

Crow Reservation

Location

The Crow Indian Reservation encompasses 2.2 million acres, mainly in Big Horn County, in south central Montana. The reservation is bordered by Wyoming to the south. The Northern Cheyenne Reservation borders the reservation to the east. The Crow Reservation is divided into six districts for cultural and Crow governmental purposes: 1) Reno (also known as Center Lodge), 2) Lodge Grass (the Valley of the Chiefs), 3) Pryor (Baapua or Arrow Creek), 4) Big Horn (Valley of the Giveaway), 5) Wyola (Mighty Few) and 6) the Black Lodge (AshShipte) districts. Historically tribal members are divided into three subgroups: Mountain Crow, River Crow and Kicked in the Bellies.

The Crow Reservation has three mountainous areas: the Big Horn Mountains and the Pryor Mountains in the south central and southwest respectively and the Wolf Mountains in the southeast. In addition to the high mountains (elevation 7,000 feet), valleys, rolling plains (elevation 4,500 feet) and flat alluvial floodplains (elevation 3,000), the reservation includes gravelly or stony slopes, broad hilltops with soils generally capable of supporting and maintaining excellent vegetative cover, level and productive irrigated valleys along the Big Horn Rivers and Pryor Creek, deep canyons and extensive areas of rolling plateaus. Much of the western portion of the reservation is difficult to traverse as the hills that climb from the plains are dissected by a labyrinth of coulees and canyons. There are three major drainage systems on the reservation: the Bighorn River; the Little Bighorn River; and Pryor Creek.



The climate is relatively moderate for its latitude. The warm Chinook winds that blow from the western mountains melt most snow accumulations. The mean annual temperature is 45.5 degrees Fahrenheit. Extreme temperatures range from 110 degrees Fahrenheit in the summer to -40 degrees Fahrenheit in the winter. Depending on the elevation, annual precipitation ranges between 12 to 18 inches.

Lodge Grass has a gas station and a grocery store; Crow Agency has a gas station and two small grocery stores; however, the nearest service center is Hardin, Montana, immediately adjacent to the reservation's northern boundary where restaurants, shops and motels are available. The biggest retail and business center for the Crow Tribe is Billings, located 59 miles north of Crow Agency, Montana.

Population

Tribal members living on or near the Crow Reservation	10,000
Tribal members living off the Crow Reservation	5,000
Total number of enrolled Tribal Members	14,500*

*(not all members have enrolled)

The growth rate is approximately 4.1% per year.

Gender ratio: 50.1% females; 48.9% males.

Median age: 27.

Age distribution: 9.9% of the population is under five years old; 6.5% are sixty-five or older.

Education*: 28.6% have no high school diploma; 38.2% are high school graduates; 17% have a bachelor's degree or higher (*2011 U.S. Census Bureau).

Land

Of the 2.2 million acres which comprise the Crow Reservation, 1.425 million acres are held in trust by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) for the Crow Nation. The Crow Tribes owns 18% of the reservation while 50% of the acreage is owned by individual allottees who are tribal members. Although rare, some tribal members own fee lands. Roughly 700,000 acres or 32% of the reservation are in fee status and owned by non-Indians. As a result of the individual allotments from the 1920 Crow Allotment Act, the Crow land base is characterized by a significant “checker boarding” of Indian and non-Indian land ownership. In an effort to reclaim the sold allotments and other non-tribally owned property within the exterior boundary of the Crow Reservation, the tribe has established a fund to purchase fee lands as they become available.

Land Use and Housing

Within the reservation, Crow Agency is the largest community with approximately 3,245 residents. The majority of BIA, Indian Health Services (IHS) and tribal housing is located in Crow Agency. Crow Agency is the seat of the tribal government and located in the Center Lodge district.

Lodge Grass is the second largest community with approximately 2,125 residents. An IHS Clinic which also serves Wyola is located in Lodge Grass. This clinic is supported with limited IHS housing. Lodge Grass has the second largest tribal housing site.

Pryor is the third largest community with 1,108 residents. It is located 69 miles northwest of Crow Agency and 30 minutes from Billings, Montana. Pryor also has an IHS Clinic with limited IHS housing and support. Tribal housing encompasses a large portion of the community.

Wyola, the fourth largest community with 215 residents, is located 13 miles south of Lodge Grass. Wyola also has a tribal housing site.

St. Xavier is the smallest community with approximately 83 residents. It is also a tribal housing site. Fort Smith, also known as Yellowtail is located in this Big Horn district. The National Park Service and the Bureau of Land Management provides housing for its employees. There are no tribal housing developments in the Big Horn and Black Lodge districts.

