

# The Path Back: Buffalo, the Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes of Fort Peck

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*The following is a brief history of the restoration of buffalo herds by the Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes of Fort Peck. The goal of this document is to provide a readable, concise resource that discusses major milestones in the recent history of the buffalo program. This history could be useful as one of many resources the Fort Peck communities have at their disposal to educate the public and tribal members about the buffalo program and to support future planning for buffalo-related activities. This report is primarily based on interviews conducted in 2015 with 18 individuals by Robert McAnally (FPCC), Julia Haggerty and Beth Rink (MSU), following a protocol approved by the Fort Peck Institutional Review Board (IRB #). We reached out to individuals known to our research team as community members familiar with the buffalo program. We recognize that our efforts reached only a portion of the people central to buffalo restoration, as some key figures have passed away, others were unavailable for interviews and still others remain unknown to us. While some direct (anonymous) quotations are featured in this account and some individuals are named, we have not mentioned all of the many individuals who have been important to the buffalo restoration program by name. This could improve this account significantly, but would require significant outreach and discussion and might best be led from within the community.*

*We also conducted limited research in newspapers and available public records. We have not sought access to records from the buffalo program nor from the Tribal Executive Board, and note that these would greatly improve the account. This document could be most beneficial to the members of the Fort Peck tribes if it included an appendix with key public documents including tribal resolutions, historic and present buffalo management plans and an archive of past news articles.*

*Julia H. Haggerty*

*Robert McAnally*

*Elizabeth Rink*

When serious conversations about a tribal buffalo herd gained momentum on the Fort Peck Reservation in the 1990s, it had been over a century since wild buffalo had roamed the area. Buffalo were lost to Fort Peck during the ‘starving years’ of the early 1880s when the brutality of U.S. policies towards indigenous people and the land manifested in widespread suffering. Two events in 1883 signaled the severity of the situation for the Fort Peck peoples—the banning of Sioux religious ceremonies by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior and the killing of the last buffalo in northeastern Montana (Smith, 128-130).

In the early 1900s, Native American stewardship of wild buffalo persisted in a few locations, including in western Montana on the present-day Flathead Reservation and on the Philips Ranch near present-day Pierre, South Dakota. Historian Ken Zontek calls the year 1926 the year “when the physical relationship between Indians and buffalo broke” in the sense that Native Americans were no longer in the position of primary stewards of wild buffalo (Zontek, 65). Nonetheless, even in the absence of the physical animals, the commitment to buffalo stewardship was unbroken. Stories, prayers, songs and other practices kept the importance of buffalo alive across generations of Sioux and Assiniboine families at Fort Peck.

### **Momentum for a Tribal Buffalo Ranch, 1987-1999**

The possibility of the tribe acquiring and stewarding a herd gained traction in the 1990s for several reasons. More and more buffalo were present on the Great Plains. Interest in commercial buffalo ranching took off in the 1980s as ranchers pursued new markets and diversification in the wake of that decade’s devastating economic crisis. The majority of ranches produced cattalo or beefalo—hybrids bred primarily for the quality of the meat—and used systems mimicking conventional livestock production. Some of these ranches were visible from the roadside. When people from Fort Peck travelled around the region and other states in the 1970s and 1980s, some would see buffalo. On these road trips, some parents often made a point of stopping near buffalo ranches to pray, enjoy the sight and point the animals out to their children.

More importantly, Native American self-determination efforts were in full bloom in the 1960s and 1970s, supporting the public celebration of cultural traditions and emphasizing repatriation of tribal homelands. A re-emergence of cultural traditions and ceremony (many of which had gone ‘underground’ as a function of

1882-83 | Last buffalo killed on Fort Peck lands; tremendous suffering

1880s-1980s | Buffalo relations honored through prayer and ceremony, keeping buffalo connection alive

having been forbidden in school or outright banned by U.S. law) in reservation life accompanied these trends. The gradual, but powerful reinstatement of ceremony and indigenous culture as organizing principles for individuals, families and communities on the Fort Peck reservation continues into the present-day. Naturally, what ‘tradition’ means and how people incorporate it into their lives has many variations. Furthermore, the ability for non-native, outside researchers to witness and understand this is clearly has limits. That said a familiar narrative emerged in our interviews regarding the influence of rediscovering cultural traditions and emerging as champions of buffalo restoration. Several interviewees described connecting to ceremony after an absence from the reservation community—a lapse in residence or a lapse in spirit brought on by substance abuse. Reconnecting through prayer and participation in sweat lodges, Sun Dances and other ceremonies was seen as facilitating a process with re-connecting with the place and people of Fort Peck. As individuals rediscovered, or learned for the first time, about buffalo and their central role in Sioux and Assiniboine traditions, they also became invested in having buffalo on the reservation. Other buffalo supporters from the reservation have benefitted from uninterrupted knowledge of and spiritual commitment to buffalo.

Beyond Fort Peck, Native American self-determination in the 1970s and 1980s had led to great success in establishing buffalo herds on tribal lands. By 1992, there were approximately 26 tribes raising some 3,600 buffalo on tribal lands across the United States and Canada (Zontek, 69). Fort Peck was not yet among these tribes, however. And by the end of the 1980s, some Fort Peck people were wondering why not. A key moment for the history of the tribes’ buffalo program involves the summer drug and alcohol free youth camp-outs developed by councilman Eugene Culbertson and hosted in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Menu planning for the big end-of-camp community feed raised the question, why not buffalo instead of the standard pork or beef? (“5-year management plan,” 2001). In reaching out to other tribes about buffalo meat availability, members of tribal council and staff learned that many other tribes, including in Montana, had buffalo herds. According to a 2001 local newspaper article, Leroy Comes Last, Curley Youpee and Abby Ogle then began serious conversations about acquiring and hosting a buffalo herd (“Buffalo return home,” 2001).

1990 stands out as an especially important year in the history of the tribal buffalo program. Perhaps as a result of having reached out on

1970s-1980s | Indigenous people around U.S. and Canada establish buffalo herds

1980s | Beginning of discussions about acquiring a herd for Fort Peck

1990 | Theodore Roosevelt National Park offers 50 buffalo to Fort Peck Tribes

the subject of obtaining buffalo meat, in 1990 tribal staff received a phone call from a representative of Theodore Roosevelt National Park, offering 50 park buffalo to the Fort Peck tribes. This offer prompted members of the Tribal Executive Board and staff to begin to make a serious inventory of the tribal rangelands to assess the possibility of devoting specific pastures to buffalo. This was not a small or straightforward task. Livestock ranching and farming have long been dominant land uses in the area, and leases of tribally-owned range units form an important component of many livestock operations. Another obstacle to finding a place for buffalo is the highly fragmented nature of land ownership across the 2 million acres of reservation lands, with communal and private land interspersed and some private ownership demonstrating extensive fractionation.

Indeed, the visible public controversy about conflicts between a tribal buffalo herd and ranching on the reservation dates to the very first formal conversations about using tribal range units for buffalo pasture. The controversy was probably inevitable, but was certainly accelerated by the decision by a Billings Gazette reporter to publish a news article about her chance observations of a tribal council meeting that featured discussion about finding a place for buffalo. This was a meeting prompted by the offer from Theodore Roosevelt National Park. Once the serious interest in buffalo was made public, ranchers anxious about losing range units and or about risks of buffalo mixing with domestic cattle began to register their concerns with elected tribal officials. That opponents included both tribal and non-tribal members suggests the social complexity of this issue for the Fort Peck Tribes. The political pressure from ranchers opposed to buffalo was not insignificant and contributed to the length of time—nine years—it took to ready a secure a place for a buffalo ranch on the reservation.

Within the context of the challenges to establishing a herd, 1990 is also important because it marks the establishment of the Intertribal Bison Council (ITBC). The ITBC a formal network of Indian nations from across the United States to share expertise and resources for tribal buffalo management. With the growth in tribal buffalo stewardship in the 1980s, a small buffalo-focused interest group had emerged within the membership of the Native American Fish and Wildlife Society (NAFWS). (NAFWS was established in 1982 as a national organization focused on assisting tribes in exercising sovereign rights to develop and protect wildlife resources.) The NAFWS buffalo interest group expanded to include

representatives of nineteen different tribes and establish the Intertribal Bison Cooperative in 1990. With congressional support, the ITBC launched an effort to coordinate and assist tribes in returning buffalo to tribal lands. The ITBC has focused since this time on securing and sharing financial, technical and other resources that assist member tribes in developing successful and self-sufficient buffalo management programs.

Fort Peck was represented at the very first gathering of emissaries from nineteen different Indian nations in Rapid City in late 1990, the meeting that launched the ITBC. The ITBC has been essential to the success of the Fort Peck buffalo program over the 25 years that have passed since that first meeting. As one observer of the early history of the program notes, “I always like to believe that we energized the interest in buffalo from those meetings [the first ITBC meeting in Rapid City]. From then on people were just talking about buffalo.” But it took time for these ideas to result in a formal program. Initial plans for a Fort Peck submission of a grant proposal to the ITBC in 1991 did not win the necessary approval of the Tribal Executive Board.

The challenge of designating tribal range units for a buffalo ranch was more a substantial barrier politically than the idea of hosting buffalo, according to interviews. Government staff and elected officials continued to meet to discuss the buffalo issue formally and informally. But still, it was unclear how the Tribal Executive Board could move forward with acquiring land. A solution eventually emerged in 1999, when local rancher and enrolled tribal member Val Smith agreed to shift cattle off land she and her husband leased from the tribes so that their ranch could be the base for a tribal buffalo operation. These 5,800 acres became the core of the tribe’s buffalo operation and what is now called the Turtle Mound Buffalo Ranch.

According to interviews, with the fundamental cornerstone of a place for the buffalo in place, there was little opposition within the Tribal Executive Board to passing a resolution to support moving the plan ahead. **The resolution passed in 2000.** The ranch managers, employees from the Fort Peck Tribes Planning Department and the Fort Peck Tribes Fish and Game Department tackled the issue of installing buffalo-ready fencing and corrals in the midst of concerted fund raising. The sources of support for the early years of the buffalo program mentioned in interviews include tribal funds from BIA P.L. 93-638 contracts, ITBC grants and a grant from the

1990 | 19 Native American nations gather to launch the ITBC in Rapid City, South Dakota

1999 | Ranchers Dick and Val Smith offer their ranch as a base for the Buffalo Ranch, this later becomes the Turtle Mound Buffalo Ranch

2000 | Tribal Executive Board resolution to move buffalo program forward

Washington-based Murr Foundation.

### **Arrival of Fort Belknap Buffalo, 2001**

Early in 2001, the Fort Peck Tribes were in a position to welcome 100 buffalo purchased from neighboring Fort Belknap (“Bison return home,” 2001). 70 arrived in late January, followed by another 30 soon after. Fort Belknap’s buffalo program dates to the mid-1970s. By the end of the 1990s, approximately 400 buffalo ranged over a 22,000-acre area. The Fort Belknap management program evolved toward emphasizing the free-ranging, wildlife characteristics of buffalo (in contrast to viewing them as livestock) and was recognized as a model of good management (Zontek, 93-95). Fort Belknap had also implemented creative programming focused on the social and health benefits of buffalo, such as the Buffalo Watch Program that focused on using time spent with buffalo to address public health issues such as alcoholism and domestic abuse (Ibid).

In addition to preparing the ranch facilities for the arrival of the new tribal buffalo herd, attention was devoted to spiritual and ceremonial activities focused on honoring and welcoming the buffalo people. The following is an excerpt from an interview about how the first buffalo to come from Fort Belknap to Fort Peck were honored.

But before we [went to get the buffalo from Fort Belknap] we had to get our traditional people involved, the ceremonial people. And we only had a couple. [Lists four individuals.] So we purchased a buffalo and had meetings with them, and had a little plan, a strategy, of when they came back to have a ceremony bringing the buffalo home. And that ceremony was a day long in a teepee. We smoked a pipe. We said prayers. We welcomed them back, their spirit first, to come back here, to see if it was the right place, and that they would stay there.

...

I said [to an elder], ‘How are we going to welcome these buffalo back?’ ... [The elder] says, ‘Well, I had this dream. I want to share this dream with you.’ And we spoke about it. And he says, ‘We’re going to welcome them back with sage and tobacco, but we’re going to do it the traditional way.’ So we rolled up a corn husk pipe. And I watched him do it. And there was a couple other people that came from town and we kind of announced it when we were bringing the herd back, but it was during the week so a lot of people were working.

And when the semi finally pulled in . . . . It was kind of

January and February 2001 | 100 buffalo arrive at Fort Peck, purchased from Fort Belknap

February 2001 | Welcoming ceremony for new Fort Peck buffalo herd

beat-up and everything, but, you know... And we backed the semi-trailer up there. And I remember this day because it was so calm, and [the elder] had a bag of sage and he sprinkled sage on that big semi-trailer wrack coming down into the corral system. I asked him, I said, 'What's that about?' He said, 'We're going to comfort their hooves as they're coming back home.' I said, 'Okay.' So he said, 'Go ahead and open the gate,' and they opened the gate. And he said, 'Don't rush them. Don't spook them. Just let them, you know...' And he said, 'We're going to smoke this corn husk, just me and you.' So we started smoking it and it was pretty rough tobacco.

