22 Living in a New Montana
1970–2007

FIGURE 22.1: Wilsall Elevators, by Clyde Aspevig, ca. 1994

READ TO FIND OUT:

- Why your community is different from the way it was 30 years ago
- What challenges Montana is facing as you grow up
- How Montana's American Indians are solving problems on the reservations
- How we as Montanans are changing the way we see and use the land

The Big Picture

No matter how life changes in Montana, three things remain constant: our lives are shaped by our relationship with one another and with the land; our economy is driven by forces far away from here; and we have the power to shape our future.

You stand at the beginning of a new era in Montana's story. Three things that greatly affect life—the climate, the economy, and the mix of people who live here—are all changing. No one knows what will happen or how the future will take shape. But because we understand the larger patterns of Montana history, we do know three important things.

We know our lives are tied to the land. Montana's dry climate, its distance from major cities, its natural resources, and its grandeur all affect how we live and make a living here. Many decisions you make in your lifetime will shape the land. And how you feel about the land will also influence the decisions you will make.

We know that forces outside the region affect Montana. This has been true throughout history here. Human migration, new technologies, world markets, climate changes, and other forces strongly impact Montana's population, economy, and social life.

We also know that we can work together to make life better. Even though we as Montanans do not have complete control over our future, together we can help shape the course of history.

Who We Are

Montana's state constitution celebrates the cultural heritage and human dignity of its people (see Chapter 21). In the years since it was written in 1972, Montana has changed.

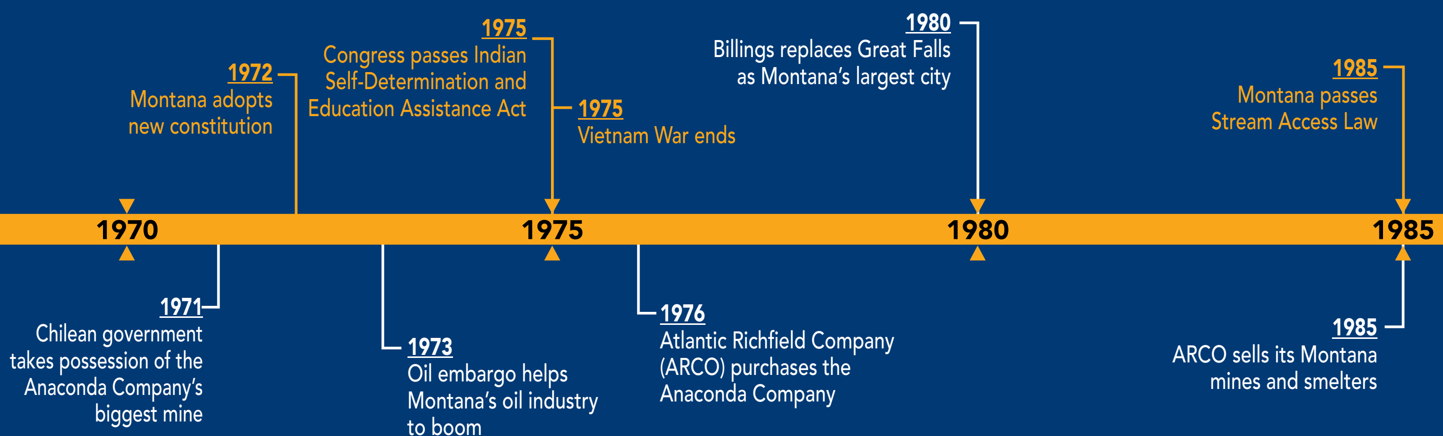
More people now live in or near cities and towns. Today 75 percent of Montanans live within 50 miles of seven western or central towns: Billings, Bozeman, Helena, Missoula, Great Falls, Butte, and Kalispell. Many of them are newcomers to Montana. Between 1990 and 2003 more than 120,000 people moved to Montana. Mass migration has turned the entire Rocky Mountain region into one of the fastest-growing areas in the country.

Fewer of us make our living from the land. Ever since the homestead boom went bust (see Chapter 13), Montanans have been leaving farms and ranches and moving into town—or away. Today Montana has fewer than half as many farms as it did in the 1970s. As a result, farming communities are shrinking.

FIGURE 22.2: Ten-year-old Jace Kuntz of the Dillon Junior Fiddlers follows in a long tradition. Fiddles first arrived in this region with the Métis in the 1800s.

Between 1970 and 2000 the 21 counties of eastern Montana lost 19,000 people. Most of the people who moved away were under age 25. Towns shrank, and school districts **consolidated** (combined several into one). Many eastern Montanans now struggle to define a future for their communities.

Today rural and urban communities struggle with very different problems. Montanans may see their world differently, depending on where they live. One of their biggest challenges will be coming together despite these different points of view to make decisions and solve problems.



Our Population Is Aging

The new immigrants to western Montana are not the young, energetic adventurers that the homesteaders and gold prospectors were. Most of them are between ages 40 and 65. As a rule they are wealthier than the average Montanan. Many are retired and moved here for a second career. Some earn their living outside Montana and just keep vacation homes here.

For most of the 1900s, kids under 14 years old made up the largest population group in Montana. The smallest group was seniors over age 65. But as younger people moved out of eastern Montana and as older people moved into western Montana, those proportions changed. By 2020 more than 20 percent of Montana's population will be senior citizens. Montana will have the fourth- or fifth-highest proportion of seniors over age 55 of all the 50 states.

> **"Where is eastern Montana? It's simple . . . If you can get two-day [mail] delivery from a major city in two days, you're in western Montana. If it takes eight days, you're in eastern Montana."**
>
> —*Tim Bedwell, who grew up in Plentywood and now lives in Bozeman*

> **"Of the $9.4 billion income that Montanans earned in fiscal 2004, $2.9 billion came in through the mailbox as retirement and disability payments to individuals. In contrast, $886 million was earned as paychecks by federal employees."**
>
> —*Associated Press, January 17, 2006*

Newcomers to Montana bring a new set of needs and expectations. They want their towns to have airports, hospitals, arts centers, well-stocked stores, and scenic surroundings. Many do not want mines or industrial projects to alter the landscape. And they strongly influence Montana politics. Both the 2004 and 2006 elections were decided by 16 of Montana's 56 counties—and those 16 counties are where most of these new Montanans live.

