

SECTION 2

Acknowledging Tribal Sovereignty and Some Native American Perspectives on Native Plant Conservation



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ACKNOWLEDGING TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY AND SOME NATIVE AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES ON NATIVE PLANT CONSERVATION

An Acknowledgement to Native Americans in Montana

The development of a *Montana Native Plant Conservation Strategy* necessitates inclusion because all people who reside in Montana benefit from native plants. The Core Team of the *Montana Native Plant Conservation Strategy* acknowledges and honors the many Indigenous peoples^{1,2}, past and present, whose traditional homeland is the land that today we call the State of Montana. Being the original stewards, Indigenous peoples have developed the closest relationships to plants, lands, waters, animals, minerals, and other beings. What the Core Team presents is a Strategy that has strived for inclusion of people and organizations that share a vested interest in native plant species, habitats, and communities; it also includes components essential to plant conservation. This Strategy reflects input, ranging from little to lots, from a large and diverse assemblage of people and organizations, including some Native Americans from a few Tribes (see Table 1 on page iii). The Core Team recognizes that it is by no means comprehensive of all viewpoints. The Strategy, and its authors, value the rights and sovereignty of all Tribal nations and Native American peoples across Montana.

In this section of the *Montana Native Plant Conservation Strategy*, we provide basic information on Montana's federally recognized Tribal nations, share some Native American perspectives on native plant conservation, and suggest some general approaches or actions that can promote respectful dialogue and working relationships with Native American peoples. The following sections of the Strategy also include various conservation objectives that suggest ways to consider or include Native American views and practices in the statewide effort to sustain native plant species, habitats, and communities, and especially for those determined to be of Greatest Conservation Need.

Tribal Nations in Montana

Montana is home to eight federally recognized Tribal nations, who also own land (Table 2-1). These Tribal nations are the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Reservation; Blackfeet Nation; Chippewa Cree Tribe of the Rocky Boy's Reservation; Fort Belknap Indian Community, Fort Belknap Reservation; Fort Peck Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes; Northern Cheyenne Tribe; Apsáalooke Nation on the Crow Reservation; and the Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians with lands on Mount Royal and other places (Table 2-1;

¹ The usage of capitalization in the Strategy follows the conventions used in the *The Status of Tribes and Climate Change Report* (STACCCWG 2021). "Indigenous", "Tribe", "Tribal" are capitalized while "people", "peoples", and "nation" are not unless denoting an official name.

² This Strategy uses the term "Indigenous peoples" in agreement with *The Status of Tribes and Climate Change Report* (STACCCWG 2021). The term is to be inclusive of self-determining societies whose political and cultural foundations pre-exist the formation of the United States, regardless of their recognition status by the US government. Indigenous peoples are also referred to as Native American people(s).

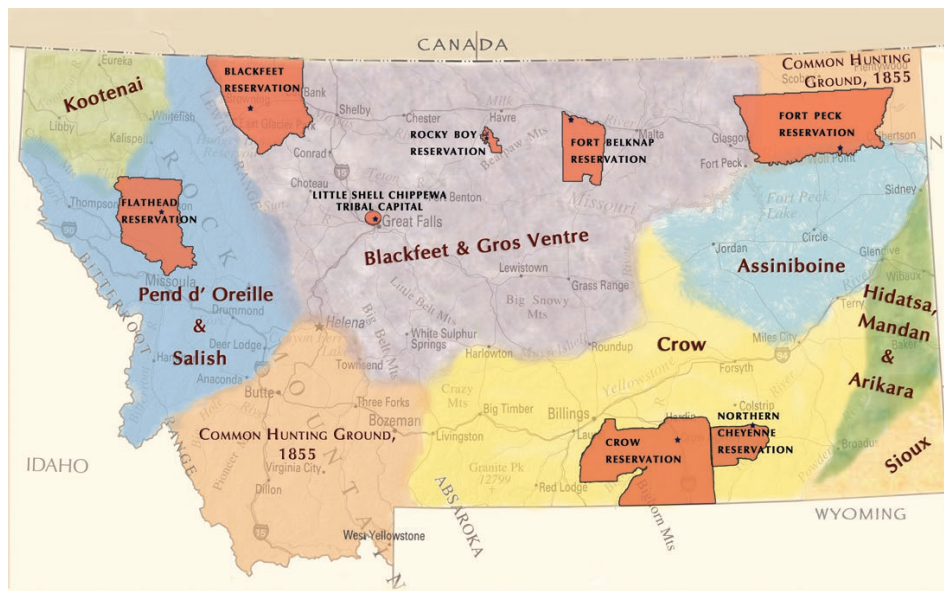
³ Recommended sources to learn more about Tribal sovereignty, self-determination, and self government include:
-The Status of Tribes and Climate Change Report (STACCCWG 2021): https://www7.nau.edu/itep/main/docs/publications/ITEP.STACC.Report_2021.pdf
-Office of Tribal Justice-Native American Policies: <https://www.justice.gov/otj/native-american-policies>
-Montana Governor's Office of Indian Affairs: <https://tribalnations.mt.gov/>.

