



# **Fort Belknap Indian Community Fish and Wildlife Department**

## **Draft Five-year Conservation Plan October 1, 2021 – September 30, 2026**

Version: August 16, 2021

## Table of Contents

<b>Background on Conservation and the Aaniiih and Nakoda Nation .....</b>	<b>5</b>
Brief History of the Land and Its People.....	5
Geography .....	5
Fort Belknap Fish and Wildlife Department .....	6
Interested Parties .....	6
Fort Belknap Entities.....	6
State and Federal Entities .....	8
Non-governmental Entities .....	8
<b>Purpose of this Conservation Plan .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Relationship to Other Planning Documents and Processes .....</b>	<b>9</b>
The existing documents listed below provides the basis for many of the decisions and activities in this conservation plan. ....	9
Future Planning efforts.....	10
<b>Approach Used in this Document.....</b>	<b>11</b>
Vision, Mission, and Scope .....	11
Vision .....	11
Mission.....	11
Geographic Scope.....	11
<b>Land Types on the Reservation, and Approximate Acreage.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Time Period for this Conservation Plan.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Situation Analysis.....</b>	<b>14</b>
Ecosystem Services and Benefits to People.....	14
Biodiversity: Key Species and Habitats.....	14
Direct Threats and Contributing Factors .....	18
<b>Strategies, Goals and Activities.....</b>	<b>22</b>
Strategies.....	22
Strategy 1: Species Management.....	23
Strategy 2: Habitat restoration and management.....	29
Strategy 3: Hunting and fishing program management.....	31
Strategy 4: Community awareness and education .....	32
Strategy 5: Enforcement of Fish and Wildlife Conservation Code.....	33
Strategy 6: Policy.....	34

Strategy 7: Sustainable financing.....35

Strategy 8: Management and administration .....36

Draft

## Acronyms Used in This Document

ANC	Aaniih Nakoda College
ARMP	Agriculture Resource Management Plan
CWD	Chronic Wasting Disease
BIA	Bureau of Indian Affairs
EPA	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
FBIC	Fort Belknap Indian Community
MTFWP	Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
SCBI	Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute
USFWS	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
USGS	U.S. Geological Survey
WWF	World Wildlife Fund

## Background on Conservation and the Aaniiih and Nakoda Nation

### **Brief History of the Land and Its People**

The Aaniiih and Nakoda Nation, also known as the Fort Belknap Indian Community, is located in north central Montana. Forty miles south of the Canadian border and twenty miles north of the Missouri River, the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation is homeland to the Gros Ventre (Aaniiih) and Assiniboine (Nakoda) Tribes. The Reservation spans parts of Blaine and Phillips Counties and encompasses approximately 629,760 acres (comprised of 406,279 acres in Tribal trust, 192,408 acres individual trust, 20,150 acres Tribal fee land, 6,498 acres individual fee land, and 4,425 acres of state government land. The Tribes also hold mineral and surface rights to approximately 28,395 acres trust and Tribal fee lands in the submarginal lands west of the Reservation<sup>1</sup>. Fort Belknap is the fourth largest reservation in Montana.

The Gros Ventre and Assiniboine Tribes established their respective territories when they signed the Fort Laramie treaties of 1851 and 1855 with the U.S. Government. The Fort Belknap Indian Reservation was created by Congress on May 1, 1888, and it is governed by the Fort Belknap Indian Community Council. The Council consists of a President and Vice President who serve four-year terms, plus eight members (four from each Tribe) who are elected every two years. Tribal headquarters are located in Fort Belknap Agency at the northwest corner of the Reservation.

The Aaniiih and Nakoda Nation has 8,308 enrolled members, with more than one-half (4214 enrolled members) living on the Reservation. There are 115 non-enrolled members living on Fort Belknap Indian Reservation<sup>2</sup>. The Reservation has three main communities: Fort Belknap Agency in the north; and Hays and Lodge Pole in the southern part of the Reservation. Harlem is a community just a few miles north of the Reservation where many enrolled members live as well.

Cattle ranching and farming are the main industries. The Reservation's rolling prairie hills, mountains, streams, culture, and wildlife, in addition to its proximity to the American Prairie Reserve and Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge, make tourism another promising industry. Additionally, the Mission Canyon area offers popular attractions like the Natural Bridge, Wilson Park, Devil's Kitchen, and Needle Eye, and Kid Curry's Hideout. The Fort Belknap Indian Community (FBIC) and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) are major employers.

### Geography

Bordered to the north by the Milk River, the Reservation has marked geographic features. The Reservation primarily has prairie grasslands, but it hosts parts of the Little Rocky Mountains in the south and Snake Butte, a sacred site, in the north. As part of the North American Great Plains region, this semi-arid area is characterized by flat to undulating grassland underlain by glacial till and alluvial bottomlands, providing ideal habitat for grassland wildlife. The Reservation is within the Missouri River watershed, and it contains five reservoirs: Old Woman Reservoir, Weigand Reservoir, Government Field Reservoir, Seventeen Mile Reservoir, and Lake Seventeen. People's Creek, Little People's Creek,

---

<sup>1</sup> Source: BIA 2016

<sup>2</sup> Fort Belknap Planning Department 2021 census data

Lodgepole Creek, Three Mile Creek and Warm Springs Creek generally flow northward through the Reservation. Elevation on the Reservation ranges from about 2,300 to 5,000 feet.

Agriculture is the predominant land use on the Reservation with more than 60 % of the land being used for farming and ranching activities (approximately 388,900 acres). Ranching activities account for 42% of the land and farming accounts for 23%<sup>3</sup>. Most of the grazing land on the Reservation is composed of native grassland and shrubland habitats.

Two large open-pit, cyanide heap leach gold mines were opened in 1979, just south of the Reservation. The Zortman-Landusky mines have since contaminated surface and groundwater resources, destroyed sacred sites, and degraded and eliminated wildlife habitat. Since 1992, the Tribes have worked through the U.S. courts to try to shut down and bring the mines into compliance with environmental and water quality standards.

Wildlife on the Reservation include the endangered black-footed ferret, black-tailed prairie dogs, pronghorn, bear, moose, grassland birds, white-tailed and mule deer, beaver, wild turkey, elk, mountain lion, Northern Leopard frog, and aquatic species like walleye, among many others. The Tribes also manage two bison herds: a 500-600 head buffalo herd in the Snake Butte area and 125-150 head of genetically pure Yellowstone bison in a separate pasture east of Hwy 66.

#### **Fort Belknap Fish and Wildlife Department**

The Fort Belknap Fish and Wildlife Department (Department) was established in 1992. The Department manages wildlife on Tribal trust lands across both Blaine and Phillips Counties on behalf of the Aaniiih and Nakoda Nation. It is also responsible for administering hunting and fishing on Tribal lands and for enforcing the FBIC Title X- Fish and Wildlife Conservation Code.

#### **Interested Parties**

The department works with Fort Belknap Indian Community Council and with the general public including Tribal and non-Tribal ranchers, farmers, hunters, anglers, and other members of the local community. It coordinates efforts (or would like to do so during the next five years) with the following organizations, among others:

#### **Fort Belknap Entities**

- **Fort Belknap Indian Community Council (Tribal Council)** is the official government entity of the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation.
- **Fort Belknap Fish and Wildlife Department** issues are discussed in the **Tribal Council's Public Safety Committee**; other relevant Tribal Council committees include the **Land Committee and Natural Resources Committee**.
- **Fort Belknap Buffalo Management Program** manages lands that include critical habitat for endangered species. Buffalo management, particularly in the Snake Butte area, is integral to

---

<sup>3</sup> FBIC Final Agricultural Resource Management Plan and Programmatic Environmental Assessment

ferret, prairie dog, and grassland bird related goals. The black-footed ferret program in particular requires regular communication with the Buffalo Program Manager about forage needs for both prairie dogs (the ferret's main prey) and buffalo. Though it is not currently a major issue, perceived or real impact of prairie dogs on available forage for bison could become a bigger issue in the future.

- **Tribal Environmental Protection Department** has vast experience working with the land and can help with conservation issues. Their water quality program monitors water reservation-wide, though they only have the capacity to monitor a couple of watersheds every year. The Environmental Protection Department also has a Brownfield program which monitors the Reservation for illegal dumping and performs outreach with the public. Any violations to the soil, water, air, are monitored by the Environmental Protection Department. The Wetlands Program completed collecting baseline wetland data from all watersheds on Fort Belknap Indian Reservation and has an Aquatic Resource Protection Ordinance. The Environmental Protection Department's **Climate Change Program** has created a draft climate change adaptation plan that outlines the Tribe's priorities from impacts associated with climate change. It integrates tools to address changes in climate that impacts habitat and food for wildlife.
- **Tribal Social Services** (sponsors annual fishing derby)
- **Tribal Land Department**
- **Tribal Historic Preservation Office**
- **Tribal Employment Office**
- **Montana State University Extension (MT statewide and local Fort Belknap office)** provides education and outreach on how to protect, restore, and conserve tribal lands, especially when agricultural practices are involved. Their programs also address noxious weeds.
- **Aaniiih Nakoda College (ANC)** is the link to future students who may become leaders of natural resource management (especially the Natural Resources class). ANC is also the link to accessing interns for wildlife work on the Reservation. The Tribal wildlife department can be a link to students interested in natural resource management careers by providing mentorship to students. The wildlife department can benefit from funding and research opportunities secured through the college. For example, the wildlife department collaborated with the college on a National Science Foundation grant expected to be awarded Spring 2021.
- **Fort Belknap Indian Community (FBIC)** – Enrolled members of the Aaniiih and Nakoda Tribes are the key to the success and longevity of a conservation plan for the Reservation. Their voices matter as does inclusion of their voices in the plan.
  - **The guide association** (an informal group of guides that cater to non-member hunters)
  - **Ranching community** (grazing associations, BIA, Montana State University Extension, Tribal Land Department)
  - **Elders** (Senior Centers)
  - **Native language speakers** (ANC immersion school, Lodgepole's new school)
  - **Youth** (representatives from ANC, 477 program, Boys and Girls Club)
  - **Tourism/recreation** (e.g., Island Mountain Development Group, Discover Ft. Belknap, campground managers, Fort Belknap Economic Development Corporation, Community Development Financial Institution)
  - **Community Garden Club** (e.g., connections to medicinal plants)
  - **Community volunteers** (Hays, Harlem, Dodson and Lodgepole communities, e.g., trails; fishing sites)

