



Feral horses,
South Unit

Issues and Influences

This section includes influences and opportunities inside and outside the park, resource-based issues, and internal issues that affect interpretation and education. Collectively, it reflects the perspectives of Theodore Roosevelt National Park’s management team, as well as staff members and stakeholders.

CONCERNS

- Impact of increasing energy exploration and development on lands outside the park boundaries
- Impact and active control of the many invasive, non-native plant species within the park
- Maintaining the park’s natural habitats through prescribed fire and

active management of its bison, elk, and feral horse populations

- The ability of the park to engage the “tech-savvy” and demographically changing public
- The ability of the Division of Interpretation to develop and maintain high quality interpretive services with a small permanent staff and anticipated budget limitations
- Raising awareness in the education community that the park is an important and valuable educational resource

ISSUES

- The park recognizes that the overall interpretive program lacks any mention of American Indian Tribes and their historic and cultural



connections with the Little Missouri Badlands in North Dakota. There is a need to begin consultation with the Tribes to begin to build relationships and to invite their involvement in determining the most appropriate ways to interpret how the Badlands are significant to them.

- Creative enhancements to Painted Canyon Visitor Center could more effectively inform visitors about the park and encourage extended visitation and return visits by communicating what is available to do and see in all three park units.
- There is a need for more publicity about park programs.
- Opportunities for partnerships with local colleges and universities could be explored to provide adult educa-

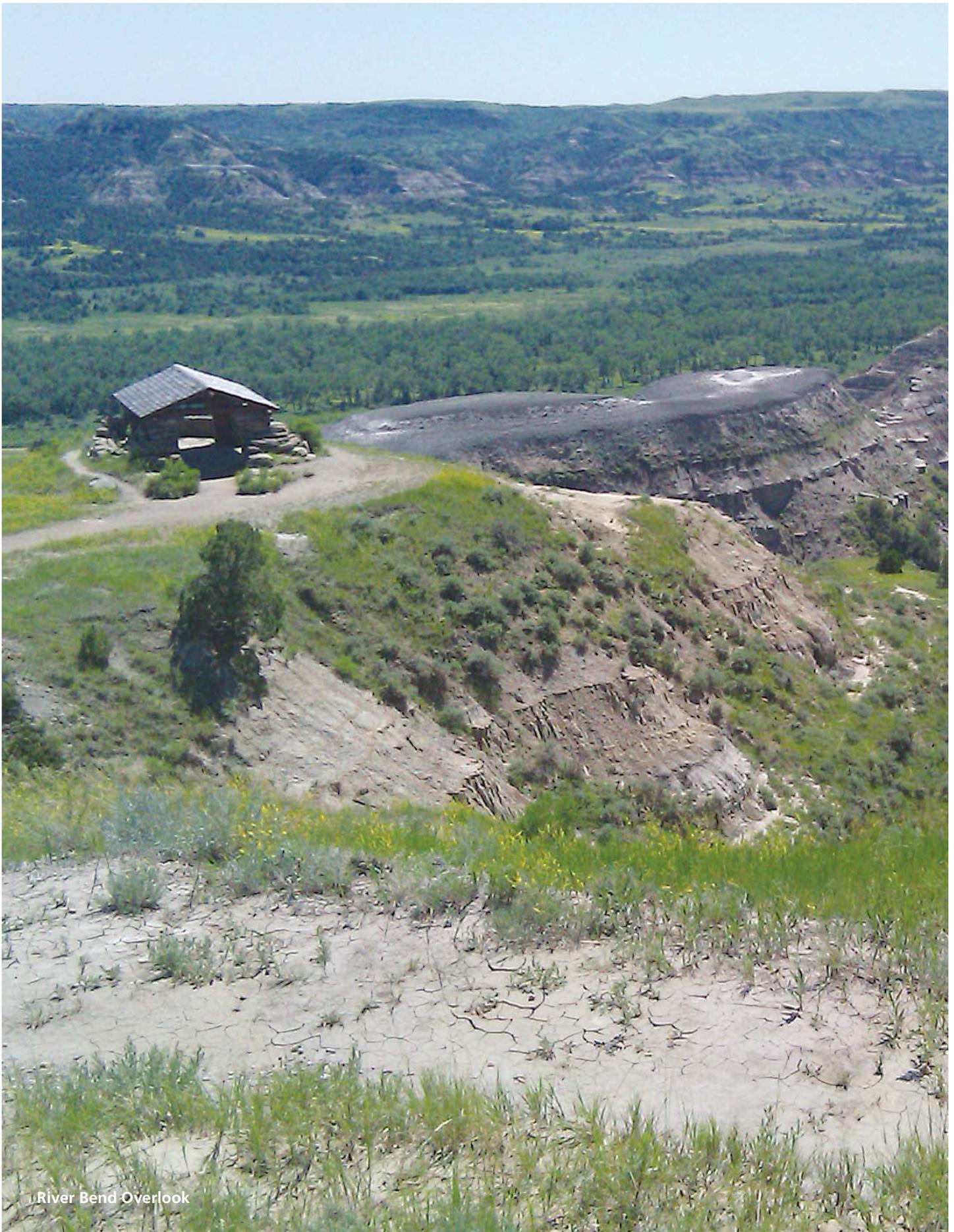
tion and learning activities outside of traditional interpretive programming.