Many new Montanans also think about the land differently—as an asset to own and enjoy, rather than as an ancestral homeland or a land of opportunity. They are not as rooted to Montana. And if the benefits they came for disappear, they are willing and able to move out of state again. In this way, the newcomers may create their own **boom-and-bust**

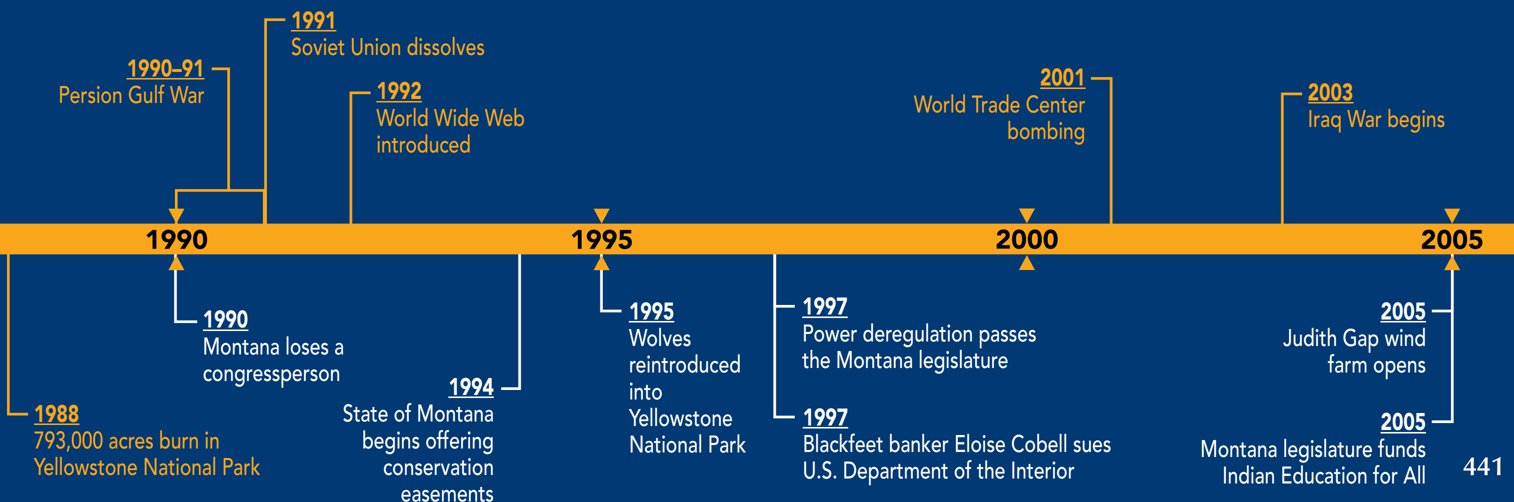


FIGURE 22.3: In 1993 the *Billings Gazette* printed this picture of a Menorah (a symbol of Judaism). Some 10,000 people displayed the picture in their homes and businesses to tell people guilty of hate crimes that the community would not tolerate racist violence.

cycle (sudden economic activity followed by decline) based on beauty as a natural resource.

We Support Diversity

Through most of its history, Montana has had much more ethnic and cultural diversity than it has today. People of many tribes and cultures lived in and traveled through this land for thousands of years before non-Indians arrived here. People of many cultures and races participated in building Montana as a state. But as jobs and opportunities declined in the mid-1900s, Montana's population became more white. New communities like the Hmong of Missoula and Peruvians around Lincoln have restored a little of our ethnic diversity. Today 91 percent of Montanans are white; 6 percent are American Indian.

Yet we are communities who stand up for our minorities. In 1993 some racists committed a string of hate crimes against Jewish and American Indian families in Billings. Instead of quietly condemning the violence, Billings residents organized to stop it. Their actions started a national anti-hate movement and set a model for other communities.

Montana Loses a Congressman

Even with all its growth, Montana is growing more slowly than other regions of the West. Even the big towns that we call cities are considered rural by national standards. Our biggest cities—Billings, Missoula, and Great Falls—are about the same size as medium-sized towns in other western states.

Montana's slow growth in the 1980s, compared to huge growth in other regions, brought one very important result. It cost us one of our

Image removed due to copyright restrictions. To view the image, see the print edition of *Montana: Stories of the Land*.

FIGURE 22.4: Missoula's Hmong immigrants came from Laos, in Southeast Asia, after the Vietnam War. The Hmong faced many challenges adapting their tribal customs to life here. They struggle to maintain their cultural identity through traditional music, art, rituals, and language.

two seats in Congress. The U.S. Constitution dictates that congressional representatives be elected by districts based on population. This way, each congressional representative speaks for roughly the same number of people. After the 1990 **census** (a count of every person living in each area of the country), the federal government redrew congressional districts and combined Montana's two districts into one.

Only one congressional district in the country (Alaska's) covers more miles than the district represented by Montana's lone member of Congress. While the average congressperson represents about 581,000 people, Montana's represents more than 935,000—more people than any member of Congress in the history of the country. The result is that Montanans have less of a voice in Congress than most Americans do. The federal government will once again set congressional districts after the census of 2010.

The Challenges We Face

Ever since the 1830s, Montana has shipped off its raw materials to fill America's needs. But in the late 1900s, Montana shifted from a **natural resource economy** (based on natural resource extraction, such as mining, timber, and agriculture) to a **service economy** (based on providing health care, education, professional, and other services). Mining once dominated Montana's economy, but in 2006 mining provided less than 4 percent of the state's income. One of the reasons is that the Anaconda Company disappeared.

In Butte: A 90-year Boom Ends

Butte is a living example of how world events far away can deeply affect Montana. In 1971 the Chilean government seized control of the largest and most profitable copper mine in the world, a mine owned by the Anaconda Company. In one year the Anaconda Company lost $357 million (equal to almost $1.8 billion today).

Immediately, the Anaconda Company shut down mines and smelters in Butte, East Helena, and Great Falls. It sold off vast tracts of its forestlands. More than 2,500 Montanans lost jobs. Montana Power Company lost its biggest gas and electricity customer. The largest non-iron

FIGURE 22.5: ARCO shut down the Black Eagle refinery in 1980. On September 18, 1982, an explosives expert demolished the 506-foot-high brick smokestack. A crowd of 40,000 watched it go and said good-bye to 70 years of smelting jobs in Great Falls. "When the stack came down it was heartbreaking," said George Remmel, who worked there 42 years. "It was a landmark, just as much as the Statue of Liberty."

“When ARCO announced the shutdown of the Butte mines, the people of Butte refused to believe it. They could no more believe that mining had disappeared from Butte than the Indians, a century earlier, could believe that the buffalo had disappeared from the prairie.”

—*EUGENE C. TIDBALL, A FORMER ANACONDA COMPANY ATTORNEY*

mining company in the world, which had dominated the state's economy and political life for 90 years, dove into bankruptcy.

In 1976 the Atlantic Richfield Company (ARCO), one of the largest oil corporations in the world, purchased Anaconda Copper's properties. At first ARCO seemed dedicated to keeping the company alive. But after only a few years, ARCO laid off 700 employees, closed the Anaconda smelter, and sold off the rest of its properties. In 1985 it closed its Montana operations for good.

Montanans knew that all **extractive industries** (industries based on removing natural resources from the earth), such as metal mining, commonly go through boom-and-bust cycles. Historians say that the only surprising thing about the death of the Anaconda Company was that its boom lasted 90 years.

The end of the Anaconda Company sent Montana's economy into crisis. After the Company, which once ran Montana, shut down, many Montanans struggled to figure out a new way to make a living.

In the twenty-first century Butte began to recover. New markets in China and other **industrializing** (developing industries on a large scale) countries have boosted the price of metals like molybdenum (used in alloys to make lightweight bike frames and machinery). Even though the new activity employs far fewer people than a century ago, Butte's mining business is growing again—and so is another open-pit mine.