## State and Federal Entities

- **Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MTFWP)** grants import permits of wildlife into Montana (like ferrets and foxes). They also may play a role in helping the department conduct ungulate flights. Maintaining partnership with MTFWP is important for existing and future restoration of prairie wildlife. MTFWP works closely with Fort Belknap Fish and Wildlife Department on law enforcement activities and wildlife management including sharing information and joint wildlife projects. Last year, the MTFWP Aquatic Program did an assessment of invasive species in Fort Belknap Indian Community's water bodies.
- **Montana Natural Heritage Program** serves as a partner in sharing information on species in the area. They have also developed ecotypes.
- **Natural Resource Conservation Service (U.S. Department of Agriculture)** provides technical services and guidance on farmlands, plants, and soils on Fort Belknap Indian Reservation.
- **The Governor's, Montana Invasive Species Committee** includes many state department heads who manage different areas of land who can provide information and links to resources.
- **Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA)** – BIA is an important financial and technical supporter of the Fort Belknap Fish and Wildlife Department and manage leases for grazing on the Reservation. BIA has trust responsibilities on the Reservation and can provide valuable expertise, equipment, and funding.
- **U.S. Department of Agriculture Animal Plant Health Inspection Service Wildlife Services** – They serve as a partner that bring technical resources to wildlife protection and possibly management on the Reservation.
- **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)** – The Service is an important player in allocating ferrets to the Reservation for restoration of that population. USFWS implements endangered species recovery efforts and works closely with the Tribe on ferret recovery efforts and other programs including migratory birds and eagle feather. They have helped FBIC with bird surveys.
- **U.S. Geological Survey (USGS)** -- The USGS is planning to conduct grassland bird community modeling under various climate change scenarios.

## Non-governmental Entities

- **World Wildlife Fund's (WWF) Northern Great Plains Program** is playing a key role in capacity building for the Fish and Wildlife Department and helps with advancement of science-based conservation of imperiled prairie wildlife. WWF is integral with planning efforts and with the development, management and administration of grants and other funding opportunities. WWF brings expertise, funding, technical, and logistical support to the ferret and swift fox work and can potentially do the same for the Buffalo Program. WWF's Northern Great Plains Program is also partnering with the department and ANC on a National Science Foundation proposal.
- **Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute (SCBI)** – They are a new partner of the Fort Belknap Fish and Wildlife Department and bring financial and technical resources to the table. SCBI is involved with swift fox reintroduction and is collaborating with the community college to study bison behavior and impacts of vegetation.
- **Defenders of Wildlife** has been a long-time partner of the Fort Belknap Fish and Wildlife Department and bring financial and technical resources to the table.
- **Montana Audubon** has partnered with Dennis Longknife as part of the Wings Across Big Sky program. They offer resources for bird surveys.



- **Zoo Montana** is a potential partner that could provide support for swift, foxes, ferrets, bison conservation.
- **American Prairie Reserve** is a current partner that is working with the fish and wildlife department and Aaniiih Nakoda College on bison issues and vegetation monitoring.
- **Native seed harvest & restoration partnership** (with Society for Ecological Restoration, Christina Eisenberg, Council, Dennis Longknife)
- **Pheasants Forever** could potentially provide seed and technical assistance for upland game bird management (e.g., food plots) as well as provide other types of support)

## Purpose of this Conservation Plan

The purpose of this plan is to summarize what the department intends to achieve, why, where, how and by when. It does so by describing the:

- Vision for the department, and geographic scope of the department's activities
- Key species, habitats, ecosystem services to people, and main factors affecting them
- Main strategies, and time-specific goals, activities, and indicators over a five-year period

Ultimately, this conservation plan aims to help:

- Clarify the department's intended medium and long-term impacts
- Link each of the department's activities to a goal
- Focus effort and resources of the department and its partners
- Inform financing needs (which will be identified in a department financial plan, to be developed)
- Enable shared understanding among department staff and its constituents
- Help the department communicate with partners
- Increase transparency and accountability for the department

## Relationship to Other Planning Documents and Processes

This conservation plan includes all main activities that the department plans to undertake over a period of five years. A financial plan will be developed that will estimate the total costs, existing funding, and resulting financial gap associated with the goals and activities in this plan. The department may develop more detailed management plans for individual species as needed, and those should be consistent with information in this conservation plan (either by conforming to information in the conservation plan or updating the conservation plan as needed).

**The existing documents listed below provides the basis for many of the decisions and activities in this conservation plan.**

- The BIA Agricultural Resource Management Plan (ARMP) provides an overview of the available agricultural resources. In addition, the ARMP identifies and establishes ARMP-specific Tribal agricultural resource goals and objectives, management objectives for those resources, and actions needed to reach those objectives. This Conservation Plan does not replace management authority of the BIA but rather incorporates some of the objectives or recommendations provided in the ARMP.
- The BIA Forest Management Plan is currently being revised by the BIA and the Fort Belknap Fish and Wildlife Department is committed to actively participate in the planning process. The goals

and activities described this plans' Forest habitat strategy are dependent on the department engagement in the Forest Planning process.

- The 2020 Swift Fox Reintroduction Plan is currently being implemented and the main goals and objectives of this plan are stated in the conservation plan.
- The department's Upland Game Bird Management Plan was developed in the late 1990's but was only partially implemented. The conservation and management of upland game birds on Fort Belknap Indian Reservation will now be guided by goals and activities stated in this conservation plan.
- The goals and objectives discussed in the Pronghorn Management Plan have been revised to reflect current changes in population and management. The goals and activities for Pronghorn in this Conservation Plan will supersede those in the earlier Pronghorn Management Plan.
- A draft Prairie Dog Management Plan for Fort Belknap Fish and Wildlife Department was developed in 2002. This will be reviewed and updated to align with the goals and activities outlined in this conservation plan.
- The Noxious Weed Strategic Plan developed in 2013 has never been fully implemented. The existing plan requires the creation of a new coordinator position and needs to be revised.

#### **Future Planning efforts**

- Moose Management Plan: No plan exists yet; however, there is a desire to develop one to guide future conservation and management of the species on the Reservation.
- Black-footed Ferret Conservation Plan: No plan exists yet; however, there is a desire to develop one to guide future conservation and management of the species on the Reservation. It will include the goals and activities outlined in this conservation plan.
- Climate Change Adaptation Plan: The Department plans to contribute to FBIC's climate change plan's vulnerability assessment and application of adaptive management strategies to address impacts to wildlife and habitats.
- Bighorn Sheep Management Plan: No plan exists yet; however, there is a desire to develop a management plan to guide future conservation and management of the species on the Reservation.
- The 2010 Wetlands 5-year Work Plan is outdated. The Tribal Environmental Protection Department will apply for funding to update the work plan and develop a wetland management program. Goals and activities listed in this conservation plan support co-creation of a Wetlands program and development of a wetlands monitoring plan.

This conservation plan is more detailed than existing BIA planning documents for FBIC, and its content should be used to make future BIA plans more specific. Similarly, a draft regional conservation plan is being further developed for fifteen Native nations in the Northern Great Plains ecoregion, which will be more general (and possibly be informed by) this Fort Belknap Fish and Wildlife Department's conservation plan.

## Approach Used in this Document

The planning approach used in this document is based on the Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation<sup>4</sup>, a set of open-source best practices for planning conservation initiatives. These standards were created in 2004 by several conservation organizations, and they have been used by hundreds of conservation projects and programs around the world. This Conservation Plan was developed by the Fort Belknap Department of Fish and Wildlife with support from the World Wildlife Fund.

### **Vision, Mission, and Scope**

#### Vision

Preserve healthy ecosystems on Fort Belknap Tribal lands for the social, economic, and cultural well-being of the Aaniiih and Nakoda People for generations to come.

#### Mission

Restore and sustain wildlife and biodiverse habitats on Fort Belknap Tribal lands through stewardship informed by science and traditional ecological knowledge.

#### Geographic Scope

The Fort Belknap Fish and Wildlife Department manages fish, wildlife, and hunting on trust lands throughout the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation, and on the approximately 28,395 acres owned by the Tribes off the Reservation. The following tables contains breakouts of land types on and off the Reservation.

## Land Types on the Reservation, and Approximate Acreage

Most trust land within the Reservation remains in prairie grassland and shrubland and mountain land, while much of the fee simple land and prime farmland has been converted to agricultural cropland. A major challenge for natural resources management is that land ownership is fractionated in many places, meaning wildlife may cross through lands owned by multiple parties within a small area. Fractionated land tenure stems from federal policies during the early twentieth century Allotment Era (the Dawes Act) that opened up reservations to private landownership. Fort Belknap Indian Community has since worked to consolidate and expand Tribally owned lands within the Reservation. The 2009 Cobell v. Salazar Settlement over federal mismanagement of Tribal resources directed money to the Tribes to purchase fractional land ownership. By June 2019, the Tribes purchased over 200,000 equivalent acres, consolidating more than 25,000 fractional interests from thousands of individuals<sup>5</sup>.

