

Circle Speaker

JANUARY—MARCH, 2024

Aaniiih & Nakoda Environmental Newsletter

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Smoke from the Redhorn Fire shrouds the craggy summits of the Mission Mountains as viewed from near St. Ignatius August 7, 2022. Hunter D'Antuono | Flathead Beacon

CSKT Climate Change StoryMap Wins Award for Excellence in Traditional Ecological Knowledge

The interactive multimedia presentation is transforming a static climate change plan into a 'living document'

BY MICAH DREW | JANUARY 19, 2024

<https://flatheadbeacon.com/2024/01/19/cskt-climate-change-storymap-wins-award-for-excellence-in-traditional-ecological-knowledge/>

Mike Durglo Jr. has spent more than 40 years preserving cultural and natural resources on the Flathead Indian Reservation, with a focus on finding ways to bridge his professional work with the local community. Durglo spent years leading development of the Tribes' Climate

Change Strategic Plan (CCSP), bringing dozens of community members into the process as members of a planning committee that has been lauded as an example of Native-led climate action. To engage local youth in sustainability pro-

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CSKT Climate Change StoryMap Wins Award for Excellence in Traditional Ecological Knowledge

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jects, he created the Environmental Advocates for Global Logical Ecological Sustainability (EAGLES) Program, helping students set up recycling programs and community gardens. These efforts, and more, led to recognition by the Obama administration in 2016 as a “White House Champion of Change for Climate Equity,” and he recently stepped into the position as Climate Change Coordinator for the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT).

Despite his successes, Durglo still finds it hard to convey the complexities of the Tribes’ ongoing work to counter climate change impacts.

“It seems like the local people don’t know as much about what’s going on as people far away,” Durglo said. “We were one of the first tribes in the nation to develop a climate plan, but that’s a PDF document that’s pretty dense for most people. In reality, it’s a living document and we need to be able to communicate that.”

Over the last few years, Durglo and Kyle Bocinsky, the director of climate extension at the Montana Climate Office, have led a project to develop an innovative ArcGIS StoryMap that gives an interactive and interconnected view of climate change, its impact on the CSKT, and how the tribes are bringing forward solutions.

The StoryMap is part of the National Integrated Drought Information System-funded Native Drought Resilience Project, a collaborative effort between the CSKT, Salish Kootenai College, the Montana Climate Office and The Wilderness Society, and the initial multimedia website recently earned recognition in the Esri ArcGIS StoryMaps competition, winning a new Native Nations Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) award.

“We are honored to receive the Esri Native Nations TEK Award,” Bocinsky said. “This recognition is a testament to CSKT’s commitment to leveraging technology to convey the profound impacts of climate change on the reservation and to engage the community in solutions.”

The effects of climate change are clearly visible across the landscape that comprises the Flathead Indian Reservation.



Michael Durglo Jr. testifies during the *Held v. Montana* trial in Helena on June 14, 2023. | Micah Drew

From rapidly receding snowpack in the Mission Mountains, or historic low water levels of Flathead Lake due to extreme drought, Durglo can draw a direct connection to the changing climate. But a comprehensive explanation of its effects, as well as examples of solutions-oriented projects, are trickier concepts to convey.

When the CSKT first developed its climate plan in 2012, the idea was to take it out to the community and engage residents in various strategies to combat climate change, Durglo said. At first, he was able to accomplish that through local gatherings and meetings, but the ever-evolving nature of the climate plan — due to additional research, continuously updated models and new on-the-ground initiatives — made it difficult to keep citizens up to date and engaged.

When COVID hit in 2020 and it wasn’t possible to gather in person, he realized he needed a new strategy.

“It’s an idea I’d actually wanted to do for a while, but it really came to fruition after COVID,” Durglo said.

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CSKT Climate Change StoryMap Wins Award for Excellence in Traditional Ecological Knowledge

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“We got some grants and started the conversations with the Climate Office and it all just came together in a good way.”

Bocinsky was brought in to do climate projection analysis for the Reservation, but instead of merely extracting data to be used in charts and graphs, he found himself finding ways to translate it into real world variables. Through conversations with Durglo and others on the CSKT Climate Change Advisory Committee — “If you want to be on the Climate Change Advisory Committee, you’re a lifetime member,” Durglo says — the opportunity to develop a multimedia project to present the story of climate change and climate adaptation came together.

“StoryMaps are a great tool for doing that especially these days where we’re inundated with maps and geospatial data in everyday life,” Bocinsky said. “We can tell stories spatially, which is how we really orient ourselves in the world and how we see change. We see fire scars across the land, we see where smoke settles in the valleys, we see animal pathways change over time. Most of human experience has a spatial component and projects like this acknowledge that.”

