septic.
- There is no meter on the waterline entering your home.

DO I NEED TO MAINTAIN MY SEPTIC SYSTEM?

Yes! Septic systems must be properly maintained to ensure they are functioning correctly so they don't fail.

Why? Regular septic maintenance will save a homeowner money. A failing septic system is expensive to repair or replace. In addition, sewage from a failing septic system will not be adequately treated, and can threaten human health by contaminating drinking water wells. Surface water can also be contaminated with bacteria and viruses from improperly treated sewage, spreading disease to both humans and animals.

SEPTIC SYSTEM MAINTENANCE AND BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

HOW DO I MAINTAIN MY SEPTIC SYSTEM?

- The average household septic system should be inspected every 3 years by a septic service professional.
- Have your septic tank pumped every 3-5 years by a licensed septic pumper.
- Use water efficiently by following these tips:
 - Fix leaking water fixtures & toilets.
 - Install high-efficiency toilets, faucet aerators, high-efficiency shower heads, and other low-water use appliances (ENERGY STAR).
 - Wash full loads of laundry and space out laundry loads to give water time to move through the septic system.
- Only flush human waste and toilet paper. **Never flush:**
 - Feminine hygiene products
 - Baby wipes or wet wipes
 - Medications
 - Cat litter
 - Cooking grease or oil
 - Any household chemicals such as paint, oil, pesticides, or antifreeze
 - Coffee grounds
 - Cigarette butts
- Do **not** use septic tank additives.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS THAT MY SEPTIC SYSTEM NEEDS MAINTENANCE?

- Foul odor or sewage smell near the septic tank or the drainfield.
- Water drains very slowly in sinks and bathtubs.
- Water backs up in household drains.
- Toilets are slow to flush.
- Pooling water around your septic system or in your basement.
- Bright green, or lush grass over the septic tank or drainfield, even during dry weather.

For a list of licensed septic pumpers in the state of Montana, contact the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) at 406-444-2544, or review the list on the MDEQ website at: <https://deq.mt.gov/twr/Programs/septic-tank>

HAVE QUESTIONS? WANT TO LEARN MORE? CONTACT US

FBIC Environmental
Department
(406) 353-8384
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Harlem, MT



For more information on how you can be SepticSmart, visit www.epa.gov/septicSMART

PEOPLES CREEK WATERSHED FACT SHEET

WHAT IS A WATERSHED?

A watershed is an area of land that drains all the rainfall, snowmelt, and runoff to a specific water body such as a stream or river, like Peoples Creek.

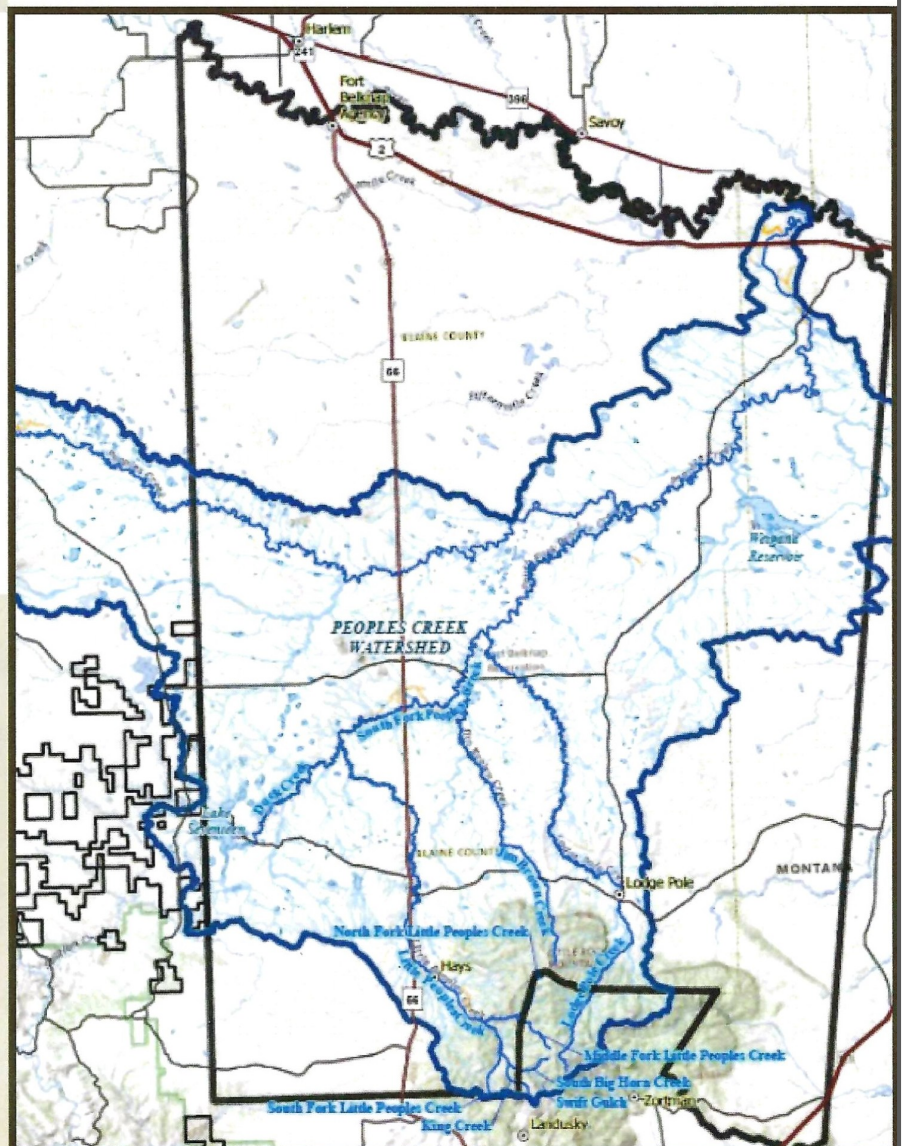
WHY ARE WATERSHEDS IMPORTANT?

