FOR COUNTLESS GENERATIONS, American Indians relied on natural resources to survive. Not only did they use these resources for food and shelter, their culture and spirituality were centered on the land. As settlers moved west, ownership of those resources became the spark for many battles. Ultimately, Indians were forced onto reservations, ceding vast territory to the government. In return, the Indian tribes got concessions and an understanding that their lands were not to be infringed upon by new settlers. But over time the pressures increased on native people, settlers wanted the land for farming or the mineral wealth it provided, and the size of many reservations started to shrink. Although much of the Native American way of life was lost, connections to the land remain a large part of the culture. In this report, students in the University of Montana School of Journalism’s Native News Honors class explore how natural resource issues provide new challenges and new opportunities for Montana’s first peoples.

Engrained in each of these natural resource issues are the stories of the people behind them. Their struggles and victories highlight the continued importance of natural resources for Montana’s first peoples.

H2Own
Since 1868 the Crow tribe has tried to clarify its water rights. A new law will finally quantify them and fund improvements to reservation water systems.

Vital Resource
Fort Belknap tribes are raising buffalo and using the meat to support new reservation businesses. But not all is going exactly according to plan.

Prize and Poison
Oil drilling promises prosperity for the Fort Peck Reservation. But painful lessons about how it can also degrade water aren’t far from the surface.

Sacred Recreation
Though few Rocky Boy’s tribal members ski, a tribal ski hill is popular with off-reservation residents. But pine beetles are threatening the hill’s future.

Failure & Fortune on the Frontier
Indians were allotted land to encourage them to farm. Through sweat and grit, Bud LaCounte turned his mother’s plot into a thriving operation.

Hidden Treasure
For years Northern Cheyenne leaders rejected plans to mine coal. Now they are going forward to try to bring the reservation out of poverty.

The Edge of Extinction
Tribal fisheries managers are hoping to find new ways to save the threatened native bull trout populations in Flathead Lake.

The Crow tribe is working to preserve the rights to water on their land, while on the Flathead Reservation, tribal scientists are trying to save the native bull trout from extinction. Fort Belknap is raising buffalos and using the sacred animals in new ways to provide money for their tribe. On the Blackfeet Reservation, tribal members are continuing to use native plants for medicinal remedies and to pass on their knowledge to succeeding generations.

The Native News Honors Project is reported, photographed, edited and designed by students at the University of Montana School of Journalism. This is the 20th annual edition. If you have comments about the project we’d like to hear from you, E-mail us at carol.vanvalkenburg@umontana.edu, or jeremy.lurgio@umontana.edu, or write to Native News Honors Project, School of Journalism, University of Montana, 32 Campus Drive, Missoula, MT 59812.

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Oil drilling promises jobs and development, but it comes at a cost

The brine is primarily salty water, but it can also include compounds like benzene, a known carcinogen, so Oil Field Manager White Hawk points out his tasks—two holding oil and one holding the salty byproduct—with a pride not unlike a farmer’s taking care of his land. “You look like they belong to somebody, like somebody’s taking care of them,” he says.

Three levels of government—federal, state and tribal—mean getting work done on the reservation is not easy. Some companies were put off by the extra layer of bureaucracy, Stafne says, but that can be the cost of doing business on eastern Montana’s richest oil fields. When hiring oil field workers, companies must comply with Tribal Employment Rights Office (TERO) regulations, a federal mandate that requires them to employ at least 80 percent Indians for all on-reservation projects. Douglas Mundok, TERO director on the Fort Peck Reservation, says these rules guarantee there will be more jobs for unemployed tribal members as development increases, especially oil exploration and drilling. Mundok says he welcomes another oil boom and is developing an oil training program so that when it arrives it has a cache of potential employees.

“Any time you’re pulling stuff out of the ground it’s always going to be disruptive,” says Deb Madison, Fort Peck’s environmental program manager, so even regular drilling, following all the right protocol, can negatively impact water supplies and wildlife patterns.

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**Native News 2011**

**FORT PECK RESERVATION**

Groundwater is impacted by the leak because the contaminated shallow aquifer feeds rivers and streams each fall, Madison says. Floated chloride levels have been found in that surface water. While chloride and some of the other byproducts are harmless, others like benzene—a carcinogen—cause red flags in Madison’s department.

The area’s highly salty tap water, even if technically safe to drink, has negative impacts. Having to buy water means people drink less than they should for their health, and the salt water can have corrosive effects on piping and fixtures, she says.

In terms of having a comfortable home it just makes it an nightmare,” Madison says. Bad drinking water hurts opportunities to attract businesses too, she says, which means the effects of poor drinking water impact the whole area, even those who can afford bottled and treated water.

The water in the area has always had higher levels of rust and iron, but those are easier to treat than the salty water, Madison says.

The practice of putting injection wells close to production wells is unheard of these days, Madison says. Unlined pits are no longer acceptable and pipelines are much more fortified for extremely hot and cold temperatures. More living and more wastemangement means more hope future disasters can be prevented.

“If you can’t predict the future and you just never know when something is just going to go really completely wrong,” Madison says.

Keven Jackson leans against his red Ford Explorer in the muddy parking lot of the Fort Peck water treatment plant. He crosses his arms and ignores the icy wind and sleet assaulting his face.

Jackson knows the oil business on the reservation, and he knows its impacts. The building behind him is partially the result of work for a non-tribal company that made him successful more than 20 years ago. In the late 1980s he worked as an oil rig inspector and says that lack of regulation in the business led to a host of environmental problems on the reservation.

He remembers unlined pits of oil and byproducts, watching oil company employees fill those pits with gravel and dirt to “clean them up,” and fires burning from spilled oil.

“I was naïve,” he says. “I didn’t know until afterwards: holy crap, you know, something should have been done about this.”

Now, the plant holds a sign from that natural resource’s consequences. The treatment plant is part of an ongoing federally funded project to deliver fresh drinking water to homes on the reservation’s eastern half, homes with undrinkable tap water.

The government has already ignored existing problems, like contaminated drinking water, and he doubts whether they’ll put forth any legitimate efforts to overcome future drilling. Christian worries about the cultural impacts of more oil operations, the land, the future.

Driving past the oil fields and agricultural land dotted with farm houses, Lambert takes a drink from the bottled water in the cup holder between the two front seats and looks out onto the expanse, onto what that could be the answer for a struggling reservation. He knows the fellow tribal members won’t, and in some cases can’t, leave the reservation, he knows they need the jobs. They need them now.

“Three thousand people could be killed with nuclear radiation and we would still be fine,” he says.