Durglo authored the main storylines covered in the CCSP and Annika Mayer with the Montana Climate Office developed the first round of interactive story collections.

The StoryMap breaks down the CCSP into various sectors, including forestry, water, wildlife and fisheries, with each chapter highlighting the impacts of drought and climate change on the sector and proposing solutions. The combination of written words, videos, audio tracks, maps and images transforms what was initially a static 75-page document into a dynamic, accessible resource.

“It’s something that can capture people’s imagination and tell stories in a way lots of people haven’t seen,” Bocinsky said.

One section of the StoryMap focuses on the CSKT’s whitebark pine tree restoration efforts. The whitebark pine is considered a keystone species in the alpine landscape and holds an important place in tribal heritage.



A dead whitebark pine in the Two Medicine area of Glacier National Park on July 28, 2023. Hunter D’Antuono | Flathead Beacon

StoryMap viewers are transported to Three Lakes Peaks where an ancient sc̓́łpáłq w̓́ (whitebark pine) named llawye”, or “great great grandparent,” watches forlornly over a landscape that, once teeming with groves of live trees, is considered a “ghost forest.”

From there, viewers are shown how CSKT climbers cage pinecones on living whitebark pines to collect seeds and transport them to a greenhouse in Ronan where tribal foresters oversee thousands of seedlings. After four years of growth, the seedlings are planted — in 2023 the CSKT placed more than 4,000 seedlings in the ground. It’s a kind of storyline that prompts questions and conversations and hopefully urges viewers to get involved.

“Each of these stories is meant to show people what’s going on, but also let them know what they can do to make a difference,” Durglo said. “People think there’s nothing they can do to change the direction we’re going in, but there is. For me, it’s about instilling hope into folks, and telling them there’s a whole lot of stuff we can do each and every day.”

Service Announces Gray Wolf Finding and National Recovery Plan



PRESS RELEASE: Feb 2, 2024

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service completes status review and finding for gray wolves in the Western United States; launches National Recovery Plan

<https://www.fws.gov/press-release/2024-02/service-announces-gray-wolf-finding-and-national-recovery-plan>

WASHINGTON — Recognizing that the national discussion around gray wolf management must look more comprehensively at conservation tools available to federal, state and Tribal governments, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today announced a path to support a long term and durable approach to the conservation of gray wolves, to include a process to develop – for the first time – a National Recovery Plan under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) for gray wolves in the lower 48 states. Today’s announcement does not make any changes to the legal status of gray wolves in the United States.

After an extensive peer-reviewed assessment using the best available science, the Service today announced a not warranted finding for two petitions to list gray wolves under the ESA in the Northern Rocky Mountains and the Western United States. This finding is not action-forcing; the legal status of gray wolves does not change as a result of this finding.

The Service conducted a comprehensive analysis using robust modeling that incorporated the best available data from federal, state and Tribal sources, academic institutions and the public. The model assessed various threats, including human-caused mortality, existing regulatory mechanisms, and disease. The analysis indicates that wolves are not at risk of extinction in the Western United States now or in the foreseeable future.

Gray wolves are listed under the ESA as endangered in 44 states, threatened in Minnesota, and under state jurisdiction in Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, and portions of eastern Oregon and Washington. Based on the latest data as of the end of 2022, there were approximately 2,797 wolves distributed across at least 286 packs in seven states in the Western United States.

This population size and widespread distribution contribute to the resiliency and redundancy of wolves in this region. The population maintains high genetic diversity and connectivity, further supporting their ability to adapt to future changes.

Next Steps in Gray Wolf Management

In a February 2022 op-ed, Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland wrote: “I am committed to ensuring that wolves have the conservation they need to survive and thrive in the wild based on science and law... It is critical that we all recognize that our nation’s wolf populations are integral to the health of fragile ecosystems and hold significant cultural importance in our shared heritage.”

Debate over the management of wolves has included more than two decades of legislation, litigation and rulemaking. Wolf recovery to date has been construed around specific legal questions or science-driven exercises about predicted wolf population status. Courts have invalidated five out of six rules finalized by the Service on gray wolf status, citing at least in part a failure to consider how delisting any particular population of gray wolves affects their status and recovery nationwide.

To accomplish this and address the concern about nationwide recovery for gray wolves, the Service will undertake a process to develop a first-ever nationwide gray wolf recovery plan by December 12, 2025. Recovery plans provide a vision for species recovery that is connected to site-specific actions for reducing threats and conserving listed species and their ecosystems.

