

# Circle Speaker

JANUARY—MARCH 2022

WHITE CLAY & NAKODA ENVIRONMENTAL NEWSLETTER

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Landusky water treatment facility shown in 2004 (Courtesy Bureau of Land Management).

## DEQ pauses Zortman Landusky project, but mine owner may move forward with larger project

BY: DARRELL EHRLICK - FEBRUARY 4, 2022 8:25 AM

<https://dailymontanain.com/2022/02/04/deq-pauses-zortman-landusky-project-but-mine-owner-may-move-forward-with-larger-project/>

On Thursday, the Montana Department of Environmental Quality announced that it would require a small mining operation to undergo more historical and environmental assessment before taking as much as a 125 tons of rock for metallurgical sampling.

The new requirement came after the nearby Fort Belknap Indian Community raised concerns about the site's archaeological and spiritual significance, and that community was joined by support

from the Fort Peck Indian Community as well as the Confederated Salish and Kootenai tribes.

However, the mine's owner, Luke Ployhar, said that further analysis could easily cost upwards of \$200,000, and the DEQ has already approved a permit for removing as many as 10,000 tons of rocks without such a study, so he will likely pursue the previously approved project even though it could be more

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## DEQ pauses Zortman Landusky project, but mine owner may move forward with larger project

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disruptive than the smaller, limited 10-day project that now has more requirements.

The mining permits centers on private land that was previously part of the Pegasus gold mine that went bankrupt in Zortman Landusky in Phillips County. It was the site of extensive remediation after acid mine drainage caused environmental damage that led to nearly \$30 million being spent during the course of two decades, with mining experts saying the contamination is likely permanent.

### Two permits, same owner

Ployhar purchased the land after Pegasus went bankrupt, outbidding the nearby Fort Belknap Indian Community. For years, he's held the land, but when a lapse in federal paperwork caused a mining moratorium to expire, he filed new claims on the site.

One of those claims was part of a larger, more extensive plan to remove more than 10,000 tons of rock for testing and exploration. That original project was approved by the DEQ, but hasn't been completed because Ployhar has not yet submitted the bond to begin the work.

However, he later scaled back the project to only remove 125 tons of rock in a trench not much bigger than a house's foundation (35 feet long, 10 feet wide by 25 feet deep). A draft environmental analysis performed by the DEQ didn't raise any significant issues with the exploration late in 2021. During a contentious public meeting, though, tribal members and others spoke against the project, and the Fort Belknap Indian Community accused state officials of not consulting them and discounting the historical, archaeological and spiritual significance of the land.

In the final assessment, prepared after the meeting, the department said that after further consultation with the tribal officials, including the tribal historical preservation officer, it determined that more analysis was likely needed, and that cost would be borne by Ployhar if he wanted to complete the smaller project.

Ployhar told the Daily Montanan that the issue raises serious questions about private property rights, and said that a cultural and archaeological assessment

has already been completed on the land prior to the Pegasus mine. He also said the tribe repeatedly asked Pegasus to develop mining on tribal lands so that it could reap the financial benefits of gold mining. He suspects the tribes are trying to stymie his plans so that they can capitalize on the proven gold reserves.

### 'We must follow the law'

The DEQ defended its revised assessment, saying the changed outcome proves the public process works. In other words, the public input was incorporated to the final decision.

"Comments on the draft environmental assessment presented DEQ with conflicting evidence from credible and potentially expert sources," the department said. "This evidence raises substantial questions regarding whether significant impacts could occur to historical, archaeological, social and cultural resources as a result of the proposed actions."

Michael Black Wolf, the Fort Belknap Tribal Historic Preservation Officer, weighed in on the proposed project, as did cultural resource officers from Fort Peck Assiniboine and Sioux and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes.

"Most, if not all, mountain tops/peaks are extremely important to the tribes (Gros Ventre and Assiniboine) both culturally and spiritually," Black Wolf wrote. "I appeal to your fundamental humanity and ask that you respect the spirituality and cultural beliefs of the Gros Ventre and Assiniboine tribes and weigh the immeasurable and irreparable impacts this project will have on the people and landscape."

The DEQ also sourced an ethnographic study of the Little Rocky Mountains that performed in conjunction with the state office of historic preservation.

"From the perspective of those that follow traditional ways, there is no clear-cut division between the physical characteristics of the environment and the spiritual characteristics of the environment," the research said. "Tribal members usually do not believe that once an area is destroyed or disturbed, the culturally significant sites or areas within the disturbed or

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## DEQ pauses Zortman Landusky project, but mine owner may move forward with larger project

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destroyed areas are diminished in value or importance. For the Nakoda (Assiniboine) and Aaniiih (Gros Ventre) the fact that the Zortman-Landusky mine disturbance exists does not diminish the spiritual importance of the Little Rocky Mountains, but rather emphasizes the need to continue to protect and heal this sacred space.”

DEQ Director Chris Dorrington signed the final environmental assessment, which will require further investigation if Ployhar and the mining were to move forward.

“This was the right decision for this site. DEQ received comments from three Tribal Historic Preservation officers, all of whom indicated potential serious impacts to cultural resources,” Dorrington said. “When public comments uncover substantive issues that were not addressed in our initial review, we must do our due diligence and follow the law.”



*The following is a statement Luke Ployhar provided to the Daily Montana explaining his concerns and position:*

We were notified by the DEQ yesterday that they plan on requiring an EIS due to what they call “potential serious impacts to the cultural resources for the Nakoda and Aaniiih people.” When speaking with the DEQ, I inquired as to the general costs of an EIS for our permit. They replied in the past that they have costed several hundreds of thousands of dollars. Keep in mind that our permit and any interests we have in exploration are on my own private property and would involve a 35-foot trench. Yet, the DEQ is requesting a several hundred thousand dollar Environment Impact Study? This is clearly government abuse and overreach. Keep in mind I purchased this property more than 20 years ago and have allowed the state full access to water treatment and past reclamation completely. The DEQ is stating that the tribes are concerned about cultural heritage sites and protecting them. Multiple studies have been done in the past for Pegasus Mining and it was determined that no significant cultural sites exist where we will be doing our work. I will be providing all documents to the state and informational outlets. In addition, I will be releasing the Pegasus tribal exploration plan documents that outline the tribes’ desire for Pegasus Mining

to explore tribal lands on the reservation for gold and minerals for exploitation. There was a drill program done and extensive research. Make no mistake, the tribes are interested in this area due to its significant economic possibilities and not cultural heritage. Any and all claims by the Tribes of bad water extending onto their lands is a blatant falsehood. The water treatment facilities put in place by Pegasus Mining are able to capture and contain and process any historical elevated acidic waters. Also, acidic water that is produced by the mountains was there long before mining ever started. It was a main factor in old time prospectors being able to locate mineralized vein structures that naturally produce “acid rock drainage.” In addition, there is also a common falsehood being propagated that it’s the Montana taxpayers footing the bill for water treatment. The money comes from a tax on other mining that takes place in Montana, not the general population tax.