But the buffalo just started walking out of that big stock trailer, just taking their time, smelling the sage, walk, get on the ground. They wouldn't run; they would just take their time. Because there was horses -- and they were kind of hesitant about it. But all the buffalo made their way out. It took us probably about two hours for them just to come out, because [the elder] said, "Don't chase them. Just let them walk." So that's what we did. ... The next day another semi came, that half a load, and we did the same thing--put sage on there, we did the same ceremony, new corn husk, because it was a new day he'd said. So we unloaded them, and then the people came up. ... Then they sang some songs. Because he didn't want the herd to be mixed up; he wanted them together as one for them to start singing the coming-home ceremonial songs for them. He didn't want to do one herd one day. Because they're family, so that's what he did.

Elders interviewed by the newspaper included Carole Spotted Bird, Christine First and Chuck Eagleman. Larry Wetsit also provided poignant comments to the newspaper. (Full transcripts of the news articles published when the herds returned in January 2001 are provided in the Appendix).

During the days that the Fort Belknap buffalo were arriving (they arrived over three days), the assembled elders discussed how to continue the practice of honoring and celebrating the buffalo in the future. They built an arbor and later hosted a powwow and feed.

We do not have access to early planning documents that discuss specific intentions for the buffalo program in the early 2000s. According to interviews and reports in *Wotaniin Wowapi*, the plan was developed by a Colorado-based wildlife consultant named Craig Knowles. The plan focused on growing the herd to a size that would allow harvesting for the USDA's commodity distribution program, a program developed to facilitate the slaughter and distribution of buffalo for the purposes of reservation food systems.

2001 | Tribal Executive Board adopts first 5-year plan for buffalo program

The Tribal Executive Board approved the buffalo ranch management plan in late June of 2001. Interviews suggest that different people brought different expectations or multiple expectations to the program—that it could support tourism and economic development (even in 2001, there was talk of a herd near the highway), that it would provide healthy meat for distribution, and that it would support educational and spiritual practices. In the early 2000s, the Turtle Mound Buffalo Ranch provided horsemanship training for a Cultural Diversion Activities program and ranch managers looked to expand to buffalo-based activities. Fee hunting was an alternative but not an explicit commitment in the original management plan. When the Fort Belknap buffalo first arrived, they lived as one herd. According to one interviewee: “We just wanted to have a herd here so the school kids, college students, the elders could come out. And we never did discuss a culture herd or another herd, you know, or any kind of herds; it was just one herd that came back with the people.”

2001-2004 | Early days of buffalo program

The first few years on the buffalo ranch were an experience in trial and error. At first, as they roamed, the buffalo helped their managers learn the land. Ranchers would call and say the buffalo were in the wrong pasture, on non-tribal land, and the managers—the ranch operators Val and Dick Smith supported by Fish and Game staff—would respond by moving the buffalo and often restoring or replacing fence. This was not a small job. Indeed, it quickly became apparent that the costs of maintaining the buffalo ranch facilities would be high, prompting the Tribal Executive Board to direct the buffalo program to implement a fee-hunting system, starting in 2003. Val Smith left the buffalo program in 2004.

2004 | Buffalo program implements fee hunting as a source of program revenue

The basic idea for offering a fee hunt was to make the buffalo program self-sustaining financially while also ensuring that the program would make a small number of buffalo available on an annual basis for donations for meat distribution and feeds. This basic model continues to inform the program, although a major overhaul of the buffalo management program began in 2014. Since 2003, hunting has been and continues to be important as a revenue source for the Fort Peck buffalo program, providing revenue to match grants from various sources and or to repay revolving loans available through the ITBC. Wildlife conservation groups have been important sources of funding and technical support as the program has expanded and their interest increased significantly with the opportunity to make Fort Peck a sanctuary for the troubled Yellowstone buffalo.



Direct responsibility for the buffalo ranch has remained with the Fish and Game Department since 2004. For much of the buffalo ranch's history, the Fish and Game Department reported directly to the Tribal Executive Board; however, the Tribes reinstated the Fish and Game Commission in 2014 after a 10-year hiatus. The 20-person Commission advises on and approves Fish and Game Department activities, especially in regards to wildlife harvest quotas. In the case of the buffalo ranch, the Commission has strong interests in understanding and providing input on the amount of buffalo offered for donation from the ranch for community purposes. The Fish and Game Department worked with a buffalo management plan written in 2004 until 2014, when a major overhaul of the plan began. The new plan, issued in late 2015 and developed with extensive community and technical consultation, serves as a point of reference for the Commission, the Fish and Game Department and the Tribal Executive Board.

#### **Fort Peck as Sanctuary for Yellowstone Bison**

Despite the fact that Yellowstone National Park is one of only two places in the United States where genetically-pure bison rebounded from near extermination, Yellowstone bison have been in need of a separate geographic sanctuary for nearly forty years. Due to perceived conflicts between the livestock industry's brucellosis-free status and the risk of transmission of brucellosis from bison, Montana does not tolerate free-roaming bison within its borders. The result is that for years the Park Service has been forced to come up with solutions to keep bison from migrating out of the Yellowstone National Park in winter along corridors that lead them to lower ground outside the Park's borders. Past policy solutions have included culling animals in the Park, attempting to haze the animals to keep them in the Park, using public hunting to cull animals on state land in Montana, back to using federal agents to cull the animals. In the 1950s, it was standard practice to distribute culled animals to some Indian agencies and boarding schools (although Fort Peck does not appear to have been one of these places). Carcass distribution ceased in the late 1960s. The next opportunity that tribes had to access Yellowstone bison occurred in the 1990s when some tribes were invited to participate in culling that was executed by park personnel. Some meat came to Fort Peck via hunters invited to Yellowstone for this purpose.

By the 1990s, international and national concern was directed at the land and wildlife managers in charge of what had turned into an absurd situation, with most outside observers fundamentally

2014 | Tribal Fish and Game Commission reinstated

2013-2015 | Development of a new management plan for the buffalo program

1970s-1990s | Yellowstone National Park system for managing bison bounces around; tribes have sporadic access to hunt or collect carcasses on Park's northern boundary

objecting to what looked like mass slaughter of an iconic wildlife species. For its part, the management community involved has been attempting to devise a policy solution since 1990, but as it involves numerous agencies with diverse missions working under a complex umbrella of state and federal policies, the process has been slow-moving and often inconclusive. Native American leadership and perspectives were central to the search for a humane solution to the bison culling issue. Despite the fact that various tribal nations, including Fort Peck, participated on occasion in hunting or slaughtering culled bison on the Park's boundary, many Native Americans fiercely objected to the mass culling and the intolerance of bison migration across political boundaries.

The winter of 1996-1997 was a pivotal year for the public debate about bison. During the winter of 1996-97, a harsh winter resulted in Yellowstone bison migrating outside the park into the north and west. Due to Montana's zero tolerance policy, 1,052 bison were slaughtered that winter. The news of the slaughter traveled widely, thanks in part to protests mounted by Native Americans and non-native environmental groups. Hundreds of Sioux people rode on horseback to Gardiner, on the Yellowstone National Park, in the middle of winter to make a protest. Others traveled to Helena to make their voices heard in state government, including then tribal chairman Caleb Shields. Notable as only the third time in history that a tribal representative addressed a joint assembly of the Montana legislature, Shields' address was focused on the state of the Indian Nations ("Putting bison on tribal land," 1997). He made a strong statement about the relationship of Yellowstone bison to the well-being of Native American tribes in Montana:

I speak for all Montana Indian nations when I say that the slaughter of this herd must stop. The killing is out of hand. Hundreds of buffalo have been slaughtered without even attempting to test them for brucellosis.

Our cultures are different on this issue. Under our religion, buffalo are respected. They are good medicine. Their skulls and hides still adorn our most sacred lodges. We will dance, sign and pray to them. What is occurring outside of Yellowstone Park is disrespectful. (Shields, quoted in Zontek, 104).

Partnerships were important in this movement for management change. In mid-1996 the ITBC and the National Wildlife Federation joined together and initiated a dialogue about Brucellosis and bison management in Yellowstone. The following year produced a Memorandum of Understanding between the two organizations

Winter of 1996-1997 | 1,052 bison slaughtered on Yellowstone's Northern Boundary; Indian nations ride to Gardiner in protest

1996 | ITBC and National Wildlife Federation initiate partnership to campaign for bison management reform for Yellowstone National Park

February 12, 1997 | Tribal chairman Caleb Shields addresses joint session of Montana legislature, calling for a stop to the slaughter of Yellowstone bison

focused on two goals: “The first goal was to reestablish management of North American bison as one of the premier wildlife species of the West, by restoring bison to those tribal and public land habitats capable of supporting their long-term survival. The second goal was to enhance the availability of wild bison to Native Americans for cultural and subsistence uses.”<sup>1</sup> Beyond this, “The ultimate goal was a public-to-tribal transfer of Yellowstone bison and then a tribal-to-public transfer of healthy bison to reestablish wild bison on public lands.”<sup>2</sup> This was the first time a tribal organization had formally joined with a national conservation agency. The MOU occurred at a pivotal moment. As the bison slaughter of 1996-97 was underway, the ITBC and NWF were able to raise public awareness and use the event as a catalyst for management change. From their partnership, they developed what they originally called the “Seven-Point Plan” which soon became the “Citizens’ Plan” as more conservation organizations joined the movement. Importantly, as the influence of the Citizens’ Plan grew, the opportunity for tribes to receive relocated bison was moving closer and closer to reality.

As founding and sustaining members of the ITBC, the Fort Peck Tribes were attentive to the developments in the Yellowstone National Park bison management planning process. As the opportunity to pursue a model of transferring brucellosis-free buffalo to tribal lands beyond the Park was emerging as a serious consideration, the Fort Peck Fish and Game Department was working to make the buffalo ranch a potential cornerstone of such an effort. Acquiring and improving more rangeland leases supported this vision, as did participating in the many meetings and planning sessions necessary to work with the state and federal agencies. In 2005-2006, the State of Montana Department of Fish Wildlife and Parks and the federal agency APHIS began an experimental program to operate a quarantine facility in order to provide tribal governments with live, Brucellosis free bison. After three years of operation, cooperating agencies agreed the model was working and that some bison could be transferred from the facility

1997 | ITBC and NWF release the “Citizens’ Plan” focusing on public-to-tribal transfer of live Yellowstone bison as an alternative to slaughter

2005 | First bison quarantined near Gardiner

2007 | Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks deems quarantined bison safe for live relocation

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Torbit, Louis LaRose, “A Commentary on Bison and Cultural Restoration: Partnership Between the National Wildlife Federation and the Intertribal Bison Cooperative”, *Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and Social Sciences*, University of Nebraska – Lincoln (April 1, 2001), pp 175

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. pp 176

<sup>3</sup> “Interagency Bison Management Plan”, July 1, 2008 – June 30, 2009, <http://ibmp.info/library.php>

<sup>4</sup> The delay in the immediate transfer to Fort Belknap from Fort Peck was a result of a restraining order against bison transfer issued by the advocacy group Citizens for Balanced Use in May of 2012 against bison transfer from Fort Peck

to tribes prepared to accept them.<sup>3</sup> The leading candidates for receiving relocated buffalo in 2007-2008 were the Wind River, Fort Belknap and Fort Peck reservations.

Recognizing the heightened scrutiny and sensitivity that accompanied this historic development, the Fish and Game Department developed a proposal to develop dedicated range and fencing facilities. In the actual event, the Department ended up developing two new range units to accommodate the concerns of the State of Montana. When the Yellowstone buffalo arrived, they would live separately from the existing buffalo herd. The Yellowstone buffalo would become the cultural herd, the Fort Belknap buffalo one single business herd. This distinction was justified on the basis of the unique genetic heritage of the Yellowstone bison, as these animals are understood to be one of only two populations in the United States that escaped in-breeding with cattle (IUCN report, 2010). This distinct genetic heritage and its importance to global biodiversity is a major priority for some of the large conservation organizations that donated substantial resources to help support the Fort Peck buffalo program from the early 2000s to the present, including the Defenders of Wildlife, Wildlife Conservation Society, and the World Wildlife Foundation. Our interviews demonstrated a wide range of perspectives about the genetic basis for a distinct cultural and business herds, we develop this theme in the last section of this document, Perspectives on the Buffalo Ranch.