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service completes status review and finding for gray wolves...

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Facilitating a more durable and holistic approach to wolf recovery must go beyond the ESA. The Service also recently announced a new effort to create and foster a national dialogue around how communities can live with gray wolves to include conflict prevention, long-term stability and community security. These discussions, led by a third-party convenor, will help inform the Service's policies and future rulemaking about wolves, and include those who live with wolves and those who do not but want to know they have a place on the landscape.

States and Tribes have been important partners in managing gray wolves and will remain integral to

their long-term conservation and acceptance on the landscape. This is important because the federal government's legal authority alone cannot address the variety of approaches to wolves that generate conflict. The states of Montana and Idaho recently adopted laws and regulations designed to substantially reduce the gray wolf populations in their states using means and measures that are at odds with modern professional wildlife management. The steps the Service is outlining today include continued work with state and Tribal partners, including nation-to-nation consultation, to create opportunities to craft enduring solutions that protect wolves and sustain human communities and livelihood.

2024 Fort Belknap Reservation Head Start Poster Coloring Contest

Submitted by Lonette Blackcrow, FBEPD Administrative Assistant



The Fort Belknap Environmental Protection Department hosted its annual Head Start Poster Coloring Contest. Deadline to turn in the coloring posters was January 24th, 2024. All of the posters were displayed and judged by the community at the Fort Belknap Mid Winter Fair on February 1st and 2nd, 2024, at the Fort Belknap Agency Bingo Hall. Community members of all ages were delighted to see the little kids' colorings. It's a great way for community engagement and a time for us to celebrate our little ones.

Each community's Head Start was represented well with an estimated 70 students from the three centers: Gilbert Horn, Sr. Early Childhood Center, Agency; Three Strikes Center, Lodge Pole; Ramona King Center, Hays .

It's fun to see what creativity our young artist's come up with. Each has their own unique way of bringing out their personality in their colorings. They are all great

pieces of art and are judged subjectively by all who came out and participated. We also have to commend the Teacher's for helping us out and letting the children participate in our endeavor.

Certificates and prizes for the top three scored for 1st, 2nd & 3rd place were awarded to the students in their respective Centers. All the kids did an amazing job and we are extremely grateful for the communities' help in picking out winners. The prizes were delivered to each center on February 7, 2024.

Congratulations to the Winners of the 2024 Head Start Poster Coloring Contest! **Gilbert Horn Sr Early Childhood Center (GHSECC):** 1st—Jalen Brockie, 2nd—Breslyn Allen, 3rd—Wylie Stewart. **Three Strikes Center (TSC):** 1st—Azaeliah Kirkaldie, 2nd—Hunter Kirkaldie, 3rd—Gabiella Werk. **Ramona King Center (RKC):** 1st—Jayden LaSarte, 2nd—Gage Essert, Jr., 3rd—Carson Lecheler.

**Pictured below are some of the winners of the Poster Coloring Contest, in no particular order.*



Fort Belknap Indian Community
ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION DEPARTMENT



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Fort Belknap Indian Community
(Tribal Govt.)
Fort Belknap Indian Community
(Elected to administer the affairs of the community
and to represent the Gros Ventre and Assiniboine
Tribes of the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation)

February 7, 2024.

Public Notice

To All Community Members and Residents on the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation with regards to the burning of bins at the Agency Transfer site the day of Feb. 1 & 7, 2024. This is a direct violation of the Fort Belknap Indian Community Open Burn Ordinance No. 1-07, Resolution 73-2007 and pursuant to Section 108: Outdoor Fires-Prohibited Types and can be prosecuted under Section 112: Violations:

- (1) Any violation of the Fort Belknap open burning regulations shall constitute a civil violation subject to a civil penalty of not less than fifty dollars (\$50.00) or more than five hundred dollars (\$500.00) and all governmental and administrative costs incurred, including legal fees and expenses related to the Fort Belknap Indian Council's response to such violations. The Tribal Council shall assess triple damage costs for repeated acts of violation.**

You may also think you are doing the community a favor, but in fact are putting everyone in danger. The dangers of Open Burning may produce many pollutants, some being hazardous to all human health. You have particle pollution that creates particles small enough to get deep into your lungs, which aggravate health problems such as, asthma, bronchitis and are detrimental to the elderly and youth who are at higher risks from these exposures. Some other pollutants which may be produced include: dioxins, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAH's), volatile organic compounds (VOCs), carbon monoxide (CO), hexachlorobenzene (HCB), ash residue. Many dangerous health conditions can be caused by inhaling or ingesting even small amounts of these pollutants. Small children, the elderly, or people with preexisting respiratory conditions can be especially vulnerable to some of these pollutants.