- There is a need to interpret emerging resource issues, both natural and cultural, and to interpret the park as a whole, rather than merely interpreting its individual parts.

OBSERVATIONS

- Relations between the park and surrounding communities are generally good.
- Park programs offer a balance to the more commercialized offerings in the local communities.
- The park is very good at keeping stakeholders informed about park activities and programs.

Energy industry impact



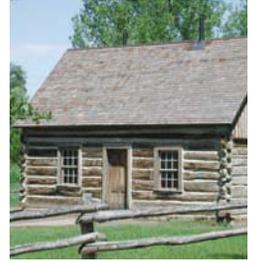
River Bend Overlook



The Setting

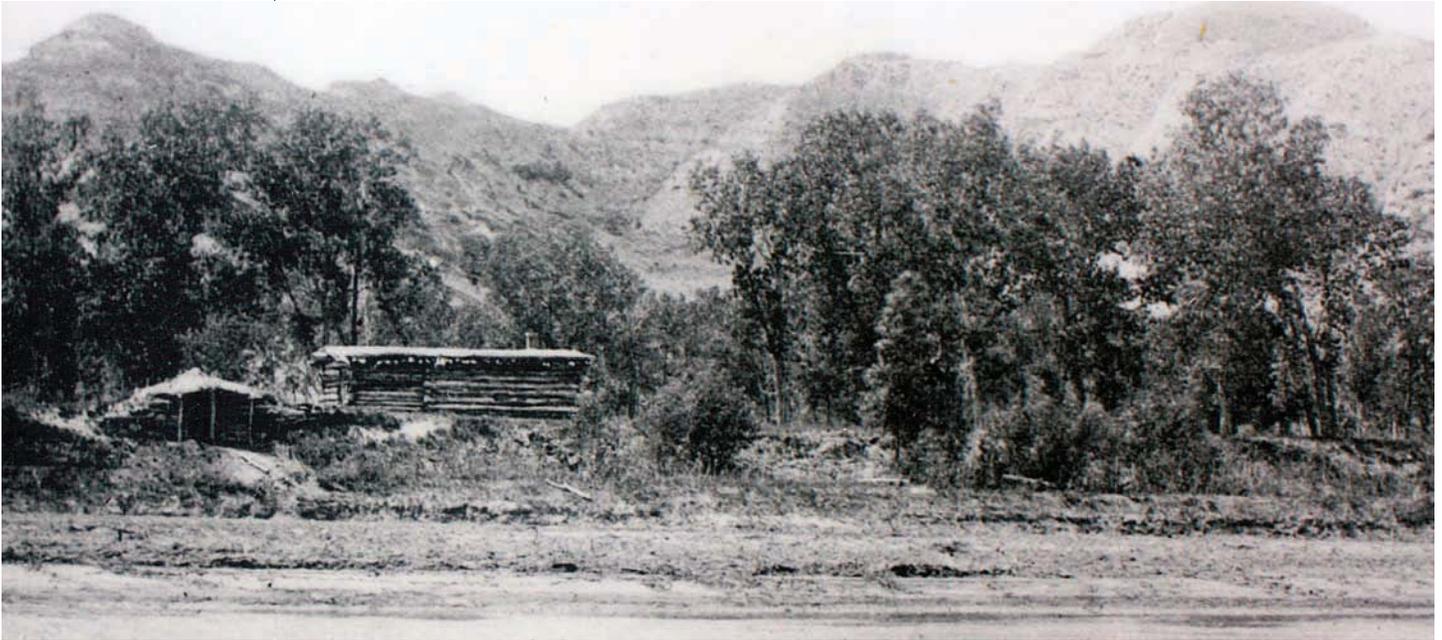
Theodore Roosevelt National Park (THRO) could be considered one of the “undiscovered” jewels of the NPS. The three discontinuous units of the park—the North Unit, South Unit, and Elkhorn Ranch Unit—cover more than 70,000 acres, and offer geological wonders and abundant wildlife. The Little Missouri River flows through and links all three park units. The park is headquartered at the South Unit, in the small town of Medora, North Dakota. In spite of being the state’s most popular tourism destination, its proximity to the town of Medora, and its location on Interstate Highway 94, the park could still be said to occupy a remote location: Billings County, in which Medora is located, has a population of only 827 year-round residents according to 2009 census estimates, while McKenzie County, in which the North Unit is located, counts about 5,799 residents. The two counties together cover almost 4,000 square miles.