One tribal spiritual leader and executive board member, a Dakota-based company that drills near Fort Peck, declined to comment.
Rocky Boy’s little-known skiing gem is increasingly threatened by the pine bark beetle

By Daniel Mediate and Devin Schmit

story by Daniel Mediate, photos by Devin Schmit

It’s early Saturday morning and the sun is creeping above the snowy knolls. Bear Paw Ski Bowl offers a ringside view of a frothy tidal wave of granite, the Bears Paw Mountains. Often called the Bear Paws, the mountains surface majestically among the high plains of northern Montana.

These mountains are a comfort zone, a home for the Chippewa Cree. It was the last of Montana’s seven Indian reservations to be established.

Windy Boy says, “And those are signs that are reminders to us young, upcoming people to be mindful of the land, and the importance of the land, and the importance of our culture, our way of life.”

This season marks DeCora’s third year as a lift operator. His older brother, BJ, worked as a lift operator before him, and got Lance DeCora the job. BJ died at the end of the 27-year-old’s first season on the ski hill.

“We’re very fortunate Rocky Boy shares this area with us. Our ski hill is a gift from the people of Havre to the people of Havre,” says Martens.

Mr. Martens, a native of Havre, graduated from the University of Montana’s School of Forestry in 1974 and has been the historic preservation officer and former chairman of the Chippewa Cree.

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DeCora stands about 6 feet tall, Cehrtins draped over him and a stringing pole pulled over his nose. He is a quiet 27-year-old, friendly to all the eager skiers and snowboarders. His dark eyes and soft smile light as he watches a dad scoop his toddler onto the swooping lift.

We’re very fortunate Rocky Boy shares this area with us. Dave Martens

This season marks DeCora’s third year as a lift operator. His older brother, BJ, worked as a lift operator before him, and got Lance DeCora the job. BJ died at the end of the...
DeCora has short black hair, an even demeanor and the blood of two tribal races running through his veins. His dad's lineage hails from what is now Nebraska, and his mom is Cree descent.

“A lot of people don’t realize the fact that even though we’re isolated, a little island out on the prairie, we do have a really, really bad pine beetle problem,” Martens says.

The consequence of the beetle’s wrath is more than just orange-tinted stands of trees scattered through the hills. The trees on the ski hill provide shade to hold the snow pack on the runs. If the trees have to be cut down, the sun will shine more intensely on the slopes, melting the snow faster, leaving Bear Paw Ski Bowl with no way to protect its snow cover. The ski hill will also lose its shelter from the high winds that blast across the northcentral Montana.

“The reservation is dealing with it the best way they can,” Lodgepole says the tribe’s management practices have lessened the impact of the infestation. On the state’s smallest reservation, having a track record of strong forest management is an achievement, he says. “I mean, if somebody does the management part of it, you could have it all over the majority of your forest. Management, I think, is key over the lifetime of the forest.”

DeCora watches as a handful of skiers load onto the chairlift. He pauses, shuts his eyes and takes a deep breath.

“I like being out in the fresh air,” he says. “It beats sitting at home all day.”

The Bears Paw Mountains slumber beneath a chilly blue sky. A breeze whips across the furrowed trails, and the sun begins its descent toward the horizon.

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Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reservation</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rocky Boys</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>3,223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reservation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once the process is complete, beetles can tolerate long periods of extreme cold. But if temperatures drop below minus-10 before they’re ready, the changing beetles freeze and die.

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The six buffalo slaughtered at the plant came from the Fort Belknap Reservation, which manages the herd. Mike Fox, a tribal council member who has managed the herd on and off for $150,000 a year, says that the Fort Belknap, which manages the buffalo, makes more money than any other department on the reservation, bringing in around $150,000 to $250,000 a year. The smokehouse has yet to turn a profit and provide a service to the community by offering a place to dine out for those who have few other options, she says. She’s hoping to acquire a contract with Sysco, the largest food distribution company in the country, as well as the company that provides food to the U.S. National Park Service. But with the smokehouse’s temporary closure and the restaurant’s need for a reliable source of meat, Michelle Fox is branching out from selling mostly buffalo, looking to stop selling and start fully utilizing the meat packing plant and smokehouse. High demand for buffalo meat outside the reservation and more populated areas is the driving force in Fort Belknap’s attempt to make their herd more profitable.

The National Bison Association reports that the price of the carcass of a young bull in 2010 was 58 percent higher than the price three years earlier. “I’ve been saying this for the past three years, we’ve had the three components — the buffalo herd, the packing plant, and the smokehouse — but we haven’t been able to connect the dots,” Fox says. “We’re finally moving in that direction this year.”

In December Michelle Fox opened the Smokehouse Grill in Fort Belknap Agency without using any tribal funds. With a $70,000 grant from Indian Country Economic Development Program, which is overseen by the Montana Department of Commerce, she was able to start the restaurant. A month later she opened a second business across the street in the Fort Belknap Casino, called the Smokehouse Deli. Both locations will be a tool for Michelle Fox to promote the products that come out of the Little Rockies Meat Co. and the Little River Smokehouse.

While the restaurants and smokehouse provide a service to the community by offering a place to dine out for those who have few other options, she’s also hoping to attract tourist traffic and begin to sell the plant and smokehouse products nationally. “It’s important the resource is here for our people, but if we’re going to make any money, it’s definitely going to be targeting other outside individuals,” she says.

She’s hoping to acquire a contract with Sysco, the largest food distribution company in the country, as well as the company that provides food to the U.S. National Park Service. But with the smokehouse’s temporary closure and the restaurant’s need for a reliable source of meat, Michelle Fox is branching out from selling mostly buffalo, looking to stop selling and start fully utilizing the meat packing plant and smokehouse. High demand for buffalo meat outside the reservation and more populated areas is the driving force in Fort Belknap’s attempt to make their herd more profitable.

Today more than 400 bison graze the 22,000-acre pasture that lies in the shadow of Snake Butte, a prominent tabletop rock formation that rises out of the prairie. Set against the end less and uninterrupted horizon of northcentral Montana, they look much like they did thousands of years ago, before onward expansion and the American government’s open encouragement of the buffalo’s extermination in the late 1800s.

Despite decreasing from an estimated population of 60 million to fewer than 1,000 in a matter of decades, for more than 30 years buffalo have been making a comeback on Fort Belknap. Originally brought back in 1974 for their cultural importance to the reservation’s tribes, the buffalo have since become an economic tool for the reservation.

Despite the rise in the state of the meat packing plant and smokehouse, the herd has worked to become more than just a tie to the past, it is now moving toward becoming the future of the reservation’s economy.

