



*Ft. Belknap Indian Reservation*

## **Ft. Belknap Indian Reservation Montana Reintroduction Site Profile**

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**Date Updated:** February 2010

**LOCATION:** Fort Belknap Indian Reservation, homeland of the Gros Ventre and Assiniboine people, is located in Blaine and Phillips Counties in north central Montana, some 40 miles south of the Canadian Border. Fort Belknap is the fourth largest of the seven Reservations in Montana, encompassing some 652,593 acres within the Reservation's boundaries and 28,731 acres acquired outside of the Reservation, known as the submarginal lands. Most of the northern portion of the Reservation consists of extensive grassland plains and alluvial bottom lands covered with riparian forests, draining into the Milk River.

**Species of PD:** Black-tailed Prairie Dog      **Acres of PD:** Prior to several episodes of plague epizootic, there was about 15,000 acres of prairie dogs on the Reservation. Site is to be resurveyed in 2010.

**Land ownership:** Mostly Tribal - The entire reservation is owned and controlled by the Tribal government as tribal or allotted lands.

**Years of ferret reintroduction:** 1997 - 2000

**Number of ferrets released to date:** 167

**Estimated population size:** 0

**Research activities:** none

**Site challenges:** plague – In August of 1999, serum samples detected a plague epizootic that was centered in the Peoples Creek ferret reintroduction area, located east of the geographic center of the Reservation. Plague was confirmed on Peoples Creek in

September 1999. Roughly, 1,500 acres of prairie dogs were lost to plague in 1999 and another 1,500 acres in 2000. Since then several additional episodes of plague have occurred within prairie dog towns on the Reservation.

Recreational shooting of prairie dogs has also been a regulated management tool/activity on Fort Belknap. However, in 1997 about 4,000 acres of prairie dog colonies were closed to prairie dog shooting to protect and improve BFF habitat on the Reservation. The closures included about 2,000 acres on the Snake Butte BFF reintroduction site and about 2,000 acres on the Peoples Creek BFF reintroduction site. Recreational shooters who have never shot prairie dogs on the Reservation were also required to hire local hunting guides before being allowed to shoot prairie dogs on the reservation.

Fort Belknap also was site of a prairie dog captive facility which supplied ferret breeding and holding facilities with prairie dogs and prairie dog meat.

**Volunteer or visitor opportunities:** none

**Education staff and activities:** none

**Future plans:** Fort Belknap has applied for a Tribal Wildlife Grant which, in part, calls for resurveying their prairie dog colonies and any remaining ferrets that might remain on the Reservation. The Bureau of Indian Affairs plans to contract for resurveying of prairie dog towns on the Reservation in 2010.

**Other information:** none