

# Northern Cheyenne Reservation

## NORTHERN CHEYENNE TRIBE

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#### Location

The Northern Cheyenne Reservation, situated in southeastern Montana, lies within the counties of Big Horn and Rosebud. The Crow Reservation borders it on the west and the midstream Tongue River on the east. The Northern Cheyenne Reservation consists of ponderosa pine, plateau, and valley country with an annual rainfall of approximately 16 inches. The topography ranges from about 4,800 feet to a low of a little less than 3,000 feet. The Reservation headquarters and the center for business activities and population are in Lame Deer. The reservation itself is divided into five districts; Busby, Lame Deer, Ashland, Birney, and Muddy.

#### Population

Total number of enrolled tribal members approximately is 10,840. Even though there are over 10,000 enrolled members, about 4,939 members live on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation scattered through the five district communities. Relatively small population of non-Indians and other tribal members are also living on the Reservation.



#### Land Status

Total acres within the reservation's boundary	444,774.50 acres
Individually allotted lands	113,277.70 acres
Tribally owned lands	326,546.81 acres
Fee title or state lands	4,827.70 acres

Non-Indians own about 30 percent of the fee or state lands on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation. The Tribal Council has selected a Land Acquisitions Committee whose primary policy is directed to the purchase of land into tribal ownership. The Committee thus assures that Northern Cheyenne land is retained in Cheyenne ownership.

As of December 2014 under the Northern Cheyenne Land Buy Back Program \$6,850,409.00 has been paid to landowners for fractionated lands, a total of 13,845 equivalent acres purchased. The Northern Cheyenne are one of the few tribes in the United States having virtual complete Indian ownership of their reservation.

A major legislation in December 2014 restored control of 100 percent ownership of mineral rights to the Northern Cheyenne Tribe. In early 1900 when the Northern Cheyenne Reservation was created, an oversight was made by the Federal Government that left 5,000 acres of mineral rights to the railroads. These mineral rights contained some of the richest coal deposits; and for the past twenty years the Northern Cheyenne Tribe has sought a correction to this oversight. Finally on December 12, 2014 the U.S. Senate approved the Historic Public Lands agreement called the Cheyenne Lands Act. This victory has long been coming and Northern Cheyenne Tribe finally has total control of the minerals on the Reservation. In addition to granting the Tribe mineral rights to some 5,000 acres of Reservation sub-surface, the Tribe will receive 40% royalty interest in off-reservation coal that may be developed by Great Northern Properties. The passage of the Cheyenne Lands Act was a major victory and "it is a true expression of sovereignty that will be very important to our economic well-being in the future" stated Councilman Tracy Robinson.

## Historical background

The Cheyenne Indians are part of a linguistic group of the Algonquian language stock. Originally, it is believed that the ancestors of the Cheyenne lived south of the Hudson Bay and James Bay areas and slowly moved west into what is now northwestern Minnesota where the Red River forms a border between Minnesota and the Dakotas. During the late 1600s, they settled among the tribes of the upper Missouri River and began farming rather than subsisting as small game hunters and fishermen. During the early 1700s, they were still primarily farmers growing corn, but they also hunted buffalo. The Cheyenne acquired the horse around 1750, and made the transition from a horticultural existence to a horse culture within a matter of several generations. Hunting buffalo became a way of life as they migrated as far south as Old Mexico and Texas.

The Cheyenne participated in the treaty making in the Friendship Treaty of 1825 near what is now Fort Pierre, South Dakota. A few years later, the larger part of the tribe (now the Southern Cheyenne) moved southward and occupied much of the Arkansas River in Colorado and Kansas. The remainder who became the Northern Cheyenne continued to inhabit the plains from the headwaters of the North Platte up on to the Yellowstone River in Montana. The division of the tribe was recognized by the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851.

