

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on Forests & Forest Health

Witness Testimony

TESTIMONY OF
ARTHUR TAYLOR
NEZ PERCE TRIBAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
BEFORE THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE
ON FORESTS AND FOREST HEALTH
MAY 25,1999

Madame Chairman and subcommittee members. Thank you for the opportunity to be here today testifying on an issue to which the Nez Perce Tribe is central, the bicentennial of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. Just as we handled the coming of the Corps of Discovery with grace and dignity, we likewise meet head-on the challenge of this 200 year commemoration of the expedition which was symbolic in changing the lives of the Nez Perce people forever.

As you know, Nez Perce tribal representatives have been participating in the meetings of the National Lewis and Clark Bicentennial Council. In fact, on April 15, we hosted, along with the National Park Service, a multi-agency, multi-tribal meeting to discuss plans for the commemoration of this event. In many different forums, including the Idaho Governor's Committee on Lewis and Clark, we have provided our input into what we believe would be an appropriate manner of commemorating the event.

First, the Nez Perce people are the only people who can tell the Nez Perce story with regard to our ancestor's interaction and relationship with the Corps of Discovery. While we embrace the Lewis and Clark's mission of peace and friendship, we must tell the story from our perspective in a way that honors the Nez Perce's significant contribution to the success of the expedition. History has recorded, and our own oral accounts through generations, have shown that the expedition may have faltered at the Bitterroot Mountains if it wasn't for the generosity of the Nez Perce. We look to focus on the spirit of that peace and friendship in developing a future of improved relations with our neighbors of today.

Second, we have proposed a \$7.3 million Nez Perce Cultural Interpretive Center the primary site being located on the Nez Perce Reservation, approximately 1.6 miles east of Orofino. Our proposal is timely in that it will help the nation commemorate the Lewis and Clark expedition. The plan is quite extensive and includes ample exhibit space, a learning center and an auditorium for public events. We would like to request this subcommittee's support, both

financially and politically for this proposal. Where better to locate such a center than near the first sighting of the Lewis and Clark party by Nez Perces as members of the expedition stumbled out of the mountains in need of food and other assistance

Third, we wish to ensure the protection of the natural resources in the Nez Perce tribal homelands which encompass Tribal, Forest Service, and State owned lands, during this time of increased promotion of tourism to the area sacred and spiritual sites must be protected from vandalism and mis-use. Some of these sites overlap the Lewis and Clark Expedition and should be preserved and protected for conservation purposes. To this end, the Nez Perce Tribe is ready and able to assume management authority over any of the culturally significant sites on Forest Service lands.

In that same vein, the contribution of the Nez Perce Tribe in providing historical accounts, family stories and other significant educational contributions should be protected. The Tribe and its members have been exploited by many researchers, movie producers, archeologists and others over the years. We simply would like to see some protections of our intellectual property and retain any rights involving the Nez Perce role in these events.

Finally, we concluded a meeting-just last week with representatives from the five National Forests located on Nez Perce homelands. The meeting was fruitful and the outlook for improved relations is hopeful. We talked about a variety of issues in addition to the Lewis and Clark bicentennial, and our plea to the Forests and Forest Resources Subcommittee is to encourage the Forest Service to continue to recognize that the Nez Perce people and other Indian Tribes have an inherent link to the lands on which they've dwelt for thousands of years. Just because these lands are administered by the Forest Service does not mean that tribal concerns with retention of rights and access to those lands should be dismissed or ignored. Treating Indian Tribes as just another "Interested party" is a disservice to the Tribe, to the historical relationship that the Nez Perce people have with the land, and to the unique trust relationship between the Tribe and the federal government. We look forward to positive improved relationships as we work together to embrace the commemoration of this eventful meeting in the mountains of Nez Perce country 200 years before.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony today.

Ket'siyeu.

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