The Fish and Game program had worked hard to develop a new fenced area in response to first learning that the quarantined bison were available to tribes in 2009—there was new pasture secured and fenced in 2010 (Range Unit 62). The program encountered state wildlife managers who were not yet ready to act. The Fish and Game Department was disappointed to learn that the first bison to be released from the Yellowstone quarantine would go first to Ted Turner’s Flying D Ranch and made their disappointment known among state leaders, including Governor Brian Schweitzer. Ultimately, Governor Schweitzer indicated his support for ensuring that Fort Peck would receive the next available bison from quarantine, but insisted on fencing a new range unit entirely with electric fencing. Range Unit 63 was quickly secured and fenced to State of Montana standards with support from a Department of Interior grant. In March 2012, the Fort Peck Tribes signed a

2009 - 2010 | expansion of buffalo ranch and preparation for Yellowstone buffalo

2010 | First Yellowstone bison released from quarantine go to Ted Turner’s Flying D Ranch

2012 | Fort Peck Tribes sign Memorandum of Understanding with Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks to acquire 64 bison from Yellowstone National Park

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<sup>3</sup> “Interagency Bison Management Plan”, July 1, 2008 – June 30, 2009, <http://ibmp.info/library.php>

Memorandum of Understanding with Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks stating that the tribes would take 64 bison from the Yellowstone National Park quarantine facility.

Ultimately, the tribes welcomed 63 bison that were retrieved from the quarantine facility in Gardiner, Montana on March 19, 2012. The buffalo arrived during a spring snowstorm and in the dark of night. The event was conducted with significantly more national and international attention than the previous arrival of buffalo in 2001, and numerous officials from national conservation groups were in attendance. In addition more tribal members were involved in formally welcoming the buffalo to the reservation than in 2001. Members of the Assiniboine nation waited for the buffalo at the bridge over the Missouri River at the entrance to the reservation, where they drummed and sang traditional songs. At the Turtle Mound Buffalo Ranch, Sioux people performed a blessing and drummed and sang when the buffalo arrived. To a person, those in attendance describe the arrival of the Yellowstone buffalo that night as powerful, inspiring and deeply scared.

A press conference and public meeting on March 21st gave Governor Schweitzer and tribal leadership the opportunity to discuss the significance of the event to the tribes, the state and the nation. *Indian Country today* quoted Schweitzer in an article on the bison relocation:

‘When they took the buffalo from the Indian people they took the heart and soul of the Indian people,’ he said. ‘They’re back and they’re back to stay this time. They’re back to be that symbol of pride, not only of the Indian people but this entire country.’

Schweitzer called the event ‘a historic opportunity to repopulate this special place on the planet with genetically pure bison.’ ... ‘These are the bison that will be the breeding stock to repopulate the entire western United States, in every place that people desire to have them,’ he said. (McNeel).

Fort Peck’s initiative to host a buffalo herd from Yellowstone National Park met with fierce resistance from northeastern Montana’s agricultural community. Because Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks wrapped tribal buffalo herds in Montana into the process for statewide buffalo management plans, numerous public meetings and planning events occurred that required attention and presence of leaders from Fort Peck and the Fort Peck Fish and Game Department. As the meeting rooms could be filled with non-Indians

March 19, 2012 | 63 Yellowstone bison arrive at Fort Peck at night during a spring storm. They are welcomed by a gathering of Assiniboine people at the bridge over the Missouri River at the entrance to the reservation and by Sioux relatives at the Turtle Mound Buffalo Ranch.

March 21, 2012 | Celebration and press conference at Poplar, attended by Governor of Montana and many guests

opposed to bison restoration on tribal lands, representative of the tribes had to be determined and refuse to be intimidated.

Describing a meeting at the state capitol, Floyd Azure said:

When I first got in as chairman the first job ... I had, was to go to Helena and argue for the bison. That was my first job. And as chairman I was scared, you know?

I went up there, I took my wife with me, we went up there together, walked in that office, or in that meeting room, and looked around--we were the only two Indians in there. And, I mean, and we sat there and we listened to these people. And, you know, we had to sit through all this and listen to both sides argue.

Then they opened up for public discussion and I sat there and I raised my hand, and I just asked the chairman, I told him flat out, "I want to be the last one to speak. When no one else wants to speak I want to be the last one." I said, "That way I can say my part, anybody has any questions I'll be right there to answer them."

So I waited, and I argued with them, and I told them flat out, "This is a Native American cultural issue that we need to take care of. We as Indian people want to take care of these animals. They took care of us for generations. We want to give back to them."

Speaking up for the Fort Peck interests also included attendance at local public meetings in places such as Glasgow. Public records from such scoping meetings document the hostility of the assembled farmers and ranchers, something that participants in our interviews who were at the meetings recall vividly (Northern Ag Network, 2012; MTFWP 2012). The interviewees also described the strong and effective statements of tribal members who spoke, including people such as Iris Grey Bull. Others were more likely to offer silent, spiritual support like the kind described in this interview except:

Like Robbie took a load of us to Glasgow one time, you know, couple of times. And I'd go, but I'm not the kind that's going to shout and scream, you know? I'll be there, you know, but I think I have more to offer by being there spiritually, you know, taking a spiritual essence over there, you know? All of the time that we were over in Glasgow it was scary. It was really scary that one time that we went. All those ranchers and white people were just loaded, that school auditorium, you know? And I could just feel that anger right there, you know? And I was thinking that the best way to participate and get this done was to pray for each one of our speakers. And so that's what I did--I

prayed for all of our speakers.

Keeping tabs on the public process around bison relocation and ensuring that tribal perspectives were represented were critical actions in maintaining the path for buffalo to return to the reservation. Fort Peck Sioux and Assiniboine people and their leaders drew on personal and collective confidence to persist in this path, despite vocal opposition that was often mixed with strands of outright racism.

In August of 2013, 36 of the Fort Peck bison from Yellowstone were moved to Fort Belknap from Fort Peck, following up on the terms of the original proposal that both the Sioux and Assiniboine Tribes of Fort Peck and the Assiniboine and Gros Ventre Tribes of Fort Belknap would share in receipt of Yellowstone bison.<sup>4</sup> Subsequently, Fort Peck prevailed among a number of candidates interested in receiving bison that were quarantined on Turner's property and deemed safe for transfer by Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks in 2014. These members of the cultural herd arrived on November 13, 2014, again welcomed by an expectant and happy crowd (Chaney, 2014).

In 2014, Fort Peck also played an important role in moving buffalo restoration forward as a signatory to an historic treaty, the Northern Tribes Buffalo Treaty. Representatives of the Blackfeet Nation, Blood Tribe, Siksika Nation, Piikani Nation, the Assiniboine and Gros Ventre Tribes of Fort Belknap Reservation, the Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes of Fort Peck Reservation, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, and the Tsuu T'ina Nation signed the treaty on September 23, 2014 in Browning, Montana. The treaty, recognized as the first trans-boundary treaty in 150 years, focuses on restoring bison to the 6.3 million acres under the control of these indigenous nations. In 2015, Fort Peck hosted a celebratory re-signing of the treaty as part of its community-wide buffalo summit (see below).

As of 2015, the Turtle Mound Buffalo Ranch supported roughly 115 animals in the business herd size and approximately 250 animals in the cultural herd. The current acreage of the ranch is 25,000 and includes range units converted from cattle leases as well

August 2013 | Fort Peck transfers 36 Yellowstone bison to Fort Belknap after nearly a year of delay due to court injunction

November 13-15, 2014 | 139 Yellowstone bison arrive after four years on Ted Turner's property outside of Bozeman

September 23, 2014 | Fort Peck joins northern plains nations from U.S. and Canada as signatories to Northern Tribes Buffalo Treaty

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<sup>4</sup> The delay in the immediate transfer to Fort Belknap from Fort Peck was a result of a restraining order against bison transfer secured by the advocacy group Citizens for Balanced Use in May of 2012 against bison transfer from Fort Peck to Belknap. On June 19, 2013 the court overturned the injunction stating that the Citizens for Balanced Use filed on erroneous grounds. "Montana Supreme Court Case", June 19, 2013, [http://leg.mt.gov/content/Committees/Interim/2013-2014/State-Tribal-Relations/Meetings/Oct-2013/Bison\\_MT%20Supreme%20Court.pdf](http://leg.mt.gov/content/Committees/Interim/2013-2014/State-Tribal-Relations/Meetings/Oct-2013/Bison_MT%20Supreme%20Court.pdf)

as deeded land acquired by the Tribal Executive Board, including Val Smith's original base ranch. Fish and Game Department is hopeful that the current tribal buy-back program, which focused on using Cobell settlement funds for the acquisition of fractionated land holdings, can contribute deeded acreage that is adjacent to the buffalo ranch. The Fish and Game Department, drawing on support from allies in the World Wildlife Foundation, recently updated its Buffalo Management Plan, with an eye on ensuring the long-term financial sustainability of the ranch and taking stock of the community's priorities for the buffalo program.

In addition to the growing program within the Fish and Game Department and the expansion of the buffalo herd, a strong community-based movement has coalesced around celebrating the Fort Peck buffalo. Today, two formal programs are at the center of this, the Fort Peck Language and Culture Program and the Pté Group. These programs have developed numerous educational and cultural activities and programs to support the integration of the buffalo herd into community life (for a summary see Smith et. al., 2015). A highlight of recent activities included community-wide "buffalo summit" held in September of 2015 over four days. Our interviews and observations suggest that there are also many individuals and families that have incorporated the cultural and business herds into their spiritual and daily lives, visiting the ranch for personal and sacred reasons and acquiring buffalo meat as well as body parts for use in art, craft and ceremony.

### **Perspectives on the Buffalo Program**

The Fish and Game Program, with MSU and World Wildlife Foundation, recently surveyed community members about their hopes and expectations in regards to the Fort Peck Buffalo program. The results were incorporated into the 2015 Buffalo Management Plan. In our interviews of 18 individuals influential in the restoration of buffalo to Fort Peck, we also asked about perspectives on the buffalo program. Our interviews were open-ended and encouraged a conversation between the participants and the research team. As such, they allowed individuals to elaborate on thoughts about buffalo management, which some did, while others had little to say on the matter. We identified five themes that emerged from the answers that our interviewees provided when asked to share their thoughts current buffalo program. Our own interpretation of each of these themes follows below. These perspectives may complement and provide texture to the survey findings, but we do not claim them to be representative of any



perspectives beyond the small group of people interviewed for this project.

### **Youth & healing**

Directing the buffalo's potential for healing and teaching surfaced as universal concerns in our interviews. "All youth should be around the buffalo. There's a healing," was the simple explanation of one interviewee. Another explained that the buffalo have teachings s/he understood to be vital to securing a hopeful future for the next generation.

...[t]he sooner I think we can get our young children exposed to our culturally-relevant practices, teachings, you know, the values that we strive to live by, you know, expose them to what that means to be compassionate, to have respect, integrity, all these virtues that we strive to live by as Native people, we had the help of the buffalo, you know? With the buffalo demonstrating those virtues--that strength, that compassion, you know, that they exhibit with each other. And once those younger children can witness that and experience that, and know that they are Dakota, they are Nakota, that that's who they are, and that's how they should act, that's how they should conduct themselves. And the buffalo can only be a positive effect to that end, and to that means, to change things in our community, on our reservation, you know?

Speaking about the rationale for the state to support buffalo restoration at Fort Peck, another participant offered these comments:

...[W]e not only needed these animals or these people back with us for the health benefits, the meat, but we needed them back for our spirituality benefit, and maybe even our mental health, mental issues, or societal issues like alcoholism, you know, and suicide, things like that. They could help with that. ... We have this connection with the buffalo people that will help us make better lives and make our children see that connection.

Interviews suggest that activities and facilities that would enable children to visit the buffalo ranch, either as part of school groups or with their families are important priorities. Continuing to grow and support curricular activities that draw on the presence of the buffalo—at all grade levels—also surfaced as a shared value within our interview cohort.

### **Food & materials**

There is strong support for moving forward with systems to distribute buffalo meat among tribal members. Some frustration exists about what is understood to be a large cost associated with harvesting a buffalo: “They're not available to us unless you have \$1000, yes, unless you're a hunter coming in. That's not fair.” And the value of having access to a buffalo for individuals for ceremonial and cultural purposes cannot be overstated. In the following quotation, one of our interview participants describes how their family made a buffalo harvested from the ranch a centerpiece of a vital family ritual.

[I]t was an honor of our grandmother, her passing, her four-year feast, four years after. So we did it at a powwow and we did it in the afternoon so we could take some time. And we told about her and her Indian name and all of that. And it was an honor song. But we had previously killed and skinned and cooked the buffalo. And we brought every bit of it out there--tripe and everything--even though we kind of wanted to keep that, not everybody. And we just said, "Elders first," somebody said a big prayer for everybody... They all came out; everybody was respectful of each other as far as I could tell and took just enough for them personally. And what was left over we asked those elders from out of town to come take. And within an hour-and-a-half, gone. And everybody came and shook our hands. And my brother's got the head--he's had it mounted. And the hide, one of my cousins bought the hide at their own expense and had it tanned. But the last time people were able to get buffalo from our herd, instead of just a powwow group or whatever, there was some for sale. They offered some for sale, the tribal members. But the price was around \$600, or \$700, or \$800. And then if you paid the tribes then they would kill the buffalo for you, okay, bleed it out, and then you had to take care of the head, and the hide, and the meat.