FIGURE 22.6: In 1995 a flock of migrating snow geese stopped to feed and rest in the **toxic** (poisonous) waters of the Berkeley Pit, and at least 342 of them died, calling attention to the need to clean the water. In 2000 more than 150 women, men, and children gathered at the pit in sky-blue sarongs and danced a hula to the sound of a Sons of the Pioneer song, “Cool Water,” bringing beauty, good will, and humor to clean-up efforts. Artist Kristi Hager organized the “art action” as a reminder to celebrate and treasure water because it is essential to life.

The Berkeley Pit: Another Legacy of the Anaconda Company

The death of the Anaconda Company left a challenging **legacy** (something handed down from the past) in Montana: the Berkeley Pit. On April 22, 1982—Earth Day—ARCO turned off the pumps that kept water out of its Butte mines, which tunneled far below the water table. Water—made poisonous by

exposure to mining remains—began pouring into the 900-foot-deep Berkeley Pit at a rate of 7.2 million gallons a day. The water level in the pit rises about 2 feet per month.

Today the Berkeley Pit is part of the largest **Superfund site** (a hazardous waste site that is part of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Superfund pollution clean-up program) in the United States. The Superfund site stretches along the Clark Fork River from Butte almost to Missoula. The federal government and ARCO monitor the water levels and are developing water clean-up programs. The mine that once employed thousands of people now supports a growing number of pollution clean-up workers.

In Libby: Declining Opportunities, Poison in the Dust

Libby once was a major logging and mining center of northwest Montana. Set in the forested west, some people see it as a mountain paradise. Like Butte, however, Libby is dealing with a painful legacy of its industrial past.

From 1934 to 1991 Libby was home to the largest **vermiculite** (a yellowish mineral that expands when heated) mine in the world. The open-pit mine covered 1,200 acres and shaved off the top of Vermiculite Mountain. It produced more than 16 million tons of vermiculite—nearly 80 percent of the world's supply. Once expanded through heating, vermiculite was used in insulation, lawn and garden products, automobile brakes, paints, fertilizers, pesticides, and many building products.

The vermiculite mined at Libby was contaminated with a toxic form of naturally occurring **asbestos** (a lightweight mineral made up of millions of tiny, heat-resistant fibers) called tremolite. In the 1970s people learned that exposure to asbestos damages people's lungs. Everywhere that people mined, packed, transported, or processed Libby's vermiculite, people developed lung disease.

"We carried the dust on our clothes, in our cars—that dust got everywhere," one former worker said. Libby resident Gayla Benefield said, "We played in the vermiculite piles all the time. It

FIGURE 22.7: An employee of W. R. Grace holds a handful of vermiculite. The glittering specks contain asbestos, which is deadly when inhaled. If you were to handle it today, you would use protective clothing and a respirator. But when the mine was operating, workers did not know to take those precautions.

FIGURE 22.8: Environmental Protection Agency clean-up efforts have once again made Libby a beautiful, healthy place to live, work, hike, fish, and visit.

was like rolling around in heaps of colored popcorn." The company even paved the high-school running track with it.

In 2002, 18 percent of Libby's adult population tested positive for asbestos-related lung disease. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recently found that death rates in Libby from asbestos-related lung diseases were 40 times higher than in other areas of Montana, and 60 times higher than in the rest of the country.

In the 1990s the mine's owner, W. R. Grace and Company, shut down the mine and filed for bankruptcy. The company left hundreds of former employees without health care and left large tracts of contaminated soil for the federal government to clean up. In 2001 the town of Libby was listed as the federal Superfund clean-up program's top priority.

The U.S. government is pursuing criminal charges against several former executives and managers of the mine for covering up information about the health risks of vermiculite. As of 2007 the case is still in court.

Deregulation: How Montana Lost Control of Its Power

Have you ever heard your parents complain about the cost of heating your home? A series of events in the 1990s directly affected how much Montanans pay for electricity and natural gas today. It was called deregulation.

Deregulation (removing government controls) of the generation and sale of electrical power had an enormous impact on Montana's economy. Before deregulation, the state assigned each power company a geographic region and **regulated** (oversaw) the prices it could charge its customers. You could not choose who you bought your electricity and natural gas from, but you paid a low price for it. In the mid-1990s Montana homeowners paid much less for their household

electricity and natural gas than most Americans did.

> **"Montana residents used to pay some of the lowest rates for power in the Northwest, but now, some lawmakers lament, they pay among the region's highest. What happened? Mainly deregulation."** —*NEW YORK TIMES*, AUGUST 21, 2003

In 1997 the state **legislature** (the branch of government that passes laws) passed laws deregulating Montana's power business. The legislators thought that deregulation would increase competition between power companies, which would result in lower costs to consumers. In fact, deregulation did the opposite. Since the state no longer controlled the price to consumers, prices went up.

In 2000 a power crisis spread across the West. It drove electricity prices up even further—sometimes 1,000 or 1,500 percent. Households, schools, hospitals, and small businesses saw their electricity bills double or triple. Suddenly, big power customers like Columbia Falls Aluminum, Montana Resources in Butte, and ASARCO in East Helena found it more profitable to shut down and sell their **power contracts** (a right to buy power at a certain price) than to stay in business.

By 2001 more than 2,800 Montanans had lost their jobs because of power deregulation. In 2006 Montanans paid higher average monthly electric bills than anyone else in the region. And today Montana no longer has control of the electricity its coal and dams produce.

In 2006 the Public Service Commission (the government commission responsible for making sure that power companies treat consumers fairly) tried to undo some of the deregulation laws. Yet state leaders agree that no matter what happens, there is no way to return to the cheap, reliable power Montana enjoyed before deregulation.

The Challenge of Growth

One of the biggest threats to our wildlife and environment is growth. Developers are turning farms into neighborhoods. New communities are spreading into wildlife habitat. Roadkills, property damage, and other problems have increased as humans and animals compete for resources. The spread of neighborhoods is difficult to control or regulate.

In some places, more **adaptable** (able to adjust) species like mule deer have simply moved into town—causing a different kind of conflict. In 2004 the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks organized an Urban Wildlife Working Group to help Montana towns control problem wildlife.

Growth also complicates firefighting. More people are building houses and cabins in the **wildland/urban interface** (the area where the city and the wilderness meet). This means that firefighters are spending more resources to protect homes and property than they spend to put out fires. Wood structures like houses, decks, and fences burn hotter than trees do, which adds fuel to wildfires and makes them more dangerous.

FIGURE 22.9: A worker stacks bags at the Billings Great Western Sugar plant in the 1990s. In 2002 the Rocky Mountain Sugar Growers Cooperative bought the plant.

In 1988 fires burned 1.4 million acres of Yellowstone National Park and the surrounding area. In the summer of 2000, a series of fires tore through the Bitterroot Valley. These fires surrounded towns, drove hundreds of families from their homes, killed livestock, blocked roads, and burned down houses, barns, and other buildings. With fires an increasing threat, many people disagree over how they should be handled in Montana's changing landscape.

