

Fort Peck Reservation

ASSINIBOINE AND SIOUX TRIBES

Fort Peck Tribes

The Fort Peck Indian Reservation is home to a number of different Nakoda (Assiniboine), Dakota, and Lakota (Sioux) communities that stretch along northeast Montana's Hi-Line from the Big Porcupine Creek to the Big Muddy Creek. The reservation, Montana's second largest in terms of land area, consists of 2,093,318 acres of which just under half is owned by individual tribal members or held in common by the Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes. Linguistically, the Nakoda, Dakota, and Lakota are related. Sometime in the late 16th century they resided in the region between the Mississippi River and Lake Superior. As pressure from eastern tribes increased, the Nakoda split from the other Dakota and Lakota groups and moved north into Cree country. Today, bands of Nakoda, Dakota, and Lakota reside in Frazer, Oswego, Wolf Point, Poplar, Brockton, Riverside, and Ft. Kipp. These communities lay along the Missouri River's north bank, the reservation's southern boundary. Wolf Point, with a population of 4,000, is the largest town on the reservation and serves as the reservation's commercial center. Poplar, the next largest community, has a population of 3,200. Poplar is also the center of tribal government. The Ft. Peck Tribes, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the Indian Health Service are headquartered there, as well as a number of other federally funded programs. The nearest primary trade centers are Billings, Great Falls (both approximately 300 miles from the reservation), and Williston, North Dakota, which lies some 75 miles east of Poplar.



Population

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| Enrolled Sioux members | 8,814 |
| Enrolled Assiniboine members | 4,568 |
| Total Ft. Peck tribal members | 13,382 |

There are close to 1,000 members of other tribes living on Ft. Peck Reservation. One of the largest non-enrolled tribal groups is the Chippewa from the Turtle Mountain Reservation in North Dakota. The next largest non-enrolled group is the Assiniboine from Ft. Belknap followed by individuals from the Three Affiliated Tribes (Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara) in North Dakota, and a number of Canadian Assiniboine.

Land Status

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| Total reservation acreage | 2,093,124 |
| Total tribal acreage | 413,020 |
| Total individually allotted acreage | 548,000 |
| Total fee simple or state acreage | 1,132,104 |

The Ft. Peck Tribes have instituted an active policy of land acquisition. Over the past 20 years the Tribes have acquired over 19,000 acres. Ft. Peck, like most reservations, experienced the allotment policy, which resulted in the loss of just over half of tribal land holdings. Although the Dawes Act was enacted in 1887, it wasn't until the early 1900s when Ft. Peck was allotted. By 1922 the allotment process was near completion and lands not allotted were opened up for homesteading by non-Indians. Again, like most reservations, much of the better

cropland passed into non-Indian hands. During the Depression, many non-Indian farms failed and the government repurchased the lands. An Act of Congress returned much of that land to the tribes in 1975.

Historical Background

In the mid-1600s, the Nakoda separated into two groups. One group moved further west to the upper Red River territory, where they and their ever-present Cree allies began refining their buffalo hunting skills. The other group moved north toward Lake Winnipeg and initiated a trading relationship with the Hudson's Bay Company.

Soon after they established a foothold in the upper Red River region, the Nakoda and Cree found themselves engaged in a bitter dispute over hunting grounds with the Dakota bands who had also moved onto the Northern Plains. By the time the United States was forging a new nation east of the Appalachian Mountains, the Nakoda were engaged in a full scale war against the various Dakota bands. Raids on each opposing village became commonplace as Plains warfare evolved. The boundary differences between the United States and Britain over present-day Montana, North Dakota, and Canada also affected the Nakoda. By the time these disputes were settled, the Nakoda divided into bands that either moved west of Lake Manitoba or southwest toward the Missouri River. The bands that controlled the area north of the confluence of the Yellowstone and Missouri Rivers, found themselves in alliance with the United States political forces. In September 1825, the Nakoda met with Indian agents at the Mandan Indian Villages.

A few years later, trader James Kipp of the American Fur Company began trading with the Nakoda at newly established Ft. Union. As the demand for beaver pelts decreased, trade focused on buffalo hides and the Nakoda, Dakota, and Lakota became increasingly dependent on American trade items. Women welcomed metal pots, pans, skinning knives, manufactured blankets and cloth, and beads. Men were more interested in guns, ammunition, and tools. Trade enticed the southern Nakoda to move their lodges, some 1,200 strong, more permanently to the vicinity of Ft. Union. Unfortunately, as more contact occurred, disease decimated lower Nakoda populations. Smallpox, carried upriver on a steamboat, reduced their numbers by two-thirds. Similarly, Dakota groups fled their homes to escape the smallpox epidemic of 1837-38. Thousands perished and bodies were dumped into rivers or left where they had died.

In 1851, the United States government formalized its relationship with Nakoda, Dakota, and Lakota groups. Along with dozens of other Plains tribes, they met near Ft. Laramie and negotiated the first of many treaties between tribal leaders and government officials. The treaty involved acceptance of a set of tenuous boundaries. The Nakoda believed their designated territory lay in the northeast region of Montana, near Ft. Union. The Lakotas and some bands of Dakotas accepted much of present-day North and South Dakota.

