

THE  
**FUTURE**  
OF  
**AMERICA'S**  
**NATIONAL**  
**PARKS**

First Annual  
Centennial Strategy for

# Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site

August 2007

CENTENNIAL INITIATIVE



**Site:** KNRI

**Year:** 2007

**Vision Statement**

Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site serves as the National Park Service unit focused upon Indian cultures of the Northern Great Plains. The 1,759 acre unit protects sixty-four known archeological sites, five identified cultural landscapes, and a diverse natural resource including areas of native prairie.

The archeological resources span the periods from paleo through historic American Indian and early European plains settlement. Knife River Indian Villages is widely regarded as having the finest remaining earthlodge village sites, consisting of hundreds of such remains and depressions.

The park's location, at the confluence of the Knife and Missouri Rivers, features view sheds reminiscent of pre-European contact. Other areas provide scenery of modern agricultural fields, offering an interpretive parallel to the agrarian practices of the Hidatsa and Mandan peoples of two centuries ago. There are areas within the village sites where visitors can easily envision landscape that the Mandan and Hidatsa would have experienced for generations.

The goals of Knife River Indian Villages NHS include the long-term protection of the parks cultural and natural resources, the largely pristine view sheds and soundscapes, and to enhance the educational and interpretive experience.

Presently, the management of Knife River Indian Villages is actively pursuing partnership opportunities. The park's small, but dedicated friends group has offered to become a catalyst in stimulating partnership opportunities with local and regional corporations and philanthropic entities.

**Park/ Superintendent/ Program Manager**

Brian McCutchen, Superintendent

Site: KNRI

STEWARDSHIP

Provide inspiring, safe, and accessible places for people to enjoy - the standard to which all other park systems aspire.

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

Visitor comments routinely heard by Knife River Indian Villages staff regard the pristine landscape that is directly visible to the east of the 1,758 National Park Service unit. The high bluffs, directly across the Missouri River from the park boundary remain relatively unchanged from their pre-European appearance. The bluff line, which is privately owned, contains a wealth of archeological resources directly related to the centuries of habitation on the Knife River side of the Missouri.

Presently, there are numerous threats to the view shed - including encroaching coal mining and the potential of residential development. Such intrusions to the historic and natural scene would prove an irreversible impact upon the visitor experience and a loss of the surrounding landscape integrity.

As this vital landscape falls outside of the Congressionally designated landscape boundary, preservation easements provided by a partner would provide long-term protection from irreversible threats, and continue the appreciation and enjoyment for visitors.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: KNRI

STEWARDSHIP

Improve the condition of park resources and assets.

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

As an effort to preserve delicate environmental areas, while enhancing the visitor experience, constructing a boardwalk on the North Forest Trail would permit closing a gap in the trail to create a loop, that presently is impossible without such an elevated access. This would encourage more visitors to experience the full extent of the trail while still protecting a delicate wetland area.

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Site: KNRI

STEWARDSHIP

**Assure that no compelling chapter in the American heritage experience remains untold and that strategically important landscapes are acquired, as authorized by Congress.**

**Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)**

With each succeeding generation, articulate language details and stories are often lost. For example, fewer than six individuals survive that speak the Mandan language - a once widely spoken dialect. As the Knife River Indian Villages is the national park unit to preserve, interpret and educate people about resources and culture of the Indian groups of the Northern Great Plains, ensuring the documentation and preservation of the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara - three tribal groups that had for centuries occupied the immediate Knife River region - languages is paramount. As much of a culture is tied to its language, once the language is lost or fragmented, a significant part of the cultural identity is lost forever.

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Site: KNRI

STEWARDSHIP

**Serve as the Preeminent resource laboratory by applying excellence in science and scholarship to understand and respond to environmental changes.**

**Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)**

The 1,758.35 acres that comprise the Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site are only a small portion of the overall pre-European settlement of the upper-Missouri River region. Numerous and distinctive groups and cultures thrived for centuries in the upper-Missouri corridor. Relationships between the groups were extensive, though complex. Trade across the region was dynamic, and largely centered at the former villages within the boundaries of the Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site.

A comprehensive research program that directly addresses the archeological and cultural resources within this corridor will provide an integrated source of study and knowledge for a better understanding of the social and cultural dynamics of this once vibrant network of communities. This program will bring together as a consortium researchers from the Midwest Archeological Center, state historical societies, and academic institutions.

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Site: KNRI

**ENVIRONMENT**

Engage partners, communities, and visitors in shared environmental stewardship.

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

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**EDUCATION**

Promote life-long learning to connect generations through park experiences.

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

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