In the Battle of the Little Bighorn in 1876, the Northern Cheyenne, the Sioux, and Arapahoe joined forces in what the Cheyenne call “where Long Hair was wiped away forever.” Cheyenne oral history recalls a time when Stone Forehead, keeper of the Sacred Arrows, smoked the pipe with George A. Custer. Stone Forehead told Custer that “if you are acting treacherously toward us, sometime you and your whole command will be killed. Custer speaking for the white soldiers promised to keep peace with the People. Stone Forehead dropped the ashes from the pipe on the toes of Custer’s boots. As he did so he declared “Thus will Maheo’o destroy the soldier chief if he ever walks contrary to the peace pipe again.” These ashes were wiped away signaling Custer’s commitment never to fight the Cheyenne again. (People of the Sacred Mountain, pg.707) Although the Cheyenne won the battle Where Long Hair was killed, it was the beginning of the end for them for in 1877 they were exiled to Indian Territory in Oklahoma with the Southern Cheyenne. In September 1878 a small band escaped in a desperate effort led by Chief Dull Knife (Morning Star) and Chief Littlewolf. These two chiefs, in one of the most heroic episodes of western history, bravely fought against overwhelming odds, leading a small band of men, women, and children back to their homelands. The Northern Cheyenne call themselves “the Morning Star people.” The name is taken and used in respect of Chief Dull Knife who was also known as Morning Star.

By Executive Order of November 26, 1884 President Chester A. Arthur created the Tongue River Indian Reservation which consisted of 371,200 acres for the Northern Cheyenne Tribe. Within this area the early white homesteaders were allowed to remain. While on the other side of Otter Creek, which is now in the town of Ashland, Montana forty six Northern Cheyenne families had established their home sites under the Homestead Act of March 3, 1875. These Northern Cheyenne families lived off the Reservation and they were not eligible to receive assistance from the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Meanwhile within the new Reservation there was extensive conflict between the white settlers, who from the beginning had fought against the establishment of the Reservation. Finally in early 1900 congress settled the land problem and all the white settlers were bought out, while the forty six Northern Cheyenne families on the Otter Creek area were moved onto the west side of the Tongue River at \$25.00 each for their home sites. The midstream of the Tongue River was established as the eastern boundary of the Reservation. On March 19, 1900 the second executive order signed by President William McKinley established the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation. This executive order extended the land to its present boundaries.

## Organizational Structure

The Northern Cheyenne Tribe was organized in 1936 under the Indian Reorganization Act. Today, the Tribe is a federally chartered organization with both governmental and corporate responsibilities. The governing body is a tribal council headed by a president (elected at-large) to serve a term of four (4) years. Other members of the Council include the vice- president (elected at-large) and ten (10) council representatives from the five (5) districts on the Reservation and serve four (4) year staggered terms.

The Constitution and Bylaws of the Northern Cheyenne Tribe have been amended and approved by the Secretary of the Interior three times. The latest amended constitution is dated March 27, 1996. This amendment consists of the following: Amendment A, (Governmental Reform), Amendment B (Separation of Powers), and Amendment C (Code of Ethics). The chief judge and associate judge positions are both elected at-large to serve four (4) year terms. Today tribal membership is based on descent and those that are able to provide documentation and lineage to the 1935 census rolls are eligible for enrollment.

## Housing

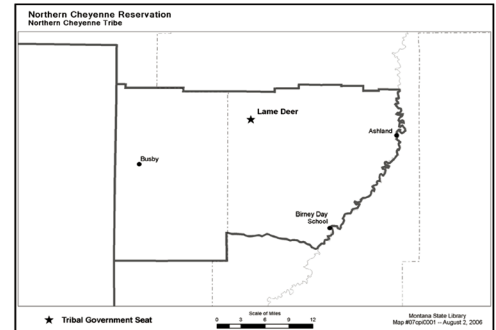
The availability of housing on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation has improved in recent years because of participation in federal housing programs similar to other tribes in Montana. To date, the Northern Cheyenne Tribal Housing Authority (NCTHA) which was under the Department of Housing and Urban Development (DHUD) program has been transformed into the Native American Housing Self-Determination Act (NAHSDA). This Act allows the Northern Cheyenne to become more self-sufficient through block grants from DHUD. There are 525 mutual help homes and 299 low rent homes that have been built since the inception of federal programs on the Reservation. Currently, the NCTHA is looking into tax credit homes and home ownership rather than continuing with mutual and low rent homes. Through NAHSDA, the NCTHA on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation operates on an annual budget of \$3.1 million.