As this description suggests, there is strong demand for buffalo for use in family and clan celebrations. This description also serves as a reminder that those tribal members who are disconnected from traditional social networks and the associated ceremonial practices may be unlikely to demand buffalo or have opportunities to interact with them in this way.

There is also strong interest in continuing to support distribution of meat to elders and families through a reservation-wide program. This approach complements the disposition of buffalo to families and clans by ensuring distribution focuses on need and prioritizes access to the meat for elders and diabetics. One participant said, “I

mean, me, I would love to drive around and give elders meat, you know? That would totally make their day.”

### **Separate herds**

The maintenance of separate herds was a topic of discussion in many of our interviews. This was not so much a controversial as an interesting and sometimes confusing concept for our informants. Most of the interviewees understood the premise of preserving the unique genetic heritage of the Yellowstone buffalo. As one person put it, the Yellowstone buffalo are special because of their direct linkage to pre-European history.

I know the scientific reason, you know? They want to keep them pure, genetically pure and all that. So that's the last vestige of the real Tatanka, you know? These others, their genetics have been changed by science, and they're used for hides, and meat, and things like that, ceremonies and stuff. But Yellowstone buffalo, that's a real special ceremony.

At the same time, some see in the separate herds a separation that reminds them of the separation on the reservation between Sioux and Assiniboine that can sometimes be a source of tension. Asked if s/he thought the buffalo would continue as two separate herds, one participant answered this way.

No, I don't think so. It's just like our tribe, the Sioux and the Assiniboine but now we're all together. We're all inter-married so it's one now, one big happy family. And I think that's what is going to happen here with our buffalo. You can't separate them, they're all buffalo. You can't differentiate between one kind. I think they will all be together. Should be.

In another interview, a participant spoke about hopes that the buffalo from Yellowstone could help restore the bloodlines of the descendants of the Fort Belknap herd toward a more 'pure' state.

### **Management & transparency**

When asked, most our respondents had only vague information about the buffalo program and how it operates. This struck us as significant for a couple of reasons. Firstly, few people appreciate the expense of operating the ranch. Understanding the costs of operation could contribute to clarity about how the program is run with regard to the contribution of fee hunting and other sources of funding to the overall program. In addition, there may be a missed opportunity in this limited knowledge of the many relationships that the buffalo program maintains with a diverse group of partners,

including many national and regional non-profit environmental and wildlife conservation organizations. The buffalo program could serve as a model for the opportunity to leverage external support for local benefit.

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# Wotanin Wowapi



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Poplar, Montana

February 13, 1997

## Employee drug testing policy approved

By Bonnie Red Elk  
Wotanin Editor

The Tribal Executive Board took a major step forward in dealing with illegal drug use by employees by amending the Tribes' Personnel Policies and Procedures to strengthen and add to employee drug testing at their Feb. 10 meeting.

For the first time, for tribal employees, the Tribes will be implementing a random drug

Tribal Express to test - page 10

testing program, a reasonable suspicion policy as a basis for drug testing, and will include followup testing to monitor employees, said the Tribes' Personnel director Garrett Big Leggings, who was directed by the TEB a year ago to work with the Tribes' attorneys to draft such policies.

We know there's illegal

drug use problems among some of our employees, said Big Leggings in an interview with the *Wotanin*. We (Personnel Office) and the TEB get reports of it, and the newly approved policies will allow us to identify employees with illegal drug use problems, and to provide help to those employees, he said.

Big Leggings said the next step is implementation, which will be done in stages. Some details need to be worked out, training has to be taken, and they need to meet with employees yet, he said.

The TEB appointed Tribal Health director Gary J. Melbourne as the approved officer for drug tests, and the Big Leggings as the verification officer for drug tests.

(Testing - Page 10)

## State & National Political Arena

### Chairman addresses joint session of State Legislature Shields only 3rd tribal rep. to do so

By Bonnie Red Elk  
Wotanin Editor

The State must do more for tribes rather than less - that will be one of the messages Fort Peck Tribal Chairman Caleb Shields said he will deliver to a joint session of the Montana State Legislature when he spoke on the "state of the Indian nations" on Wednesday, Feb. 12.

Chairman Shields was invited to give the address and is only the third tribal representative to address a joint session of the Legislature.

At the Tribal Executive Board meeting on Monday, Feb. 10, Chairman Shields said he will talk on a wide-range of issues of concern of all tribes. One will be cooperative agreement tribes made with the State, he said, and will include welfare reform, allowing for tribal input on issues affecting Indians, dual taxation on Indian lands for the oil and gas industry, and what will the State do to help us get jobs on the reservation.

Shields said his testimony would have input from other tribal chairpersons, who would also be in Helena for the address.

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Tribal Chairman  
Caleb Shields  
Bison Killing  
highlights  
speech - P. 9

## 5-4 vote provides \$500,000 to ASTI

By Bonnie Red Elk  
Wotanin Editor

In almost a split decision, the Tribal Executive Board at their Feb. 10 meeting voted 5-4 to provide a \$500,000 line of credit to be repaid in one year at 7.5 percent interest.

ASTI got a \$633,140 sub-contract through Medical Place, Inc., of Montgomery, AL, to produce 3,548 medical

### Council Highlights

chests which should employ 50 people, reported councilman Stoney Anketell, who is also a member of the ASTI board. "This gets ASTI back into the deep draw industry," he said.

The line of credit will be used to purchase supplies,

said councilman John Morales, also an ASTI board member. ASTI's past problems in paying their bills has caused their vendors to request payment upfront, he said.

Medical Place, Inc. is a medical supply company that

is 8A certified, meaning that it will get preference in contracts from the Defense Department as a minority owned company. The company is graduating from the certification in 10 months and will be bidding on two more chests that will again employ another 50, said Anketell to TEB.

ASTI will be paid directly

(Highlights - Page 10)

## Oil activity on Fort Peck picking up

By Minnie Two Shoes  
For the first time in several years, there is lots of oil development activity on the Fort Peck Reservation, said officials from the Tribal Minerals Office (TMO).

With Gulf Canada's agreement with the Fort Peck Tribes to lease hundreds of thousands of acres of allotted lands, the oil and gas industry on the reservation will definitely expand, said Larry Monson, TMO geologist.

Using Nessalk Oil, Inc. of Denver, Colorado as their leasing agent, Gulf Canada has spent over \$1 million leasing

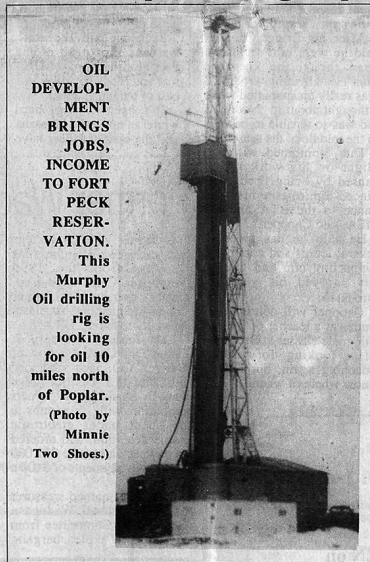
up reservation lands, both allotted and non-Indian fee, said Monson.

"It's been since the early '80s since there's been this much activity, and it's not just one or two companies, there's many," said Monson.

The oil and gas industry on the reservation has taken a dramatic upswing because of there's a lot more new seismic testing that's being done on the reservation, said TMO director Mervyn Shields.

Two years ago, a 60 square mile three dimensional seismic

(Oil - Page 10)



OIL DEVELOPMENT BRINGS JOBS, INCOME TO FORT PECK RESERVATION. This Murphy Oil drilling rig is looking for oil 10 miles north of Poplar. Minnie Two Shoes.

## 84 allottee tracts get bids

By Minnie Two Shoes  
Eighty-four tracts of allotted lands received over \$400,000 in bonus bids at the January 6 Oil and Gas Lease Sale No. 1/97

There was only one oil company who bid on the 84 tracts offered for leases at the Jan. 6 oil and gas lease auction.

A total of 16,174.61 acres of allotted lands received bonus bids ranging from \$18.50 to \$31.50 an acre, according to a recapitulation report pro-

vided by the Fort Peck Agency of the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

All 84 tracts offered were bid on by Nessalk Energy, Inc., who bid a total of \$414,769.84 in bonus bids for the tracts.

The average bonus bid was \$25.65 with 19 tracts receiving bonus bids of \$31.50 for acreage ranging from 80 to 320 acres per tract, states the BIA report.

The royalty rates on the leases is 16 and 2/3 percent.

## Burshia denied release pending sentencing

Michael Alan Burshia, 26, who was convicted of involuntary manslaughter in the strangulation death of Joseph Cloud Boy, will remain in jail until his sentencing March 28.

Burshia, 26, had asked Chief U.S. District Judge Jack Shansstrom to allow his release from jail so he could spend time with his 3 year old son before going to prison.

However, at a hearing last week in Billings, the victim's uncle, Herman Red Elk, opposed the request and presented a petition with over 400 names from people from the Poplar area who were opposed to his release.

In an order signed Tuesday,

Shansstrom denied Burshia's release, saying that Burshia had failed to provide evidence that he was not a flight risk or a danger to the community.

Burshia's attorney, Frances McCarvel of Glasgow, said Burshia was not likely to flee and did not pose a danger to others or to the community.

When Burshia was previously released without bond in June, 1996 prior to his trial in December, McCarvel said Burshia was under electronic monitoring and never left his family's ranch 25 miles north of Brockton except to see his attorney, to be tested for drugs, and for medical emergencies. Any movement was

to be reported and no problems had been reported, he said.

McCarvel said he had 50 or so letters from family and friends who support Burshia's release pending sentencing.

Burshia took the stand and said if he's released, the mother of his 3 year old son agreed he could keep the boy at the Burshia ranch. "I want to be released only so I can spend my last few weeks I have left until sentencing so I can be with my son and get him used to the fact that I'm going away for quite awhile," he told the judge. "I'm only asking I be able to spend

some time with my son."

Red Elk, who said he raised Cloud Boy in high school and before he went into the Marine Corp, said the federal court system doesn't pay attention to Fort Peck. "People are trying to unity against violence. Court TV was there. The judicial system needs to speak out."

Joseph doesn't get a second chance to go home and tell anyone he's going away, said Red Elk.

The judge delayed his decision until this week. Burshia was convicted by a jury of voluntary manslaughter

(Burshia - Page 8)

## Montana's Congressional delegates to help Fort Peck Water pipeline supported by all 3

By Bonnie Red Elk  
Wotanin Editor

Tribal Chairman Caleb Shields had good news for the Tribal Executive Board upon his return from Wash. DC, where he spent 3 days lobbying primarily for the Tribes water pipeline project.

Shields reported that the project has the support of Montana's three Congressional delegations - Senators Conrad Burns and Max Baucus, and Rep. Rick Hill in the House of Representatives.

Our bill for construction monies for the water pipeline has to be reintroduced, and Sen. Burns, who sponsored the bill in the last session of Congress, told Shields that the project is his top priority. Burns is on a committee that's important for the project, said the chairman.

Sen. Baucus will be co-sponsoring the bill and thanked the Fort Peck Tribes for their support during the last General Election, reported Shields.

Shields, Water Resource director Tom Escarcega, the engineer Mike Watson, of Helena who's been working with the Tribes on the project, and tribal attorney Mary Pavel met with Rep. Hill to go over the project, and Hill has indicated he would introduce Fort Peck's bill in the House, said the chairman, adding that Hill is on the important Energy and Water Committee.

(Water - Page 8)

## President wants more funds for Indian programs

But Governors support moratorium on putting new land into tribal trust

WASHINGTON (AP) - Following through on a promise to tribes, President Clinton proposed a 6 percent increase in spending on federal Indian programs next year.

Clinton's 1998 budget includes \$1.7 billion for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, an 8 percent increase over this year, and \$2.4 billion for the Indian Health Service, a 3 percent rise.

Other Indian programs, including housing subsidies, would rise 8 percent to \$2.3 billion. Congress cut the BIA's budget from \$1.65 billion in 1996 to \$1.6 billion this year.

Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt told tribal leaders recently that he would "be out on the point" fighting for more federal aid for them and

that they should be exempted from spending cuts that are being made to balance the federal budget.

The extra money that Clinton has requested for BIA next year would allow tribes to maintain 1,250 more miles of reservation roads, hire 400 additional people for law enforcement and to repair an additional 75 homes for needy families, said Ada Deer, assistant interior secretary for Indian affairs.

Overall spending at the Interior Department would drop \$300 million, to \$7.1 billion next year.

But while it's good news about the budget, Tribal Chairman Caleb Shields said the problem now is keeping it intact as it goes through the

(Budget - Page 8)

# Bill for Indian preference in schools, for Indian studies introduced

By Bonnie Red Elk  
Wotatin Editor

A bill to provide for Indian preference in employment in school districts on the reservation, and a bill that requires all state school personnel to take classes in American Indian studies was introduced in the State Legislature on Wednesday, Feb. 12 by Rep. William Whitehead, Wolf Point, a member of the Fort Peck Tribes.

