

FORT BELKNAP INDIAN COMMUNITY

2014 TRIBAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY PLAN



Developed by the: Fort Belknap Tribal Transportation Department

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FORT BELKNAP INDIAN RESERVATION SAFETY MANAGEMENT PLAN

2014

Promote Safety, Prevent Crashes, Preserve Culture

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From 1996 to 2012, there were nearly 30 fatalities and over 120 injuries in traffic crashes on the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation.

To combat these issues, the Tribe submitted for the BIA Highway Safety Grants, the Save Communities concept was followed leading to a Tribal Transportation Safety Plan was developed in 2008. This plan identified a number of strategies to reduce these terrible events, including; establishing a safety committee, implementing a primary seat belt law and support for the Safe On All Roads (SOAR) Coordinator.

In 2013 the Fort Belknap Indian Community, Transportation Department undertook efforts to update this initial plan. This update included the review of existing data in conjunction with Darcy Merchant, MPH, Environmental Health Specialist, Billings Area Indian Health Service Office of Environmental Health & Engineering, Division of Environmental Health Services. Darcy worked on a dataset that primarily entailed a Detailed crash file, putting this file together in a GIS format takes a long time editing in addition to quality assurance, editing and analysis.

A roadway safety audit (RSA), was conducted through this office and James Wilson, RSA Coordinator.

These strategies were prioritized around the 4E's of safety and included:

Education

- Develop a "Healing from the Pain" Video
- Develop a Young Drivers Education Program
- Participate in a Multi-Tribe Arrive Alive Campaign

Enforcement

- Implement an Electronic Crash Records System (Web-based Crash Data Reporting)

- Provide Tribal Highway Safety Officer(s)
- Develop a Cross Jurisdictional Agreement
- Develop an Enforcement Team for Livestock Removal

Engineering

- Continue Utilizing Road Safety Audits on BIA Routes
- Install Livestock Fencing
- Install Mile Markers, delineators, stripping on all BIA Routes

Other

- Implement-enforce an ATV Ordinance

BACKGROUND

The Fort Belknap Indian Reservation is located in north central Montana and is homeland to the Gros Ventre and Assiniboine peoples. The Assiniboine were part of the Yantonai Sioux. The Gros Ventres are closely related to the Arapaho. The Assiniboine originally resided in the woodland area near northern Minnesota. The Gros Ventre resided near the Saskatchewan River area of the province of Alberta, Canada. In search of hunting areas, competition from other stronger Tribes, and the development of new trade routes, the Tribes migrated toward Montana in the 1700's-1800's.

The Fort Belknap Indian Reservation was established in 1888. Seven years later it was reduced to its present size of 652,593 acres (approx; 970 square miles) of land. In addition, there are 28,731 acres of Tribal lands outside the reservation's boundaries obtained through the land acquisition program. The 1985 B.I.A Annual Report of Indian Lands indicated that 188,017 acres of land were being held in Tribal trust. The report identifies 400,738 acres as being individually (Indian) owned. The Government does not own any land within the Reservation.

The reservation is rectangular, in shape with an average width of 28 miles. The average length north to south is 40 miles. The northern boundary is the Milk River; the southern boundary includes a large portion of the Little Rocky Mountains. The east and west boundaries are marked by survey lines.

The Fort Belknap Reservation is the fourth largest of the seven reservations in Montana and is included in portions of Blaine and Phillips counties. About 80 percent of the Reservation is situated in Blaine County. The remaining 20 percent is located in Phillips County.

The Fort Belknap Indian Reservation was created by an Act of Congress on May 1, 1888 (Stat., L., XXV, 113). The site for the Fort Belknap Agency as the government headquarters was informally established in 1889. The Fort Belknap Agency is located four miles southeast of Harlem, Montana.

The male Indian voters accepted the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) on October 27, 1934. This allowed Tribal members of Fort Belknap to establish a constitution and corporate charter. The constitution was adopted on October 19, 1935 and a corporate charter on August 25, 1937 in accordance with Section 16, of the IRA.