SOUTH UNIT. The main visitor center is located in Medora in the South Unit of the park. The visitor center exhibits are professionally designed and well maintained, but date from the mid-1980s, and show it. The park’s current interpretive film, which features quotes and images of Roosevelt, shows on a regular schedule in a small auditorium. A new, high-quality park film is currently being produced by Argentine Productions; it is scheduled to be finished by September 2011. A cooperating association sales area offers Theodore Roosevelt and natural science materials, as well as a variety of items for children. Roosevelt’s Maltese Cross Cabin, moved from his first ranch, is located in back of the visitor center. Interpretive tours of the furnished cabin are offered periodically



Roosevelt’s Maltese Cross Cabin

Existing Conditions



Historic photo,
Elkhorn Ranch

throughout the day during the summer months; access is self-guided in the off-season.

The most popular visitor attraction at the South Unit is the 36-mile scenic loop, which features many pullouts, some interpretive signs, and a variety of hiking trails. It provides excellent opportunities for viewing wildlife. In season, a park concessioner, Shadow Country Outfitters, offers guided horseback trail rides from historic Peaceful Valley Ranch. Camping is available in the Cottonwood Campground; Roundup Horse Camp provides visitors with horses a place to camp with their stock. Backcountry camping is also available.

NORTH UNIT. The North Unit Visitor Center includes exhibits, a small cooperating association sales area, and a television screen with an audio-visual program. The 14-mile scenic drive offers spectacular scenery—including the River Bend Overlook,

said to be one of North Dakota's most photographed scenes—and plentiful wildlife, especially bison. The North Unit also includes hiking trails, frontcountry camping in the Juniper Campground, and backcountry camping opportunities.

The 96-mile Maah Daah Hey Trail passes through or near all three units of the park and is available to hikers and equestrians. It starts at Sully Creek State Park, located south of Medora, and proceeds to the CCC Campground, which is just south of the North Unit. The parts of the trail that pass through the park do not allow bicycles, although the rest of the trail does.

ELKHORN RANCH. The Elkhorn Ranch, which is a separate, discontinuous unit of the park, can be challenging to find, and road conditions sometimes discourage access. However, the Elkhorn is at the heart of the park's Theodore Roosevelt story. Once there, it is possible to



experience some of the beauty and solitude of life on the Little Missouri that Roosevelt himself described so eloquently. It is an inspiring place to visit, and is undeveloped except for a set of wayside exhibits, installed in 2008, that interpret Roosevelt's time at his "home ranch."

PAINTED CANYON VISITOR CENTER AND OVERLOOK.

One of the most dramatic aspects of visiting Theodore Roosevelt NP is that as one drives west along on Interstate 94 through rolling ranch and farming country, the scenery suddenly opens up to a fantastic Badlands landscape. This first encounter from the east occurs at the Painted Canyon Visitor Center and Overlook. The small visitor center there features a limited number of exhibits, but also a very successful sales area run by the park's cooperating association, the Theodore Roosevelt Nature and History Association. The most compelling feature at Painted Canyon is the large patio overlooking

the Badlands, offering the visitor the first taste of what is to come. A sidewalk along the rim of the Badlands offers one of the few totally accessible overlooks in the park.