During the first years of the Civil War, many eastern Dakota bands fled from reservation life. As the Civil War waned, exiled Dakota and Lakota groups battled American militiamen near the Killdeer Mountain, west of the Missouri River in Dakota Territory. This was one of the largest assemblies of American forces fighting in a single battle against Plains tribes. Dakota and Lakota bands continued moving further west, and leaders such as Sitting Bull, Medicine Bear, Standing Buffalo, and Waanatan found the country of the upper Missouri quite agreeable. Under the leadership of Red Stone, the Nakoda, Dakota, and Lakota put old differences aside and began to participate in buffalo hunts and inter-marry with each other. Eventually, the bands of the southern Nakoda and their new Dakota and Lakota allies began inquiring about securing an agency of their own somewhere closer to the mouth of the Milk River. By 1871 the government established the Fort Peck Agency near the old Ft. Peck trading post on the Missouri River. Some 5,000 Nakoda and Dakota moved closer to this new agency. Sitting Bull, however, and most of his Hunkpapas drifted back to Dakota Territory, nearer to his Lakota relatives. After the

Battle of the Little Bighorn in 1876, soldiers hunted Dakota and Lakota refugees until they submitted or sought sanctuary with Sitting Bull and other leaders in Canada. By 1880 bands of Lakota following Sitting Bull, Gall, and Black Moon began to drift back into the United States, with most of those refugees surrendering at Ft. Buford. However, some of Sitting Bull and Gall's people remained on Ft. Peck.

With the buffalo near extinction, the Nakoda, Dakota, and Lakota faced total dependence on the United States government. In 1885, they mounted a hunt in which they shot the last few buffalo left in Montana. The reservation period, marked by starvation and confinement, had begun. Tribal consolidation and land cessions became the fare of the day. After much suffering, the chiefs of the Blackfeet, Gros Ventre, Upper and Lower Nakodas and Dakotas, along with a few refugee Lakota bands, signed an agreement in 1887. They surrendered about 17.5 million acres and accepted smaller reservations. The next year Congress ratified the agreement creating the Ft. Peck Reservation with its present boundaries.

At the turn of the century, the allotment process was in full swing, the Great Northern Railway was completed and towns began to emerge on and near the reservation. By 1911 allotment was completed and hundreds of thousands of acres were left over. Conveniently, homesteading by non-Indians seemed the answer. Most tribal allotments remained in trust for the next 25 years. When the Depression hit Ft. Peck, many non-Indian homesteads failed and the land reverted back to the government.



The building of the Ft. Peck Dam on the Missouri River provided some relief, however, most Indians remained dependent upon what little the government provided. Most Nakoda, Dakota, and Lakota families planted gardens, worked on local farms, and hunted and trapped to supplement their livelihoods.

During World War II, Nakoda, Dakota, and Lakota men and women joined the armed forces. This was the first time many of them had left the reservation. Many served in European, African, and Asian campaigns.

Oil was discovered on the reservation in the early 1950s and over 50 wells were producing enough crude oil each year that the Ft. Peck Tribes became the leading oil producing tribe on the Northern Plains.

Economically, the Ft. Peck Tribes relied heavily on agriculture, tribal leases, and oil and gas production. However, in 1968, the A & S (Assiniboine and Sioux) Industries began, which refurbished M-1 rifles for the U.S. government. They soon expanded this venture to include other government contracts. A & S Industries was followed by West Electronics, which operated in the private sector. By 1990 A & S Industries went out of business; however, West Electronics continued to operate. In December 1998, a geographic zone within the boundaries of Ft. Peck was designated as an Enterprise Community. The intention was to encourage federal agencies in assisting Ft. Peck in efforts of empowerment toward social and economic growth.

1978

Tribal Community and Universities Act

When this act was passed it created Indian Community Colleges and gave them funding. Fort Peck Community College was founded in 1979 and continues to serve the Fort Peck Indian Reservation and the FPCC campus expanded in 2003 to Wolf Point.

1985

Fort Peck Water Compact

Fort Peck Tribes signed the first tribal-state water compact with the state of Montana. Under the conditions of the compact the tribes are allowed to divert 1 million acre feet of water from the Missouri River and its arteries.

1999

Tribal Buffalo Ranch

Fort Peck established a buffalo ranch 25 miles northwest of Poplar.

2009

Cobell Case

Eloise Cobell filed a class action suit in 1996 because of mismanagement of federal Indian trust monies and land. The U.S. Government settled the case for \$3.4 billion.



2012

Yellowstone Bison

The Fort Peck Tribes expand their bison ranch herd with 75 (including calves) genetically pure bison. Soon after, 36 of these 75 bison were given to the Fort Belknap Reservation. In 2014 another 134 pure genetic herd of buffalo were added. These bison originate from the Yellowstone bison herd and will be added to the cultural herd.

