

Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes / Flathead Indian Reservation

The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes are the aboriginal land managers of the Flathead Indian Reservation. The Reservation, which makes up the lower quarter of the Flathead River Basin, encompasses 1.3 million acres. About a third of that area, some 459,000 acres is forested. Most of these timbered acres are on the hills and mountains along the perimeter and central portions of the Reservation and represent the bulk of the Tribal land base. The Reservation contains a patchwork of land types that include Tribal, allotted, state, federal and private fee ownerships. Six towns are located on the Reservation. Other features include the National Bison Range, Flathead Lake, Flathead River, Tribal Wilderness Area and major state and federal transportation corridors. Tribal members number about 7,000, which represents approximately 24% of the local population.

Prior to the 1865 Hellgate Treaty the Salish and Kootenai speaking Indians inhabited a vast territory that extended from the Cascades to the Rocky Mountain Front and from the southern portions of the adjacent Canadian Province's to northern California. In the 1890's the remaining Bitterroot Band was relocated to the Flathead Reservation. Since that time initial acts and laws enacted by the Federal Government acted to acculturate and diminish Reservation lands through homesteading and selling lands surplus to the needs of the Tribes. More recent Federal legislation has reversed some of the negative aspects that reduced Tribal lands and sovereignty.

Today the Reservation contains a patchwork of land types that include Tribal, allotted, state, federal and private fee ownerships. Six towns are located on the Reservation. Other major features include the National Bison Range, Flathead Lake, Flathead River, Mission Mountain Wilderness Area and major state and federal transportation corridors. Tribal members number about 7,000, which represents approximately 24% of the local population.

The Tribes have always been keen observers of the natural environment. Hunting and gathering directed the pattern and timing of yearly activities. The vast forests and plains available to them provided a surplus of foods, medicines and materials for the needs of Tribal inhabitants.

European style forest management practices started after the turn of the century. The advent of the railroad coming to the Reservation along with catastrophic natural disturbances heralded the need for sawmills, logging and new management techniques. Congress enacted legislation and laws implemented locally by employees of The Bureau of Indian Affairs.

The Tribes are in the continued process of restoration. Restoration of sovereignty, restoration of visual beauty, restoring use of natural processes like fire in applying ecosystem management principles, and restoring all the plants and creatures that lived or visited western Montana. The prevailing thought is to look and care for seven generations ahead, using both coarse and fine filter approaches in management decisions.

Our current management plan was adopted in 2000 and represents a fully integrated Forest Management Plan. The direction and basis of the plan is an ecosystem management approach with emphasis on restoration toward a pre-European contact condition. The role of fire, both natural and human caused, provides the mechanism for disturbance that directs the types and patterns of vegetation that exist on the Reservation. Four distinct burning types (fire regimes) exist with distinct vegetative and successional pathways. Management within each fire regime targets healthy forest communities that represent all stages from primary to climax conditions.

The Tribes are the largest employer on the Reservation with up to 95 employees employed by the Tribal Forestry Department. The Tribes own an extensive containerized greenhouse operation that has recently expanded into suitable species for highway or riparian restoration projects. They manage the greenhouses and facilitate planting and mechanical site preparation for reforestation efforts.

Forest Management Structure and Governance

Ownership of the Flathead Reservation is inherent in the Trust relationship maintained by the United States Government for the members of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. The Congress relegates authority down through the Department of Interior and Bureau of Indian Affairs to its local authority, the Agency Superintendent. Guidance via the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) gives rise to local authorities and ordinances implemented by the Tribes and authorized by the Superintendent.

Tribal leadership and Federal oversight call for a frequently updated forest management plan. The mixed ownership of the Reservation somewhat complicates matters as jurisdiction over members and non-members can be a contentious matter. The Tribes tend to be a conservative owners and managers of the resources. Policy decisions are made by the Tribes and authorized by the Tribes as to issues of hiring, minimum employment requirements in timber contracts and types and size of offerings to individual Indians for free use, permits, small sales and major timber contracts. Local town, private / public land ownership are but a small portion of Reservation Timber Resources. In the past this factor had more influence than at present, as the Tribes have been active buying larger land holdings and Allotments as they become available.

Acquisition

Tribal land acquisition is an ongoing process. Tribal council sets the budget goals from the general fund. Additional settlements like Kerr Dam mitigation or proceeds from specific grants may provide acquisition targets such as wetlands or wildlife corridors. The tribes purchase lands from fee status and also get first right of refusal on individually owned lands that are allotted.

Efforts to retain some forest lands, for fuel and lumber for Tribal member use (March 3, 1909) allowed timber to be sold separate from the land it grew on. Congress

passed these corrective acts in response to questions raised by the 1904 Act that opened the Reservation to non-Indian settlement. These changes retained Tribal timberlands that were not selected for allotment.

Tribal funding resources and income are varied. Timber alone provides from three to five million dollars yearly. Direct employment from timber harvest is estimated to be 11.03 man-years per MMBF of timber harvested with an income of \$350,170. Indirect and induced jobs are estimated at 22.17 with an income of \$437,713. This yields a total estimate of employment at 33.20 with a total estimate of \$787,883 per MMBF (using 1993 volume data, FMP EIS).

Additional values from timber harvest include timber stand improvement collections (TSI) currently set at \$22.00 per MBF, weed control collection of \$50.00 per mile of road used for hauling and cyclical road improvements during sale, road closure and abandonment, fuel reduction and urban interface fire protection.

Long-Term Management

Management goals for Tribal forest reserves include the balancing of seral cluster stands across each landscape and fire regime. Visual restoration of older harvest units not meeting visual goals, quality diversified recreation opportunities, reduced open road miles to meet targets in the management plan, income to support Tribal goals, viable populations of species reintroduced to the Reservation, increased opportunity for quality high paying jobs, repurchase of lands removed from Trust.

Conservation objectives identified by management plan objectives and during the NEPA process for each proposal evaluated. The monitoring and evaluation process is ongoing on the Reservation with audits and committee evaluation processes set in motion by current management plan directives. BIA's Portland Area Office also provides expertise, monitoring and oversight. Continuous forest inventory plots spread across the Reservation also help gauge the state of the forest.

Community

The definition of community refers in a primary way to the community of Tribal members living on and off the Reservation. However, the secondary level of community includes descendents and the non-Indian community living on the Reservation.

Obstacles to community buy in or support are minimal and probably inherent to never having all the funding needed to purchase land available as it comes up for sale.

Benefits the forest provides have been partially listed in previous paragraphs. Additional benefits are recreational, subsistence foods provided by plants and animals, traditional medicines, religious, sovereignty over Indian lands and resources on the Reservation, pride, education and accomplishment.

Lessons Learned

Patience in dealing with people and issues as this is a most contentious age. Also, the identification, education and training of quality people for key positions as it takes great effort to accomplish most of these management goals.