1999

Blackfeet environmental ethnography

Gabriel A. Renville

The University of Montana

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Blackfeet Environmental Ethnography

By

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M.S. The University of Montana, 1999

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Science

The University of Montana

1999

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9-14-99

Date
This thesis study describes Blackfeet tribal member environmental attitudes on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation located in north central Montana. Lack of tribal member participation in areas of tribal resource management on the reservation is the driving force behind the study. The study objective is to identify reasons for this lack of participation in resources management and suggest methods of approach to increase tribal member participation.

To accomplish this, the study focuses on contemporary Blackfeet tribal members and explores how they are relating to their natural environment on the reservation through a qualitative survey. A qualitative ethnographic study method was utilized to uncover and define the roots themes underlying tribal member non-participation. The study consisted of 13 random unstructured tape-recorded interviews on Blackfeet tribal members' attitudes about the natural environment on the Blackfoot reservation.

The results of the study revealed a reoccurring underlying sense of frustration towards aspects of tribal government. The feeling of frustration, it was discovered was driving the majority of the interviews when it came to feelings about the natural environment of the reservation. It was found that due to frustration, tribal members were not participating in resource decision-making processes on the reservation. The interviews of Blackfeet tribal members and their views and concerns on the natural environment on the reservation are displayed in a self-analysis style to create a pictorial illustration of the dimensions that make up the frustration felt among tribal members.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Most of all, I give thanks to the Creator who gives us life and makes all things possible.

Secondly, I would like to acknowledge members of my committee; Tom Roy, Department Chair...Environmental Studies, Len Broberg, Professor...Environmental Studies and Mike Patterson, Wildlife Biologist...Forestry Department for their patience, time and guidance in making this study a reality.

Finally, I dedicate this work to my family who gives me the encouragement to continue on with my endeavors.

Gabriel A. Renville
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Chapter One

Introduction

Our religion is inseparably connected to the land. The mountains especially hold a great significance. In our beliefs "natural" and "spiritual" are one and the same. The mountains are essential to our religion; they provide the solitude of a pristine natural setting which enables our people to communicate with the Creator (Pikuni Traditionalists Association, 1996).

The above statement by a Blackfeet Indian statesman reflects the principal belief system of the Blackfeet Indian tribe of north central Montana. Throughout historical documentation and early ethnology of the Blackfeet, traditional Blackfeet people were intricately linked both biologically and spiritually to the lands they occupied. The Blackfeet, through their beliefs and culture, placed a great reverence for their natural environment that linked them to their Creator. Culturally grounded by their many ceremonies that served to inter-connect them as a people to the natural environment, the Blackfeet were natural stewards of the land.

Although the Blackfeet and their culture have been dramatically impacted by western civilization, their culture is still an integral part of the tribal members living on the Blackfeet reservation today. Yet, while many of the Blackfeet tribal members continue to carry on the legacy of their ancestors in land ethics, it was discovered that tribal member participation is seriously lacking in many areas of resource developments on the reservation despite the opportunity to participate. The public participation opportunity for the tribal members exists through the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) who utilizes the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) for development on Indian lands. Past documentation in tribal resource developments indicates little or no participation from
tribal members in major resource developments: for example, forest management plans, commercial mineral exploration and drilling, range management, water resource planning and other significant resource developments on the reservation. Many questions arise. Despite the tribal members intimate relationship with their lands, why aren't the Blackfeet tribal members getting involved? What is causing this level of non-participation? Could it be a lack of environmental awareness, cultural barriers, social barriers that prohibit tribal members from participating? Does the NEPA format for public participation fit the background of the tribal traditional ways of making decisions? These and other questions strongly suggest the need for a study to determine the extent of Blackfeet tribal members' environmental relationships on the reservation.

Problems

In preliminary interviews conducted on the Blackfeet reservation on the subject of tribal member participation and environmental relationships, several interviewed Blackfeet tribal members expressed how they related to the natural environment on the reservation. The interviews suggested strong feelings for the environment but a lack of interest to participate in natural resource decisions that affect them and their lands as the following quote from an interview depicts:

For myself, I think about the environment; I know it's real important, but again, I'm not involved in it. Like a lot of people, they just kind of sit back and see what goes on. As an Indian, I've got deep feelings for the environment and the earth, but I'm sure all these people think about it that way. We just let people who we elect, the council and so forth, handle it for us (Interview, 3/10/98).
Another tribal member, speaking on the question of environmental relationships, had the following to say about how the tribal people relate to the natural environment:

My personal feeling is that the Indian people have always been sensitive to our environment, the wildlife, the land, the plants, the water, even more so when it comes down to the actual Indian that becomes a rancher or farmer (Interview, 3/11/98).

There was also the concern that when people did voice their opinions, there was no action taken as the following depicts:

There's a lot of people that voice their opinion, but that's as far as it goes. Then there's a lot of people that voice their opinion, but they don't attend the meetings; I'm one of them. But, then again, a lot of these people attend these meetings, and there's no action (Interview, 3/7/98).

For many Blackfeet Indians living on the reservation, the attitude toward the natural environment and participation is common, an attitude of caring, but an indifference to becoming involved. The inert feeling of closeness to the land comes out through the interviews; however, these feelings were not translated into action in the form of tribal member participation. In the last century, public participation has played a prevalent and exceedingly important role in today's management of our public natural resources. The participation process in regional federal land management offers unique perspectives from involved state and federal agency professionals and, most importantly, from the people themselves. Concurrently, we know that upsetting the natural process in wild and rural lands without adequate preservation, conservation, and protection measures can seriously
impact and impair natural ecosystems. It is recognized that the Blackfeet tribal members hold significant cultural, economic, and long term interests concerning their lands and should be involved in the decision making processes. Non-participation in public forums in resource decision making processes on the Blackfeet reservation provides the foundation for this thesis study in an attempt to understand the motives behind tribal non-participation.

Study

In the need to understand tribal member non-participation in areas of natural resource management on the reservation, a qualitative study was developed. A social science method in ethnography known as the process of discovery in grounded theory was applied as a tool to identify the variables behind non-participation. The discovery study focused on the Blackfeet tribal members residing on the reservation and explores how they are relating to their natural environment on the Blackfeet reservation through unstructured tape recorded interviews. Discovery in grounded theory as defined by Schatzman and Strauss states, "Theory from data is systematically obtained from social research. In discovering grounded theory, one generates conceptual categories or their properties from evidence; then the evidence from which the category emerged is used to illustrate the concept" (Schatzman and Strauss, 1973). The study consisted of 13 tribal member interviews conducted over a three-month period along with a field journal used to document, observe, and record methodological developments of the study.

The study objective was to discover pre-existing attitudes, underlying feelings, and attributes about the reservation natural environment that may hinder tribal members from participating in tribal resource decision making. Due to the diversified social background
of the reservation, the process of discovery method in grounded theory allowed the qualitative survey the flexibility to address a variety of different issues of environmental attitudes behind non-participation.

**Theme and Message**

The results of the study behind non-participation indicated a strong underlying reoccurring sense of frustration in the area of environmental issues on the reservation that affected tribal member participation. The saturation point of the study was achieved at 13 tape-recorded interviews over a three-month period after it was discovered that frustration was found to be driving the majority of the interviews. Driessen describes saturation as, "It is upon arriving at this precise point where we will refer to as our data becoming valid. The decision on this matter will depend upon a number of reoccurring situational themes derived from additional interviews that become almost predictable" (Driessen, 1972).

With frustration as the discovered theme, this paper displays, characterizes, and discusses dimensions of frustration from the interviews with tribal members on the Blackfeet reservation. In addition to examining frustration, the paper displays existing tribal member cultural attitudes toward the natural environment that may be linked to non-participation. Understanding what makes up frustration represents the primary purpose of this study to better understand the Blackfeet tribal land and relationships that will be imperative in order to address the existing problem of non-participation on the reservation.

**Blackfeet Philosophy**

In the ancestral oral tradition of the Blackfeet culture, the Blackfeet people believed the Rocky Mountains to be the backbone of the world created by the Old Man, Napi (the Creator). The sacred headwaters that flowed from the mountains were the veins that
flowed from the heart and stretched outward to sustain all of Napi’s creations. In the beginning, the Blackfeet believed all of Napi’s creations were blessed with spirits. In a metaphysical sense, the early Blackfeet lived in an animated world, a world that was alive with spirits where the Blackfeet believed were attached to all creations. These animal entities were viewed as Indian medicine to the Blackfeet. The bear (kiyo) represented strength and courage, and the buffalo (ene’ee) reflected the center, who sustained the Blackfeet in all their needs. The eagle (beta), highly respected and revered as a powerful medicine to the Blackfeet, represented the spirit of valor and bravery to the Blackfeet. To the Blackfeet, the animal spirits could be called upon in ceremonies. These ceremonies included prayers, sweats, dancing, and singing, asking the Creator to bless the individuals with the animals qualities or to give themselves in times of hunger. For example, the turtle Soo-opi (sitting in the water) represented a long and healthy life by its physical qualities. Translated as slow and deliberate, the turtle, never in a hurry, knew who he was and knew where he was going. Always calm, exhibiting quiet wisdom, the turtle shell represented the circle of a long healthful life. The symbol of the turtle in the form of art was often presented to others as a gift of goodwill and long life. These symbolic animals were all part of the Mother Earth that represented a never-ending cycle of life for the Blackfeet.

