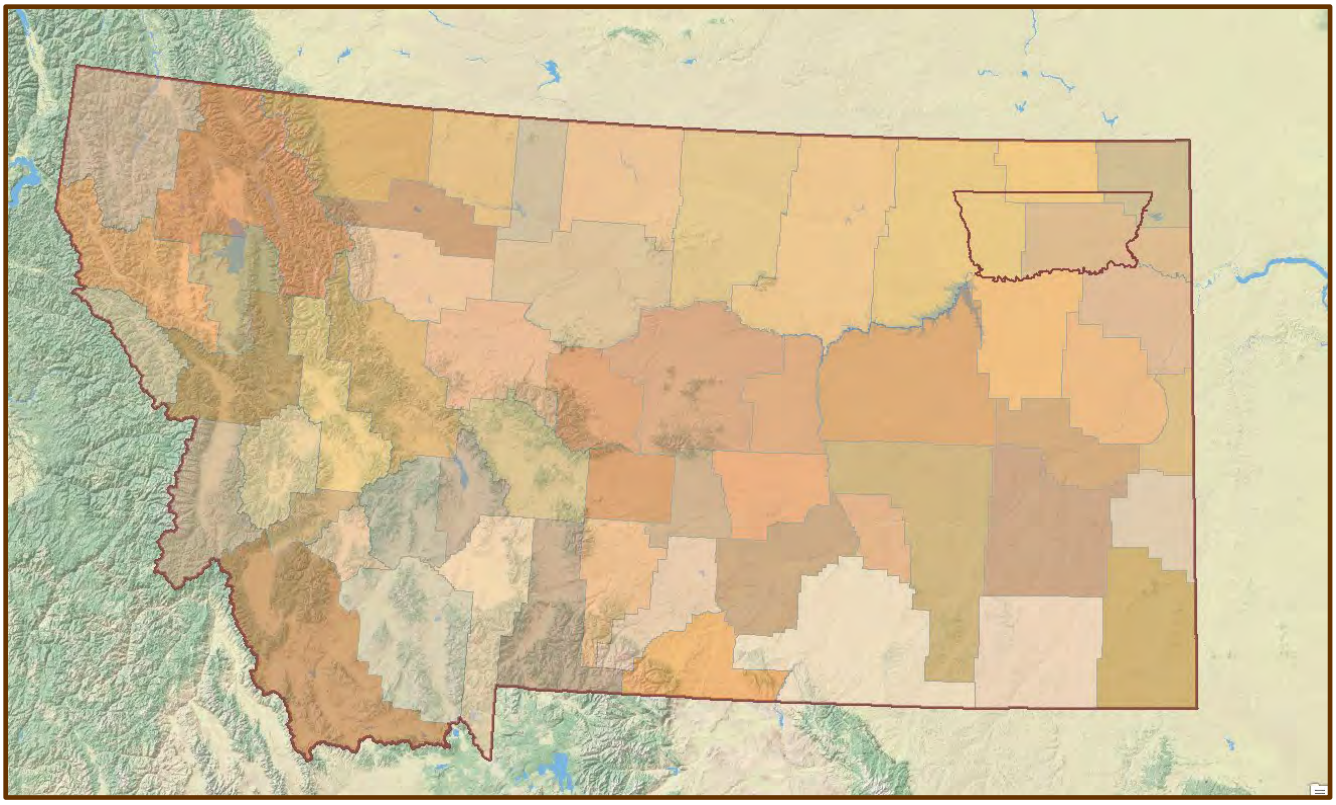

FORT PECK RESERVATION
RANGELAND IMPROVEMENT PLAN

INCREASED STEWARDSHIP TO PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE USE OF RANGELAND RESOURCES

NRCS MONTANA, POPLAR FIELD OFFICE

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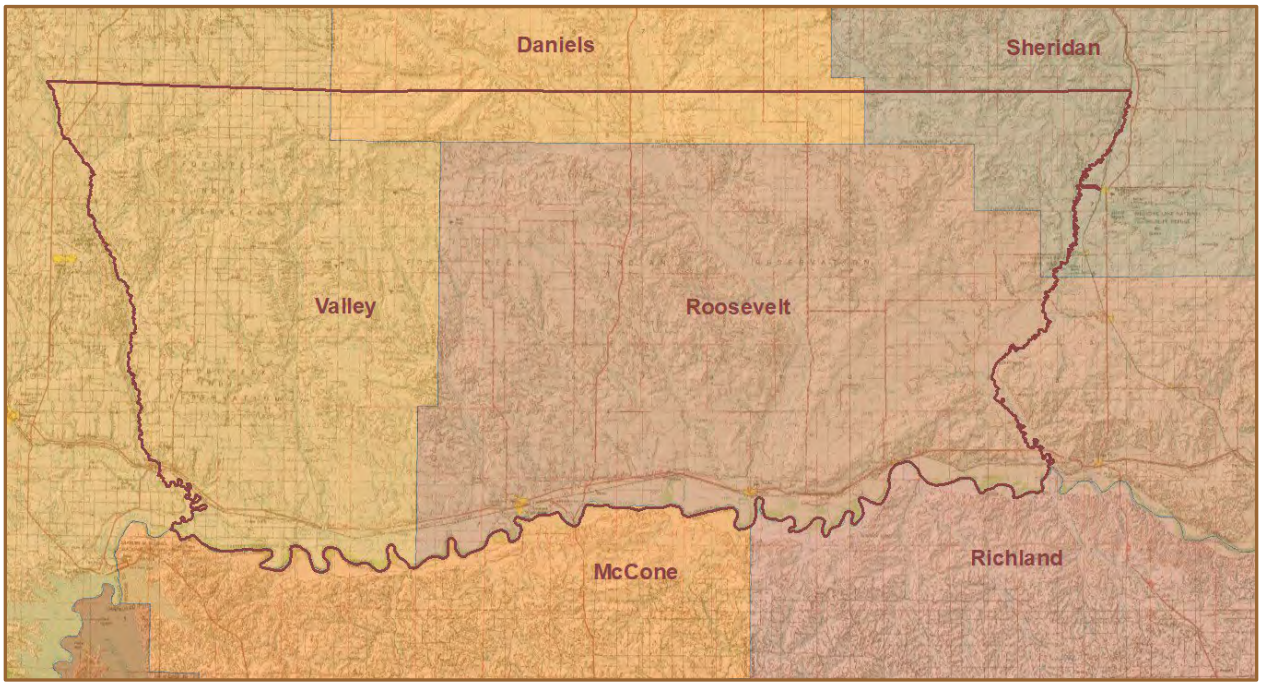

Figure 1 TIP Project Area: Fort Peck Reservation

The Fort Peck Reservation is in northeastern Montana within Roosevelt, Valley, Sheridan, and Daniels Counties (Daniels County Long Range Plan, page 5; Sheridan County Long Range Plan, page 5, Roosevelt County Long Range Plan, page 6). The southern boundary of the Fort Peck Reservation is the Missouri River (Figure 1). The focus area of this Targeted Implementation Plan (TIP) will be the Fort Peck Reservation.

BACKGROUND

The Fort Peck Tribes manage 371,062 acres of native rangeland. The rangeland is broken into 93 units (Figure 5) varying in size from 518 to 34,272 acres delineated by 1,700 miles of fence. Ninety permittees utilize 70,763 AUMs with over 12,000 head of cattle, horses, and bison.

In 2014, the Tribes developed and adopted an Agricultural Resource Management Plan (ARMP) (NRCS Success Story, Roosevelt County Long Range Plan, page 53; Daniels County Long Range Plan page 47; Sheridan County Long Range Plan page 48) that identified additional resource concerns on rangeland. A comprehensive range unit inventory has been completed for each tract within each range unit. Fifty eight of the 93 range unit inventories included rangeland health summaries.

Results of the range unit inventory concluded that:

- Similarity index averaged 38% on the range units.
- Total annual production averaged 789 pounds per acre.

- Of the three soil health factors (soils, biology, and hydrology), biologic health had the lowest score (17%) exhibiting a degree of departure of 'None to Slight'. The remaining 83% fell within the moderate to severe departure categories.
- Apparent trend was moving toward the historic plant community on 19% of the rangeland.
- Club moss and noxious weeds, primarily leafy spurge (Roosevelt County Long Range Plan, page 39), are increasing throughout the range unit complex.

In 2014, The Tribes dedicated $300,000 and secured EQIP contracts to build 494 miles of fence on approximately 100,000 acres (See NRCS Helps Fort Peck Reservation with Grazing Management Project | NRCS Montana (usda.gov)) . The Tribal Natural Resources Department has also established monitoring sites with exclusions and photo plots on all the range units representing 371,062 acres (Figures 2, 3 and 4).

Figure 2. NRCS Rangeland Management Specialist providing guidance in rangeland monitoring and data collection.

