The Flathead Reservation covers almost 620,000 acres of western Montana. This land is home to two separate tribes functioning as a single unit, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (GAI, 193). A small contingent of the Kalispel Nation and some Spokane, both Salish tribes, also live there.

The Salish were called “Flatheads” by the whites, due to their appearance and connection to the Coastal Salish who actually tied padded boards to their foreheads to shape their heads. However, they now call themselves by their original name. The Kootenai live both in the United States and Canada, where their name is spelled “Kootenay” (ENAT, 113-114). After countless generations as fishermen, the Kootenai obtained horses around 1700 and transformed themselves into a tribe of the Plains, pursuing the buffalo and using tepees.

Today, these two tribes celebrate their former Plains lifestyle on their flag (sample provided by the Office of Property & Supply, Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribe, Pablo, Montana). Centered on the red background is a blue disk bearing a tan tepee decorated with bear prints and a buffalo in dark blue. These two emblems reflect hunting and fishing—buffalo as a major game animal and the bear as a skilled fisherman. Behind the tepee in blue stand the Rocky Mountains, which transverse the land of the Salish and Kootenai, and above them is a yellow sun. The sky and the mountain snow are light blue.

Crossed behind the central disk, which symbolizes an Indian shield, are a traditional bow and arrow, the hunting weapons of the Plains.
Indians. From the bow and shield hang seven white-and black eagle feathers, representing the seven members of the Flathead Council. The bow and arrow are tan and dark blue. Above the disk is “FLATHEAD” and below is “NATION” in yellow; on either side are “SALISH” and “KOOTENAI” in dark blue. In recognition of the difficulty that writing causes on a flag viewed from the reverse, two versions of the flag of the Flathead nation exist: the formal flag is double-sided, with the writing appearing properly on both sides; the common flag is single-sided.