

# REVITALIZATION IN TRIBAL COMMUNITIES

**M**any tribes recognize that brownfields can be turned into valuable community assets and opportunities for revitalization. Cleaning up and reinvesting in contaminated sites can promote economic development and create jobs while improving and protecting the environment. The challenge is finding ways to use these assets to sustainably revitalize tribal lands while preserving cultural values and meeting community needs.

Tribes with brownfields on their lands encounter problems similar to those faced by many small communities. They often lack the financial or technical resources available to larger cities, and may not have the redevelopment drivers that might spur cleanup and reuse in larger communities.

Tribes also face unique circumstances when addressing brownfields on their lands. Each of the 565 federally recognized tribes within the United States is an independent, sovereign nation responsible for setting standards and managing environmental programs for its people. Each tribe's history and culture and the complexity of jurisdictional issues present

## NEW ENVIRONMENTAL SOLUTIONS

EPA's land revitalization initiatives are producing significant environmental benefits and helping to transform communities into more sustainable and livable places. The strategy of encouraging market-driven redevelopment of brownfields and other contaminated sites for economic reuse is proving to be a successful approach at many sites. However, challenging real estate markets and economic realities can leave some formerly contaminated properties unused, possibly for a long time. New approaches are needed to revitalize these sites and protect human health and the environment.

EPA's Land Revitalization Team is working with communities, states, other federal agencies, academic institutions, nonprofit organizations, and the private sector to develop and test new approaches that recognize valuable reuse alternatives for formerly contaminated properties. Building green infrastructure to help manage stormwater runoff and floods, promoting safe soil management to support urban agriculture, and siting renewable energy on contaminated sites can bring environmental, ecological, and social benefits to communities. Unlocking the potential value of these underused properties often requires creativity and close collaboration with many public and private partners. These projects can help stabilize communities and spur economic development.

challenges to addressing environmental issues and promoting revitalization.

EPA Regions and EPA's Brownfields and Land Revitalization Program work closely with the Office of Sustainable Communities and other EPA offices, federal

partners, and local stakeholders to support tribes. These programs provide technical assistance and tools to help tribes build their capacity to address environmental issues and realize their economic revitalization goals.

## PETROLEUM BROWNFIELDS ARE KEY TO ZUNI PUEBLO'S NEW "MAIN STREET" REVITALIZATION

A new toolkit, *Equitable Redevelopment of Petroleum Brownfields for Zuni Pueblo and Other Tribal Communities* compiles best practices and principles from petroleum brownfields redevelopment, smart growth, and equitable development into a planning-level toolkit organized into a step-by-step revitalization process. Each step offers a menu of strategies that can be tailored to the specific needs and context of each community. The toolkit also identifies numerous online resources with additional information, examples, and models related to each step in the process.

The toolkit was inspired by three petroleum brownfield sites within the Zuni Pueblo, the specific needs of the Zuni community, and the unique circumstances tribes face when confronting petroleum brownfields. It is the product

of a partnership between the Zuni Pueblo, EPA Region 6, and the Office of Sustainable Communities' Smart Growth Program, Office of Underground Storage Tanks, and Office of Brownfields and Land Revitalization.

Although it was created for the Zuni Pueblo, the toolkit can be used by other tribes and rural communities. It shows how cleanup and redevelopment of small petroleum brownfields can foster a larger community-led revitalization effort.

The project began several years ago. The Zuni Pueblo asked EPA Region 6 for assistance addressing environmental contamination at the Black Rock Airport hanger, a brownfield site managed by the Zuni tribal government. Built in the 1960s, the airport provides access to the remote Zuni Pueblo and is surrounded by a residential neighborhood with

several commercial businesses. It also housed a gasoline station with underground storage tanks that must be removed. The site is being assessed by the Northwest New Mexico Council of Governments under an EPA brownfields assessment coalition grant. Even if a new runway continues to operate after the site is cleaned up, the surrounding



*Closed Chevron gas station, Zuni Pueblo, New Mexico*

area could be redeveloped to address a number of community needs.

Two former gas stations located nearby also could be redeveloped because of their key location along State Highway 53, which bisects the pueblo and serves as its “Main Street.” Both are near the Zuni Pueblo’s Middle Village, the historic district where most of the pueblo’s local businesses and tribal arts trading posts are located. The central locations of the airport and gas stations led the tribe to consider redeveloping them as a single unit that would help to revitalize the whole area. Together, the sites offer an oppor-

tunity to promote a mix of commercial and related land uses that would serve the tribe’s needs and promote tourism in the area around a walkable “Main Street” concept.