Painted Canyon is underutilized as an interpretive facility. It is an ideal place to orient people to what there is to do in the park at large. Though this is currently accomplished by NPS and TRNHA staff at the information desk, waysides and exhibits are out of date and do not focus on enticing visitors to further explore the park, stop over in Medora, or come back at a later time. In addition, signs on I-94 indicating the visitor center do not clearly identify it as part of a National Park, and there is no directional sign to Painted Canyon that indicates the exit for eastbound travelers. The Painted Canyon Visitor Center is open from April 1-November 11 (weather permitting). During the time it is open, lack of staffing as well as safety and security concerns limit the hours of operation. The restrooms

Above Left:
Peaceful Valley
Ranch

Above Right:
Painted Canyon
Visitor Center
Overlook

are open 24 hours per day during the operational season.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT NATURE AND HISTORY ASSOCIATION (TRNHA). The TRNHA is the park's cooperating association. The organization, which was created in 1951, promotes and supports historical, scientific, and educational activities at the park. Publications and other products related to Theodore Roosevelt NP are offered for sale at the North and South Units and Painted Canyon Visitor Center. The South Unit sales area has an exceptional children's corner and provides good theme-related sales items, not only on Theodore Roosevelt, but also on the park's many natural features. The North Unit cooperating association sales area materials focus more on natural resources. In addition to travel and orientation items, the sales area at Painted Canyon Visitor Center includes a full complement of Theodore Roosevelt titles and children's articles. The Association also operates retail functions at Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site and the Upper Souris National Wildlife Refuge, both in North Dakota. Proceeds provide support for interpretive films, publications, interpretive programs, museum activities, and research.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT. Resource management strategies at the park provide unique interpretive opportunities, as the park is engaged in a number of cutting-edge initiatives. The Elk Management Program has attracted national attention. Under

this plan, small teams of supervised volunteers are utilized to lethally reduce the elk population to 100-400 animals. Management of the feral horse population through intermittent roundups remains a long standing controversial issue. The park is conducting research regarding the innovative use of contraceptives as a potential tool for future feral horse population control. Bison management also requires a roundup whenever the population exceeds desired management levels. Generally, roundups of bison are required every 3-5 years in the North and South Units. Management of non-native plant species is significant and requires innovative solutions as well. The use of prescribed fire to maintain grassland ecosystems remains an important management tool and an interpretive challenge, as there continues to be relatively poor understanding and acceptance of prescribed fire by area residents.

Park History

Theodore Roosevelt National Memorial Park was established in 1947 in memory of the president whose experiences in North Dakota helped shape his conservation ethic. The park was redesignated as Theodore Roosevelt National Park in 1978. It is one of six national parks that feature Roosevelt; the others are Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace NHS, Sagamore Hill NHS, Theodore Roosevelt Inaugural NHS, Theodore Roosevelt Island, and Mount Rushmore National Memorial. Early interpretation at the park focused on Roosevelt's time

in the Dakota Badlands, but since the 1970's emphasis has shifted to the park's natural resources. Roosevelt's road to the presidency, shaped by his own admission by his life in North Dakota, along with his strong support for conservation of natural resources, provide the perfect platform for an interpretive strategy that combines history and nature into an integrated set of stories with strong national significance.

Issues like climate change, management strategies for wildlife and other resources, and development outside the park have become increasingly important to visitors in recent years. North Dakota's oil boom is of particular concern, especially with regard to industrial odors and the protection of natural viewsheds and soundsheds, and because of its impact on roads and transportation in the area. At least one oil well is already visible from the Elkhorn Ranch, others are visible from some of the South Unit overlooks, and there are sure to be more to come in other areas surrounding the park. Wind, natural gas, and coal energy may also have an impact as these energy sources continue to be developed in the state.

The park's planning documents, including the General Management Plan (GMP) and prior Interpretive Prospectus, are outdated. A Cultural Affiliation Statement and Ethnographic Resource Assessment Study was completed for all three North Dakota National Park units (the others are Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site and Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site) in December 2008. The document provides

invaluable background information on the park's culturally affiliated and traditionally associated tribal peoples, and includes many recommendations provided by tribal consultants that have helped inform the LRIP regarding interpretation of the park's important American Indian stories.