EXHIBIT MT11-101 – Rangeland Utilization Estimate Worksheet–Key Forage Plant Method

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

MT-ECS-119
4/2006

RANGELAND UTILIZATION ESTIMATE–KEY FORAGE PLANT METHOD

CLIENT: Natural Resources	TRACT:
ECOLOGICAL SITE & SIMILARITY INDEX:	FIELD:
TRANSECT LOCATION: RU 64	EXAMINER:
SEASON OF USE: (circle) WINTER SPRING (SUMMER) FALL	DATE: 9-14-16
SOIL MOISTURE OR PLANT GROWTH: (circle) LOW (AVERAGE) HIGH	ANIMALS GRAZING: Cow/Calf

KEY SPECIES: western wheat grass

USE CLASS (1-5)	MIDPOINT (a)	TALLY (checks or marks)	GRAZED PLANTS (b)	CURRENT USE (b) x (a)
SLIGHT 0-20%	10			
LIGHT 21-40%	30			
MODERATE 41-55%	48	western wheat grass 5"		
HEAVY 56-75%	65			
SEVERE 76-100%	88			
		TOTALS -->	(c)	(d)
		PERCENT SPECIES UTILIZATION	(d) / (c) -->	

REMARKS:

inside the cage 8"
outside the cages"
Done in late summer the grass is Drying out

took pictures counter clockwise starting at the north

KEY SPECIES:

USE CLASS (1-5)	MIDPOINT (a)	TALLY (checks or marks)	GRAZED PLANTS (b)	CURRENT USE (b) x (a)
SLIGHT 0-20%	10			
LIGHT 21-40%	30			
MODERATE 41-55%	48			
HEAVY 56-75%	65			
SEVERE 76-100%	88			
		TOTALS -->	(c)	(d)
		PERCENT SPECIES UTILIZATION	(d) / (c) -->	

REMARKS:

Figure 3. Montana NRCS Rangeland Utilization Estimate Worksheet. One of the tools used to create and implement prescribed grazing on the Fort Peck Reservation.

Figure 4. An exclosure used to monitor grazing impact and forage harvest in a key grazing area as part of a prescribed grazing plan.