The NCTHA also houses a Senior Citizen's Complex that was built in 1978 with 35 apartments. Currently, the complex has 29 occupants with the majority of them being elders. The other units are for people with disabilities. Several units have been converted as public service offices.

The NCTHA has been exploring the possibility of building log cabins with the use of local timber and labor. There have also been air force housing relocated from the Maelstrom Air Force Base. NCTHA has been active in seeking alternate housing for there are many families still in need of shelter.

## Medical facilities

An Indian Health Service (IHS) clinic was recently built to replace the old clinic lost to fire. The new clinic opened in 1999 and is located in Lame Deer, Montana. The clinic provides medical doctors, dentists, nurses, sanitation personnel, nutritionists, Well Child personnel, and others. It has been modified and expanded to include the mental and physical needs of the Reservation and non-Indian communities. The nearest Indian Health Service hospital is at Crow Agency, 45 miles west of Lame Deer, Montana. The nearest specialized facility, other than the Crow hospital, is at Billings (110 miles from Lame Deer). Other medical facilities not on the Reservation include places such as Colstrip, Hardin, and Forsyth.



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## Education

Northern Cheyenne students are served by six schools: St. Labre Indian School and Ashland Elementary School, both in Ashland; Lame Deer Public Schools, Lame Deer; Northern Cheyenne Tribal School, Busby; Hardin Public Schools, Hardin; and Colstrip Public Schools, Colstrip. Both St. Labre Indian School and Ashland Elementary School border the eastern part of the Reservation approximately 20 miles from Lame Deer. The Northern Cheyenne Tribal School is located 16 miles west of Lame Deer near the western border of the Reservation in the community of Busby. Hardin Public Schools is approximately 55 miles west of Lame Deer. Colstrip Public Schools is located approximately 25 miles north of Lame Deer. All schools that serve the Northern Cheyenne Reservation have buses that run on a daily basis to and from school. Increasingly, culture and language are being emphasized at most schools that serve Reservation students. Chief Dull Knife College (CDKC) serves as the tribal community college on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation. The College is named after one of two chiefs instrumental in returning the northern group back to Montana from Oklahoma. The College was originally chartered in September 1975 by Tribal Ordinance as the Northern Cheyenne Indian Action Program Incorporated (IAP). Funding was granted by the Indian Technical Assistance Center of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Today, CDKC is an open-admission, community-based, comprehensive, tribally controlled community college and land grant institution designed to provide quality educational opportunities to Reservation and surrounding communities. CDKC's financial support includes Bureau of Indian Affairs' funds, grants foundations, and partnerships with other institutions.

## Employment and Income

Major employers on the Reservation include St. Labre Indian School, the federal government, tribal government, PP & L (an electrical power producing plant formerly operated by Montana Power Company) of Colstrip, Western Energy Company, and the local and surrounding public schools including CDKC. The branch of Forestry of the Bureau of Indian Affairs is another source of employment, particularly during the fire season. Unemployment fluctuates and is usually anywhere from 60 to 75 percent. On average, Reservation income is at poverty level.

Tribal income or operating funds for the Northern Cheyenne tribal government includes grazing fees, farm and pasture leases, and timber and stumpage fees. The Tribe also operates under federal monies through the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The funds are administered through the Tribal Council to provide many services via tribal programs including Tribal Health, Social Services, Tribal Employment Rights Office (TERO), Tribal Court, Natural Resources, and others.

## Contemporary Issues

The Northern Cheyenne Reservation has one of the largest coal reserves of any tribe in Indian Country. Deliberations on coal development on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation have been ongoing since the 1960s. In the 1960s sections of land were leased for coal development. At the request of the Northern Cheyenne Tribe these leases were cancelled. In a unanimous decision concerning the Hollowbreast Case, the U.S. Supreme Court on November 19, 1976 ruled that all mineral rights are owned and controlled by the Northern Cheyenne Tribe. Members have definite opinions about coal development. Some see development as the answer to unemployment and creating a stronger economy. Others are concerned about disturbing pristine land that could possibly have cultural and sacred significance. On December 12, 2014 a recent land exchange made right a more than a century old wrong. The Northern Cheyenne Tribe now owns all minerals underlying the Reservation.