Rebuilding Montana's Economy

Montana's new economy is more **diversified** (varied) and spread across more kinds of businesses. Most people now work in service industries like health care and hospitals, engineering and management services, finance and insurance, real estate and construction, education, and other businesses. Tourism is the state's fastest-growing industry. Agriculture employs fewer people than it did 30 years ago, but by using new technology and methods, farmers are able to produce as much, and sometimes more, food per acre.

The types of jobs available in your community depend on where you live. Bigger towns in western and central Montana are growing quickly, and there are more kinds of jobs to choose from. Meanwhile, eastern Montanans struggle to keep their towns and schools alive.

Tourism: Selling the Montana Experience

Tourism has been increasing since the Northern Pacific Railroad began delivering visitors to the gateway of Yellowstone National Park in the 1880s. Today about 37,000 Montanans—8 percent of the workforce—have jobs related to tourism. Most tourists visit western and central Montana.

Tourists mostly come to experience Montana's great outdoors, so the growth of tourism has shaped how people see the land. Its scenic beauty has become a resource more valuable than gold or copper mining. Unspoiled mountaintops, healthy fisheries, and abundant wildlife have always been a part of Montanans' quality of life. Now they are crucial for Montana's economic health as well.

FIGURE 22.10: Ranchers today do not just raise cattle. They are **stewards** (caretakers) of the land. They may spend one day rounding up cows to vaccinate (shown here), the next spraying noxious weeds, the next at a side job as an excavator, and the next researching cattle markets on the Internet.

Many tourists come to experience Montana's past. They visit historic towns like Virginia City or Philipsburg, where people have preserved historic buildings. And thousands visit places like the Little Bighorn National Monument to stand on the spot where important events happened.

Many Montana communities rely on tourism to survive. Yet expanding tourism requires building more services like gas stations, hotels, and fast-food restaurants. And these things change the landscape that visitors come to see.

"When I was growing up in the '60s, we had four employees. Now I can do more work with a swather [a machine that cuts hay] than those four people put together."

—*CHRIS LONG, PETROLEUM COUNTY RANCHER AND COUNTY COMMISSIONER, 2005*

"There is no single Montana economy. There are many. And because of this there can be no single state strategy for economic improvement." —*LARRY SWANSON, A MONTANA ECONOMIST*

Energy Development: Threat or Opportunity?

Where will our nation get its energy in the upcoming years? Some of it almost surely will come from Montana. Our **fossil fuels** (coal, oil, and natural gas) are a legacy of the shallow seas, tropical plants, and dinosaurs that were here 245 to 65 million years ago (see Chapter 1).

FIGURE 22.11: A joke between two neighbors outside Utica in 1989 turned into the annual "What the Hay" contest that attracts hundreds of sightseers every September at haying time. All the sculptures must be made of hay, and their titles must use the word *hay*. This one is called "The Great Sp-hay-nx."

> “Like all big booms this one too shall pass. State and federal officials predict that [the current boom in coal bed methane production] could play out within 20 years, and environmentalists and landowners wonder what will be left when it’s gone. Still, many are content to enjoy it while it lasts.”
>
> —*BILLINGS GAZETTE, FEBRUARY 20, 2001*

Montana sits on part of the largest known coal basin on earth. High-grade coal lies beneath 35 percent of Montana’s land surface. Today six major strip mines produce about 35 to 41 million tons of coal per year and employ nearly 900 Montanans.

In 2007 Montana got about half of its electricity from coal-fired power plants. Several companies have proposed building more coal-fired plants in Hardin, Roundup, and Great Falls to provide even more energy. But environmentalists warn that burning coal is the most polluting way to generate electricity—and that coal plants produce greenhouse gases that contribute to global warming.

Oil and natural gas are also abundant in eastern and central Montana, especially in the Williston Basin in the far east and in the Powder River Basin in the southeast. Oil and gas production increases and decreases with world market activity.

Coal Bed Methane

Much of Montana’s natural gas appears in the form of coal bed methane, a clean-burning natural gas found in coal **seams** (layers). Coal bed methane is valuable and easy to retrieve. Have you ever shaken a can of pop and opened it? If you drill a well down to a coal seam and let off some of the water, the methane gas in the seam will rise into the head of the well just like pop overflows from a pressurized can.

The Powder River Basin in southeastern Montana sits on part of one of the largest known coal bed methane deposits on the planet. Geologists estimate that 0.8 to 2.5 trillion cubic feet of methane gas lies there. The prime sites lie beneath the Crow and Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservations. There is also coal bed methane in the Gallatin Valley and on the North Fork of the Flathead River.

While some people see coal bed methane as an opportunity for Montana to produce low-cost energy, others worry about problems it causes to the land and the animals living near the wells. Pumping the water out of a coal seam can reduce the water table and dry up the wells used by anyone living nearby. In addition, water used in the process takes on a high content of mineral salts, which could damage streams, fish, waterfowl habitat, and the land itself.

Many people think Montana’s coal, oil, and gas reserves may help the United States reduce its dependence on foreign oil. Yet Montanans know that all natural resource industries follow a boom-and-bust pattern. These cycles are dependent on world market forces far beyond local control.

The nation’s continuing search for reliable energy sources will challenge Montanans’ feelings and beliefs about how best to use our natural

resources. As Montana develops its coal bed methane industry, landowners here are learning lessons from Wyoming, where coal bed methane is expanding rapidly. There, more than 39,000 wells will be operating by 2010.

> **"You know we cussed that wind all the time, only to find out, it really could be the lifeblood of Montana."**
>
> —GOVERNOR BRIAN SCHWEITZER, WHO GREW UP IN GEYSER, IN THE JUDITH BASIN

Alternative Energy: Wind Power, Biodiesel, and Ethanol

In addition to fossil fuels, Montanans are also developing energy from **renewable resources** (natural resources capable of restoring themselves) like wind and farm crops.

Montana's first large-scale commercial wind farm started up near Judith Gap in 2005. Here 90 towers, each 260 feet tall, generate electricity while cattle and crops grow on the ground below. Central Montana's steady winds quickly made the Judith Gap Wind Project one of the most productive wind farms in North America. Other wind farms are planned in central and eastern Montana.

Montanans are also developing alternative fuels like biodiesel and ethanol. **Biodiesel** (a diesel fuel made from seed oils like canola, safflower,

FIGURE 22.12: Each of these wind turbines at the Judith Gap wind farm can produce enough energy in a year to power 300 homes. The 90 towers combined can supply electricity to about 27,000 houses a year. Energy experts rank Montana the fourth-best state in the union for wind-energy potential. Yet some people see wind farms as intrusions on the landscape.

FIGURE 22.13 (INSET PHOTO): An ironworker stands atop a 282-foot-tall wind-powered generator at the Judith Gap wind farm. Each blade weighs 13,784 pounds.

or flax seed) can power cars, trucks, farm equipment, and snowmobiles. It produces less pollution and greenhouse-gas emissions than regular diesel does, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Ethanol (a fuel made from corn and grain) is another alternative fuel that has earned attention—and controversy. Ethanol burns cooler than gasoline and produces less carbon buildup, which creates lower exhaust emissions. But it is not as efficient as petroleum gasoline. It takes 1.5 gallons of ethanol to drive as far as 1 gallon of gasoline. Some researchers say it takes more energy to make ethanol than it produces.