The Fort Belknap Indian Community Council (FBICC) is recognized as the official government body of the Fort Belknap Indian Community. A ten (10) member council, consisting of two (2) Gros Ventre district representatives and two (2) Assiniboine district representatives, two (2) Assiniboine At-Large Representatives, and two (2) Gros Ventre At-Large Representatives, are elected to serve two-year terms. A Gros Ventre and Assiniboine, President/Vice-President team is elected at-large with the team serving a four-year term. The Tribal Secretary/Treasurer is appointed when the new council members take office. The current FBICC and its administration were seated in November of 2013 with ten (10) new council members.

The Fort Belknap Indian Community is committed to reducing the number of deaths and serious injuries and improving the overall safety of the transportation system. As part of an ongoing effort to make safety improvements, this Tribal Transportation Safety Plan is a community based, multi-disciplinary approach to identify transportation safety issues and potential implementation strategies with the goal of improving transportation safety on Tribal Lands.

The plan is intended to outline existing programs and policies as well as identify issues and procedures or projects that can be implemented to further improve transportation safety for the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation, its people and visitors to the Reservation.

The Fort Belknap Indian Reservation have implemented or are currently working on a number of programs and have developed relationships with other government entities to help assist in safety improvements. A complete list of these, as well as other safety issues that have been identified, is included in Attachment A, but below are some of the highlights:

- The Tribe, in association with MDT has developed a Safe on all Roads (SOAR) program on the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation with a local coordinator.
- The Tribal enforcement office has a electronic crash records system and is entering all crash reports into it.
- The tribe has an active Injury Prevention Program.
- The Tribe and the State of Montana have a currently do not have a cross deputization agreement.
- Tribal police have previously obtained a grant for a highway safety program and have funded four officers to work on traffic enforcement.
- The Tribe has initiated safety checkpoints that are manned by the Tribal Police.

The initial plan was a good starting point for the Fort Belknap Indian Community, the plan was not data driven at the time and was in need of an update. To assist with this update, the Fort Belknap Tribal Transportation Department applied to and received funding from the FHWA FY-2013 Tribal Transportation Program Safety Funding (TTPSF), with the intent of updating the Safety Plan internally. Because who knows our Tribal Transportation System better then the Transportation Department.

FORT BELKNAP RESERVATION DATA ANALYSIS

This update included the review of existing data in conjunction with Darcy Merchant, MPH, Environmental Health Specialist, Billings Area Indian Health Service Office of Environmental Health & Engineering, Division of Environmental Health Services. Darcy worked on a dataset that primarily entailed a Detailed crash file, putting this file together in a GIS format takes a long time editing in addition to quality assurance, editing and analysis.

This data analysis and an updated RSA proved to be very beneficial in the development of this plan.

In an effort to further enhance safety efforts and save lives, the following items have been identified as a priority for expansion or initiation within the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation over the next 3 to 5 years:

- Expansion (re-activate the Safety Committee)
 - The Tribe previously had a Safe Communities Committee which interacted with the Injury Prevention Program. The committee met on a quarterly basis with a focus on safety, including transportation safety. The SMS Plan implementation will become part of this existing committee's mission/oversight. As additional committees get established on other reservations in Montana, the Fort Belknap Committee will participate in the statewide Native American Transportation Safety committee and network with other Tribal Transportation Organizations at the National Level.
 - To further implementation of this SMS Plan, the committee would like to have MDT and FHWA participate in one of their meetings each year to monitor implementation and refine objectives.

Issue Champion: Tribal Transportation Planning Office and Tribal Health.

Implementation: Need to meet with the statewide injury prevention coordinator and member of the Montana Comprehensive Highway Safety Plan Committee, to determine how a statewide tribal transportation committee could coordinate with our efforts.

- Develop and Implement Tribal Ordinances to enhance highway safety
 - Develop an ordinance making wearing a seat belt a primary offense.
 - Develop an ordinance to ban domestic animals on highway rights of way.
 - Develop an ordinance regulating ATV use and operations.
 - Develop an ordinance that requires utility companies to repair any excavations or other impacts they have to roadways back to existing conditions.
 - Develop an ordinance that regulates hitchhiking, specifically addressing hitchhiking during dark conditions.

Issue Champion: Injury Prevention and DUI Committee

Implementation: Due to the cross cutting nature of these ordinances, this should be undertaken by a committee as a whole. To assist in implementation, after an ordinance is drafted, it should be vetted through the public to gain public support prior to presentation to council for adoption.