In response to the DEQ’s unjustified decision to burden us with an absurd EIS responsibility, we will move back to our original permitted area to extract the 10,000 tons instead of the 750 at the new location. We will also appeal this decision based upon the requirements presented for normal exploration permits in the state. We will also be requesting an independent water quality study be done at both the Zortman and Landusky locations. It is our understanding that there is virtually little to no water contamination coming from old mining activities on the Zortman side and mild amounts depending on weather/water events on the Landusky side. The same companies that get the contracts for water treatment from the DEQ are the same ones engineering a perpetual cycle of contamination.

In addition to the current exploration that we are proposing at the sites, it is our belief that our long-term plan would benefit all parties involved. If we prove that mining is still viable in the Little Rocky Mountains — with correct planning and design we would be able to remediate water issues for the future as well as potentially contribute to actually rebuilding the current open pits back to their original mountain shapes. This would, I believe absolutely thrill the Tribes and environmental agencies that are encouraging the tribes to prevent mining. If they were willing to listen they might find that great good could be done to that area as well as produce economic benefit for the county, towns, and tribes of the area. I will be curious to see if anyone is interested in hearing what we would like to do...

# Fort Belknap Indian Community responds to Luke Ployhar's plans for mining at Zortman Landusky

BY: JEFFREY STIFFARM - FEBRUARY 14, 2022 9:57 AM

<https://dailymontanain.com/2022/02/14/fort-belknap-indian-community-responds-to-luke-ployhars-plans-for-mining-at-zortman-landusky/?eType=EmailBlastContent&eld=6fefc046-8d82-400d-97ad-3b036b129353>

Montanans have every reason to be proud of Luke Ployhar, a Hi-Line boy-made-good.

He was raised and educated in Montana, then moved away to explore opportunities in Hollywood, where he has had a successful career doing special effects work on major films. His glamorous path has given him more resources than most of us who live in Montana can imagine, especially those of us on the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation, where the majority of our Aaniiih and Nakoda people live below the poverty line.

Historic unemployment on our Reservation often exceeded 70%, especially on the southern end, in and around the Little Rockies where Mr. Ployhar wants to bring more gold mining.

The legacy of gold mining in the Little Rockies has been devastating to our people from both cultural and environmental perspectives. Therefore, our tribes have steadfastly resisted more mining ever since federal agents and gold-mining interests took the "Grinnell Notch" portion of the lands in the Little Rockies, promised to us in our solemn treaties with the United States in 1896, under express threat of starving our families and children if we did not agree to the land cession.

This grim history is recounted in numerous contemporaneous Congressional reports. But despite that deadly threat, only 37 Gros Ventres consented to the 1896 cession. This was because our land, and especially our mountains, are the foundation of our cultural practices. The Little Rockies are home to many of our sacred sites and cultural ceremonies. They are the place we go to fast, to pray, to engage in spiritual communion.

We endured the grave injustice of the loss of the Grinnell Notch, which was sliced and diced in various private land transactions thereafter. One such transaction resulted in Ployhar being able to pay a substantial sum of money for a property roughly 20 years ago, easily outbidding our poor tribes. He now seeks



Water from the Zortman Landusky site (Photo provided by the Fort Belknap Indian Community).

to explore gold mining on the property notwithstanding near universal local opposition to his proposals.

Happily, Gov. Greg Gianforte's Administration and the Montana Department of Environmental Quality have heard our concerns and pledged to follow Montana's environmental laws requiring deeper professional analysis of Ployhar's proposals. This is a major change from past mining permitting in the area, where tribal concerns were ignored and proper methods of identification of cultural sites were not followed.

In short, the State of Montana has announced their intent to follow Montana law and to do better than past administrations.

*(Continued on page 5)*



## Fort Belknap Indian Community responds to Luke Ployhar's plans for mining at Zortman Landusky

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Each of Ployhar's arguments about why he should not have to comply with Montana law is meritless:

1. **The modest costs of compliance with Montana's environmental laws are proportional to the potential damage of the proposed activity.** In his response to the DEQ's decision, Ployhar complains about the cost of legal compliance in comparison to what he categorizes as the de minimus size of the exploratory activity he wishes to undertake. Gold-mining is a highly environmentally destructive and toxic activity and Montana law requires DEQ's closer analysis of the environmental effects of Ployhar's proposal.
2. **The Tribes' opposition to any further gold-mining is not predicated on a secret desire to mine and profit from any gold ourselves.** Ployhar surmises that the tribes' opposition to his proposal is because the tribes wish to extract gold. Mr. Ployhar is mistaken. The Aaniiih and Nakoda people have zero interest in any more gold mining on or near our reservation. Water flows northward out of the Grinnell Notch on to our reservation. That water is routinely and continuously bright orange and foul as the photos illustrate. This intensive pollution is well-documented and persistent. The pollutants of gold mining have poisoned us for generations, creating documented cancer clusters, including among children, in the communities at the southern end of our reservation. We swim in the waters of Mission Canyon, important both for recreation as more or less our community pool, and also for certain ceremonies that require a cold plunge by participants. For years, we bathed in and ingested the chemical remnants of more than a century of gold mining. We are now continuously fighting to clean it up and restore the safety of the waters flowing to our permanent homeland.

Mr. Ployhar's statement that "Any and all claims by the tribes of bad water extending onto their lands is a blatant falsehood. The water treatment facilities put in place by Pegasus Mining are able to capture and contain and process any historical elevated acidic waters" simply could not be more wrong.

Ployhar's strident response statement misses the mark on many things. He is clearly angry and has failed to listen to our pleas not to take us down a



Water from the Zortman Landusky site (Photo provided by the Fort Belknap Indian Community).

path that further poisons our children and destroys their cultural heritage. There is no conspiracy at work—we want our children to be safe, we want to be able to drink our water, we want the graves of our relatives to be at peace, and we want our sacred places left unmolested as was promised to us in our treaties with the United States. These are modest dignities that we seek.

Ployhar's response wonders if the Aaniiih and Nakoda Tribes are willing to listen to him. We are and we will. Our doors and hearts are open to conversations. While we will not change our mind about gold-mining, just as our two-greats grandfathers stood against federal-backed gold tyranny in 1896, we also want to be fair to Ployhar. Our greatest wish would be to buy him out, to give him fair value for the land and let him realize the benefits of his successful career. We are also very willing to talk to him about non-mining economic development on the Hi-Line. We would rather greet him as a neighbor than an enemy and seek to meet and talk together in hopes of finding a shared vision for the success—and health—of our broader Montana family.



# Water Quality Program Brochure

By Mitchell Healy | Water Quality Program Coordinator, Environmental Protection Department | February 24, 2022

Hello, to all of the Fort Belknap Indian Community. Hope that you all have been healthy and safe during the difficult time that COVID has caused, and for all of us to continue to stay positive and work together.

In the meantime, I'd like to share the Water Quality Program Brochure in case you have never seen it. It is normally available at the local events such as the Mid-winter Fair, Earth Day Fair, Native American Week, and at the Office.

