

SUMMARY OF COMMENTS RECEIVED

Badlands South Unit General Management Plan

In March 2008, approximately 10,000 newsletters were mailed or otherwise distributed to announce the beginning of the Badlands South Unit General Management Plan process. The newsletter (“Newsletter #1”) described the park and its resources and provided information on the draft purpose and significance of this unique national park unit. In addition, a press release was prepared and distributed to roughly 30 media contacts.

Public open houses were held during the second and third weeks of April, in Wall and Rapid City, and in 13 locations on Pine Ridge Reservation. In each of these formats, the public was invited to comment on the concepts for management provided in the newsletter and to share with the team any issues or concerns to be considered in the General Management Plan.

Through distribution of the newsletter and feedback given on the National Park Service planning website, by electronic mail, and at the public meetings, a variety of concerns and suggestions were obtained. The largest number of comments were recorded at the open houses. Many of the documents submitted by the public contained more than one comment or suggestion regarding the General Management Plan. The comments received were reflective of a public that is passionate about the future of the South Unit – 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 South Unit.

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;
- Thoughts/suggestions about the proposed management concepts;
- Issue-specific statements 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.

WHAT THE PUBLIC VALUES ABOUT THE PARK

The majority of the commenters expressed what they valued about the South Unit. The responses varied – there were those who appreciate the beauty and serenity, the South Unit’s natural resources, and the fossils. Others appreciate and value the historic landscapes. Following is a sampling of comments:

Incredible views of Palmer Creek and Stirk Table. Magnificent sunrises and sunsets, spectacular rainbows. The incredible scenery, wildlife, and other natural resources must be protected from misuse and exploitation.

The South Unit is somewhat remote compared to the north one, at least it is not as developed. The area seems wilder, more mysterious – and I like that.

The paleontological resources unique to the White River Badlands, the Badlands topography, the isolation, the wildlife.

The South Unit of Badlands NP is a very important area because it protects geologic deposits and fossil resources that are not preserved in the North Unit. A complex river system from 37 million years ago is preserved within the South Unit. These fluvial deposits internally preserve some of the most spectacular Titanotherium remains found in the country.

The unique culture, history, formations, and wildlife found in this remote area of SD. It is a beautiful area that needs to be preserved with all its native species intact.

THOUGHTS/SUGGESTIONS ABOUT THE PROPOSED MANAGEMENT CONCEPTS

Of approximately 255 comments directly addressing the management concepts, the vast majority preferred a change from current management. In most cases, those who favored continuing current management preferred Concepts 2, 3, or 4, but were concerned that the Tribe would be unable to take on a financial burden, or currently lacks expertise in managing a National Park unit. There was a nearly equal number in favor of shared management of the South Unit of Badlands National Park, creation of a new national park unit managed by the Oglala Sioux Tribe with technical assistance from the NPS, and deauthorization of the South Unit with no connection to the National Park Service. In addition, about 20 commenters suggested a gradual progression from shared management of the South Unit to eventual deauthorization at the point at which the Oglala Sioux Tribe is prepared to assume total management.

ISSUE-SPECIFIC STATEMENTS REGARDING THE CURRENT OR FUTURE MANAGEMENT OF THE SOUTH UNIT THAT SHOULD BE ADDRESSED BY THE PLAN

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

Access

Issues regarding access to the South Unit were raised by many commenters who expressed very passionate views and opinions. The comments ranged from broadly supporting or opposing more access to identification of specific concerns regarding access. Some commenters expressed a desire that the park be accessible and that access not be limited, while others are concerned about an increase in development and the possible ramifications of increased access to the park.

Cultural Resources

Commenters want the cultural and historical sites protected, but want Oglala history and culture shared through interpretive programs, oral histories, and “hands-on” experiences. Spiritual and cultural preservation was a common theme.

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 people, and on training opportunities for Tribal members.

Facilities/infrastructure

Comments received regarding concerns about development in the park included development of facilities either in a broad sense or in particular areas, and commercial development. Some commenters were concerned about overdevelopment of the park in the future.

There was much support for development of a visitor center or other facility to feature Oglala history, culture, crafts, and a place where artwork could be sold. There was also support for a museum for fossils and cultural artifacts. Some commenters wanted to see a hotel and other tourism infrastructure, such as an amphitheater, rodeo and pow wow grounds, and a café. Others suggested improved roads, scenic drives with overlooks, backcountry and developed campgrounds, and trails/trailheads for hiking and horseback riding. Several commenters proposed minimum development, restricted to the perimeter of the South Unit.

Natural Resources

During the scoping process, comments were received regarding concerns or issues about preservation of resources. Natural resource-related concerns included protection of fossils and plants that are used for medicinal and spiritual purposes, reintroduction of native prairie grasses, and replacing cattle with buffalo (bison). Several commenters would like to have the resource managed under traditional Oglala ecosystem methods. Numerous comments centered on renewable energy sources – wind, geothermal, solar -- and carbon credits. Other issues of concern were mining, particularly of zeolite, use of pesticides and herbicides, protection of watersheds, and pollution generated from car exhaust.

Management/operations

Many commenters were concerned about management of the South Unit, the lack of facilities, and enforcement of regulations. A number of commenters raised concerns about law enforcement and the need for more rangers in the park. Several comments focused on a desire to see the Tribe exercise its sovereignty through managing the South Unit. There was overwhelming support for Tribal management, with a variety of suggestions for which Tribal entity (OST, OSPRA, Land Committee, or other entity) would have the management responsibility.

COMMENTS TO BE ADDRESSED THAT ARE BEYOND THE SCOPE OF THE GMP OR MORE APPROPRIATE FOR ANOTHER PLANNING EFFORT

A number of comments were received expressing public concern about resources or the management of the South Unit that were categorized as either being beyond the scope of the GMP process or would be better addressed under a specific resource implementation plan. These comments will be taken into account by the NPS at the South Unit for future consideration; however, these comments will not be addressed by the GMP. Topics of these comments include tribal hunting regulations, fees, implementation plans, and cooperation with other agencies.

Some commenters made suggestions to change things that are not within the NPS' control. For example, cooperative programs with the Oglala Lakota College or the South Dakota School of Mines, methods for managing the South Unit under Concept 4 (where the NPS is not involved), or returning the lands to their original owners or descendants.