Another significant cultural event in the early days of the Blackfeet, was the sacred Sundance ritual, commonly referred to as the Medicine Lodge by the Blackfeet. The Medicine Lodge was held annually in the late summer and early autumn. Before the days of Christianity on the reservation, the Blackfeet's sacrificial ceremonial Medicine lodge served several important purposes. The Medicine lodge provided the opportunity to fulfill a vow made on behalf of a family member, a chance to renew and cleanse one’s self from
the past year, and a time of socialization for the people. A place of healing for the people, the ceremonial Medicine Lodge served to reconcile the people to the past in the form of renewing ties with the Mother Earth. It is understood that prayer and rituals, while serving many important social functions, remain to be an important part of the Blackfeet culture that exists today.

**Historical Background**

The Blackfeet Indian people are composed of three divisions: the Kainah or Bloods of Canada; the Blackfeet proper (Siksika); and the north and south Piegans, the Pikuni of northwestern Montana. As international political boundaries were enforced in the late 1800s, the three bands slowly became completely separated from being a single culture. The early Blackfeet were well known for their persistent hostility toward trappers, settlers, and rival tribes for fiercely defending their homeland. Originally, the Blackfeet were thought to have migrated from the eastern woodlands, in part because of their speaking the common Algonquin dialect that is traced to other northern woodland tribes (Ewers, 1974). It is believed that during pre-contact the Blackfeet were one of the first tribes to move west. Soon after moving west, the Blackfeet were roaming a huge portion of the northern plains that became their primary territory. The Blackfeet were hunters and gatherers who evolved from the "dog" days as many historians called them, because domesticated wolf dogs served to be one of the Blackfeet's primary beasts of burden. These animals at one time represented one's wealth and means of social status in the tribe. Called 'emaduski' for dog, the Blackfeet utilized the animal for a variety of household chores such as moving, hunting, and companionship. In the early days of the Blackfeet, 20 to 30 people in a clan seemed to be the most effective number for hunting buffalo.
However, the tribes would come together for social and ceremonial activities during the summer and to trade, separating again in the winter. A chief selected for his generosity and bravery and ability to speak well led each band. Chiefs decided band movements and resolved internal disputes (Ewers, 1974). Historical accounts show ancestral Blackfeet territory that included the following: the northern Saskatchewan River, central Alberta to the Rockies, the headwaters of the Missouri, and as far south as the Yellowstone Park.

The Blackfoot name has several origins. Theory relates that the early Blackfeet either traveled over burnt prairie or customarily painted their moccasins black which eventually resulted in the name Blackfoot. The Blackfeet, commonly referred to as the Blackfeet Nation by tribal members and outside constituencies, primarily reside on their ancestral land.

**Cultural Impacts**

To trace the path of acculturation by western society that led to the ultimate deterioration and eradication of many North American native cultures including the Blackfeet, can be extensive and complex. Beginning with the removal of the eastern tribes, as the tribes were pushed back toward the west, tribal traditions began to decline. This progressive cultural demise eroded many traditional Native American values toward the land as the lives of the tribal people began to be shaped by the new technology in the form of trade goods that came from the fur traders (Overholt, 1979). Many theories exist concerning exact cause of the decline of the American Indian cultures in the North American continent. Calvin Martin writes that fur trade scholars are in uniform agreement and that over the long run, the trade was a disaster for the Indian tribes involved. Cultural disruption and often physical dislocation were common place (Martin, 1980).
Another contributing factor was the whiskey trade that heavily influenced the Indians eventual cultural demise. The horse, translated (Elk Dog), was introduced to the Blackfeet in the mid 1700’s by neighboring tribes. Some believe they got them from Shoshones of the south, others believe it is likely that they got their horses from encounters with the Kootenai, Flathead, and Nez Perce (Corbett, 1934).

All these dramatic cultural impacts and changes served to create a whole new way of life for the Blackfeet that profoundly affected their culture and traditional way of life. A historical chronology of the Blackfeet up to mid 1900’s summarizes these lifestyles and cultural changes to give the reader an insight into the historical factors behind the assimilation of the Blackfeet.

**Blackfeet Chronology 1600’s -1900’s**

1600’s - Dog days of the Blackfeet, before the introduction of the horse.

1700’s - Blackfeet were introduced to the horse and trade goods brought in by the French.

1750’s - Blackfeet were expanding their territory, pushing other tribes back.

1806 - Blackfeet encounter with Lewis and Clark

1810 - Missouri Fur company attempts to establish trading post in Blackfeet Country.

1821 - Trading post reopened and closed again.

1832 - First established trading post, indicating Blackfeet became accustomed to trade

1837 - Two-thirds of the Blackfeet Nation wiped out by the small pox epidemic.

1855 - First treaty between the United States government and the Blackfeet tribe, forming the great Blackfeet reservation. The tribe was given almost two-thirds of what is now Montana.
1840-1860 - The three Blackfeet bands became more distinctive and their home regions more defined.

1865-1866 - Blackfeet reservation land reduced, originally comprised two-thirds of Montana.

1870 - Baker Massacre, Army retaliated after prominent settler was killed outside Helena.

1873-1874 - Blackfeet reservation again reduced by president Grant.

1877 - Blackfeet bands were broken up by the 49th parallel.

1881 - Blackfeet had little success with buffalo hunts.

1882 - Blackfeet forced to rely on federal government, over 600 die of starvation.

1887 - Blackfeet forced to sell and settle for present reservation land.

1895 - Blackfeet relinquish Glacier National Park.

1907 - Howard Wheeler Act, (allotment act), effort to assimilate the Blackfeet into the mainstream culture.

1933 - Indian Reorganization Act, tribes allowed to form their own tribal governments.

By the time the Great Northern Railroad was built in the late 1800's which cut the reservation in two, the Blackfeet bore little resemblance to once fiercely proud and majestic people that ruled the northern plains a few decades earlier (Booth and Jacobs, 1992). A series of failed policies that followed up into 1920’s resulted in the reservation ending up with a very fragile economy (Mcfee, 1974, ).
Chapter Two

Characteristics of the Blackfeet Reservation

The two following characteristics make the reservation and its people different from the surrounding regions and populations.

1. A homeland has been reserved within the country for tribal members, and the use and disposal of this land is restricted by governmental regulations.

2. The tribal members are defined legally as Indians. Like other ethnic groups, Indians are usually recognized by themselves and others as a separate social category. This is the social definition of an ethnic. In addition, the Indian has been given legal status that further sets him apart from the general citizenry. The Indian is a conquered indigent, not an immigrant (Mcfee, 1972).

Study Area

The interviews were conducted on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation located in the central northern state of Montana. Comprising approximately 1.5 million acres, the Blackfeet reservation is home to 15,000 federally enrolled Blackfeet tribal members with approximately 8,500 living on the reservation. The western boundary of the reservation is the gateway to Glacier National Park beginning at the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. The northern boundary of the Blackfeet reservation is the United States and Canada international boundary, with the east and southern boundaries of the reservation made up of the Great Plains (see figure I, map of Blackfeet Reservation).

The land within the reservation boundaries consists of wind-swept, high-rolling prairies, delineated by coulees and valley ways carved out by numerous rivers, tributaries, lakes and ponds (Mcfee, 1972). The western foothills of the reservation are heavily forested with numerous lodgepole pine, Douglas fir, Engelmann spruce, white
bark pine, subalpine fir, white pine, and juniper. Quaking Aspen, sedges, wetland marsh grasses, cattails, willows and poplars, and cottonwood trees dominate the lower valleys (Wilmoth, 1992). The mountains bordering the Glacier National Park reach up to 8000 to 10,000 feet with the majority of the land averaging 4500 feet in the west to 3500 feet above sea level in the east. The Blackfeet Reservation is abundant in natural resources and contains key headwaters as well as producing oil and natural gas wells along the eastern Rocky Mountain Front. The prairies, temperate forests and wetlands, with viable ecosystems support a wide variety of wildlife on the reservation.

The Blackfeet Reservation has a wide diversity of wildlife with many of these species threatened and endangered, which include the Bald Eagle, the Perigrine Falcon, the Grey Wolf, and the Grizzly Bear.

The climate on the reservation is considered arid with a short growing season where winters are long and cold. The reservation is known and characterized by winds that can reach up to 100 miles per hour that sweep off the front during the winter months. The Blackfeet reservation with its arid conditions may appear to be desolate and foreboding to a newcomer; however, to the Blackfeet people, this region is home.

The Blackfeet tribal headquarters and main commercial center is located in Browning with a population of approximately of 1170 located on U.S. Highway 2, which is 12 miles from the town of East Glacier (Mcfee, 1972). Various reports on the population of this town vary with the U.S. Census Bureau reporting a population in 1980, of 1226 with 1027 made up of Indians. These figures are said to be too low. New figures by a tribal planning team estimate the population at 3000, with non-Indians accounting for 600 of this estimate. In Browning, the tribal enrollment indicates approximately
15,000 tribal member enrollment, with approximately 8300 residing on the reservation and non-members widely scattered in the western states. The Blackfeet reservation is mainly situated in Glacier Country that comprises seventy-nine percent with Ponderau County making up the remainder. The Blackfeet tribal government was founded in 1936 by the Indian Self-determination Act or Indian Development Act, an Act delegated by Congress that allows tribes to form their own tribal governments to oversee reservation tribal governmental affairs.

Nine tribal council members who represent the various communities on the reservation oversee the tribal government. Each council member serves a two-year term, and duties include: representation of the people, final decision making in major developments, development of new policies, and overseeing of day-to-day tribal operations. The tribe is both a political entity with legislative, judicial, and executive powers and a business corporation. The Corporate Charter of the Blackfeet tribe establishes the tribe’s sphere of authority over the handling of funds and the use of tribal assets for the benefit of its members. All tribal members are shareholders in the corporation and have a vote in its affairs. The nine members of the tribal council direct both the political and business affairs of the tribe and the corporation (U.S. Blackfeet Corporate Charter, 1936) (Mcfee, 1972).