Watersheds sustain life by supplying the water we drink, providing water for our livestock and irrigation water for the crops we grow, create habitat for plants and animals, and offer recreational opportunities.



WHERE IS THE PEOPLES CREEK WATERSHED?

The Peoples Creek Watershed encompasses approximately 454,585 acres in Blaine and Phillips counties. Nearly 70% of the watershed lies within the Fort Belknap Reservation boundary.



PEOPLES CREEK WATERSHED FACT SHEET

ARE THERE ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS IN PEOPLES CREEK WATERSHED?

Yes! Environmental concerns include livestock waste and other agricultural products such as fertilizers and pesticides that can enter the watershed when they are applied. Other concerns include contaminants from leaking septic tanks, lagoons, and former mining operations that may enter the watershed.

PEOPLES CREEK WATERSHED PLAN

The FBIC Environmental Department developed a Peoples Creek Watershed Plan to protect and improve water quality within the Peoples Creek Watershed. The Peoples Creek Watershed Plan will also serve as a guidance document for future projects.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO PROTECT THE PEOPLES CREEK WATERSHED?

- Conserve water at home.
- Limit livestock access to creeks and streams.
- Only apply pesticides or herbicides during calm, non-windy conditions and not when it is raining or expected to rain.
- Follow manufacturer application rate guidelines of pesticides and herbicides so they are not overapplied.
- Do not apply pesticides, herbicides, or fertilizers near surface water.
- Don't over apply fertilizers and consider using organic fertilizers.
- Dispose of chemicals properly and never pour them down the drain.
- Have your septic system inspected and pumped every 3-5 years.

QUESTIONS? WANT TO LEARN MORE? CONTACT US

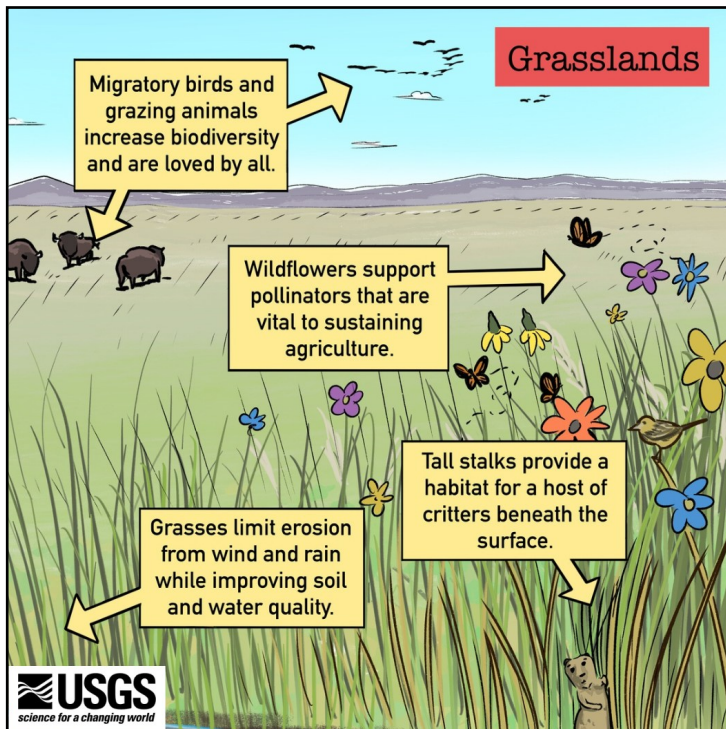
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Grassland Ecosystems