The Fish and Wildlife Department on Fort Belknap, which manages the buffalos, makes more money than any other department on the reservation, bringing in around $150,000 to $250,000 a year, says Mike Fox, a tribal council member who has managed the herd on and off for the past 20 years. In January the tribe made $60,000 from selling 37 of their buffalo. The money is transferred into a general fund, and goes to support not only the Fish and Wildlife Department, but other agencies and programs on the reservation as well, he says. Revenues from the bison herd has further been invested into the plant so that it can sell the meat to the community by offering a place to dine out for those who have few other options, she says. She’s hoping to acquire a contract with Sysco, the largest food distribution company in the country, as well as the company that provides food to the U.S. National Park Service. But with the smokehouse’s temporary closure and the restaurant’s need for a reliable source of meat, Michelle Fox is branching out from selling mostly buffalo, looking to stop selling and start fully utilizing the meat packing plant and smokehouse. High demand for buffalo meat outside the reservation and more populated areas is the driving force in Fort Belknap’s attempt to make their herd more profitable.

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Island Mountain Development Group, a company that works in developing businesses on the Fort Belknap Reservation, took over both the meat packing plant and smokehouse in January bringing to the table a new business plan and management team that is looking to start the businesses around to make them profitable. As the chief executive officer of the organization, which employs 20 people on the reservation, Michelle Fox, Mike Fox’s niece, knows what it takes to succeed in business. She graduated from Dartmouth in 1998 with a business and marketing degree. She doesn’t lack in making tough decisions.

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Funk says his concern with the buffalo trespass is

Funk also says he doesn’t believe the herd is fed properly

Walter Funk’s property abuts five miles of the western border of the buffalo pasture. He says the buffalo have trespassed onto his land for years, but

Mike Fox, a tribal council member who manages the bison on the Fort Belknap Reservation, stands outside his office in Fort Belknap Agency.

The massacre of the buffalo brought the loss of the Plains Indians’ source. They no longer had meat to feed themselves, hide to clothe and shelter them, and bone to create tools from.

The buffalo are now a symbol of the Plains Indians’ history.

Despite new business plans for the meat packing plant

Hides Weekly Edgトー, an employee of the Little Rockies Meat Packing Plant, stands amongst a pile of Bison hides and skull.

The buffalo shouldn’t be moved from Yellowstone for fear of cattle catching the disease. Four bills introduced in the Montana Legislature this year would have placed regulations and restrictions on the Yellowstone buffalo’s relocation. Two of these bills died, but what will sell the Fort Belknap Reservation in moving toward getting some of the buffalo.

In mid-May Gov. Brian Schweitzer vetoed a bill that

The program works to convert highly erodible land to vegetative cover like grass in order to allow soils to develop and function properly.

Funk knows how to fix the problem, but doesn’t have the funds to fully implement the solution.

The fence for the holding pasture will cost between $200,000 and $250,000, and the fish and Wildlife Department doesn’t have enough money to construct a full-scale holding pasture. Fox says they plan to construct a smaller pasture first and will expand it as money becomes available.

“We’re trying to be good neighbors, so we may not take down the buffalo, but we’ll still keep a close eye on them if they’re still in the main pasture,” she says.

The winter holding pasture is an idea that satisfies both neighbors.

The herd on Funk’s ranch could be five years,” she says. “It could be two years, it just depends on the season. We’re used to seeing most of the bison leave their pasture and go onto their neighboring land.

The winter holding pasture is an idea that satisfies both neighbors.

The program works to convert highly erodible land to vegetative cover like grass in order to allow soils to develop and function properly.

Fox also says the bureau is not solely to blame. The winter months are when the herds are at their full strength.

Funk’s call for better management, and staying in the good graces of neighboring ranchers, has caused some Yellowstone bison to abort their fetuses, has caused some Yellowstone bison to abort their fetuses, has caused some Yellowstone bison to abort their fetuses.

Almost all bison, including those on Fort Belknap, are the offspring of bison experimentally crossbred with cattle. One of the last genetically pure herds lies in Yellowstone National Park, and in receiving some of those Fort Belknap bison Fox says he hopes to preserve their exceptional genetics.

In 1967, the slaughter of the buffalo brought an end to the buffalo’s grazing, and the species was declared extinct.

“The buffalo are now a symbol of the Plains Indians’ history. “If you don’t establish satellite populations of them, they’ll go extinct in our lifetimes,” Funk says.

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The Crow Tribe will soon legally possess the rights to manage their own water

Generations ago, the Crow people, the Apsáalooke, came from a “land of many lakes” to settle near the waters of the Yellowstone and Bighorn rivers. Water was the life blood of the infal, the source of all being. One hundred and sixty years ago the first Fort Laramie Treaty with the United States set the Crow Reservation boundaries, reserving for the tribe 3.85 million acres of towering mountains and rushing waters. As more white settlers moved west, more treaties cut into the reservation, boundaries, reserving for the tribe 38.5 million acres of the Yellowstone and Bighorn rivers. Water was the lifeblood of the tribe, the source of all being.

The old outhouse his family used is still standing by an old tree. The most noticeable object in the kitchen, though, is the water cooler next to the sink. Jefferson bought the stand at a grocery store in Hardin. It holds refillable plastic jugs filled with water from a grocery store in Hardin. It holds refillable plastic jugs filled with water that looked fine. But let it sit for a few hours and it takes on a yellowish hue and bits of red minerals settle in the glass.

Jefferson is a happy person who likes to laugh and crack jokes. He has a pleasant demeanor even when expressing his frustrations. He gets mischievously as he tells a story about helping his adopted brother in Wyoming, who portrayed Buffalo Bill. Jefferson was asked to play the part of Sitting Bull, and he agreed on the condition he didn’t have to do anything too silly. However, during an interview with members of the Crow tribe, Jefferson couldn’t resist pulling a little prank. His brother was talking about Gun. Custer when Jefferson interjected to remind his brother not to forget “our friend Colonel Sanders.” He caught on quickly and agreed, saying Colonel Sanders killed off all the “pirate chislers.” This day, Jeffersonlaughs at the thought of the Swedish journalist taking his joke seriously. The kitchen in Jefferson’s house is small and has a makeshift island with what looks like a wooden bucket in the middle, propped up on one side by a phone book and a cookie tin. Casserole dishes line the top of the cabinets. The table is tall and round. Various bills and pieces of mail form a small pile on one side. The most noticeable object in the kitchen, though, is the water cooler next to the sink. Jefferson bought the stand at a grocery store in Hardin. It holds refillable plastic jugs filled with water.

The Crow Reservation

story by Falge Huston
photos by Matt Riley

We want to be... able to capitalize on the water and be in control of our own destiny.