House Bill 487 authorizes school boards of trustees, in school districts partially or

wholly located within the boundaries of an Indian reservation, to adopt a policy establishing an employment preference for Indian residents for school district positions within the reservation. The bill would amend Montana law.

House Bill 490 says that the Montana Constitution commits the educational policy of the state to the preservation of the cultural integrity of the American Indian, and that the constitutional framers intended that the preservation of

American Indian cultural integrity would be effected through educational programs available to both Indians and non-Indians.

Current Indian studies law applies mainly to public school districts located in the vicinity of an Indian reservation, and the Committee on Indian Affairs believes that all public school districts in the State of Montana should provide the means by which school personnel can gain an understanding of and appreciation for the Montana Indian

people, and pass on that understanding and appreciation to their non-Indian students, says the bill.

The bill requires that if a school district qualifies for federal funds for Indian education programs due to the enrollment of Indian students, the school board may require that all of its certified personnel satisfy the requirements for instruction in American Indian studies. It also calls for the enforcement and administration of this requirement to be the sole responsibility of

the local school board. The bill also calls for school board members and all non-certified personnel in public school districts on or in the vicinity of reservations be encouraged to also satisfy the requirements for instruction in American Indian studies.

Because HB 487 "fully supports the intent of Indian Preference as it relates to Indian

Tribes in their endeavors for self-governance," and because HB 490 "promotes the concept of multi-cultural diversity within the education processes and institutions for the State of Montana and also parallels and supports the philosophies of the Tribal Education Code," the Tribal Executive Board on Feb. 10 went on record to support both bills.

# Tribes among many opposing anti-Indian bills

By Bonnie Red Elk  
Wotatin Editor

Preferential treatment for minorities is wrong, and all state programs that grant such a preference should end, a Kalispell lawmaker said at a meeting on House Bills 299 and 303 last Friday in Helena.

House Bill 299, proposed by Republican Rep. Bill Boharski, would amend the Montana Constitution to bar any program that grants or encourages favorable treatment to anyone on the basis of race, color ethnicity, national origin or sex for the purpose of employment, education or contracting.

HB 303, also proposed by Rep. Boharski, would accomplish the same thing by rewriting state law.

"I think not only our state but our country is going down the wrong path" with affirmative action programs, said Boharski. "What we do far too often is commit evil to right a wrong."

The Fort Peck Tribes joined other tribes, Indian students and educators, advocates for women's issues, organized labor and human rights groups from across the state who lined up to testify against the bills in a meeting before the House Judiciary Committee. So many were present to oppose the measures that dozens were allowed time to only give their name.

The two bills offered by Boharski primarily would affect programs and preferences for American Indians - most notably minority hiring and contracting preferences, and a state university tuition and fee waiver for Indian students who show financial need.

Fort Peck Tribal Councilman Stoney Anketell, in testi-

mony he presented in opposition to the two bills, stated that existing federal and state law and policy has long recognized the inherent sovereign right of Indian tribes and their unique status under law.

"The Supreme Court of the United States has upheld the federal government's use of Indian preference in the employment at the Bureau of Indian Affairs."

Anketell's testimony also pointed out that previous federal court decisions have held that Indian tribes and their members possess a unique political status with the U.S., which did not violate the equal protection provisions of the Constitution of the U.S.

"At the same time that the bill's authors want to ignore the unique status and needs of the State's Indian population, they want to preserve the funding that they are given because of the unique status of Montana's Indian population," stated Anketell.

Testifying on behalf of education, Fort Peck Tribes' Education Department director Desiree Kim Lambers, who taught on 5 of the 7 reservations in Montana, urged the State Legislators to not repeal the existing tuition waiver for persons of one-fourth Indian blood or more who have been bona fide residents of Montana for at least one year. "The repeal of this waiver could forever affect the future relationship between the State and the tribes," she said.

"The tuition waiver program permits 23 people from Fort Peck to attend school in Montana, and these 23 people will become productive and contributing citizens of not only the state but the Fort Peck Tribes," said Lambert. "The only way that tribes can address the myriad of issues

that face us in the coming 21st Century is through education." She also said that the tuition waiver is not based on race, but on the state's committed policy to improve the economic, health and social status of the tribal nations within the state. "This policy shows that the State of Montana understands that in order for the state to be strong, the tribal nations within must be strong."

Fort Peck Community College vice-president Margaret Campbell, who spent her entire adult life as an educator, administrator and a protector of Native American rights, testified that both bills would "effectively destroy the progress that has been made to bring equity to the State of Montana."

American Indians make up roughly 7 percent of the state's population, and are the most significant racial group in terms of percentages and native ancestry, and as such, both bills are a direct attack on American Indians, she said.

"A perfect and real example" of how the tuition waiver helps Indian students attending college in Montana was provided in Campbell's testimony. "Horace Pipe and his wife, who attended FPCC for two years, received their Associate degrees and transferred to the University of Montana with their five children. Both attended the university for two years, receiving during that time Indian Fee Waivers of \$1,814 each per year. They graduated last May and Horace became the first geologist of our tribes."

Very few voices were present to speak in favor of the bills. Laurie Koutnik, of the Christian Coalition of Montana, said voters should decide

whether affirmative action has helped or hindered Montana. "The single standard for all is being eroded away. Fundamental individual rights are being supplanted by group entitlements," she testified.

The House Judiciary Committee is expected to take action on the bills this week. Besides Anketell, Lambert and Campbell, TEB member John Morales was also in attendance at last Friday's meeting.

The TEB went on record on Jan. 24 to oppose the bills and to send a delegation to voice that opposition.

# Putting bison on tribal land addressed

HELENA (AP) - The killing of Yellowstone National Park bison should stop and putting the animals into quarantine on tribal land is a good alternative, a Montana Indian leader told the Legislature on Wednesday.

Fort Peck Tribal Chairman Caleb Shields used his "state of the Indian Nations" address to promote the idea of a quarantine facility on a reservation, something being considered by the Fort Belknap tribes.

However, a state livestock official said no such question could be started before next winter because federal regulations would have to be changed to allow it.

Shield's comments about the bison problem highlighted his nearly 90-minute speech, the third time a tribal representative has addressed a joint session of the Legislature.

The park bison, about half of which are believed infected with Brucellosis, have left snow-covered Yellowstone in record numbers this winter to search for food at lower elevations.

A joint federal-state management plan requires most of the migrating animals to be shot or captured and sent to slaughter. The program is intended to protect Montana's status as a brucellosis-free state and address concerns of the livestock industry that the bison could transmit the disease to cattle.

Brucellosis can cause cows to abort their calves, and it can result in undulant fever in humans.

The management plan has resulted in more than 800 bison being killed so far this winter.

The Yellowstone herd is the remnants of the last wild bison that existed 100 years ago, Shields said. "Like us, they are the last survivors."

"I say that the slaughter of this wild herd must stop," he said. "The killing is out of hand. What is occurring now outside Yellowstone Park is disrespectful."

Under the quarantine proposal, tribes would care for the bison testing negative for exposure to the disease until a quarantine period passes and they are certified disease-free. The animals then would be returned to public land or put on tribal, he said.

Those with brucellosis would be killed in a respectful manner in keeping with the Indian view that bison are "good medicine" and objects of prayer, Shields said.

He said the federal agencies have expressed support for a tribal quarantine facility.

However, Larry Petersen, executive secretary for the Board of Livestock, said the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service has not guaranteed the state will keep its brucellosis-free status if such a site is opened.

That would require a change in the agency's regulations, something that takes months to accomplish, he said.

Even if the federal office gave its approval, animal health officials in other states could ignore the decision and refuse to take Montana cattle, Petersen added.

"So many things come into play" before a quarantine operation can be allowed, he said. "It's not going to happen this season."

In his speech, Shields also listed the problems facing Montana's Indian reservations and urged legislators to work with the tribes in trying to solve them.

He said the high school graduation rate is only 65 percent on some reservation. Seven of 10 Indians earn less than \$7,000 a year.

"It's incumbent on tribal and state leaders to change these statistics," Shield said.

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# Sioux Nation needs to speak out

By Bonnie Red Elk  
Wotatin Editor

The time has come for the Sioux Nation to take the lead in demanding an audience with President Clinton that the federal government just can't cut Indians off welfare,

health, education, and more, Tribal Chairman Caleb Shields told the Tribal Executive Board following his recent trip to Wash., DC. "That's diminishing rights guaranteed by treaties."

The federal government has a trust responsibility to Indians through treaties and

statutes and welfare reform is a federal responsibility, even if a tribe is in a state program, said Shields. "Tribes can do things to challenge the courts if necessary if we're not treated fairly."

Welfare is a subsistence, it's a right and to be denied that - no one is saying that's a violation of our treaties, said Shields. The next time the Sioux tribes meet, he suggested that an audience with the President be demanded.

In response to the

chairman's statements, the TEB went on record to join the Dakota Territory Association, which is made up of Sioux tribes of North and South Dakota. "There is strength in numbers," said councilman Stoney Anketell in making the motion to join.

There's been no organization who said - if the government wants to stop welfare on the reservation, we need the jobs, said Shields. "If any group can get the ears of Congress and the public, it's the Sioux Nation."

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# Wotaniin Wowapi

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Indian Reservation  
Poplar, MT



75¢



Fort Peck Housing Authority's board of commission chairman Kevin Longtree and director Maurice Lambert hear strong words from council members.

## 16 laborers laid off in \$188,000 FPFA budget over run Tribal Council dissatisfied

Fort Peck Housing Authority recently laid off 16 laborers after learning that a \$1.8 million Comp Grant budget to modernize 60 homes was overspent by over \$180,000. FPFA's plan of correction, approved by the FPFA board of commissioners (BOC) last Thurs. Jan. 25 and carried out by FPFA administration, was to lay off 16 of the 33 laborers who did not rate enough points in an evaluation conducted within Housing; to find funds within one of their budgets to cover the over run; to reprimand an unspecified number of FPFA employees; and to switch Comp Grant's workers from "force account" to bidding them out to contractors to do.

Council members present at the FPFA Planning meeting last Tuesday in the Tribal Chambers strongly expressed dissatisfaction with the report and voted 7-0 not to approve the request for the budget amendment, which FPFA says is needed as required by HUD. FPFA was given until Feb. 20 to provide documentation

to support the reasons given for the over run, and that a complete evaluation of Comp Grant's budget be provided; along with a report of what each unit received - from material and labor costs to the time it took on each home; that an audit be conducted; and that an action plan be developed to prevent this from happening again.

In the meantime, vendors who provided work or material to homes in this particular project will not be paid until the amendment is approved by the Tribes. FPFA director Maurice Lambert said he developed this with HUD, and was told it would be difficult to get approval, but it needed to be done.

Vendors and contractors who worked on this specific project won't be paid if this amendment is not approved, Lambert told the seven council members present.

Don Granbois, Comp Grant director, said labor costs was the main reason the 1999

(Housing-Page 11)

## Billings woman murdered daughter of TLC director

By RON SELDEN  
for the Wotaniin

BILLINGS -- A woman apparently murdered Jan. 26 in a Billings motel was the daughter of a prominent American Indian leader Gordon and Cheryl Belcourt.

Billings resident Elena Kate Belcourt, 21, was found dead at the Kelly Inn after another woman who was allegedly abducted and raped escaped from her captors and notified authorities. Police later arrested two suspects, Myron Wesley Fallsdown, 24, who had been released from the Wyoming State Penitentiary in Rawlins the day before, and Victor Yann Kennedy, 23, of Hardin, Mont.

Authorities say Belcourt died from a single gunshot to the head, apparently from a .38-caliber pistol that was found at the scene. Gordon

Belcourt is executive director of the Montana-Wyoming Tribal Leaders Council and the Montana-Wyoming Area Indian Health Board.

According to police reports, Elena Belcourt and a 23-year-old Billings woman met up with Fallsdown and Kennedy the evening of Jan. 25 and ended up at a party at the motel. While details are sketchy, police say Belcourt apparently got into a confrontation with Fallsdown in one of the rooms and he allegedly shot her. Fallsdown and Kennedy then allegedly fled with the other woman, who says she was held against her will while being repeatedly raped and pistol-whipped.

The woman later escaped from the men's pickup in Butte. She called police and

(Billings- Page 11)

## Bison return home after century-long absence

By Richard Peterson  
For the Wotaniin  
NORTH POPLAR -- With an eagle soaring nearby, the Fort Peck Tribes welcomed home Wednesday the first herd of wild bison to the reservation in over 100 years.

About 70 head of the animals, which were nearly wiped out in the late 1800s, arrived in several livestock trailers at the Val Smith ranch 20 miles north of Poplar. Another 30 bison are expected to arrive later this month.