One of the primary reasons of sharing the Brochure is to inform the Public, that the Water Quality Program is funded to monitor and collect data from surface waterbodies, which include streams, drainages, rivers, lakes, reservoirs, ponds, and wetlands, that are

on Tribal Lands and not Private Lands (the past efforts to collect surface water on Private Lands and work with landowners was not successful, and therefore, the Program has ceased the effort and only collects on Tribal Lands)

## The Program Does Not Collect Water Samples From:

- ⇒ Private Owner Wells
- ⇒ Private stock ponds or reservoirs

So, if you are having water quality issues with your private wells or ponds, I apologize that the WQ Program does not provide direct assistance with sampling and getting samples analyzed, but what I can do is provide you with some possible resources that may

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Water Quality brochure—FRONT

**Water Quality Program History**

The Fort Belknap Water Quality (WQ) Program was established in 1994 to monitor Tribal waterbodies impacted by the Zortman/Landusky Mines. Within 8 years, the monitoring expanded to include other pollution impacts from agricultural practices and non-point source pollution. Many monitoring sites have been established throughout the Reservation for all major waterbodies.

Fort Belknap Indian Reservation has 4 Watersheds: Middle Milk, Peoples, Beaver, and Fort Peck Reservoir. There currently are 51 monitoring sites within 26 waterbodies that include a mixture of perennial, intermittent, and ephemeral characteristics, however, there are more waterbodies that need to be assessed to determine future monitoring strategies.

The WQ Program works very closely with the Non-point Source Program in providing assistance, developing monitoring strategies, assessments, sampling implementation, and project proposals to be able to conduct additional and necessary field work. The WQ Program is funded by EPA based on the Clean Water Act, Section 106 requirements.

The WQ Program goals are parallel to the US EPA goals, and understand the critical importance of water as well as the issues that are occurring world wide, and highly encourage everybody to begin caring about our future, and this means taking care of our water resources and not polluting or allowing pollution to enter our sacred and most crucial water resources.

**FORT BELKNAP ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION DEPARTMENT**  
**Water Quality Program**  
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Water Quality Coordinator  
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**Water Quality Program**

**PROTECT OUR TRIBAL WATERS**

**Section 106 of the CWA:  
Water Pollution Control**

What Would We do Without Water?



## Water Quality Program Brochure

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be of help to you in getting answers and finding out what you need to do to address your water quality issues. But, just keep in mind that private landowners are responsible for their own wells and stock ponds. Some of the resources include:

- ⇒ Tribal Sanitarian or IHS Engineer
- ⇒ EPA – Private Drinking Water Wells webpage. <https://www.epa.gov/privatewells>
- ⇒ USGS – Water Resources webpage. <https://www.usgs.gov/mission-areas/water-resources/science>
- ⇒ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – Private Ground Water Wells webpage. <https://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/drinking/private/wells/index.html>
- ⇒ Natural Resources Conservation Science - <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/>

I really hope that this information is useful to you, or at least have made you aware of the purpose of the Water Quality Program. I have submitted numerous articles in our past Circle Speakers on all different kinds of topics, issues, and information relating to the Water Quality Program, that provide more information other than what is in the Brochure. So, as always, Stay Safe, Good Health, Be Positive, Respect Each Other, Respect what we have left of our Water & Land Resources.

For future reference, if there is a stream you're concerned about or if you have any questions about our waters, then contact me at my work phone: 353-8433 or by email: [mitchell.healy@ftbelknap.org](mailto:mitchell.healy@ftbelknap.org) or [mitchellhealy@yahoo.com](mailto:mitchellhealy@yahoo.com). Thanks!

Water Quality brochure—BACK

# Water Quality Program Overview—Section 106 of the CWA

## SUMMARY OF THE CLEAN WATER ACT

The Clean Water Act (CWA) establishes the basic structure for regulating discharges of pollutants into the waters of the United States and regulating quality standards for surface waters. The basis of the CWA was enacted in 1948 and was called the Federal Water Pollution Control Act, but the Act was significantly reorganized and expanded in 1972. "Clean Water Act" became the Act's common name with amendments in 1972.

Under the CWA, EPA has implemented pollution control programs such as setting wastewater standards for industry. EPA has also developed national water quality criteria recommendations for pollutants in surface waters.

The CWA made it unlawful to discharge any pollutant from a point source into navigable waters, unless a permit was obtained:

- EPA's National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit program controls discharges.
- Point sources are discrete conveyances such as pipes or man-made ditches.
- Individual homes that are connected to a municipal system, use a septic system, or do not have a surface discharge do not need a NPDES permit;
- Industrial, municipal, and other facilities must obtain permits if their discharges go directly to surface waters.

## FBIC WATER QUALITY PROGRAM

### PURPOSE:

To understand the cultural, chemical, biological, and physical characteristics of the waters of the FBIC and to provide scientific water quality analysis, monitoring, study design and procedures. The Water Quality Program administers the Clean Water Act Section 106 grant from the EPA.

### SHORT TERM GOALS:

Develop improved monitoring strategies to collect the most valuable data that would be used in determining optimal approaches for the protection of tribal waters and Designated Uses.

Continue to ensure WQ staff are well-trained in all aspects of the WQ Program, Clean Water Act requirements, and Permitting processes.

Continue developing Tribal Water Quality Standards for Tribal Council adoption.

### LONG TERM GOALS:

Apply for Treatment in a Similar Manner as States (TAS) to administer a CWA Section 303 (c) and Section 401—Water Quality Standards & Water Quality Certifications Program.

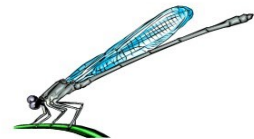
Seek Federal EPA approved Tribal Water Quality Standards to have the regulatory protection in the Clean Water Act.

**All Goals** are focused on ensuring our tribal waters are protected at the highest level from harmful levels of pollution, for future generations.



## HABITAT ASSESSMENTS

Habitat Assessments are done to measure the health of stream banks, stream substrate, aquatic vegetation, and riparian zone vegetation. Habitat Assessments are done during the summer months when vegetation is at its fullest.



## BENTHIC MACROINVERTEBRATES

Aquatic insects dwell at the bottom of streams. A Kick-net method is performed to determine biodiversity. Many benthics depend on non-polluted water, which means they are an excellent indicator of various types of pollution.



## ELECTROSHOCKING/SURVEYS

Collection of specific fish species is conducted, which the fish tissue is analyzed for metals of concern such as Mercury. Species would include Brook Trout, Walleye, Northern Pike, and Catfish.



# CLIMATE CHANGE NEWS

By Dennis Longknife, Jr., Climate Change Coordinator



Hello Climate Warriors, I had a very busy year managing our new project called the "Little Rocky Forest Resilience Project" (LRFR). Our Partner, the Center for Large Landscape Conservation, and Rebecca Waters, Project Officer and Melly Ruelig, Program Director, helped secure a grant through the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), to manage a 100 acre tract of forested land and perform a thinning operation on it, and to monitor the site for impacts of Forest Treatment and Forest Health.

We also partnered with the Aaniiih Nakoda College, and their Natural Resource Instructor, Dan Kinsey. He has a student (Adrian Kulbeck), that is doing a Soil Moisture Probe Survey on-site. We are currently experiencing a Severe Drought and our forest soils and vegetation are being impacted.