Conflict and Compromise over the Land

Montanans sometimes wonder if they must choose between protecting the environment and feeding their families. In the past 30 years, many conflicts have arisen between these two values.

For example, ranchers around Yellowstone National Park protested **reintroducing** (bringing back) wolves to the park in the 1990s because wolves sometimes prey on young calves and sheep. By contrast, many environmentalists applauded wolf reintroduction as a way to bring balance back to an ecosystem.

Environmentalist groups want to limit snow machines in national parks and other backcountry areas because they cause noise and air pollution. But winter tourism businesses fear the loss of important income from snowmobilers.

Many groups worked to stop oil exploration on the Rocky Mountain Front to protect that wilderness region from environmental **degradation** (damage). Pro-development forces argued that opening the Front would create jobs and help make the nation less dependent on oil from other countries.

FIGURE 22.14: Some people visit Yellowstone National Park to experience the wide-open winterland on snowmobile. Others argue that the noisy machines pollute the air. These two sides rarely see eye to eye.

All these are examples of conflicts that arise because of two deeply held principles in Montana: love of the land and the need to make a living from it.

Conservation Easements: Cooperation between Landowners and Government

Some groups wrestling with environmental issues have found that working together can bring better results than fighting. One example is the conservation easement program.

Within your lifetime, thousands of acres of prime Montana ranchland have been subdivided for housing developments. Ranch owners often have to sell their land to avoid paying huge inheritance taxes or simply to have enough money to retire. Yet when ranchlands are subdivided for development, wildlife lose important habitat. The ecosystem loses some of its **biodiversity** (variety of plant and animal species). And Montanans of the future lose the option of using that land another way.

In 1994 the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks began negotiating conservation **easements** (the legal right to use a piece of land for something). Conservation easements are legal agreements in which the landowners are paid a lump sum for their land (commonly 40 to 45 percent of the land value). In exchange, the landowner agrees not to subdivide and to follow agricultural practices that benefit wildlife and the ecosystem. Conservation easements help conserve two things that Montanans value: wildlife habitat and family ranches.

Blackfoot Challenge: Building Community in a Crisis

In 1975 an earthen dam on a tailings pond at a gold mine north of Lincoln burst. It flushed 100,000 tons of toxic, metals-laden tailings into the Blackfoot River. Instead of fighting about what to do, biologists, mine owners, and community leaders decided to solve the problem together.

Everyone realized that no one would benefit from the degradation of the Blackfoot River, so they all joined together to preserve the watershed. All the participants worked together to find solutions. In the process

FIGURE 22.15: Even though people use natural resources for different activities, most Montanans share a deep appreciation for the land.

they created a group called the Blackfoot Challenge, an organization of people and agencies in the area that helps everyone conserve and protect the natural habitat and rural lifestyles there.

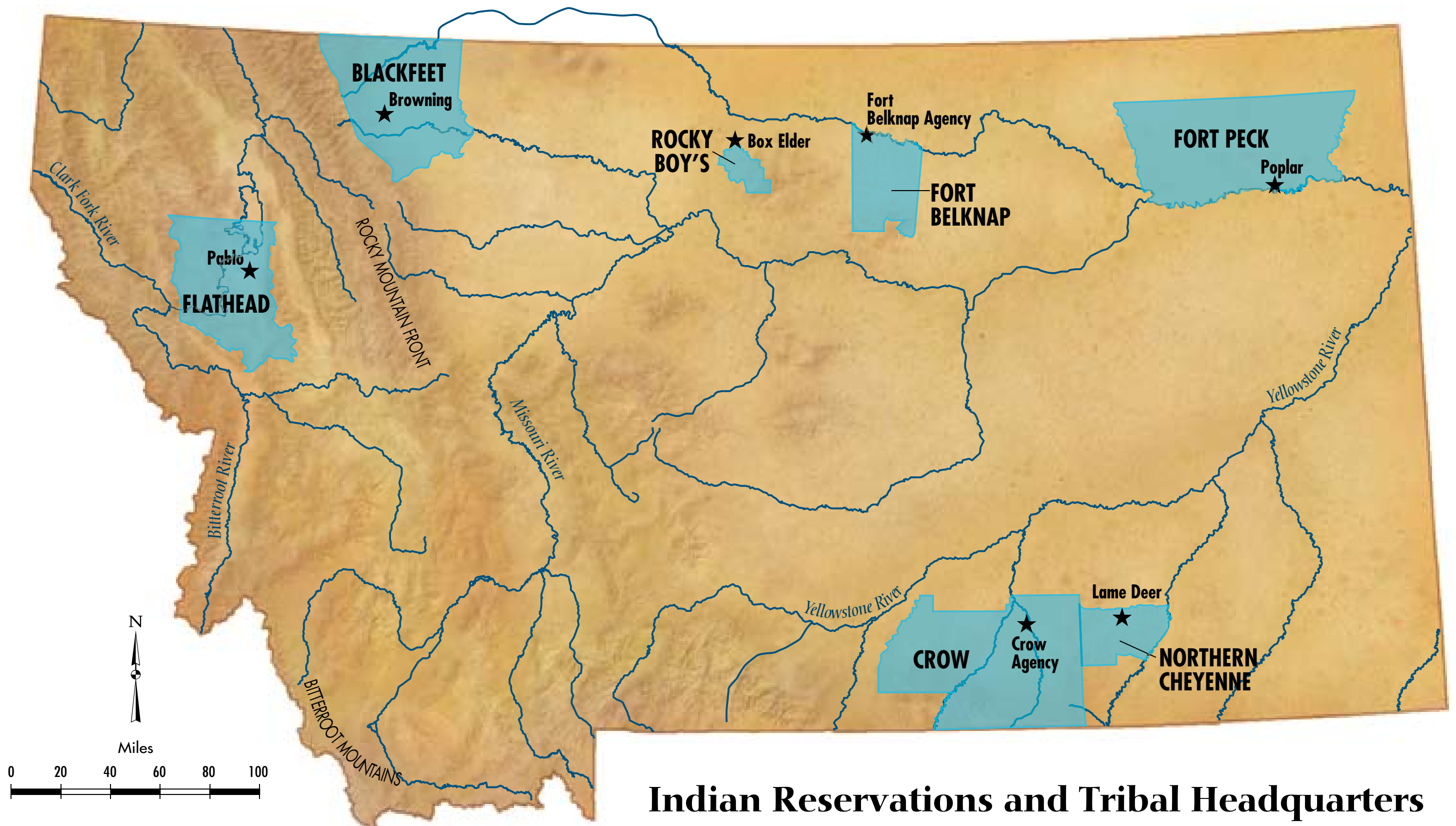
Modern Montana in Indian Country

If you live on one of Montana's seven Indian reservations, your community has become stronger in many ways in the past 30 years. Each Indian tribe faces its own unique challenges. But all have seen a period of increasing strength and cultural renewal.

