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CUSTER BATTLEFIELD NATIONAL MONUMENT
PLANNING ISSUES AND ALTERNATIVE SOLUTION APPROACHES

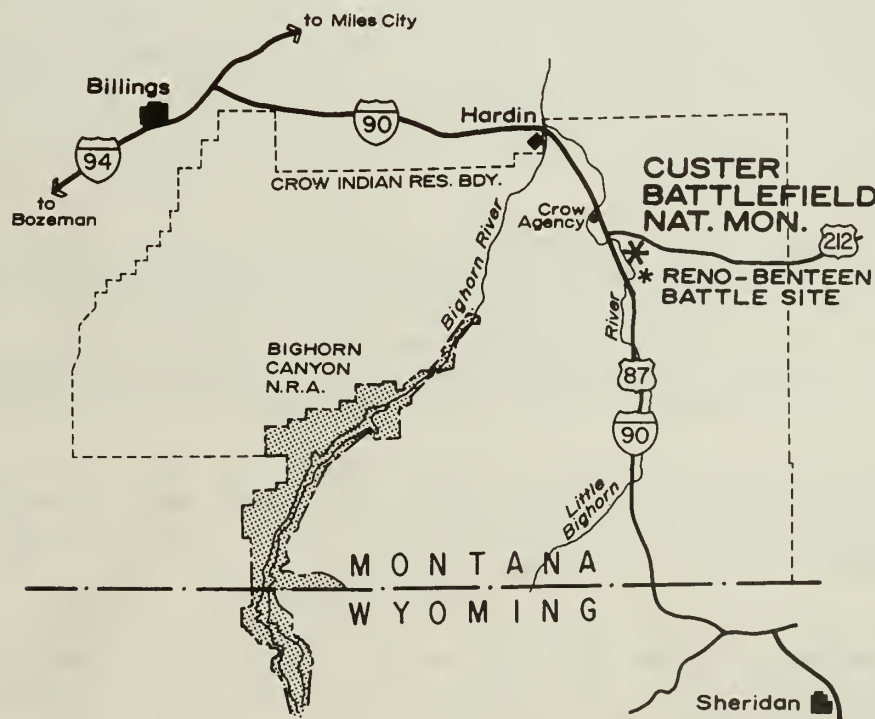
Introduction

This is a request to seek public and other Agency comment and input into the new long range plan for Custer Battlefield National Monument. It is important to receive your comments in the early stages of the planning process to assure that all issues and alternatives are considered. Space is provided in the back of this document for your written responses. Please return response back to us before December 15, 1982. You may keep the first nine pages of the document.

The new plan (a master plan) entitled the "General Management Plan" is being prepared by a National Park Service interdisciplinary planning team. This plan will provide guidance and direction for managing the park over the next 20 years. Issues raised and alternative approaches developed to date were prepared by the planning team and from public response to a flyer listing issues.

One additional public response period will follow this mailing. It will consist of a 30-day public review and response to the environmental assessment. The environmental assessment will present alternative plans including the National Park Service preferred plan and an analysis of the impacts of each alternative plan. The environmental analysis is scheduled for distribution in June 1983. The mailing list for the environmental assessment will consist of those interested citizens and Agencies responding to this planning document.

Location



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Custer Battlefield National Monument is located in the northwestern part of the Crow Reservation, Big Horn County, in south central Montana. It is comprised of two plots of land consisting of 602 acres at the Custer last stand site and 162 acres at the Reno-Benteen battle site.

Surrounding Land Use

Lands surrounding the monument are primarily under Indian ownership. These lands are either allotted, Tribal or individually owned and can be leased to anyone. Predominate land use is agriculture consisting of irrigated farming in most of the bottom lands along the river and grazing on the upland hills. Several farmsteads and residences are located along the Little Bighorn River valley.

Purpose of the National Monument

The primary purpose of the national monument is to preserve and protect all historic resources pertaining to the Battle of the Little Bighorn, and to provide visitors with a greater understanding of those events which led up to the battle, the encounter itself, and the various effects the encounter had on the two cultures involved. A portion of the monument is to be administered and maintained as the Custer Battlefield National Cemetery.

