



# How do Indigenous languages shape relationships to environment?

## Knowledge sharing between Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes of the Fort Peck Reservation and Indigenous Peoples of the Darhad Valley, Mongolia

### Yellowstone Altai Sayan Project

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Mongolia, June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2016 , Ovoo entering the Darhad Valley

#### Introduction

Mongolia's Darhad Valley and regions of Montana can be considered *bioregions*. A bioregion "encompasses landscapes, natural processes and human elements as equal parts of a whole" (BioRegions.org). Indigenous people live within both regions, and they respectively consider holistic interactions between landscapes, natural processes and humans. Both are faced with change related to developmental pursuits and globalism. Understanding and documenting language and mode of expression is an important way for community members to recognize the value of place and tradition, and how these things are threatened by change. This research works to connect the importance of place through maps and descriptive language.



Mongolia, June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2016-Taylor, Nyama, Esther and user group

#### Objectives

This work has two main components: 1) Knowledge sharing will contribute to a map that will serve as a tool for locals that will be continuously updated with relevant information. 2) This work illustrates the relationship between a person's age and her/his knowledge of the stories or descriptions traditionally associated with place names. Place names serve not only as locations that Darhad locals use to navigate their territories but they also provide historical and contemporary contexts that illuminate spiritual importance, ecological importance, and more. "Language is the sphere of the culture and if you lose the sphere then you lose the culture."-Khukh Uvgun (Blue Old Man)

#### Methodologies and Methods

Methodologies included implementation of holistic management, and Indigenous Research methodologies. Holistic management includes action based items that occur out of decision making processes that are mutually developed in cooperation with the 'whole' that is being managed (Neill KM, 1999). Indigenous methodologies are described as being place-based methods of gathering and disseminating data, they are attentive to cultural values of communities, and world views (Lambert, 2014).

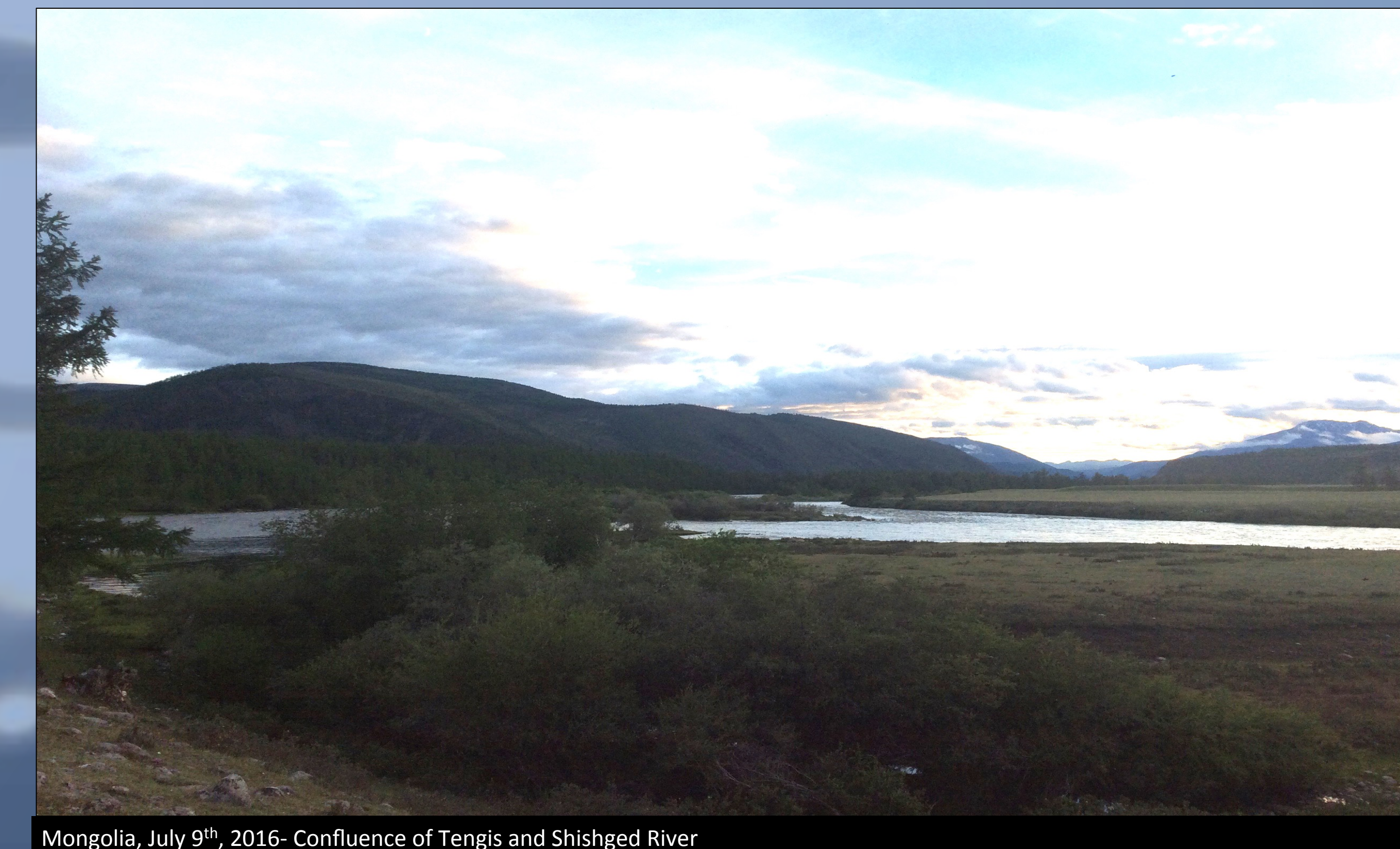
Therefore, methods were distinctive between Fort Peck and the Darhad Valley, and included time spent in communities, open ended interviews, ongoing conversations with community members, and demographic surveys.