By Climate Adaptation Science Centers October 2023 (approx.)
<https://www.usgs.gov/media/images/grassland-ecosystems>



Detailed Description

While these vast open spaces might seem uniform, they're actually home to diverse plant and animal species, and they provide a whole host of ecosystem services! Migratory birds and grazing animals increase biodiversity and are loved by all. Wildflowers support pollinators that are vital to sustainable agriculture. Tall stalks provide habitat for a host of critters beneath the surface. Grasses limit erosion from wind and rain while improving soil and water quality.

Prairie Pothole Wetlands

By Climate Adaptation Science Centers May 2, 2025
<https://www.usgs.gov/media/images/prairie-pothole-wetlands>

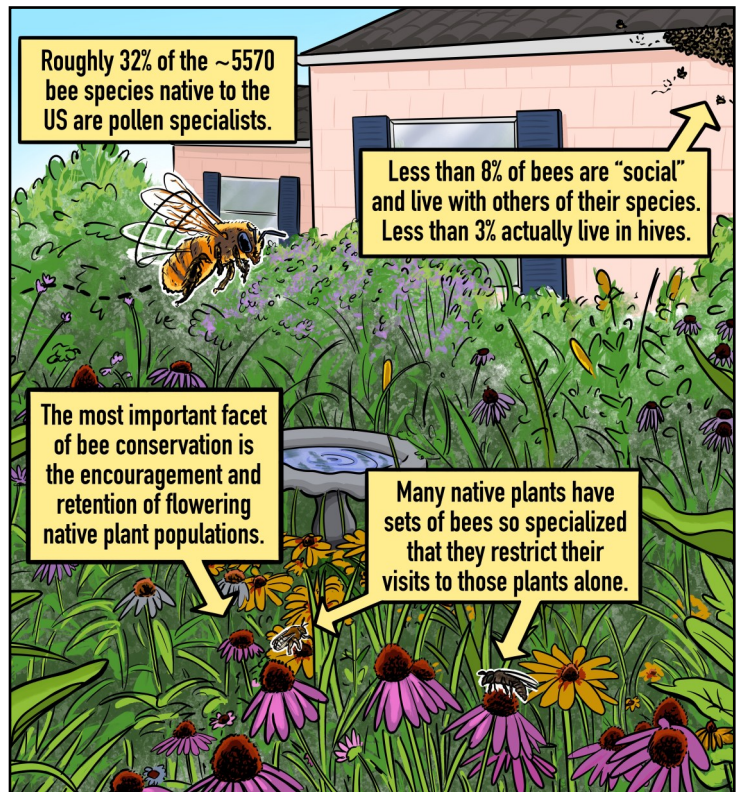
Detailed Description

The Prairie Pothole Wetlands:

- Provide critical habitat for many migratory bird species;
- Provide recreation opportunities;
- Hold large amounts of carbon, mitigating the effects of climate change;
- Store water and slow runoff following extreme precipitation events, reducing damage from floods.