We also plan to use the Hays-Lodgepole High School, and Rod Benson's class, to be involved in the LRFR Project. Rod has expressed interest in Flying his Drone over the project site and this coming summer will be recording his Drone flights over the LRFR Project area, based on Fort Belknap Indian Community Council approval.

With the constant threat of catastrophic wildfires all over the west, the LRFR Project would strengthen our forest, making it more Resilient to impacts from climate change, by reducing the fuel source. Key monitoring practices are to survey the site and identify native grasses and plants within the unit, wildlife usage and soil moisture readings, and see if environmental conditions improve once the unit has been thinned.

## CHALLENGES

Project planning was always a hurdle to overcome, as the management of the LRFR Project was originally done by the Tribal Fire Management

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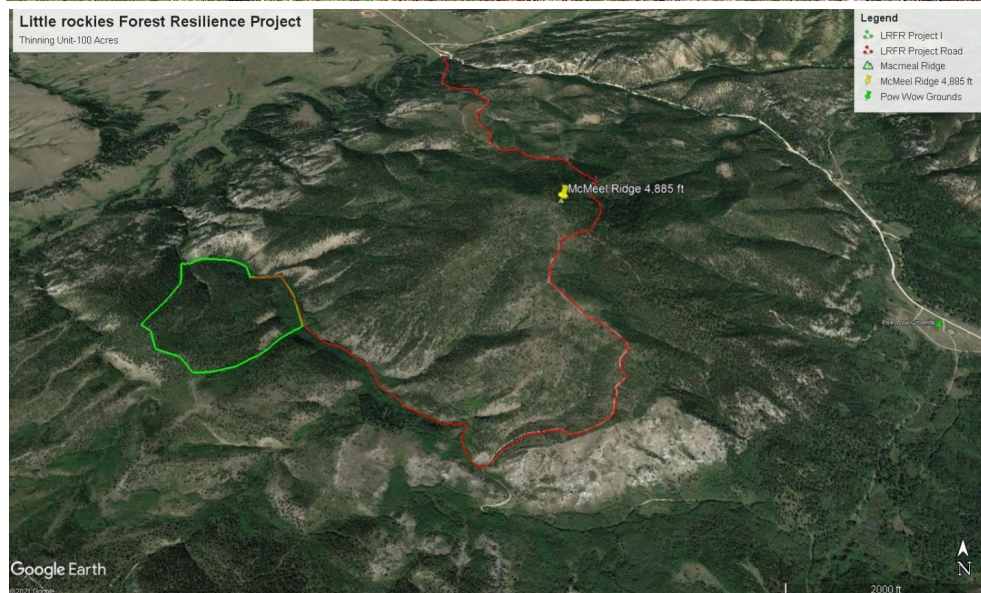
# CLIMATE CHANGE NEWS

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Department, but they were disallowed due to technicalities from the BIA Regional Area Office, so I had this project dropped on my lap, and had to also find help administering the budget, managing the hiring process, and ordered all the required equipment and supplies for the LRFR thinning project. I worked diligently to overcome hurdles as the project moved forward. One great thing was that Lee Blackcrow, Fire Management Manager, still had time to assist in helping me get the required equipment and supplies on board, and was instrumental in the hiring process. Chet Gladstone, BIA Forester, also had a hand in assisting by monitoring the thinning unit and the Thinning Crew. Chet made sure that the thinner followed protocol and sawed and cut to exact specifications, to ensure project would be completed correctly.

When all pieces were in place for the project, we began advertising for the Thinning Crew. Due to the Wildfire season, we could not get a Thinning Crew started in July 2021, and when we did get enough for a Thinning Crew with a project start date of August 9, 2021, our own Little Rocky Mountains, experienced a wildfire, called the Pine Grove Fire. Finally on September 26, our LRFR Thinning Crew started work on the thinning unit.

Through all the pitfalls and setbacks, we managed to get 75 acres completed by the project end date of December 2, 2021.





The fire of 2021 we experienced this past summer was but a few the Little Rocky Mountains suffered. I was asked to assist with locating and identification of prehistoric and historic sites within the fire parameter. The following stories were taken from DOI reports and interviews on the fire of 1936 and earlier blazes.



Little Rockies Fire of 2021.

## HISTORY OF FOREST FIRES IN THE LITTLE ROCKY MOUNTAINS

By Richard King, Simon Firstshoot, and Talks Different  
(Researched, retyped & resubmitted by Morris "Davy" Belgard, Nonpoint Source Pollution Coordinator)

The first fire that we know of in the Little Rockies was in 1883. There was a lot of mining going on at that time, and the white men came on the reservation and prospected for gold. They didn't have any permit, but were sneaking in. There is a lot of dispute about who was the first to discover gold in the Little Rockies. Many men claim that they were the ones, but according to the old-time Indians a fellow named Keyes was really the first man who discovered gold in the Little Rockies.

This fire 1883 was caused by the miners setting fire to the mountains. They didn't like to have the Indians coming in during the summer months to pick berries and hunt. There were lots of elk, bear, mountain sheep, deer, and small game. This fire destroyed all the timber and scared the game away. This is just what the miners wanted to do to in order to keep the Indians away. There's no game left there now, only a few deer and mountain lions. We have found big elk horns, showing that they were there once. Beside the Indians who came in to hunt and pick berries, these mountains were hiding place for outlaws and robbers, and the miners wanted to drive them out too. Henry Tucker, one of the old timers who settled there, told us the story of this fire.

There was another fire about 1890. The Act of 1883 established the Fort Belknap, Blackfeet, and Fort Peck Reservations, and the old agency was moved

from Chinook, Montana. Shortly after these Indians moved into these reservations, there was the fire of 1890 at Fort Belknap. An old Gros-Ventre woman started the fire by leaving a fire burning near her tent while she slept. The tent and the old woman both burnt up. It was in the fall of the year, just about the time when grass begins to get dry, and the fire spread over the whole Little Rocky Mountains.

The next fire was in 1917. This was caused by lightning and destroyed about one-third of the trees in the mountains.

There was no big fire after that until 1936. There were little, small spot fires, but the Forest Service and the Indian Bureau had taken over jurisdiction of these mountains and had men stationed at lookouts. They were organized and took care of small fires before they had a chance to spread.

The big fire of 1936 started from the Little Ben mining camp near Mission Peak. It had been extremely dry for three years. It was so dry that all the springs and all the water dried up. A man at the mining camp threw a cigarette stub in the stove. It was summer, and a lot of papers had accumulated in the stove, which started to burn. It got so hot that sparks fell on a tree and started to burn. The wind was blowing with the fire, and it spread so fast no one could get near it.

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## HISTORY OF FOREST FIRES IN THE LITTLE ROCKY MOUNTAINS

*(Continued from page 10)*

The fire ran thirteen miles in the first nine hours. After that it kept on spreading. It would look like we had it out, but the leaf mold, which turns up the soil, was just like dry powder, and whenever the wind started blowing again it would start blazing. It destroyed all of the mountains. It was the worst fire we ever had.