Fort Peck Reservation, Montana June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2016-Gillian carrying Timpina/Wild Turnip



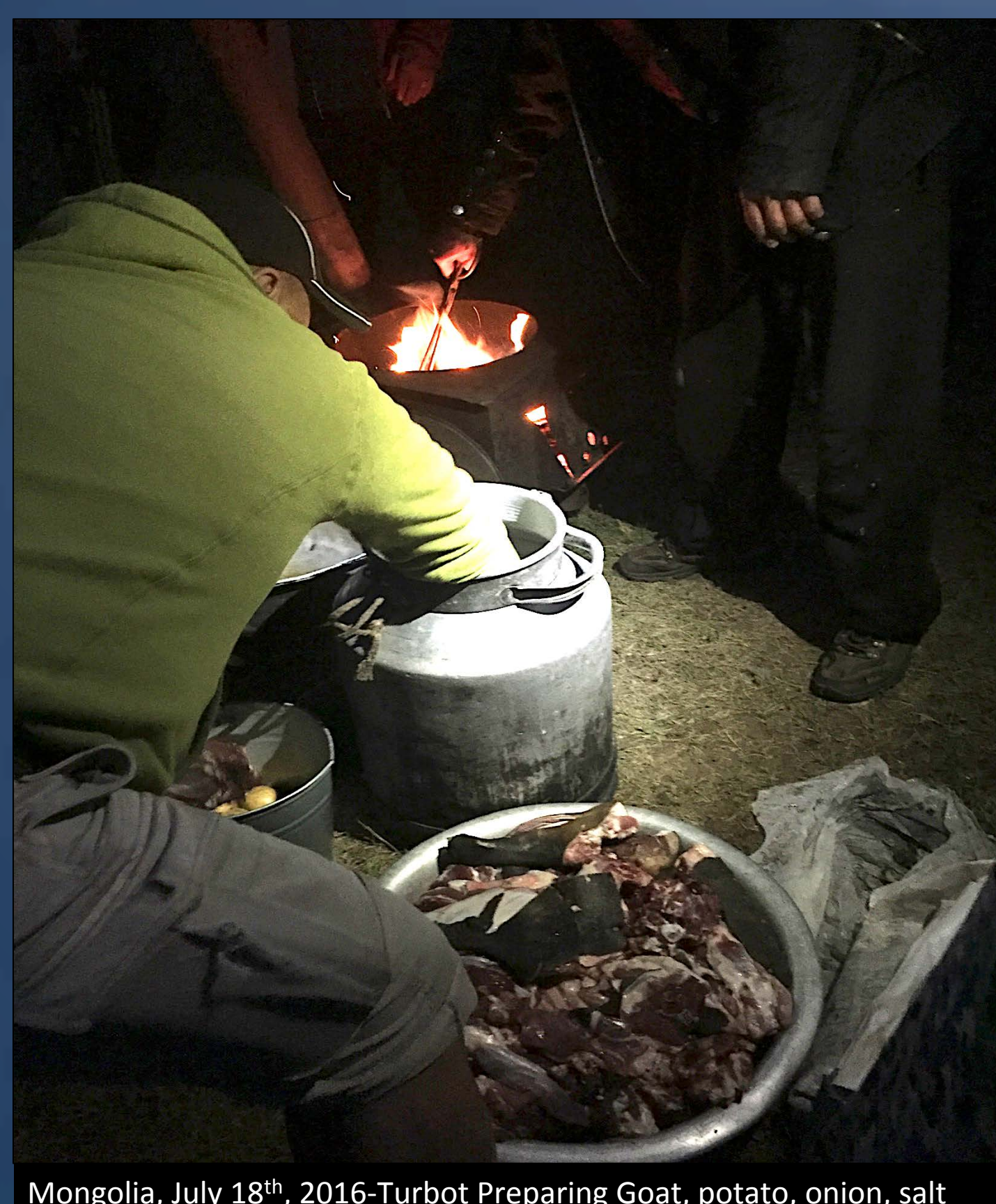
Mongolia, July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2016-Badmaa, Taylor and Kendra working with Herders on mapping



Mongolia, July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2016- Confluence of Tengis and Shishged River



Mongolia, June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2016-Bas Bish talking about medicinal dandelion jam



Mongolia, July 18<sup>th</sup>, 2016-Turbot Preparing Goat, potato, onion, salt

#### Preliminary Results and Conclusions

On the Fort Peck reservation, language loss is significant and has affected intergenerational interactions, relationship to place, loss of identity and culture. Likewise, in the Darhad Valley, younger people were especially effected by language loss. Statements were also made claiming that no language loss had occurred. This discrepancy is likely due to the fact that Mongolians continue to speak their language, yet local place name meanings are disappearing as elders pass away. During sharing sessions in Mongolia, community members expressed their lack of understanding as to the extent of language loss and the political climate that exists in Native communities in the U.S. Once realized, community members began to understand how they are being effected by globalization and have a strong desire to address it.

#### Future

The Yellowstone Altai Sayan Project intends to continue hosting knowledge sharing opportunities between the People of the Darhad and Native communities in Montana and the surrounding bioregion. There are unique and noticeable similarities between these Indigenous Peoples. A multi-layered map that portrays the physical landscape as well as culturally and spiritually significant stories and place names, plants, animals, and water bodies is in development.

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