Within the Blackfeet Reservation many communities exist, consisting of Starr School, Heart Butte and Boarding School, and Blackfoot which are the older more established communities. Later housing developments were established in the town of Browning, which include Housing and Urban Development (HUD) housing districts that are located in the surrounding outskirts of Browning. Places like Glacier Homes, Easter
Egg Homes, Old Low Rent, China Town, and the Ghetto are popular dwelling areas known by their clustered development. Within the exterior boundaries of the reservation, many Blackfeet cultural areas exist, which include Chief Mountain, Badger Two Medicine, and Big Nose Coulee. Considered sacred to Blackfeet tribal members, these cultural areas are still used by many traditional Blackfeet who still practice the Indian religion in the form of ceremonies, sweatbaths, and vision quests.

Contemporary Economic Overview

Using the state poverty guidelines, the 1993 Montana Department of Commerce finds the Blackfeet reservation of Glacier County leading in many areas of economic underdevelopment.

- Families in poverty by county with children ages 5-17; Glacier County leads with 34.7%; the county average is 17.1%.
- Estimated number and percent of people of all ages in poverty by county; Glacier County leads with 31.4% compared with an average of 15.2% for all Montana counties.
- Estimated median household income by county records; $20,860 for Glacier county compared with an overall average income of $26,386 for Montana counties.

The household income figure on the reservation is historically lower than the overall county average (Montana Department of Commerce, Census, 1993).

Methodology

Data collection

The qualitative survey was developed that utilizing basic principles laid out in the process of discovery in grounded theory by Schatzman and Strauss in 1973. The primary
method for gathering information was in the form of unstructured interviews. Kerlinger states that the unstructured interview is flexible and open, “It permits research purposes to govern the questions asked, their content, their sequence, and their working are entirely in the hands of the investigator” (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The interviews began on the topic of tribal members' attitudes toward participation and the natural environment on the reservation. Questions were in the form of converses and were open ended, letting the interviews go in their natural directions with narratives developing accordingly. New questions were developed in accordance with new emerging themes (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). A total of 13 Blackfeet tribal members were interviewed utilizing basic methods outlined as previously discussed. The interviewees were interviewed in their homes with interview times averaging forty-five minutes to an hour and a half for each interview. The sentence structure and grammar of the interviewees' answers were kept intact intentionally and reflect the cultural diversity of the people interviewed.

Sampling

Study samples were made up of interviewed, enrolled Blackfeet tribal members. The qualitative study attempted to target all levels of the social classes on the Blackfeet reservation. Social classes in this study include gender, age, employment status, education, family status, and reservation resident status. To protect their identity, the individuals are identified by interview numbers only and are listed in the tribal member interviewee portfolio (see Figure II, Blackfeet tribal member portfolio).

Data Analysis

The data was transcribed and analyzed utilizing basic principles of Jon Driesson's article, "Topical Analysis: A Method for Collecting, Classifying and Developing
Concepts and Models from Narrative Data" (Jon Driessen, 1967). All data was analyzed by topics and analyzed comparatively to make up the organizing system. The tape-recorded interviews were transcribed in their entirety and classified individually in evolving themes (see figure III, Comprised Themes). A total of 13 tribal member interviews were transcribed, analyzed, and categorized throughout the ethnography study on the Blackfeet Reservation. After compiling the resulting themes from each interview and selecting major categories of responses, the data was then numerated and was placed under a specific category. Major categories of responses were the following: problem statements concerning aspects of tribal government management of natural resources, tribal member environmental relationships, and cultural relationships pertaining to the natural environment. Categories were assigned a number and ranked according to occurrence (see Comprised Themes, Table III). A table was set up to numerate each category by how many times it was represented during the 13 interviews. A field journal was kept to record observations and document developments throughout the course of the study. It was found that problem statements were driving the majority of the interviews while addressing the topic of environmental relationships relating to participation.

Results

Concept of frustration

I am disappointed in tribal government. Why? Because I can never get a job out of them; they never help the people. Why? Because of mismanagement, nepotism, ethnic background, and jealousy, a feeling of hopelessness has resulted. I am angry and defeated, now, because I have tried, but they closed the door on me. I'll just let them take care of things.
The quotation above demonstrates the resulting conclusive concept behind frustration felt among interviewed Blackfeet tribal members. Based on the 13 interviewed tribal members, 'frustration' was the discovered topic arising from the categories of themes among the tribal member interviews. A saturation point of the study was achieved after it was found repeatedly that the Blackfeet tribal members interviewed were frustrated when it came to feelings within the natural environment. The saturation point is revealed as, “From the very beginning in the search for data and properties of related themes and sub themes, the theme of frustration began to surface repeatedly and became predictable” as noted by Driessen’s article Topical Analysis A method for collecting, Classifying and Developing Concepts and Models from Narritative Data. (Driessen, 1967).

This repeated expression of frustration by tribal members helps provide a theoretical understanding of why Blackfeet tribal members, despite their reverence for the natural environment, do not participate in public decisions about resource issues on the reservation. As Glaser and Strauss note, “the pressure is not on the sociologist to know the whole field or to have all the facts” from a careful random sample, “his job is not to provide a perfect description of an area, but to develop a theory that accounts for much of the behavior” (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). With frustration as the primary discovered topic underlying non-participation, the study results display the tribal member interviews in describing how different dimensions of environmental relationships contribute, makeup, and illustrate the feeling of frustration from tribal members and towards participation in reservation resource management.
Significance of Study

The objectives of the ethnographic qualitative study on the Blackfeet Reservation include many accessing levels of environmental uses, awareness, and environmental attitudes as well as cultural beliefs toward tribal lands and the natural resources to gather information and display in such a manner as to create a contemporary picture of the Blackfeet tribal members and their attitudes about the natural environment surrounding non-participation. The overall goal is to obtain information that will determine methods of approach that will be used to improve tribal natural resource management as well as awareness on the reservation. This pilot study will also provide baseline data that will be helpful in determining how tribal member participation in natural resource decisions on the reservation might be increased to better address present and future issues of development of resources on the Blackfeet reservation. The Blackfeet people stand poised at a critical junction at this time with many of their natural resources as well as their cultural heritage dwindling. It is areas such as these that form the basis of this thesis study in the effort to defend, protect, and conserve natural ecological systems on the Blackfeet Indian reservation.

Theme and Message

Frustration

Websters Dictionary II defines the word frustration as follows, “To prevent from accomplishing something.”

Tribal members were concerned about their natural environment on the reservation but were unable to be involved because of their underlying frustration with tribal government.
Model of Frustration on the Blackfeet Reservation

- Disappointment
- Frustration
- Hopelessness
- Anger at Defeat

Elements of Frustration

In this model three elements of frustration are used to illustrate the Blackfeet tribal members feelings underlying tribal member non-participation.

Introduction to Tribal Member Interviews

In the following interviews, samples of the interviews are cut from the tape recorded transcriptions as related by tribal members and used to describe dimensions of frustration. Short interpretations will serve as a guide to the reader in illustrating various dimensions of frustration. The use of visual models will be used to present each of the dimensions of frustration with the elements that revolve around each chosen dimension. It has been found through research that it is more beneficial for the reader to be given a visual aid rather than attempting to interpret each individual dimension and its elements. It must be noted that while many of the interviews contain information specifically relating to the dimensions, they can also reflect one or more dimensions of frustration.

Because of frustration, tribal members were not participating in public forums on the reservation in natural resource issues. The sources of their frustration were many, but
certainly included disappointment, hopelessness, and anger at defeat. To capture this collective sense of frustration and its sources, the narratives will allow the voices of the tribal members to be heard!

Frustration: Disappointment

The feeling of disappointment towards the tribal government for mismanagement of tribal resources was a common response among interviewed tribal members. Dimensions of disappointment surround this element below to make up this section of responses from tribal members:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spoiled System</th>
<th>Nepotism</th>
<th>Disappointment</th>
<th>Lack of Unity</th>
<th>Jealousy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Dimensions of Disappointment

Q: How do you feel about tribal management in regard to our environmental resources such as water, timber, and soil.

A: I definitely see our management isn’t too accurate for our tribe; that’s what leads to our biggest problems on the industrial side and all the jobs and things like that. Our mismanagement is what I would say. There’s a lot of resources out there, but the tribe is not handling it. If you don’t get the proper people to manage it, that’s what it makes bad (Interview # 8).

Q: Do you feel the tribe’s natural resource department is lacking in technical people and skills to adequately manage our resources?
A: Yes, I believe the Blackfeet tribe is inadequate for anything like that. The people they got for stuff like that aren’t qualified or whatever. I think that is the problem (Interview #8).

Another tribal member’s comment when asked about his views and opinions on the Blackfeet reservation toward the natural resources and tribal views on the reservation toward public meetings and natural resources had the following to say:

A: Okay, I think basically our problem with natural resources is the fact that Blackfeet government has used both its regulatory authority and its business proclamations as a corporation together creating an environment of a spoiled system where tribal where assets are liquidated. By changing the organizational structure and separating these two government functions of our government, things will change.

Q: What do you think about the attitudes of the people. How are they feeling toward the environment: for example, the water, the soil, trees and wildlife. Do the people still care about these things?

A: I think everybody from the old people to the young people all cherish drinking water. I think that we all enjoy the environment over all. All the common people are in favor of protecting and enhancing the environment as opposed to those people who are inactive in government who want to exploit the natural resource base on the reservation.