Taking advantage of an unexpected opportunity, the Tribes purchased about 100 head of bison from the Assiniboine and Gros Ventre tribes at Fort Belknap, which have been forced to reduce their herd of 500 due to drought conditions.

"Getting them in the trailer was the hard part. It took two hours to load them up," said Robbie Magan, director of the Tribes' Fish and Game Department.

Magan and eight others from the Tribes left to Fort Belknap early Wednesday



One of 70 bison munches on hay Wednesday afternoon just after being moved from Fort Belknap to its new home in North Poplar. By the end of February, the Fort Peck Tribes will own a 100-head bison herd.

morning and brought home the bison during a 4-hour return trip. A tipi was set up on the

ranch, where Assiniboine and Sioux spiritual leaders and tribal officials held a pipe ceremony for the herd. A meal

of corn and wild turnip soup, wopaji and frybread was also

(Buffalo - Page 3)

## Elderly Poplar man attacked while walking home

An elderly Poplar man received a head wound early Thursday morning after he was attacked by three juvenile males while walking home from downtown.

The man was walking home along B Street East when three young males approached him. The boys asked the man for a cigarette.

When the elderly man reached into his shirt pocket,

one of the boys pulled out a metal object and began hitting the victim on the head and upper body area, according to the Fort Peck Tribal Police department.

When the man fell down, the boys searched through his pockets and kicked him in the stomach area.

A passing motorist scared away the boys. The motorist gave the man a ride home, a

police report said.

Two days after the incident, the victim discovered a wound on top of his head and an employee at the man's apartment building urged him to contact police and get treatment for the wound.

The man told police he didn't know the boys' names but could identify them if he saw them again. No suspects have been found so far, police said.

This is the second time in the past month that Poplar residents on the eastside of town have been robbed and threatened with a weapon. In January, two teenage girls walking to a relative's home were robbed at gunpoint near the Fort Peck Housing Authority. Several juvenile males were cited into juvenile court for that crime.

## Still no contract for Poplar School's teachers

By Traci Miller

"You can't have great students without great teachers. Pay 'em or lose 'em," the sign read outside the Depot Bar and Casino in Poplar.

Frustrated Poplar school teachers are in the mediation process of a 19 month contract dispute with the school board. According to veteran English teacher Diane Elliott, a representative from the state will be in Poplar on March 6 or 7 to speak to each side of the table and attempt to bring the two to an agreement.

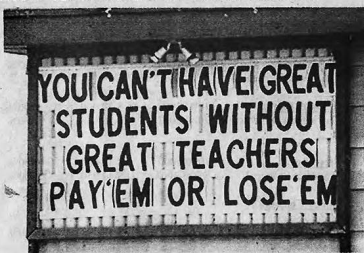
"We're looking at insurance proposals, and we're requesting a 3 percent retroac-

tive pay increase for last year, this year, and 2001," Elliott explained.

Elliott said that the sticking point is with the salary and insurance. "We have given up quite a bit of language that the school board wanted out during negotiations. Once the language is gone, it's gone."

Teachers and administration work by a master agreement, a set of policies and rules. Work days, grievances and the evaluation process is involved in the agreement. "A maintenance of standard is pretty major stuff.

(Teachers - Page 11)



This sign outside the Depot, expresses frustration by the Poplar School teachers about the unresolved contract dispute.

## Public allowed comment on Fort Peck Water Project

By Richard Peterson  
For the Wotaniin

Dozens of people in the area got the chance to learn more about the Fort Peck Reservation Rural Water System, and had the chance to question local officials about the \$192 million project.

The Tribes and Dry Prairie rural Water sponsored 4 "scoping meetings" the past week, which are required by federal law before the project asks Congress for millions of dollars in appropriation funds. The project, which is expected to begin in 2002, will

bring fresh water to about 30,000 residents on the reservation and in Northeastern Montana.

The public was allowed to comment on the project during the hearings and hear the latest developments from project officials. Hearings were held in Poplar, Plentywood, Culbertson and Glasgow.

"This is the first step in our environmental analysis process," said Joe Elliott, an environmental specialist contracted by the Tribes and Dry Prairie to handle all environmental matters. Elliott also

worked on the massive Mni-Wiconi Project in South Dakota.

Elliott said several issues have come to the forefront during the recent hearings. The Army Corps of Engineers is concerned about how the water intake plant, to be built near Poplar, will affect paddlefish, sturgeon and other fish in the river.

"We're not going to do something to jeopardize these fish," Elliott said.

The Corps is also raising the water of the Missouri this summer by releasing extra water from the spillway at the Fort Peck Dam.

The higher water is expected to help save the sturgeon and paddlefish, and divert more water into the Mississippi for further development.

Fort Peck Tribal Councilman Leland Spotted Bird asked what would happen if the

(Project - Page 11)



# Return of buffalo to Fort Peck seen as meaningful, significant

January 31 became a historic day as 127 years after the last buffalo hunt, they have returned to the Fort Peck Reservation.

The day was significant to elders and other tribal members across the reservation because they know and understand Indian culture, in which *tatanka* are incorporated.

"It's good we're getting buffalo. Other tribes have them, why shouldn't we?" Reno First, an elder from the Fort Kipp area, said. "People were healthy when we depended on buffalo. If our people go back to eating buffalo, we will become strong and slim and trim like the buffalo. Not fat and slow like cows."

First also offered the cultural significance of the buffalo from his perspective. "When I was a little boy, there was a man in Fort Kipp by the name of Black Crow. He used to tell how the buffalo were hunted. Black Crow said you could ride up beside the buffalo, and in their gallop stride, you could shoot an arrow through their chest and it

would puncture their lungs so they would bleed to death. With that one arrow, you could also shoot a buffalo on the other side. The buffalo provided everything for our people. They would use every part of it. They never wasted any of it. If you look at pictures of old Indians, they're all slim. There's no fat ones."

Assiniboine traditionalist

**"This is a new day. A new hope. It means something. More so for our children and grandchildren, they're the ones who really need help,"** - Larry Wetsit, traditional Assiniboine

and former Chairman of the Tribes Larry Wetsit saw this as a "historic occasion."

"Our Assiniboine people's lives revolve around buffalo. Buffalo are the center of our universe. Everything we do revolves around buffalo. This event signifies something people before me, my parents, my grandparents, my lodge men, prayed for everyday, that this animal be returned to our people. Because it's more than an

animal, it's a spirit. Our grandfathers travel with the buffalo. That's where we learn the values in our family."

"This is a new day. A new hope. It means something. More so for our children and grandchildren, they're the ones who really need help," said Wetsit. "We've had the opportunity to learn our traditional way. My generation

was the last generation who knew people that followed buffalo. We're still somewhat tied to the tradition. This is an opportunity for our children and grandchildren to see the buffalo. This is a great day. We've been praying for this for years and years."

Robbie Magnan, Fish & Game Director, commented that he's been getting stopped by a lot of elders who feel that the buffalo is hooking up the

missing link in our culture. "Many elders felt the buffalo was missing from the circle, and now that they're back, the culture will come back. It makes the circle better. It helps enhance the culture," Magnan explained that the buffalo will begin to tie the culture together because of their significance in our lives.

Fort Peck Tribes Tourism Coordinator R.J. Young said he was happy the buffalo were finally here. Young has been working on getting buffalo at Fort Peck.

"Overall it was a good project. The buffalo could help in many different ways, whether it be culturally or economically. It was our goal to get them here, but there's some kinks that need to be worked out on the Economic Development Office's part. The project isn't done because we still need to pursue grants to make sure the project becomes self sufficient. It's up to the tribe in whichever direction they would like to pursue. It could be cultural based, or economic based. Personally, it gives me a lot more to work with, tour-

ism wise." Several elders were at the site when the buffalo first touched Fort Peck's land. One of them, Christine First, Poplar, stated that she felt, it was a good thing. "Our ancestors were involved in buffalo and we should be too. It's good for everybody, it's nice to see it actually happening."

"I thought it was good," Carol Spotted Bird, Brockton, said. "We have to start rebuilding our buffalo so our children and grandchildren could see what our ancestors did with buffalo. Buffalo provided everything for our peo-

ple, like food, shelter, clothing. It's a good sign, the buffalo coming back. I'd personally like to thank RJ Young and all the people he worked with in helping the buffalo come back. We need to teach our children the tradition."

Chuck Eagleman, said he thought it was great. "For a long time, all the tiny reservations got in on the buffalo. Now we're getting buffalo. Some people are against it, but that's okay. I'm just glad they're back. It's long overdue. They were here before us. This is where they belong."

## Daniels - Headdress



Anthony & Jade Headdress

On Friday, December 22, 2000, Jade Daniels and Anthony Headdress were married in a double ring, evening ceremony at the Elks Club, Wolf Point, with the bride's grandfather, Chief Tribal Judge A.T. Stafne, officiating.

Parents of the couple are Jay and Twila Daniels and Arlyn Headdress, all of Poplar, and Arlene Small, Wolf Point. Tim Trotter and Donna Timm provided the wonderful music for all to enjoy. The maid of honor was Kiley Zimmerman and the best man was Keith Erickson. The pretty flower girl was the couples' cousin, Donna

Headdress. The cute ring bearer was Jade Daniels, the bride's younger brother. The beautiful blue fountain tiered cake was made by Joe Neutgens.

The family wishes to thank Grace Pipe, Reyna Perez, Tom & Jordan Stafne for helping in the decorating. Also thanks to Grandpa Shep Ferguson for the nice prayer for the wedding couple. Laura Krauth and all people who brought food for the reception. Thank you Mom & Dad for all that you did for Jade & Tony. The couple received many nice gifts. What would we do without you all?

## Buffalo - (from page 1)

served. Several busloads of tribal elders and Brockton school students, some perched on fence posts overlooking the corrals, looked on as the bison charged from the trailers and into the corral. A huge pile of hay and fresh water also greeted the herd.

"I'm glad they're back," said Brockton fifth-grader Leigh Spotted Bird. "It was kind of scary at first but it was cool to see them come home."

"They'll make us stronger," added Brockton third-grader and Leigh's brother Trent Spotted Bird, who was one of several dozen students to check out of school Wednesday to watch this once-in-a-lifetime event.

Buffalo once dominated the Great Plains and was the main source of food and shelter for many tribes, including the

Assiniboine and Sioux. But with prodding from the U.S. government, the buffalo was slaughtered to point of near-extinction in the late 1800s by hunters, fur trappers, soldiers and settlers.

The last documented buffalo hunt on the reservation was in 1873, shortly after the herds disappeared at a dramatic pace.

The return of bison has raised concern from local ranchers, who worry that some of the herd may be afflicted with brucellosis, a contagious disease that causes bison to abort their calves.

Magnan said all of the herd have been tested and are free of the disease.

For the Tribes, the arrival of "tatanka" also signals the filling of a cultural and spiritual void, said Tribal Planning Director Abby Ogle. "There may be some

opposition to this but it is part of our culture that was lost, and now its back," Ogle said.

Six of Montana's seven Indian reservations have buffalo herds on their lands. Like many of those tribes, Fort Peck has developed a business plan, which includes possible marketing and tourism opportunities in the near future.

Talks are already underway to move a few of the animals to a roadside stop on the reservation, for tourists and

other visitors to visit. Magnan pointed out that with the help of grants, about \$30,000 was used for the purchase of the 100 head of bison.

The Tribes have been planning on bringing a herd onto the reservation for the past decade, said Ogle. But recently Fort Belknap presented an opportunity that the Tribes could not pass up.

Ogle said the Executive Board, the chairman's office and several tribal departments worked together to bring about the return of the bison. He also credited Val Smith,

whose ranch the bison will be held until this spring when they are sent out to roam on 5,800 acres north of Poplar. "She really got the ball rolling," Ogle said.

The Tribes will soon begin construction on a \$110,000 fence that will surround the range unit, which will be under the direction of the Fish and Game department.

The wild herd will be released in the spring, Magnan said.

"The next stage is to declare the range unit a wildlife preserve. We'd like to leave them as a wild herd," Magnan added.

About 10 years ago, the Tribes expressed interest in purchasing a herd after some tribal members pointed out there was no buffalo on the

menu during the former Alcohol and Drug Free Youth Campout, said Ogle.

We were asking ourselves "How come we can't have them." So we started looking at getting them," Ogle said. Former Fish and Game Director Leroy Comes, Last, Curley Youpee and Ogle then began a coordinated effort to bring the buffalo back to the reservation.

The Tribes have also been working over the years with the Inter-Tribal Bison Cooperative, which helps tribes work to bring bison

back. "But the herd's arrival happened sooner than I expected when Fort Belknap called the Tribes last month and offered to sell a portion of their herd."

The lack of moisture has produced little or no pasture available to their herd, located south of Harlem. "The ground is literally dirt over there," said Magnan.

Numerous volunteers also helped move the bison into corrals on the Smith Ranch, while withstanding freezing windchill temperatures and snow.

## Lab -

(From page 1)

also disposed of some of the materials. The investigation into Bush's activities continues, investigators said.

