

Tribes empower students to support global environmental sustainability



Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Nation

Project Time Period
FY2015– Present

- **Tribal Contact:** Willie Keenan, Environmental Director
- **GAP Project Officer:** Diana Hammer, EPA Region 8
- **Media:** Solid Waste
- **GAP Funded Results:**
Outreach & Education
Training

Polson, Montana

Project Description

The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes' (CSKT) Environmental Protection Division within the Natural Resources Division has developed a Climate Change Strategic Plan and established a Climate Change Oversight Committee. The committee spearheaded the creation of a youth-led group called EAGLES (Environmental Advocates for Global and Local Ecological Sustainability). The purpose of this effort is to help empower interested tribal and other local youth to become engaged and informed citizens regarding environmental and climate change issues at the reservation, state, regional, national and global levels.

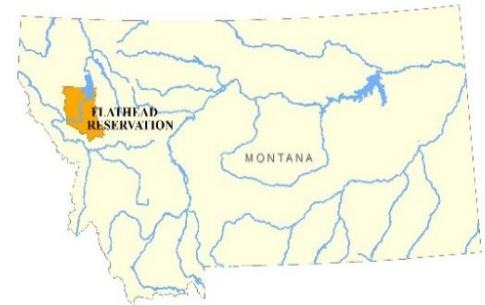
The project creates, develops and supports student-led groups that are actively involved with their communities, schools, tribal leaders and elders in learning about and addressing these issues. The youth learn that environmental issues, such as climate, are complex but basic to all life and involve multi-disciplinary scientific, cultural, historical, societal, academic, legal, and even artistic aspects. Youth become aware of the many environmentally related jobs and careers within the CSKT and reservation communities and beyond to encourage their academic and career exploration, motivation and planning. Currently there are eight EAGLES youth groups formed and actively involved in their schools and communities.

Project Details

The EAGLES youth groups were started originally in 2015 by the Climate Change Oversight Committee. The committee members wanted to see the local youth engaged and active regarding environmental and climate issues, both locally and globally. The groups work with a Climate Change Schools Coordinator from the tribe's Environmental Protection Division to develop their programs.

The EAGLES groups first started out with recycling efforts within their schools and branched out into their communities. Some staff trained in recycling strategies, funding and resources. A consultant initially collaborated with the local schools to assist with student recruitment and developing the EAGLES groups. Collaborations expanded to include other Confederated Salish Kootenai Tribal departments, the local schools, Lake County Transfer Station, Flathead Boys and Girls Club, Desert Research Institute, Salish Kootenai College Extension Office, Flathead Lake Biological Station and other local entities.

Along with recycling, a few of the EAGLES youth groups have added other projects to their efforts, such as energy audits, air quality, native plants gardening, and hydroponic gardening and aquatic invasive species awareness.



Flathead Reservation

Headquartered in Pablo, Montana, the Flathead Reservation is ranked fourth in land base encompassing approximately 1.3 million acres. The reservation is home to 65% of the 7,443 enrolled Confederated Salish and Kootenai tribal members. The Flathead Indian Reservation is home to three tribes, the Bitterroot Salish, the Upper Pend d'Oreille and the Kootenai.

The Arlee EAGLES youth group won three awards: 2016 – the Montana SMART Schools Green Challenge, 2017 – the Montana SMART Schools Recycling Challenge, and 2018 – judges pick for Montana SMART Schools Overall Champion Award.

The Arlee EAGLES group has been fortunate to have the same EAGLES Advisor since the inception of their group. As a result, the Arlee EAGLES youth group has done an outstanding job in their community. However, as with any project, there can be

challenges along the way. Some of the other schools have had changes in advisors and school personnel and, as a result, these EAGLES groups are not as active or as far along as the Arlee EAGLES. To rectify this, the Climate Change School Coordinator has continued to go into the schools to give assistance and a hands-on approach, as well as providing the students with information and presentations to keep them engaged.

Due to the lack of funds, there is one coordinator spread amongst eight current schools in a 140-mile radius. It has been a challenge to keep the advisors and students engaged beyond the recycling project. Recently, a Climate Change Youth Day was offered to the local youth and only three out of eight schools were able to attend. A total of 17 youth attended.

Community Response

The local EAGLES youth groups have influenced their entire school community. They are known community wide on the reservation for their efforts and the knowledge they have shared through presentations and outreach to other schools in nearby communities. The impact on human health will be seen in the future as more students and families are educated and actively recycle and become aware of how their daily actions affect the environment and the climate.

Change starts with one person and has a domino effect throughout the reservation. The EAGLES youths are making a positive impact on the future through the way they care for the land, water and air. In addition, the confidence of the students involved and the pride they have in their schools and community has been outstanding and spread throughout the reservation.

Innovation

Introducing the idea of EAGLES has given the young people a sense of pride and ownership for their projects. The program has boosted their self-esteem and environmental awareness, and challenged them beyond their comfort zones. The EAGLES concept is new to the schools, and the youth have an interest to provide a positive impact on others. This includes helping other youth become engaged and educated on environment and climate issues and the difference young people can make for the future of the world.

The collaborations of the schools and the Confederated Salish Kootenai Tribes Natural Resources Department has been instrumental in the success of the EAGLES

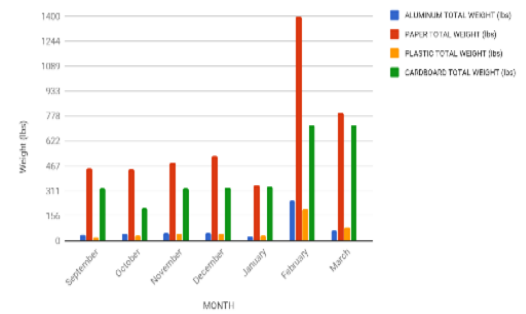
program on the Flathead Reservation. By working closely with the advisors and teachers and teaming the youth up with mentors in the environmental sciences, the program has given the young people knowledge and assisted them in setting goals for their communities. The EAGLES students regularly reach out to their schools and communities through presentations and other interactions to raise environmental awareness and foster stewardship and youth leadership.

Next Steps

The partnership between the Confederated Salish Kootenai Tribes Natural Resources Department and the local schools is only the beginning of a larger project that could go statewide and nationally first, then globally. With additional funding, all the area schools could be as successful as the Arlee EAGLES and become mentors for other schools statewide. Additional funding would allow staff to be more involved in all the schools on a weekly basis to keep the youth engaged and assist with the advisors.

Although these are student-led groups, and some of the youth are natural leaders, many of the youth need assistance to become the leaders they could be and training to lead their peers in climate resilience efforts. The tribe hopes to be able to provide additional training to advisors on how to best assist their students to lead a student-led group. With the right amount of assistance and empowerment, the tribe is confident the student-led EAGLES groups will continue to be active and will one day be self-sustainable.

For more information, please visit the [Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes](#).



Leading the Way

Prior to the formation of EAGLES, there was little collaboration between local schools and youth to become interested, aware or engaged in environmental or climate change issues. Arlee EAGLES has been one of the most successful student-led groups. They have inspired others and made a difference in their school system and with their peers.