To illustrate the level of distrust, another comment was as follows:

C: I think what has happened is that those people who work in tribal government have created an organizational structure that has allowed them to monopolize both the regulatory functions of local government as well as business practices and the business environment of the economic component within the social economic portfolio that exists on the reservation. I think that the natural resources department is in collusion
with private business to cheat and rape the Blackfeet people out of their natural resources (Interview # 7).

Disappointment was represented in many forms of complaints coming from a wide variety of variables that the people viewed as problems:

A: In my opinion, the tribal council business council don’t seem to have any of the members interested in soil conservation or the timber rights, because for the simple reason, they choose the same councilmen at the same time, and they are not educated enough in those areas. They just know a little bit about this and that, and they were never out there to really conserve or analyze what’s going on with our timber rights and they don’t realize how much they are making or how much a beating we’re getting. Therefore, they don’t want you to know that they don’t know, because they don’t know themselves. They say we’ll look into it, like other people, putting it off, putting it off, just like the tribal court system. We are getting raped now out of our timber resources.

Q: Why do you think the tribal members won’t get involved?
A: Because they are not interested in nothing, just in their own personal problems. They don’t try to improve the economy because none of them got the experience to. One tries to improve it, and the rest hangs back. They got different ideas; they don’t pull as a team. When they elected the nine members, they were supposed to pull as a team.

Q: What do think about the Tribal members here on the Blackfeet reservation? Do they still care about the mountains, the timber, and the land?
A: They value them a lot, we talked about that down in the natural resources; I am graduating this year. And the trouble is the tribal council figures well, we the Chiefs we tell you, we tell you the people what to do. They don’t say we’re here to help you, that’s what they are in there for. That’s what they were voting in for. To have the people have the voice and they just be the proprietors (Interview # 4).
Q: How you feel about the tribal natural resources here on the reservation? What the problems are there, if any? How do the people view the environmental management here on the reservation?

A: Our environmental management is like our timber and grazing leases and stuff like that. The grazing leases here are management. You know, I haven’t followed this up in a long time but, ahh, for the people like on our grazing leases and stuff like that, it’s no good. A handful are controlling our lands and the people don’t. Any landholder’s heirs to the land don’t have nothing to say about their own lands (Interview # 7).

Q: Do you feel there is a lack of getting the word out for advertising public meetings, or do you feel the advertising is sufficient?

A: Well, the advertising is mostly by word of mouth, and that don’t go too far. There are a lot of people that voice their opinion but that don’t go too far either. Nothing is being done (Interview # 7).

Q: Do have an idea of how our management is done here on the reservation?

A: Seems to me, like just one person or a little group of persons will get on an issue. Then, they will talk about it. Do stuff about it, argue against it or for it, and then it kind of seems like it fizzles out. They are not there very long; they don’t dedicate themselves to it. Then another group will come along and get on something else. They bark about it for awhile, like drilling oil or water rights. The Blackfeet don’t all come together on one issue and get behind it and press until they get results. Just a group of people will do that, and they won’t follow through, seems to me. (Interview # 1).

Also under tribal members disappointments, statements of jealously, nepotism and self interest within the tribal government system represented an additional form of disappointment against the tribal government.
C: One thing about our Blackfeet tribe is when they see someone trying to create something. If they don’t like what that guy is trying to do, they try to pull him down, they don’t want him to be important. Each feels he’s going to be more important than me; let me get up there. Why, you don’t belong; let me get up there. Before long it’s forgotten (Interview # 4).

C: We got a guy who’s in charge of our timber and never even went to school for it. In fact, we could not even find how he got hired. We couldn’t even find where the job was advertised or anything else, but he was one of the councilmen’s brother in-law who was in there at the time. They say the councilman got him the job, and now he’s right up there and still I don’t think he knows what the hell he’s doing. Right now, it’s all about politics, relatives, and friends (Interview # 7).

C: Spouse - You know, the way I feel about the whole thing is that money is the main the reason that they are in. It comes in from their budgets. Really, they are not honest (Interview # 7).

C: Why are we giving away our resources to just a handful of people who are stuffing their pockets when we support them, like me. A lot of people including our state’s representative see they don’t realize this, but many of us don’t know the politics (Interview # 7).

Summary of Dimensions of Disappointment

In the dimensions of disappointment, the interviews suggested tribal members were disappointed in the current system of tribal government believing it was a spoiled system where their resources were mismanaged as result of a corrupt system in which nepotism, jealousy, and self interests were apparent. Tribal member interviews tended to
show a general disappointment in the area of environmental concerns on the reservation and related these problems toward the tribal government. These disappointments were key factors in the results of the study that led to the discovered topic of frustration. In frustration, disappointments of many types were found to be the most common theme underlying frustration. The outcome of disappointment is that complaints led to the feeling of hopelessness in which tribal members felt it was hopeless to get involved in resource decision making. In the following interview samples, various dimensions that contribute to the feeling of hopelessness will be illustrated.

**Frustration, Hopelessness:**

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<tr>
<th>Lack of education</th>
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<tr>
<td>Hopelessness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of voice</td>
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<td>Inherent problems</td>
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Hopelessness was connected to individual interviews who displayed characteristics of hopelessness as being useless or unable to get involved. These various dimensions portrayed in the interviews of tribal members when discussing tribal member participation.

**Dimensions of Hopelessness**

In the element of hopelessness, there was a definite belief that the lack of education was evident and hindered the Blackfeet people.
Q: Do you believe there is a lack of education in terms of awareness?

A: Yes, I would say yes, the lack of education is very high on this reservation. They know what they want to do, but they lack the education to do what they want to do on the reservation (Interview # 9).

C: The elders, they don’t fully understand, like I say, their lack of education. Our elders, they start out on one point, one point of view, one easy point. Pretty soon one guy will be talking about Korea, another about the veterans at the end. Then another guy will talking about our committees, about not getting them in. Well, they are supposed to be talking about one specific thing. That’s what that meetings is for. It’s pretty pathetic the way they hold their meetings (Interview # 6).

Tribal members voiced their comments about the problem of non-participation and reasons why people don’t participate.

C: The problem that I see in almost every aspect in this whole thing is education, the general public becoming involved. There’s apathy or sentiment among our people over the years to where they don’t seem like they care (Interview # 3).

C: Then there’s a lot of people that voice their opinion, but they don’t attend the meetings; I’m one of them. But then again, a lot of these people attend the meetings, and there’s no action (Interview # 7).

Q: When they are having these public meetings, do you think access could be a problem in getting to these meetings?

A: Yea, it could be that, but some just don’t want to go to meetings period. Ahh, they say why should we because they ain’t going to listen to us anyway. We have no voice anyway; if they did say something that we
want picked up, it turns around and tribal council don’t go through with it because it’s not what they want (Interview # 9).

Q: In your opinion what do you think deters tribal members from participating in public comment forums on natural resource issues?

A: Loss of self-esteem by the divided social working community which affects the upcoming school children and carries on. People feel there is no hope, no word, and voices are not heard. Public participation is just a formality, nobody wants to speak out, they feel there is no integrity to the present system of government (Interview # 4).

Poor Blackfeet Reservation economics played a role in the way tribal members felt about their tribal resources and reservation life in general.

Q: Do you feel that sometimes the economy is so low that there is a lot of unemployment and that people are just trying to survive and not think about the land?

A: Yea, they just give up. They go and get drunk or something. I see a lot of that here (Interview # 6).

Q: Do you feel threatened by the oil and gas development?

A: Well, they are going to start drilling. Aren’t they? Well, I think that would help the tribe, so we could get bigger per capita every year. It would benefit everybody, but a lot of people don’t want them drilling on this reservation. I know they going to be starting. It would benefit everybody (Interview # 5).

C: The problem is and its here to, you have one family or two family members working in order to make a profit. The job pays so damn low it takes two people to work. The kids are out raising hell getting in trouble, and it’s not their fault and it’s not the parents fault. It’s our leadership,
their fault when they could of brought in all kinds of big business people and could of been making wages like compared to the city life (Interview # 10).

Q: Is the tribal council keeping up with the outside world in terms of technology, adapting to the outside world.

A: Well, I really don't think they adapt to the outside world too much. But I don't think they are getting out to the outside world enough. They are abiding by their policies and that makes it tougher for the people to understand. (Interview # 11)

Ethnic background was a factor for some tribal members who viewed that tribal government decision making being was left up to a select group of people:

C: There's a difference between the breeds. There are breeds that were raised Indian, and breeds that were raised white, the white way of living rather than the Indian way. Those are the ones that look out for themselves and the Indian breed and the rest of the Indian people here are just accepting just whatever they are handing us. I think there should be more tribal input from the people, but you know how the Indian people are, ahh like your full blood type. They are humble people, and they accept whatever the tribal council, the federal government, and everybody else puts out. They just take it and swallow it. They accept it (Interview # 7).

Multiple jurisdictions on the reservation created a hopeless situation in where it impossible for many tribal members to relate to their lands.

C: And under these we receive allotments and become individual owners of these lands and have always taken care of them. But because of our reservation not getting any bigger and our population is exponential, it makes it hard for the individual Indian to really take care of the parcel of land. Now we under the problem of undivided interests which makes it really hard for these individual Indians to use these lands under federal
regulations and try to take care of everything. We got a million and half acres here that encompass the reservation, but we got a checker board ownership. Then you have dual jurisdiction; you have the tribal governing body and the tribal law and order; and you have tribal a judicial system. Then you have the federal government, the state government, and the county government. And then they overlap and mix with each other. Even though we are Indians, we are also a part of the whole America and also state citizens and county citizens and we have all these unique rights. See on the ownership on a million acres (Interview # 2).