Cedric Black Eagle

“Old Horn, the translator of the Water Rights Settlement into Crow, and the Crow tribal historic preservation officer, says getting clean water to rural parts of the reservation will be a challenge. The primary goals of the tribe are to improve irrigation and water quality in rural parts of the reservation with the settlement money. Tribal Chairman Cedric Black Eagle explains that the settlement will eventually give the tribe full water adjudication rights. As a boy and a young man, Jefferson never thought too much about that. "No one really knew about the water rights," he says. "It ruins our pipes, it ruins our water heaters, it causes soiled or stolen. His mother had a complete traditional outlet belonging to White Man Runs Him, a Crow scout who served under Gen. George Custer. Another family member got it, and he believed it was pawned, which he says "made me sob." Jefferson is a happy person who likes to laugh and crack jokes. He has a pleasant demeanor even when expressing his frustrations. He gets mischievously as he tells a story about helping his adopted brother in Wyoming, who portrayed Buffalo Bill. Jefferson was asked to play the part of Sitting Bull, and he agreed on the condition he didn’t have to do anything too silly. However, during an interview with members of the Crow tribe, Jefferson couldn’t resist pulling a little prank. His brother was talking about Gun. Custer when Jefferson interjected to remind his brother not to forget "our friend Colonel Sanders." He caught on quickly and agreed, saying Colonel Sanders killed off all the "pirate chislers." This day, Jefferson laughs at the thought of the Swedish journalist taking his joke seriously. The kitchen in Jefferson’s house is small and has a makeshift island with what looks like a wooden bucket in the middle, propped up on one side by a phone book and a cookie tin. Casserole dishes line the top of the cabinets. The table is tall and round. Various bills and pieces of mail form a small pile on one side. The most noticeable object in the kitchen, though, is the water cooler next to the sink. Jefferson bought the stand at a grocery store in Hardin. It holds refillable plastic jugs filled with water.

"Who in the heck’s going to drink this stuff?" Jefferson asks. He looks over at two bottles of water filled just a half

money won’t be given to the tribe in one lump sum. Funds will be requested, and the U.S. Treasury will release them to the tribe via the Bureau of Reclamation or the Bureau of Indian Affairs, as water projects take shape.
reservation. It will also upgrade existing systems in towns across the reservation. “Most of us have the luxury of turning on your tap water, and being able to drink that tap water. It’s not like that for people on the reservation. We’ve been in poverty for many years,” Black Eagle says. “Here’s the Yellowtail Dam…producing electricity that is being shipped off to the west coast,” he says with exasperation.

The settlement “creates the mechanism to have safe drinking water, and I think a lot of our Crow feel that that’s really a significant part of this settlement; that they will be able to have safe drinking water,” Black Eagle says.

For Old Horn, using power from other parts of the state seems ridiculous with the presence of Yellowtail Dam on the reservation. “If the Crow tribe opts to set up their own co-op, then it seems to me it would be logical to be a primary off-taker,” Old Horn says.

The settlement “creates the mechanism to have safe drinking water and the hydroelectric plant stimulates business on the reservation.” I see this as gateway legislation to industrial growth on the Crow Reservation. With industrial growth, the economy rises,” Old Horn says.
We've all drifted so far from our connection to the Earth, and it's so amazing we can't get it through our heads.

Pauline Matt

Plants to nourish and heal their bodies and souls. Plants often considered weeds today. Plants, a natural resource for the tribe, that could die out unless Weatherwax and other tribal members can help revive the traditions that he says saved his life.

The adult Weatherwax learns back on the table where he sits in the language room of the Blackfeet Community College, using gestures to reenact memories in rhythm with his speech. He raises a hand to one side then sweeps it across his chest, just as his grandfather Phillip Wells did when Weatherwax was an infant.

“I remember smelling onions and sucking on something,” Weatherwax says, moving his hand as if to stick a root in his mouth. “Then there was this loud whirring noise and someone said, ‘Cover the windows.’”

He was one month old. His mother is amazed at the memory, but absolutely certain of its truth. His grandfather was doctor and praying over him on the kitchen table when the sound of engines filled the sky. War planes were returning home from World War II, flying the Great Circle Route through the North Pole region, then south over the reservation to the airbase in Great Falls.

The United States had won World War II, but the Blackfeet Nation was still losing its fight to keep sacred lands, maintain traditional knowledge and protect the Earth from harmful development projects.

The reservation was established in 1855 as prospectors clambered for gold in the mountains where Blackfeet roamed.

The tribe lost some of its most sacred lands. Even today the plants that thrive there continue to be threatened by more contemporary searches for natural resources, such as oil drilling in the Badger-Two Medicine area southwest of the present reservation.

In 1896, Blackfeet elders reluctantly agreed to allow mining exploration in “The Backbone of the World,” or the Rocky Mountains, on the reservation’s western edge. They sold the land for 10 years of $150,000 payments. After mining proved unproductive on the ceded land, the federal government created Glacier National Park in 1910. The Blackfeet still battle to restore their rights to access, fish, hunt and cut timber on the “Ceded Strip” as was written in the original agreement but nullified by the park’s creation.

The park lost the loss of their land acutely. The park’s peeks shelter plants for healing that can only be found in the Rockies’ alpine ecosystems, and the mountains are home to some of the most powerful spirits for the Blackfeet and other neighboring tribes. But the federal government had already outlawed traditional healing and many religious practices by 1887. And children were taken away to be educated and assimilated, but were often abused and isolated. Decades of policy to uproot Indian culture weakened Blackfeet’s knowledge of their own history and traditions and limited succeeding generations’ ability and interest in sharing them.
Pauline Matt remembers her father every time she handles roots cut into a small bubble on the powdered white shaft of an aspen tree and scoops off the sap that gushes from her nail.

Emil’s 10 children, including Pauline, would mix him as they walked through the woods, clearing deer leaves, picking berries, digging roots—and eating a globule of aspen sap for its medicinal properties.

“He never told us, ‘This is used for medicine,’” Matt says. “But we learned by example.”

Her father’s generation was a quiet one of necessity, Matt says. People who openly practiced the Blackfeet religion or used traditional medicines were punished. The prosecution of sinners also led to some knowledge being lost in the bustle. For instance, Matt says some of the original 288 prayers to sing when gathering tobacco were lost.

It is also said that children raised away from traditional practices sometimes didn’t see the uniqueness of those daily lessons.

“I never really thought about it, ’Matt says. “It’s how we just used to be.”

She sometimes fed and taught her four children as she learned from her father, but it took several years for Matt to realize the larger significance of those ways.

“Whenever you have a real natural respect for the Earth, you’ll never have to worry,” Matt says. “Those mountains have that medicine, that knowledge.”

Pauline Matt prepared a batch of deep-healing skin salve in her home office outside Browning.

“The salves are the result of two years of gathering, drying, extracting and blending plants.”

Pauline Matt uses a small to scoop a light green paste from a food processor into another dish. Braided sweetgrass, Matt’s signature tobacco blend and some oil from her own garden are gently released smoke from a small ceramic dish on the counter.

“I always burn the smudge first to cleanse myself and keep it going so the smoke gets in the house,” Matt says. “I keep it burning all day because I know the plants were here.”

Matt scary the horns from her porch, looking over numerous ecosystems that stretch from the high alpine ranges of the mountains to the lowest valleys. She says, gesturing to the swamp below that has a grey ring of dying willow.