The National Park Service's primary mission is to preserve this nationally significant resource for the enjoyment of the public. It is their responsibility to promote a greater understanding of the total event that took place and those involved. The resource that the battlefield represents is more than Custer's engagement with Indians. Therefore, the story and all supporting facilities should in no way overshadow the pride and tradition associated with either force involved. There should be no psychological barriers to draw attention to any one particular individual or groups of individuals. Interpretation must begin on equal grounds in an effort to develop a thorough understanding of The Battle of the Little Bighorn.

The national cemetery is now closed to burials, except for the burials of spouses in reserved spaces. About 117 reserved spaces next to spouses and about 680 reservations with spouses remain. There were 34 burials in 1981.

The Monument's Resources

The primary resource of the national monument is the battlefield itself. The stage, upon which The Battle of the Little Bighorn was enacted, encompasses the broad, open panorama of the Little Bighorn River valley, the grassy hills, the coulees, and the tree-lined river with its agricultural bottomlands. Remaining physical evidence of the battle itself are the shallow battle entrenchments and rifle pits dug by Custer's troops.

Superimposed on this scene are the simple stone markers, depicting the site where each officer, soldier, and civilian-employed Indian scout fell, one monument under which some 200 soldiers are buried, and the present national cemetery.

Ground cover of the battlefield and surrounding country is made up largely of bluestem grass, grama grass, Buffalo grass, clumps of sagebrush, yucca, greasewood and prickly pear plants, typical of a semiarid climate. Because the battlefield has been fenced since 1891, it has not been overgrazed, and it is one of the few areas in the region where the original grasses remain largely undisturbed.

The existing development consists of a two-thirds-mile access road into the northwestern part of the monument from U.S. Highway 212. At the Last Stand site are the national cemetery, the visitor center, and parking area, the historical monument marking the mass grave of 200 of Custer's men, and the historical markers. Just west of the national cemetery is a stone house built in 1894. A five and one-half mile, hard surfaced, access road connects this area to the Reno-Bentzen site, which includes a parking area, historical marker, and an interpretive trail.

Management Objectives

All decisions concerning the management, use, and development of the park are directed toward achieving these objectives and fulfilling the park's purpose. Management objectives provide a framework for conserving park resources, for integrating the park into its regional environment, and for accommodating environmentally compatible public use in accordance with existing National Park Service management policies.

Essentially, the management objectives are a list of desired conditions. Because they spell out ends rather than means, they do not preclude alternative planning strategies. Rather, they provide a framework that enables planners and managers to work toward fulfilling the park purpose, while applying Park Service policy.

The management objectives for Custer Battlefield National Monument are as follows:

To manage the natural resources, so as to continue to maintain the general environmental scene as it appeared at the time of The Battle of the Little Bighorn in 1876.

To provide the visitor with the opportunity for appropriate interpretation and orientation of those events that led up to The Battle of the Little Bighorn, the encounter itself, and the effects of the encounter on the two cultures involved.

To provide for the preservation and protection of historic structures, relics, artifacts, and museum collections in a manner that will assure their availability for the education, research, and enjoyment of the public.

To continue to acquire historical objects that are essential for interpretive purposes and that serve the national monument study collection holdings.

To promote the use of the monument for the study of regional Indian culture and the effects of early western expansion through cooperation with other government Agencies, organizations, the Crow, Northern Cheyenne, and Sioux Tribes, and other public interests.

Cooperate with the Crow Tribe, other Agencies and groups in maintaining compatible land use around the battlefield.

To interpret the historic elements within the national cemetery.

To manage and maintain the national cemetery within its present limits.

Legislative and Administrative Constraints

The following list of constraints are utilized in the management, operations, and for future planning purposes of the monument.

Custer Battlefield Deed No. 8, June 28, 1938, granted to the United States Government a right-of-way extending from the Custer Battlefield to the Reno-Benteen Battlefield through Crow Indian (Tribal and allotted) land.

Cooperative Agreement, of January 25, 1979, between the State of Montana, and the United States of America, acting through the appropriate officials of Eastern Montana College, Billings, Montana, states that it would be in the best interest of the public to have the college participate in the physical protection and preservation of the collection of correspondence, manuscripts, books, documents, etc., relating to The Battle of the Little Bighorn. The college will also provide an area within close proximity of Custer Battlefield National Monument for academic use and dissemination of the information contained within this collection. This agreement expired September 30, 1982. (It will be renegotiated.)