Summary of Dimensions of Hopelessness

Those tribal members who thought that the tribal members lacked the tools to get involved in decision-making processes reflected hopelessness. Lack of education, lack of a voice, lack of knowledge about resources issues, and inherited social structure on the reservation posed a barrier for some who gave the impression of hopelessness. This dimension of frustration led to non-participation on the part of tribal members who thought it useless to go to public resource meetings. Lack of education created a sense of hopelessness among tribal members who felt the tribe was lacking the education to be successful. Another major characteristic of hopelessness as stated by the Blackfeet tribal interviewees was the lack of a voice. Tribal members had no desire to participate believing their voices were not heard. Others felt tribal members lacked awareness about tribal resource issues that prevented the tribal members from being involved in the decision making processes regarding the tribal natural resources. The dimension of hopelessness was represented by many that believed the inherent social structure of poverty on the reservation kept people from being involved. The sub themes of hopelessness lead into the third element called anger at defeat. Past defeats on the
reservation were dimension of frustration used to categorize those tribal members who felt defeated and anger at times because they were unable to become involved. In the area of anger at defeat, tribal members tended to take on a passive attitude toward public participation. Anger from past defeats to participate led tribal members to lack of action or unwillingness to be involved. Anger at defeat is illustrated by the quotes that attempt to describe the dimension of anger at defeat.

**Frustration, Anger at Defeat:**

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<tr>
<td>Anger at Defeat</td>
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<td>Lack of Action</td>
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<td>Past Defeats</td>
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**Dimensions of anger at defeat**

**Q: What is your perception of the environment here on the reservation, how people think in terms of the land and water?**

**A:** Let see, ahh, for myself, I think about the environment, I know it's real important, but again I'm not involved in it, like a lot of people who just kind of sit back and see what goes on. As an Indian I've got deep feelings for the environment and the earth, but I'm sure all these people think about it that way, but we don't just get involved enough. We just let people who we elect, the council and so forth, handle it for us (Interview # 1).

**Q: Why do think Blackfeet tribal members won't participate in public meetings and comment sessions where they can be allowed to help in decision making?**
A: There could be lot of reasons why they don't participate. They don’t want to be involved, or I really don’t know, I can’t answer that very truthfully. Yea, that’s a good question of why they don’t get involved. It’s a lot like myself; I really don’t want to get involved in anything that I don’t think is right for myself. I don’t like to get involved with any kind of meetings or participate where it might hurt my family or myself, so that’s why I stay away for my part. I don’t know why the people don’t get involved. I can’t answer that (Interview # 9).

Q: Do you think the tribal people identify with their natural resources or do they seem to think they are responsible?

A: Yea, the biggest majority can’t identify the resources, what resources really mean. I don’t think the biggest majority can understand what it really means. I think through educating the people, they will get more input on resource issues (Interview # 9).

C: There’s a lot of people that voice their opinion, but that don’t go too far. Then there’s a lot of people that voice their opinion, but they don’t attend the meetings, and I’m one of them. There was also a concern when people did voice their opinion there was no action. But, then again, a lot these people attend these meetings, there’s still no action (Interview # 7).

Defeat in the past resulted in anger on the part of this tribal member's feelings toward participation.

C: When I go to a meeting, they start joking, then they put one guy down. One guy was up there talking, and two guys were looking at him and making fun of him. I seen that and it’s all right to tease, but darn, when you're having a meeting you could keep that all out of it. Get the meeting over, you know, and tease after the meeting is over with. But when a person is trying to talk and they're saying like ‘O you Hooderite lover.’ It don’t make any difference what the hell I’m going
to do, lets try to get some things done that we're meeting about. So maybe that's
what happens to a lot of them. They see it, and they don't like it. That's one of
reasons that I don’t go to the meetings. They act like I don’t know what I’m
talking about or anything like that, but I’ve been in that town, so I know a lot
about what is going on (Interview # 7).

Q: Do you feel access or transportation to these areas and communities like is a
problem?
A: They don’t go down because they don’t know enough. They don’t know what
it’s about. They figure, ahh, its just another meeting, just a bunch of bark and no
bite (Interview # 6).

Summary of Dimensions of Anger at Defeat

Anger at defeat was the last dimension of frustration that tribal member
interviews reflected. Those who were concerned about the land but were not involved
represented anger at defeat on the reservation. It was theorized that past participation and
past defeats have led to anger that has fueled frustration. Many tribal members were
concerned about the natural environment, but did not take action. Tribal members felt
they did not have a voice and thus adopted passive attitudes about participation. Those
employees of the tribal government who promoted participation were left with a feeling
of non-participation. Ultimately, it is believed that tribal members tended to adopt a
passive attitude toward public participation processes on the reservation.

In summary with frustration as the major theme of this study, it is theorized that
through the interviews, disappointment, and hopelessness leading to anger at defeat are
leading elements that make up frustration. In order to define frustration and its origin and
before we can come to recommendations to reduce frustration and improve tribal member
participation, we must discuss the various factors and attempt to better understand the variables that may have brought on this frustration in tribal members.

**Blackfeet Cultural Relationship Toward the Natural Environment**

Blackfeet tribal culture playing an important role in environmental relationships on the reservation is an important part of this study. In the following chosen interviews, the study illustrates the cultural relationship of interviewed tribal members that exists on the reservation with respect to beliefs and value systems. It is felt the Blackfeet culture is an extremely important area that is instrumentally connected to the results of this study about Native American environmental relationships. The diagram below outlines various aspects of the Blackfeet culture and how people related them to the natural environment. Selected interviews will follow presenting cultural relationships and issues of conflict.

**Cultural Relationships:**

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<td>Blackfeet Cultural Relationship Toward Natural Environment</td>
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<td>Cultural Conflicts</td>
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Tribal members' cultural relationship attitudes, loss of culture, and how tribal members relate Blackfeet culture toward environmental ethics of tribal members.
Traditional Cultural Relationships Toward the Environment

Q: What do think about the environment, like our land and water?
A: I guess I just feel it inside, like when I go off the reservation. That’s when I miss the wind, the cool air, and the wildlife, like the gophers, the birds, and the magpies. I miss the sense of freedom. When you're in city, you don’t get that. You're kind of stuffed in with no breeze, a lot of traffic, and a lot of different people. Outside, you're just free; you're in your own natural environment. That’s what it seems to me (Interview # 1).

Q: When you were growing up, did you have any chance to experience outdoors in the country? If so, is that how you learned how to care for the land?
A: Being raised out in the country, you don’t appreciate it when you're growing up. It's just there. When you grow up, then you get to appreciate the animals. You see that they have to live, and you just mostly let them be. Because they have to live, because they have their place on this environment around us, try not to be cruel to animals. Don't kill them needlessly . . . be kind to animals.

Q: Did you have any other kind of culture when you were growing up, that kind of related to protecting the environment, traditions or things that might have influenced you?
A: While growing up, I heard Indian stories, things like Napi stories about different animals and what they would do. You just know animals are there, and that they should be there (Interview # 1).

Q: So you would say that culture is very important and it is associated with the environment here on the reservation?
A: Yea, because of the stories and the way the Indians used to dress and how they lived their lives by animal spirits that guided them. But I never was that deeply a part of it (Interview # 1).

Q: Do think that is important now, in terms of management? Do think Indians still need that kind of spirituality?
A: Yea, I think it will always be there; I think the Indian always knows it's there and always will be there. We don’t practice as much maybe as we should. As I said, the Blackfeet always got animals in there, the way they are (Interview # 1).

Q: In relating to the environment, do you feel the tribal people have drifted away from a sense of caring?
A: My personal feeling is that the Indian people have always been sensitive to our environment, the wildlife, the land, the plants, and the water, probably even more so when the actual Indian becomes a rancher or farmer and not only along with the federal agencies, just going back in our history and our aboriginal culture (Interview # 2).

Q: In your opinion, are the cultural traditional people on the reservation more inclined to protect the environment than the non-traditional people?
I think that is a truth? I believe that the traditional people understand that the animals who they pray to and sing to in their religious ceremonies and that they store in their Beaver bundles force that community to respect the natural habitat of their friends as opposed to non traditional people who have never been introduced to or understand the concept or the connection between the Blackfeet people and Blackfeet religion (Interview # 5).
Cultural Relationships

Blackfeet culture plays a prevalent role in environmental relationships on the reservation. Loss of the culture is related to loss of land ethics that results in a form of non-participation on the reservation.

Q: How do you feel about the traditions here on the reservation? Do you feel there’s a lot left?
A: I think it’s dying out. Like my baby, I want him to go the Indian school. I don’t even understand the immersion program. I feel like I was left out on a lot of it. I always hear my grandma talking, and I don’t understand. I know it’s important to a lot of people, but I always hear of people selling their land to white people (Interview # 6).

Q: Do you feel that the people with the traditional values, the people that still practice some of the Indian religion, are more sensitive toward environmental issues?
A: That’s why they believe in the old Indian religion. You take the older Indians, they prayed to everything. We pray to the maker, to the suns, to the light, to the eagle and to the bear for strength. But, I think the traditional people think more about the environment than anybody else (Interview # 7).

Q: Do you feel we have a lot of traditional people left here on the reservation?
A: Not very many. There’s not too many that are still here. There’s just a handful that are still practicing the Indian religion. It’s being revived, coming back. You can see that it’s going to be good in the future. We can get back our old ways. It makes it hard, you know; they have this bilingual program and they are trying to teach us to talk Blackfeet. Well, nobody in the family speaks Blackfeet, so it’s dead right there. They’d
have to educate the whole outfit. Now in Moccasin Flat School, they tried it. They would hold classes for the parents once or twice a week. We were supposed to be going but we knew too much (Interview # 7).