“I was an oasis and a pharmacy in itself,” Matt says, gesturing to the swamp below that has a grey ring of dying willow.

Soon, Matt will dig for roots. Plants hold the Earth’s energy in their roots through winter, so it is best to gather them in the early spring before the power—the medicine—a plant should leaves and buds. But today her kitchen smells like crab apple.

This is an orchard and a pharmacy in itself,” Matt says, standing in the main room. “Whenever you make something you always give the first one back in Blackfeet tradition.”

When Matt was a child, her family used two beautiful walking sticks, one for themselves and one as a gift for a relative. She took a piece of diamond willow into the cracked, grey limbs of a stump on her property. She broke up the smallest sections, gauging the canoe on the big branches and the small ceramic dish on the counter.

Slow-burning sage gently release smoke from a burlap bag. Matt’s signature tobacco blend and some oil from her own garden are gently released smoke from a small ceramic dish on the counter.

“I always burn the smudge first to cleanse myself and keep it going so the smoke gets in the house,” Matt says. “I keep it burning all day because I know the plants were here.”

Matt says it’s important to remember the healing power of woodland plants. The land’s important even before it is dissected into parts and its resources developed into pills, motor oil or a home’s wood paneling.

“Those mountains will take care of you,” Matt says. “Those mountains have that medicine, that healing power.”
Marvin Weatherwax says a prayer while burning sweetgrass, sweet pine, cedar and sage. Weatherwax prays for the students and the college every morning because only part of it is managed by the tribe,” says Betty Matthews, an environmental studies professor at Blackfeet Community College, who studied the contemporary land issues of the area last year. She notes in her study that cultural and ritual use of Chief Mountain is increasing, as it is recreational use. Because it is only four miles from the Canadian border, and near both Waterton and Glacier parks, she says many Blackfeet want to see a joint plan among all affected governments to increase protection for the mountain.

Weatherwax says communication about preserving important cultural sites has improved, but misses the larger wilderness of wildliferd in Blackfeet tradition. While some specific areas might be recognized as the home of certain ceremonies, he says, the medicine of spirits and the Earth are not contained by boundaries.

“My grandfather used to tell me, ‘Wherever you are that’s where your spirit is.’” Weatherwax says. “We don’t have no set altar. The whole area is sacred to us.”

Conservation used to be a more subtle, spiritual value for the Blackfeet, stemming from their belief that they live with the land, not on it. “We’ve all drifted so far from our connection to the Earth,” Matt says. “And it’s so amazing we can’t get it through our heads.”

Weatherwax learned the Blackfeet stories and values from his grandfather, who asked to raise him in exchange for saving his life. “Anywhere my grandfather went, I went,” Weatherwax says. “I was his shadow. I attended all the ceremonies. Or when he used to doctor somebody, I would go with him.”

Weatherwax, and later his brothers, often would fetch the plants his grandfather needed to make remedies for visitors. He would run to the coast closest, kneeling down as he lifted the stick that covered the family “medicine chest.” His hands wouldfeel in the dark for the right shape and texture, then his nose would confirm whether he had pulled out the right root or leaf.

“We could tell by the smell what it was,” Weatherwax says, sniffing an imaginary root in his raised hand. “I would get a little root, lift the cloth that covered the family ‘medicine chest.” His hands would feel in the dark for the right shape and texture, then his nose would confirm whether he had pulled out the right root or leaf.

“We could tell by the smell what it was,” Weatherwax says, sniffing an imaginary root in his raised hand. But strong role models and leaders are scarce today. Many of the tribe’s elders have died in the last decade, so men and women like Weatherwax and Matt are filling the role of storyteller and traditional leader younger than usual.

Blackfeet Community College, where every room is labeled with a Blackfeet name, has become a new center of tribal knowledge. At the college, after drinking a cup of red willow tea for the bank’s powerful antioxidants, Weatherwax joins his colleagues in teaching Blackfeet ways and how they fit into modern studies such as nursing and energy technology. They also teach the songs and prayers sung and recited when gathering plants for teas, salves and balms.

Many programs reach out to the community beyond the students and many people take courses for the sake of learning rather than a degree.

Beaver Gobert, a motel manager from East Glacier, took a course on the medicinal uses of native plants and says it radically changed his perspective.

“I used to think there were a lot of weeds around here and someone needed to get out there and spray ’em,” he says. “Then I took this medicinal class at the college and learned all these weeds were medicine.”

Because the Blackfeet are part of the Earth and the primary stewards of the lands they still retain, Weatherwax says the fate of the Blackfeet religion, plants used for traditional healing and the next generation of Real People are inextricably tied.

“It would be very hard to keep our religion alive (without the land) because it is such a huge part of our world,” Weatherwax says. “We’ve been here forever. It’s part of us. We’re part of it.”

Marvin Weatherwax

“... We’ve been here forever. It’s part of us. We’re part of it.”

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Marvin Weatherwax says a prayer while burning sweetgrass, sweet pine, cedar and sage. Weatherwax prays for the students and the college every morning in the Tipi Ceremont Room at Blackfeet Community College.
Failure & fortune on the frontier

The 1887 Dawes General Allotment Act left many American Indian families with nothing but scattered land and a grim future. But with grit and tenacity, one man turned his mother’s allotment into a sprawling ranch.

Bud LaCounte

“I don’t think the experiment worked because I was born an Indian in 1923, which makes me 87 today, and I’m still an Indian.”

He stood in shock next to the combine on top of the hill. He felt the dread welling up in his chest, but he didn’t cry. Willard “Bud” LaCounte rarely cries. But more than guessing, it took hard work, the sweat of a whole family.

“I just guessed,” he says. “Sometimes you miss, sometimes you don’t.”

And more than guessing, it took hard work, the sweat of a whole family.

He likes to remember a time when the farm was green and cattle milling around the crowded feedyard. A time when his oldest child, Larry, still wanted to be a cowboy. When his older daughter, Linda, still followed her mom around the kitchen while his younger daughter, Cynthia, hung on to the fence, taking every move her father made. But as it turns out, he’s opened up in the last year Bud’s right hand shakes a little as he points to the floor. His fingers are long and gnarled. His veins stick up beneath his skin and run like snakes up his right hand, disappearing beneath the cuff of his crisp blue button-down shirt.

He’s a cowboy, though without the hate. He says he got tired of chasing after it after forgetting it on the tractor, in the car, in the house or with the neighbors. Other than that, not much has changed since he retired.

Bud started the farm by renting, and later buying, the allotted 160 acres from his mother. It was his history. Bud never liked to talk much about himself, but Larry says he’s opened up in the last year.