---

<sup>4</sup> For additional information on the Open Standards, see <http://cmp-openstandards.org/>

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior. Buy-Back Program Partners with Fort Belknap Indian Community and Sends Offers to Landowners with Fractional Interests at Reservation. Access April 23, 2021: <https://www.doi.gov/buybackprogram/buy-back-program-partners-fort-belknap-indian-community-and-sends-offers-landowners>

**Lands within the exterior boundary of Fort Belknap Reservation<sup>6</sup>**

#	Land Type	Description	Approximate Size (acres)	% of Reservation
<b>TRUST LANDS</b>			<b>598,687</b>	<b>95%</b>
1	Tribal trust land	Owned by the Tribe and held in trust by the federal government (BIA)	406,279	64.5%
2	Allotted trust land	Owned by Tribal member individual(s) and held in trust by the federal government (BIA)	192,408	30.5%
<b>FEE SIMPLE LANDS</b>			<b>31,076</b>	<b>4.9%</b>
3	Tribal fee simple land	Private fee simple land owned by the Tribe in process of transferring to trust status	20,150	3.2%
4	Individual Indian-owned fee simple land	Private fee simple land owned by Tribal member individual(s)	6,498	1.0%
5	Individual non-Indian-owned fee simple land	Private fee simple land owned by non-Indian individual(s)	-	<1%
6	Government	State and DOI lands	4,425	0.7%
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>629,760</b>	<b>99.9%</b>

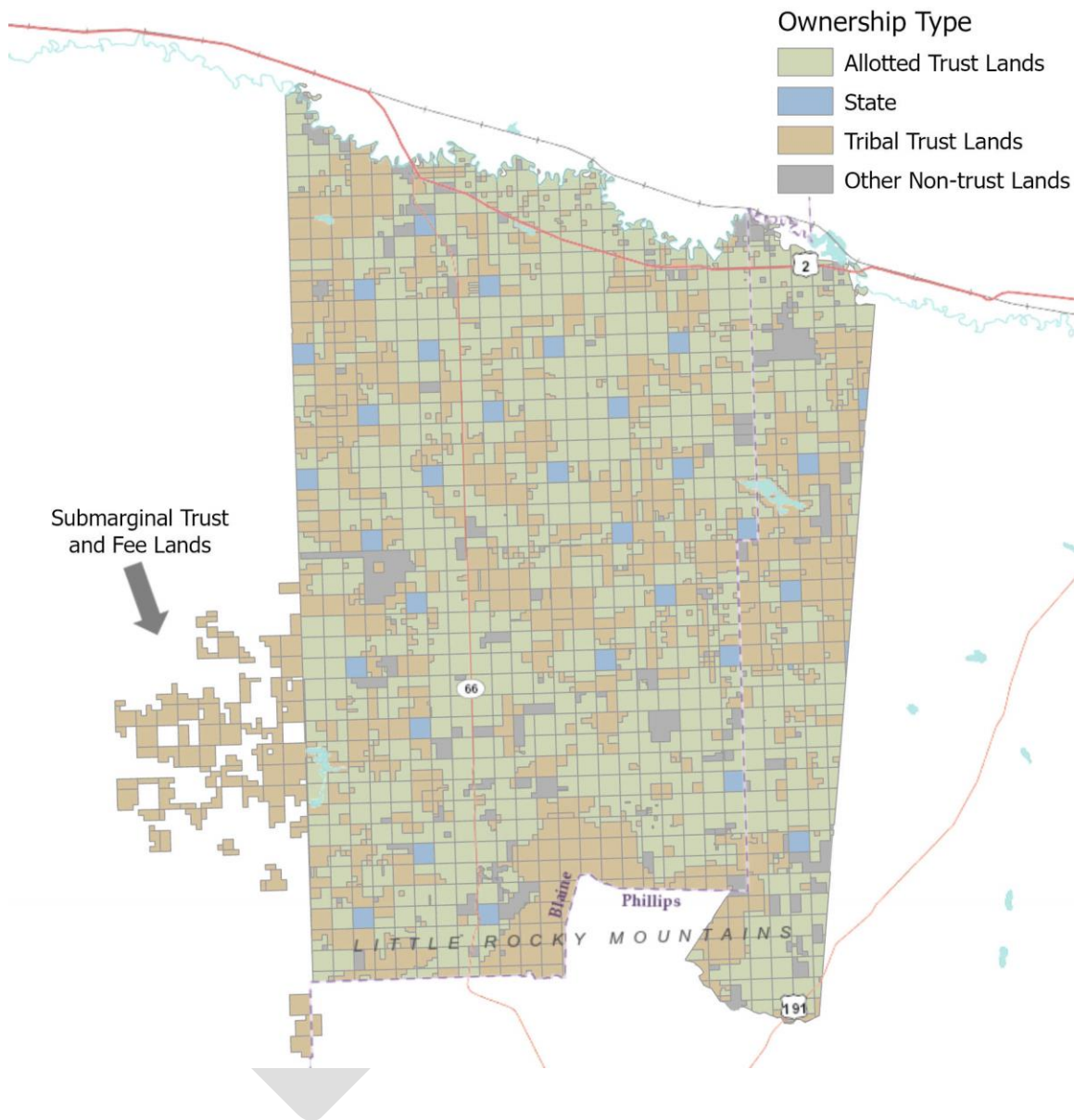
**Tribal Land Types off the Reservation, and Approximate Acreage**

#	Land Type	Description	Approximate Size (acres)	% of Tribal Land off Reservation
1	Tribal trust lands	Owned by the Tribe and held in trust by the federal government (BIA)	21,395	75%
2	Tribal fee simple land <sup>7</sup>	Private fee simple land owned by the Tribe in process of transferring to trust status	7,000*	25%
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>28,395</b>	<b>100%</b>

<sup>6</sup> BIA will be providing Fort Belknap Indian Community with updated acreage numbers within the next 12 months.

<sup>7</sup> Tribal fee simple land acres have been calculated from a Blaine County ownership map.

## Map of Fort Belknap Indian Reservation and off-Reservation Tribal Lands<sup>8</sup>



<sup>8</sup> Map produced by Dana Nelson of Clemson University using BIA data.

## Time Period for this Conservation Plan

The Fort Belknap Indian Community Fish and Wildlife Department operates on a fiscal year that runs from October 1 through the following September. The term “fiscal year 2022” (FY2022, or FY22) refers to the time period from October 1, 2021 through September 30, 2022. This five-year Conservation Plan is for the period from FY2022-FY2026.

Successful achievement of all goals in this plan will depend on the availability of sufficient sources of funding to implement all activities. The financial plan that will be developed for the department will identify the funding gap to implement this Conservation Plan.

## Situation Analysis

This section summarizes key species and habitats, and the main ecosystem services that the Fort Belknap Indian Community’s natural resources provide to Tribal members and others who reside in, live near to, or visit the Reservation. It also describes direct threats and contributing factors expected to significantly affect ecosystem services and biodiversity over the next five years. (For information on the Fort Belknap Indian Community Fish and Wildlife Department’s activities and intended impacts, see the *Strategies, Goals and Activities* section.)

### **Ecosystem Services and Benefits to People**

Natural resources on the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation and off-Reservation Tribal trust lands provide many ecosystem services and benefits to people in the local area and region. Grasslands, wetlands, and forests store and purify water, cycle nutrients, and sequester carbon – vital services, especially in a rapidly changing climate. They also provide food (e.g., habitat for deer, elk, pronghorn, moose), medicine (e.g., grassland and forest plants), fiber, and wood products (e.g., for teepee poles), as well as livestock forage. FBIC’s lands provide valuable recreational opportunities like hiking, hunting, and wildlife viewing amidst breathtaking scenery, which in turn, brings income to guides and revenue the Tribe. Access to their natural resources means Aaniiih and Nakoda citizens can continue to engage in cultural and religious practices and gain scientific and educational opportunities. Protecting and restoring FBIC’s lands is a source of community pride, as recently demonstrated by community events surrounding FBIC’s restoration of swift fox to the Reservation.

### **Biodiversity: Key Species and Habitats**

Below is a brief description of the key species and habitat types identified by the Fort Belknap Indian Community. The purpose of this list is to identify a limited number of species and habitats that represent or benefit the preservation of important ecosystem services or conservation of many other species or habitats, and that The Fort Belknap Department of Fish and Wildlife will focus the majority of its efforts on (please note that although bison is a very important species for the community, and the department will help expand bison pasture area as described under Goal 2.2, bison is not listed in the table below because the Fort Belknap Buffalo Management Program leads the Tribe’s efforts on bison).

#	Key species or habitat	Reason for selection related to social, economic, and cultural well-being of the Aaniiih and Nakoda People	Reasons for selection related to restoring or sustaining wildlife and biodiverse habitats
1	Upland game birds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ringed-neck pheasant, Gray partridge and sharp-tailed grouse provide hunting opportunities for Tribal members and non-members, and hunting license revenue to the department and bird hunting guides. (Greater sage grouse are not hunted on Fort Belknap Indian Reservation due to their current population status).</li> <li>• Wild turkey, though an introduced species, provide hunting opportunities to Tribal members and non-members.</li> <li>• Native sage grouse and sharp-tailed grouse mating displays are mimicked by Native American dancers at pow-wows and other cultural events. Game bird hunting provides a source of food and hunting recreation.</li> <li>• Scientific (e.g., nesting success and recruitment, impacts of predation on populations, etc.) and educational opportunities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater Sage Grouse is a sensitive species.</li> <li>• Sharp-tailed Grouse and sage grouse are good indicators of landscape health.</li> <li>• Game birds are prey to avian and mammalian predators, providing an ecological role</li> </ul>
2	Prairie dogs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Source of hunting license revenue for the Department, and jobs for hunting guides through the recreational shooting program.</li> <li>• Cultural significance to the Tribe.</li> <li>• Scientific and educational opportunities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prairie dogs provide food and habitat to many wildlife species including black-footed ferrets, bison, swift fox, and pronghorn.</li> <li>• Grassland birds utilize and depend on prairie dog habitat, including sensitive species such as burrowing owls, mountain plovers, Sprague's pipits, thick-billed longspurs, long billed curlews.</li> <li>• Keystone species.</li> </ul>
3	Black-footed ferrets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Historical and cultural significance to the Tribe, including historic use of pelts in dance regalia.</li> <li>• Scientific and educational opportunities.</li> <li>• Reintroduction has been source of community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Endangered species that has successfully been reintroduced on the Reservation.</li> <li>• One of the rarest mammals in North America.</li> <li>• Ecological role of a predator in the ecosystem.</li> </ul>



		<p>pride by being able to provide habitat to return a native species to the Reservation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Economic benefits through employment of Tribal members assisting with reintroduction activities and research, grants</li> </ul>	
4	Swift fox	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Historical and cultural significance to the Tribe.</li> <li>Scientific and educational opportunities.</li> <li>Reintroduction has been source of community pride by being able to provide habitat to return a native species to the Reservation.</li> <li>Economic benefits through employment of Tribal members, grants.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Imperiled species that the department recently reintroduced on the Reservation.</li> <li>Imperiled species on the Fort Belknap landscape</li> <li>Ecological role of a predator in the ecosystem.</li> </ul>
5	Pronghorn antelope	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Source of hunting license revenue for the department, and jobs for hunting guides.</li> <li>Important source of food.</li> <li>Recreational and scientific values.</li> <li>Wildlife viewing/aesthetic values.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Populations have declined during the past decade but appear to be on rebound. (Impacted by severe cold and snow).</li> <li>Pronghorn ecological role as prey species (e.g., eagles, coyotes)</li> </ul>
6	Deer: white-tailed and mule	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sources of hunting license revenue for the department, and jobs for hunting guides.</li> <li>Important source of food.</li> <li>Recreational and scientific values.</li> <li>Wildlife viewing/aesthetic values.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mule deer populations have declined in recent decades (probably for a variety of reasons).</li> <li>Impacted and vulnerable from disease and viruses like EHD/blue tongue and CWD.</li> <li>Deer's ecological role as prey species.</li> </ul>
7	Elk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Source of hunting license revenue for the department, and jobs for hunting guides.</li> <li>Important source of food.</li> <li>Recreational and scientific values.</li> <li>Wildlife viewing/aesthetic values.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Indicator of landscape health.</li> <li>Elk's ecological role as prey species.</li> </ul>
8	Bighorn sheep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Source of non-member hunting license revenue for the department, and jobs for hunting guides.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Native to Fort Belknap Indian Reservation.</li> <li>Potential to restore escape habitat (steep and/or rocky slopes greater than 70 %) and expand population onto the Reservation.</li> </ul>
9	Moose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Highly sought-after source of hunting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Historically, moose have been transient on Tribal</li> </ul>