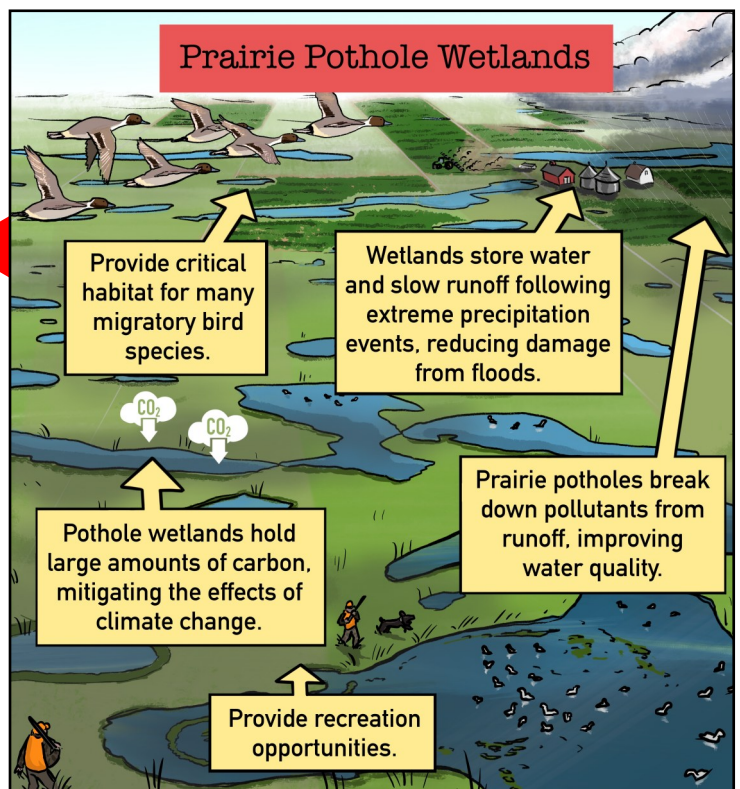
Bees as Pollinators_1

By Climate Adaptation Science Centers September 9, 2025
<https://www.usgs.gov/media/images/bees-pollinators1>



Detailed Description

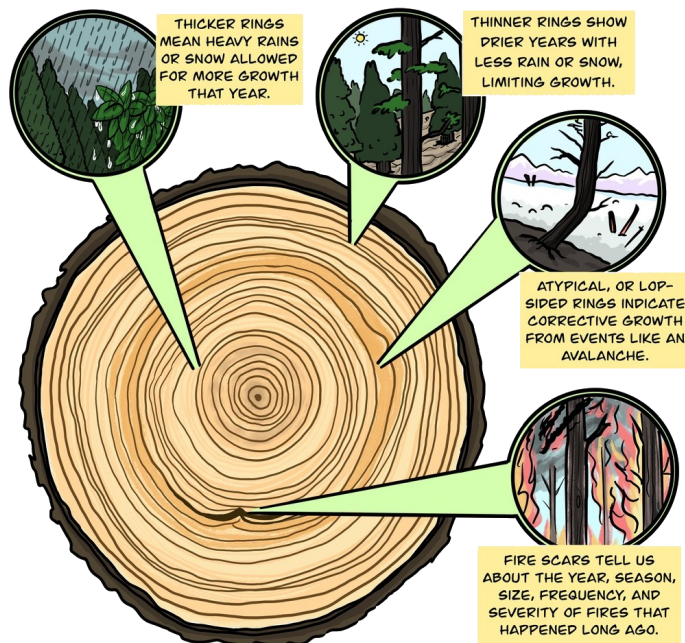
Roughly 32% of the ~5570 bee species native to the US are pollen specialists, making them an important part of ecosystems.



Tree Rings

By Climate Adaptation Science Centers January 22, 2024
<https://www.usgs.gov/media/images/tree-rings>

INTERPRETING TREE RINGS



Detailed Description

The secret lives of... trees? Trees can live for hundreds and sometimes thousands of years. As they grow, they add new layers of growth – or tree rings – that scientists can study to learn about the tree's life. The width of tree rings often reflects the factor most influencing growth from one year to the next depending upon where the tree lives.

Thicker rings often mean heavy rain or snow allowed more growth during that year. Thinner rings often mean less rain or snow, and thus less growth. Scarred or lopsided rings could indicate the tree got hit by an avalanche or some other event that the tree had to recover from. Scars in the rings can also record past fires.

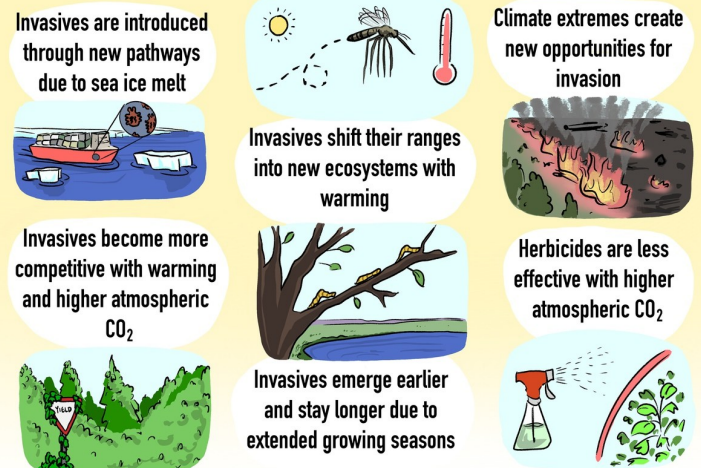
By studying rings in individual trees and through comparisons between trees, paleoclimate researchers can learn about past changes in temperature, precipitation, fires, insect outbreaks, and hazards like avalanches and earthquakes. For example, fire scars can tell us the year, season, size, frequency, severity and climate relationships of fires that happened long ago.