Throughout the four communities, the tribe owns, manages and maintains 200 single-family housing units. The Black Lodge district does not have a collective community. Most Black Lodge residents live on 2.5 acre home sites scattered between Hardin, Crow Agency and towards St. Xavier.

In addition to the tribal housing developments in Crow Agency, Lodge Grass, Pryor and Wyola, an additional 300 single-family mutual-help housing units are scattered throughout the reservation. Mutual-help housing units are rent-to-own units with a 30 year life located on private property on individual allotments. After the maturity of the mutual-help housing units, the tribe conveys these units to the homebuyer and they become private property.

Housing conditions on the Crow Reservation continue to be poor. Many housing units, 60%, are substandard. Overcrowding is a serious problem with two to three generations of families living in one small home. More than 1,000 housing units need to be built.

Land Use Control

Land use on the reservation is proscribed by the Crow Tribal Council. The main component of the council is the Crow Tribal Legislature. The legislature enacts resolutions designating tribal land use.

Although the tribe has a land use plan in place, it does not have a zoning ordinance to enforce its land use plan. Non-Indian residents living on private parcels located within the exterior boundaries of the tribe are not subject to the tribal authority. This further complicates enforcement of tribal codes and ordinances.

Historical Background

The ancestors of the Crow Indians came from a “land of many lakes,” probably in the headwaters of the Mississippi or further north in the Winnipeg Lake region. They eventually settled along the Missouri River in what are now the states of North and South Dakota. The people lived in semi-permanent villages of lodges covered with earth. They became known as the “people who lived in earthen lodges.”

Nearly 400 years ago the people divided into two factions. One group, the Hidatsa, remained along the Missouri. The other group, the Apsaalooké or Biilooke, migrated westward and eventually claimed most of what is now eastern Montana and northern Wyoming as homeland. At the time of the breakup, this latter group, numbering about 500, was made up of several families. Its population reached about 8,000 before the small pox epidemic of the middle 1800s. At that time, the Apsaalooké or Crow Tribe traveled in two or three groups or bands, the Mountain Crow, the River Crow and the Kicked in the Bellies.

The Apsaalooké chiefs entered into their first treaty, a friendship treaty, with the United States in 1825. In 1851, Crow Nation entered into the first Fort Laramie Treaty allocating 33 million acres of land to the Crow people. That land was located in the Montana, Wyoming, and Dakota Territories. The second Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 reduced the Crow Indian Reservation to eight million acres in South-Central Montana Territory. ⁽¹⁾

An 1882 Act of Congress further reduced the land base. In compensation for taking the land, the U.S. government committed to buy livestock and build houses. By this time, the tribe had been settled within the boundaries of the reservation for about ten years. In 1890 yet more land was ceded for \$946,000. In 1905 the last major land cession was made, leaving approximately three million acres of land for the tribe.

The Crow have always felt that the U.S. government failed to give them adequate compensation for the land it acquired. The estimated value far exceeded the five cents per acre received. In 1904, the Crow Indian Nation first initiated legal proceedings for just compensation for lands taken. Almost six decades later, in 1962, the Court of Indian Claims awarded a \$10,242,984.70 judgment to the Crow.

Since 1905, further attempts have been made to reduce the Crow land base. Senator Dixon in 1910, Senator Meyers in 1915 and Senator Walsh in 1919 all sponsored legislation in Congress to open the balance of the Crow Reservation for settlement by the public. These attempts failed. An Act of Congress passed on June 4, 1920, sponsored by the tribe itself, divided the remainder of the reservation into tracts which were allotted to every enrolled member of the tribe. The titles to these lands are held in trust by the federal government and allottees may not dispose of their lands without the consent and approval of the government. The rough mountain areas were withheld from such allotment and remain in communal tribal ownership.

⁽¹⁾ <http://www.crow-nsn.gov/>

Organizational Structure

On June 24, 1948 the Crow adopted a written Constitution, which was amended on December 18, 1961. Thus, the Crow Tribe chose not to organize under the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934. Under the Crow Constitution, the governing body is the Crow Tribal General Council, which consists of three branches, the Executive, Legislative and Judicial Branches. The Executive Branch consists of the Chair, the Vice-Chair, the Secretary and the Vice-Secretary. The duties of the Chair include building beneficial relationships with other tribes as well as the State of Montana, and promoting economic and energy development interests.⁽²⁾ Elections for all Executive Branch positions are held every four years in November with inauguration into office in December. In order to vote, one has to be at least 18 years old and be an enrolled member.