Montana's Indian tribes are **sovereign** (independent and self-governing) nations with limited powers of self-government within U.S. law. Indian tribes today are fighting to recover from 200 years of shifting federal policies. Many of these policies were designed to destroy Indian tribes and cultures and to **assimilate** (to absorb) Indian people into **mainstream** (majority) society.

Because of the federal government's relocation program in the 1950s and 1960s (see Chapter 20), many Montana Indians moved from their reservations to towns and cities where there were more jobs. Some of them studied law, finance, education, and resource management. They returned to Montana with the knowledge and the political know-how to fight for their rights. With their expertise and activism, along with changing social attitudes, federal policy toward American Indians began to change. In the past 35 years, American Indian tribes have experienced a surge of renewal and empowerment.

FIGURE 22.16: Today Montana is home to 7 reservations and 12 Indian tribes: Assiniboine, Blackfeet, Chippewa, Cree, Crow, Gros Ventre, Kootenai, Little Shell, Northern Cheyenne, Pend d'Oreille, Salish, and Sioux.



Tribes Will Determine Their Own Future

In 1975 Congress enacted the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act. After 22 years under the termination policy (see Chapter 20), America's Indian people gained back some of their sovereign powers. With the Self-Determination Act, American Indian tribes gained the right to govern tribal affairs on their **reservations** (land that tribes reserved for their own use through treaties).

Self-determination means that Indian tribes and the federal government more often deal with one another on a government-to-government basis, as they did when the United States was formed. The U.S. government no longer makes decisions about Indian tribes without their participation and consent.

Reclaiming History and Culture

The laws listed on the right, above, led to a renewal of Indian culture, education, and empowerment in Montana and across the nation. Now each Montana reservation has a tribal college so people on or near reservations can get a higher education without having to leave home.

Several tribes also sponsor language immersion schools where students speak only their native language—no English at all. One example is the Nizipuhwahsin (Real Speak) language immersion center on the Blackfeet Reservation, where K–8 students study every subject—all in the Blackfeet language. One hundred years ago American Indian children were punished for speaking their own language in school. Now students are rewarded and admired for it.

Laws to Know and Understand

1968 – Indian Civil Rights Act: Extends constitutional guarantees like free speech, freedom of religion, equal protection under the laws, and other civil rights to Indian reservations, which previously were not covered by the U.S. Constitution.

1975 – Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act: Acknowledges tribes' right to govern themselves and to contract with the federal government to provide health, educational services, and other programs guaranteed by **treaty** (an agreement between governments).

1978 – Tribally Controlled Community College Assistance Act: Provides support and encouragement to the nationwide movement to fund tribal colleges to serve American Indian communities.

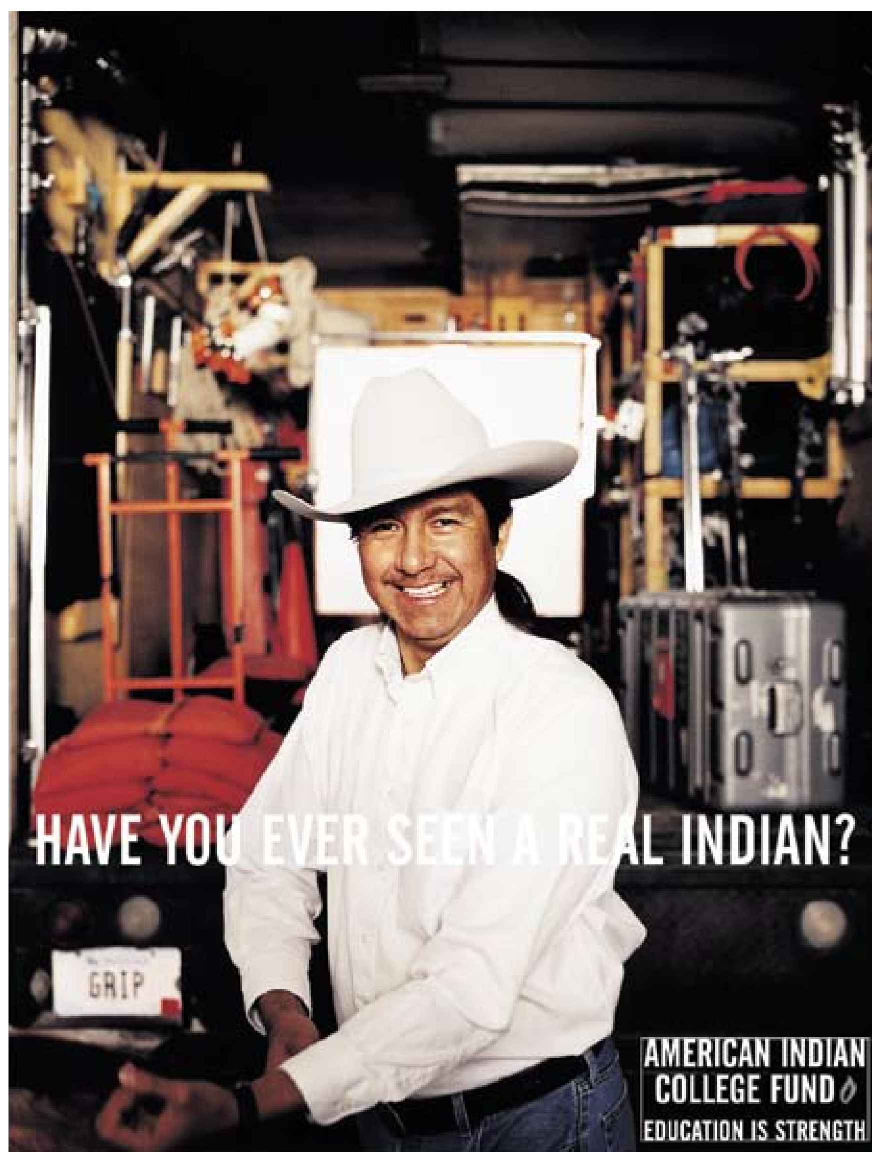
1978 – American Indian Religious Freedom Act: Grants to American Indians the right to free exercise of religion as guaranteed by the First Amendment.

1990 – Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act: Requires museums and institutions that have human remains or sacred objects to return them to the tribes from which they came. It also establishes that any American Indian remains or ancestral sacred objects belong to the descendants or their associated tribe, not to museums or collectors.

FIGURE 22.17: Traditional skills in a brand-new format: Cree beadwork artist Evelyn Eagleman beaded these red Converse high-tops in 2005.

> **"I enjoy speaking my language with fellow Cheyenne speakers because embedded in this language are lessons that guide our daily lives and, thus, all that we are as human beings . . . For me the Cheyenne language binds me to my reservation, my relatives, my culture, my fellow tribal members, and to life in general."**
>
> —*DR. RICHARD LITTLEBEAR, PRESIDENT OF CHIEF DULL KNIFE COLLEGE IN LAME DEER*

FIGURE 22.18: American Indians are breaking stereotypes and redefining what it means to be Indian today. The American Indian College Fund published this poster featuring Crow filmmaker Dean Bear Claw, who was a featured artist at the Sundance Film Festival and is pursuing a doctoral degree in ethnic studies.