Bud was able to save up enough money to purchase a neighboring allotment. Larry says his parents were thrifty and cautious not to overspend on indulgences. After that, Bud added another 160 acres to the farm, and from there, things moved quickly. He bought 440 more acres and paid for them in crops until he met the purchase price of $18,000. Then he stopped selling cows and started raising cattle.

He stood in shock next to the combine on top of the hill. He felt the dread welling up in his chest, but he didn’t cry. Willard “Bud” LaCounte rarely cries. But more than guessing, it took hard work, the sweat of a whole family.

“The 1887 Dawes General Allotment Act left many American Indian families with nothing but scattered land and a grim future. But with grit and tenacity, one man turned his mother’s allotment into a sprawling ranch.”

LaCOUNTE: “Well, I’m proud of my family. They’ve done good.” Bud LaCounte says with a smile. “But I’m also very proud of the accomplishments we’ve done, building ourselves up the way we have.”

The 1887 Dawes General Allotment Act left many American Indian families with nothing but scattered land and a grim future. But with grit and tenacity, one man turned his mother’s allotment into a sprawling ranch.
Most of his memories are with Venice. They were mar-
ried for 67 years and three days. When she died, some-
ing there was no contest over his cremains. But he
wanted her ashes to rest in a niche in a wall at the
side of his chair and stands. He turns from the painting
and looks around the living room.

“Sometimes I can still see her crossing the yard,” he
says, pointing at the painting. His voice shakes as he
resents the respect and love he has for the woman
who taught him to be proud to be Chippewa. She did her
best to raise him in that tradition, and he feels
behind his glasses, “I don’t think the experiment worked because I was
released to return to Bainville for third grade he was
out his life. Two of the vehicles were his father’s, including a 1939 sunset-orange Chevrolet truck, now in mint condition.

Bud was born near Bainville. Family life is sort of a blur
because he spent most of his young life in and out of Indian
boarding schools. When he was 6, a Bureau of
Indian Affairs agent came to take him away from his
mother to go to a school for Native American children.

“Sometimes I can still see her crossing the yard,” he
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They're attractive, but they're not his favorite. They mind he's mulling over the comfort of the new boots. jointed and random to anyone not paying attention. thoughts at a time, making conversations seem dis consumed by the memories. He tends to focus on two the wall. He is entranced by it, but not completely his attention returns to the painting of the farm on later, they would grow together on the land. like so much in his early life, he didn't have a choice. Bud shakes his head and frowns. He says he missed crucial years to bond with his only son, but World War II. Bud bought his first cows on the farm. He hated milking them, but it paid the grocery bill, and together with income from crops, helped them save enough money to buy additional acreage. Bud knew he couldn't rely on trust land alone to start a successful farm. Land that's in trust can't be used for crops or livestock. But the farm doesn't quite look the same as the rolling farmland. Not far from the front door is a garden of rocks and weeds had to be removed. Bud had his eye on the land. He knew, one day, it would fall on him to support his family and his immediate family. But he had to determine how to go about it. For the first year after his army discharge, the two lived without running water or electricity in a rooftopped sheep wagon on his mother's allotted 160 acres. Venice cooked while Bud hunted in the big 50 miles or so, they learned the art of making the best for cooking. Larry stayed with his grandmother in Bannock, too young to help in the process. Together, through sheer will, they groomed the land into something manageable. Bud points across the room to a bronzed daisy sitting by the window. Larry says he remembers playing with that hand that's holding rocks for his dad. As he recalls the hard work it's easy to see the respect he has for what his dad accomplished. He describes his father as a quiet, determined man. Larry doesn't know all of his secrets, but he's collected bits of the story over the years and treasures the knowledge his father shared with him. Larry wanted to take over the farm after Bud retired, but he couldn't afford to maintain it and he wasn't about to ask his father for money. Bud says Larry doesn't ask for help with anything. Larry says he was always a quiet one. In its prime, the farm was more than 2,000 acres of sprawling grain fields, feed and caging yards and rolling hills. The buildings sit on the 440 acres purchased so many years ago. The house is surrounded by grain silos, a barn, a blacksmith shop and a large empty building where the machines were stored. The view from the house is perfect, overlooking miles of rolling farmland. Not far from the front door is a garden that Venice planted for vegetables. It's in the yard, one side and separates the house from the feed yard where the cattle were corralled for feeding just listening for what they wanted to market. But the farm doesn't quite look the same as Bud remembers it. Now, the land he's sold off is in CRP (Conservation Reserve Program), which gives him the chance to redevelop and lessen the damage done by years of harvesting crops and grazing cattle. It doesn't look the same and Bud says it makes him sad. If he could have his way, his youngest daughter Cynthia would paint the buildings and replace the windows. But she's busy with her own career. Cynthia mirrors her father. Linda looks just like her mother. In her name at Rocky Mountain College in Whitefield. Donna is in her 60s. Donna says she's partner now, who he says is too young. She works the crops. But he had to do it on his own, like Bud. Larry runs on game time. Bud and Larry have the same excuse for not going back to the other couples in a two-step around the floor. Donna rolls her eyes. "Don't believe a word he says," she shouts. The Cimarron Band belts out "There's a Tear in My Eye" and Bud leaves closer to Donna. "You ready?" he asks. She nods and follows him from the table and they join the dance floor. Bud is usually in bed by 11 p.m. and up and about by 6 a.m. Tonight, he'll stay out a little too late with Donna. He'll take her home, then sit for the night. Usually, the house is empty, but Larry is there tonight. Larry and Bud have the same excuse for not going back to the farm; they're retired. It's too much work for either of them to do alone and they've both stubbornly to get about it in any other way. They both agree, however, that the all companies need to hurry up and get a well set up on the farm. Ameri Energy Partners and the Whiting Oil and Gas Corp. are poised to begin drilling on the land. Each family member will receive 20 percent of the profits. Bud holds Venice's share. Bud says he'll be happy when the drilling starts. Venice was excited to learn oil was on the land, but Bud has no idea what they would have done with the extra money. He thinks she'll set up a scholarship in her name at Rocky Mountain College in Billings. Venice would have wanted it that way.
The key to economic prosperity on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation could lie beneath its surface.

Most of the Northern Cheyenne Reservation hasn’t changed much since Gen. George Custer and his cavalry came trotting across the plains in their blue wool uniforms and over a rise to see thousands of Cheyenne and Sioux Indians camped out for a sun dance ceremony. Except for a curving two-lane highway and a handful of small towns, the rolling, sagebrush-dotted plains of southeastern Montana look today as they have for thousands of years. The southeastern corner of Montana, to a reservation that has been their home ever since.

