

It's a new day for the Three Affiliated Tribes

Ken Hall, executive secretary, Three Affiliated Tribes, believes this is the ground floor for a new movement in



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tribal energy development. Although energy development is nothing new on the reservation, owning energy development is.

"The tribe has been involved with oil and gas since the 1950's, but we've never drilled our own wells until last year," Hall said. "That was very monumental and exciting."

Hall is referring to Missouri River Resources, a tribally-owned oil and gas company. Hall is the Chairman of Missouri River Resources and recalls how just a couple years ago it was only an idea.

"Dave Williams is our CEO and we both are enrolled members of the Three Affiliated Tribes. A few years ago it was just an idea and concept on paper," Hall said. "Fast forward to last year where they drilled their first four wells; [it was a] very historic event."

Hall continued saying the tribe is also engaging in midstream activities and workforce development.

"It's been a really good start to a viable company that could become a big player someday," Hall said.

According to Hall, there are sovereignty models for oil and gas development and they are trying to become another one of those models.

"We are a sovereign nation, we believe in our own people. We believe it is a new day," Hall said. "We use our own people when you talk about workforce development and oil field services. From top to bottom — our environmental science folks, our drillers, our pumpers, our administrative folks."

Hall continued saying he believes their people can do quality work and are just as capable as the next person. One of the reasons is education.

Many Native Americans are getting an education in order to assist the energy industry.

"We know there are vocational, educational institutions in our state, Unites Tribes comes to mind, a technical college," Hall said. "And then we have a community college in our backyard, the Nueta Hidatsa Sahnish College, formerly known as Fort Berthold Community College. They are a four year accredited college now"

Hall pointed out there are a number of universities in the state of North Dakota as well as a partnership they have with San Juan College in New Mexico, where they recently sent a few students for training.

"It's a good set up for us. A good model," Hall said. "We believe we are going to have COOs, CEOs, geologists, drillers — and all of that will be Native American."

For Hall, the big picture is about empowerment — the ability to lift up a generation and create new opportunities.

"When you empower someone, you build confidence in them," Hall said. "You let them know they can do it, and then they start to flourish."

Build confidence, get an education and start working. That seems to be the simplistic plan. But the simple actions create moments of momentum for the entire reservation.

"They are off becoming a professional or a businessperson or having a specialty that they can offer and come back and really help their nation to become prosperous again," Hall said.

Not everyone is on board with the energy movement, according to Hall.

However the numbers are small and are learning more and more about how oil and gas are aiding and assisting everyday life on the reservation.

"You are always going to have a few that resist," Hall said. "I think there will always be some resistance. But if they could see the big picture, and look at the economics of it, I think they would buy more into it."

Hall said the Bakken is in an era of technology, which is proving to be safer than past energy extraction cycles. He believes the more people understand the technology, the more they understand

the development of energy economics.

"Technology was the game changer for the Bakken. I think everyone understands that," Hall said. "And we know as technology improves as the years go by. I think the word of the day is becoming more 'efficient'. With this downturn it gives everyone a chance to become more efficient at what we do."

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— Ken Hall, executive secretary, Three Affiliated Tribes

While the technology is making things more efficient and streamlined, the Federal Government continues to be the sovereign nation's biggest issue. Regulation and oversight has created an uneven playing field for the tribe, particularly in dealing with the timing and speed of permitting land and mineral rights.

"Early on when the leasing happened, 2006 and 2007, if you were off the reservation and you were a private owner, it took you four steps from signing a lease to getting your first royalty check," Hall said. "Now you step on the reservation, all the Federal regulations that are in place 49 step process."

According to Hall, this cumbersome process is not only complicated, but it created an obvious issue that was visible to the naked eye.

"When you would drive at night and you could oversee the landscape, there was all these flares outside the reservation. It was completely dark on the reservation," Hall said. "There was a doughnut hole. All the activity was around, but nothing going on the reservation because of the regulations and the cumbersome process."

Hall continued saying nobody actually knew what the entire process entailed and they still had streamline that process from a land and mineral owner's perspective. It became even more confusing for the regulators, mineral owners and

the tribe.

Out of the confusion and chaos an association was developed to lobby and advocate on behalf of the land and mineral owners.

"We tried to create a one-stop shop. And it is still being developed to this day," Hall said. "A one-stop shop service center, which we believe could be in Denver. All tribes could utilize when it comes to leasing and right-of-ways in order to streamline the whole process."

As they continue to develop a system to improve efficiency, the reservation is seeing and feeling the entrepreneurial wave ripple through.

"The (entrepreneurial) opportunities are tremendous. I think before the boom we had a handful of Native American businesses," Hall said. "Today,

I want to say, there is well over 250 that have their own business. Its oilfield services, roustabouts, trucking, you name it. It's been a tremendous opportunity for those folks."

Hall said three-and-a-half years ago, when they created offices for their company, they also created Community Development Corporation. The CDC has their own charter, mandate from the Tribal Business Council, own bylaws, appointed board.

"They work on housing projects and businesses on Main Street. Like a coffee shop, which is opening, a hair salon, a flower shop. Those businesses are opening on Main Street as we speak," Hall said. "The spin offs have been tremendous. It's been a real opportune time if you are an entrepreneur and wanting to get into business."

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