Information and Orientation

WAYFINDING. Signs directing people to the park from the interstate highway are minimal. A single brown highway sign from the west indicates the presence of the park. Signs from the east indicating Painted Canyon Visitor Center do not identify it as part of the national park. As indicated above, Painted Canyon could better serve the park as a key venue in capturing the interest of visitors, many of whom are headed west toward Yellowstone and Glacier National Parks. Signs directing visitors to park headquarters, the South Unit Visitor Center, and the scenic drive are adequate within the town of Medora, as are directional wayfinding signs within the park.

WEBSITE. The park website features a number of professionally produced multimedia presentations, including a downloadable audio tour of the Elkhorn Ranch. Abundant information is available on Roosevelt's life in North Dakota, as well as on the wildlife and geological features that can be observed in the park. It includes an up-to-date schedule of the exact programs offered each month, including their place and time.

PUBLICATIONS. The park's unigrid brochure emphasizes the Roosevelt

Existing Conditions

The DSU Theodore Roosevelt Center kiosk

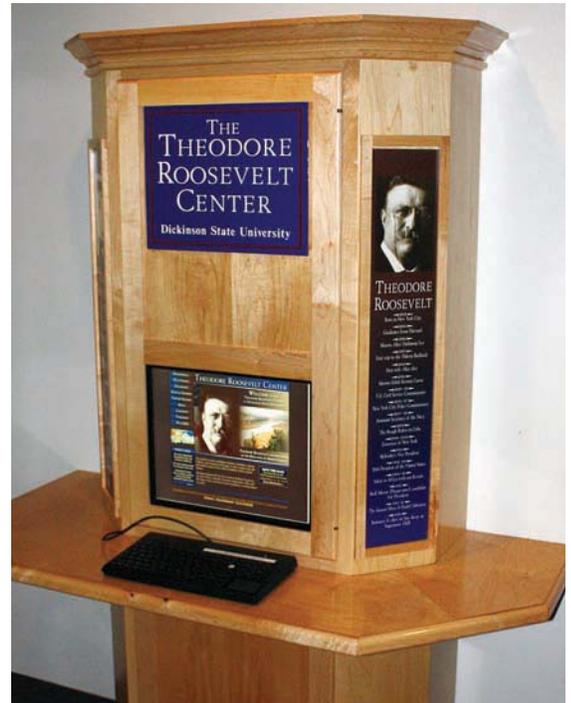
aspect of the park's history. It provides short descriptions of things to see and do in the North and South Units, but requests that visitors ask for information before travelling to the Elkhorn Ranch. The park newspaper covers the three North Dakota National Park units; it has recently been revised to be a trip planning tool that can be used by visitors before and during their visits. Beginning in fiscal year 2012, it will be distributed at the entrance stations during the high visitation summer season rather than only being available in the visitor centers. A number of site bulletins are available at the visitor centers. These cover a variety of natural and cultural history topics. They are being revised to conform to current NPS graphic identity standards and the content is being rewritten to be interpretive rather than informational.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT CENTER/ DICKINSON STATE KIOSK.

Dickinson State University's Theodore Roosevelt Center has provided a computer kiosk for the lobby of the South Unit Visitor Center that provides online access to the Center's growing data base of Roosevelt documents and other information. The kiosk provides visitors with an immediate means for more in-depth learning about the life and achievements of the president.

The Audience

Annual visitation in recent years has been over half a million; 2010 saw a 6.2% increase (630,326) over the previous year. Visitation is centered on the South Unit. In addition to



the North Dakotans who are a substantial segment of the park's audience, many visitors are from the upper Midwest or Canada. The main period of visitation extends from June through September, with the Fourth of July marking the beginning of the high season. Shoulder seasons are becoming busier. Winter visitation is quite low, especially in the North Unit.

The park has not participated in a Visitor Studies Project through the University of Idaho, but two other types of studies have been completed in the last decade: a "Summary of Visitor Characteristics and Investigation of Group Differences" by researchers from the University of Minnesota's Department of Forest Resources, Cooperative Park Studies Program, August 2002; and "Visitor Meanings at Theodore Roosevelt National Park," a master's thesis (MS degree in Resource Interpretation) by Victoria L. Mates, Stephen F. Austin State University, completed May 2006.