The Cheyenne have struggled against development for decades. Like many Indian tribes today, they struggle economically with an estimated unemployment rate of 60 percent. But in the last few years, tribal sentiment seems to be swinging the other way. To see why people want coal, Steve Small, the director of economic development for the tribe, points outside the Little Wolf tribal office conference room to a view of the Powder River in southeast Montana. The government forced the Cheyenne to move from Montana to Indian Territory, what later would become Oklahoma. But after more and more of his band fell ill and died, Dull Knife and his followers tried to make their way back home. Intercepted, they were imprisioned at Fort Robinson, Neb., where the army tried to starve them into submission. They made an escape and most of the band were killed, but a few survivors, including Dull Knife, eventually made it to the southeastern corner of Montana, to a reservation that has been their home ever since.

“Many of the elders say that their ancestors fought hard for this land,” says Steve Brady, chairman of the Northern Cheyenne cultural commission. As he speaks he gestures out the window of his sister’s home, where car headlights flash by in the early spring dusk on Highway 322. In 1876, thousands of Indians traveled across that very plain before being attacked by Custer at the Battle of the Little Bighorn, now a historic site on the Crow Reservation just adjacent to the Cheyenne. “They fought hard for this land.”

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“The worst case scenario? Small says they know coal development won’t be a benefit if companies come in, take the coal and leave behind some money. And Small doesn’t want to see enormous plots of the reservation torn up or any historic sites damaged.

For health care, shopping, movies or even a good steak, most of the shops are shuttered. The unemployment rate means that at all hours of the day, groups of jobless people wander the streets or stand around the administration offices.

Small says coal could fix those problems, and that’s why the tribe elected President Leroy Spang in 2008. Spang, a retired coal miner, is hard of hearing and when he speaks it’s in a quiet, hoarse voice. In meetings, Small often speaks for him, beginning sentences with, “The president thinks...” or “Mr. Spang here...”

The tribe could make millions of dollars from coal development. “Nothing grandiose,” Small explains. “We just want a standard of living.”

He believes coal mining is the tribe’s only real option for improving their economy. They’ve considered tourism, but the reservation doesn’t even have a motel for travelers. And there’s no money for infrastructure. “They won’t let us be here and they wonder why we don’t have roads,” he says. The worst case scenario? Small says they know coal mining won’t be a benefit if companies come in, take the coal and leave behind some money. And Small doesn’t want to see enormous plots of the reservation torn up or any historic sites damaged.

A chart on the wall projects 2024 as the earliest that a Cheyenne mining operation could be up and running. “This isn’t something we’ll see, this is something our children and grandchildren will live,” Small says.

To finally escape a history of oppression, the Cheyenne need a measure of independence in how their resources are developed. Small and Spang envision bringing in experts to teach them how to mine their own coal and run their own power plant. With the money, they’d fund tribal education and infrastructure, and give per capita payments to enrolled tribal members. Tribal members would be employed. Small and Spang’s grandchildren could have guaranteed free education and retirement funds.

The obstacles to this are many, but the first and most difficult is tribal resistance. Small has a memo, dated 1991, about the tribe’s plans to develop coal. It didn’t go through then because an anti-coal president took over in 1992. The same political swing could very well happen again, but Small wants to make sure the tribe gets a legal contract for development signed so as to prevent another plan from stagnating. Next is the tribe’s Class I air status, which means the quality is the same designation as accepted national parks. When Montana Power Co. wanted...
Colstrip, a town of 2,400 people, owes its existence to coal. A local radio station plays on that importance in its call letters, KCCB. Colstrip is dominated by enormous, booming coal-fired generating multimile stacks named 1, 2, 3, and 4, which pump steam, sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxides into the sky at all hours of the day. It’s the second-largest coal-fired facility west of the Missouri. The plant, which has generating capacity of 2.04 megawatts, is fed in part by an adjoining coal strip mine completely hidden from public view by mountains and miles of fencing. Much of the area that’s visible now was once part of the mine, but was reclaimed with soil. Tribal members like McLean and White Crane say Colstrip shows how reclamation can be done.

To others, Colstrip is a horrifying vision of the future. For cultural consultants Lynette Two Bulls and her husband Philip Whitestar, the arguments about reclamation and benefits from mining are empty promises. "We’re doing it, they covered up the land again," Two Bulls says, "but it’s been changed. You can’t get back what’s gone. You can’t put back the springs."

While all talk about developing Cheyenne coal is just conjecture at this point, what is clear is that the tribe will be affected by all the mining off the reservation. East of the reservation boundary are the controversial Otter Creek coal tracts, which will be mined in the near future. Stipulations in the proposed Otter Creek mining contract state that the tribe will receive remunerative payment, since the area is historically important and Otter Creek itself merges into the Tongue River, which marks the eastern border of the reservation.

Other residents worry about whether coal bed meth

### Northern Cheyenne Reservation

**MCLEAN**

Northern Cheyenne tribal member Diane McLean stands in a gas station in Lame Deer. She hopes new development will bring more jobs to the reservation.

**TRANSPORTATION**

A train car filled with coal sits along Interstate 90 near Hardin.

**UNEMPLOYMENT**

A train car filled with coal sits along Interstate 90 near Hardin.

**Everybody needs food. Culture isn’t putting food on your table.**

Diane McLean

### Northern Cheyenne Reservation

to expand its power-generating plant at Colstrip, just north of the reservation, in the early 1970s, the tribe fought all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court for the pristine airshed of the reservation, in the early 1970s, the tribe fought all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court for the pristine airshed of the reservation, in the early 1970s, the tribe fought all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court for the pristine airshed of the reservation, in the early 1970s, the tribe fought all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court for the pristine airshed of the reservation, in the early 1970s, the tribe fought all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court for the pristine airshed of the reservation.

**Deer**

A man bikes past Colstrip’s sprawling power plant.

**U.S.**

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Other residents worry about whether coal bed meth...
At the crack of dawn, the hum of pickup trucks disrupts the calm silence of the Blue Bay Campground. For one by one, fishermen broadcast their boats into the crisp, cold waters of Flathead Lake. They are ready for the day's first cast. Many anglers will spend the entire day fishing, leaving only when the dusk skies darken. During Mack Days, a month-long fishing derby every spring and fall, they return to shore, where they catch and release their catch. As they return to shore, they bring their catch to a lake cabin to be tallied. Hundreds of fish with shiny scales and beady eyes are placed on ice—their bellies swollen with air from the pressure of being pulled up from deep water. The fish will be filleted and distributed to local food banks. These fishermen’s fortune is a symbol of good intentions gone awry.

Lake trout, or Mackinaws, have overtaken the massive body of water. They are a droning force in the dwindling numbers of native fish, such as westslope cutthroat and bull trout, found in Flathead Lake. For countless generations, it was the native bull trout that could be counted on to provide food in times of need. The bull trout has so much cultural significance to members of the Flathead Reservation’s Salish and Kootenai Tribes, it’s been referred to as the ‘bear of the water.’ Tribal fisheries manager Tom McDonald notes, “There are some things in nature you will always remember because they are so magnificent,” White says. She remembers when people could come to Blue Bay and catch bull trout. Today, he fishes out of the same bay and has caught more than 3,500 Mackinaw in all that time. In one instance, he hooked only one bull trout.

