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**General Management Plan
Newsletter 2
July 2009**

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Agate Fossil Beds National Monument



Our Public Involvement Effort

Published newsletter in hard copy and electronically on park and NPS' public comment websites. (May 2008)

Mailed newsletters to groups and individuals, local, State and Federal government agencies and affiliated American Indian Tribes. (May 2008)

May 31, 2008 - Park GMP Open House

June 2008 - GMP Open Houses in Alliance, Chadron, Crawford, Harrison, and Scottsbluff.

Dear Friends,

Last May, we began the public involvement process for the Agate Fossil Beds General Management Plan (GMP). We sent out a newsletter, posted information on our website, and held six public open houses. As a result, we received over 100 comments. Commenters expressed both general and specific ideas and concerns about the Monument's future.

Thanks to each of you who took time from your busy schedule to attend a meeting or drop us a line. Your input will be invaluable in helping the GMP team develop a plan that will make a lasting difference in the long-term management of Agate Fossil Beds.

Inside this newsletter, you will discover the wide range of interests and concerns people have about the Monument.

Please read this newsletter and find out what people have been thinking and saying about the Monument and its future. These issues and concerns provide important insights into what park visitors, neighbors, and other agencies and organizations expect from the GMP. If you have any comments, contact the GMP team through the Monument's website at www.nps.gov/agfo

James Hill, Superintendent
Agate Fossil Beds National Monument

What We Heard From You

In May 2008, newsletters were distributed to announce the beginning of the General Management Plan process. The newsletter (Newsletter #1) described the park and its resources and provided information on the purpose and significance of this unique National Park unit.

Public open houses were held during the month of June at the Monument and in Alliance, Chadron, Crawford, Harrison, and Scottsbluff, Nebraska. In each of these meetings, the public was invited to comment on ideas for management and to share with the GMP team any issues or concerns to be considered in the General Management Plan.

Through comments on the National Park Service planning website, by regular and electronic mail, and at the public meetings, we obtained a variety of concerns and suggestions. All comments were reflective of a public that is passionate about the future of the

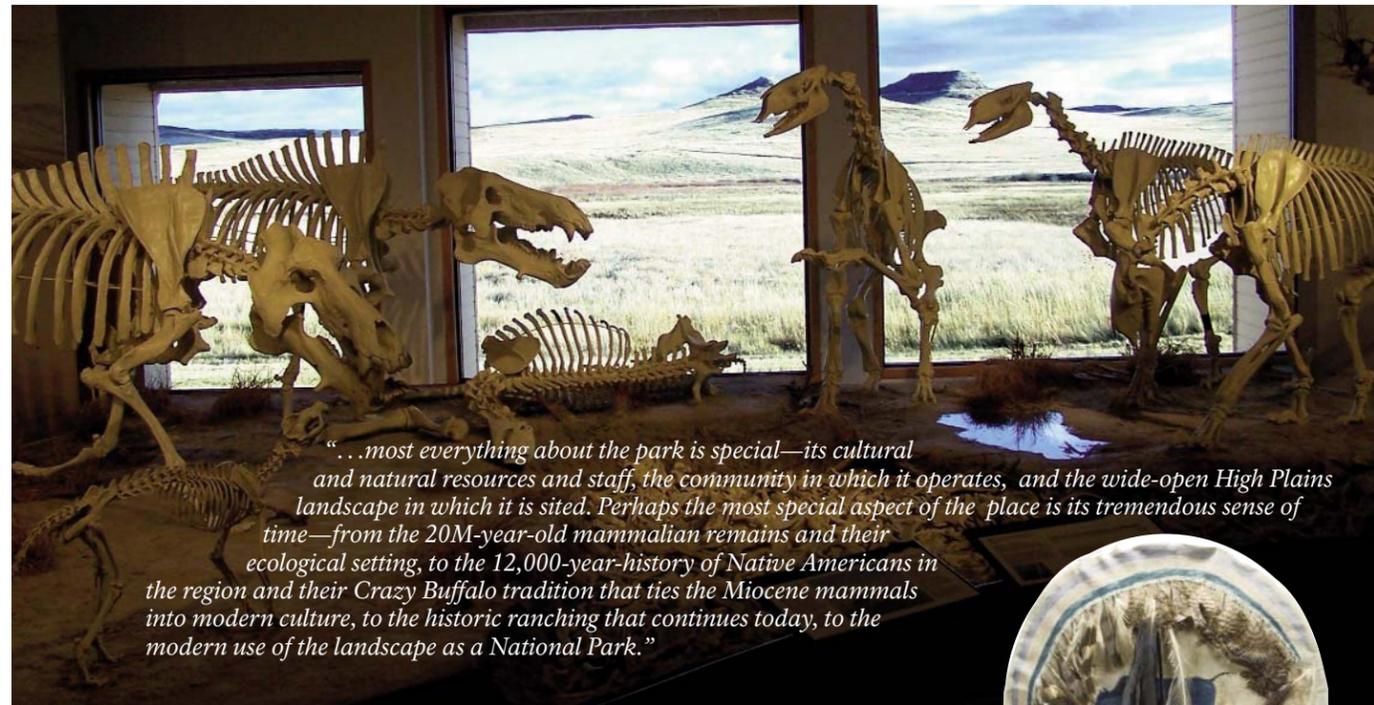
Monument—its resources, uses, and management. Many of those who commented provided detailed recommendations on how areas in the park should be managed, what resources are most important for protection or preservation, and what they would like to see for the future of the Monument.