Figure 2-1). Montana is also home to Native American peoples representing other Tribes. Readers of the Strategy are encouraged to view

each Tribal nation’s website (Table 2-1) to learn more about the people and their history, as well as to consult published literature.

Table 2-1. Contact information for the eight federally recognized Tribal Nations in Montana.

<p>Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes 42487 Complex Blvd. PO Box 278 Pablo, Montana 59855 https://csktribes.org/</p> <p>Chippewa-Cree Tribal Council R.R. 1, Box 542, Box Elder, MT 59521 www.facebook.com/ChippewaCree</p> <p>Northern Cheyenne Tribe PO Box 128 600 Cheyenne Avenue Lame Deer, MT 59043 www.cheyennenation.com</p> <p>Blackfeet Nation Blackfeet Reservation PO Box 850 All Chiefs Square Browning, MT 59417 https://blackfeetnation.com/</p>	<p>Fort Belknap Indian Community of the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation 158 Tribal Way Harlem, MT 59526 https://ftbelknap.org/</p> <p>Fort Peck Assiniboine & Sioux Tribes PO Box 1027 501 Medicine Bear Road Poplar, MT 59255 https://fortpecktribes.org/</p> <p>Little Shell Chippewa Tribe 625 Central Avenue West Great Falls, MT 59401 https://montanalittleshelltribe.org/</p> <p>Crow Tribal Council P.O. Box 159 43 Heritage Lane Crow Agency, MT 59022 http://www.crow-nsn.gov/</p>
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Tribal Territories in Montana

Boundaries as defined by the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851, and the Flathead and Blackfeet Treaties 1855.

- Reservations today shown in red.
- ★ Star indicates location of tribal capital.

Names Tribes Call Themselves: A Key

Salish / Sqelio
Pend d'Oreille / Qæisp'p'e
Kootenai / Ksanka

Blackfeet / Niitsitapi (Pikuni)
Chippewa (Ojibwe) / Annishinabe
Plains Cree / Ne-i-yah-wahk

Gros Ventre / A'aninin
Assiniboine / Nakoda
Sioux / Lakota, Dakota

Northern Cheyenne / Tsististas and So'taa'eo'o
Crow / Apsaalooke
Little Shell Chippewa / Assishinabe and Métis

Figure 2-1. Tribal territories, as defined by the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851 and the Flathead and Blackfeet Treaties of 1855^a and current Tribal nation reservations and Tribal capitals in Montana (Thompson and Lugthart 2009).

^a In this map Tribal boundaries were determined by non-Indian officials during the time of developing these treaties and do not accurately reflect traditional Tribal Territories.

A Selection of Native American Perspectives on Native Plant Conservation⁴

On Native Plants

Native plants to Montana have been habitants on the land for time immemorial. They were the landscape, the earth, and continue to be the basis of life. They provide food and shelter for all living entities around them. This mutual respect has given them a high importance especial with Indigenous communities. The cultural value is ingrained in the Montana landscape and history. Native plants of Montana are traditional medicinal beings.

Native plants are living beings that feel, grow, and survive depending on the care they are given. They are not to be overharvested to the point of no return. Stories have been passed down from generation to generation on how traditional plants are to be used, harvested during what time of year, and how they are to be taken from the Earth. Each tribe is unique in their own teachings but the same respect for protocols is followed. One standard that is followed by most tribes is in leaving something when taking something from the earth. Whether that offering is tobacco or food, the items left are done with intention. Another great way to give back is to see and acknowledge the native plant, but to leave it in place to continue their life or to provide for other animals and future generations.

Today, these protocols are still very much in place. They reside and thrive within Native communities in Montana. The locations of traditional plants are kept with the community's knowledge, so they are not to be exploited. Seeking information as a non-

indigenous individual it is very important to first ask for permission. Traditional Ecological Knowledge of native plants is valued to the highest extent for their existence as living beings. This knowledge is important for the betterment of all Montana communities and should be protected for the generations that follow. An effort in Montana is working towards creating sustainable collections of locally adapted native plant materials while also integrating Traditional Ecological Knowledge into ecological restoration practices. The Fort Belknap Indian Community partnered with the Montana/Dakotas Bureau of Land Management's Seeds of Success program and the Society for Ecological Restoration to develop a native seed and grassland restoration program⁵. This project not only contributes to native plant seed collections, but it also incorporates an understanding of the cultural importance of native plants to the Fort Belknap Indian Community.