With the help of tree rings, scientists have been able to reconstruct environmental changes thousands of years into the past!

Climate Change Helps Invasive Species Spread

By Climate Adaptation Science Centers July 26, 2023
<https://www.usgs.gov/media/images/climate-change-helps-invasive-species-spread>

Climate Change Helps Invasive Species Spread



Detailed Description

Climate change is impacting invasive species in many ways, including:

- Creating new pathways for invasive species to be introduced, such as new shipping routes that open up as sea ice retreats.
- Increasing CO2 levels, making some invasive plants more competitive and making herbicides less effective
- Causing range shifts as invasive species expand their range into habitats once too cool for them.
- Allowing earlier and longer emergence of pests due to extended growing seasons
- Creating new opportunities for invasions through extreme events like wildfires and hurricanes

Fort Belknap Environmental Protection Department

Circle Speaker Newsletter
Volume 30, Issue 2
(January–March, 2026)

Deadline for Articles:
Friday, March 6th, 2026
@ 5:00 p.m.

Articles can be emailed to:
lonettebc@ftbelknap.org

To allow time for editing and layout of the newsletter, articles must be submitted on time in order to be considered for publication. Articles received after this deadline will be considered for the following issue. All articles submitted are subject to review and approval.



Fort Belknap Indian Community
ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION
DEPARTMENT
Fort Belknap Agency
656 Agency Main Street
Harlem, Montana 59526

FBEPD Directory:

Mitchell Healy

*Acting Environmental Manager/
Water Quality Coordinator*
mitchell.healy@ftbelknap.org
(406) 353-8433/8421

Lonette BlackCrow

Administrative Assistant
lonettebc@ftbelknap.org
(406) 353-8384

Jeremy Walker

Environmental Specialist
jeremy.walker@ftbelknap.org
(406) 353-8465

Vacant

GIS Technician
Email tba
(406) 353-8412

Shelby Main

Nonpoint Source Coordinator
shelby.main@ftbelknap.org
(406) 353-8416

Adrian Kulbeck

Brownfields Coordinator
adrian.kulbeck@ftbelknap.org
(406) 353-8411

Kermit Snow, Jr.

*Environmental Compliance
Officer*
ksnow@ftbelknap.org
(406) 353-8368

Megan Martin

*Brownfields Environmental
Technician*
megan.martin@ftbelknap.org
(406) 353-8431



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Merry Christmas & Happy New Year



Find our newsletters on <https://ftbelknap.org/forms%2Fdocuments> (EPA)

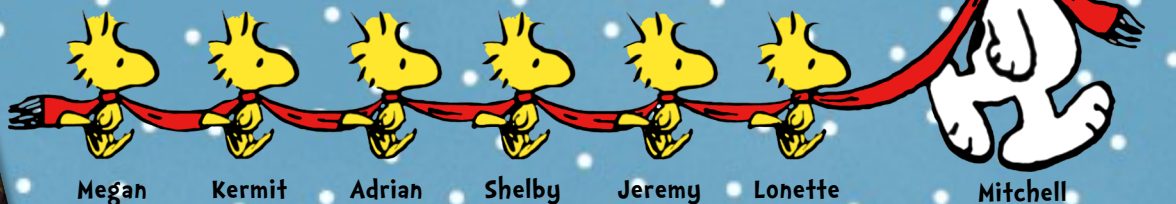


Ina has been detailed to the Chief Administrative Officer "CAO" position with the Fort Belknap Indian Community on a 90-day Detail. Mr. Mitchell Healy, Water Quality Coordinator, will be Acting Environmental Manager in her absence.

If you have any questions, please call Mitchell Healy at (406) 353-8433, email mitchell.healy@ftbelknap.org, or Lonette Blackcrow at (406) 353-8384, email lonettebc@ftbelknap.org.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS

From the Fort Belknap
Environmental Protection Department



Performance Partnership Grant (PPG) | General Assistance Program (GAP) | Water Quality Program (WQ) | Nonpoint Source Pollution Program (NPS) |
Nonpoint Source Special Project | Brownfields | IUA Brownfields 128a Project | Brownfields Cleanup Grant.