The People Face Many Challenges

Montana's seven Indian reservations face far more challenges than most Montana communities in the twenty-first century. Decades of oppressive federal policies have left Montana's reservations some of the poorest communities in the nation. Montana's American Indians earn some of the lowest wages anywhere in this country. Unemployment rates among working-age people not attending school range from 47 percent to 70 percent—far higher than in the rest of the state.

American Indian students are more likely to drop out of high school than are any other students. Indian children have a significantly higher death rate than white children in Montana. They face higher rates of diseases like diabetes. And American Indians are more likely than any other ethnic group to experience violence committed by someone of another race.

Montana's tribes are combating these problems through better education, economic development programs, and improved health care. Indian writers and artists are bringing new life to their tribes and communities. And educators and culture committees are creating new opportunities to celebrate and strengthen their tribes' cultural heritage.

Fighting the Legacy of Past Policies

Montana Indians today are working to solve problems caused by past federal policies. One of the biggest challenges is the issue of land ownership. The Dawes Act of 1887 (see Chapter 11) divided tribally owned land into individual **allotments** (individual pieces of land) and assigned one allotment to each enrolled tribal member living at the time.

The government then often took

control over that land, leased it to settlers, ranchers, oil companies, and railroads, and collected the money on behalf of the Indian landowners. When an Indian landowner died, ownership of the land was divided equally among his or her heirs. Over many generations each original allotment became owned by hundreds—sometimes thousands—of people. In some instances today, an Indian person will own 14 billionths of a share of his or her ancestor's property. In 1997 a Blackfeet banker named Eloise Cobell sued the U.S. Department of the Interior for mismanaging $176 billion in trust funds earned by leasing and selling Indian-owned reservation lands. Cobell's lawsuit claimed that the government lost and destroyed financial records, transferred Indian trust money into the general budget of the government, and had cheated Indians out of money and services for the 110 years since the Dawes Act was passed. At the time this book was published, Cobell's case was still continuing.

> **"We are a scattered tribe. We weren't claimed by the whites. We weren't claimed by the full bloods. They used to call us persons with no souls. Now at least we have an identity."**
>
> —*ED LAVENGER, LITTLE SHELL TRIBAL ELDER*

The Little Shell Band: Seeking Recognition as a Tribe

Montana's Chippewa are still fighting for federal recognition as a tribe. In 1882 the government left a small band, led by Chief Little Shell, off federal rolls because the Chippewa were away hunting when the count took place. Without federal recognition as a tribe, the Little Shell band could not claim a reservation or participate in treaties with the United States.

For decades the descendants of Little Shell's band have gathered at holidays and struggled to stay together. In 2000 the Little Shell band received preliminary recognition as a tribe from the federal government. They later received full recognition from the state of Montana, but at the time this book was published, the Little Shell band was still petitioning for full federal recognition.

FIGURE 22.19: Two-year-old Darnell Gleason of Lame Deer gets a lift from his father, Michael, during an anti-meth rally at Lame Deer in 2007. We all ride into the future on the shoulders of those who came before us.

“Time only changes the outside of things. It scars the rocks and snarls the trees, but the heart inside is the same.”

—*CHARLES M. RUSSELL, 1924*

FIGURE 22.20: Blackfeet artist Jay Laber forged this sculpture, called *Kit Fox,* out of old car and truck parts collected while cleaning up kit fox habitat on the Blackfeet Reservation. Creating something new and beautiful out of the materials of the past will be your challenge as you take over the story of Montana from here.

You Will Make History Now

Throughout this book we have learned about how people and events have made history in Montana. We have learned how people used the land, how they made a living, what they disagreed about, and how they helped one another. We have learned a little about what they thought, what their hopes and expectations were, and how their beliefs shaped their communities.

If you could ask a person of prehistoric times, a Blackfeet leader in the 1500s, a gold prospector in 1862, a Swedish homesteader in 1916, a Sioux war veteran in 1946, or a poet in 2008 what the center and focus of life in Montana is, you might get the same answer from all of them: the land.

Montana stands once again at a pivotal point in its history. People can no longer extract vast amounts of natural resources without thought to the environmental cost. There is no more wide-open land free for the taking. Montanans now are cleaning up environmental problems, adapting to new challenges, and working to create new opportunities.

Environmental conditions like global warming will have enormous effects on Montana's climate, politics, and economy. The search for reliable, responsible energy sources will challenge all our beliefs about how we should use the land. As the West fills up with people, we will face increasing water shortages. Technology, world markets, and world politics will continue to influence life in Montana, as they have always done—but in unforeseen ways.

And when all this happens, the main question will be the same: How shall we build and nurture our communities in this land?

The next chapter of Montana history is up to you. Your actions and decisions will help determine what happens in the state, in your community, and on the land. The way you live your life will become part of Montana's story.

“As prehistoric peoples and American Indians have known for millennia, the land is the foundation and the focus of life in Montana.” —*DAVE WALTER, MONTANA HISTORIAN, 1995*

Expressions of the People

Contemporary Folk Art

Have your parents or grandparents ever taught you how to embroider, carve wood, or sing a traditional song? If so, they have shared with you a folk art from your culture.

Folk arts are special skills like bead working, saddle making, pottery, basket weaving, glass work, quilting, woodcarving, and traditional dances and songs that belong to a particular culture or group. Folk art emerges from the history and experiences of a group of people. For this reason people sometimes call folk art "beauty with history."

Folk arts connect people to their culture, language, group, ancestry, or community. They express the long-shared experiences and values of their culture. Sometimes a particular art becomes a **symbol** (something that represents an idea) of a group's identity or heritage. For example, Salish basket weaver Eva Boyd makes baskets out of cedar roots like the ones her grandmother made to collect bitterroot and camas. Her baskets are beautiful examples of a traditional skill handed down through many generations of Salish families.

Nancy Hons of Scobey is of Ukrainian descent. Her father came to northeast Montana in the 1920s, bringing with him many traditions from his homeland. Nancy remembered her grandmother making *pysanky,* which are specially painted Easter eggs.

FIGURE 22.21: Brightly colored *pysanky* eggs are decorated with traditional colors and symbols that are important to the cultures of the Ukraine, in Eastern Europe. To her designs, Nancy Hons of Scobey also sometimes adds wheat and other images from her own life experience in Montana.

FIGURE 22.22: Salish basket weaver Eva Boyd remembers the baskets her grandmother made, but she did not learn how to make them herself until she was an adult. Now Boyd has almost single-handedly revived the traditional art of Salish basket weaving. As she teaches others, she passes on a skill that has been a part of Salish life here for thousands of years.

She taught herself how to make them and now is teaching some of her neighbors, whose families also came from the Ukraine.

People usually learn folk arts informally from older friends and relatives—though some artists just learn on their own. In this way, traditions pass down through people, not through books or school. Each artist adds his or her creative intelligence to the established tradition.