On Wetland Plants and Habitats

Wetlands provide our tribes with traditional/cultural practices and spiritual well-being, which includes collecting plants for medicinal purposes, or for native craft making, and for subsistence, such as berry picking. These sacred places were created by Mother Earth and our brother the Beaver.

Many stories are told to us from generation to generation, as we are walking along with the "wise ones" (our grand-parents), when we are berry picking near wetlands. Hearing these stories makes us appreciate all the living things that depend on these wetlands.

We were always told to remember to leave something, an "offering", if we take something

⁴ Authored by members of the Fort Belknap Indian Community

⁵ Fort Belknap Partnership for Restoration: <https://www.blm.gov/programs/natural-resources/native-plant-communities/about-native-plants/montana/fortbelknap>

from this land, and to make sure we leave enough of the plants behind, so that it will grow back again to help us later. Also it was said by our elders that if a plant is growing in abundance, it was meant to be picked, so we pick from these areas, not the sites where the plant is limited or plants are scarce.

Cultural Practices include using Sage for cover scent when we are hunting and use native plants and mix with tobacco to make it sweeter tasting (Kinnikkinnick & Red Willow). Willows provide us many uses, including Tipi Stakes and binding, snares for traps, catching fish and many other crafts used around the camp such as dry meat hangers, and stakes for stretching and drying hides.

A Wetland Assessment Method may also include a cultural aspect that would be added into the matrix for scoring. For example, a wetland with lots of medicinal plants growing in it, would be classified as a High Priority site, opposed to one with good plant density and diversity, however lacking in what we would call, cultural values... meaning something we can use from the wetland site.

Conservation of wetland native plant species and habitats that considers Tribal or traditional cultural values sustains all beings. For example, a wetland with lots of native medicinal plants, in addition to other native plant density and diversity provides the most value, support, and greatest function on the landscape for all beings.



ACTIONS

ACTIONS TO IMPROVE WORKING RELATIONSHIPS WITH TRIBES AND NATIVE AMERICAN PEOPLES

- 1) Native American peoples' self-determination as practitioners of biodiversity conservation and ecological protection should be respected and reinforced (Whyte et al. 2021). Approaches to use, especially for proposed projects and species in vicinity of Tribal lands include, but are not limited to:
 - Collaborate across jurisdictions.
 - Consult and consent in the first stages of land and water planning, research, and management processes. This is especially important when the process involves native plants and habitats, especially lands and species of importance to Native American peoples.
 - Increase support mechanisms for the exercise of Tribal sovereignty.
 - Remove barriers to Native American peoples' rights to implementing land management practices.
- 2) Promote the retention of culturally valued plant species, on and off reservation, to help sustain Indigenous economies, Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) systems, livelihoods, meanings, and identities (Whyte et al. 2021). Where retention is not possible, support Tribes in their efforts to make new relationships with newly arriving living beings.
- 3) Strive to develop respectful relationships with people of the Tribes and their communities through asking, listening, and discussing. Consider making planned site visits to talk in person. Work to understand that Tribal relations take time to establish and sustain.

ACTIONS

- 4) When proposing work on Tribal lands for culturally important plants, or for other beings, consider consulting with Tribal agency or Tribal college administrators or professors about the possibilities of working together, hiring student interns, conducting joint workshops and trainings, or getting help connecting with other community members to support mutual needs.
- 5) When addressing plant species in working documents, seek input and consider including, as appropriate, traditional Tribal names along with the scientific name.

REFERENCES

- Status of Tribes and Climate Change Working (STACCCWG), Marks-Marino, D. (ed.). 2021. Status of Tribes and Climate Change Report, Institute for Tribal Environmental Professionals, Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, AZ.
- Thompson, Sally, and Kim Lugthart. 2009. Tribal Territories in Montana Map on Montana Tribes website. A collaboration between The University of Montana and Indian Education at the Office of Public Instruction. <https://montanatribes.org/> [26 April 2024]
- Whyte, Kyle, S. Gaughen, H Hardison, C. Jones, D. Marks-Marino, G. Morishima, H. Mullen, and A. Walker, (2021). Worldviews, Knowledges, and Social Impacts. In *Status of Tribes and Climate Change Report* [Marks-Marino, D. (ed.)]. Institute for Tribal Environmental Professionals, pp. 34–45.