C: Spouse: I wanted to tell this story. These kids were being taught the Blackfeet language, and they go home and speak it to their parents. The parents don’t know what there are saying, so now they have to have a class for the adults. I think that the adults should be interested in attending. It’s going to be very difficult for them because the older you get the harder it is to learn. Unlike children, they don’t learn very fast (Interview # 7).

Q: Do you feel that we have very many traditional Blackfeet people left here on the reservation?
A: I think that most all the real tradition is gone. The younger people are trying to keep it active, but I think the tradition is really gone. There is no way you can retrieve the old tradition of the Blackfeet. They could perform it in their dances, but I would say tradition is diminishing off the reservation (Interview #9).

Q: Do you feel that if there were a cultural revival and the people went back to their traditions, that would increase natural resource concerns toward the land?
A: Yea, I would think it would be good thing, but I think it would be a lost cause to try to get back the traditions. Like I said before, the traditions are gone. You can only perform it to a certain extent, but other than that you can never bring it back. They can still perform the culture, but it ain’t going to be the same as the old traditional culture. I don’t think it could ever be retrieved (Interview #9).
Much misunderstanding exists within those tribal members who practice Blackfeet culture and those who don’t. This contributes to feelings of conflict with the traditional Blackfeet tribal members who practice their culture. This section highlights a misunderstanding about Blackfeet ceremonies in which many objects are used during the ceremonies often appearing to be mistaken for junk by people ignorant of Blackfeet cultural ceremonies.

C: I know one time when I went up there was a lot beer cans and a lot of trash right in sight where people were doing traditional sacrificing, and I think one of the areas should be monitored at all times (Interview #11).

A: Yes, it’s a difficult question, and I think just like anything else, you’re going to have special interest groups who feel that culture is a very sensitive thing. I’m going to honest with you on a couple issues. We talk culture, and I have viewed some potential or supposed culture sites. And one I’m going to pick in particular is that the debate on whether Chief Mountain is a culturally sensitive area, and I agree that it’s very culturally sensitive area but also it’s a very environmentally sensitive area. You go there and you take a look and you see where people have gone and trashed that particular area out and supposedly in their vision quests and left a lot of the junk. Things that shouldn’t be there, and so I have to question some of these issues that are going on in the cultural aspect. Do these people truly know what they’re doing? I think if you go back and look at what happened early on in our ancestral days, you will find a different story. One particular area that I know about is very culturally sensitive. There is no trash there, there’s no ribbons tied on trees, all that kind stuff, but all the remnants of how sacred the place is. It’s alive, as well, if you can respect it that way. And so I think we can maybe go into a day long debate about what is acceptable and what’s not acceptable, and that’s a tough one. I don’t think you’re going to be able to find a right answer or a wrong
answer; it’s one of opinion. I know there are a lot programs out there to revitalize the culture. Sometimes people get into these debates about the way people talk about the color of your skin, the color of your eyes, and even our own people discriminate against breeds. It really comes right down to a black and white answer of what’s in your heart (Interview # 4).

Summary of Cultural Dimensions

Through the three areas of tribal cultural relationships we know that the traditional Blackfeet culture plays an important role in tribal member attitudes toward the natural environment on the reservation. Those with traditional Blackfeet cultural backgrounds tended to possess the inherent respect and value for their lands that came as part of the traditional Blackfeet culture. The traditional Native American relationship is very instrumental in determining the extent of tribal members' environmental attitudes toward the natural environment. Although we know that the Blackfeet culture does not take on a magnitude of feelings within the interviews, it is a factor to be recognized and documented. The Blackfeet culture is not as prominent in today’s world and is still dissipating despite the efforts of the tribe to revitalize it. The Blackfeet people are moving toward the western culture, adapting to the western culture in a significant way. Without confusing the reader, the purpose of this study is to merely look for an outline of basic environmental attitudes using the discovery process in grounded theory. In establishing this, the purpose for this section of cultural relationships is an attempt to determine the connection between culturally traditional tribal members and the natural environment. Although we know this aspect of cultural and environmental relationships definitely needs further study, the interviews do show that traditional tribal members show a closer relationship than non-traditional tribal members on the Blackfeet
reservation. In linking this to the issue of tribal member participation, this finding will undoubtedly proves that culturally oriented environmental management plans must be integrated with the Blackfeet culture.

Limitations of Study

Due to the small sample size of 13 tribal members, the study results should be thought as representative types rather than statistical conclusive results. Themes derived from interviews should not be considered the ultimate authority for all contemporary Blackfeet tribal environmental attitudes on the reservation.
Chapter Three

Discussion

In conclusion of the study, frustration has emerged as the predominant theme among the Blackfeet tribal members underlying non participation and feelings about the natural environment. The feeling is that because of frustration, the outcome ultimately resulted in tribal members not participating as a community. Certainly, there are many sub themes that contribute to this frustration in this thesis study on the Reservation with many of these reflected in the study as inherited deep-rooted social problems. There are many questions pertaining to the causes of aspects of non-participation and tribal member environmental relationships that are left unanswered. Further research is undoubtedly needed to resolve these social science questions, but this thesis represents a major body of current thinking on this topic. The following paragraphs represent a series of theological theories that seek to determine the origin or cause as a result of the discovered topic of frustration.

Historical Structure of Reservation as Part of the Problem

History plays a prevalent role in the development of the Blackfeet people and their assimilation into the white culture. A view may be that historical aspects may be linked to hopelessness in the fact the some of these current problems existing on the reservation are historical problems that have been inherited and have brought many problems to the reservation. As a result, the historic structure of the reservation provides a foundation for existing problems on the reservation such as diversity, jurisdictional problems, government structure and others. This serves to further prevent the people from becoming involved.
Organization of Tribal Government as the Origin of the Problem

A theory is that frustration on the reservation is linked to the structure and evolution of the tribal government beginning with the Reorganization Act of 1930. A dissertation by Wilmoth traces the evolution of the Blackfeet tribal government beginning with the Reorganization Act of 1930. "Tribal Governments were formed evolving and creating their own system of internal colonialism, encysted society as the author of Development of Blackfeet Policies and Multiethnic Categories put it. Wilmoth concluded in his dissertation of 1987, that the tribal government has followed the course of that of one of natural evolution. This being of Indian graft meaning literally "Let us admit that self-government includes graft, corruption and the making of decisions by inexpert minds. Certainly these are features of self-government in white cities and counties, and so we ought not be scared out of our wits if somebody jumps up in the middle of a discussion of Indian self-government and shouts 'graft' and 'corruption'" (Cohen, The American Indian, quote In Joseph 1971 and Wilmoth in 1999).

Inherent Problems

Poverty on the reservation brings an array of social constituents like high unemployment, lack of opportunity and social illnesses, alcoholism, drug abuse that leads to dysfunctional lifestyles posing a barrier for many on the reservation. The assimilation of the Blackfeet into the great melting pot has not come without its costs, bringing an array of diverse inherent social problems to the reservation. The Blackfeet reservation has been characterized by many for its poverty-stricken environment, substandard housing, mismanagement of federal and state administrative duties, and a failing economy that presents a multitude of challenges to the tribal people. Subsequently, many of these social
problems of the Blackfeet did not evolve overnight; these have served to place the people in the current state of social and economic polarization. The inherent cycle of poverty on the reservation extends far back into the history of the Blackfeet beginning with the first cultural impacts of European contact. As one tribal member stated, “I would say that we have inherited a whole array of many sins, years of not knowing what the heck was going on as far as the environment is concerned.” The quote shows the succession cycle that has led to the difficult job managing reservation resources. Beginning with the origins of the reservation and early governmental polices of his miss assimilation practices, the Blackfeet are what they are today. We know that these social aspects all contribute to the frustration on the reservation and must be considered in a study of this nature.

**Economic Challenges**

Among the formidable challenges facing Native American tribes today are those set in economic conditions. American Indians living in the nation's nearly 300 reservations are among the poorest people in the United States. The Blackfeet reservation primarily functions alone in that reservation boundaries, jurisdiction, and culture from the surrounding regions sever it. The Blackfeet reservation also relies heavily on the federal government for economic development. With the median family income a little more than $15,000 annually and unemployment ranging from 30 to 40 percent, economic development is a high priority for the Blackfeet Reservation. It must rely on the federal government to function. Sixty-nine percent of the tribal members work for the federal government. In the future this will have adverse affects on the reservation with increasing budget cuts and restraints put on federal dollars.
Obstacles to Development

While these obstacles can vary from the various reservations they are basically related to inherited poverty that exists on the Blackfeet reservation. This list of obstacles facing tribal development emphasizes the challenge for economic development on the reservation. The obstacles are daunting; tribes face a host of problems. Some of these problems are shared with other would-be developers, cities and states, while some are specific to Indian tribes. In a study compiled by the Kennedy School at Harvard of economic development on American Indian Reservations listed the numerous factors that deter development on Indian Reservations as indicated below:

- Tribes and individual lack access to financial capital.
- Tribes and individuals lack human capital (education, skills, technical expertise) and the means to develop it.
- Reservations lack effective planning.
- Reservations are subject to too much planning and not enough action.
- Reservations are poor in natural resources.
- Reservations have natural resources, but lack sufficient control over them.
- Reservations are disadvantaged by their distance from markets and high costs of transportation.
- Tribes cannot persuade investors to locate on reservations because of intense competition from non-Indian communities.
- Federal and state policies are counterproductive and or discriminatory.
- The Bureau of Indian Affairs is inept, corrupt, and/or uninterested in reservation development.
- Non-Indian outsiders control or confound tribal decisions making.
- Tribes have unworkable and/or externally imposed systems of government.
- Tribal politicians and bureaucrats are inept or corrupt.
- On-reservation factionalism destroys stability in tribal decisions.
- The instability of tribal government keeps outsiders from investing.
- Reservation saving rates are low.
- Entrepreneurial skills and experience are scarce.
- Non-Indian management techniques fail to be effective on the reservation.
- Tribal cultures get in the way.
- The long term effects of racism have undermined tribal self-confidence.
- Alcoholism and other social problems are destroying tribe’s human capital (Cornell, Kalt, 1993).
- Centralized governmental system, both tribal and BIA.
These explanations do not necessarily pertain to all tribes. However, most of them are right somewhere or other in Indian Country. While some are far more significant than others are misleading. Whatever the case, the sheer magnitude makes it difficult or impossible to develop a long-term plan of resolution to the reservation regional problems. It is obvious that the tribes have everything working against them in the effort to become self-sufficient. Today, the Blackfeet reservation economy remains largely dependent on income from ranching and from oil and natural gas leases.