Bush was arraigned in Roosevelt County Justice Court on Monday; his bond was set at \$10,000. Bush is also awaiting possible extradition to Texas.

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# Wotani Wowapi



Tribes first major buffalo herd

## 5-year management plan shows positive potential

By Richard Peterson  
For the Wotaniin

The Fort Peck Tribal Executive Board is close to approving a five-year management plan for the Turtle Mound Bison Herd, the reservation's first major herd to set foot in northeastern Montana in 130 years.

A full herd would be achieved in the year 2006. That's when the Tribes would be able to start profiting from the herd by selling 18-30 month old bison to the US Department of Agriculture for its commodity distribution program, said Fish and Game Director Robbie Magnan and R.J. Young of the Tribes' economic development office.

"For tourism purposes, we'd like to also bring a herd closer to the highway. As the herd gets larger, we'd like to transport some near Highway 2," said Magnan.

Tourism is expected to boom, particularly along the Mis-

souri River, in the coming years because of the 300th anniversary of explorers Lewis and Clark's trip into the West.

The management plan, written by wildlife consultant Craig Knowles of Boulder, says there may also be opportunity for the Tribes to sell live calves to area residents who want to start their own herds on the reservation.

The Tribes may expect to receive about \$4,000 a head for each two-year-old, 1,800-pound bison, Young said. That could bring in up to \$100,000 annually for the Tribes.

The plan went before the land committee Wednesday and will be before the full Executive Board next week. The Tribes' herd is housed in the MacDonald Breaks area 25 miles north of Poplar in the Poplar River Valley.

The USDA recently developed a program that allows the agency to purchase Indian-owned bison for slaughter. They would be slaughtered at and processed at USDA approved

facilities and the meat redistributed to reservations.

The USDA has set the purchase price at \$2.50 a pound for hanging carcass weight. This is double the price of beef and a higher rate than given to other tribes.

The head and hides will be returned to the Tribes for cultural purposes, Magnan said. The author of the plan said this program represents a significant economic incentive to develop one or more large bison operations on Indian reservations.

The plan also calls for the Tribes to donate 7-10 bison males each year for field slaughter by tribal groups. Protocol for these donations needs to be established by the tribal council.

The bison program will also cooperate with a tribal youth

(Buffalo - Page 11)

### Fort Peck Tribes Utility Tax:

## Federal court ruling "devastating"

Chairman optimistic tax may still be legally reclaimed

BILLINGS - In a financial blow to Indian tribes in Montana, a federal judge in U.S. District Court ruled last Thursday that the Fort Peck Tribes' 4-percent utility tax on Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad is illegal.

Senior U.S. District Judge Jack Shanstrom's decision severely limits the Tribes' authority to tax non-Indians on fee land.

The estimated loss of taxes from BNSF is about \$1.3 million annually. Northern Border Pipeline and BNSF paid about \$2.2 million in taxes to the tribe each year.

"We're very disappointed," said Tribal Chairman Arlyn

Headdress. "But this is a sign of the times. We're up against a court system and (presidential) administration that's against Indian sovereignty and Indian rights."

Last year, the council slashed the budget by \$2 million when BNSF took the case to court and refused to give the tax-farmers to the Tribes. The Tribes have relied on the utility tax since 1988.

BNSF filed the suit in February and asked for a declaration that the tax is invalid as well as an injunction aimed at stopping legal proceedings initiated in tribal

court earlier this year.

In his ruling Thursday, Shanstrom granted the railroad's request and declared that the Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes lack civil authority to levy, pass and collect the tax from the railroad. He also made a move to prevent the Tribes from enforcing the tax authority in tribal court.

"Absent express authorization by federal statute or treaty, Indian tribes lack civil authority over the conduct of nonmembers on non-Indian fee land, or its equivalent, within a reserva-

(Taxes - Page 11)

## Inside - Special TEB approves \$150,000 in requests Elderly center for Poplar sought

If a \$50,000 Rural Development grant is approved, and with a \$50,000 match that the Tribal Executive Board unanimously approved of providing at their June 11 meeting, a new senior citizens feeding site in Poplar may be a reality.

Rural Development announced the availability of economic incentive funds for renovation and/or construction of community facilities. The funds will provide a maximum of \$50,000 or 75 percent of the total project costs for eligible grantees for needed facilities, but require matching monies before we can access funding for a community facility, said Tribal Operations Officer Jackie Miller.

With over \$800,000 in Ramah settlement funds coming

into the coffers of the Fort Peck Tribes, the TEB voted to utilize \$50,000 of it to leverage the RD funding for the senior citizens center and to prevent modifying the Tribes' Fiscal Year 2001 budget.

Poplar is not the only community in need of a new feeding site for senior citizens, according to a report to the council by Miller.

In Poplar, where there are 142 seniors 60 years of age and over, the feeding site is located in the Fort Peck Housing Authority 12-plex, but FPHA would like them to move, however there are no alternative sites of adequate size in the community; Wolf Point has 104 seniors, and for now, a FPHA home has been located for use as a site; and in Brockton, where there are 22 seniors, a small trailer is

currently being used, but it's on a lot that's being traded and they also have to move.

It's not so bleak at Frazer, where there are 43 seniors, as a new community center will be built with Community Development Block Grant funds that will have room to feed the elderly, reported Miller.

There was concern expressed by some council members that the Ramah settlement monies should be carefully prioritized first before any expenditures from it are made, and that most of it should be reserved for economic development - or to make more money.

"I'm for senior citizens, but my concern is we're taking money from the settlement for a project when we never de-

(Highlights - Page 11)

## Beautiful Culture



DESIGNER CLOTHES - Today's competitive dancers are designing dynamic outfits, using the latest in materials, with accompanying items all in cutglass beads and intricate designs. One such dancer is Rowena Roberts, a Stoney-Sioux who's originally from Canada but now living in Shawnee, OK. Her headwork includes a beaded bracelet attached to beaded ring. (This black and white photo does not do justice to this outfit.)

See Section Section for more Red Bottom photos

## Poplar man found dead

POPULAR -- Police are still investigating the suspicious death of a Poplar man that occurred in the early morning hours Monday.

The body of Ira DeLeon, 23, was found by some passersby on 3rd Street South, a half-block south of the city cemetery. Because the investigation is pending, police are unable to divulge details of DeLeon's death, said Tribal Criminal Investigator Terry Boyd.

Police were on the scene from 2:30 a.m. until 8 a.m. Monday and searched several streets and vacant lots in the area. An autopsy in Billings has been completed and funeral plans are still in the works.

DeLeon was the grandson of Bill Youngman of Poplar and the son of the late Lois Youngman.

Elsewhere, investigators are still probing the non-fatal stabbing of a Frazer man last Wednesday that took place in Frazer.

## Frazer approves building pool

Ground breaking by July 1

The Tribal Executive Board voted to authorize Enterprise to dig the new pool for Frazer.

The Frazer Community Council voted in early June to utilize their Docket 184 community monies plus interest to build a pool in an area near the school.

Frazer community chairman Phillip Fourstar Jr. told the TEB that they could save \$50,000 of their funds if the Tribes provided the equipment and labor to build the pool.

Groundbreaking for the pool is proposed by July 1, he told the council.

The TEB also threw their support behind Frazer's application for a \$50,000 Rural Development grant.

## 1 of 8 in 2-car wreck still in serious condition

By Lisa N. Perry  
For the Wotaniin

Of the 8 individuals injured in a recent two-vehicle wreck, one is still in critical condition at the Deaconess Hospital in Billings, according to a family member.

Paige Flynn, 19, has not regained consciousness since the wreck and as of Wednesday, June 20 there is no change in her condition and no responses from her, stated grandmother Lois Ferguson. Flynn sustained severe head injuries, a broken vertebrae of the neck, and lost 2 fingers

due to the risk of a receiving an infection due to a high fever.

Once again, alcohol, speed and not wearing car safety belts were factors in a two-vehicle accident that injured the 8 people, according to the Montana Highway Patrol. Two vehicles each carrying 4 people hit head on at 10 p.m. on Friday, June 8, around 2 miles east of Wolf Point on Highway 25.

The vehicle driven by Robert Birthmark, Poplar, with

(Wreck - Page 11)



The car driven by Robert Birthmark (Big Leggins) received extensive damage. Passengers riding in this vehicle received more serious injuries as a result of the head-on collision.

Father's Day Feature -

# Family, community important to Shep Ferguson

By Lisa N. Perry  
For the Wotanim

As Father's Day has come and gone this month, the Wotanim has thought long and hard in coming up with an exceptional man to write a feature on.

One individual in mind was local Poplar resident Shep Ferguson. Although, he did not consent to an interview and picture, the paper felt that he is an excellent example of a dedicated, loving and caring father and grandfather.

Besides those qualities, he is always willing to volunteer his time in all aspects of life, whether it be in rodeo, education, in cultural activities such as powwows, giveaways or feasts or in youth sports.

This year at the Wild Horse Stampede in Wolf

Point July 13-15, he has been chosen as the Grand Marshall. Wild Horse Stampede Committee member Arylss Long stated he was chosen because of his long time commitment and dedication in helping the rodeo over the years. Since the late 1960's, he has helped stock contractor Marvin Brookman during Stampede time.

Originally from Wood Mountain, Sask., Canada and a descendant of Sitting Bull, he moved to Montana to the Fort Peck Indian Reservation in 1945. In 1962 he married his wife, the late Leigh "Arlene" Ferguson. The couple was married for 38 years until her recent passing in March, 2000.

At this year's Wild West Days Rodeo he donated

\$1,000 purse money in memory and honor of his beloved wife. He has established a scholarship within the Brockton Schools to be given to a graduating senior each year, in memory of his late wife.

During his wife's illness, he cared for her and the 2 grandchildren they were raising. Since then, he has taken the responsibility of raising those children on his own. He is a dedicated and committed grandfather, volunteering in each of his grandchildren's classrooms at least once a month.

His children are J.D., Joel, Colleen, all of Poplar, and Loretta Kidder of Fort Yates, ND, as well as his 5 grandchildren - Leah, Ashley, Robert, Grant, Brennon, Randeel Belton, and Amber Strauser, all

come first with him.

"His life revolves around kids," stated his eldest daughter Joel Ferguson. Everyone, especially the little kids, who know him call him "grandpa," she said.

To him, his children and grandchildren come first, stated his daughter. "He instilled in us to be responsible parents, to work hard, pay the bills, to be a good, caring and honest person," she added.

He is also an avid youth sports fan. Whether it be softball, volleyball, basketball, football, track, cross country or rodeo, you can always count on him to be there.

This past year the Poplar High School girl's volleyball team honored him during a game for being a strong supporter of the team.



Shep is also a veteran serving a total of 20 years in the United States Army as a 1st Class Sgt. He is a veteran of the Korean and Vietnam Wars.

When he retired from the service, he worked at the Poplar Schools, Poplar

Hospital and Sunrise Lumber.

Besides his children, Shep is survived by siblings: George Ferguson, Rusty Stafne, Enright Bighorn Sr., and sisters Amanda Bighorn Crowbalt and Ruth Brock, a brother Henry Ferguson, passed away last year.

Youth Diversion Program -

# Reaching troubled youth through culturally important activities

POPLAR - The Fort Peck Reservation's troubled youth have a new program to assist them in rediscovering and understanding their cultural heritage.

Cultural Diversion Activities Coordinator Darrell Red

Eagle said the program is attempting to address the many social problems which affect most Native Americans.

Most of the problems like high drop-out rates, poor

school attendance, dysfunctional families, broken homes, alcohol or drug abuse, sexual, physical, and emotional abuse, affect Indian youth who are between 10 and 19 years old, said Red Eagle. Other problems

that face today's Indian youth are suicides, high crime rates, teen pregnancies, mental health problems, poor nutrition, and high unemployment, and poverty.

Fort Peck has a great number of disadvantaged and high risk youth who need guidance, encouragement, and an understandable corrective alternative, said Red Eagle. "Most of these kids do not have a strong family background or a strong tie to their heritage."

The Cultural Diversion Activities program has begun a Horsemanship Program to help local youth address these problems, and as an alternative youth corrections program instilling a structured stable environment.

The program aims to teach the kids horse etiquette, riding skills, and caring for a horse and its well being.

Tribal Buffalo Ranch Manager Val Smith is working with Red Eagle in providing horses for the kids. Currently, they are working with kids who are in the Juvenile Detention Center, and kids involved in Spotted Bull Treatment Center's Circle of Care Program.

Recently, the program taught the kids how to ride

horses. They began by being led around until they could ride on their own, Red Eagle said, then they learned how to groom the horses.

So far, groups have been between 10 and 18 kids, Red Eagle said. "We want to build self esteem and responsibility." They will be working with the Fort Peck Tribal Youth Council, area schools, and the Tribal Courts.

The program is funded under a 3-year grant and has already been working with troubled youth around Poplar, according to Red Eagle.

The program is obligated to work with other youth programs around the state and reservation in implementing cultural diversion programs, he said.

