

# Center for State of the Parks



## THE STATE OF LEWIS AND CLARK NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAIL: SUMMARY

### AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PARK

From 1804 to 1806, Meriwether Lewis, William Clark, and a corps of 42 hearty souls completed a journey that took them from Camp Wood in present-day Illinois west to what would become Washington and Oregon. This trek, which spanned more than 8,000 miles roundtrip, took them through a diverse landscape that included broad plains stretching to the horizon, imposing mountains peaking at more than 14,000 feet, and powerful rivers both clear and turbulent.

Hundreds of groups of native peoples had lived on these lands and developed intimate relationships with their resources for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. Remarkably, nearly every group of native peoples that Lewis and Clark encountered aided the party in one fashion or another; in fact, without their assistance, the "Corps of Discovery" surely would have failed.

In the last century, many of the places Lewis and Clark visited on their journey westward have been recognized for their significance to the collective heritage of the United States. In 1978, Congress established the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail to tie together 120 historic sites associated with the Corps of Discovery. The trail extends for 3,700 miles from Wood River, Illinois, to the mouth of the



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Lewis and Clark traveled much of the Missouri River in a keelboat similar to this one, which was built by the non-profit group Discovery Expedition of St. Charles, Missouri.

Columbia River in Oregon, and could be expanded in the future.

During this, the bicentennial year of the conclusion of Lewis and Clark's journey, the Center for State of the Parks used established, peer-reviewed methodologies to examine conditions of cultural and natural resources within the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail. Do the lands and waters along the trail look as they did when the Corps of Discovery laid eyes upon them? Are the resources well-protected and interpreted for visitors? Highlights of the assessment are reported here.

### KEY FINDINGS

- **Partnerships critical:** Although the National Park Service administers the trail, the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail owns just 78 acres within its boundaries; trail staff do not have management authority over the other lands and waters within park boundaries. As a result, trail staff work with many partners, including private individuals, state parks, other national parks and federal agencies such as the Bureau of Land Management, American Indian tribes, state museums, local historic groups, and state historic preservation societies. Staff provide guidance, assistance, and resources to partner organizations.



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- **Lands and waters along much of the trail have changed:** During the past 200 years, agriculture and water projects have altered much of the lands and waters along the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail. Today, many of the important landscapes only vaguely resemble those experienced by Lewis and Clark. For example, dams have drowned Celilo Falls on the Columbia River, once an important salmon spawning area and American Indian meeting place. Trail staff make recommendations to landowners about how best to protect existing cultural and natural landscapes, but they lack the authority to actively manage landscapes.
- **Some protected areas remain much the same:** Sections of the trail remain much as the members of the Lewis and Clark Expedition would have seen them in 1804-06. These significant cultural and natural resources include Glade Creek in Idaho and the Upper Missouri Wild and Scenic River in Montana (which is within the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument).
- **Relationships with associated tribes important:** Ethnographic resources are integral parts of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail. A comprehensive ethnographic assessment would guide future needs for maintaining positive relationships with associated tribes, identify the effects the Lewis and Clark Expedition had on traditional lifeways, and guide a centralized and systematic approach to assessing threats to ethnographic resources. Staff have worked to build successful relationships with associated tribes, but hiring a full-time ethnographer would help the park maintain these relationships and better protect ethnographic resources.

#### RESOURCE MANAGEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

- Extensive monitoring and research along the trail takes place through numerous local and national partnerships and organizations. Natural resources information that is collected should be compiled in a database so that it can be used to inform trail management.
- Through funding provided by Challenge Cost Share (a program created by Congress in 1995) and cooperation with American Indian groups, the park has engaged in a variety of cultural preservation and educational projects. Many of these projects were completed in partnership with the Circle of Tribal Advisors (COTA), which is composed of representatives from 42 tribal governments. COTA works with the trail, the National Council of the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial, tribes, and other partners to produce educational programs that describe the large contributions of tribes to the national heritage of the United States and to provide information on protecting natural, cultural, and historical resources, especially sacred sites. Both the National Council of the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial and COTA will sunset after the bicentennial commemoration, and funds from Challenge Cost Share are likely to decline. Continued financial support will be critical in building on the partnerships, cultural preservation projects, and educational programs accomplished through COTA and Challenge Cost Share.
- Spirit Mound, which was visited by Lewis and Clark in 1804, is an important American Indian site in South Dakota. In partnership with the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish, and Parks, the Missouri National Recreational River, and the Spirit Mound Trust, trail staff worked

to purchase the 320-acre site and restore it to conditions that were present in the early 1800s. This project was made possible through the efforts of individuals and organizations. It stands as an example of creative restoration that could be emulated along other parts of the trail.

#### ABOUT NPCA AND THE CENTER FOR STATE OF THE PARKS

Since 1919, the National Parks Conservation Association has been the leading voice of the American people in protecting and enhancing our National Park System. NPCA, its members, and partners work together to protect the park system and preserve our nation's natural, historical, and cultural heritage for generations to come.

The National Parks Conservation Association initiated the State of the Parks® program in 2000 to assess the condition of natural and cultural resources in the parks. The goal is to provide information that will help policy-makers, the public, and the National Park Service improve conditions in national parks, celebrate successes as models for other parks, and ensure a lasting legacy for future generations.

#### CONTACT US

For a copy of the full report on the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail, to get copies of reports on other parks, or for more information about Center for State of the Parks, visit [www.npca.org/state-oftheparks](http://www.npca.org/state-oftheparks) or contact Dr. James Nations, vice president of Center for State of the Parks, at [jnations@npca.org](mailto:jnations@npca.org).

For more information about the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail, contact the park at 402.661.1804 or visit the park online at [www.nps.gov/lecl](http://www.nps.gov/lecl). To learn more about what the public and our elected officials can do to help improve the health of this and other parks, visit [www.npca.org/take\\_action](http://www.npca.org/take_action).