**Intertribal Diversity Factor**

A theory that stems from an origin of frustration on the reservation may be caused by a distinct separation of people on the reservation that is related to ethnic background. In the early history of the Blackfeet, French trappers were commonly married into the tribes and were accepted by the people. During a span of many years, Blackfeet with mixed blood began to appear on the reservation in more increasing numbers. Soon a separation between ethnic groups served to create subcultures. As one interviewee stated on how the Blackfeet were relating to the land, “it depends on what segment of society you’re asking” (interview # 3).

Although, this ethnic separation is not as prevalent today as in the 40’s, 50’s and 60’s, it is still believed to be a major factor that contributes to the frustration on the reservation. In Malcolm Mcfee’s book titled “Modern Blackfeet, Mcfee conducted an ethnographic case study of the Blackfeet in the 50’s and 60’s. Mcfee explains the acculturation of the Blackfeet is not a linear process, but there are many sub varieties of cultures that exist on the reservation. Basically, Mcfee sums up two distinctive types of adaptation among the Blackfeet: the “Indian Oriented” and the “White Oriented” residing
on the Blackfeet reservation. A difference in behavior, attitudes and economics exist in these two types of people. Listed below are the basic characteristics of these two groups of people:

**“Indian-Oriented” Characteristics**

1. Resists change, are comfortable where they are.
2. Values are different than those of the western world off the reservation.
3. Education is not a priority.
4. Tends to live in the present

**“White-Oriented” Characteristics**

1. More adapted to mainstream society. (Largely due to genetic inheritance)
2. Share western societies views and values
3. Progressive, generally comprise the mainstream tribal government and Bureau of Indian Affairs.

The diversity explanation may account for some variety of varied opinions on the natural environment, and it should be noted that this aspect should be taken into account and considered in a qualitative study of this nature.

**Ethnic Identity Transformations**

The aspect of diversity is important because it presents a key to understanding the theory of frustration on the reservation. As a tribal member experiencing life on the reservation, it would seem that the Mcfee’s characteristic observation of the Blackfeet people is distinctly related to my theory of frustration on the reservation. In Malcohm Mcfee’s conclusion in *Modern Blackfeet*, he explains the “Indian-oriented” people of the reservation are separate from the “White oriented.” Literally, the people of both sides tend to stay where they are, where they are comfortable. This causes a division in the community, a barrier that prevents the people from working together effectively. Although, this separation is becoming less and less prevalent as the tribal members
become more educated, characteristics of "Indian oriented" and "White oriented" are still visible. Because of segregation through the generations between ethnic groups on the reservation, people, families and individuals have developed subcultures in which people have lived their own ways all their lives.

Today, the reservation is composed of many different people, ethnic groups that have different backgrounds. For many, just surviving has been a way of life on the Blackfeet reservation, they are products of their environment, and they follow in the footsteps of their fathers. Still, others have had more advantages and opportunities to prosper over others because of birthright, ethnic background and other factors. Without placing a label on all Blackfeet tribal members, for those just trying to survive, there are no standards set; there are no goals, no desire to reach out for resources; education is not a priority; substance abuse is common. With many people depending on government and tribal and county public assistance to survive, we have unbalanced, unhealthy, and unproductive communities. Like those non-tribal members living in poverty off the reservation, they have no means to achieve success, resulting in the pattern that has passed from generation to generation. They are not interested in what's outside the reservation.

 Mostly, when they leave the reservation they cannot function in society, because they are not equipped to do so. For many that leave the reservation for various reasons; school, college, work, many are driven back. In linking this to the theme of frustration, it becomes a challenge for the community to establish unity when one part of our people gets involved and the others resist. The result is a clash. Part of this community has no desire to move ahead while the other half makes the rules the other sits back, time is
wasted. I see frustration on both sides of the two ethnic groups employed and unemployed, the latter being more prevalent. When we read through the interviews we can sense the frustration from the tribal members. There seems to be no solutions despite many attempts to change the life here on the Blackfeet reservation. Through many failed government policies, youth programs and social programs that have a history of failing either because the funds run out or the people burn out, the future looks bleak. In order to change the cycle, the community needs to learn to function together for a common purpose. This can only be accomplished through the extreme effort of the people to come together as a whole community. Unity must be established among people of all ages. Fairness, integrity, and respect must be taught beginning with the young people. People of the Blackfeet reservation do have hopes and dreams; they are idealistic; creativity and uniqueness must be encouraged.

**Contemporary Environmental Relationships**

Today's Blackfeet tribal people's relationship with lands they occupy is based on their immediate needs. It is apparent that the Blackfeet do not dwell in the same realm of conservationists and preservationists minded people of the contemporary western society. For example, when tribal members need meat, they go out and kill a deer, the land has fulfilled that need. Wood gatherers need wood for fuel, the forest supplies those needs. The individual versus land relationship that exists is second nature, a natural way of life for the Blackfeet, the way it has always been. Of course, as in every society, there are those that waste and destroy wildlife and land base on the reservation; it would be a mistake to believe that this was non-existent on the reservation. The Blackfeet culture still plays an important role on the reservation and in environmental attitudes and will
bring a new increased awareness of land ethics through the efforts of improved research on cultural identities and education. However, due to limited information in this study, it is known that only by taking action and being involved will the tribe move ahead with methods of environmental stewardship of their lands. From the western point of view, education and awareness and natural social evolution will undoubtedly improve land ethics as the Blackfeet move into the new millennium.

Conclusion

There are no easy answers to the problems on the Blackfeet reservation which are inherited and deep rooted. This conclusion offers only an opinion of one tribal member who attempts to piece together a logical theory behind the frustration from growing up on the reservation. Though times have changed the internal makeup of the Blackfeet people, they still have a deep caring and respect for their lands and are linked by their traditional beliefs by the Creator who has purpose for everything he creates.

Through the reemergence of tribal culture, traditions, languages being taught on the Blackfeet Reservation, the culture is being revitalized bringing a new sense of identity back to the people. A new sense of caring and understanding of the land will in turn bring improved tribal member participation resulting in resource management to the reservation. To bring about improved community involvement throughout the diversified segments of the reservation, a direction may be to look at the problems as perceived by the people and lay them out ultimately ending with suggestions for improvement. The problems on the reservations emulate the West’s bio-regional problems where people are moving toward collaboration as a way of solving their differences. The Blackfeet Reservation community needs to move toward more open lines of communication where
people can become more conscious of the value and effectiveness of collaboration. This adoption will undoubtedly take time and persistence on the part of tribal members and reservation residents.

With increasing population on the reservation and the resource capital being used extensively, the people will have to come together in an effort to deal with increased bio-regional problems. The Blackfeet people cannot afford to just sit back and cope with the natural evolution of the tribal people that always seems to lag years behind the outside society in technical, social developmental needs, and land management. The Blackfeet need to be in the forefront of conservation, preservation and protection of their tribal lands. Tribal members with varied ethnic backgrounds, along with non-tribal members that live on the reservation, have to realize the common ground and mutually accept their differences in order to begin the healing process that will preserve the integrity and culture of the Blackfeet Reservation.

To improve the overall management of resources, it is imperative that the tribe moves toward a more coordinated resource type of management plan in which tribal members can participate. The following are suggested approaches that may promote the healing and development of the Blackfeet reservation community into a more productive socially active healthy environment.

**Suggested approaches:**

**Public participation and Collaboration Curriculum**

The object would be to promote the collaboration process by developing a seminar to encourage and instruct the Blackfeet Reservation residents on how to take an active part in the management decisions that affect their lands. The level building process builds on previous stages of environmental education and participation curriculum ultimately creating resource knowledge environmental awareness. The idea is to
empower the people and arm them so they can take an active part in natural resource planning and community development. This could be taught at the local community college as well as in the High School and in the local communities.

Goals and Objectives:
1. To make education a priority
2. To establish networking
3. To encourage problem solving and goal setting through open collaboration
4. To involve whole community
5. To start the healing process by allowing the community to work together
6. To utilize outside resources

Goals
- To develop a culturally relevant educational curriculum that would increase and empower the tribal people in environmental issues on the reservation.
- To offer seminars on professionalism in meetings.
- To promote tribal member participation in public meetings and resource decisions by adapting new reservation community adaptive methods

Environmental Education:

Establish an environmental education seminar for the public schools from Headstart to high school, inviting tribal administrators, new council members, employees, tribal members, and non-tribal member’s ideas to empower the people with knowledge to take an active part in natural resource planning. An EPA, NEPA process, study is needed to identify impact of public process on tribal members.