Revitalization of the Northern Cheyenne language has been ongoing for many years. An important relationship exists between language and culture. Culture is expressed in language. Richard Little Bear, President of Chief Dull Knife College, said that "language is the basis of sovereignty as well as the vessel of culture. During the

nineteenth century,” said Little Bear, “the United States showed its respect for Native American languages’ essential role in culture by trying to eliminate them. We have all those attributes that comprise sovereign nations: a governance structure, law and order, jurisprudence, a literature, a land base, spiritual and sacred practice and that one attribute that holds all of these together is our language. So once our languages disappear, each one of these attributes begins to fall apart until they are all gone. Those in my generation who speak the Cheyenne language are quite possibly the last generation able to joke in our own language.” Take language away and salutations, songs, prayers, humor, proverbs, literature, and laws are all lost.

Language immersion camps for children and adults have been initiated through Chief Dull Knife College. Chief Dull Knife College has a daycare on campus to assist students, staff, and faculty that have small children. The daycare staff and Administration of Native American (ANA) funded staff offers Cheyenne language classes to the children and their parents. Cheyenne language classes are also taught in the local elementaries, high schools, and college.

Class 7 gives each language group in the state of Montana the opportunity to test and certify its own language and culture instructors. The Montana Office of Public Instruction issues the license. Class 7 certified and licensed instructors have all the rights and responsibilities of the other seven classes of teachers. There are eight classes of teachers who can be licensed and certified in Montana.

The Cheyenne language is in danger of vanishing. This might be the last time that Cheyennes have the opportunity to save our language. They must learn from successful language preservation methods. The Cheyenne is a community of cultural communication. In an informal 2013 survey approximately 500 first speakers of the Cheyenne language were still living. Of that number, between November 2013 to November 2014, approximately 96 Northern Cheyenne people died. Of that 96, approximately 24 were people who spoke the Cheyenne language as their first language. This shows graphically the attrition of the Cheyenne language in a natural basis.

Every year American Indian youth pay homage to their Cheyenne ancestors by participating in a spiritual run. On January 9, 1879 Cheyennes were being held captive at Fort Robinson, Nebraska. That winter, troops locked the Cheyenne in the barracks without food, water or heat. After five days, the Cheyennes fled the barracks. Most of the band was killed within minutes, but many survived. Chief Dull Knife and a small band survived and embarked on a long, rigorous journey to the north. The long trek back to the north is commemorated today by remembering the ultimate sacrifice of our ancestor’s lives in exchange for our homelands in Montana. Today the 400 mile spiritual run begins at Fort Robinson, Nebraska and continues until the runners reach Busby, Montana. Running through winter storms and below freezing conditions much like their ancestors did in 1879.

In September 2013, the Northern Cheyenne Tribe made a land purchase adjacent to Bear Butte State Park, South Dakota. The property was called “Free Spirit Campground.” Bear Butte is a uniquely solitary mountain on the edge of the Black Hills that many Plains Tribes regard as a sacred site. The Cheyenne have a strong relationship to Bear Butte. It is the place of origin for their nation through the Sacred Arrows Covenant, which established their government, military systems, and code of conduct. Bear Butte, known as Noavose by the Cheyenne, has been a major concern over the past few years. Recently, the area has experienced disturbances to the area because of the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally that brings thousands of visitors to the area every summer. The Northern Cheyenne Tribe is concerned for the cultural preservation of the region. This is a sacred area where people come for prayer and ceremony. Now the Northern Cheyenne have another sanctuary for spirituality. The Northern Cheyenne Tribe intends to begin the process to have the land put into trust so that it will be better protected against inappropriate use.

