

Flags of the Montana Tribal Nations

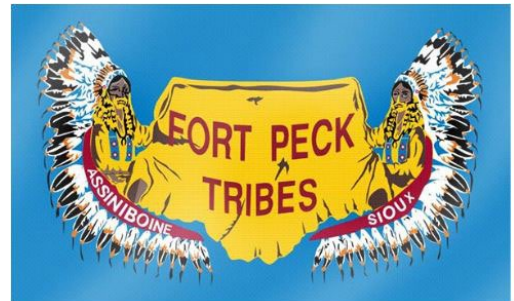


There are seven Indian reservations and twelve Indian tribes in Montana. They are Blackfeet on the Blackfeet Reservation; Crow on the Crow Reservation; Salish, Kootenai, and Pend d'Oreille on the Flathead Reservation; Gros Ventre and Assiniboine on the Fort Belknap Reservation; Dakota and Assiniboine on the Fort Peck Reservation, Little Shell Chippewa (no reservation); Northern Cheyenne on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation; and Chippewa Cree on the Rocky Boy's Reservation. These twelve tribes make up the eight sovereign tribal nations in Montana, each with its own distinct and unique form of government.

The flags of the eight tribal nations reflect unique cultures and histories and are powerful symbols of their sovereign status.

Fort Peck Tribal Nation Flag: The Fort Peck Reservation is home to several bands of the Assiniboine and Sioux. The Assiniboine are represented by the Canoe Paddler Band and the Red Bottom Band. The Sioux include parts of the Sisseton, Wahpeton, Yanktonai, and Hunkpapa Teton bands.

The tribal flag of the Fort Peck Tribes was designed and sketched by artist Roscoe White Eagle. It is on a field of blue sky. The two chiefs displaying the robe of the prairie buffalo represents the fact that two tribes, Assiniboine and Sioux, reside together on the same reservation. The tribal names appear along the trail of the two chiefs' headdresses. The sacred robe of the buffalo symbolizes the tight and lasting bond of friendship and understanding between the two tribes.



Northern Cheyenne Tribal Nation Flag and Seal: The Northern Cheyenne Flag was developed during the tribal administration of Chairman John Wooden Legs. The diamond shape represents the Morning Star, which is also another tribal name for Chief Dull Knife. His descendants are “The Morning Star People.”

The message of Morning Star on the flag is the past and present survival of the people. The Morning Star will rise each day and bring light to the Cheyenne people now and to those yet to be born. The Northern Cheyenne identify themselves as the people of Chief Morning Star and Little Wolf, who led their people on a heartbreaking journey back from their forced placement in Oklahoma to their homelands in the great Northern Plains.



Crow Tribal Nation Flag and Emblem: The Crow Cultural Commission designed the Crow tribal emblem and flag, and Lawrence Big Hair designed the graphic illustration.

The flag is trimmed in gold, symbolizing the horns and hooves of the Seven Sacred Rams. The flag background is blue, representing the belief that when the sky and the waters are clear, everything between them is good and peaceful.

The emblem is in a circle, representing the Path of All Things.

There is the sun and its rays, representing the clans of the Crow. The three mountains are the three mountains on the present-day Crow Reservation -- the Wolf Teeth, the Pryor, and the Big Horn -- Which are considered sacred by the Crow. The two rivers depicted are the Big Horn and the Little Big Horn.



The white tipi represents that given to Yellow Leggings by White Owl. It represents purity and good. Nothing evil or bad comes to the home when the tipi is white. The four base poles represent the never-ending cycle of the seasons. The two smoke flap poles represent the Spirit of the Coyote (right, facing eastward) and the Spirit of the Owl (left). They are the sentries that watch over the home -- the Coyote by the day and the Owl at night. The stakes are a gift from the badger who said the stakes have the strength of his claws when imbedded in the ground and no force on Earth can move him from his home.

The two war bonnets represent the Clan to which we belong (*mother's clan*) and the Clan of our Fathers (*their mother's clan*). In both Clans, there are Chiefs (*Gifting and protection-strong relationships*).

The Clan system is one of the four major beliefs and religious foundations of the Apsáalooke. The other three are the sweat lodge -- gift from Creator, the sacred tobacco bundle -- representing the foundation of the religion of the Crows, and the pipe -- spiritual gift from the Seven Sacred Buffalo Bulls and Buffalo Woman.

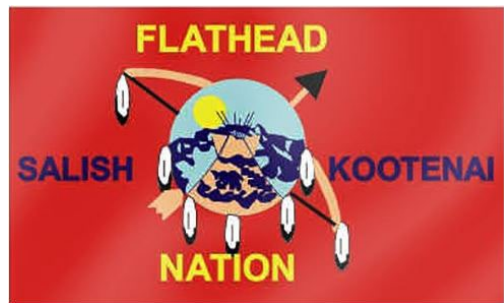
Fort Belknap Tribal Nation Flag and Seal: Created by George “Sonny” Shields, the emblem of the Fort Belknap Reservation’s seal is the traditional shield, symbolizing the shield’s protection of the two tribes, the Gros Ventre and Assiniboine, from the past, present, and future, and protection against the loss of tribal culture, identity, and land base.



The circular shape of the shield symbolizes the constant cycle of life, each living thing dependent on one another for life. The colors symbolize the four directions and seasons are -- red for summer, yellow for fall, white for winter, and green for spring. The buffalo skull symbolizes the existence of two tribes on the reservation, functioning as a whole. Even though colors divide it, the skull remains as one. The jagged line from horn to horn represents the Milk River and Snake Butte is illustrated above the skull. The two arrowheads facing each other emphasize the strong traditional ties with the past. Seven feathers hang from the shield. Each of six represents two of the twelve council members. The center feather represents the tribal chairperson.

