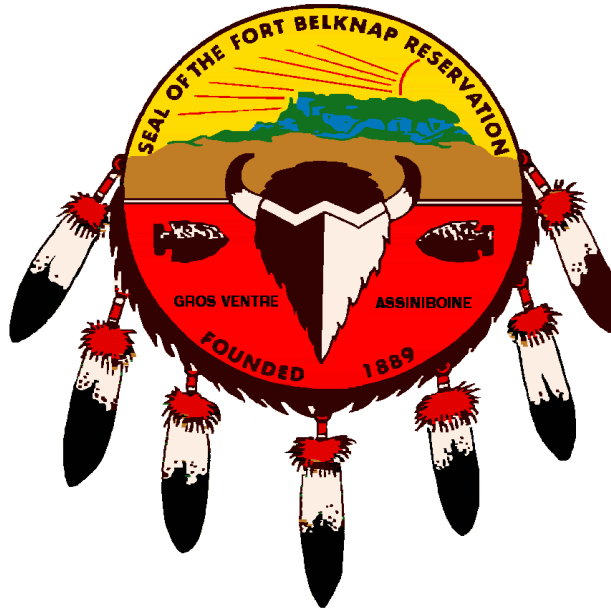


**WETLAND PROGRAM WORKPLAN  
FORT BELKNAP INDIAN COMMUNITY  
FY2010-FY2015**

**“Protecting wetlands for future generations, is the goal of the Wetlands Program”**



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## OVERALL GOAL OF THE WETLANDS PROGRAM

The Fort Belknap Indian Communities overall goal is to develop a comprehensive Wetland Management Program for the Fort Belknap Community, specifically the Fort Belknap Environment Department, proposes to develop the administrative, programmatic, legal and regulatory framework that will allow us to assess, monitor, control, and protect the health, of reservation wetland resources.

## WETLAND FUNCTIONS & VALUES

Wetland Monitoring and Assessments are needed to evaluate the functions and values of wetlands, and to develop ecosystem based approaches for land based, watershed planning efforts, such as prioritizing wetlands restoration and protection activities, and to address impacts associated with wetlands. Water Quality monitoring will also be performed in this plan, including the development of criteria for designated uses and water quality standards. Associated wildlife species depend on these wetlands that inhabit surrounding, native, grassland communities, as well as the river valleys, mountains and geo-thermal areas of the Fort Belknap Indian Community.



South Fork Little Peoples Creek-Little Rocky Mountains

## WETLAND IMPORTANCE

The Fort Belknap Indian Community's (FBIC) Wetland Workplan will provide a strategy for the FBIC to contribute to the national goal of "No net loss" of wetlands. This plan will also provide the Wetlands Program with a strategy of meeting the EPA's Core Elements that will be required for a wetland program to qualify for operational support funding. Our workplan depends on continued support from various funding sources and the EPA, so that we can carry out proposed actions in the workplan to protect our wetland resources. We need better representation from our tribal nations on this issue as wetlands are one of the first resources that get affected by global warming and climate change. Wetlands occur throughout the reservation. In the Milk River valley, wetlands include sloughs and old oxbows of the Milk River, irrigation induced cattail marshes, and cottonwood and willow dominated riparian zones. The central portion contains prairie potholes and riparian zones along the drainages. In the Little Rocky Mountains, beaver ponds, wet meadows, and riparian zones associated with streams are found. Also within the Little Rocky Mountains we have the Geo-thermal zone where two creeks are fed by Geo-thermal springs.

If we listen closely to our wetland environment, the amphibians, birds, and plants, will let us know if they are in peril. We will know from their silence, as the wind that blows thru native plants providing a soft, rustling sound that comforts our spirits and feeds our souls.

The croaking and calling of our native amphibians also let us know that they are reproducing from the breeding calls that ring out across our wetlands and riparian areas.

Our native birds also provide us with beautiful songs as only they can sing, and an active, functioning wetland, is a sacred place for these native species that all share this wonderful environment.

When a wetland is impacted, we will know from the silence.... and we will not be able to show our children these magnificent places that we were so generously, offered the opportunity to witness first hand.

Wetlands are an important part of the ecosystem and as a tribal nation, we need funding to protect, restore, and preserve these delicate places that we take for granted. Wetlands are culturally significant and provide many things for our tribal nations, from basket weaving to the healing powers of the peppermint.