The topics addressed by the public in these comments have been organized into major topics that broadly describe the nature of the comments:

- ◆ What the public values about the park,
- ◆ Issues regarding the current or future management of the park that should be addressed by the plan,
- ◆ Comments that are beyond the scope of the GMP or are more appropriate for another planning process, such as establishing a Native American burial program in the park.

What the Public Values About the Park

The majority of the commenters expressed what they valued about the Monument. The responses varied—there were those who appreciate the beauty and serenity, the natural resources, and the fossils. Others appreciate and value the history and historic landscapes.



“...most everything about the park is special—its cultural and natural resources and staff, the community in which it operates, and the wide-open High Plains landscape in which it is sited. Perhaps the most special aspect of the place is its tremendous sense of time—from the 20M-year-old mammalian remains and their ecological setting, to the 12,000-year-history of Native Americans in the region and their Crazy Buffalo tradition that ties the Miocene mammals into modern culture, to the historic ranching that continues today, to the modern use of the landscape as a National Park.”

Diorama of mammal fossils at the bone bed during the Miocene Epoch.

“Any steps taken to save our history are very important. Your efforts to preserve the fossil beds are very important. The Indian history is just as important.”

Lakota Sioux shield.

Please note that once we have developed the preliminary and preferred alternatives, you will have opportunities to comment and contribute ideas through public open houses, the websites, and mail. We look forward to your continued interest and involvement.

Step	Time Frame	Planning Activity	Public Involvement Opportunity
1	Spring 2007 (Completed)	Initiate Project The planning team assembles and begins to identify the project's scope, customize the planning process, and establish contacts with participants.	
2	Summer 2007- Summer 2008 (Completed)	Define Planning Context and Foundation The team examines WHY the Monument was established and affirms purpose, significance, and presents preliminary concepts to the public in Newsletter #1. Team members collect and analyze relevant data and public input.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Newsletter #1. • Send us your ideas and comments. • Come to public meetings and share your ideas.
3	Summer 2009 – Spring 2010	Develop and Evaluate Alternatives. Using staff and public input, the team explores WHAT the Monument's future could look like, develops a range of preliminary alternatives, and presents them to the public in Newsletter #3.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Newsletters #2 and #3. • Send us your ideas and comments. • Come to public meetings and share your ideas.
4	Summer 2010- Spring 2011	Prepare and Publish Draft Document Publish A <i>Draft General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement</i> . The draft document describes the alternatives and potential impacts of implementing each alternative. Based on the impacts and public input, a preferred alternative is identified in the document.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read draft document. • Send us your ideas and comments. • Come to public meetings and share your ideas.
5	Summer 2011- Spring 2012	Revise and Publish Final Document The team will analyze comments by agencies, organizations, and the public, revise the plan, and distribute a <i>Final General Management Plan/ Environmental Impact Statement</i> . The final plan is approved in a published Record of Decision.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read the final document, including responses to substantive comments and official letters.
6	Summer 2012	Implement the Approved Plan After the “Record of Decision” is issued, begin implementing the plan as funding permits.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stay involved throughout implementation of approved plan. Let the park know what you think.

As noted in the first newsletter, the NPS is required to study the 10-mile reach of the Niobrara River contained within the park to see if it should be included in the Wild And Scenic Rivers System. The GMP team, with assistance from the Regional Rivers Coordinator and the Inventory and Monitoring Coordinator's staff, has been conducting an eligibility study. If the river is deemed eligible, the park will consult with the Midwest Regional Office to determine whether to conduct a suitability study as part of the GMP or at a later time.