Testimony from E. Gilmore, The circumstances surrounding the origins of the fire, into which investigation was made, appear to be follows:

On the morning of July 29, 1936, sometimes between eight and nine thirty o'clock, Eldon Gilmore, who had just been hired by the Little Ben Mining Company and had worked one shift, lay in bed, and talked to his father, P.S. Gilmore, as the latter sat on the foot of the bed. The two were in a tent owned by Gordon Ness, brother-in-law to Eldon. The tent was secured by a pole frame and was erected on a floor consisting of earth thrown over with pine broughs and needles. The tent sat on the very edge of the mining settlement, known as "Cabbage Patch" and on the boarder of a fairly heavily timbered area. About eight feet from the tent was a frame house of

Gordon Ness. A short distance to the rear of the house and timber and tent, among the trees, was a frame toilet.

As the Gilmores talked, Eldon lighted a cigarette and smoked. Following the conversation, the father went into Ness's house and Eldon went to the toilet. As he came out, flames were arising from the rear of the tent, not inside the tent. The Gilmores obtained a quantity of water and extinguished the blaze or so they believed.

About twelve o'clock noon, apparently when one o'clock was near, a fire suddenly broke out in the vicinity of the tent and house and swept through the forest, destroying thousands of acres of forest land both on the Lewis and Clark National Forest and on the Fort Belknap Reservation.

FIN.

Now that we are experiencing a drought it is extremely important to remember to extinguish your camp fires, use the ashtray in your car and don't flip that cigarette butt out the window. – M. Belgard.



# Fort Belknap Indian Community Council



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## 2021-2023 FORT BELKNAP INDIAN COMMUNITY COUNCIL COMMITTEES AND COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS

The Following is the designated Committee and Chairperson and Vice Chairperson, with oversight responsibility over these respective areas.

### EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

- Chair - Judy King*  
*Vice Chair - Jeff Stiffarm*
1. Central Administration
  2. District Offices
  3. Personnel
  4. Enrollment
  5. Maintenance
  6. Recording
  7. Public Relations

### \*Enterprises

1. Island Mountain
2. ITMA
3. PMU
4. Tribal Construction
5. Casino
6. Housing
7. FBIC Insurance

### NATURAL RESOURCES

- Chair - Warren Morin*  
*Vice Chair - Brian Wing*
1. THPO
  2. Environmental Department
  3. Fire Management
  4. Extension
  5. Volunteer Fire
  6. Language Preservation
  7. Climate Change
  8. Irrigation
  9. Water Resources
  10. Hemp Program

### LAND COMMITTEE

- Chair - Tracy "Ching" King*  
*Vice Chair - Geno LeValdo*
1. Land

### FINANCE COMMITTEE

- Chair - Judy King*  
*Vice Chair - Jeff Stiffarm*
1. Finance
  2. Procurement
  3. Credit
  4. Investment Board

### GENERAL SERVICES

- Chair - Stephen Fox, Jr.*  
*Vice Chair - Tracy "Ching" King*
1. Informational Technology
  2. TERO
  3. Courts
  4. Upward Bound
  5. Headstart/Early Headstart
  6. Child Care Program



## 2021-2023 Fort Belknap Indian Community Council Committees and Committee Assignments

(Continued from page 12)

### PLANNING COMMITTEE

*Chair - Curtis Horn*

*Vice Chair - Dominic Messerly*

1. Planning
2. 477 Employment & Training
3. Energy Development
4. Tiwahe

### PUBLIC SAFETY

*Chair - Geno LeValdo*

*Vice Chair - Warren Morin*

1. LES-Police
2. Fish & Game
3. Buffalo
4. Roads Maintenance
5. Transportation
6. EMPG/DES
7. Office of the Prosecutors
8. Criminal Investigation

### HUMAN SERVICES

*Chair - Sam Azure*

*Vice Chair - Curtis Horn*

1. Sr. Centers
2. Commodity
3. Child Support Services
4. Vocational Rehabilitation
5. Social Services

### VETERANS - AD HOC

*Co-Chair - Stephen Fox, Jr.*

*Co-Chair - Tracy "Ching" King*

*Co-Chair - Warren Morrin*

### HEALTH

*Chair - Dominic Messerly*

*Vice Chair - Sam Azure*

Health Programs: Behavioral Health, CDC, CHR, Com. Based Prev Block Grant, Centralized Billing, Diabetes Coord., Diabetes Prev., Emergency Prep, Environmental Health, Family Planning/ Domestic Violence, Medicaid Transp., Medicaid Eligibility, Micro Grant, Elderly Medical Transportation, Native Connections, Nutrition, Partnership for Success, PCA, PHN, Public Health Emerg. Prep., SOAR, Sanitation, Security, Tobacco Prev., Tribal Health Admin., THIP, WIC, Zero Suicide



## Buffalo Nations Grasslands Alliance, a newly formed Native American led non-profit organization, announces search for first Chief Executive Officer

By Dr. Shaun Grassel, BNGA President | [www.bngalliance.org](http://www.bngalliance.org) | March 2, 2022

The Buffalo Nations Grasslands Alliance (BNGA) is a Native American developed and led organization that received its 501(c)(3) non-profit status in August 2021. BNGA's goal is to support and amplify the Northern Great Plains' 15 Native nations' conservation efforts ensuring that the region's plant and animal life will continue to flourish for generations to come.

A major barrier to protecting Native lands and the resources on which Native people depend is the lack of sustainable financing. BNGA is working to change this by providing the necessary technical and financial resources that support these communities' desire to realize a shared vision for their traditional lands and waters.

Building on a foundation of guiding principles and a

board that that has been developed over the past year, BNGA is now well-aligned and positioned to hire a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) who can take the organization to the next level. In this position, the CEO's primary responsibility will be to work closely with participating Native nations, while

fundraising and building relationships with potential partners. The CEO will also recruit and manage BNGA staff and contractors, create and manage the organization's annual budget, administer its policy efforts and programs, and work with the Board of Directors and participants to ensure

organizational sustainability.

Applicants may contact Dr. Shaun Grassel, BNGA President, with questions at [info@bngalliance.org](mailto:info@bngalliance.org) or for a full job description and to learn how to apply please visit [www.bngalliance.org/careers](http://www.bngalliance.org/careers).

***"A journey for us as Indigenous peoples includes linking the past to the future. In all that we do, we remember our connections, our relatives, and we reclaim our lifeways to ensure that there will be grasslands for generations." – Monica Rattling Hawk, BNGA Vice President***



## FACT SHEET:

# Securing a Made in America Supply Chain for Critical Minerals



<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/02/22/fact-sheet-securing-a-made-in-america-supply-chain-for-critical-minerals/>

February 22, 2022 | Statements and Releases

## *Biden-Harris Administration, Companies Announce Major Investments to Expand Domestic Critical Minerals Supply Chain, Breaking Dependence on China and Boosting Sustainable Practices*

Critical minerals provide the building blocks for many modern technologies and are essential to our national security and economic prosperity. These minerals—such as rare earth elements, lithium, and cobalt—can be found in products from computers to household appliances. They are also key inputs in clean energy technologies like batteries, electric vehicles, wind turbines, and solar panels. As the world transitions to a clean energy economy, global demand for these critical minerals is set to skyrocket by 400-600 percent over the next several decades, and, for minerals such as lithium and graphite used in electric vehicle (EV) batteries, demand will increase by even more—as much as 4,000 percent. The U.S. is increasingly dependent on foreign sources for many of the processed versions of these minerals. Globally, China controls most of the market for processing and refining for cobalt, lithium, rare earths and other critical minerals.