**Any person(s) knowing information pertaining to person(s) starting fires,
please notify Law Enforcement at: 406-353-2933
You may/will remain anonymous.**



Tribal Water Quality Standards Update

By Mitchell Healy, Water Quality Program Coordinator—Fort Belknap Environmental Protection Department | February 14, 2024

Hello, to all of the Fort Belknap Indian Community. Hope that you all have been healthy and safe, and for all of us to continue to stay positive and work together on all matters.

The Water Quality Program has a major goal of protecting our tribal waters, and it's been a long, complicated process with the development of a Tribal Water Quality Standards (TWQS) document to present to the Fort Belknap Indian Community. As we progress further along and have met all the requirements, please be aware that community input is going to be the first initial action towards seeking Tribal-adoption. There will be opportunity for all tribal members to share concerns, comments, and questions.

So, what are TWQS? In simplest terms, it is a regulatory document with the purpose of setting water quality goals and developing strategies to protect our tribal surface waterbodies from harmful levels of pollu-

tion and to ensure designated uses are being attained or achieved. Surface waters would include waters such as: streams, ponds, lakes, reservoirs, wetlands, springs, rivers, etc. The general concept is water protection, but there are comprehensive steps, legalities, and varying degrees of factors that all are part of this document and are significant in how it would be implemented on the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation.

Once completed, there are processes to abide by in order to get the TWQS approved. It should be clarified that there is more than one process and there is a major distinction between them. These processes include: 1) Tribally-Adopted Water Quality Standards; and 2) Federally-Approved Water Quality Standards. The following table briefly summarizes these processes.

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| PROCESS | | REQUIREMENTS | IMPLEMENTATION |
|---------|--|---|--|
| 1 | Tribally-Adopted Water Quality Standards | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Precursor to Federally-Approved WQS for Treatment in a Similar Manner as States (TAS) approval • Tribal Attorney Review • Informational presentation to FBICC • Public Comment Period (On-Reservation/Tribal Members Only) • Response to Public Comments Document • Tribal Council Adoption through Resolution | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federal Clean Water Act provisions DO NOT apply • Establishes water quality goals to protect water resources • Used for Watershed Assessments • Not intended to be a Regulatory Document for violations unless there were an existing Tribal Water Code/Ordinance/Law |
| 2 | Federally-Approved Water Quality Standards | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply for Treatment in a Similar Manner to States (TAS) Application for 401 Certification and 303 (c) Water Quality Standards • Tribal Attorney Review • Public Comment Period (Off-reservation/all Stakeholders) • U.S. EPA Review and Approval of both the WQS and TAS Application | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federal Clean Water Act provisions DO apply • Section 401 offers States and authorized Tribes opportunities to affect the issuance of a range of federal licenses and permits, but it is up to the State or Tribe whether to take or waive each such opportunity as it arises |

Tribal Water Quality Standards Update

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#RESPECT THE WATER WE HAVE LEFT

As you have read thus far, obtaining any level of Tribal Water Quality Standards will take time, and as we progress closer and continue to move forward, your involvement and support (all tribal members) will be very essential to having protection of our water resources, however, regardless if we have TWQS or not, we all should be doing our part in keeping our waters clean and safe for future generations and keep this in mind when you're out there enjoying the water, not only do we use and need water, other life depend on water as well. For future reference, if there is a tribal waterbody 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.



CLIMATE CHANGE NEWS

By Dennis Longknife, Jr., Climate Change Coordinator

Old man winter does not want to let go, however eventually we will have our spring. Spring time is the wet, rainy months, unless we go into an extreme Drought pattern like we did in 2017 and 2022. We went from winter, visited spring briefly, and went right

into the heat of summer, where we didn't get any moisture or very little. Those years we did not see hardly any new plant growth and water resources were in short supply for our wildlife and livestock.

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CLIMATE CHANGE NEWS

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Spring is the best time for walleye fishing along the Milk River, especially for tribal members who rely on walleye for their subsistence. Last year we didn't even get the chance to fish along the river banks, because of the high water level that seemed to drag from spring till summer. Blame Climate Change?