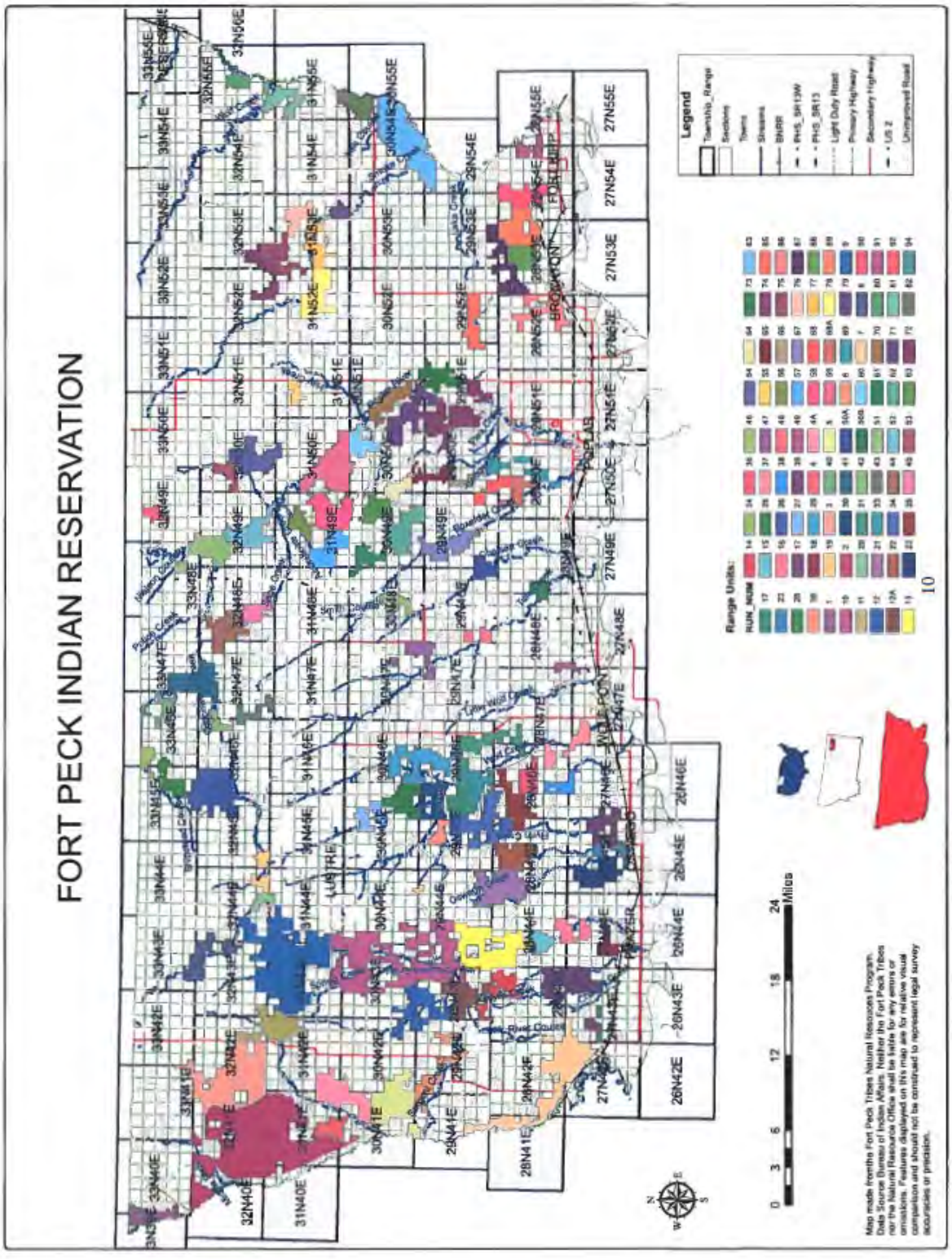

Figure 5 Locations of Rangeland Units on the Fort Peck Indian Reservation

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Baseline conditions of grazing lands infrastructure present the following problems:

- Existing fences are in poor condition. The Tribes have identified 1,150 miles of barbed wire fence that does not or can no longer facilitate proper grazing management.
- Existing grazing units are too large to manage for the desired objectives. Nearly two-thirds of the range units are a single pasture. Interior or cross fencing is needed to support proper management including multiple pasture rotations to control the frequency and duration of grazing.
- Existing fences limit the movement or migrations of several wildlife species including deer, antelope, elk, moose, swift fox, upland game birds and greater sage-grouse.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The primary goal of the TIP is to improve rangeland health on grazing land throughout the Reservation. The Tribes' ARMP contains a suite of goals and natural resource conservation objectives including:

- Replace or restore non-functioning fences to functioning condition in 10 years
- Improve forage production quantity and quality for livestock by 20% in 5 years
- Improve rangeland health to functioning condition on 70% of rangeland in 10 years
- Control club moss on 50% of infested acres in 10 years
- Manage invasive species so that new infestations are treated within one year and old infestations are treated to reduce spread in five years
- Maintain wildlife habitat and population

Many groups and individuals have invested a great deal of time, labor, and resources in pursuit of these goals and objectives. Implementation of The Fort Peck Reservation Rangeland Improvement Targeted Implementation Plan will build on the work that has been done and significantly advance our efforts to realize our collective vision of robust and resilient grazing lands on the Reservation.

RESOURCE CONCERNS

The Tribes have identified and prioritized resource concerns for the Fort Peck Reservation Rangeland Improvement Plan TIP to align with the goals of the ARMP. The priority resource concern is plant productivity and health. Secondary resource concerns are plant community structure and composition, plant pest pressure, and terrestrial habitat for wildlife and invertebrates. These are also identified as priority resource concerns in Daniels, Roosevelt, and Sheridan Counties (Daniels County Long Range Plan, page 32; Roosevelt County Long Range Plan, pages 39 & 42; Sheridan County Long Range Plan page 37).

PROPOSED ALTERNATIVES AND ACTIONS

Alternative One

Alternative One would provide conservation plans to replace existing fences with wildlife friendly fencing.

Alternative Two

Alternative Two will address the resource concerns by installing new cross fences where appropriate and replacing inadequate fences or those that have exceeded their practice lifespan with infrastructure adequate to meet the stated goals and objectives through more intensively managed grazing. Grazing land mechanical treatment (turning over of club moss with twisted shanks on a tool bar), rangeland planting and herbaceous weed treatment (biological control measures) will be applied selectively to restore the health and productivity of the grassland plant community where appropriate. Prescribed grazing plans will be included in each conservation plan and all fences will be built to wildlife friendly specifications to mitigate impacts to wildlife.

Alternative Three--No Action

If no action is taken, the inadequate infrastructure will perpetuate insufficient grazing management, causing negative impacts to native grasslands. Noxious weeds and club moss will increase, and restrictions to wildlife movement and migration will continue to cause negative impacts to individuals and populations across the Target Area.

Alternative Two is selected as the preferred alternative. Conservation practices to treat the resource concerns are listed in Table 1.