Executive Order 14017 (E.O.), America's Supply Chains, signed one year ago this week, ordered a review of vulnerabilities in our critical mineral and material supply chains within 100 days. In June, the Biden-Harris Administration released a first-of-its-kind supply chain assessment that found our over-reliance on foreign sources and adversarial nations for critical minerals and materials posed national and economic security threats.

In addition to working with partners and allies to diversify sustainable sources, the reports recommended expanding domestic mining, production, processing, and recycling of critical minerals and materials—all with a laser focus on boosting strong labor, environmental and environmental justice, community engagement, and Tribal consultation standards.

Today, President Biden will meet with Administration and state partners, industry executives, community

representatives, labor leaders, and California Governor Gavin Newsom to announce major investments in domestic production of key critical minerals and materials, ensuring these resources benefit the community, and creating good-paying, union jobs in sustainable production.

- President Biden will announce that the Department of Defense's Industrial Base Analysis and Sustainment program has awarded MP Materials **\$35 million** to separate and process heavy rare earth elements at its facility in Mountain Pass, California, establishing a full end-to-end domestic permanent magnet supply chain. Paired with this catalytic public funding announcement, MP Materials will announce it will invest another **\$700 million** and create more than 350 jobs in the magnet supply chain by 2024. Currently, China controls 87 percent of the global permanent magnet market, which are used in EV motors, defense systems, electronics, and wind turbines.
- Berkshire Hathaway Energy Renewables (BHE Renewables) will announce that this spring, they will break ground on a new demonstration facility in Imperial County, California, to test the commercial viability of their sustainable lithium extraction process from geothermal brine as part of a **multibillion-dollar** investment in sustainable lithium production over the next five years. If successful, this sets the company a path towards commercial scale production of battery grade lithium hydroxide and lithium carbonate by 2026. Imperial Valley contains some of the largest deposits of lithium in the world. Once at scale, BHE Renewables facilities could produce 90,000 metric tons of lithium per year.

*(Continued on page 15)*



## Securing a Made in America Supply Chain for Critical Minerals

(Continued from page 14)

- Redwood Materials will discuss a pilot, in partnership with Ford and Volvo, for collection and recycling of end-of-life lithium-ion batteries at its Nevada based facilities to extract lithium, cobalt, nickel, and graphite. This builds upon Redwood's recent announcements including a joint venture with Ford to build a recycling facility in Tennessee and its intention to begin construction on a new cathode manufacturing facility in Nevada in 2022.
- Secretary Granholm will discuss DOE's first-of-its-kind **\$140 million** demonstration project funded by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) to recover rare earth elements and critical minerals from coal ash and other mine waste, reducing the need for new mining. This project will deliver on the work of the Interagency Working Group on Coal and Power Plant Communities and Economic Revitalization by creating good-paying manufacturing jobs in legacy coal communities.
- She will also discuss **\$3 billion** in BIL funding to invest in refining battery materials such as lithium, cobalt, nickel, and graphite, and battery recycling facilities, creating good-paying clean energy manufacturing jobs.

### These are only the latest in announcements by major companies committing to domestic sourcing of critical minerals and materials:

- MP Materials recently announced construction of a rare earth metal, alloy and magnet manufacturing facility in Texas and a long-term supply agreement with General Motors to power the motors in more than a dozen of GM's EV models. Production will begin next year, with capacity to produce enough magnets to power 500,000 EV motors annually.
- In addition to BHE Renewables, Controlled Thermal Resources (CTR) and EnergySource Minerals have established operations in Imperial County to extract lithium from geothermal brine. GM will source lithium for EV batteries from CTR. The companies are also working with the state-authorized Lithium Valley Commission to develop a royalty structure that would invest profits from their operations in infrastructure, health, and educational investments for the residents of the surrounding region.
- Tesla intends to source high-grade nickel for EV batteries from Talon Metals' Tamarack nickel project under development in Minnesota. Talon Metals and the United Steelworkers (USW) have established a workforce development partnership for the project to train workers on next-generation technologies in the local community and from mining regions in the U.S. facing declining demand. As part of this partnership, Talon has agreed to remain neutral in any union organizing efforts by USW.

**Ahead of the one-year anniversary of E.O. 14017 this Thursday, the Administration has taken action across the Federal government to secure reliable and sustainable supplies of critical minerals and materials, while also upholding the Administration's labor, environmental and environmental justice, and equity priorities:**

- **Updating outdated mining laws and regulations.** This year, the Mining Law of 1872 turns 150. This law still governs mining of most critical minerals on federal public lands. Today, the Department of Interior (DOI) announced it has established an Interagency Working Group (IWG) that will lead an Administration effort on legislative and regulatory reform of mine permitting and oversight. The IWG released a list of Biden-Harris Administration fundamental principles for mining reform to promote responsible mining under strong social, environmental, and labor standards that avoids the historic injustice that too many mining operations have left behind. The IWG will deliver recommendations to Congress by November. They will also host extensive public input and comment sessions to ensure an inclusive process, and will work with the relevant agencies to initiate updates to mining regulations by the end of the calendar year.
- **Updating and prioritizing the Federal list of critical minerals.** Today, pursuant to the Energy Act of 2020, DOI will update its Federal list of critical

(Continued on page 16)



## Securing a Made in America Supply Chain for Critical Minerals

(Continued from page 15)

minerals, listing minerals essential to economic or national security and vulnerable to disruption. To focus the work of Federal agencies on sourcing critical minerals, the Administration will direct agencies to prioritize the production and processing of minerals necessary to produce key products like batteries, semiconductors, and permanent magnets, consistent with our strong environmental, social and labor principles.

- **Strengthening critical mineral stockpiling.** DOE, DOD, and the Department of State signed a memorandum of agreement (MOA) to better coordinate stockpiling activities to support the U.S. transition to clean energy and national security needs. In October, President Biden streamlined the National Defense Stockpile by signing E.O. 14051 to delegate authority release of strategic and critical materials to the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment.

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## Upcoming Events: 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Water Forum – April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2022

By Michael Kinsey, Nic?·Mní (Water) Center/Co-Director | Aaniiih Nakoda College | March 2, 2022

Hello everyone! I hope you are all in good health. Looking ahead, we will be hosting our 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Water Forum on April 22<sup>nd</sup>. The Water Forum has been an annual event that the Aaniiih Nakoda College - Nic?·Mní (Water) Center has been hosting since 2019. The goal of the forum is to provide the Fort Belknap and the surrounding communities with opportunities to learn about important and often complex water-related issues. Last year we conducted a survey with the audience to help us identify topics for this year, and this year we will be focusing on tribes who have settled their water rights or went into litigation,

the Aaniiih and Nakoda cultural aspects of water, and the impacts of climate change on water resources. The agenda will be finalized soon, and a poster will be released for advertising the event, so be on the lookout! This event is a valuable way to get important information out to Fort Belknap and the surrounding communities, and it is something we look forward to each year.