“My knowledge of the fishery is out of which and I know where the streams were. We can call it bull trout fishing,” he says. “It's to think at some point we could come out and catch a variety of species and not just lake trout.”

Swaney lake forays in Mack Days, which the tribes sponsor to entice anglers to help control the lake trout population. Participants can win up to $50,000 in cash and prizes. Held since 2002, Mack Days has grown from an event that drew 80 anglers who caught 888 fish to a highly competitive derby that last spring saw more than 700 anglers kill 12,051 lake trout.

Though more than 100,000 lake trout have been removed from Flathead Lake, tribal scientists say the fishing event has only managed to keep the numbers of threatened bull trout from further decline. Studies estimated bull trout in the Flathead Basin numbered about 20,000 in the early 1990s. The construction of hungry Horse Dam in 1953 blocked off spawning routes for many of the migratory fish and by 1982 the estimated population had dropped to 15,000. Today fisheries biologist puts the number at 3,000 adult bull trout. Lake trout populations are thought to be near half-a-million.

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Germante White has dedicated countless hours spreading the word about the plight of bull trout as the information and education specialist for the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, Fish, Wildlife, Recreation, and Conservation Department. The Salish-Kootenai woman has gray-black hair and her hazel eyes sparkle. As she speaks, a calm confidence quietly commands attention. Thirty years ago, when her daughters were young, White moved to a home near Mission Creek. She took her children to the headwaters of the creek to watch bull trout swim, spawn and jump near the falls. “There are some things in nature you will always remember because they are so magnificent.” White says. Today, there are no more bull trout in Mission Creek.

Bull trout are a sensitive species that need clean, cold water free of sediment, nearby trees and natural pools. This native fish can travel more than 100 miles to swim. They have pink, orange and yellow spots, a square tail and lack the black dorsal fin markings of brook trout.

In the past century, settlers have hurt the habitat. In the town of Polson on the south end of the lake, Tom McDonald works alongside White as the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes’ Fish, Wildlife, Recreation and Conservation division manager. McDonald has a big smile and outgoing personality, but when it comes to getting the job done, he’s a no-nonsense kind of man. McDonald fishes for bull trout as a young man with his father. He was taught how the fish were driven to the brink of extinction under my watch without the ability of me to stop or change it. Other tribes in Montana was an abundance of available protein—bull trout. “For the tribes that’s been hugely important,” says White. “We know where the fisheries were, where there were upwellings and the water was cold and there were a lot of fish. We know how to deal with seasonal abundance and we knew how to take advantage of this high quality protein source.”

Preserving natural resources remains embedded in the way of life on the Flathead Reservation. Flathead Lake, the largest freshwater lake west of the Mississippi, whose southern half is inside the reservation boundary, continues to draw in new residents and droves of tourists during the summer months. Picturesque islands rise out of the deep, cold waters of the lake. On calm days the water reflects large pines and jagged rocks along the edges of its massive expanse. Each one represents something special to White.

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The Flathead tribes manage the south half of the lake while the northern half is state-controlled. The lake can’t be divided down the middle, so the two governments came up with a collaborative plan to restore bull trout. In 2000, they started a 10-year joint management plan to restore the bull trout and westslope cutthroat populations. Although the tribe faced rapid reduction of lake trout, members of the public had other ideas. More than 50 percent of the 280 people who com-

mented on the plan said they wanted a conservative conservation approach, while only a small minority favored rapid reductions of lake trout using aggressive methods like gill netting and fishing.

“Immediate actions weren’t taken based upon the best science, due to the concerns of charter fishermen and other folks that have enjoyed lake trout, because it was a shock to them,” McDonald says.

Although plans for netting were delayed, the tribes conti-

ued their work to restore bull trout. They implemented Mark Days and completed major habitat restoration pro-

jects, including a multimillion-dollar project on the Ajo River drainages. The tribes restored habitat in and around the river, and bought land to keep the river healthy.

“It’s been a tremendous conservation effort,” says Mark Delay, a fisheries biologist with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

Education has also been a major component of tribal efforts to conserve bull trout. The tribes published a storybook for schoolteachers to read in classrooms. This in-

tricately illustrated, colorful book takes students on a field trip to the lake to learn about the importance of bull trout. A field journal was created for older students and adults to record their personal experiences with nature on the Flathead Reservation, and an interactive DVD highlights the cultural significance of bull trout.

“We can spend millions of dollars on restoration, but if the next generation doesn’t understand how profoundly important these fish are, then we’ve already destroyed the value of what we’ve put in place,” says White.

Tribal fisheries employees say with all of the strategies they’ve put in place, they’ve slowed the adverse effects of lake trout recovery.

Last year, the tribes introduced a lake trout netting plan, but during public meetings, they were pressured to hold off until other options could be explored and an environ-

mental assessment could be conducted in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act.

“It’s very frustrating,” says Rich Janssen, the tribes’ natural resource manager. “We came up with joint plan with the state in 2000. Here we are almost 12 years later, and we are ready to move forward. It’s part of who you are. It’s part of your culture. It’s inexpensive way to remove lake trout, he says.

In the five years he’s been fishing on Flathead Lake, he says he’s already destroyed a decline in the lake trout catch. “They’re are already destroyed one fishery and now they are in the process of destroying another,” he says, referring to the lake trout.

“Those who are promoting the killing of all of these fish are ruining my business,” says Lakeside charter fisherman, Patrick Campanella. He’s a 10-year veteran fishing guide who has been charter fishing on Flathead Lake for five years. In the five years he’s been fishing on Flathead Lake, he says he’s already noticed a decline in the lake trout catch. “They’re are already destroyed one fishery and now they are in the process of destroying another,” he says, referring to the lake trout.

Although it’s still not clear how many lake trout will be removed from Flathead Lake, it is clear that the tribes aren’t about to let native bull trout disappear from the reserva-

“The policy is part of who you are. It’s part of your culture,” Janssen says. “You don’t want to lose that connection.”

An interdisciplinary team of tribal fisheries biologists and state FWP employees are analyzing what actions to consider next. One option is trapping live fish through a tunnel system. The technique greatly reduces the likelihood of catching and killing native fish, but it’s also expensive. Also on the list is gill netting. Gill netting is controversial because native fish can also get caught. However, McDonald says gill netting can be targeted and site specific to limit the number of desirable fish netted. It’s also the most efficient and inexpensive way to remove lake trout, he says.

Gill netting has been used for research in Montana but as a fish removal method the process is fairly new. Although it’s still not clear how many lake trout will be removed from Flathead Lake, it is clear that the tribes aren’t about to let native bull trout disappear from the reserva-

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