Springtime is also the time for our Amphibian friends to come out to breed. They are most active during the rains, and you can hear them vocalizing. Our native species include: Northern Leopard Frog, Boreal Chorus Frog, Great Plains Toad and the Woodhouses Toads. Frogs and Toads all have distinctive sounds when they vocalize, and you can identify them by their calls they make. If you heard them at a distance and they quit vocalizing when you get closer, just wait several minutes and they start again. After several days of breeding, the females will lay egg masses that are attached to emergent vegetation in the water, from this point on, you will begin seeing tadpoles which will quickly turn into juvenile frogs.



Dennis Longknife with



Northern Leopard Frog Egg masses in pond

Amphibians have the Adaptive Capacity to quickly develop through their life stages, because of the short growing season that our climate gives us. Some years when water is in short supply and the ponds begin drying, before the amphibian's reach maturity, we can lend a helping hand...literally, by moving the egg masses from one pond, to another pond that has deeper water, thus ensuring the survival of the species.

Photos: Woodhouses Toad, Great Plains Toad, Northern Leopard Frog, and Boreal Chorus Frog.



Beaver Creek Beaver Dams-Little Rocky Mountains.
(Longknife Ranch in the background)

CASC First Foods Program

I am also involved with another climate change project, called the First Foods Project, through a partnership with Jennifer Thompson, Forestry Program Manager, of the University of Montana's Forestry Studies Program. Other project partners are Michael Black Wolf, THPO Director, of the Tribal Historic Preservation Office, and Dan Kinsey, Natural Resources Instructor, at Aaniiih Nakoda College and their students Katelyn Goes Ahead, and Austin After Buffalo. Other partners include David Sauchyn of the Prairie Adaptation Research Center in Canada, who has done extensive work on Island Mountains in our region, mainly in Canada.

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CLIMATE CHANGE NEWS

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The main tasks are to identify native plant plots in the Little Rocky Mountains, we can use for monitoring and assessments, that will be used to develop protocols that will be used to prioritize our tribes' priority species we use for cultural and ceremonial uses. The data will be used to develop management and

restoration plans, to ensure we always have stable populations of native plants we can use.

Native Plants that inhabit our prairies and Little Rocky Mountains include: Service Berries, Wild Peppermint, Chokecherry, Sage, and Wild Turnip.



ResilienceMT Exhibition and Community Climate Event Coming Soon!

Submitted by Robin Saha, Director, Associate Professor | Environmental Studies Program

The University of Montana's spectrUM Discovery Area and UM's Environmental Studies Program, in partnership with the FBIC Climate Program, will bring a hands-on climate resilience exhibit to the Red Whip Gym on Tuesday, April 23 for local school visits in the morning.

Students will also learn about Aaniiih Nakoda environmental science student projects, the FBIC climate program, and cultural uses of plants from a tribal elder.

Families and community members are invited to the

Red Whip Gym from 5 to 7 pm for a community meal and event. The exhibit will be open for exploration by families and children of all ages, and ANC students and elders will display and share their research and cultural knowledge. Those who attend can learn how to get involved with tribal and community projects and activities that are helping to make the FBIC climate resilient.

The [ResilienceMT](#) exhibit includes an interactive display that turns air quality data into music, a do-it-yourself home air filter demonstration, a beaver dam flood engineering table, a "nature's superpowers" display, climate resilience story maps, and short videos including one featuring Dennis Longknife Jr, titled [Beavers and Climate Resilience in the Fort Belknap Indian Community](#).

spectrUM will also bring some of the exhibit displays to the FBIC Environmental Program Earth Day event on Apr. 22.

For more information about ResilienceMT use the QR code.



Montana's Priority Climate Action Plan is published

By Denise Roth Barber, Climate Pollution Reduction Coordinator | Montana Department of Environmental Quality
Denise.RothBarber@mt.gov | DESK: 406-444-4636

The Montana DEQ is pleased to announce the publication of the Montana Pollution Reduction Plan, which represents the state's Priority Climate Action Plan (PCAP) required by the EPA's Climate Pollution Reduction Grant program.

The plan is now available on DEQ's website at: <https://deq.mt.gov/about/Climate-Resilience>

Montana selected key focus areas that represent the state's priorities. Within each focus area, the plan outlines potential projects (measures) designed to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. These focus areas include:

- Healthy, Resilient Forests
- Sustainable 21st Century Schools
- Innovative Agricultural Practices & Working Lands
- Clean, Reliable Transportation
- Industrial & Power Sector Innovation
- High Performance Homes & Businesses
- Waste Reduction or Diversion

To develop this plan, DEQ solicited public input on potential emission reduction priorities from late-October 2023 through early January 2024 and re-

ceived more than 350 submittals from individuals, organizations, and businesses across the state. In collaboration with other state agencies and the Governor's office, DEQ then reviewed and prioritized project proposals, focusing on projects that will cut harmful pollution, catalyze innovation, reduce energy cost burdens, and provide real benefits to our communities without any new red tape.