Custer Battlefield National Monument is on the National Register of Historic Places. Preservation of the area's cultural resources fall under the 1906 Antiquities Act, the 1935 Historic Sites Act, the 1966 National Historic Preservation Act as amended, Executive Order 11593, and the 1979 Archeological Resources Protection Act as well as the Park Service historic preservation program.

The Custer Battlefield Historical and Museum Association, Inc. operates the bookstore at the visitor center. The association is a non-profit organization.

Executive Order Nos. 11988 and 11990 control any development on 100/500-year flood plains and designated wetland habitats.

Problem Statement

Issues identified to date and alternative approaches to their solutions are:

1. Issue

The need to identify and protect the historic resources that relate to the Battle of the Little Bighorn, and immediate surrounding area.

Many artifacts relating to the Battle of the Little Bighorn have been found outside of the existing monument boundary. Some of these have been lost, destroyed, and the site disturbed to the extent that some site specific historical integrity has been diminished. The present landscape setting of the monument is quite similar to that of June 25 and 26, 1876. The rolling hills, valleys, bluffs, and rivers have a similar landscape character to that of 1876 with minimal disturbance detectable to most of the monument's visitors.

Many trees still exist along the Little Bighorn River similar to those that screened views of the large Indian villages from Custer's troops and

offered both sides of the battle some cover. The river valley has received the most change since June 1876. It presently contains tilled fields, county roads, some farmsteads, a railroad, and interstate highway. The rolling hills, bluffs and draws surrounding the battle fields have remained as pasture lands retaining the open grasslands character of June 1876. Threats to the setting and to undiscovered battle artifacts are mounting as demands for more ranchsteads with accompanying threats to the historical resource such as roads, powerlines, motor vehicles, and buildings increase. Strict land use control is necessary if the undiscovered and unidentified artifacts are to be protected and if the existing landscape is to retain its historical integrity for the enjoyment of future generations. The alternative approaches listed suggest several methods of achieving this, there may be others that have not surfaced as yet. We will appreciate your views on this and the other issues and alternatives, please elaborate in the space provided in the back of this document (attach additional sheets, if necessary). The present alternative approaches are:

- a. Existing conditions to continue.
- b. Expand the boundaries of the park.
- c. Support private financing to acquire threatened lands.
- d. Seek authorization for acquisition and/or appropriations for lands in fee title or less than fee.
- e. Coordinate land exchanges between National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, allottees, Tribe, and State.
- f. Other

2. Issue

Need to provide the visitor with a better comprehension of the events and historical perspective of the Battle of the Little Bighorn.

The first-time visitor to the monument finds the current visitor circulation routes counter productive to sequential understanding of the events of June 25 and 26, 1876. Visitors are not oriented to the chronology of the battle unless they make a special effort to go first to the Reno-Benteen battle site and return to the Custer last stand site. These two battle sites are disjointed creating a cognitive void in the events relating to the battles at these two isolated sites. Visitor interpretation of the monument is also incomplete. Very few visitors ever venture to that area near Garryowen, where the Indians and Major Reno had their first encounter. Thus, visitors only view from atop the bluffs, the woods along the Little Bighorn River from which Major Reno's troops made their frantic retreat. Visitors can not get the full appreciation of the Battle of the Little Bighorn, if they do not see firsthand the valley, progress to the Reno-Benteen battle site, and terminate their visit at the climactic "last stand" site.

The following alternative approaches have been presented, some of which will work in combination with others. If you have others, please elaborate on them.

Alternative Approaches

- a. Existing conditions to continue.
- b. Provide opportunities and facilities for visitor exposure to correct chronological battle sequence.
 1. Park entrance at Garryowen.
 2. Park entrance at Reno Creek.
 3. Park entrance at the Junction I-90 and Highway 212.
 4. Shuttle system starting at the park entrance.
- c. Improve quality/extent of static interpretive media.
- d. Expand personal services interpretation program.
- e. Augment the park interpretive program through private and public sector coordination at the:
 1. Proposed privately operated Plains Indian Museum.
 2. Proposed State highway rest area/visitor information center near the Junction I-90 and Highway 212.
- f. Improve visitor understanding of the Indian role in the battle.
- g. Initiate a guided tour bus system throughout the park and to Garryowen. If a guided tour bus system is selected, what would be a fair price for a tour of the park?
- h. Other

3. Issue

Need to resolve the problems of oversize vehicles in the monument.

