Woman named to EPA council: Advisory panel focuses on environmental justice
Written by Karl Puckett Tribune Staff Writer
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A University of Montana environmental studies instructor from the Blackfeet Reservation has been appointed to a three-year term on the National Environmental Justice Advisory Council, which advises the Environmental Protection Agency.

"Preserving and balancing economic interests with preserving the environment so people can use it is important to me," said Rosalyn LaPier, a research historian at the Piegan Institute in Browning, which promotes native language preservation and traditional knowledge.

LaPier also teaches classes in traditional ecological knowledge, federal environmental policy as it relates to native communities and U.S. environmental history in the environmental studies program at UM in Missoula.

EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy notified LaPier of the appointment in a letter Thursday. Her term begins Sunday, and her first meeting is Sept. 10-12 in Atlanta.

LaPier will represent indigenous organizations on the 26-person federal advisory committee, which the EPA established in 1993 to provide advice on integrating environmental justice considerations into the agency's programs, policies and day-to-day activities.

In recent years, committee members have taken on permitting programs, school air toxics monitoring, air quality and collaboration between federal agencies and tribal governments.

One of the jobs of the council is conducting public meetings so different communities can bring their issues of concern to the EPA, LaPier said. It also has working groups that focus on specific issues and then provide reports providing EPA guidance on policies and spending priorities.

"I think it's important for native people to have a voice in environmental issues," LaPier said.

The 49-year-old ethnobotanist, who is Blackfeet and Métis, said she learned about medicinal, edible and utilitarian plants in 20 years of study under her grandmother, the late Annie Mad Plume Wall, on the Blackfeet Reservation.

Today, she splits time living in Missoula and the reservation, where she has land at Chief Mountain and St. Mary Lake.

On the council, she will be a voice for communities with subsistence economies and residents who still live off the land.

"Not just preserving the land for the land's sake, but preserving and improving the environment for people who actually use it," she said.

Many Montanans, both natives and non-natives, still hunt, fish and gather for subsistence, she noted.