

Benefits of national, state park to be discussed

Site of park would be former Tule Lake Relocation-Segregation Center near Newell

BY LEE JULLERAT
H&N Regional Editor

NEWELL — Possible economic benefits from creating a national or state park at the former Tule Lake Relocation-Segregation Center near Newell will be discussed Saturday.

Leading the discussion will be Bob Gracey, a Korean War veteran who for many years owned and operated a Chevron gas station and Subway restaurant in Independence, Calif., home of the Manzanar War Relocation Center.

Like Tule Lake, Manzanar was among 10 locations where Japanese Americans living on the West Coast were held during World War II. Unlike Tule Lake, Manzanar has been made a national historic site by the National Park Service.

Economic report part of presentation

Saturday's informal meeting on the economic benefits of creating a national historic site at the former Tule Lake Relocation-Segregation Center near Newell will include an economic report.

David Misso, who is coordinating the 1 p.m. Saturday meeting at the Newell Elementary School gymnasium, said the summary of "Impacts of Visitor Spending on the Local Economy: Manzanar National Historic Site 2004" report by Michigan

State University will be available.

"This could be a designation that might help people stay longer," Misso said of developing a national historic site or park.

"People could hit a couple of things at one time," he said, referring to visiting Lava Beds National Monument and/or the Klamath Basin National Wildlife Refuges, former Civilian Conservation Camp/German prisoner of war camp and other sites.

Gracey will discuss the impacts on the economy of Independence and Inyo County economy at an informal meeting at 1 p.m. Saturday at the Newell Elementary School gymnasium.

Dave Kruse, Lava Beds National Monument superintendent, will be available to answer questions on the progress of a possible study to determine if 42 acres of the former

Tule Lake camp merits development. At its peak, the 7,400-acre camp had 18,789 internees. It also was the nation's only segregation center and the last camp closed.

An asset

"It's been an asset," Gracey said of Manzanar's development. "It adds another thing that pulls people off the highway. Visitorship has

increased steadily. And it's part of the history. It's like a museum, and the park service is constantly improving it."

Independence is a small community in a rural area, like Tulelake and Newell, located along Highway 395, that relies on tourism.

Gracey, 79, was in high school in 1942 when Manzanar was built and opened. For a time he delivered milk to the camp.

"I saw it built. I saw it torn down. I'm one of the few who saw the camp evolve totally," said Gracey, who is retired and living in Reno. "I'm not coming up to impose anything on any body. That's the purpose of my coming up, giving people the benefit of my experience."

Later, when Manzanar was developed as a park, he was a county supervisor. He said there was some opposition at first.

"Eventually that dampens itself. It was a very emotional time when the camp was built. It's turned out really well. It's still a work in progress."

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