The Crow Nation Legislature, established by Article V of the Crow Constitution, is the law-making body of the Crow Nation Government. The legislature has 18 members elected by the voters of six reservation districts to staggered four-year terms.⁽³⁾ Article X of the Crow Constitution established the judiciary branch. It consists of all courts established by the Crow Law and Order Code.⁽⁴⁾

The government has various departments such as housing, credit, education, enrollment, natural resources, business registration, social services, media, tourism, transit, water resources and wellness.⁽⁵⁾

Current Issues

- Adequate and sufficient housing
- Balancing natural resource development with conservation for future generations
- Addressing the high unemployment with more sustainable job creation
- Addressing high school drop-outs
- Maintaining and preserving Crow language fluency as older Native speakers pass on

Medical Facilities

The Crow/Northern Cheyenne (IHS) Hospital is a government-maintained facility with two satellite health clinics in Lodge Grass and Pryor.

Education

The Tribe maintains the Little Big Horn College, a two year, fully accredited community college. The Crow Reservation has three high schools and eight elementary schools. School Districts 17H and 1 serve the northern sector with elementary schools (grades 1-5) in Crow Agency and Ft. Smith. The school districts are headquartered in Hardin, Montana. The school district also maintains two elementary schools, a middle school and a high school in Hardin, attended by a large number of tribal members mostly from the Center Lodge, Black Lodge and Big Horn districts.

Other school districts serving the Crow Reservation include the Wyola School District #29 (K-8), the Lodge Grass School Districts #27-2 (K-12), Pryor School Districts 2 and 3 (K-12) and two Catholic schools: Pretty Eagle Academy (K-12) in St. Xavier and the St. Charles Mission School (Preschool-8) in Pryor.

² <http://www.crow-nsn.gov/chairman.html>

³ <http://www.crow-nsn.gov/legislature.html>

⁴ <http://www.crow-nsn.gov/courts.html>

⁵ <http://www.crow-nsn.gov/departments.html>

Employment and Income

The largest employer on the reservation is the Crow Tribal Government, which is also the biggest taxpayer in Big Horn County. Twenty-four percent of the reservation's tribal residents are employed by tribal, federal, state and county government entities and programs.

Employment by field:

- Agriculture (small farming and ranching) 6%
 - Manufacturing 4%
 - Mineral Extraction 4%
 - Retail 2%
 - Service Industry 2%
 - Education; Health Care; Judicial Services 6%
 - Unemployment rate: 52%
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- Median household income: \$44,000
 - Median family income: \$30,038
 - Per capita income: \$8,800

People below the poverty level in Bighorn County: 25%

Recreational Activities

The Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area, which includes the Yellowtail Dam (height: 525 feet) and the Bighorn Reservoir, is a popular fishing, boating and camping destination. The reservoir encompasses 120,000 acres and draws up to 230,000 annual users. The Bighorn River is known for its trout.

The Hardin Community Activity Center is the only public swimming pool servicing the reservation and tribal members. It is owned by the school district and primarily benefits school activities. The public use is secondary to school events.

The Apsaalooke Center in Crow Agency has a gymnasium. The facility is used for high school sporting events by the area schools, adult basketball leagues and tribal community basketball tournaments. Cultural events such as Halloween masquerades, New Year's dances and spring hand-game tournaments are also held here. Across the street from this center is a rodeo arena and horseracing track with stables. Nearby, on the I-90 Frontage Road, is an aesthetically pleasing, small Veteran's Memorial Park, where President Barack Obama was officially adopted into the Crow Tribe.

Annual Festivities

Around June 25 every year at Crow Agency Crow Native Days occurs; this celebrates the anniversary of the Battle of the Little Bighorn.

The third week each August brings Crow Fair, the largest teepee encampment in the world, held in Crow Agency. It is a time of family gathering, Pow-Wow watching and visiting loved ones in adjacent camps. Each morning at 10:00 a.m. Friday –Sunday, there is a parade, where Crow members display their finest, hand-made regalia on riders atop horses and floats. Vendors sell frybread, jewelry, sweaters, music and more. Under the starlit skies one can occasionally hear “49er songs,” by roving bands of youth who sing from camp to camp. Family celebrations include birthdays, graduations and other special events with clan feeds with delicious buffalo meat stew and June-berry pudding. This event is open to the public.

Points of Interest

The Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument features museum exhibits, an interpretive center and ranger-led programs at Crow Agency. The monument memorializes the Native victory over the Seventh Cavalry.

Chief Plenty Coups State Park in Pryor contains the home of the beloved Crow Chief Plenty Coups who was a visionary and a diplomat. One can visit the home and enjoy a picnic in the scenic picnic area.

Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area and Yellowtail Dam, in Fort Smith, Montana which includes two visitor centers and fish tackle shops for fishing and boating.

Little Big Horn College, Crow Agency. Contact the college for group or individual tours.

Report Source: Dr. William Luke EnemyHunter, CEO of the Crow Indian Nation and other footnoted sources as indicated above.