- Education and Training Programs
 - Continue and expand DUI and seatbelt campaigns on the reservation. Distribute and develop bicycle/ATV use and pedestrian safety information targeting drivers, walkers and bicyclists including crosswalks and school zones.
 - Drivers Education Classes at Hays-Lodgepole High.

Issue Champion: Soar Program Coordinator, in conjunction with MDT

Implementation: SOAR will continue with campaigns within the community and utilize the “Room to Live” video. SOAR will develop and disseminate bicycle and pedestrian safety information.

- Engineering Studies
 - Review the US Hwy #2 corridor to determine whether approaches, passing lanes etc. are safe.
 - Review the locations of the crosswalks through the 3-major communities to determine if any adjustments in signing, marking or locations need to be made.
 - Perform a traffic study to determine if restricted speed limits are warranted east of the Fort Belknap Agency.
 - Review the section of BIA Rt #15 to see if taking out a S-curve section would be warranted.
 - Review sites pointed out in the updated RSA.

Issue Champion: Tribal Transportation Department, MDT District Traffic Engineer, RMRO-BIA, Division of Transportation.

Implementation: The Tribe will initiate these studies by submitting a request to MDT. A field review will be set up to identify potential problems and solutions that can be worked on jointly for implementation.

- Obtain training for local law enforcement and disaster services in handling and containment of hazardous materials.

Issue Champion: Tribal Disaster and Emergency Services

Implementation: Contact will be made with the state to see what training is available and training will be scheduled.

- Develop a Sample Tribal Traffic Code to present to Tribal Council

Issue Champion: Tribal Transportation Department, MDT District Traffic Engineer, RMRO-BIA, Division of Transportation.

Implementation: The statewide Montana Comprehensive Highway Safety Plan includes an action item to develop a sample tribal traffic code. This should be completed this summer. Once that has been done the sample will be provided to the tribe.

ATTACHMENT A

Existing Programs Identified:

- The Tribe, in association with MDT has developed a Safe on all Roads (SOAR) program on the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation with a local coordinator.
- The Tribal enforcement office has a Cisco electronic crash records system and is entering all crash reports into it.
- The tribe has an active Injury Prevention Committee that meets on a quarterly basis.
- Tribal police have previously obtained a grant for a highway safety program and have funded officers to work on traffic enforcement.
- The Tribe has initiated safety checkpoints that are manned by the Tribal Police.
- SOAR Coordinator has made many presentations at local events and functions across the reservation.
- SOAR Coordinator has worked with youth to enter into a contract to not drink and to wear your seatbelt with youth in the community.
- SOAR has developed public service announcements that have played on local radio stations.
- Seat belt surveys have been completed with usage rates found of 40-50%.
- Seat belt incentive program has been utilized with gas vouchers given to those who are belted.
- Conducted Click it or Ticket campaign.
- Tribe has updated a Road Safety Audit with TTAP & BIA.
- The Tribe has a GIS system that could utilize crash and other transportation data as a layer.
- Tribal Health Service is collaborating and coordinating with other tribal entities to promote and enhance transportation safety.
- The Injury Prevention Committee is drafting and gathering local support for a Primary Seat belt ordinance.
- The Tribe is going to obtain GPS training for its officers so that they can provide better crash location information.
- The Tribe provides free car seats to members with small children.

Previous Issues Identified:

- Communication/Coordination among law enforcement agencies
- Domestic Vehicle Collisions
- Drinking and Driving
- Overweight vehicles damaging tribal roads
- Lack of seat belt use
- Lack of child seat use
- Young Drivers
- Hitchhikers, particularly at night
- Intersection of US 2 and BIA Rt #8 (possible Park & Ride).
- Wildlife (deer) and vehicle collisions
- Lack of adequately marked crosswalks
- Hazardous materials transportation across the reservation (rails and roads)
- Poor maintenance tribal roads
- Lack of shoulders and separated facilities for bicyclists and pedestrians
- Utilities impacting roads and not leaving in good condition
- Lack of an adequate traffic code
- Mindset of parents and drivers on the reservation in allowing or accepting risky or dangerous driver behavior
- Unsafe vehicles operating on the roadway
- Lack of driver registration
- Court system not adequately punishing Traffic offenders. This is in part due to excessive work load and traffic issues being lower priority than criminal offences
- Poor lighting at some intersections
- ATV's on the roadways
- Lack of visible pavement markings
- Signs being shot up