In July 2012, the National Trust for Historic Preservation designated the Zuni Pueblo as the first Native American “Main Street” community. It is one of 2,000 communities that receive assistance through the Main Street Program for revitalization of their business districts. Program staff help build the capacity of local Main Street programs, provide resources and technical assistance, and work with the National Trust Main Street Center to address revitalization challenges.

The Zuni Pueblo and the Northwest New Mexico Council of Governments continue to work with EPA Region 6 to conduct environmental site assessments and clean up these three sites and other brownfields on the pueblo. EPA, its federal partners and other stakeholders are planning a “Building Partnerships for a Better Zuni” meeting in 2013. The meeting will bring together public and private-sector partners to identify opportunities and resources to help the Zuni Pueblo meet its environmental and community revitalization goals.

## SPIRIT LAKE NATION’S SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PLAN IS “A JOURNEY FROM THE PAST TO THE FUTURE”

In December 2012, the Spirit Lake Nation of North Dakota adopted a new framework for sustainable development that includes initial components of a comprehensive plan; provides planning guidance; and identifies land use, housing, transportation, and economic development options. *A Sustainable Development Framework for Spirit Lake Nation* also outlines a process the tribe can follow to develop a full, comprehensive plan for future development. One Spirit Lake Nation tribal elder described the tribe’s comprehensive planning efforts as “a journey from the past to the future.”



In 2010, the Spirit Lake Nation asked President Obama for assistance with recovery from repeated flooding of Spirit Lake, also known as Devil’s Lake. For about 20 years, the lake regularly flooded reservation lands and surrounding communities. Following federal disaster declarations, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) convened a group of federal partners, including EPA Region 8 and the Office of

Sustainable Communities, to help the tribe develop a plan for long-term recovery. It was the first time that FEMA, EPA, and other federal partners provided comprehensive post-disaster long-term community recovery assistance to a tribe under FEMA’s National Disaster Recovery Framework.

The tribe adopted *The Spirit Lake Nation’s Recovery Plan*—a list of more than 49 projects and potential resources—in December 2010. All involved recognized that more work had to be done before the Spirit Lake Nation could realize tangible results from its recovery plan. The tribe invited EPA and other partners to help them on their journey.

In 2012, EPA convened a meeting with federal partners, state agencies and EPA’s expert consultants to help the tribe develop its comprehensive plan to address the needs identified in the 2010 Recovery Plan. EPA’s Office of Sustainable Communities provided leadership, technical assistance and training and capacity-building assistance on planning for sustainable living. EPA Region 8 also provided technical assistance to enhance the tribe’s financial management programs and help identify additional revitalization resources.

EPA and federal partners supported several “mini” charrettes hosted by the tribe with the tribal community, Tribal Council, and elders. These meetings produced a community-wide expression of sustainability-based principles and designs for the Spirit Lake Nation’s sustainable

development framework. EPA Region 8’s Partnership for Sustainable Communities with the U.S. Departments of Transportation and Housing and Urban Development developed a strategy to assist the tribe with recovery and with implementation of the recovery plan and framework. The partnership continues to help the tribe leverage resources and ensure continued disaster-resilient, sustainable development.

The sustainable development framework adopted in December 2012 includes maps and drawings that show the location and desired character of projects and future growth. It outlines next steps, including several actions that the tribe can initiate immediately. Several recovery projects currently are under way, including a major “green homes” development. The tribe was awarded \$900,000 from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to partially fund replacement of a waste water treatment system at risk of failure from the rising lake. As a result of the effort, the tribe plans to site future development in areas that are not subject to flooding.

(For more information, see the recovery plan at: <http://www.spiritlakenation.com/Documents/Spirit%20Lake%20Nation%20Recovery%20Plan.pdf> and the development framework at: [http://www.spiritlakenation.com/Documents/12\\_0930\\_Framework.pdf](http://www.spiritlakenation.com/Documents/12_0930_Framework.pdf).)

### MORE INFORMATION:

EPA Land Revitalization Program: <http://www.epa.gov/landrevitalization/>

United States  
Environmental Protection  
Agency

Office of Solid Waste and  
Emergency Response  
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