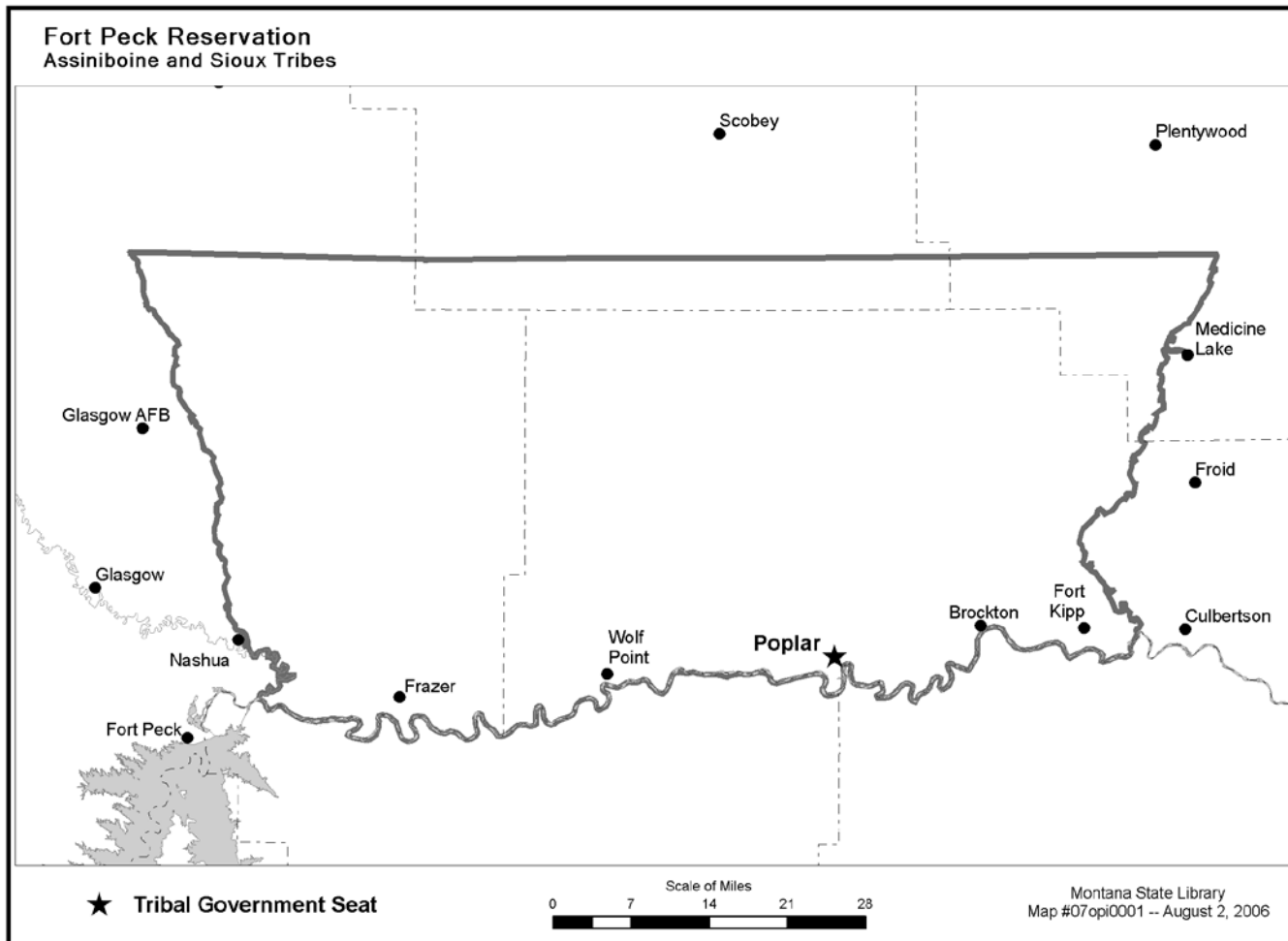


# FORT PECK RESERVATION

ASSINIBOINE AND SIOUX TRIBES



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## FORT PECK RESERVATION

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 BIA, 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

|                               |              |
|-------------------------------|--------------|
| Enrolled Sioux members        | 6,962        |
| Enrolled Assiniboine members  | <u>4,209</u> |
| Total Ft. Peck tribal members | 11,171       |

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

|                                     |           |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|
| Total reservation acreage           | 2,093,124 |
| Total tribal acreage                | 413,020   |
| Total individually allotted acreage | 516,092   |
| Total fee simple or state acreage   | 1,164,012 |

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 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 Hunk papas 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 United States 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.

## **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 has approximately 1,391 housing 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. 93-639 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.

## ANNUAL FESTIVITIES

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

**Oil Discovery Celebration**—three-day Pow Wow. Last weekend in August - Poplar

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

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

**Iron Ring Celebration**—three-day Pow Wow. Third weekend in July - Poplar

**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

## POINTS OF INTEREST

**Ft. Peck Assiniboine and Sioux Culture Center and Museum, Poplar, Montana, (406) 786-5155**

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

**Ft. Peck Community College, Poplar, Montana, (406)768-5551**

Offers many Associate of Arts and Associate of Science degrees and certificates and also limited Bachelor of Science degrees. It has a library and wellness center.

**Tiotka Tibi, Poplar, Montana, (406) 768-3213**

Ft. Peck Community College bookstore and gift shop. Displays local artists' work, including beadwork, hide paintings, sculpture, star quilts, etc., most of which are for sale.