

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on Forests & Forest Health

Witness Testimony

FINAL

STATEMENT OF

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FOREST SERVICE

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Before the

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee Forests and Forest Health

United States House of Representative

Concerning

The Bicentennial of the Lewis and Clark Expedition

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MADAM CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE:

Thank you for the opportunity to be here with you today to discuss the Forest Service's role in preparation for the bicentennial of the Lewis and Clark expedition.

For over two years now, we have been working with communities, organizations, Indian Tribes, and other government agencies to develop a plan of action to provide quality visitor experiences, develop sustainable tourism projects, and protect the Lewis and Clark trail on National Forest lands during the bicentennial of the Lewis and Clark expedition. The overall theme of the commemoration of this historic event is "Leaving a Legacy."

The route Lewis and Clark and their Corps of Discovery followed is designated as a National Historic Trail, comprised of sites, trail segments, and designated highway routes that follow the courses of the Missouri and Columbia Rivers. It traverses both private and public lands and is

managed by a variety of Federal, State, and county agencies whom the National Park Service oversees. The Forest Service's management responsibility focuses primarily on those trail segments on National Forest system lands in North Dakota, Montana, and Idaho. Although there are only approximately 210 miles of walkable trail on the National Forests, there are over 2,000 miles of designated Lewis and Clark Highway as noted on the maps accompanying me.

We anticipate a record number of people from around the world will retrace the journey of Lewis and Clark during the bicentennial years. This increase in visitation is expected to be generated by a combination of sources, including; books about the journey, information on the Internet, marketing efforts to attract visitors by each of the States along the trail, advertising of numerous community events, media releases of movies and video trail guides, and planned educational efforts including major exhibitions that would travel across the nation during the bicentennial years.

Forest Service Bicentennial Planning

During the bicentennial, the Forest Service will be responsible for providing services to the public, protecting historic resources, and assisting communities and Tribes in their efforts to develop sustainable economies through our State and Private Forestry programs. Because this nationally significant event will involve National Forests and Grasslands and adjacent communities, we have assigned a full time coordinator to work with a team of recreation planners, archeologists, state and private forestry program leaders, and tribal coordinators to plan and implement actions that will fulfill our responsibilities.

Preparations on National Forest System Lands

We have evaluated the availability of visitor services and current management of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail on the affected National Forests. We have also evaluated the capacity of our sites and the trail to handle the large numbers of people expected to visit key locations on the actual 200th anniversary dates of Lewis and Clark's visit.

Because road access, key segments of the trail, and visitor facilities are limited, and because the historic route contains sensitive heritage resources, we need to improve interpretive signage as well as enhance access and use of undeveloped sections of trail. The strategy to prepare for increased visitation on the National Forests focuses on five key points:

1. protecting the heritage resources along the trail;
2. updating information and interpretation for the public;
3. refurbishing existing recreation developments to address safety, sanitation, and accessibility concerns;

4. providing enhanced visitor assistance and service during the bicentennial period; and
5. regulating use, if necessary, in areas where use may exceed capacity of the infrastructure.

Partnership with Communities and American Indian Tribes

Many westerners have referred to the bicentennial as "the tourism event of the century." Communities, tribes, and State Foresters are enthusiastically telling us they want to embrace tourism, leave a legacy by enhancing and interpreting their resources, beautify their community entrances and main streets, and enhance aesthetics and economics through urban and community forestry. Numerous communities along the trail are already gearing up for this event and are looking to Federal agencies to participate and lend support.

This is an opportunity for us and our communities to reestablish positive relations with Native Americans who were so essential to the success of the expedition and who have a stake in the natural and cultural resources we all value. It is also an opportunity for Native American tribes to focus attention on the need to preserve their culture and educating others on their history told in their own words.

Through our State and Private Forestry Program, we are involved with communities and tribes in assisting with their bicentennial efforts, focusing on 3 areas:

1. economic action programs, such as seed money and technical assistance, for communities, and tribal governments;
2. urban and community forestry through state foresters; and
3. conservation education through state foresters, communities, tribes, and national forests.

Interagency Coordination

We will be an important player in the activities commemorating the bicentennial, but we are not the only player. The Bureau of Land Management and Corps of Engineers are the other significant players who manage large segments of the trail. The National Park Service has significant historic park sites as well as administrative oversight responsibility for the trail. Other agencies have specific programs and technical expertise that can contribute greatly to this national commemoration.

In 1997 we began working on a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to establish a general framework for cooperation between Federal agencies, tribes, and with the National Lewis and Clark Bicentennial Council. This MOU was signed on October 1, 1998.

The agencies and the Council are working together to achieve the common goal of advancing domestic and international awareness, understanding, and appreciation of one of the most remarkable and productive scientific and military exploratory expeditions in the history of the United States.

By seeking to:

1. cultural and natural resources along the route;
2. encourage economic advancement in the communities and States through which the expedition traveled;
3. enhance the quality of life in America; and
4. develop a new understanding and appreciation for all of America's indigenous nations and cultures.

This interagency team is developing an integrated strategy that will build on each agency's strengths and avoid unnecessary duplication of efforts.

Our bicentennial coordinators in the Northern and Intermountain Regions and the National headquarters are active participants on the MOU working groups. They have attended National Bicentennial Council planning workshops, and the series of tribal listening sessions. We are also actively involved with the

Montana and Idaho Governor's Bicentennial Committees and currently working on an interagency interpretive plan with the State of Montana.

Summary

The bicentennial of the Lewis and Clark expedition is a multi-year event that will receive world-wide attention. We have great optimism about what it can do for the economic well being of rural communities across the west, but we also recognize the challenges of coordination of many activities across several states and through many levels of governmental jurisdiction.

The Forest Service is excited about this event and looks forward to playing a significant role, in cooperation with other Federal agencies and Tribal governments, to meet community and visitor expectations while protecting and preserving this unique cultural heritage for future generations.

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