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FORT BELKNAP, MONTANA Initiating Positive Change

Efforts made by the Fort Belknap Indian Community's Brownfields Program are helping to clean up and redevelop abandoned and contaminated properties as well as provide necessary job training to the area's people. EPA has awarded two complimentary \$200,000 grants to the Fort Belknap Indian Community: a Brownfields Assessment Pilot and a Brownfields Job Training Pilot. The aid of the EPA Brownfields grants has allowed the Fort Belknap Indian Community to take the initial steps toward overall community revitalization.

Located in north-central Montana, the 653,940 acre Fort Belknap Reservation is home to members of the Gros Ventre and Assiniboine Tribes. The reservation encompasses two counties, Blaine and Phillips, and contains the Fort Belknap Agency, Hays, and Lodge Pole areas. Over half of the 5,138 members of the Fort Belknap Indian Community reside on the reservation.

Several community-wide problems have been recognized by tribal members. Among them, several brownfields properties of cultural significance have been identified as degraded sites of importance. Degradation has occurred due to previous activity including landfill siting, illegal dumping, and abandonment of buildings and quarries. It was determined by tribal members, that these properties could be utilized for redevelopment purposes. Other community-wide problems identified by members are the 70 percent unemployment and 45 percent poverty rates suffered by the reservation's population. Area residents are often unable to find work and lack the necessary training and skills to acquire jobs that would provide a suitable living wage.

Creating Change

The Fort Belknap Brownfields Program has taken some important first steps to address these problems. One of the initial steps was to create a brownfields inventory. The inventory was created by conducting community outreach including meetings, one-on-one interviews with local senior citizens, and circulating questionnaires. Upon completion of the brownfields inventory, two properties were selected to begin the environmental assessment work: the Snake Butte Quarry and Old Agency Landfill. In the 1930s, the Snake Butte Quarry was utilized by the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers to obtain rip-rap for the construction of the Fort Peck Dam. Upon completion of the



Snake Butte Quarry Site

dam, the butte area was left in a damaged state with remains from blasting, railroad construction, and other debris strewn throughout. The Old Agency Landfill property was estimated to have been in operation for approximately 60 years until it was closed in 1970. During that time, the landfill reportedly accepted residential, industrial, and agricultural wastes and allegedly received unspecified amounts of pesticides and PCBs.

Starting in 2002, EPA-funded Phase I assessments were conducted to determine the extent of environmental damage on these two brownfields properties. Subsequent Phase II assessments were later completed. These assessments revealed that the Snake Butte property did not contain significant contamination, however

numerous contaminants were found at the Old Agency Landfill. The Old Agency Landfill will require further action before redevelopment activities can occur.

Throughout the Brownfields Process the Fort Belknap Brownfields Program has sought input from tribal members to determine the future uses of both culturally significant properties. Since the Snake Butte Quarry property is near many existing scenic vistas, the highest priority was to return it to a natural state. Similarly, a balance of natural preservation and creation of recreational trails was suggested for the Old Agency Landfill property.



Old Agency Landfill Site

Meeting Economic Needs with Education

To combat soaring unemployment and poverty on the reservation, and empower community members to deal with the environmental challenges facing the Tribes, the Fort Belknap Brownfields Program has initiated a Job Training Program with funds provided by a 2003 EPA Job Training Grant. The aim of the program is to provide community members with the necessary skills to acquire jobs in the environmental field while helping to preserve natural and cultural resources of particular significance to the community.

The Fort Belknap Brownfields Program has partnered with numerous institutions and groups including, but not limited to, Fort Belknap College, Montana Tech of the University of Montana, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Tribal Health Services, White Clay and Buffalo Chasers Cultural Societies, and Portage Environmental Inc., to provide the two year Job Training Program. The program seeks to train 60 students (30 students per year), achieve a 70 percent job placement rate, and track program graduates for at least one year of their post academic work. As this Pilot has only recently been awarded, current activities have focused on advertising and recruitment.

The two-year, 370 hour Job Training Program will consist of two tracks: a hazardous waste and remediation/ecosystem track. The first year includes eight courses under the hazardous waste track including HAZWOPER certification, hazardous materials management, alternative/innovative treatment technologies, lead risk assessment, industrial toxicology, industrial hygiene and safety, administration programs, and cultural preservation awareness. The remediation/ecosystem track begins in the second year. It offers sampling techniques, ecosystem management, hydrology, professional planning management, restoration ecology, environmental site assessment certification, cultural preservation awareness, and excavation trenching and soils courses. The first round of classes began on October 13, 2003 with 20 students meeting at Fort Belknap College.

With the combination of the Brownfields Assessment and Job Training Pilots, the Fort Belknap Indian Community with assistance from EPA are initiating positive changes. Environmental assessments, job training, and community support will help to preserve the natural and cultural resources while revitalizing the land and training the people who live on the Fort Belknap Reservation.

For further information about the Fort Belknap Brownfields Program contact the Fort Belknap Environmental Program at (406) 353-8429 or Stephanie Wallace, EPA Region 8, at (406) 457-5018.