Amphibian Surveys on the Milk River



Geo-Thermal wetland site

## **A. Overall Goal Statement and Time Frame for Plan:**

The Fort Belknap Indian Community's (FBIC) Wetlands Program, plans to develop its monitoring and assessment program over the next five years (2011-2014). In 1999, the FBIC Wetland Program developed a 5 Year Strategic Plan, which had short and long term goals for protection of wetland and riparian resources of the FBIC. The Aquatic Resource Protection Ordinance (ARPO) that was approved by tribal council in 2003, will continue to be strengthened with enforcement capabilities, including a Penalty Matrix that will be used for potential violations to the ARPO. The major impacts to wetlands are grazing and past mining activities, that have elevated levels of metals in the streams, directly below the defunct, Zortman-Landusky Gold Mines.

The EPA has recently revised the core elements to include: 1) Monitoring and Assessment, 2) Regulation, 3) Voluntary Restoration and Protection, and 4) Water Quality Standards for Wetlands.

Within the FBIC Wetland Plan, we will address 1) Monitoring and Assessment, 2) Regulation, and 4) Water Quality Standards. Short term and long term goals for the FBIC Wetland Program have been addressed in prior workplans but at a developmental level, and will continue to be progressively strengthened, until we have a Comprehensive Wetland Management Program.

In FY-2000 our Quality Assurance Project Plan was approved, and then we began conducting wetland inventories and vascular plant surveys. We have completed collecting baseline data on all four watersheds, which involved characterizing selected wetlands within each HUC-5 watershed, using the Montana Department of Transportation, Wetland Assessment Method, which scored functions and values each wetland site has. We also completed wetland delineations to identify jurisdictional wetlands, including, collecting, identifying and mounting vascular plants from wetland sites within the FBIC. We also completed Amphibian and Bird Surveys on all four watersheds as well. Wetland Restoration sites and Mitigation Methods have been identified and are in our wetland database.

Educational Workshops have been performed here for the FBIC, including community meetings to address any wetland concerns and field trips for the local school are regularly scheduled every spring. Our Wetland Program submits articles on our wetland activities, to our local radio station KGVA, the Fort Belknap News and the Circle Speaker (our environmental newsletter) to keep the community informed.

Beginning in FY-2010 the first year in the wetland workplan, there will be an immediate short term plan to revise the Aquatic Resource Protection Ordinance (ARPO) to include a Penalty Matrix for violations to wetlands/aquatic resources. We have revised the Quality Assurance Project Plan (QAPP), to include current and future wetland projects, and activities and are waiting for EPA's approval. We have also revised the Floodplain Ordinance and currently seeking approval from FEMA. Long term plans are to conduct more Monitoring and Assessments by selecting additional wetland sites to assess the health and functions of wetlands. The FBIC Wetland Program will use information gained from baseline data on wetland conditions to develop wetland protection and prioritize wetland restoration activities. Development of water quality standards and designated uses on wetlands will also be performed. By achieving these goals over the next 5 years using the core elements, we plan to incorporate a Wetland Monitoring & Assessment Method unique to the FBIC.

## **B. Action and Activities Supporting Overall Goals, with Schedule:**

### **Year One (2011):**

#### **Action:**

FY 2011 WPDG funding will assist the FBIC to build upon the Regulatory component of the core elements of the Wetland Program, by monitoring and assessing the biological integrity of the wetland communities within Peoples Watershed. The use of GIS technology will aid in tracking jurisdictional wetlands within each watershed. Wetland education and outreach activities are an important activity for the FBIC Wetland Program and we will continue to build upon our

commitment to educate our community on wetlands. These plans are consistent with the National Strategic Plan and EPA Region 8 Priorities. Deliverables will include

- Perform wetland monitoring to assess the biological integrity of wetland communities within Peoples Watershed, using Reference Sites, to gauge the functions and values of wetlands
- Researching Wetland Monitoring Methods that can be incorporated into FBIC wetland sites that are unique to Fort Belknap
- Conduct outreach meetings and participate in workshops to inform the community and local schools about wetland education
- Develop education materials that can be used by students for identifying wetlands and native species
- Revise the ARPO to include Enforcement and a Penalty Matrix for potential violations to wetlands
- Document wetland losses and gains
- Attend training on wetland topics such as climate change, wetland policy, native plant restoration, wetland assessments and monitoring

## **Year Two (2012):**

### **Action:**

The WPDG funding will continue to build upon the core elements by performing water quality monitoring on Peoples Watershed which is a high priority watershed for the FBIC. The Wetland Program will also research and develop narrative and numeric criteria that will be used to implement water quality standards to reflect conditions found in wetlands, including designated uses for wetland activities. This is the first time that water quality monitoring has been performed on wetlands for the FBIC.