The Interpretive Experience

The majority of visitors come to the park as part of short vacation trips to Medora, which features a number of tourist attractions, including a long-running musical with historical themes that features Theodore Roosevelt. The town offers several visitor facilities that complement park experiences, including the Chateau de Mores State Historic Site, the North Dakota Cowboy Hall of Fame, the Billings County Museum, and the Rough Riders Hotel, where Roosevelt himself stayed in later years. More visitors tour the South Unit than the North, with Elkhorn Ranch being the least visited unit. The typical visit to the South Unit might include a stop at the visitor center, followed by a driving tour of the park's scenic loop. In addition, a variety of hiking trails are available for visitors wishing to explore the park on foot. A detailed "Road Log Guide" has been available for sale at park visitor centers or online at the cooperating association website. TRNHA is exploring options

for offering the same content in audio and podcast formats to be compatible with electronic media.

The North Unit features hiking trails in addition to a 14-mile scenic drive. Most of the North Unit trails are longer and more rugged than those in the South Unit. Some trails in both units traverse the park's designated wilderness area.

Visitors to Elkhorn Ranch Unit will find new wayside exhibits at the entrance to the site of the ranch house, but the actual site has deliberately been left undeveloped, and interpretation is minimal so as to preserve the sense of solitude, peace, and quiet that Roosevelt himself enjoyed. An audio tour of the Elkhorn Ranch and three podcasts are available on the park website; a CD version of the audio tour is available for sale at the South Unit Visitor Center.

EDUCATION. The park does not have a formal Education Program. The park is under-utilized as an educational entity for all phases of education, from

Interpretive
Wayside Exhibits,
Elkhorn Ranch



Existing Conditions

kindergarten to college level. School classes from kindergarten through high school do visit the park, but do not receive programming specifically linked to state science and history curricula. Fourth and fifth grade classes would be a particularly prime audience for park programming. Park staff would like to promote more school group visitation, but recognize the challenges conveyed by a very small park staff, long travel distances within the state, and limited funding for field trips.

School outreach and distance learning strategies may alleviate some of these challenges.

The park has distance learning equipment on site, but has not had the opportunity to put it to use. Medora's Community Center is equipped with distance learning and video conferencing capability, and makes the equipment available to De Mores Elementary School, which is close by. Local teachers have been experimenting with creating their own podcasts with their classes, and routinely have the

use of Smartboard technology in the classroom. There are a number of opportunities to connect with schools through electronic media and distance learning. Though most North Dakota schools are small and rural, over 90% have access to distance learning technology.

The Visitor Center and headquarters do not currently have wireless internet service.

INTERPRETIVE MEDIA. The South Unit Visitor Center's 1970's-era exhibits are well designed. They emphasize Theodore Roosevelt's experiences in the Badlands, but do not address his impact on the national conservation movement. Interpretation of the park's natural resources is also limited, as are American Indian stories. The park's film—effective, but outdated, focusing almost exclusively on Roosevelt—is being replaced with a new film with high production values. The new film addresses the park's dramatic landscape, and Roosevelt as an example of the way a close relationship with the land has shaped the American character. It emphasizes that Roosevelt's experiences in North Dakota helped him become the greatest conservationist in presidential history, designating hundreds of millions of acres as national parks, wildlife refuges, national monuments, national game preserves, and national forests.

The North Unit Visitor Center is very small. Its exhibits, which address park wildlife, share space with the lobby/information desk. A small room with comfortable chairs houses a TV screen showing a recently produced

North Unit Visitor Center exhibits





audio-visual introduction to the North Unit. The new park film will be shown periodically at the North Unit when it becomes available.

With the exception of the signs at Elkhorn Ranch, the existing wayside exhibits in both the North and South Units are a mixture of various vintages of outdated signs that are largely descriptive rather than interpretive. Park themes are not evident from the existing wayside exhibits.

PROGRAMS. The park offers a number of ranger programs, covering a wide range of topics, from early June through Labor Day. Programs are available at other times during the year as staffing allows. They are well publicized in the community, including in local motels and restaurants. Programs

showcase both the park's natural and cultural history, and include interpretive talks, evening campfire programs at Cottonwood and Juniper Campgrounds, guided walks, guided tours of the Maltese Cross Cabin, and a few longer hikes.

Personel

The Interpretation Division is a very small one. In addition to the Chief of Interpretation, who also serves as the park's Public Information Officer and Volunteer Coordinator, the staff consists of a South Unit District Interpreter, a North Unit District Interpreter, and nine to twelve seasonal interpreters. Student Conservation Association Interns supplement the summer staff.

A Student Conservation Association Intern (SCA) presents an interpretive program at the South Unit Visitor Center