Oversize vehicles entering the monument consist of semi-tractors, some with their trailers attached, motor homes, pickup campers, busses and camp trailers. The proximity of the monument to Interstate 90 is a major contributing factor for a large number of these oversize vehicles entering the monument. A great number of visitor's complain that these vehicles look totally out of place in the prairie grass landscape setting of the monument. The roads are narrow and turning radii are often too tight to accommodate these vehicles. Some semi-tractor drivers park their trailers in a graveled parking area at the junction of Montana 212 and the entrance to the monument and proceed into the monument with the tractor only. Acknowledging the fact that drivers of these oversize vehicles do have a right to visit the monument, the following alternative approaches have surfaced. Other suggested solutions and how to carry these solutions out are most welcome.

Alternative Approaches

- a. Existing conditions to continue.
- b. Provide adequate parking space near the park entrance and provide a shuttle transportation system to and within the park. Private cars may be used within the park.
- c. Eliminate private vehicles; require all visitors to use guided bus tours during the heavy visitor use season.
- d. Upgrade and enlarge roadways and parking facilities within the park to accommodate these oversize vehicles.
- e. Provide a one-way road system with adequate parking and turning radii.
- f. Provide parking for trailers outside the park entrance.
- g. Other.

4. Issue

Need to provide adequate storage and protection of museum collections.

The existing museum collections are stored at Eastern Montana College in Billings and in a secure storage area at the monument's museum. There is a desire by some for a more visible storage area and that research opportunities be provided for serious individuals as well as institutions. Some suggest removal of existing museum storage from its present location and construction of a new facility out of the historic district. The following list of alternative approaches have been developed so far. Your comments and suggestions on this issue are most welcome.

Alternative Approaches

- a. Existing conditions to continue. (Shared locations.)
- b. All storage within the park.
- c. Expand facilities in the park to display more historical items.
- d. Other

5. Issue

Need to provide picnic and sanitary facilities.

Currently many visitors carry a picnic lunch to the monument and eat their lunch on the national cemetery lawn in the shade of the large trees. This is the only outdoor area within the monument that provides relief from the hot mid-day sun. Limited sanitary facilities exist at the visitor center only. There is a demonstrated need to provide sanitary facilities in the vicinity of the Reno-Benteen battle area located approximately five and one-half road miles from the visitor center. A list of alternative approaches identified to date is stated below. If you have any comments, please present them.

Alternative Approaches

- a. Existing conditions to continue.
- b. Seek cooperation with other organizations for providing needed facilities outside the park.
- c. Provide picnic and/or sanitary facilities within the park;
 - 1)--at the headquarter area (revamp existing sanitary facilities for handicapped access and enlarge)--no picnic facilities.
 - 2)--at the Reno-Benteen area--sanitation facilities only (underground building to eliminate historic resource deterioration).
 - 3)--on bottom lands near the river on land outside the present boundary--both picnic and sanitary facilities.
- d. Other.

6. Issue

Need to expand the national cemetery.

The national cemetery in Custer Battlefield National Monument was officially closed to new burials in 1977, except for the burials of spouses

in reserved spaces. About 117 reserved spaces next to spouses and about 680 reservations with spouses remain. There were 34 burials in 1981.

Further expansion into the park causes a greater encroachment on the historic integrity of the Custer "last stand" site. The following alternative approaches have surfaced. If you have others, please present them.

Alternative Approaches

- a. Existing conditions to continue (cemetery closed to further interments).
- b. Work with Veterans Administration and State to find a nearby site outside the park.
- c. Locate a memorial section (for cremations) within the existing gravesite area.
- d. Other.

7. Issue

Need to continue national cemetery irrigation within the park.