- WQ Monitoring (pH, Turbidity, Salinity, D-net, Conductivity, Temperature)
- Research WQ criteria
- Develop narrative Water Quality Standards and Designated Uses
- Perform Aquatic Dip Net Surveys
- Continue to implement the revised ARPO if it has not been completed and approved at this juncture
- Document wetland losses and gains
- Attend training on wetland topics such as water quality standards academy, water quality training, aquatic collection techniques
- Find out if I could use FB WQ QAPP?

## **Year Three (2013):**

### **Action:**

WPDG funding will be used to build upon the core elements by performing water quality monitoring on Beaver and Fort Peck Watersheds. Both watersheds border the Little Rocky Mountains on the southern portion of the FBIC. Specialized vascular plant assessments will be performed on the Geo-thermal region of Beaver Watershed, on wetlands associated with Big Warm and Little Warm streams. Plant specialists from past collaborative wetland projects will be used to identify any sensitive and rare plant species that inhabit the wetlands.

- Perform WQ Monitoring at wetland sites within Beaver and Fort Peck Watersheds
- Perform Aquatic Dip Net Surveys
- Perform Specialized Vascular Plant Identification with the use of Plant Specialists.
- Conduct educational outreach with the local community on the ARPO

- Continue to have the revised ARPO approved and enforced on the FBIC
- Document wetland losses and gains
- Attend relevant training on wetland related project and activities

## **Year Four (2014):**

### **Action:**

WPDG funding will be used to build upon the core elements by conducting water quality monitoring on the Middle Milk River Watershed, which is the largest of the four watersheds, that takes up about half of the land base of the FBIC. Northern Leopard Frogs are abundant in this watershed and this species is identified as threatened in the western Montana, which we will intend to develop Partnerships and collaboratively work with tribal, state and federal agencies to strategize how to preserve the species and manage effective control measures that ensure their survival. The Prairie regions of the FBIC are also included in the Middle Milk River Watershed and the potholes associated with it. These pothole wetlands are very unique to Fort Belknap and are very dependent on snowmelt and rain, for the migratory birds and aquatic insects that inhabit these wetlands during their short time span. We will select additional sites for monitoring and identify reference wetlands to gauge the functions and values of these prairie pothole wetlands. Additional vascular plant species will be identified and collected for the Vascular Plant Reference Collection (VPRC) we developed in FY-2000.

- Conduct WQ monitoring on the Middle Milk River Watershed
- Develop Partnerships with tribal, state, and federal agencies to preserve and protect the Northern Leopard Frog
- Perform wetland monitoring on the prairie pothole region of the Middle Milk River Watershed
- Identify wetland reference sites on the Middle Milk River Watershed
- Identify and collect vascular plants for the VPRC
- Document wetland losses and gains

## **Year Five (2015):**

### **Action:**

WPDG funding will be used to build upon the core elements by completing Water Quality Standards and Designated Uses on wetlands for the FBIC. Continue to work with the EPA to secure base funding for wetlands (education, outreach, maintain what has been developed). Develop the capacity to gain wetland information, technology and activities, by becoming involved with wetland workgroups, steering committees, and attending webinars and meetings, to include traditional, cultural & spiritual uses as part of the wetland function and value system. Continue to train wetland staff on latest scientific, cutting edge, assessment techniques, and continue to develop a comprehensive Wetlands Management Plan. Continue to revise the QAPP as needed to include new wetland activities and projects associated with wetlands.

- Project specific reviews of regulated activities involving wetlands
- Perform wetland inventories on all reservation wetlands and generation of GIS maps
- Develop and refine Tribal Water Quality Standards for reservation wetlands.
- Conduct wetland education and field trips, including outreach to the community
- Ensure that all reservation wetlands have had inventories, surveys, assessments, delineations, and have been classified into a database.
- Update the QAPP as necessary