This plan includes strategies to reduce emissions and support thriving Montana communities through innovation, not regulation. DEQ produced this plan to support investment in practices and technologies that reduce air pollution, create high-quality jobs, spur economic growth, and enhance the quality of life for all Montanans. Nothing in this plan is intended to be implemented through new policies, regulations, or requirements, and projects that propose to use regulation to cut emissions are not covered by this plan.

The measures in the Plan are intentionally broad to ensure they are available to any entity in Montana that is eligible to receive funding under Phase II of the CPRG program or other funding streams, as applicable.

Thank you for your interest in the CPRG program.



ANC will be having the Nic Mni (Water) Center Annual Forum the 4th week in April (TBA), in Room 213 at Returning Buffalo building, Aaniiih Nakoda College, Fort Belknap Agency.

For more information, please contact Rebecca J. Bishop at (406) 353-2607 or email rbishop@ancollege.edu.

EPA Releases Revised Policy on Consultation with Indian Tribes

Contact Information: U.S. EPA Press Office (press@epa.gov) | December 7, 2023
<https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/epa-releases-revised-policy-consultation-indian-tribes>

WASHINGTON - Today, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) released the revised EPA Policy on Consultation with Indian Tribes and the companion Guidance for Discussing Tribal Treaty or Similar Rights, reflecting the Biden-Harris Administration's commitment to strengthening Nation-to-Nation partnerships.

"From day one, President Biden committed to respecting Tribal sovereignty, honoring the federal trust responsibility, and engaging in regular, meaningful, and robust consultation with federally recognized Tribal governments," said EPA Administrator Michael S. Regan. "With the release of our revised consultation policy, we're delivering on the President's promise to Tribes and I'm looking forward to EPA's continued engagements with Tribes under this strengthened policy."

EPA has long been at the forefront of developing policy that ensures consideration of Tribal interests in making agency policy and managing environmental programs affecting Indian country. In 1984, EPA became one of the first federal agencies to develop a policy for interacting with Tribal governments, laying out how to consider Tribal interests in carrying out its programs to protect human health and the environment. In 2011, EPA was among the first federal agencies to issue a Tribal consultation policy and has since conducted more than 900 Tribal consultations. In 2016, EPA developed the Guidance for Discussing Tribal Treaty Rights, the first of its kind for any federal agency. Complementary to the consultation policy, EPA provides training to staff on working effectively

with Tribal governments. Successful implementation of EPA's Consultation Policy is a top priority for the Agency.

The current revisions were initiated by President Biden's January 26, 2021 Memorandum on Tribal Consultation and Strengthening Nation-to-Nation Relationships, which asked each federal agency to ensure regular and meaningful consultation with Tribal officials. EPA's revisions incorporate standards developed by the White House and interagency workgroups to promote uniformity in the way the federal government conducts consultation with federally recognized Tribal governments. The finalized policy and guidance additionally reflect valuable input from Tribal officials and Tribal partnership groups. Key revisions include:

- Guiding principles addressing the consideration of Indigenous Knowledge and information regarding sacred sites;
- Additional specificity on consultation timing, notification, coordination, participants, and follow-up;
- A section titled "Consultation Process Review" providing a means to resolve Tribal concerns of the sufficiency, timing and agency compliance with consultation policy requirements; and
- Expanded scope of the Guidance for Discussing Tribal Treaty Rights to include additional instruments of federal law and to apply to national EPA actions.

Learn more about the EPA Consultation Policy. <https://www.epa.gov/tribal/consultation-tribes>



HAPPY MOTHER EARTH DAY
April 22, 2024

The Fort Belknap Environmental Protection Department will be hosting it's Annual Earth Day Fair on Monday, April 22, 2024 with area students in grades 4-6 in Hays, Montana this year. Programs who wish to participate, please call (406) 353-8384 to sign up for a Learning Station.

Fort Belknap Indian Community



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Fort Belknap Indian Community
(Tribal Govt.)
Fort Belknap Indian Community
(Elected to administer the affairs of the community and
to represent the Assiniboine and the Gros Ventre
Tribes of the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation)

Fort Belknap Indian Community Water Rights Settlement Act of 2023 S.2226, National Defense Authorization Act, Division K January 16-17, 2024

The Fort Belknap Indian Community (FBIC) Water Rights Settlement Act was introduced in the Senate by Senators Jon Tester and Steve Daines on June 14, 2023, and in the House by Representative Matt Rosendale on July 28, 2023. The bill was approved on a bipartisan basis by the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs on July 19, 2023, and passed the Senate on July 27, 2023, as part of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). Unfortunately, the bill did not make it into the final version of the NDAA, but is ready to be included as part of appropriations or another legislative vehicle.