Cultural Emphasis in Natural Resource Planning

Today, tribal culture is being revitalized by the reemergence of tribal cultures, traditions and languages being re-taught on the reservations. All over the North American
continent, tribes are moving toward managing their land and incorporating their tribal cultural knowledge into all areas of management. The development of natural resource management plans that are integrated with traditional tribal cultures and practices are improving tribal management. These culture sensitive management plans help bring back traditional values of culture and traditions and respect as well as a renewed sense of identity to the tribal people. Blackfeet culture is vital because it has great value as an identity teaching tool, serving to link tribal members of all ages to the environment. The continuation and utilization of cultural sensitivity as a resource tool allows the tribal people as a whole to build holistic management plans that integrate the tribe’s traditional values and builds mutual respect for the land. This type of management should place a great emphasis on the elders, traditionalists of the tribes to gather and select traditions, school curriculum, existing cultural knowledge, and tribal values of the land to be integrated with modern land management techniques such as computer modeling to enable the tribes to plan for the future. One example of a culturally oriented type of management would be the development of a comprehensive land management plan that would incorporate traditional Blackfeet culture and beliefs into land management on the reservation.

The objective is to develop a culturally relevant Blackfeet Environmental Comprehensive Land Management Plan (BECLMP) that will display a comprehensive picture of the Blackfeet Reservations resource management.

- BECLMP culturally adapted, easy to read for Blackfeet tribal members and community.
- Graphics that will illustrate management concepts and techniques.
Community and tribal member input and artwork with cultural stories relating to environmental topics.

**Tribal Water Resources**

Next to its people and its land, there is no more important tribal resource than water. The reservation has a vast amount of water resources that can and should be put into perspective for tribal members to utilize as an environmental educational resource. Millions of acre feet pass through the reservation aquifers, headwaters, creeks, perennial streams, and canals annually. Without effective water management, much of this valuable resource is lost through seepage and ineffective planning. Tribal wetlands and creeks and streams, another area of critical importance to wildlife on the reservation, need to be protected. With growing uses of water resources on and off the reservation, tribal members need to be aware of the danger of pollution by animal wastes and human development and over utilization. The water resource is a very large part of the natural resource, and with uncertain water shortages, the people must be aware of the importance of planning and collaboration.

The goal is to promote educational careers in water management fields, to encourage tribal member participation, and to promote awareness of Indian water laws and rights facing the reservation. This will not only serve as an educational tool but will also enhance awareness and promote more water planning and encourage tribal member participation and awareness in water issues facing the reservation.

- Water education, watershed functions, vocabulary, and public elementary water festivals for kindergarten through high school.
• Water educational program for the Public Schools and general public of the reservation.

• Indian Water rights, definition of the current policies governing reservation water resources.

• Identify the potential for forming ad hoc groups and watershed coalitions that can work together to solve jurisdictional disputes over water.

Establishment of Tribal Wilderness

The intent is to increase tribal awareness and identity through the establishment of a tribal wilderness educational area on the Blackfeet Reservation. This would be a way of preserving the cultural heritage, traditions, and sacred sites to carry on the legacy of the Blackfeet people for future generations.

The goal is to promote and bring back unity back to the tribal people and the reservation community, to revitalize the rich heritage of the Blackfeet, and to instill a sense of pride and self-esteem in their heritage. Of course, there are limitations that will prevent the full recovery of the lost footing of the culture, traditions, and old way of life. But steps can be taken to reconcile the people back to their roots by reintroducing them to the rich legacy of their past and, therefore, bring about an improved caring for the land.
Figure 1

Map of The Blackfeet Reservation

Figure 1. The Blackfeet Indian Reservation.
Interviewee # 1, Male, Age 39, Unemployed, seasonal worker, father of five, GED education. Lifetime resident of the Blackfeet Reservation.

Interviewee # 2, Male, Age 55, Employee of BIA 20yrs. Landowner, rancher, father. Highschool graduate. Lifetime resident of the Blackfeet Reservation.

Interviewee # 3, Male, Age 45, Employee of Tribal government 20 years. Landowner, rancher. High School grad. College grad, B.S. Physical Education. Lifetime resident of the Blackfeet reservation.


Interviewee # 5, Female, Age 23, Employee of Tribal government 1yr. Non-landowner, education unknown. Lifetime resident of Blackfeet reservation.

Interviewee # 6, Male, Age 39, Unemployed seasonal worker. Non landowner, High school graduate. College graduate, UM, Political Science Degree., A.S. Lifetime resident of the Blackfeet Reservation.

Interviewee # 7, Husband, Age 73 and Wife, Age 67 Male, Retired, Former tribal councilman, Land Owner, 10th grade education each. Female, retired BIA employee, Land Owner. Highschool grad. Both lifetime residents of the Blackfeet reservation.

Interviewee # 9, Male, Age 66, Unemployed seasonal worker, Land owner, 8th grade education. Lifetime resident of the Blackfeet reservation.

Interviewee # 10, Male, Age 60, Unemployed, recent relocated to the Blackfeet reservation after 30 year absence, 12th grade education, GED. Some college classes, Semi life time resident of the Blackfeet reservation.

Interviewee # 11, Male, Age 30, Unemployed, Army veteran. High school graduate. 1 year college. Lifetime resident of the Blackfeet reservation.

Interviewee # 12, Male, Age 60, Unemployed, seasonal worker. 8th grade education, Vo Education.Barber. Lifetime resident of the Blackfeet reservation.

Interviewee # 13, Male, Age 36, Unemployed, Army veteran. High school graduate. 1 year college. Lifetime resident of the Blackfeet reservation.
Figure III

Comprised Themes

Interview # 1 Themes
1. Importance of environment.
2. Native American environmental relationship
3. Association with environment
4. Associates environment with cultural stories
5. Concern, but lack of action
6. Adaptation to new of life for the Blackfeet

Interview # 2 Themes
1. Bureau of Indian Affairs process
2. Native American relationships
3. Historical perspective
4. Problems with Tribal Government system, historic origins, structure
5. Solutions

Interview # 3 Themes
1. People who have an interest in the forest, i.e. Wood gatherers, timber sales
2. Land relationship, caring
3. Mismanagement

Interview # 4 Themes
1. Environmental relationships differ because of diversity or segment of reservation
2. Problems evident within tribal government are inherited
3. New initiatives
4. Early on instructions from tribal councils
5. Refining the NEPA process
6. Education, need
7. Cultural issues, ignorance

Interview # 5 Themes
1. Spoiled system
2. Lack of education
3. Loss of resources
4. Loss of resources
5. Environmental relationship
6. Loss of culture on the reservation
7. Resource mismanagement, unfair politics
8. Cultural stories
9. Reservation threats and resource uses
10. Community dysfunction, jealousy
11. Solutions, education

Interview # 6 Themes
1. Reservation resource mismanagement
2. Environmental relationship
3. Culture aspects
4. Reservation resource threats
5. Solutions

Interview # 7 Themes
1. Spoiled system
2. Solution to spoiled system
3. Environmental relationships
4. Solutions
5. Cultural aspects
6. Tribal resource mismanagement

Interview # 8 Themes
1. Views of tribal land, mismanagement
2. Polarization
3. Lack of action to back up concerns
4. Spoiled system, lack of professionalism
5. Solutions, education
6. Humility of tribal fullblood type

Interview Number # 9 Themes
1. Mismanagement on the reservation,
2. Inadequate technical employee's
3. Perceived lack of involvement.
4. Perceived causes, lack of education, awareness
5. Tribal members lack voice
6. Solutions,
7. Problems with Tribal management
8. Dissipating Blackfeet culture, cannot be retrieved.
9. Retrival of culture would be good for Blackfeet tribal members to increase land awareness.

Interview # 10 Themes
1. Overuse of land
2. Tribe could use more regulations
3. Water issue
4. Health problems due to mismanagement
5. Talking but no action
6. Culture aspects, Trashed areas

Interview # 11 Themes
1. Importance of getting involved
2. Tribal government problems
3. People lack the tools to run the Tribal Government
4. People are spoiled
5. Washington examples, comparing Glacier County
6. Mismanagement of federal funds
7. New tribal groups
8. Lacking tribal economy
9. Tribal mismanagement
10. Law enforcement problems
11. Poverty on reservation
12. Tribal mismanagement
13. Culture revitalization, positive for the people.

Interview # 12 Themes
1. Environmental relationships, stories
2. Cultural relationships, stories
3. Cultural sensitivity towards the environment
4. Blackfeet culture loss
5. Solutions

Interview # 13 Themes
1. Views of tribal government, mismanagement
2. Unemployment on the reservation
3. Firefighting story
4. Growing up experiences
5. Lack of cultural knowledge
6. High school sports
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About the Author: Gabriel A. Renville

Enrolled Blackfeet tribal member of the Blackfeet reservation. Grew up with minimal understanding of Blackfeet culture and language, developed a concern for the natural environment at an early age. “We didn’t get much environmental education, most of us had no concept of what it meant to conserve and protect our land and resources. Life on the reservation was hard, many times the family was without running water and electricity.” Belief in that poverty has major impact on tribal member land ethics. Experienced life off the reservation at an early age that had an influence on the direction of life that eventually lead to pursuing an education and acquiring a M.S. at the University of Montana in Environmental Studies.

Origin of thesis study

Participated on a forest management plan on the Blackfeet Reservation as a first-year graduate student. During the public meetings as part of the NEPA process, was dismayed to see a lack of participation by tribal members. Noticed an overall lack of awareness in environmental knowledge and participation in general on the part of tribal members.

Original idea for the project was to develop an environmental seminar to present to tribal members to promote awareness and education in environmental issues on the reservation. Needed a survey to gather baseline data. Developed qualitative survey that allowed flexibility to explore other concerns about environmental awareness and attitudes on the reservation.

Future goals are to continue to work for increased participation and community awareness on the Blackfeet reservation while promoting conservation, preservation, and protection of Blackfeet natural resources.

Gabriel A. Renville