Last week, Red Eagle showed the youth how to stretch a hide to make raw hide, drums, and shields. He also explained traditional games and various other cultural activities.

Red Eagle, a graduate from Poplar High School, began working as a cultural resource specialist in 1993 at Fort Aberdeen in Mandan, ND. He also worked with area schools in the same capacity, learning research and presentation skills.

Other activities planned are:

- >Cultural education on Dakota/Nakota knowledge
- >Family tree research
- >Learn traditional values
- >Assist elders in cleaning yards and houses
- >Learn many uses of the buffalo
- >Learn Native American trade routes and items
- >Learn how to brain tan various hides
- >Learn making moccasins, shields, hand drums, and other arts and crafts
- >Learn how to set individual goals and set time lines
- >Learn constitution and by-laws of tribal government
- >Learn about societies
- >Leadership skills
- >Cooking skills, traditional domestic skills, and motherhood classes
- >Fishing skills and how to identify the different types of fish and how to clean
- >Hunting skills and how to identify animals and how to dress and butcher them
- >Learn the plants and roots and when to pick them and how to use them
- >Learn traditional games
- >CPR and first aid

Anyone interested in the program can contact Red Eagle at the Tribal Courts or call 768-5557.



(Wotanim photo by L.Perry)

Darryl Red Eagle's new job for the tribes will be focusing on working with at risk youth across the reservation.

Native Journalist Assoc. -

# Wotanim 1st in Tribal Gov. coverage

BUFFALO, N.Y. - Wotanim Wowapi Editor Bonnie Red Elk was one of several dozen journalists who received first place awards at the 17th annual Native American Journalists Association conference last week.

Red Elk received first place in the Best Coverage of a Tribal Government category. The Navajo Times of Window Rock, Ariz., took home second place.

This is the second year in a row Red Elk has taken first place in that category.

Over 300 Indian journalists from the United States and Canada attended the annual event, which featured work-

NAJA membership also honored the "Dean" of Indian journalism, Richard LaCourse during a testimonial Friday night.

LaCourse, a former Seattle Times reporter and editor of the Yakima Nation Review, died at the age of 62 in March after suffering a massive stroke after heart surgery. He also covered national stories such as the shootout in Wounded Knee and the murder of two FBI agents in South Dakota.

Fort Peck tribal member

Louis Montclair, a 2001 graduate of Poplar High School, participated in NAJA's student newspaper project and also received a \$3,000 scholarship from the organization. His current plans are to attend the University of Montana.

The theme of this year's conference was "Journalism Without Borders." A number of issues regarding the border and the troubles of Indians in the USA and Canada were featured in several workshops.



**\*Week-end Specials\***

**6/22/01- FRIDAY- \$20.00 PACKET SPECIAL.** Buy 1 get the 2nd packet for \$15.00. Special's are included in the 2nd packet. Splitting is allowed.

**G-Ball: \$3,100.00**

**6/23/01- SATURDAY- \$12.00 PACKET SPECIAL.** Buy 1 & get the 2nd Packet for \$8.00. Specials are included with 2nd Packet. Splitting is allowed.

**6/24/01 SUNDAY-**

Fort Peck Community College Bingo Monday Nights at the Silver Wolf Casino. Packet Prices: \$5.00 & \$10.00. Regular Session @ 7:00 p.m.

Tuesday night Bingo at the SilverWolf Casino. Early birds at 6 p.m. Regular session at 7 p.m. Regular Packet Prices: \$ 5.00 & \$10.00

**Tuesday, June 26, 2001, there will be a FREE \$5.00 Packet Night.**

Red Bottom Bingo every Wednesday night at the SilverWolf Casino. Regular



Attention All Bingo players: Any seats that needs to be reserved, must be called in to the Casino prior to Bingo for that night. The Casino will not reserve any seats unless you call in by phone.

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## As others abandon plains, Indians and bison come back

FORT YATES, ND - In writing the obituary of the Great Plains, social historians have looked out at the abandoned ranches, collapsed homesteads and dying towns huddled against the wind in a sea of grass and seen an epic failure.

And members do tell a compelling story. More than 60 percent of the counties in the Great Plains lost population in the last 10 years. An area equal to the size of the original Louisiana Purchase, nearly 900,000 square miles, now has so few people that it meets the 19th century Census Bureau definition of frontier, with six people or fewer per square mile. And a large swath of land has slipped even further, to a category the government once defined as vacant.

But something else is under way from the Badlands of the Dakotas to the tallgrass fields of Oklahoma: a restoration of lost landscape and forgotten people, suggesting that European agricultural settlement of big parts of the prairie may have been an accident of history, or perhaps only a chapter.

As the nearly all-white counties of the Great Plains empty out, American Indians are coming home, generating the only significant population gains in a wide stretch of the American midsection. At the same time, the frontier, as it was called when it was assumed that the land would

*"What's happening is really quite astonishing," said Patricia Locke, a Lakota and Chippewa elder and a MacArthur Foundation fellow who returned to the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation here several years ago. "It's like an evacuation one way, and a homecoming in the other."*

soon be spotted with towns and farms, is actually larger than it has been since the early 20th century.

These changes have been under way for decades. But they have reached a point - 108 years after Frederick Jackson Turner suggested that the American frontier was closed, with the buffalo herds wiped out and native populations down to a few tribes - that there are now more Indians and bison on the Plains than at any time since the late 1870's.

"What's happening is really quite astonishing," said Patricia Locke, a Lakota and Chippewa elder and a MacArthur Foundation fellow who returned to the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation here several years ago. "It's like an evacuation one way, and a homecoming in the other."

Indians, of course, are still a faction of the overall Plains population, making up just under 8 percent of the population in the state, Oklahoma, where they have the biggest population, 272,601 people.

But while many Plains counties lost 20 percent or more of their population, the overall Indian population grew by 20 percent in North Dakota, 23 percent in South Dakota, 18 percent in Montana, 20 percent in Nebraska and 12 percent in Kansas. Some of this can be attributed to better counting and higher birthrates, but tribal officials say there has been steady immigration dating to the mid-1980's.

In North Dakota alone, 47 of the 53 counties lost population. Among the handful that gained people were three counties populated primarily by Indians.

In South Dakota, half of the counties lost people. But the second-fastest-growing county, Shannon, is in the heart of Indian country, on the Pine Ridge Reservation, a county that is 94 percent Indian and grew by 26 percent in the last census.

And much of Montana is nearly as open today as it was when Lewis and Clark explored there nearly 200 years ago. All but four of the counties in the flat eastern part of the state lost population; of those with gains, three contain Indian reservations.

"All of these numbers suggest that the experiment on much of the northern Plains with European agricultural settlement may soon be ending," said Myron Guttman, a University of Texas professor who is an authority on Plains population trends.

As Indians have moved home, on or near the reservation lands, whites had fled the counties that were opened to homesteading in the last of the great Western land rushers in the early 20th century.

The whitest county in the nation, Slope County, N.D., is down to 767 people; all but three of its residents are white. By contrast, in 1915, six years after the prairie was opened

to ranchers and farmers throughout the Enlarged Homestead Act, Slope County was bustling, with 4,945 people. Now the county seat, Amidon, has 25 people, and the population density, less than one person per square mile, is well below the 19th century Census Bureau definition of land that is vacant or wilderness.

Much of North Dakota has a ghostly feel to it; empty homesteads and occasional schoolhouses litter the land, with caved-in roofs and grass growing where there used to be front porches. The wind blows so hard that a cup of coffee brought outside develops whitecaps.

Cattle ranching and farming of wheat, barley and corn still prevail, especially on large corporate farms in the middle and southern plains. But in Slope, Hettinger, Adams, Grant, Burke, Divide, Garfield or any of the hundreds of other plains counties that seem to have one foot in the grave, land is being left to the wind and sparse rain.

In publicly owned prairie land, the native grasses and wildflowers have returned, and species like prairie dogs, black-footed ferrets, burrowing owls and bison have made comebacks. Much of this land will never be plowed again, for a third of the nation's 3.7 million acres of national grassland is designated roadless under a measure started by President Bill Clinton over the objections of many in the region's Congressional delegation. Other parts are managed by private groups like the Nature Conservancy, which has been buying up ranches and homesteads.

"I'm an old prairie guy, and it does my heart good to see so much of the Plains greening up again with native species," said Greg Schenbeck, a wildlife biologist with the grasslands division of the Forest Service. "And I tell you, people who come to visit are really excited - they talk about the expansiveness, the openness, the grass stretching to the horizon."

At the turn of the century, only a few hundred buffalo were left in the West. Now there are 300,000, and more than 30 tribes in the northern Plains are controlling large herds on land where bison, unlike cattle, need no help to flourish. A third of the nation's 31 accredited Indian colleges offer bison management.

"Just having these animals around, knowing what they meant to our ancestors, and bringing kids out to connect to them has been a big plus," said Mike Faith, who manages the bison herd on the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation here, not far from where Sitting Bull was killed.

Indians have the highest rate of diabetes in the nation. Part of the overall restoration of the Plains is an effort to get bison meat, which is low in cholesterol and fat, back into the Indian diet.

"We're probably one of the few ethnic communities that have been blessed with a God-given creature to help restore us," said Donald Lake, director of the Inter-Tribal Bison Cooperative of Rapid City, S.D., a nonprofit group that works to repopulate Indian country with bison.

Mr. Lake, a Santeee Indian from Nebraska, has returned to the Plains after living for years in Los Angeles. He likes the slower pace, the connection to other Indians, the low prices. He winces at the description that the historian Turner used to describe frontier land as it became populated with Europeans. It was, Turner wrote, "the place where civilization meets savagery."

Many Indians have moved back to reservations because of jobs in the casinos, the so-called new buffalo, which have been the main economic salvation. On the Standing Rock Reservation, for example, the casino is the county's biggest job provider, employing 376 people, and it has expanded six times since it opened in 1993.

But Indian reservations remaining among the poorest places in the nation, with high unemployment, high out-of-wedlock birthrates and chronic drug and alcohol abuse.

Still, life has improved. Tourism has increased. People come to look at bison, tribal officials say; others pay up to \$2,500 for the right to hunt them. People interested in the Plains tribes' history are also drawn to the prairie.

"Sitting Bull is one of the biggest names in the world, and he still has family here," said Elaine McLaughlin, the Standing Rock tribal secretary. "A lot of people in state government seem surprised when people show up from all over because they want to know more about Indians."

The re-emergence of a Great Plains of Indians and bi-

*"The people coming back, they get their degrees and they start their own business, or take jobs as teachers here on the reservation," said Anita Blue of the Turtle Mountain Reservation in North Dakota, where the population in the Indian-dominated county grew 7.1 percent.*

son was foretold in 1987 by two Rutgers University professors, Frank J. Popper and his wife, Deborah E. Popper. They said white depopulation would accelerate, as it became clear that farming and building towns on the arid Plains was "the largest, longest-running agricultural and environmental miscalculation in American history."

They proposed a "Buffalo Commons" in the empty counties, an open range populated by the species that once thundered over the land. People throughout the prairie scorned their idea, and the Poppers became the objects of intense hatred. But their idea has been revived of late, with little rancor.

While the Poppers may ultimately be proved right in several respects, they were wrong in one major sense: In their vision, government would be the driving force, buying land and bringing buffalo back, then turning some of it over to Indians to manage.

Now, in a twist, it is government that keeps the white farming and ranching communities alive, through annual subsidies of more than \$20 billion. Many historians have long argued that white settlement, particularly of the northern Plains, was largely government-induced from the start, through subsidies to railroads and homesteaders.

"If the government ever pulled out, the Buffalo Commons would come on like a storm," Mr. Popper said.

Indians and bison have returned by self-initiative and free enterprise, helped by the success of casinos.

"The people coming back, they get their degrees and they start their own businesses, or take jobs as teachers here on the reservation," said Anita Blue of the Turtle Mountain Reservation in North Dakota, where the population in the Indian-dominated county grew 7.1 percent.

The idea of Manifest Destiny in reverse is scoffed at by many people, especially in the dying communities.

But a sense of irrevocable change pervades the northern Plains. "There is a lot of that Buffalo Commons idea that's probably true," said Gov. John Hoeven of North Dakota, a Republican elected on a pledge to revitalize the state. "It's never going to look like it did before, when all the farms and ranches were healthy."

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### Fort Peck Head Start Program 2001-2002 Recruitment

The Fort Peck Head Start Program is now taking applications for 3 to 5 year old children, for the 2001-2002 school year.

Applications are available at the Head Start Centers listed below. Turn your child's application in as soon as possible!

For more information, contact the Head Start Center in your area, or stop by the main office in Poplar, telephone (406)768-5155 Ex. 350.

Frazer Head Start Center	(406)695-2224
Wolf Point Center I	(406)653-2344
Wolf Point Center II	(406)653-2647
Poplar Center I	(406)768-5155 ex. 352
Poplar Center II	(406)768-5436
Fort Kipp Center	(406)786-3267

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