One of the few paintings of Red Cloud. This is the centennial of his death in 1909. Painting by a friend of the Cook Family, Bessie Sandes Butler, in 1903.

Education/Interpretation/Training

Comments related to education and interpretation focused on methods for visitors to learn more about the history and culture of the Oglala Lakota people, and demonstration exhibits where people can see and touch fossils and/or watch researchers unearthing fossils. Many requested on-site displays so the fossils could be seen in place. Comments also suggested programs about early and current ranching practices.

“Things for kids/ families to do to be educated about the Oglala Lakota Nation. How did Native Americans use their environment? Participate in making a Native American craft.”

“Develop the fossil beds on the trail so people can see the actual fossil out in sight. I’m sure it is a big disappointment to walk and not see anything out in sight.”

“On-going dig that provides research, but also allows the public to watch.”

“I would like to be able to interact with the resources more—hands-on or classes about the park.”

Facilities/Infrastructure

Comments received regarding concerns about development in the park included development of facilities either in a broad sense or in particular areas, such as a campground and a visitor facility at the Stenomylus quarry.

“There is also a need to address stronger long-range uses of the park as an educational facility, with a learning center and overnight accommodations including both camping area and dormitory (w/kitchen).”

“Want a campground there so I can enjoy the landscape with wide night skies!”

“More scientific information to elevate the level of public education. A visitors’ facility at the Stenomylus quarry may be desirable.”

Management/Operations

A number of commenters raised concerns about ensuring the security of the collections and exhibits without inhibiting public access. Others cited a need for a paleontologist and resource management staff.

“...safety and security are obviously primary issues—but there needs to be a full discussion of ways to secure the collections and exhibits without drastically inhibiting public access to seeing and learning about these important materials.”

“Hire a paleontologist as a permanent staff member and program leader.”

“I would like to see a resource management staff at Agate Fossil Beds. People who know the resource.”



Good Road’s dress from the James H. Cook collection.

Comments to be Addressed that are Beyond the Scope of the GMP or More Appropriate for Another Planning Effort

A few comments were received expressing public concern about resources or the management of the Monument that were categorized as either being beyond the scope of the GMP process or that would be better addressed under a specific implementation plan. These comments will be taken into account by the NPS at the Monument for future consideration; however, these comments will not be addressed by the GMP. Topics of these comments include renaming the Monument, rebuilding trust with the Cook family, and cooperation with other agencies.

“Rename the park to reflect all the purposes, e.g., Cook collection, fossils, short-grass prairie. It should have “park” in its name (not monument).”

“Rebuild trust with Cook family.”

You can read all the comments on the park’s website at www.nps.gov/agfo



Beardog and Dinohyus display at the Visitors Center.

What's Next

In the coming months, a range of preliminary alternatives will be developed and analyzed. Each alternative will be developed within the context of the Monument's legislated purpose, significance, and planning issues. Evaluating a range of alternatives enables us to compare and contrast the advantages of one course of action over another, and provides a sound approach to the decision making required by the National

Environmental Policy Act. These alternatives will be presented to the public for review and comment in a third newsletter. The comments received from the public on the preliminary alternatives will help the GMP team refine those alternatives, and will lead to a preferred alternative. The revised alternatives and the preferred alternative will be presented to the public in the Draft General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement. What we heard from you will greatly assist us in these next steps.



Aerial view of Stenomylus Quarry.

Issues to be Addressed by the Plan

Commenters identified concerns or issues to be considered during the GMP process. These concerns are grouped below in broad topics:

Recreation

Several commenters would like to see a trail that provides access to the river for hiking and fishing. Others want to see a campground.

"Promote recreational opportunities, hiking in particular."

"Improve the aquatic environment – fishing, river access."

"A campground would be nice."

Natural and Cultural Resources

During the public involvement process, comments were received regarding concerns or issues about preservation of *in situ* fossils, and bringing back actual bone bed displays.



Other issues raised were grazing, use of pesticides and herbicides, and protection of the Niobrara River ecosystem and watersheds. Commenters want the Cook collection available for general viewing, and requested more emphasis on the Oglala Lakota culture.

"Having locals return the river and rangelands back to the ranching state the Cooks had worked so hard to develop and make productive and so inviting to the Native Americans and other visitors that came and enjoyed the ranch."

"Expansion of Cook collection artifacts for general viewing."

Pictured above, Red Cloud's beaded moccasins, James Cook collection.