		<p>opportunities for Tribal members, especially in the last few years, who hunt for recreation and/or food.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides some revenue to the department.</li> <li>• Recreational and scientific values.</li> </ul>	<p>lands but in last few years an increasing number of moose have been sighted and harvested on the Reservation. There is potential for moose to reproduce and inhabit the Reservation year-long.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>
<b>10</b>	Grassland and shrub land habitat	<p>Grasslands and shrub land provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medicinal, ceremonial, and edible plants; some are culturally significant.</li> <li>• Carbon sequestration.</li> <li>• Forage for livestock.</li> <li>• Nutrient cycling.</li> <li>• Scientific and educational opportunities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grassland and shrub land provide habitat for a variety of species, notably: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Western Hognose Snake, which was discovered in 2016 at Snake Butte by Dennis Longknife and is very rare in the region;</li> <li>○ Greater Short-Horned Lizard, which is very rare in the region, is on the “Species of Concern” and “Species of Greatest Inventory Need” lists of the Montana Natural Heritage Program, and has been found in several locations on Fort Belknap Tribal lands.</li> <li>○ Sensitive grassland bird species (including burrowing owls, mountain plovers, Sprague’s pipits, thick-billed longspurs, and long billed curlews).</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Grasslands fill food and cover requirements for many species.</li> </ul>
<b>11</b>	Forest and foothills habitat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide habitat for hunted species that provide hunting license revenue to the department, and jobs for guides.</li> <li>• Gathering of medicinal and food plants by Tribal members.</li> <li>• Source of fiber and wood products, including teepee poles.</li> <li>• Carbon sequestration.</li> <li>• Source of water storage.</li> <li>• Nutrient recycling.</li> <li>• Recreation (trails).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fulfill food and cover requirements for many species, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Mountains provide habitat for Blue/Ruffed Grouse and Snowshoe Hares.</li> <li>○ Valleys and mountains provide habitat for wild turkeys.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

12	Riparian and wetland habitat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fish are caught and consumed by Tribal members.</li> <li>• Gathering of medicinal and food plants by Tribal members.</li> <li>• Tribal members used Sandbar Willows, Quaking Aspen and Plains Cottonwood for their daily lifestyles, making teepees, arrows, etc.</li> <li>• Carbon Sequestration</li> <li>• Source of water storage and purification.</li> <li>• Nutrient recycling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Riparian/wetland areas are critical to many species of wildlife (e.g., shorebirds, waterfowl, fish).</li> <li>• Prairie potholes/reservoirs/lakes provide valuable refuge for migrating waterfowl, for nesting and breeding.</li> <li>• Important habitat for Northern Leopard Frog populations, which are susceptible to habitat loss and fungus such as Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis, which can wipe out entire populations.</li> <li>• Important habitat for waterfowl and shorebird species.</li> <li>• Indicators of landscape health.</li> <li>• Beaver are keystone species that are also essential for naturally storing water and climate change adaptation.</li> </ul>
----	------------------------------	--	---

### Direct Threats and Contributing Factors

The main direct threats and contributing factors (i.e., root/underlying causes, or relevant opportunities) expected to significantly affect ecosystem services and biodiversity over the next five years are described below. Direct threats and contributing factors are broken out according to the key species or habitat to which they most relate. Following them are descriptions of the biggest general contributing factors that affect multiple key species, habitats, and ecosystem services.

Direct threats and contributing factors by key species/habitat:

#### *Upland game birds*

The primary direct threats to upland game bird populations on FBIC's lands are predation (influenced by abundance of predator populations such as coyotes and raccoons), lack of food and cover (influenced by extreme weather and drought conditions increasing with climate change), and livestock overgrazing that results in loss of nesting and hiding cover. Other direct threats are conversion of grassland to farmland, overharvesting of upland game birds, and prevalence of West Nile virus, but they are relatively minor in relation to the aforementioned direct threats on FBIC lands.

### *Prairie dogs*

In the late 1990s, wildlife managers lacked the tools needed to respond to sylvatic plague outbreaks. Today, this flea-transmitted disease can kill over 90 percent of prairie dogs infected with the disease, posing a direct threat to prairie dog population on the Fort Belknap Reservation. Additionally, unregulated recreational shooting threatens prairie dog populations, as some people shoot prairie dogs for recreation or because some people perceive them as a pest. Similarly, some people poison prairie dogs when they are perceived as a threat to farm or ranch operations. Flooding caused by rapid snow melt and heavy rain poses a minor direct threat. Predicted increases in drought and severe winters (due to climate change) could impact prairie dogs.

### *Black-footed ferrets*

Lack of habitat with prairie dog complexes and sylvatic plague are the primary threats to black-footed ferrets. It is difficult for ferrets to expand into new habitat without intervention from wildlife managers. Eradication of prairie dogs – the ferret's main prey – by ranchers poses a threat. Like sylvatic plague, Black-footed ferret populations are also negatively impacted by canine distemper. A shortage of funding and labor to mitigate plague and canine distemper makes these threats more challenging to navigate. Predation by coyotes, badgers, and raptors directly threatens ferret populations as well. Suspected inbreeding depression and reduced genetic diversity from population bottleneck underlies threats to ferret recovery.

### *Swift fox*

With an abundant coyote population on Reservation lands, predation poses a direct threat to swift fox. Vehicle collisions also pose a direct threat, especially on main roads within and adjacent to the Reservation such as highway 66, highway 2, Route 8, etc. Diseases such as canine distemper and parvo pose relatively minor threats, especially with an inability to vaccinate for canine distemper. On FBIC lands, a lack of prey abundance and conversion of grassland to farmland pose addition, albeit minor, threats to swift fox. Underlying these issues are drought and extreme weather, accelerated by climate change, and a lack of sufficient size and habitat.

### *Pronghorn antelope*

Pronghorn antelope are impacted by Hemorrhagic Disease, caused by two closely related viruses: Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease Virus (EHD) and Bluetongue Virus (BT). Infected deer potentially spread EHD and BT to pronghorn, as well as Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD). Predation by coyote and eagles on fawns poses a direct threat, as do wire fences that impede their migration and other movements across the landscape. Wire fences are commonly used for range or livestock management. Illegal harvest (influenced by law enforcement levels) and winter mortality from heavy snows pose minor threats.

### *White-tailed and mule deer*

The major direct impacts to mule deer on Tribal lands are illegal harvest (influenced by law enforcement levels), vehicle collisions, and predation. Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease Virus, Bluetongue Virus, and Chronic Wasting Disease, are minor direct impacts, as are overharvesting and winter mortality.

### *Elk*

The main direct threats to elk on Tribal lands are illegal harvest (influenced by inadequate law enforcement and high road densities that are coupled with a lack of security), overharvest (influenced by liberal hunting regulations), reported hazing of elk herds off the Reservation by non-enrolled members of the Tribes and predation (influenced by predator abundance). Chronic Wasting Disease and competition with livestock for forage availability are relatively minor direct threats. Climate change influences elk population levels through increasing drought and extreme weather.

### *Bighorn sheep*

The major direct threats to bighorn sheep on FBIC lands are illegal harvest (influenced by inadequate law enforcement and high road density), predation (influenced by predator abundance), and lack of security and cover for escape and lambing. Disease plays an important but less dominant role, as domestic sheep are introducing diseases to bighorn sheep. High road density on Reservation lands and a lack of movement corridors are important factors that underly direct threats to bighorn sheep.

### *Moose*

Moose are a highly desired species for harvesting by FBIC citizens. Their high value as a harvestable species coupled with liberal hunting regulations means that most moose sighted on the Reservation during hunting season are harvested, making overharvesting a primary direct threat to the moose population on FBIC lands. Illegal harvest, though minor, is also a direct threat. Chronic Wasting Disease and parasites like winter ticks pose a direct threat, as do the wire fences (often used for rangeland management) that impede moose migration and movement.

### *Grasslands and shrub land habitat*

Grasslands and shrub lands on FBIC lands are directly threatened by overgrazing by cattle, weeds, and invasive species, all of which are influenced by grazing and rangeland management practices and increasing extreme weather events and drought that climate change exacerbates. Grasshopper epidemics also pose a direct threat. Minor direct impacts include both the prevention/exclusion of wildland fire and catastrophic wildfire, housing development and roads (influenced by vehicle travel and increasing human population), and conversion to cropland agriculture (influenced by market prices for crops).

### *Forest and foothills habitat*

Wildland fire directly threatens forest and foothills habitat, particularly where fire has been excluded or prevented for a lengthy period of time which increases the risk of catastrophic wildfire. Invasive and noxious weeds pose a direct threat, as does the mountain pine beetle. Logging practices constitute a minor threat, and they are influenced by demand for timber and wood products and the need for businesses and jobs to offset high unemployment rates in FBIC. Roads can directly threaten forest and foothills habitat, as can off-road vehicle travel. Drought driven by climate change underlies many of these threats, particularly wildfire, beetle-kill rates, and the spread of invasive species. Diseases that can impact individual tree health such as mistletoe, galls, blister rusts, cankers etc., is another important, but minor, direct threat to forest health.

#### *Riparian and wetland habitat*

At least four major direct threats impact riparian and wetlands habitat on FBIC lands. Cattle grazing impacts riparian areas as it can wipe out shrubs and change the course of a stream. Cattle grazing impacts are influenced by land management practices, as is a second direct threat: the spread of invasive and noxious weeds. Previous introduction of invasive/non-native fish like bass and pike to streams poses a threat, as do the toxins *Cryptosporidium* and botulism. Finally, pollution from agriculture, housing developments, and roads poses a major direct threat as well. Human development, influenced by housing needs and an increasing population, poses a minor direct threat. Climate change is a major underlying factor influencing direct threats as it increases the severity and intensity of drought, which dried up prairie potholes, which in turn affect migrating waterfowl. Climate change also contributes hot, dry weather than can lead to avian die-offs.