The current version of the bill is based on more than 30 years of negotiations between the FBIC and the Department of the Interior, State of Montana, existing water users and local counties. The bill has strong support from the Biden Administration, the Montana Governor, the Rocky Mountain Tribal Leaders Council, Milk River Joint Board of Control, St. Mary Rehabilitation Working Group, farmers and ranchers, local counties, and conservation groups, among others.

The bill will ratify the 2001 Water Compact reached by FBIC, Montana, and the U.S. The Compact quantifies FBIC's Indian reserved water rights, confirms tribal jurisdiction over those water rights, protects existing non-Indian water users, and provides certainty for water users in northcentral Montana. The Compact overwhelmingly passed the Montana Legislature on a bi-partisan basis.

The bill will also settle FBIC's claims against the U.S. for its failure to protect and manage FBIC's Indian water rights. A portion of FBIC's Indian water rights was first affirmed in the 1908 Supreme Court case *Winters v. US.*, which recognized that the establishment of Indian reservations included the water rights necessary to provide tribes with a permanent homeland.

These claims will be settled through funding in the bill for critical water infrastructure projects on the Fort Belknap Reservation. The bill will provide a substantial economic boost for the Reservation and northcentral Montana, and will also avoid costly litigation that threatens 10s of thousands of existing water users. The bill includes:

- water for FBIC irrigation, livestock, domestic use, and to support fish and wildlife;
- \$415 million to rehabilitate, modernize, and expand BIA's Fort Belknap Indian Irrigation Project neglected over more than a century, and to restore and develop irrigation systems;
- \$119 million for Southern Tributary Irrigation Project and Peoples Creek Irrigation Project;
- \$443 million to provide a clean and secure water supply and construct domestic, municipal, and commercial water supply and wastewater removal systems on the Reservation;
- \$300 million to restore the St. Mary Project Canal and enlarge the Dodson South Canal; and
- \$66 million to establish a trust fund for O&M for Tribal irrigators on the Reservation.

The bill will also restore 38,462 acres of reservation homelands to FBIC through an exchange of 22,345 acres of State lands within the Reservation for BLM and Forest Service lands across Montana, and the transfer of 16,117 acres of federal lands to FBIC.

MONTHLY UPDATE for TRIBES AND THE EN

From the Tribal Exchange Network Group (TXG)



EXCHANGE NETWORK UPDATES

Learn about the EN Grant Program

<https://www.epa.gov/exchangenetwork/exchange-network-grant-program>

(PAGE 4) TRIBES IN THE EN UPDATE

FY 2023 will be the 21st year EPA will award competitive funding to eligible partners for projects through the Exchange Network Grant Program. Between FY 2002 and FY 2022, EPA provided approximately \$260 million for state, tribal, and territorial awards and associated program support through the grant program. As of February 1, 2023, all 50 states and the District of Columbia, 86 tribes, and 5 territories have received EN grants. These grants support better environmental decisions by promoting the use of more timely and consistent data which is shareable by partners across the EN as well as by environmental professionals and the public.

On EPA's site, you can view examples of past projects and find resources for applicants. Details on the FY2024 cycle are coming soon!

FUNDING & CONSULTATION OPPORTUNITIES:

Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program Announces Second Funding Opportunity

<https://broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/funding-programs/tribal-broadband-connectivity/round-two-notice-of-funding-opportunity>

(PAGE 5) TRIBES IN THE EN UPDATE

The National Telecommunications & Information Association's Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program provides funding to support tribal governments to develop broadband deployment on tribal lands to improve telehealth, distance learning, broadband affordability, and digital inclusion.

A second round of funding from the Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program will make approximately \$980 million available on Native American, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian lands for deployment of Internet infrastructure, affordability programs, telehealth and distance learning initiatives.

Please email any questions, concerns or requests for technical assistance to TBCPNOF02@ntia.gov.

Applications must be received no later than 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time (ET) on March 22, 2024.