Should you have any questions or concerns please do not hesitate to contact me at: (406) 353-3926 or [makinsey@ancollege.edu](mailto:makinsey@ancollege.edu).



## Choosing Promise Through Innovative Food Production

Submitted by Hillary Maxwell, FCS Agent, Fort Belknap Reservation Extension

The Fort Belknap MSU-Extension Program received grant funding this year to begin a reservation-wide food forest initiative. The project's title is Sustainable Food Forests: Local Development, Maintenance and Mentorship. This innovative project will address the need for a long-term plan to establish sustainable, home-based food-producing ecosystems on the Fort Belknap Reservation.

Food Forests are a self-regulating and low maintenance sustainable form of plant-based agriculture.

More practically termed 'agroforestry' it is a system based on woodland ecosystems, incorporating fruit and nut trees, shrubs, herbs, vines and perennial vegetables which have yields directly useful to humans, while also working in harmony with nature.

Food forests are organized into mutually beneficial plant communities (aka plant "guilds") that perform tasks such as nutrient accumulation, nitrogen fixation, increasing pollination, attracting a variety of

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## Choosing Promise Through Innovative Food Production

(Continued from page 16)

beneficial wildlife, decreasing the need for weeding and watering, and more!

The benefit of a food forest can include:

- Production of food that is healthy, organic, and accessible.
- Creation of long-term livelihood opportunities for community entrepreneurs.
- Improvement of quality of life through cooler micro-climate, improved water and air quality (including storm water management, climate change adaptation and carbon storage), and biodiversity.
- Provision of educational opportunities regarding native foods, healthy diets, healthy soil, diverse food production & processing, plant propagation, food entrepreneurship, and the collaborative economy.
- Engaging the community through participation in food production.

Through the implementation of this project, thirty (30) food forests will be planned, maintained, and harvested in home gardens. Local mentors will be trained to create internal capacity for a sustainable future of food production, by learning and teaching plant propagation methods. Mentors will work with interested community members in forwarding knowledge, techniques and skills in climate-sensitive plant care and propagation, thereby creating resource teams with advanced abilities to enhance the success of the project.

The project provides detailed strategies for implementation and replicability. Mentors and agents will document all phases of the project, to enhance application and utilization across other programming areas and across Montana.

Please feel free to contact Hillary Maxwell at [hillary.maxwell@montana.edu](mailto:hillary.maxwell@montana.edu) for more information on this exciting project!



# INCREASE DOMESTIC ENERGY PRODUCTION TO LOWER COSTS AT THE PUMP, TESTER URGES BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

MAR 2, 2022 | [https://www.testersenate.gov/?p=press\\_release&id=8934](https://www.testersenate.gov/?p=press_release&id=8934)

## Senator calls for strengthening energy independence from Russian enemies, urges Administration to use all tools to boost American production

U.S. Senator Jon Tester today urged the Biden Administration to immediately work to increase domestic energy production to protect consumers from spiking gasoline prices and reduce dependence on foreign oil and gas production in light of Russia's unprovoked war with Ukraine.

"As our nation unites to confront President Vladimir Putin's reckless actions, strengthening our energy independence from enemies like Russia must be a priority," wrote Tester in a letter to the Secretaries of Energy, State, and Interior. "I believe it is critically important to immediately use the tools at our disposal to increase domestic energy production to protect American consumers from spiking gasoline prices and isolate President Putin and his oligarchs. Montanans are facing gas prices that are, on average, a dollar higher than they were a year ago."

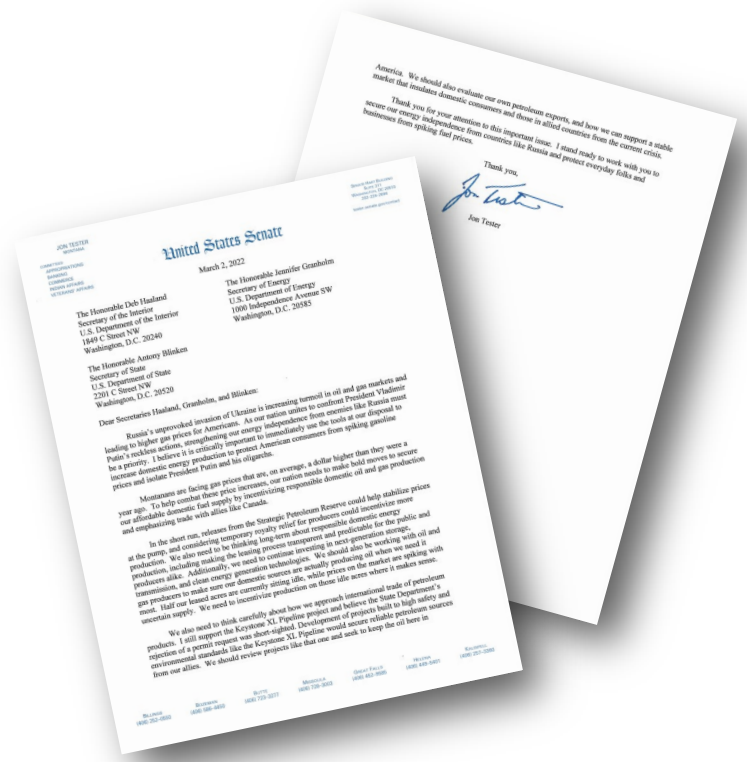
Tester's letter continues: "To help combat these price increases, our nation needs to make bold moves to secure our affordable domestic fuel supply by incentivizing responsible domestic oil and gas production and emphasizing trade with allies like Canada... I still support the Keystone XL Pipeline project and believe the State Department's rejection of a permit request was short-sighted. Development of projects built to high safety and environmental standards like the Keystone XL Pipeline would secure reliable petroleum sources from our allies. We should review projects like that one and seek to keep the oil here in America. I stand ready to work with you to secure our energy independence from countries like Russia and protect everyday folks and businesses from spiking fuel prices."

Tester's letter calls on the Biden Administration to release oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, increase transparency into the oil and gas leasing process, invest in domestic clean energy generation, and to work with oil and gas producers to incentivize do-

mestic energy production in order to lower cost for American consumers. He also reiterates his longstanding support for the Keystone XL Pipeline, and encourages additional review of similar projects that would keep oil in America.

As a longtime supporter of the Keystone XL Pipeline project, Tester cosponsored bipartisan legislation to override President Biden's decision to cancel the Keystone XL permit and allow the project to move forward. He also broke with his party to approve the pipeline's construction in 2015, and when former President Obama vetoed the bill, Tester voted to override the veto.

Full text of Tester's letter can be found here: <https://www.testersenate.gov/files/Letters/2022-03-02%20Interior%20Energy%20and%20State%20Secretaries%20Haaland%20Granholm%20and%20Blinken%20Gas%20Prices.pdf>





# Drought on the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation

By Dennis Longknife, Climate Change Coordinator

The drought situation in Fort Belknap developed in the spring of 2021, from no snowpack the previous winter, and no spring precipitation.