The following are general contributing factors that affect multiple key species, habitats, and ecosystem services:

#### *Weather, exacerbated by climate change*

Climate change is increasing the frequency and severity of drought, increasing the frequency of flooding, and increasing the frequency of extreme weather events like heavy snows and other precipitation. All of these factors influence the health of species and habitats on FBIC's lands. For example, heavy winter snows can increase pronghorn mortality. Flooding impacts aquatic and terrestrial species, including prairie dogs. Drought and high temperatures can spark avian die-offs and influence tree mortality and fire, among many other things.

#### *Insufficient quality and quantity of habitat*

The Fish and Wildlife Department will address a variety of factors related to quality and quantity of habitat. Overgrazing and grazing practices are a major factor that the Department address along with BIA and Tribal Lands. For example, cattle grazing in riparian areas can wipe out shrubs and change course of a stream. Other factors influencing habitat that the Department will address are lack of food and cover (including escape and lambing cover), low recruitment\* (usually a function of other threats to the health of species and their abilities to reproduce, which is tied to food availability and habitat), fish planting or stocking for recreation, lack of prey abundance, and impediments to movement (e.g., fencing with bottom wires too low for pronghorn to pass through). There are a variety of other important factors that influence quality and quantity of habitat, though they are addressed by other FBIC departments. The Tribal Environmental Protection Department addresses invasive or non-native plant species impacts to habitat, including non-native fish introduction to streams. BIA and the Tribal Lands Program address the threats conversion of rangeland to cropland poses to habitat quality and quantity. Housing development and roads impact habitat and is overseen by Tribal Housing and Roads. Competition and forage availability as well as water and soil pollution pose additional threats.

#### *Direct removal or hazing*

The Fish and Wildlife Department addresses direct removal or hazing of wildlife by people. Illegal harvesting, overharvesting, poisoning, and recreational shooting on FBIC lands all pose threats to wildlife. The Department also addresses threats from vehicle collisions, eradication of prairie dogs, and hazing of elk herds off the Reservation.

### *Insects and diseases*

A variety of insects and diseases pose threats to habitats and species populations on FBIC lands. Mountain pine beetle outbreaks can decimate forests (a focus of BIA Forestry), while grasshopper epidemics impact grasslands (a focus of BIA and Tribal Lands). The Fish and Wildlife Department address threats to wildlife from the following diseases: West Nile virus, sylvatic plague, canine distemper, Parvo, EHD/BT, and Chronic Wasting Disease.

### *Wild land fire and logging practices*

A history of fire prevention or exclusion in forests and grasslands influences the frequency of catastrophic fires, which falls within the purview of BIA Fire. Logging practices, a focus of BIA Forestry, influence forest habitat and wildlife populations.

### *Predation*

While predation by one species on another occurs naturally, it nonetheless can pose a threat to species that are already under pressure from the aforementioned factors. Consequently, the Fish and Wildlife Department monitors and manages for impacts of predation on species like pronghorn, upland game birds, ferrets, and swift fox, elk, big horn sheep, and deer.

## Strategies, Goals and Activities

The following sections summarize the Fort Belknap Indian Community Fish and Wildlife Department's main strategies, the goals associated with each strategy, and activities that will help achieve the goals.

### **Strategies**

The following are the main strategies, or thematic functions, that department staff work on:

1. Species management
2. Habitat restoration and management
3. Hunting and fishing program management
4. Community awareness and education
5. Enforcement of Fish and Wildlife Conservation Code
6. Policy
7. Sustainable financing
8. Management and administration

Given that all strategies and some goals closely relate to one another, bullets under many goals in this plan highlight particularly strong links to other specific strategies and goals. For example, given their role in revenue generation, activities related to the department's hunting and fishing program are listed under the sustainable financing strategy, though there are close links between that work and wildlife management and law enforcement.

Please note that when the wording of an individual goal or activity cites a specific fiscal year (e.g., "By FY2022..."), it means that the timeline for achieving the goal or implementing the activity is the last day of that fiscal year (e.g., the last day of FY2022 is September 30, 2022).

## Strategy 1: Species Management

To restore and sustain wildlife on Fort Belknap Tribal lands through stewardship informed by science and traditional ecological knowledge, The Fish and Wildlife Department will strive to maintain viable and thriving populations of key species. As described below, general activities that support key species include monitoring, data management, recruitment of additional technical support, and coordination with regional wildlife management agencies like USFWS and MTFWP.

### *Species Management Goals and Activities*

**Goal 1.1 By FY2026, maintain or increase populations of greater sage grouse, sharp-tailed grouse, ringed-neck pheasants, and wild turkey.**

*With the exception of greater sage grouse (which is closed to hunting due to conservation concerns for the species), populations are managed for subsistence and sport hunting and to earn revenue for Tribal hunting guides and the Fish and Wildlife Department.*

*For activities related to:*

- *Winter habitat planning for pheasant and wild turkey, see the Hunting and fishing program management strategy (Strategy 3).*

Activity #	Activity
<b>Upland game birds: Greater sage grouse and Sharp-tailed grouse</b>	
1.1.1	By FY2022, create an electronic database for sage grouse and sharp-tailed grouse breeding ground information.
1.1.2	Every year, monitor all Greater sage grouse leks (dance grounds) and every two years (starting in FY2022), monitor sharp-tailed grouse leks.
1.1.3	Every year, coordinate with Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks on status of Greater sage grouse in north central Montana.
1.1.4	By FY2024, develop a comprehensive assessment of suitable nesting and brood rearing habitat for both Greater sage grouse and sharp-tailed grouse.
1.1.5	By FY2024, work with Tribal Lands Department and BIA to minimize or mitigate (including incentives to leasees and landowners) fragmentation or deterioration of upland game bird habitats.
1.1.6	By FY2024, identify and monitor important nesting and brood rearing habitats for Greater sage grouse.
<b>Ringed-neck pheasant</b>	
1.1.7	By FY2023, coordinate with Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks and Pheasants Forever to identify strategies (including incentives to landowners) to increase/protect pheasant habitat.
1.1.8	By FY2023, identify and map potential areas where pheasant habitat improvements can be conducted.
1.1.9	Every year (starting in FY2024), actively manage pheasant habitat (e.g., provide food plots in selected areas adjacent to escape cover).
1.1.10	By FY2024, secure equipment and seed to begin establishing food plots for pheasants, and every subsequent year, establish those food plots.
1.1.11	Every year (starting in FY2023), conduct pheasant crow count monitoring.
<b>Wild turkey</b>	
1.1.12	By FY2023, search for funding to provide supplemental feed to wild turkey during winter.



1.1.13	Every year, record (GPS locations) wild turkey sightings and numbers.
1.1.14	Every year, record wild turkey harvest data.
<b>General</b>	
1.1.15	By FY2023, identify nesting areas and brood rearing habitats impacted by cattle and other land uses.
1.1.16	Every year, (starting in FY2024), improve nesting and brood rearing habitats (riparian areas) where feasible.
1.1.17	By 2024, develop habitat improvement projects to increase winter survival.
1.1.18	Every year, coordinate with guides to distribute harvest surveys and collect data.
1.1.19	Every year, enter population monitoring and harvest data into spreadsheets to assess whether population goals are being met.

**1.2 Prairie dogs outside of black-footed ferret recovery areas - By FY2023, revise Fort Belknap Indian Reservation Prairie Dog Management Plan for Tribal Government (FBIC)-controlled lands across the Reservation, which includes acreage within Snake Butte bison pasture.**

*For activities related to:*

- *Prairie dog management in black-footed ferret recovery areas, see Goals 1.3a and 1.3b*
- *Bison pastures as prairie dog habitat, see Goal 2.2*
- *Prairie dog shooting management, see the Hunting and fishing program management strategy (Strategy 3)*
- *Raising community awareness about the ecological importance of prairie dogs, see the Community Awareness and Education strategy (Strategy 4)*
- *Managing the prairie dog hunting program (e.g., licensing), see the Sustainable Financing strategy (Strategy 6)*

Activity #	Activity
1.2.1	By FY2023, complete population monitoring (mapping) of prairie dog colonies reservation-wide outside of black-footed ferret recovery areas that had started in FY2021.
1.2.2	By FY2023, work with BIA and lessees to prioritize range units where competition for forage between prairie dogs and livestock may exist and provide recommendations to remedy this issue.
1.2.3	Every year (starting in FY2022), monitor recreational shooting including tracking the number of non-member shooters, number of days spent shooting and locations where shooting occurred and include recreational shooting as a prairie dog control mechanism.
1.2.4	By FY2024, develop and implement an incentive program for private landowners and lessees to improve social tolerance of prairie dogs.
1.2.5	By FY2023, recommend mandatory use of non-lead ammunition to reduce harmful effects of lead poison to non-target species on Tribally (FBIC)-controlled lands across the Reservation.
1.2.6	By FY2023, provide information to interested landowners about certification requirements for the use of approved toxicant to control prairie dogs on allotted land.
1.2.7	Every year, conduct visual surveys of prairie dog colonies for evidence of sylvatic plague.
1.2.8	Every year during a plague epizootic, record the extent and duration of the event and prairie dog colonies and acreage impacted.
1.2.9	Every year, record sightings of mountain plover, burrowing owls, ferruginous hawks, and other bird species on a minimum of 40 prairie dog colonies.
1.2.10	By FY2023, develop goals and management recommendations for prairie dogs on Fort Belknap



	Tribal lands.
--	---------------

**Goal 1.3a Black-footed ferrets at Snake Butte – By FY2024, maintain current acreage (approximately 3,500 acres) in the Snake Butte Reintroduction Site to allow the expansion of black-footed ferrets from current population of 11 to at least 20 breeding adults.**

*For activities related to:*

- *Prairie dog (prey species) management, see Goal 1.2*
- *Bison pastures as black-footed ferret habitat, see Goal 2.2*
- *Involving the community in black-footed ferret conservation, see the Community awareness and education strategy (Strategy 4)*

Activity #	Activity
1.3a.1	Every year (starting in FY 2022), meet quarterly with Buffalo Program Manager to align ferret and bison goals.
1.3a.2	Every year, increase the amount of prairie dog colony acres protected from sylvatic plague according to the following cumulative annual plague mitigation acreage targets: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 1,750 acres in FY2022</li> <li>- 2,000 acres in FY2023</li> <li>- 2,250 acres in FY2024</li> <li>- 2,500 acres in FY2025</li> <li>- 2,750 acres in FY2026</li> </ul>
1.3a.3	Every two years (starting in FY2022), map prairie dog colonies.
1.3a.4	Every year, obtain black-footed ferret population estimates via spotlight surveys (July - August).
1.3a.5	Twice every year, live-capture unmarked black-footed ferrets to vaccinate them against sylvatic plague and canine distemper virus and mark them with an individual identification micro-chip under the skin (July - October).
1.3a.6	Every year, augment the existing black-footed ferret population (as needed).
1.3a.7	Every year, submit to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: (1) field work plans; (2) allocation requests; (3) annual site report; and (4) ferret handling permit compliance form.
1.3a.8	Every year, recruit Tribal intern(s)/technicians to assist with activities.
1.3a.9	By FY2023, complete evaluation of black-footed ferret detection techniques (i.e., scent dogs, FLIR cameras).
1.3a.10	Every year, participate in The Black-footed Ferret Recovery Implementation Team meetings.

