

Restoring Self-Determination and Self-Sufficiency: By Tanya Fiddler

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Less than 150 years ago, the Native American people who inhabited the Great Plains Region of the United States were an industrious, communal, and generous collective. The abundant and unspoiled resources of the area at that time (wildlife, rivers, plant life) were the sustenance for a people that were thriving and had been for thousands of years. Native American (Lakota) culture was one in which all things of Creation had a valued and respected interdependence.

The culture's inherent asset management philosophy was one committed to ecologically sound practices based on free exchange of all that was available, never taking more than was needed—wasting nothing. The Native people had access to this abundance of resources while owning none of it and, yet, possessing wealth, prosperity and a self-sufficient way of life.

Treaty after treaty with the United States government and the flood of settlers coming from the East began to eradicate Native Americans' traditional ownership and self-sufficiency confining their entitlements to reservation boundaries and government control.

Traditional means of subsistence were outlawed, leaving reservation communities and the Native people who resided there dependent on substandard government allocations and allotments. Families could no longer provide for themselves and the wealth and prosperity they had known in the past was gone.

Recovering from the historical trauma that displaced Native control of assets requires a policy commitment at many levels, including from Tribal government. It requires the development of training and technical assistance programs that teach necessary financial management skills. It requires making an investment in non-traditional financial institutions that offer access to the capital to grow future wealth for all reservation families.

Four Bands Community Fund is committed to working on each of these fronts so Native people on the Cheyenne River Reservation can once again take control of their own assets and their own futures.