Table 1 TIP Practices & Practice Codes

EQIP Practice	Practice Code
Fence	382
Prescribed Grazing	528
Herbaceous Weed Treatment	315
Range Planting	550

IMPLEMENTATION & TIME FRAME

This TIP will have batching periods in 2023, 2024 and 2025. The duration of the TIP will be three years. Contracts may be up to five years to accommodate three years of prescribed grazing.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Table 2 illustrated the estimated financial assistance needed and the number of TIP contracts through the lifespan of the plan. Table 3 is a breakdown of estimated contributions from Partners. The goal is to install 80 miles of fence on 20,000 acres annually.

Table 2 Estimated Financial Assistance & Number of Expected Contracts

	FY 2023	FY 2024	FY 2025
Estimated Financial Assistance	$1,3000,000	$1,3000,000	$1,3000,000
Estimated Contracts	5	5	5

There are Historically Underserved funding scenarios available for all the practices for qualified applicants. Information about the definitions of Historically Underserved categories, qualification criteria and The Financially Limited Farmer/Rancher self-determination tool are available from the NRCS at Historically Underserved Producers | NRCS (usda.gov).

Table 3 Estimated Partners' Contributions

	FY 2023	FY 2024	FY 2025
FORT PECK TRIBES NATURAL RESOURCES	$390,000	$390,000	$390,000
FORT PECK TRIBES FISH & GAME	$2000	$2,000	$2,000

WHAT ASSISTANCE WILL BE NEEDED

Assistance from Rangeland Management Specialists with the Miles City Area Office and neighboring Field Offices may be requested for rangeland monitoring training sessions for permittees and land managers. Other assistance may be requested from Miles City Area staff (mapping, contract administration, etc.) although the Poplar Field Office will likely require little more than occasional assistance.

OUTREACH

Information about the TIP and signup opportunities will be published in the Tribal newsletter and the *Fort Peck Journal* and will be presented to Tribal members at Land Committee meetings. Articles documenting the successes, adventures and lessons learned will be shared with the public through local publications and *Montana NRCS*. Materials and instructions relevant to individuals' participation in the TIP will be shared person to person through the Field Office.

PARTNERSHIPS

The long-standing partnership between the Fort Peck Tribes and the Poplar Field Office will be engaged throughout the implementation of the TIP. The Tribes will, as in the past, provide labor for installation of fences, removal and disposal of old fence and establish monitoring sites with exclusions and phots plots on TIP grazing units. Additionally, Pheasants Forever (Scobey Field Office) and Bird Conservancy of the Rockies (Glendive Field Office) partners will be available to assist with monitoring, advising or as needed to create grazing plans that maximize benefit to upland game birds and native grassland birds.

OUTCOMES

This TIP will enhance wildlife habitat by replacing fence that limits movement and increases mortality by installing wildlife friendly fence. These fences will facilitate grazing management plans by providing more options for pasture rotation. Conservation plans within this TIP will include a prescribed grazing plan on all range unit management acres to not only promote wildlife habitat but to improve Tribal natural resources. Prescribed grazing will also benefit bird species native to the short grass prairie such as the Sprague's pipet, greater sage-grouse, and curlew (Daniels County Long Range Plan, page 22; Roosevelt County Long Range Plan, page 36). Efforts to monitor rangeland health will be expanded to include more site exclusions and photo plots to measure grazing distribution intensity. This project should result in decreased animal mortality, a wider distribution of ungulates, upland game birds and migratory birds throughout the Target Area. We will also see an increase in proper utilization and grazing distribution throughout the range units, an increase in management intensity, and an increase in education to permittees on the benefits of prescribed grazing practices. The TIP will also provide up to 30 jobs annually to Fort Peck Tribal members with on-the-job training in fence installation and removal, small equipment operation, and recognizing cultural sites and survey markers, all of which are highly desirable skills wanted outside of this program.

RANKING

RANKING QUESTIONS

RANKING QUESTION	POINTS
Question 1 Does the Conservation Plan include cross fences to divide one or more grazing unit into smaller units? Yes	
Question 2 Will new fences be built to Wildlife Friendly specifications? Yes (4 wires, with top and bottom wire smooth and fence heights at 42”,32”,24”and16”)	
Question 3 How much rest/recovery time does the prescribed grazing plan provide? A grazing schedule in which adequate growing season rest is scheduled one out of two years. The grazing unit receives rest one year out of three. Time control grazing, including short grazing periods with adequate rest is designed to vegetation needs.	
Question 4 Does the Conservation Plan include practice 315, Herbaceous Weed Treatment for control of noxious weeds? Herbaceous weed treatment will include biological, grazing, and chemical strategies. Management will include chemical and biological strategies. Management will use chemical treatments only.	