**Goal 1.3b Black-footed ferrets at Peoples Creek – By FY2022, identify, map, and estimate prairie dog density for a potential second black-footed ferret reintroduction site on the Peoples Creek (Weigan Flat) complex, with the goal of reintroducing ferrets in FY2023.**

*For activities related to:*

- *Prairie dog (prey species) management, see Goal 1.2*
- *Bison pastures as black-footed ferret habitat, see Goal 2.2*
- *Involving the community in black-footed ferret conservation, see the Community awareness and education strategy (Strategy 4)*

Activity	Activity
----------	----------

#	
1.3b.1	<p>By FY2023, determine the feasibility of Peoples Creek sub complex for a new ferret reintroduction site, by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- By FY2022, meet with landowners/lessees in the area, BIA, other Tribal departments, and the Tribal Council to discuss the ferret reintroduction plan and address concerns</li> <li>- By FY2022, develop a prairie dog management plan (i.e., monitoring, recreational shooting, and plague mitigation) specifically for the Peoples Creek prairie dog sub complex that incorporates public comment</li> <li>- In FY2023, map Peoples Creek prairie dog colonies</li> <li>- In FY2023, obtain a baseline prairie dog density estimate</li> <li>- By FY2023, with Tribal Council approval, coordinate with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to approve People's Creek as a new ferret reintroduction site</li> <li>- By FY2023, submit a black-footed ferret allocation request and release ferrets. If ferrets are released on People's Creek, follow activities outlined in the prairie dog management plan</li> </ul>

**Goal 1.4 Swift fox – By FY2026, increase the number of breeding pairs of swift foxes from 0 to 10-15 breeding pairs on Fort Belknap Tribal lands, and on the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation and adjacent lands, establish 30 breeding pairs.**

*For activities related to:*

- *Involving the community in swift fox conservation, see the Community awareness and education strategy (Strategy 4)*

Activity #	Activity
1.4.1	Every year, conduct swift fox den surveys to collect information on breeding success, litter size, and health (May-June).
1.4.2	Every year (August-October), complete swift fox translocations (40-50 individuals 2020-2024).
1.4.3	Every year (October-December), conduct swift fox scat/genetic and camera trap surveys and track collared foxes to determine swift fox densities and population expansion in the region to assess progress towards the goal.
1.4.4	Every year, recruit Tribal intern(s)/technicians to assist with activities.

**Goal 1.5 Pronghorn antelope – By FY2026, maintain summer population of approximately 800 - 1000 pronghorn to provide annual harvest of up to 150 (15% of the pronghorn population) for both Tribal members and nonmembers, and every year, maintain a minimum sex ratio of 40 males per 100 females. The current population of pronghorn will be updated in July 2021 following the summer aerial survey.)**

*For activities related to:*

- *Optimizing fences, and voluntary agreements with ranchers and farmers to support pronghorn-friendly practices, see **Goal 1.9***
- *Pronghorn habitat restoration and management, see the Habitat Restoration and Management strategy (Strategy 2)*
- *Managing the pronghorn hunting program (e.g., licensing), see the Sustainable Financing strategy (Strategy 6)*

Activity #	Activity
1.5.1	Every year (starting in FY2022), monitor (count and classify) pronghorn summer population via aerial and ground surveys.
1.5.2	Every 2 years (starting in FY 2022), develop harvest quotas and regulations based on results of monitoring and harvest data.
1.5.3	By FY2025, identify and map pronghorn winter habitat (i.e., sage brush shrub lands).
1.5.4	Every year, develop and distribute pronghorn harvest survey forms for member and non-member hunters and enter data into spreadsheets to ensure population goals are being met.
1.5.5	By FY2023, coordinate with Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks to identify potential migration routes and conduct fence mapping study to identify potential movement barriers.
1.5.6	Every year, starting in FY2022, purchase materials to establish wildlife-friendly fencing along roadways.

**Goal 1.6 Mule deer and White-tailed deer (deer) – Every year conduct aerial and ground surveys to classify and estimate deer populations and manage herds for maximum sustained yield.**

*Since activities associated with white-tailed and mule deer goals are very similar, they are listed only once in the single table below (and apply to both species). For activities related to:*

- *Hunter education and monitoring related to big game, see the Hunting and fishing program management strategy (Strategy 3)*
- *Optimizing fences, and voluntary agreements with ranchers and farmers to support deer-friendly practices, see Goal 1.9*
- *Deer habitat restoration and management, see the Habitat Restoration and Management strategy (Strategy 2)*
- *Managing the deer hunting program (e.g., licensing), see the Sustainable Financing strategy (Strategy 6)*

Activity #	Activity
1.6.1	Every year (starting in FY2021), monitor deer winter population via aerial and ground surveys.
1.6.2	Every year, starting in FY2022, develop and implement CWD surveillance plan.
1.6.3	Every year, conduct CWD surveillance and report results to the public.
1.6.4	By FY2025, identify and map important deer winter habitat.
1.6.5	By FY2023, develop and distribute harvest survey forms for member and non-member hunters and record data.
1.6.6	Every 2 years (starting in FY2022), review and adjust hunting regulations to meet deer management goals and objectives.

**Goal 1.7 Elk – Every year, maintain an elk population that provides for Tribal member hunting opportunities.**

*For activities related to:*

- *Hunter education and monitoring related to big game, see the Hunting and fishing program management strategy (Strategy 3)*

- *Optimizing fences, and voluntary agreements with ranchers and farmers to support elk-friendly practices, see Goal 1.9*
- *Elk habitat restoration and management, see the Habitat Restoration and Management strategy (Strategy 2)*
- *Managing the elk hunting program (e.g., licensing), see the Sustainable Financing strategy (Strategy 6)*

Activity #	Activity
1.7.1	By FY2022, develop and implement CWD surveillance plan.
1.7.2	Every year (starting in FY2022), conduct CWD surveillance and report results to the public.
1.7.3	Every year (starting in FY2021), monitor winter elk population in conjunction with winter deer aerial survey.
1.7.4	By FY2024, identify and map elk Fall and Winter habitats.
1.7.5	By FY2026, address riparian area issues caused by livestock (i.e., fence enclosures).

**Goal 1.8 Bighorn sheep – By FY2026, maintain/manage bighorn population that provides opportunity for harvest of 1 bighorn sheep once every 3-5 years.**

*For activities related to:*

- *Enhancing bighorn sheep habitat in the Little Rocky Mountains, see Goal 2.3*
- *Bighorn sheep special permits, see the Hunting and fishing program management strategy (Strategy 3)*

Activity #	Activity
1.8.1	Every two years, starting in FY2022, conduct aerial surveys of bighorn sheep populations (June-July).
1.8.2	By FY2022, recruit a post-doctorate student to develop bighorn sheep habitat map and assess movement corridors
1.8.3	By FY2024, develop bighorn sheep habitat map with; 1) probable range boundaries, 2) minimum viable population estimate, 3) water sources not used by livestock, and 4) escape cover.
1.8.4	By FY2024, assess existing and potential movement corridors within the Reservation and connected to off-reservation habitat (e.g., through fire and timber management).
1.8.5	By FY2022, review and comment on BIA forest management plan in regard to bighorn sheep management.
1.8.6	By FY2025, develop bighorn sheep habitat and population management plan.
1.8.7	Every year, coordinate with Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks on status and management of bighorn sheep in hunt area 620 (currently MTFWP offers 1 either sex permit per year).

**Goal 1.9 Moose – By FY2024, evaluate the potential to both develop a moose habitat management plan and establish year-long habitat for moose.**

*For activities related to:*

- *Enhancing moose habitat in the Little Rocky Mountains, see Goal 2.3*
- *Hunter education and monitoring related to big game, see the Hunting and fishing program management strategy (Strategy 3)*

Activity	Activity
----------	----------

#	
1.9.1	Every year, (starting in FY2022), test for CWD (update staff training and add testing kits to do own testing).
1.9.2	By FY2021, limit the harvest of moose to antlered bulls only.
1.9.3	Every two years (starting in FY2022), determine whether to adjust moose hunting regulations for members and non-members.
1.9.4	By FY2026, determine whether to set aside special moose management area(s).
1.9.5	By FY2023, assist students at Aaniiih Nakoda College identify and map moose habitats, monitor moose utilization of shrubs and aspen and develop an estimate of population size.

## Strategy 2: Habitat restoration and management

To restore and sustain key habitat on Fort Belknap Tribal lands, The Fish and Wildlife Department will continue to undertake perform activities that range from coordinating with other FBIC departments, landowners, and agencies to assessing habitat health.

### *Habitat Restoration and Management Goals and Activities*

**Goal 2.1 Grassland and shrub land habitat – Every year (starting in FY2022), assist BIA and other Tribal Departments to implement the 2018 Agricultural Resource Management Plan (ARMP) to improve rangeland health for the benefit of livestock producers and wildlife productivity.**

Activity #	Activity
2.1.1	Every year (starting in FY2022), assist with the implementation of the ARMP, enforcement of federal and Tribal rules, regulations, and ordinances and to increase enforcement of Tribal Fish and Wildlife Conservation Code.
2.1.2	Every year (starting in FY2022), coordinate with Tribal Lands Department, BIA, permittees and landowners to identify range units where rangeland management actions could improve rangeland health.
2.1.3	Every year (starting in FY2022), coordinate with other Tribal Departments and programs to develop contingencies for drought to protect grassland
2.1.4	By FY2024, coordinate with BIA and Tribal Lands Department to initiate developing a drought mitigation plan.