RESOURCES

Environmental Protection Network's Free Technical Assistance

<https://www.environmentalprotectionnetwork.org/>

(PAGE 6) TRIBES IN THE EN UPDATE

The Environmental Protection Network (EPN) is providing NO-COST assistance to tribes. Their network of over 550 EPA alumni volunteers can help tribes effectively and meaningfully participate in government decision-making by helping them navigate EPA, potential grants, regulatory processes, federal policies, and publicly available data to support their work. Additionally, the American Indian Environmental Office (AIEO) and EPN have a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that is focused on helping tribes to address their climate adaptation priorities. Visit their website to view their focus, past projects, service types, subscribe to updates, and request assistance, or email Davina Resto.

EPA Tools & Resources Webinar Series

<https://www.epa.gov/research-states/epa-tools-and-resources-webinar-series>

(PAGE 6) TRIBES IN THE EN UPDATE

Find all past and upcoming webinars hosted by the EPA.

Institute for Tribal Environmental Professionals Online Courses

<https://www7.nau.edu/itep/main/training/>

(PAGE 6) TRIBES IN THE EN UPDATE

Check out ITEP's new Tribal Environmental Management and Planning Online Courses. Sign up for a self-paced course hosted by ITEP's Waste and Response and Tribal Air Quality programs.

The American Indian Environmental Office (AIEO) Newsletter

<https://www.epa.gov/tribal/american-indian-environmental-office-aieo-newsletter>

(PAGE 6) TRIBES IN THE EN UPDATE

The AIEO Office has released the second volume of its newsletter with an article about their revised guidance on EPA Consultation with Indian Tribes, a summary of the 2023 White House Tribal Nations Summit, and the Environmental Protection Network.



Environment

Awareness

Respect

Togetherness

Home



DAY FAIR



Monday — April 22nd, 2024
10:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.—Mission Canyon—Hays, Montana

Student's in Grades 4th—6th from Hays/LodgePole Elementary, Dodson School, Harlem Elementary and White Clay Language Immersion School are invited to participate. We encourage the schools to provide each student with a sack lunch.

Hosted by the Fort Belknap Environmental Protection Department. For more information, contact the Fort Belknap Environmental Protection Department @ (406) 353-8384 or email inperce@ftbelknap.org or lonettebc@ftbelknap.org.



PAT CLAYTON

The Smith River is one of Montana's most beloved rivers. It is a lifeblood for southwest Montana, providing major, irreplaceable cultural, ecological, and economic benefits. Proposed industrial-scale mining in the headwaters of the Smith River drainage threatens serious environmental damage and perpetually polluted waters that will forever change the character and nature of this iconic river. Now, there's a chance to help protect the Smith River for present and future generations.

The U.S. Forest Service could proceed with an administrative "mineral withdrawal" on certain federal public lands in the Smith River watershed. This withdrawal would prevent mining activity in this area and protect this cherished resource, while still allowing for traditional uses of these public lands. A mineral withdrawal in this watershed has been publicly endorsed by the Fort Belknap Indian Community and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes.

Sign the petition

asking the Forest Service to protect the Smith River by proceeding with an administrative mineral withdrawal: <https://meic.org/action-center>

Protect the Smith

Sign the mineral withdrawal petition

Fort Belknap Indian Community
**ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION
DEPARTMENT**
Fort Belknap Agency
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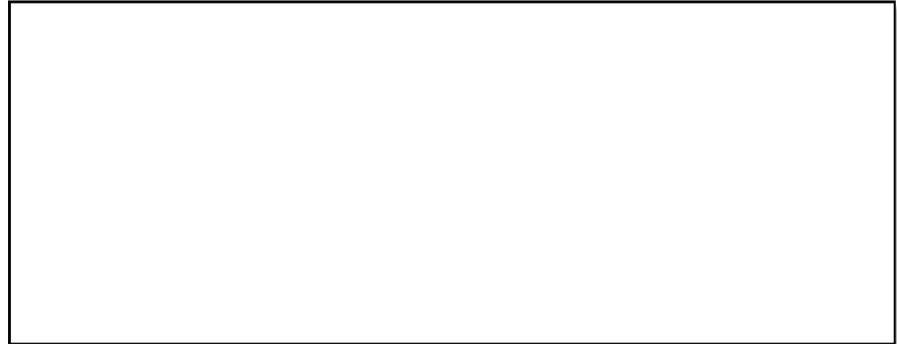
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Find us on Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/ftbelknap.environmental/>



*Wishing you a
Blessed New
Year ahead.*

*From the Fort Belknap
Environmental Protection
Department*

Circle Speaker
Aaniih & Nakoda Environmental Newsletter
VOLUME 28; ISSUE 3
Deadline for Articles is
Friday, June 5th, 2024 @ 5:00 p.m.
Articles can be emailed to: lonettebc@ftbelknap.org

CALL
for Articles



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.