The vegetation of the national cemetery consists of a green grass lawn surrounded by large spruce, fir, and juniper trees. A spray irrigation system is used to maintain this lush appearance. Water in the area contains iron and manganese that is deposited on the white marble headstones and monuments staining them brown. This brown coloration intensifies each year. The spray irrigation is also eroding inscriptions on the historical architectural monuments that depict graves moved from other military cemeteries to Custer Battlefield. Some inscriptions have become illegible due to the spray action on these historical monuments.

The national cemetery is the predominant focal point of Custer Battlefield National Monument to most first-time visitors. The large evergreen trees stand out against the sky line creating a foreign element in the natural prairie grass landscape as viewed by visitors when they approach the area along Interstate 90 and Highway 212. When these visitors arrive at the visitor center parking area, their attention is drawn to the national cemetery's lush appearance and the large evergreen trees that dominate the landscape. They mistakenly assume that this cemetery is Custer's "last stand" site and that all buried there are his troops. It is not until the visitors enter the visitor center that their attention is directed toward Custer Hill overlooking the visitor center.

National cemetery maintenance, including irrigation, at Custer Battlefield is very costly, approximately \$100,000 each year. The National Park Service funds the entire cost of maintaining the national cemetery. The following alternative approaches have been presented. If you have other alternatives or suggestions, please list them.

Alternative Approaches

- a. Existing condition to continue.
- b. Convert existing lawn areas to native grasses and wildflowers, eliminate irrigation and maintain by mowing several times per season.

- c. Install an underground drip irrigation system.
- d. Other.

8. Issue

Need for additional maintenance storage.

Storage for equipment and supplies to maintain the national monument and national cemetery is very limited. The maintenance building is located near the national cemetery requiring that the area around this building remain neat appearing at all times. The alternative approaches are listed below. If you have some thoughts on this issue, please share them with the study team.


Alternative Approaches

- a. Existing conditions to continue.
- b. Enlarge the present building with an additional 27' x 36' wing.
- c. Double-deck some bays and install a freight elevator.
- d. Other.


CLOSING STATEMENT

Thank you for taking the time to read and comment on the long range planning issues and alternative approaches for the Custer Battlefield National Monument General Management Plan. A response deadline is set for December 15, 1982. Please send your comments to us before that date to permit their use in the planning process.

Public review and comment period for the environmental assessment and draft general management plan is scheduled for June 1983. At that time there will be a minimum 30-day review period. AGAIN, THE MAILING LIST FOR THE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT WILL CONSIST OF THOSE INTERESTED CITIZENS AND AGENCIES RESPONDING TO THIS PLANNING DOCUMENT.



Superintendent, Custer Battlefield NM



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COMMENT SHEET

Please use space provided to respond to these planning issues. Use additional sheets if necessary. You may retain the first nine pages of this document.

1. The need to identify and protect the historic resources that relate to the Battle of the Little Bighorn, and immediate surrounding area.

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 - 4. Shuttle system starting at park entrance
- c. Improve quality/extent of static interpretive media.
- d. Expand personal services interpretive program.
- e. Augment the park interpretation program through private and public sector coordination at the;
 - 1. Proposed privately owned plains Indian Museum
 - 2. Proposed State Highway rest area/visitor information center near the junction of I-90 and Highway 212
- f. Improve visitor understanding of the Indian role in the battle.

- g. Initiate a guided tour bus system throughout the park and to Garryowen. If a guided tour bus system is selected, what would be a fair price for a tour of the park?
- h. Other.

3. Need to resolve the problems of oversize vehicles in the monument.

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- c. Eliminate all private vehicles; require all visitors to use guided tour busses during the heavy use season.
- d. Upgrade and enlarge roadways and parking facilities within the park to accommodate these oversize vehicles.
- e. Provide a one way road system with adequate parking and turning radii.
- f. Provide parking for trailers outside the park entrance.
- g. Other.

4. Need to provide adequate storage and protection of museum collections.

- a. Existing conditions to continue (shared location).
- b. All storage within the park.
- c. Expand park facilities in the park to display more historical items.
- d. Other.

5. Need to provide picnic and sanitary facilities.

- a. Existing conditions to continue.
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- c. Provide picnic and/or sanitary facilities within the park:
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 - 3. On bottom lands near the river on land outside the present boundary--both picnic and sanitary facilities.
- d. Other

6. Need to expand the national cemetery.

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