Soon we began seeing the impacts brought on by hot, dry, windy, weather patterns, that seemed to begin drying out our water resources on the prairies. In June, 2021, we also noticed that our native grasses were not developing and were not growing and developing seeds. As the spring gave way to summer, most of our vegetation continued to worsen with most of our native plants reaching maturity 5-6 weeks ahead of time, and others that just did not grow or got quickly consumed by grazing activity.

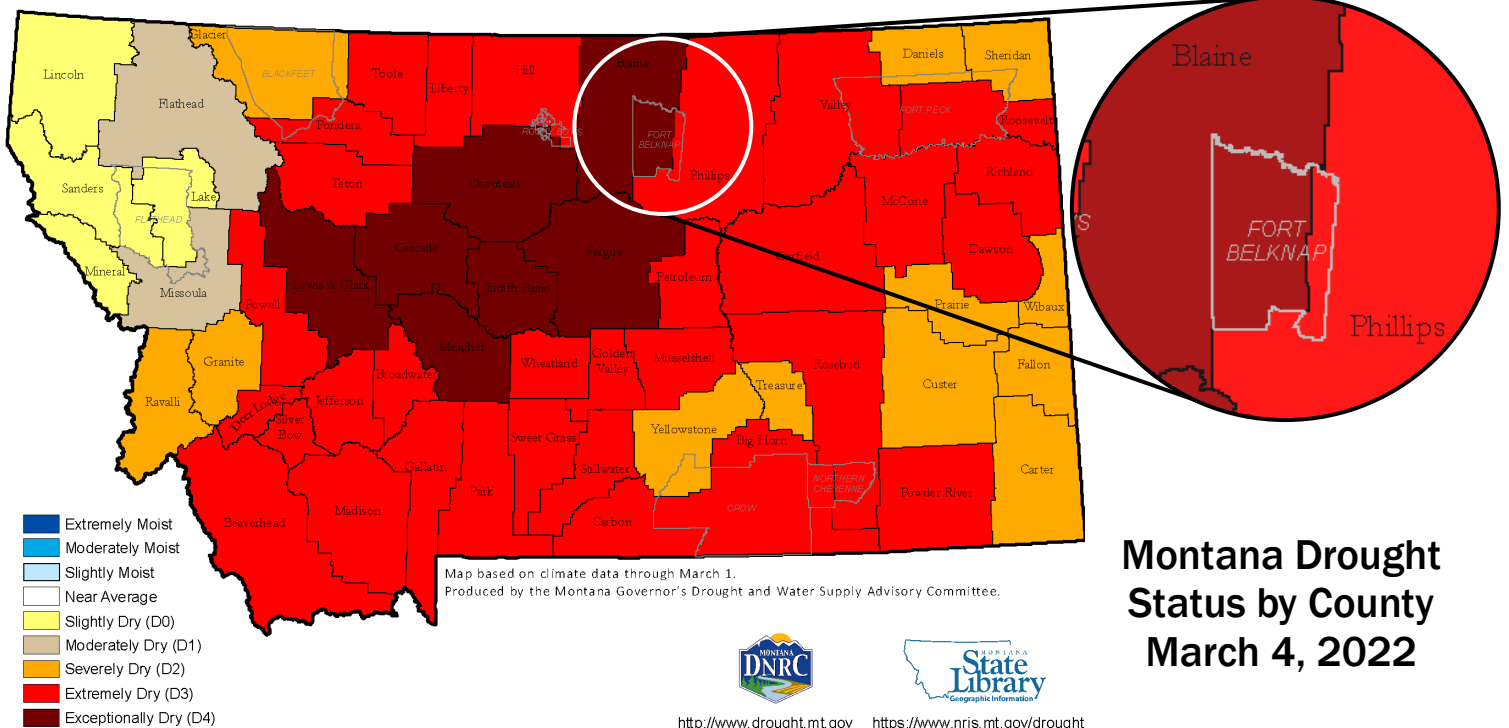
If that wasn't enough, grasshoppers started emerging in late June, and quickly became a problem, as they took over crops and rangelands that were already in poor condition, and consumed and stripped the vegetation of all foliage. The grasshopper epidemic took over most of the reservation and surrounding communities to the east. The Animal, Plant, Health Inspection Service (APHIS), came and used airplanes to help spray the grasshoppers, however most of the grasshoppers reached another life stage where the pesticide used, was not effective. The reason for spraying late, was waiting for the planes to arrive because of limited resources, and planning that took longer than expected.

CRP plots were going to be used for emergency hay for the livestock, but the CRP fields were also impacted from the drought, as most available CRP fields, were too short to effectively to be used for feed. Some of the vegetation was so dry that when baled, it turned into dust before it could be baled up. Then another factor that caused problems from the drought, was the Blister Beetle. It's a small insect/pest that feeds on vegetation that livestock graze on. If livestock consume too many Blister Beetles that are in their feed/Hay, it can cause blisters on cows esophagus and tongue, and even death from not being able to eat.

Rangelands were so poor that all water bodies quickly dried up by late August, so the only available water sources were the ponds created when all the streams dried up. For emergency purposes, our tribe had to enact a Resolution, so that Ranchers/Producers livestock, could use Reservoirs, that were previously reserved for our Fisheries.

Our tribe will have all this to contend with this coming year, as our drought situation doesn't seem to be improving.

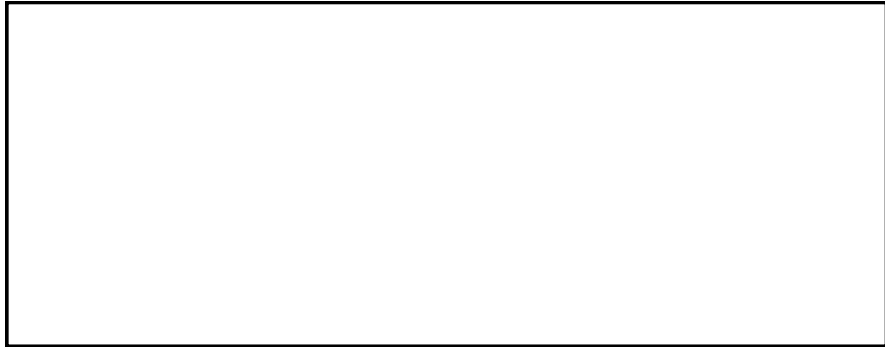
Currently plans are being implemented to research and develop old wells and to create new Stock Tanks, Ponds and Reservoirs.



**Montana Drought Status by County March 4, 2022**

Fort Belknap Indian Community  
**ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION DEPARTMENT**

Fort Belknap Agency  
656 Agency Main Street  
Harlem, Montana 59526



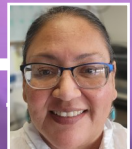
 Find us on Facebook:  
<https://www.facebook.com/ftbelknap.environmental/>

[www.ftbelknap.org](http://www.ftbelknap.org)

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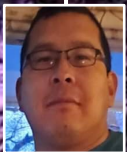
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