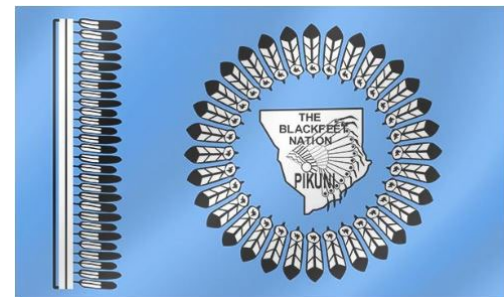
Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribal Nation Flag:

Created by Karen Hale, a 25-year veteran employee at CSKT, in response to a content is 1978. The selection committee felt this design had the strongest representation of the CSKT people.



The flag depicts the natural resources of the reservation, along with the buffalo and tipi. Behind the tipi is the outline of Flathead Lake and the mountain represents the Mission range. The tipi, bow, arrow, shield, and eagle feathers were chosen because of their historical importance to the tribes.

Blackfeet Tribal Nation Flag and Seal: The Blackfeet Media Department sponsored a contest to design a flag in 1980. A panel of judges consisting of artists, elders, and community members chose it.



The design is black and white on blue sky. A circle (cycle of life) is created with single eagle feathers (many bands of the Blackfeet). The current land base of the Blackfeet Reservation is inside the circle. The traditional flag, the Eagle Feather staff, is on the left-hand side.

The colors and design represent the earth, the cosmos, the elements, the plants, the animals, and the people. The sun rises in the East and circles to the West. The moon rises and sets in this circular motion, as does the cosmos. Blackfeet people pitch the lodges with the doors to the east, knowing that they start life with the circle in mind. The feathers represent the majesty and mysticism of the eagle. Eagle feathers represent long life, energy, power, and accomplishment or coup. The way the eagle feathers are arranged on the traditional staff represents the buffalo’s boss ribs. Buffalo are the staff of life to the Blackfeet.

Little Shell Chippewa Tribal Nation Flag and Seal: The seal and flag of the Little Shell Chippewa Tribe was designed in 2006 by then Tribal Vice-Chairman James Parker Shield. He had four different versions for tribal members to vote on.

The buffalo was central to the survival and economy of the Pembina Chippewa (from whom the Little Shell are descended) and the Métis people. The buffalo image faces west to symbolize the migration of the Little Shell Chippewa and Métis from the Great Lakes region in Minnesota to what is now North Dakota and Montana.



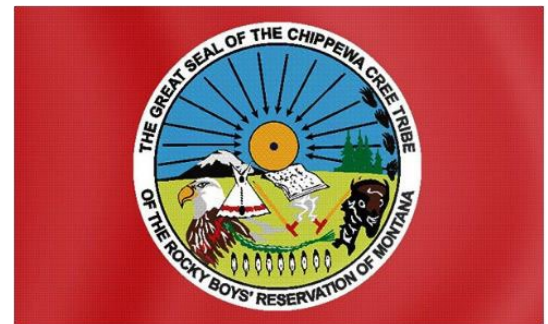
Years ago, tribal spiritual leader Henry Anderson was presented with a single eagle feather by a Chippewa man from Wisconsin. The eagle feather is incredibly old and now hangs from the “crook” in the eagle staff that is behind the buffalo (made by Henry Anderson and presented to the tribe). The eagle staff represents the full-blood, traditional heritage of the Little Shell Chippewa Tribe. The crook is carried by a tribal leader or veteran, leading the Grand Entry at the Little Shell Chippewa Powwow each year.

The red and white background colors of the “Assiniboia” flag used by the Métis people represent the mixed blood heritage of the tribe. The yellow “fleur-de-lis” represents the French heritage of the mixed blood Chippewa while the green shamrock represents the Scots/Irish heritage. The yellow background on the Little Shell flag depicts the color of the sun.

Chippewa Cree Tribal Nation Flag and Seal: The Chippewa and Cree came together to form the present-day Rocky Boy’s Indian Reservation.

The seal on the flag represents the circle of life on the reservation.

Baldy Butte is the sacred mountain of the tribe. The sun represents life rising from the east and the Sacred Grass Dance Drum of the tribe. The sun’s rays represent the fifteen Sacred Grass Dance Chiefs who are active in preserving the culture of the Chippewa Cree Tribe.



The Sacred Four Bodies text under the sun represents good health and good fortune for the tribe, so they can prosper in education. Tribal customs and traditions are integrated in each of the schools on the Rocky Boy’s Reservation.

The eagle represents strength, wisdom, bravery, and honor, which are elements conceived from the bird that represents the thunder and lightning of the sacred sky. The buffalo, a source of food and shelter for the tribe for many years, is also a sacred animal representing the source of life and a Sundance element. Bear paw tracks represent the Bear Paw Mountains where the Chippewa Cree now make their present home. Also, the bear is a sacred animal of the tribe.

The tipi is where all values and customs are derived as well as the life and traditions the Chippewa Cree have always held. The sacred pipes were held by the Chief Rocky Boy and Chief Little Bear, the last official chiefs of the Chippewa and Cree. The braid of sweet grass is an element of communication to the Creator and the Spirits. The nine eagle feathers represent the nine elected chiefs of the Chippewa Cree Business Committee.

Source: Tribal Flags and Seals Brochure, University of Montana Native American Studies Department.