In 1906, the Northern Cheyenne Reservation was bombarded with heavy rains for several weeks. Then violent winds followed uprooting thousands of trees. More than one million board feet of timber lay upon the ground, according to Superintendent John R. Eddy. Superintendent Eddy thought the wind-blown timber should be cut to avoid deterioration. These events led to the early stages of the timber industry on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation. Sawmills were purchased and agreements were made with the Forest Service. Sawmills were originally constructed to manage wind-blown trees and later in 1911 for the beetle infested pines.

The mill in Ashland, Montana was acquired by the Northern Cheyenne Tribe in the 1980s. However, sharply declining timber markets resulted in closure. In 2012 Ash Creek fires in the Ashland area spurred interest in salvaging timber left from the fires. In May 2014 the Cheyenne Tribal authorities negotiated a lease on the mill to harvest and utilize timber salvaged from the Ash Creek fires. Negotiations were made with Fox Lumber. The reopening of the mill will be a boost to the economy in the area. The mill will hire approximately 15 full-time employees earning from \$10-\$15 an hour. Back in 1909 Northern Cheyenne loggers earned approximately \$2.00 a day.



## Recreation

The Northern Cheyenne Reservation and its surrounding area offer a variety of activities. There are a number of fishing and camping areas. Non-Indians can purchase permits that allow fishing in all ponds and streams.

## Points Of Interest

- **Head Chief/Young Mule Monument**  
On September 2, 1890 two Northern Cheyenne youth rode to their death after shooting a white settler's cow. The people were starving. The Calvary hunted the boys down. They chose death rather than being arrested and hanged.
- **Two Moons Monument at Busby**  
This historic monument was built in 1936 in memory of Chief Two Moons, who was a participant in the Battle of the Little Big Horn.
- **WHITE BULL (ICE) MONUMENT**  
Located across from the Two Moons monument, this monument was recently established to honor one of the great medicine men of the Tribe. White Bull performed a miracle at this site in 1867.
- **Crazy head Springs Camp Area**  
Located between Lame Deer and Ashland on U.S. Highway 212, the area is used for swimming, fishing, and camping.
- **Chief Dull Knife College**, Lame Deer, Montana, (406) 477-6215 The first academic courses were offered in the winter of 1978. Chief Dull Knife College is one of 36 tribal colleges in the United States. The curriculum has expanded to provide the Northern Cheyenne people and their neighbors with access to a variety of programs leading to the degrees of Associate of Arts, Associate of Applied Science, and Certificates in several skill areas.

- **St. Labre Indian School**, Ashland, Montana

Established in 1884 by the Franciscan Order; the visitors' center, museum, and gallery are important showplaces of Cheyenne heritage and art.

- **Deer Medicine Rocks**

The site is located five miles north of Lame Deer, Montana and off the Reservation. On June 11, 2012 this site was dedicated as a National Historic Landmark. According to stories told it was at this site where Sitting Bull, Lakota chief, pledged 100 pieces of his flesh in the Sundance. During his quest he had a vision of soldiers and some Indians on horseback coming down like grasshoppers, with their heads down and their hats falling off. They were falling right into camp. The warriors knew it meant those white men would be killed. Sitting Bull's vision of the upside down soldiers was carved into the rocks.

- **Rosebud Battlefield**

A National Historic Landmark and it is a site of the battle between the Cheyenne and Sioux against General Crook's cavalry. This site is off the Reservation and is located off Highway 314 eleven miles south of Kirby, Montana.



*Charging Horse Hill, site where the youth rode to their death.*

## Annual Events

- White River Days, June 18 to coincide with the anniversary of the Rosebud Battle or Battle of Where Girl Saved her Brother.
- 4th of July Pow Wow, Lame Deer, Montana
- Labor Day Pow Wow Ashland
- Memorial Day Pow Wow and Rodeo, Lame Deer, Montana
- Veteran's Day Pow Wow, Birney, Montana

For more information about the Northern Cheyenne Reservation, contact: Northern Cheyenne Tribe, (406) 477-6285 or Chief Dull Knife College, (406) 477-6215.

## Resources for more information on the Northern Cheyenne

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