

Splintered Montana tribe struggles against history

By **MATTHEW BROWN**
Associated Press Writer

BILLINGS, Mont. — In their centurylong battle against history, Montana's Little Shell Indians have been denied a homeland, deported to Canada and forced to live in rural shanty towns because whites and other Native Americans rejected them.

Now the scattered Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa faces possibly the biggest test of its resilience: After the government denied federal recognition last fall, political infighting has split the tribe's 4,300 members and left them at risk of cultural disintegration if they cannot settle on a common destiny.

"If all this continues, I don't know what the future will be," said tribal member Patricia Maki, 69, who runs an Indian education program in Great Falls. She said the tribe needs to do some healing, but isn't hopeful it will come anytime soon.

Maki is part of the faction that blames the upheaval on tribal president John Sinclair, a 54-year-old plow operator for the state Transportation Department.

Those detractors say Sinclair's leadership style — which they called autocratic — undercut the recognition petition just as that 31-year effort came to a head. As an

example, they cite his decision to unenroll members of the opposition in the run-up to his re-election last year.

Opponents held an election earlier this month, choosing as their chairman Great Falls businessman John Gilbert.

Sinclair meanwhile says some of his chief critics lack the blood quantum to qualify as tribal members.

He issued warnings that voters in the rogue election could become victims of identity theft. And he charged the opposition, the Little Shell Chippewa Alliance, with stealing tribal enrollment documents.

His opponents also hold Sinclair responsible for the recent suspension of almost \$900,000 in grants and stimulus money for the tribe. State audits determined Sinclair and his staff had failed to properly account for past spending.

The loss of funds forced the tribe to cut back from five employees to just one. Sinclair acknowledges mistakes, but says his opponents are risking any chance at sovereignty for the tribe through their appeals for outside intervention. If any government entity stepped in, he said, it would be a "death knell" for the tribe.

Arlinda Locklear, a Washing-

ton, D.C. attorney assisting the tribe with its federal recognition effort, said it's no surprise the Little Shell looked inward for blame after losing their recognition bid.

But she said the real culprit was the Department of Interior, which issued the October denial. That sentiment was shared by Jack Campisi, a retired Wellesley College professor and expert on the federal recognition process.

"It's the government that screwed up this one," he said.

Campisi worked with the Little Shell on the early stages of their petition. He said bureaucrats within Interior did not know what to make of the Little Shell's nomadic history, which lacked the paper trail the government relies on for recognition decisions.

"The Little Shell is a tragedy. They continued to operate as a people who are not locked to one piece of land and that's been held against them," Campisi said.

Interior officials said recognition parameters set by Congress compelled the agency to reject the Little Shell — even though the tribe met most of the government's criteria.

The tribe's ancestors, led by Chief Little Shell, were followers of the great bison herds that once roamed much of North America.

Artifacts source blamed self for suicides

By **PAUL FOY**
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Associated Press Writers

SALT LAKE CITY — Two days before he killed himself, the undercover informant in a federal sting targeting looted Southwestern artifacts told a friend he felt responsible for the suicides of two defendants, according to police reports released last week.

Ted Gardiner told the friend he was upset over his involvement in the case and felt like he'd been "thrown to the curb," according to records released by the Unified Police Department.

The sting eventually led to charges against 26 people for allegedly stealing and trafficking in American Indian relics taken illegally from public and tribal lands.

Two people, including a prominent southern Utah doctor, committed suicide last June shortly after the indictments were announced.

Police were called to Gardiner's home in Holladay

on Feb. 27 after reports that he was threatening to take his own life. A friend who came to his aid told investigators that Gardiner was suicidal, saying over and over again that he was "done."

The friend, a woman Gardiner met at Alcoholics Anonymous years earlier, told police that the 52-year-old informant said he was rattled by the suicides in the case, believing he had "killed two people."

A woman who called 911 that night from his house told a dispatcher Gardiner had a gun and was threatening suicide.

"You're really going to hurt me bad if you do this," she told him. A short time later, she was overheard saying, "Put your gun away."

Gardiner was taken to a hospital for a mental health evaluation and released the next morning.

Police were called to Gardiner's house the next day by a roommate who said Gardiner was again suicidal and brandishing a gun.

An officer reported seeing Gardiner kneeling with his head on a bed and a gun in his hand. At one point, Gardiner pointed

the gun at his own head, according to the reports. The officer, who had his gun drawn, told Gardiner to drop his weapon.

"You're gonna have to do what you have to do," Gardiner replied.

The officer said that when Gardiner swung the gun in his direction, he fired a shot that missed as he backed out of Gardiner's bedroom.

Gardiner shot himself in the head a short time later.

Gardiner, a former antiques dealer and grocery chain CEO, worked undercover for the FBI and the U.S. Bureau of Land Management for more than two years.

He wore a wire and transmitted live video and audio signals to federal agents who monitored his transactions with a cast of dealers and collectors in Western states.

He eventually struck deals for more than 250 artifacts worth more than \$335,000. He was typically paid around \$7,500 a month.

Of the 26 defendants, four have pleaded guilty. Trials for the others are scheduled for later this year.

Judge grants gag order in Ariz. sweat lodge case

CAMP VERDE, Ariz. (AP) — An Arizona judge has granted the prosecution's request for a gag order in the case of a motivational speaker charged with manslaughter.

Prosecutors made the re-

quest Feb. 12, claiming it's needed to limit pretrial publicity that could taint the jury pool. Yavapai County Superior Court Judge Warren Darrow granted it last week and ordered attorneys on both sides to comply with the rules of conduct.

Self-help author James Arthur Ray pleaded not guilty to three counts of manslaughter stemming from the deaths of three people following a sweat lodge ceremony he led in October near Sedona. His trial is scheduled to begin in August.

Police, FBI investigating woman's death

Warm Springs tribal police and the FBI are investigating the death of Veronica Wesley, 56, an enrolled member of the Yakama Reservation.

The body of Wesley was found on Friday, March 26, just north of milepost 3 on Tenino Road on the Warm Springs Reservation.

"At this time, we're stress-

ing that there is no sign of trauma," Jim Soules said. "There are rumors out there, but the cause of death is unknown and the investigation will continue."

Soules said that the tribal police are working with the FBI in what is now considered to be an investigation into a death that is suspicious in nature until the facts can be determined.

"We're interested in speaking to anyone who may have seen Veronica Wesley on either Thursday or Friday," Soules said.

If you have information that can help detectives, please call the Warm Springs Police Department and ask to speak to Detective Starla Green or Captain Sam Williams.

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on the first Monday of the month at the Family Resources Center in Warm Springs. Or call us at 385-6944 Monday through Wednesday between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m.