



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Niobrara National Scenic River

214 W. Highway 20

Valentine, Nebraska 69201

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IN REPLY REFER TO:

L76(NIOB)

March 29, 2012

**Subject: Preparation of a River Management Plan and Commercial Services Strategy for
Niobrara National Scenic River**

Dear Friends and Neighbors:

Niobrara National Scenic River is beginning the process of developing a River Management Plan and environmental assessment (RMP). The broad purpose of the RMP is to provide enjoyable visitor experiences consistent with the preservation of the river's outstandingly remarkable values (ORVs) as identified in the 2007 General Management Plan (GMP).

The goals of the RMP are to 1) review the ORVs, free-flowing condition and water quality; 2) refine desired future conditions of the ORVs; 3) establish guidelines to manage and protect the ORVs; 4) define zones of visitor use and appropriate activities within those zones; and 5) establish limits of acceptable change from human use of Niobrara National Scenic River resources and suggest appropriate actions to mitigate impacts from previous human use.

Scoping is the first step for involving individuals, organizations, agencies and interested parties in the planning process. Public scoping is an early phase of the planning process, which is designed to obtain public input on issues and areas of concern related to the project, including a suitable range of alternatives, the nature and extent of potential environmental impacts and benefits, and appropriate mitigation strategies.

Because the RMP will analyze many important issues, your participation is encouraged and needed. Please be involved in this process. Your participation will ensure a better product for the management of this national treasure. When the RMP is complete, it will be made available for your review and comment.

Please attend and participate in one of the upcoming public workshops scheduled for April 2012. These workshops will provide an overview of the process and include small group discussions on resources, including their monitoring and protection. Sign in begins at 6:30 pm and the workshops begin at 7:00 pm.

- April 16, 2012 Valentine - NPS Headquarters, 214 W. Hwy 20
- April 17, 2012 Ainsworth - Elks Lodge, 111 East 3rd
- April 18, 2012 Grand Island - Howard Johnson Hotel, 3333 Ramada Road
- April 19, 2012 Omaha - NPS MWR Headquarters, 601 Riverfront Dr.

The ORVs presented in the GMP have been refined, based on input from NPS and other federal, state, and local government, and Tribes. The refined ORVs have been developed for use in the RMP and are available at the park's website: <http://www.nps.gov/niob/parkmgmt/index.htm>. To prepare for the workshops, please review the ORV Workshop Report and come prepared to discuss positive and negative impacts to the ORVs, how impacts can be monitored, how the impacts can be mitigated or improved, as appropriate, and what "zones" of use might look like, to protect ORVs.

In conjunction with this effort, we will also be preparing a Commercial Services Strategy (CSS) which is designed to:

- protect resources;
- provide for a quality visitor experience; and
- protect the interests of those providing visitor services within this National Park Site.

National Park Service commercial service professionals from around the country will be here on April 16 to have discussions with us regarding how commercial services operate in national park sites and how what happens within Niobrara National Scenic River affects what happens in the local communities. Because the CSS will analyze many important issues, your participation is encouraged and needed. Please be involved in this process. Your participation will ensure a better product for the management of this national treasure. When the RMP and CSS are complete, they will be available for your review and comment.

Please attend and participate in the upcoming CSS workshop scheduled for April 16, 2012 at the Niobrara NSR Headquarters, 214 W. Hwy 20 in Valentine. This workshop will provide an overview of the RMP process and its relationship with the CSS, experiences on other rivers with commercial services, and how local community businesses play an important role in defining desired outcomes of visitor experiences within Niobrara NSR. Sign in begins at 1:00 pm and the workshop will run from 2:00 to 5:00 pm.

We know that with other commitments, you may not be able to attend these workshops. However, your ideas are important and can be provided to us at any time, but would be most helpful prior to May 31, 2012. This can be done on the NPS Planning, Environment & Public Comment (PEPC) website (<http://www.parkplanning.nps.gov/niob>) or through mail to:

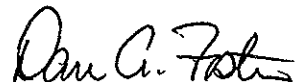
Superintendent
Attn: River Management Plan/EA Comments
Niobrara National Scenic River
214 W. Hwy 20
Valentine, NE 69201

As development of the RMP proceeds, documents prepared during this planning effort will be available online at the above PEPC website and at public libraries in the local area. Notices about the process will be posted on the park website, the PEPC website, and announced in local newspapers. Please take time to share your thoughts with us.

If you have questions, please contact me or Pamela Sprenkle at 402-376-1901.

We look forward to your participation.

Sincerely,



Dan A. Foster
Superintendent