

## BRIEFING PAPER FOR THE STATE DIRECTOR

FROM: Mark Sant, Tribal Coordinator

SUBJECT: Rapid Ecoregional "Ethnographic" Assessments and the White House Initiative for Tribal Colleges and Universities

### I. INTRODUCTION

The intent is to propose a pilot program for the Montana/Dakotas BLM that will form a partnership with Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (THPOs), tribal colleges and universities, respective State Historic Preservation Offices, and/or other interested Federal agencies or departments. The goal of the partnership will be to produce **Rapid Ecoregional *Ethnographic* Assessments** that can be integrated into developing ecoregional direction for the future management of public lands in the Montana/Dakotas. The Montana/Dakotas would like to establish a "pilot program" for developing the appropriate partnerships and producing Rapid Ecoregional Ethnographic Assessments for the Middle Rockies and Northwestern Plains Ecoregions.

### II. BACKGROUND

A common theme on the weekly BLM conference calls for high priority Renewable Energy projects are the issues regarding tribal consultation and tribal concerns for the protection of cultural resources, traditional cultural properties, and sacred cultural landscapes. Project specific compliance for NEPA/NHPA for the most part effectively deals with site specific cultural resource issues. However, tribal concerns regarding traditional cultural properties (TCPs), sacred areas, and cultural landscapes have proven to be exceedingly difficult to address in an adequate and timely manner. Considerable effort is expended "reacting" to tribal concerns resulting in slipping time lines, project delays, and in some cases pending litigation. To address the larger issues of TCPs, sacred areas, and cultural landscapes, project specific compliance efforts are often too little (small in scale and scope), and too late (not enough time to collect appropriate cultural information from tribes). NEPA compliance and EA preparation under Oil and Gas Leasing Reform is running into similar problems with the larger issues of TCPs, sacred areas, and cultural landscapes. Often tribal concerns are suspected, but not confirmed, resulting in potential lease parcels being deferred pending additional tribal consultation efforts.

In 2010 the BLM launched seven Rapid Ecoregional Assessments (REAs) to improve the understanding of the existing condition of major western landscapes, and how conditions may be altered by ongoing environmental changes and land use demands. REAs look across an ecoregion to more fully understand ecological conditions and trends; natural and human influences; and opportunities for resource conservation, restoration, and development. REAs look across all lands in an ecoregion to identify regionally important habitats for fish, wildlife, and species of concern. REAs also help identify areas that do not provide essential habitat; that are not ecologically intact or readily restorable; and where development activities may be directed to minimize impacts to important ecosystem values. The BLM will use the REAs to inform resource management at the ecoregional and local levels. At the ecoregional level, along with input from stakeholders, partner agencies, and Tribes, the REAs will aid in developing broad-level management strategies for an ecoregion's public lands. This *ecoregional direction* will identify priority areas for conservation and development, including focal areas for conserving wildlife habitats and migration corridors, and focal areas for potential energy development and urban growth.

According to the REA web site (<http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/more/climatechange/reas.html>), cultural resources are important resource values, but are not being assessed in the REAs partially due to funding constraints, and partially because it is unclear how to identify and evaluate cultural resources at the broad, ecoregional level. This may be a **critically limiting factor** when the analysis is utilized to identify areas where future development activities may be directed. However, the ecoregional model may be precisely the approach (proactive analysis of appropriate scale of scope) needed to address issues involving the identification and protection of TCPs, sacred areas, and cultural landscapes. Information obtained in **partnership** with tribes, could then be easily integrated with

REA ecoregional efforts, providing a comprehensive baseline with which to evaluate and guide future management actions.

**Executive Order 13270** – Tribal Colleges and Universities, formally establishes the White House Initiative on Tribal Colleges and Universities. Executive Order 13270 also requires all federal agencies to submit three year plans outlining each agencies effort to fulfill the purposes of the order, which may emphasize the preservation and revitalization of cultural traditions. Under the Executive Order, agencies may provide funding to tribal colleges and universities for research and development, in the form of grants, contracts, or cooperative agreements. There are a total of 33 fully accredited Tribal Colleges and Universities in the United States, approximately half of these (16) are located in Montana, North Dakota and South Dakota.

Forming **partnerships** with respective Tribal Historic Preservation Officers, local Tribal Colleges/Universities, and State Historic Preservation Officers will enable the development of specific Scopes-Of-Work, operating protocols, and budget proposals that can be followed in the development of Rapid Ecoregional Ethnographic Assessments. Potential funding sources within the BLM would be appropriate benefitting sub-activities, with additional funding being sought from participating land managing agencies (e.g. FWS, BOR, BIA, FS ) and regulatory agencies and other federal agencies (e.g. NRC, EPA, Department of State, Department of Education, BIE), and/or off-site mitigation funding provided by corporate interests (renewable energy, oil and gas, transmission line, etc.) all of which would benefit from the completion of ecoregional scale ethnographic overviews.

### III. POSITION OF INTERESTED PARTIES

The Montana-Dakotas BLM supports renewable energy, fossil fuel, mineral development and the infrastructure needed (pipelines and power lines) to facilitate the appropriate development of these resources. The MT/Dakotas BLM is also an organization seeking an active tribal consultation process that emphasizes respectful, proactive collaborative engagement. This collaboration will insure tribal input and involvement early in our decision making process, while also striving to cultivate partnerships with tribal governments in the management of natural and cultural resources of importance to the health and welfare of their tribal membership. The results of these efforts and the participation of tribal groups and tribal colleges could easily be incorporated into, or developed in concert with, the **Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCC)** initiative for the Great Northern and Plains and Prairie Pothole LCC's. Similarly, natural landscapes are closely tied to the history and cultural identity of Native peoples. It is these "cultural landscapes" that are tangible links to the traditional cultural life of Indian students. Participation of students from Tribal Colleges would help reconnect students with important elements of their traditional culture and tribal history, while imparting a conservation/environmental stewardship ethic as outlined in the goals of the President's **Great Outdoors Initiative**.

In several inter-tribal consultation meetings held by the Montana/Dakotas and Wyoming BLM in 2010 and 2011, tribal representatives have expressed considerable concern over the identification of TCPs, sacred areas, and cultural landscapes, and appropriate level of tribal involvement in the identification and documentation of these resources. They also recognize the need for a proactive approach in the identification and protection of these resources that can be completed at a landscape or "ecoregional scale" rather than on a project by project basis. They wish to be a partner with the BLM in the identification and management of these important resources.

The BLM has been contacted by numerous Tribal Colleges and Universities trying to identify opportunities for student involvement and/or research projects for students to be involved with. Tribal colleges are eager to provide practical experiences and opportunities for their students.

### CONTACT

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