**Goal 2.2. Grassland and shrub land habitat - Every year, assist the Fort Belknap Buffalo Management Program with grassland restoration on 2,000-3,000 acres of newly acquired leases adjacent to the Snake Butte bison pasture. Restoration will contribute to a positive net gain of grassland on trust lands reservation-wide.**

Activity #	Activity
2.2.1	Every year (starting in FY2023), assist bison program with restoring vacant farmland to grassland.
2.2.2	Every year (starting in FY2022), meet with Buffalo manager to discuss ongoing black-footed ferret reintroduction activities and prairie dog management.

2.2.3	Every year (starting in FY2022), meet with Buffalo manager to discuss ongoing black-footed ferret reintroduction activities and prairie dog management.
2.2.4	Every year, work with Tribal Lands Department and the Buffalo program to develop contingencies for drought to protect grassland resources in the buffalo pasture.

Goal 2.3 Forest and foothills habitat – By FY2023, engage with BIA and inform the Forest Management Plan revisions to ensure Fort Belknap Fish and Wildlife Department’s priorities are included (e.g., deer, bighorn sheep, moose, wild turkey).

Activity #	Activity
2.3.1	By FY2023, provide input into the BIA Forest Management Plan to enhance bighorn sheep and moose habitats in the Little Rocky Mountains.
2.3.2	By FY2023, provide input into the BIA Forest Management Plan to protect important wildlife habitats as identified in the Forest Management Plan.
2.3.3	By FY2024, conduct an assessment of overall health of mountain streams.
2.3.4	By FY2025, develop a mountain stream and riparian area assessment and monitoring plan in coordination with Tribal Environmental Protection Department.

Goal 2.4 Riparian and wetland habitat – By FY2026, in cooperation with Tribal Environmental Protection Department, develop a riparian and wetland area monitoring and assessment plan and identify and map important habitats for the species listed below:

- Beaver and muskrat
- Pollinators (e.g., butterflies, fireflies, etc.)
- Amphibians (e.g., Northern Leopard Frog, chorus frog, salamander, etc.)
- Shorebird and waterfowl species
- Fish species
- Riparian and Grassland Bird species

Activities to be included in the riparian and wetland monitoring plan are in the table below:

Activity #	Activity
2.4.1	By FY2023, assist with review and update of Tribal Environmental Protection Department's Wetland Work Plan and Wetland Quality Assurance Project Plan.
2.4.2	By FY2024, identify areas and/or map where livestock are impacting streams and vegetation, and where potential impacts to fish, sage grouse, and other wildlife is significant.
2.4.3	By FY2024, Use the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Watershed Approach and prioritize the four watersheds that occur on the Reservation to identify riparian areas damaged by livestock where fencing could alleviate the problems.
2.4.4	Every year (starting in FY 2023), use EPA's Watershed Approach to support co-creation of a formal Wetlands program with potential partners such as the Tribal Environmental Protection Department, Tribal Lands Department, and Fish and Wildlife Department.
2.4.5	Every year (starting in FY2022), coordinate with Tribal Environmental Protection Department to apply for funding (i.e., Tribal Wildlife Grant, U.S. Environmental Protection



	Agency Wetland Development Grant, Climate Change Grants) to develop and implement a Wetlands program following EPA Guidelines for Core Elements of a Wetland Management Program.
2.4.6	Every year (starting in FY2023), participate in the Tribal Environmental Protection Department's strategic planning meeting to identify restoration projects. Every year assist Tribal Environmental Department develop and implement a restoration plan for each project.
2.4.7	By FY2026, cooperate with the Tribal Environmental Protection Department to develop reservation-wide riparian and wetland monitoring plan.

### Strategy 3: Hunting and fishing program management

To increase revenue from hunting and fishing programs while sustaining wildlife populations and providing recreational opportunities to Tribal members and non-members, the Department will engage in activities such as determining the number of hunting licenses to be sold based on species management goals, maintaining clear records of hunters' harvests, and doing educational outreach.

In a typical year, the Department sells over 1,300 licenses to approximately 600 hunters (many of whom purchase multiple licenses for different species). About 75% of the people who buy licenses are FBIC citizens, and the other 25% are non-enrolled citizens of FBIC. Hunting also provides revenue FBIC citizens who provide guide services. Currently there are approximately eight active guide services operating on the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation, and each service often employs multiple guides.

#### *Hunting and Fishing Goals and Activities*

**Goal 3.1 Hunting and fishing program management – By FY2026, increase revenue from hunting and fishing programs over FY2020 baseline while sustaining wildlife populations and providing recreational opportunities to Tribal members and non-members.**

*For activities related to:*

- *Hiring a wildlife biologist and other department personnel, see the Management and administration strategy (Strategy 8)*

Activity #	Activity
3.1.1	Every year (starting in FY2022), actively participate in the Montana/Wyoming Fish and Wildlife Commission meetings and Native American Fish and Wildlife Society conferences.
3.1.2	Every year, manage hunting and fishing licenses sales by entering data into a spreadsheet and creating an annual report.
3.1.3	By FY2024, adopt an online system to monitor harvest data and track sales of hunting and fishing licenses.
3.1.4	Every two years (starting in FY2022), identify number of licenses that will be sold based on species management goals and establish license fees for Council approval.
3.1.5	Every year, issue hunting and fishing licenses and develop, update, and print hunting and fishing promotional materials (website, social media, brochures, etc.).
3.1.6	By FY2023, hire and maintain full time Tribal wildlife biologist including purchase of vehicle, supplies and equipment (e.g., 4x4 truck, ATV, trailer, etc.)

3.1.7	By FY2023, develop a winter habitat planning (maps, priority areas, etc.) and feeding program for pheasant and wild turkey.
3.1.8	Every year (starting in FY2022), distribute a prairie dog shooting questionnaire to guides and enter data into spreadsheet to track shooting on the Reservation.
3.1.9	Every year (starting in FY2022), distribute hunter education information regarding status of CWD and other big game diseases to Tribal member hunters including mitigation measures (e.g., disposal of carcasses).
3.1.10	Every year (starting in FY2022), update spread sheet with hunter harvest data (e.g., success, age, sex, whether tested for CWD).
3.1.11	Every year, determine if there will be a bighorn sheep special permit offered.
3.1.12	Every year, conduct outreach with Tribal members to ensure they know hunter safety education is a requirement and inform them about where they can take a class.
3.1.13	Every year (starting in FY2023), sponsor or support a fish and wildlife event (e.g., fishing derby, elk bugle contest, turkey shoot).

#### Strategy 4: Community awareness and education

Working towards the Department's vision of preserving healthy ecosystems on Fort Belknap Tribal lands for the social, economic, and cultural well-being of the Aaniiih and Nakoda People for generations to come requires a long-serving commitment to a) understanding community needs and concerns, b) responding to community input, and c) enhancing communication flow between the Department and FBIC community members. Consequently, the Department will continue to visit schools and work with Aaniiih Nakoda College staff and students. New priorities include annually surveying community members about their needs or concerns, increasing interactions FBIC residents at community events and meetings like the mid-Winter Fair, and disseminating more information by establishing a departmental website.

#### Community Awareness and Education Goals and Activities

**Goal 4.1 – Every year, increase awareness, education, and engagement among the local community to support wildlife management and conservation, creating capacity for conservation leaders and students who are willing to lead conservation efforts, and people who will support those efforts.**

Activity #	Activity
4.1.1	In FY2022 develop, distribute, collect, and analyze a survey for community needs or concerns, then address the concerns.
4.1.2	Every year, interact with people and obtain input at the mid-winter fair, mandatory guide meetings, and other community events about Fort Belknap Fish and Wildlife's work and community needs and concerns.
4.1.3	Every year, co-host at least one tour (i.e., Native plants, wetlands, wildlife viewing) with Tribal Environmental Protection Department staff and Tribal Elders.
4.1.4	Every year, disseminate information about hunting, fishing, regulations, conservation, and project activities through KGVA 88.1 and the Tribal website.
4.1.5	By FY2021, post-twice monthly swift fox facts and updates on the Tribal and ANC's Facebook pages.



4.1.6	Every year, involve community members in swift fox and black-footed ferret reintroduction programs by posting flyers and radio announcements inviting people to observe.
4.1.7	Every year, write press releases and blog posts about swift fox reintroduction and updates for local and national audiences.
4.1.8	Every year (starting in FY2021), visit schools and/or host field trips focused on swift fox and other wildlife and conservation programs, including providing invited presentations on swift fox and black-footed ferret reintroduction at local schools and ANC.
4.1.9	By FY2021, implement an elementary school module on swift fox ecology with worksheets and educational videos developed by Smithsonian and Clemson University.
4.1.10	<p>Every year (starting in FY2022), work with Aaniiih Nakoda College (ANC) in training and mentoring the next generation of conservation officers and biologists, e.g., through their new B.S. natural resources degree. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Every year, coordinating the monthly ANC Ecology Seminar Series (year-round)</li> <li>• Every year, recruiting interns from the college for wildlife monitoring and community science (as opportunities and funding allow)</li> <li>• Starting in FY2022, assisting with developing and implementing a for-credit Field Ecology Workshop course every spring semester</li> <li>• Starting in FY2022, then annually, assisting ANC with implementation of their NSF grant (if awarded) by mentoring students, providing opportunities for learning and internships, and giving presentations.</li> </ul>
4.1.11	Every year (starting in FY2021), work with Fort Belknap Extension and 4H leaders on a swift fox ecology and camera trapping lesson plan (summer).
4.1.12	Every year (starting in FY2022), work with Native speakers and the language program to create a table with Native names for wildlife species and then incorporate the Native names in department outreach.
4.1.13	Every year, coordinate with partners regarding active and potential projects and for potential funding.

#### Strategy 5: Enforcement of Fish and Wildlife Conservation Code

Without effective enforcement, hunting, fishing, and trapping rules and regulations will not conserve wildlife. Effective enforcement requires sufficient personnel and equipment, a clear mandate, and close cooperation between The Fish and Wildlife Department, Tribal Courts, and the Prosecutor's Office to ensure effective processing of citations. A law enforcement code that is legally defensible, all-inclusive, transparent, and practical is of utmost importance, so every two years, the Department will coordinate with the Tribal Law and Order Committee, Tribal attorney, and Tribal Courts to review, update, and fully incorporate the code.

