

1999 Annual Report Executive Summary

Fort Peck Assiniboine & Sioux Tribes Enterprise Community

Fort Peck Assiniboine & Sioux Tribes Enterprise Community (ASTECC) is a Round II Rural EC. The Round II opportunity was the first time that tribes and/or tribal communities were eligible to apply for designation. The Fort Peck Tribal Planning Department and the Fort Peck Community College, through the USDA Center of Excellence program, were instrumental in coordinating the community application effort. Fort Peck Community College's Center of Excellence Program provided funds to hire Melissa Buckles to coordinate the EC planning and application process.

During the planning stages in 1998, a 'core' group of community members met on a weekly basis. After application submission, the group continued to meet on a weekly basis in order to implement projects identified by community participants during the strategic planning process. Upon designation, a governing Executive Committee was established consisting of representatives from Tribal government, city governments, development corporations, census tract representatives, ministerial sector, and the tribal college; participation reflects the racial diversity of the community. Not all of the original 'core' group fit into these categories. However, those individuals continued to meet and were central to the formation of subcommittees to address specific areas of need in the larger community.

In January, the community was notified of their selection as a Round II Rural EC. On January 28, Montana USDA State Director Anthony Preite and Rural Development Coordinator Bob Parsley presented the ASTEC with a plaque on behalf of Vice-President Al Gore and Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman.

The ASTEC began to develop and formalize the necessary organizational documents and define the structure of the Enterprise Community.

In February, more than 75 residents attended, and made application, during the first USDA Home Owner Loan Program site visit. On February 24, Montana Governor Marc Racicot issued a letter to the Montana Department of Commerce informing them of our EC designation. Also during February, ASTEC Coordinator Melissa Buckles and Tribal Chairman Spike Bighorn, were flown to Oregon by NIKE to meet with the PLAY Corps. division to establish a scholarship program for the 1999-2000 school year. HUD officials requested to meet with the ASTEC to discuss opportunities.

During the month of March, training sessions were held to inform the community what it means to be an Enterprise Community, the importance of collaboration and attendance at meetings, and process for submitting projects. Also during March, participants were sent to Oklahoma for USDA's EZ/EC training, and a dedication was held for the Medicine Bear BIA-Tribal complex in partnership with USDA and the Fort Peck Tribes. During the dedication ceremonies, members of the First family (descendants of Chief Medicine Bear), Wilbur Peer, John Dean, Chris Alsop, Anthony Preite, and Bob Parsley, all of USDA, Rural Development, took part in a traditional star quilt ceremony.

By April, an increasing number of projects were submitted to the ASTEC Executive Committee for review, approval, technical assistance, and support.

In May, the ASTEC Executive Committee began recruiting organizations and community members to strengthen and expand the housing subcommittee, as well as others. USDA, Rural Development provided funds to the ASTEC for a temporary Intern position. Organizational documents were finalized and approved. On May 18, Jim Jacobs of Rural Development, Office of Community Development

arrived on-site to conduct a Management Control Review of the Fort Peck Community College USDA National Center of Excellence. Jim Jacobs remained on-site through May 20th, joined by Montana State Rural Development Coordinator Bob Parsley to provide technical assistance to the ASTEC. The ASTEC committees met with Jim and Bob to discuss benchmarks and proposed by-laws in preparation for the Memorandum of Agreement signing.

On June 3rd, the Memorandum of Agreement was signed between the ASTEC Coordinator Melissa Buckles, USDA Under-Secretary Jill Long-Thompson, Tribal Chairman Spike Bighorn, College Board Chairman Arlyn Headdress, and USDA State Director Anthony Preite. The MOA signing was witnessed by Montana's Senior Senator Max Baucus. Following tribal customs, all took part in a traditional star quilt ceremony. Also in June, the ASTEC Executive Committee developed job descriptions for EC staff, operating policies, budgets and benchmarks; area school superintendents and administrators met with the ASTEC Executive Committee and formalized an Education subcommittee.

During the month of July, area health-care providers and administrators met with the ASTEC Executive Committee and formalized a Health subcommittee. Budgets were completed and approved; job descriptions were advertised for the Executive Director and Administrative Assistant positions.

In August, Frazer School Superintendent Helen Minick traveled to Washington, D.C. to meet with Dept. of Education officials to discuss funding needs for Safe School projects. The ASTEC Executive Committee interviewed applicants for staff positions and hired Melissa Buckles as Executive Director. The Administrative Assistant position was not filled due to funding constraints. Groundbreaking ceremonies were held for a 20-unit housing project in the City of Poplar. USDA, Rural Development had provided technical assistance and counseling to ASTEC residents earlier on. The 20-unit project will be completed in the spring of 2000. Montana Governor Marc Racicot informed the Fort Peck Tribes and the ASTEC that he had select ASTEC Executive Director Melissa Buckles to serve as the Tribal representative on the newly commissioned State-Tribal Economic Development Commission.

During September 13-17, Melissa Buckles and Executive Committee member Barbara Smith of Reserve, Montana, attended USDA's National EZ/EC Conference in Memphis, Tennessee. The ASTEC was honored that Melissa had been asked to deliver presentation at the conference on "Program Management in Indian Country." Information from the conference was distributed to the Executive Committee. Meetings were held between the EC and various law enforcement agencies to potentially develop a Justice subcommittee.

On October 28, ASTEC Executive Director, Melissa Buckles delivered a presentation at the USDA Rural Development annual Statewide Conference in Bozeman, Montana. During the conference State Director Anthony Preite and State Coordinator Bob Parsley presented Outstanding Achievement Awards to Melissa and the ASTEC Executive Committee. On October 29, Melissa attended the first meeting of the Montana State-Tribal Economic Development Commission, during which she shared the EC concepts with other tribal representatives from Montana. An RFP for economic assessment of Montana reservations will include criteria taken from those EC concepts.

In November, ASTEC expanded the Executive Committee to include one seat and one vote to each of four county commissions within the reservation, each of the six Native American district-community organizations, and the Mayor of Brockton. On November 3, ASTEC held their first Executive Committee meeting, to continue outreach efforts, in Wolf Point. The meeting was a collaborative effort between ASTEC and Looking Eagle Manufacturing (Indian/Community owned and operated) to host representatives from MidTec Corp. of St. Louis and Rotary Rockets of California.

In December, ASTEC received their first drawdown against first year funding. The Administrative Assistant position was readvertised. In review, ASTEC projects throughout the year resulted in increased levels of community participation, available and affordable housing, senior citizen facilities, community education projects, tourism projects, cultural awareness, and infrastructure projects. Policies and by-laws are now being reviewed in consideration of changes the ASTEC experienced during the past year.

The Enterprise Community designation served as a catalyst to bring tribal and non-tribal entities together at one table to implement the vision of the racially diverse community. As a result of the designation and formation of ASTEC, communication between tribal, city, state, and federal governments have been strengthened through collaboration, participation, and partnership with community residents. It is truly a grass roots process, "not doing business as usual," that serves to develop the potential of community residents.