Montanans create many different kinds of folk art: cowboy poetry, Blackfeet storytelling, traditional Norwegian embroidery, and Hmong funeral music are just a few examples. Folk artists who sew star quilts or braid rawhide bridles may not describe themselves as artists. They may see their work as just one part of their way of life—something they learned from their elders. Yet their work does what all art does—it adds beauty, grace, and meaning to people's experiences, and it enriches our daily lives.

FIGURE 22.23: Bob Scalese grew up on a ranch in the Sweetgrass Hills. Today Bob and his wife, Sandy, live in Big Sandy and create horse bits and spurs that express their love of western culture. They have won numerous folklife awards for creating what they call "good, solid, working spurs and bits that are also beautiful to look at."

CHAPTER 22 REVIEW

CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. Identify: (a) Public Service Commission; (b) Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act; and (c) Little Shell band
2. Define: (a) natural resource economy; (b) service economy; (c) extractive industry; (d) Superfund site; (e) vermiculite; (f) asbestos; (g) power contract; (h) biodiversity; (i) easement
3. How have the population **demographics** (statistics characterizing human populations) of Montana changed since the homesteading boom?
4. What is a congressional district?
5. Why did Montana lose a congressional representative after the 1990 census?
6. What international event led to the end of the Anaconda Company?
7. Why was mining in Libby ultimately so dangerous to people's health?
8. What is deregulation?
9. Describe the debate about coal bed methane production.
10. Describe some of the alternative energy forms being researched and developed in Montana.
11. What are the pros and cons of ethanol?
12. In what ways are Indians in Montana working to ensure the preservation of their cultural heritage and their tribes' economic, political, and social development?

CRITICAL THINKING

1. As of 2007 Montana had only one congressional representative. Montana's congressperson not only has to represent many more people than average but also must represent people spread over a huge land area. Do you think this is equal representation? Is there any way to apportion representation that is equitable to all concerned?
2. The present circumstances in Libby and at the Berkeley Pit represent the worst side of mining. Yet the industries there employed many people for a long time and added greatly to Montana's economy. Is the present cost worth the past benefits? Why or why not?
3. If you were governor of Montana, what priorities would you have to help ensure the economic, political, and social success of our state in the twenty-first century?
4. Review the list of "Laws to Know and Understand" on page 455. Although they are all important, which ones do you think are most significant to Indians today? Why?
5. Create a list of the five things you think have had the greatest impact on life in Montana throughout human history. Explain your choices.

PAST TO PRESENT

1. How has the focus of your community changed over the years? What were the main industries when the town started, and what are the main places and kinds of businesses there now?
2. This chapter reports on several ongoing issues (coal bed methane development, the Cobell case, Little Shell recognition, and the lawsuit against W. R. Grace, to name a few). Update the chapter by researching where things currently stand on an issue discussed in the text.

MAKE IT LOCAL

1. Research current population statistics for your county. Did it lose or gain population between 1990 and 2000? What other information about your county's population does the census include?
2. List some of the major challenges facing your community. What steps would you take to begin to solve them?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. Research and create a report, PowerPoint presentation, or poster on one of the following topics: the Hmong community in Montana, a Montana folk art, tribal efforts to preserve native languages, or the fires of 2000.
2. Investigate the history of the Berkeley Pit. Find out some of the myths surrounding this site and some of the popular stories and legends.
3. Research the pros and cons of school consolidation. Present your findings before an "advisory committee" made up of classmates who are tasked with making a recommendation on the issue to the governor.
4. Examine a conflict over land use. Develop a plan to solve the problem.

Credits

The following abbreviations are used in the credits:

BBHC Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming
GNPA Glacier National Park Archives
LOC Library of Congress
MAC Montana Arts Council, Helena
MDEQ Montana Department of Environmental Quality, Helena
MDT Montana Department of Transportation, Helena
MFWP Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Helena
MHS Montana Historical Society, Helena
MHSA Montana Historical Society Archives, Helena
MHSL Montana Historical Society Library, Helena
MHS Mus. Montana Historical Society Museum, Helena
MHS PA Montana Historical Society Photograph Archives, Helena
MSU COT Montana State University College of Technology, Billings
NMAI National Museum American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
MSU Billings Special Collections, Montana State University Billings Library
NARA National Archives and Records Administration
NPS National Park Service
NRIS Natural Resource Information System, Montana State Library, Helena
SHPO State Historic Preservation Office, Montana Historical Society, Helena
TM Travel Montana, Helena
UM Missoula Archives & Special Collections, The University of Montana-Missoula
USDA United States Department of Agriculture
USFS United States Forest Service
WMM World Museum of Mining, Butte

Chapter 22

FIG. 22.1 *Wilsall Elevators,* Clyde Aspevig, MHS Mus.

FIG. 22.2 Fiddle champ, photo by Walter Hinick, courtesy *Montana Standard,* August 13, 2006

FIG. 22.3 Menorah newspaper insert, courtesy *Billings Gazette,* December 8, 1993

FIG. 22.4 Hmong women, photo by Michael Gallacher, courtesy *The Missoulian,* 2007

FIG. 22.5 Demolition of the Great Falls stack, 1982, photo by Thomas E. Kotynski, Great Falls

FIG. 22.6 *Cool Water Hula,* photo by Derek Pruitt, courtesy *Montana Standard,* July 9, 2000

FIG. 22.7 Vermiculite Zonolite Company (W. R. Grace) employee, Libby, photo by Bill Browning, Helena, MHS PA PAc 2002-62.I2B-10865

FIG. 22.8 Libby, photo by Lance Schelvan, Missoula

FIG. 22.9 Worker stacking sugar sacks, photo by Larry Mayer, Billings

FIG. 22.10 Dan Eddleman pushing cattle down chute, photo by Larry Mayer, courtesy *Billings Gazette,* March 24, 2007

FIG. 22.11 The Great Sp-hay-nx, courtesy Montanapictures.net

FIG. 22.12 Wind farm in Judith Gap, Montana, 2007, photo by Tom Ferris, Bozeman

FIG. 22.13 Man on top of rotor, courtesy *Billings Gazette,* October 6, 2005

FIG. 22.14 Bison and snowmobiles, courtesy *Billings Gazette,* November 21, 2006

FIG. 22.15 Hunter and son, photo by Donald M. Jones, Troy, MT

FIG. 22.16 Indian Reservations and Tribal Headquarters, map by MHS, base map courtesy NRIS

FIG. 22.17 Converse high-tops, MHS Mus. 2005.42.01

FIG. 22.18 *Have you ever seen a real Indian?* courtesy the American Indian College Fund

FIG. 22.19 Darnell and Michael Gleason, photo by Casey Riffe, *Billings Gazette,* June 9, 2007

FIG. 22.20 *Kit Fox,* sculpture by Jay Laber, MHS Mus.

FIG. 22.21 Pysanky eggs, photo by Alexandra Swaney, courtesy MAC

FIG. 22.22 Eva Boyd, basket maker, photo by Alexandra Swaney, courtesy MAC

FIG. 22.23 Spurs, photo by Alexandra Swaney, courtesy MAC