2012

Salazar Payment

The Fort Peck Tribes received a settlement claim in the amount of \$75 million dollars. The Tribal Executive Board decided to give out two large per capita payments to enrolled members. The first payment of \$1,500 was distributed on October 2, 2012 and the total cost was \$19,500,000. The second payment of \$1,000 was distributed in December 2012 and totaled \$13,000,000. The tribal board also put money into (1%) Tribal Health, (13%) tribal reserves, (13%) for land buy back, (21%) for restoration on cultural buildings and tribal facilities, and for paying off some outstanding debts (6%). The Tribal Land Buyback Program has added over 11,000 acres to the tribe's land base.

Housing

Since 1962, the housing conditions of Ft. Peck have steadily improved through tribally sponsored programs. Extensive housing programs, both low-rent and mutual help, have been undertaken by the Ft. Peck Housing Authority. The BIA Home Improvement has also helped to bring Indian homes up to standard. The Indian Health Service also provides sewer and water facilities to Indian homes. The BIA's road department has also built and paved new and existing roads and streets in the surrounding communities. Ft. Peck Housing Authority (2015): 1,062 housing units include 620 low rent unit; 438 home owner units; and 47 tax credit units.

Medical Facilities

Indian Health Service clinics can be found in Wolf Point—The Chief Redstone Medical Clinic and Poplar—The Verne E. Gibbs Medical Clinic. The clinics serve over 7,300 patients regularly. The clinics offer outpatient services, dental care, X-rays, optometry care, pharmacy, mental health care, and field health and administration. Services provided through P.L. 93-638 contracts include alcohol treatment, community health representatives, nutrition, sanitation, health education, housekeeping, environmental health, and tribal health administration. At the Poplar clinic, the Indian Health Service also operates a tribal dialysis program; however, this is totally funded by the Tribes. Inpatient services are provided by the Community Hospital in Poplar and the Trinity Hospital in Wolf Point. Many patients also see specialists in Billings and Williston, North Dakota.

Employment and Income

Unemployment on Ft. Peck reached catastrophic heights just after World War II and into the 1950s and '60s. A & S Industries provided some relief through the 1970s and into the early 1980s. The oil boom that Ft. Peck initially experienced in the 1950s and later in the early 1980s waned after oil exploration dropped off soon after 1985. Ft. Peck has experienced tides of prosperity and economic slump. Currently, the Ft. Peck Tribes have been working with off-reservation communities in a water pipeline project which will provide water for human and livestock consumption over some 75,000 square miles, both on and off the reservation. The Enterprise Community, which receives \$250,000 annually to promote economic development, is also a bright spot for Ft. Peck's economic endeavors, while farming and ranching will continue to provide a sound foundation for the future.



The median house hold income is \$36,115.00, unemployment rate of over 50%, and 25.2% individuals living in poverty. (FPTED, 2015; U.S. Census, 2010)

Annual Festivities

Poplar Wild West Days—two-day rodeo - First weekend in July

Badlands Celebration—three-day Pow Wow. Third weekend in June - Brockton

Ft. Kipp Celebration—three-day Pow Wow. Fourth of July weekend - Ft. Kipp

Red Bottom Celebration—three-day Pow Wow. Second weekend in June - Frazer

Wadopana Celebration—three-day Pow Wow. First weekend in August - Wolf Point

Wolf Point Wild Horse Stampede—three-day rodeo (Montana's oldest). Second weekend in July

Turns Around Pow Wow—Three day pow wow. Second week of August - Poplar

Poplar Indian Days—three-day Pow Wow. Labor Day weekend - Poplar

Fort Peck Public Education K-12

Several public schools are located on the Fort Peck Reservation and they include the following: Brockton Public Schools, Frazer Public Schools, Frontier Elementary, Poplar Public Schools, and Wolf Point Public Schools.

Every year during tournament time students honor individuals who have impacted them in their lives.

Points of Interest

Ft. Peck Assiniboine and Sioux Culture Center and Museum, Poplar, Montana, Director: Darrel “Curely” Youpee (406) 768-2328

Features permanent exhibits of local tribal culture.
Arts and crafts are for sale.

Ft. Peck Community College, Poplar, Montana, President: Haven Gourneau (406) 768-6300

The Fort Peck Community College consists of two campuses: Poplar site established in 1978 and the Wolf Point campus that opened in fall 2003. FPCC offers many Associate of Arts and Associate of Science degrees and certificates and also limited Bachelor of Science degrees. The TiToká Tibi-college book store and gift shop displays local artists’ work, including beadwork, hide paintings, sculpture, star quilts, etc., most of which are for sale. The college also has two community wellness centers, one located in Poplar and the other in Wolf Point, and the new James E. Shanley library for student and public use.

Turtle Mound Buffalo Ranch Director of Fish & Game: Robbie Magnan. (406) 768-5301.

The Turtle Mound Buffalo Ranch was established by the Fort Peck Tribes in 1999. It currently has two pastures that house the tribes’ business herd and cultural herd. The tribes’ business herd averages 176 bison and is used for business-live sale and buffalo hunts. The cultural herd consists of 187 animals. The tribes set aside 13,000 acres of pastureland for the business herd and 12,000 acres for the cultural bison to roam. In 2012 the Fort Peck Tribes added genetically pure Yellowstone bison to their ranch. The ranch is located 25 miles northwest of Poplar Montana.