*Enforcement of Fish and Wildlife Conservation Code Goals and Activities*

Goal 5 – By FY2026, law enforcement policies and procedures are clear, understood by department staff and the judiciary, and fully implemented as demonstrated by:

- 100% compliance with fishing permits,
- 100% compliance with recreation permits
- Daily contact with hunters and anglers
- Daily contact with the dispatch police department
- Improved relationship with RezQ Dogs

Activity #	Activity
5.1.1	Every year (starting in FY2022), compile and review conservation officers' digital logbook on a monthly basis.
5.1.2	Every year (starting in FY2023), work with the state to improve signage for hunting and fishing access to Tribal lands.
5.1.3	Every year (starting in FY2023), department will post signage wherever deemed necessary.
5.1.4	By FY2023, undertake a thorough review of the Tribal Wildlife, Fish, and Recreation Enforcement Code as well as relevant federal and state laws.
5.1.5	Every two years (starting in FY2023), work with Tribal Courts and the Prosecutor's Office to make sure citations are processed correctly.
5.1.6	Every two years (starting in FY2024), coordinate with the Public Safety Committee, Tribal attorney, and Tribal Courts to review, update, and fully incorporate the Wildlife, Fish and Recreation Enforcement Code.
5.1.7	Every year (starting in FY2021), all conservation officers complete 40-hour law enforcement training.
5.1.8	Every year, provide domestic animal control activities by enforcing the animal control ordinance, working with RezQ Dogs and others to host a free spay and neuter clinic, vaccinations, and collecting animals at large.
5.1.9	By FY2022, develop plans and identify funding sources for a facility to house seized dogs at large, and establish the facility once funding is secured.
5.1.10	Every two years (starting in FY2023), provide opportunity for specialty training for all department staff (e.g., active shooter, search and rescue, etc.).
5.1.11	Every year (starting in FY2024), coordinate with Tribal Lands Department and BIA on enforcement of Fish and Wildlife Conservation Code issues.

Strategy 6: Policy

Clarity and cross-departmental consistency regarding land access and the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Code are a core component of conservation success. The Fish and Wildlife Department will coordinate with Tribal departments and BIA to discuss and identify issues around both land access and grazing management. The Department will also enhance its communications around land access with Tribal hunting guides and other groups.

*Policy Goals and Activities*

**Goal 6.1 – By FY2023, work with BIA, Tribal Council, and Tribal Lands to clarify existing hunting access rules, regulations, and codes, improve compliance with existing policies and develop enforceable hunting regulations.**

<b>Activity #</b>	<b>Activity</b>
6.1.1	By FY2022, work with the Tribal Land Department and BIA to create a land ownership map (for internal use) to begin identifying private land access issues.
6.1.2	By FY2023, coordinate and communicate with the Tribal Land Department, Tribal Council, lessees, hunting guides, FWP and BIA to discuss and identify issues regarding access to trust and fee lands.
6.1.3	Every year (starting in FY2023), strategically use signage to resolve trespass issues on private lands.
6.1.4	Every year, inform and update Tribal hunting guides and local hunters on status of land access issues.

**Goal 6.2 – Every year, coordinate with BIA and Tribal Lands Department to identify land management and compliance issues that adversely affect wildlife habitats (i.e., grazing compliance, rangeland health, riparian area health, fencing, etc.).**

<b>Activity #</b>	<b>Activity</b>
6.2.1	Twice every year, meet with BIA and Tribal Lands Department to discuss issues related to wildlife habitats such as noxious weeds, overgrazing, trespass issues and fencing.
6.2.2	Every year, meet with BIA and Tribal Lands Department to review and discuss Agricultural Resource Management Plan goals and objectives.
6.2.3	Every year, meet with BIA and Tribal Lands Department to stay abreast of changes to "land use" leases and grazing permits.
6.2.4	By FY2024, work with BIA and Tribal Lands Department to initiate a drought mitigation plan.

**Goal 6.3 – By FY2023, review and update Fish and Wildlife Department's Conservation Code.**

<b>Activity #</b>	<b>Activity</b>
6.3.1	By FY2023, provide recommendations to the Tribal Council to update the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Code.
6.3.2	By FY2024, follow the process outlined in Strategy 5 above to fully incorporate the Conservation Code.

**Strategy 7: Sustainable financing**

Sustainable financing refers to funding sources that can support the Department's activities over the long-term. This strategy focuses on the process of prioritizing, designing and implementing new or expanded sources of sustainable financing. Increasing sustainable financing will involve meeting with Council to redirect funding for additional personnel, participating in regional initiatives like the Buffalo Nations Grasslands Alliance, applying for grants, and identifying new avenues for funding support.

*Sustainable Financing Goals and Activities*

**Goal 7.1a – By FY2024, secure a portion (100%) of sales generated from licenses and return directly to the Department to help fund a Tribal wildlife biologist, and other staffing needs.**

**Goal 7.1b – Develop and implement at least one new or significantly expanded source of long-term sustainable financing for the Department.**

<b>Activity #</b>	<b>Activity</b>
7.1.1	By FY2022, meet with the Council to discuss redirecting finances to the Department for biologist's salary.
7.1.2	By FY2022, meet with the Council to discuss securing funding for annual conservation officer training fees and travel.
7.1.3	Every year, FBIC participates, contribute ideas to, and learns from Buffalo Nations Grasslands Alliance partners, while supporting its development of a regional conservation trust fund for Native nations.
7.1.4	By FY2022 (or until passed), assist groups working to secure Recovering America's Wildlife Act and North American Grasslands Conservation Act funding.
7.1.5	Every year, apply for grants (State, Federal, private, non-profit, etc.) to fund the activities in this plan (e.g., protecting and enhancing wildlife and habitats, boost capacity, fund conservation efforts, engage/educate/inform communities and programs, etc.)
7.1.6	By FY2023, explore 3 additional avenues for funding support (e.g., through payments for ecosystem services, recreation, tourism, etc.).

*Strategy 8: Management and administration*

Management and administration includes all general functions (general management, financial administration, operations, maintenance, human resources, legal, fundraising, etc.) and inputs for those functions (staff, land leases, infrastructure, heavy equipment, field equipment, office equipment, etc.) that are not covered by the other strategies. Similarly, in the financial plan, this strategy will contain all costs associated with these general functions and inputs (e.g., electricity, insurance, etc.) that are not specifically related to one of the other strategies.

*Current Staff Positions and Organization*

The Department currently has 6 full-time staff positions and 2 temporary positions. The Department's main divisions, functions and positions are as follows:

<b>Division</b>	<b>Main Functions</b>	<b>Positions</b>
<b>Administration</b>	Provide general management of the department (supervision, revenue deposits, purchasing, license sales and grant oversight)	<i>Department Director</i> - Harold Main <i>Office Manager</i> - Cheryl Fetter

Division	Main Functions	Positions
<b>Wildlife &amp; Habitat</b>	Conduct wildlife population and habitat surveys and research, provide harvest recommendations, estimate harvest rates, perform educational outreach, manage grants, and develop and implement conservation planning efforts.	<i>Wildlife Biologist</i> - Tim Vosburgh <sup>9</sup> <i>Wildlife Technician</i> - Tom Jones (Permanent)
<b>Conservation Code Enforcement Officers</b>	Enforce Fish and Wildlife Conservation Code Assist with Search and Rescue activities Provide Public Relation services	<i>Rangers/Conservation Officers</i> - Dennis Stiffarm (Permanent) Chase Main (Temporary) Richard Buchie (Temporary) <i>Animal Control</i> - Greg Sears (Permanent)

#### *Additional Staff Positions Needed*

The Department needs to add 3 full-time positions and 2 half-time positions, as detailed below:

- 1 full-time Wildlife Biologist<sup>10</sup>
- 1 full-time Wildlife Technician and 1 half-time seasonal Wildlife Technician
- 1 full-time Conservation Officer
- 1 half-time seasonal Office Clerk/Administrative Assistant.

#### *Management and Administration Goals and Activities*

**Goal 8.1 – Every year, provide management, financial administration, human resources, and operations oversight to effectively and efficiently fulfill responsibilities of the Fish and Wildlife Department.**

Activity #	Activity
8.1.1	Every year, sufficiently staff the department so it can perform its responsibilities.
8.1.2	Every year, assess training needs for all department staff and assist with training needs
8.1.3	By FY2023, review, update, and document rules and responsibilities of each position in the department.
8.1.4	Every year, complete performance evaluations based on Tribal policies and procedures.
8.1.5	Every year, purchase and maintain vehicles and heavy equipment (e.g., trucks, ATV's, UTV's, trailers, snow machine, generator).
8.1.6	Every year, purchase and maintain office equipment (e.g., computers, software, printer/copy machines, other office supplies, phone, and internet services).
8.1.7	Every year, purchase and maintain field equipment (e.g., spotlights, binoculars, traps, ferret identification equipment, search and rescue equipment, medical supplies, etc.)
8.1.8	Every year, provide financial and administrative oversight for the department.
8.1.9	Every year, monitor and report on progress against goals and activities in the department's

<sup>9</sup> The Wildlife Biologist is currently contracted, but the aim is to make it a full-time position.

<sup>10</sup> A full time Wildlife Biologist would replace the currently contracted position.

	conservation plan.
8.1.10	Every five years (starting in FY2026), update the department's conservation and financial plans.
8.1.11	Every year, improve communication by hosting quarterly meetings between the department and the grants and finance offices to co-develop budgets for grant proposals and to track expenditures and coding on active grants.
8.1.12	Every year, draft and submit interim and final financial and technical reports for active grants.
8.1.13	Every year, provide monthly updates to Council about Fort Belknap Fish and Wildlife Department's activities, including a written report and other relevant documents (e.g., total hunting license sales, game survey results, etc.)
8.1.14	Every year, lease and maintain GSA vehicles (monthly lease payments).
8.1.15	Every year, lease department office (monthly payments).
8.1.16	Every year, complete monthly purchase orders for Red Paint Creek and Kwik Stop for fuel and for supplies from the hardware store.
8.1.17	Every year, purchase all necessary equipment for law enforcement to realize its duties (radios, rifles, ammo, cameras, etc.)
8.1.18	Every year, pay for necessary department infrastructure to realize core functions (utilities, HQ lease, insurance, etc.)