

# Center for State of the Parks



## THE STATE OF LEWIS AND CLARK NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK: SUMMARY

### AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PARK

On December 10, 1805, Meriwether Lewis, William Clark, and members of the Corps of Discovery began constructing a fort on the Netul River, now called the Lewis and Clark River, near present-day Astoria, Oregon. Fort Clatsop, named after the local Clatsop Indian tribe, was completed in a couple of weeks, and the party spent three and a half months there before commencing their return journey back east. The members of the expedition traded with the Clatsop people, who were friendly to the explorers.

In November 2004, Congress passed the Lewis and Clark National Historical Park Designation Act to preserve the cultural and natural resources associated with the Lewis and Clark Corps of Discovery on the lower Columbia River. The act redesignated Fort Clatsop National Memorial as Lewis and Clark National Historical Park and provided for the inclusion of three additional sites in Washington State.

At Lewis and Clark National Historical Park, rangers, staff, and volunteers strive to interpret the story of the Corps of Discovery encampment during the winter of 1805-1806, as well as the much larger narrative of the history and culture of the lower Columbia region through interpretive and living history programs, reenactments, hands-on demonstrations, and museum



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The placid waters of the Columbia River flow past Station Camp where Lewis and Clark landed and made camp on November 15, 1805. A Chinook village was also located there, and rich archaeological resources have been uncovered.

exhibits. Natural resources are also an important part of interpretation. The park protects some diverse and important habitats such as old Sitka spruce forests and American beachgrass communities that provide habitat for protected wildlife species.

### KEY FINDINGS

- **Cultural and natural resources in fair condition:** The Center for State of the Parks assessed the conditions of cultural and natural resources at Lewis and Clark National Historical Park. Much information was available for resources within the former

Fort Clatsop National Memorial, but information was not available for all aspects of cultural and natural resources within newly added units of the park. Using all available information, Center for State of the Parks researchers determined that cultural and natural resources are in fair condition, overall, scoring 74 out of 100 and 62 out of 100, respectively. The natural resources score is based on just 59 percent of the information required by the assessment methodology, however, and additional scientific research is needed to establish a comprehensive understanding of resource conditions.

- **Cultural resource studies needed:** With the recent expansion of the park, several cultural resources stud-



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ies are needed: historic resource study, ethnographic overview and assessment, administrative history, general management plan, archaeological overview and assessment, and cultural landscape report.

- **Inadequate staffing:** To adequately manage park resources, staffing needs include a natural resource compliance and program manager and a full-time cultural resource program manager. The current cultural resource position is full-time, subject to furlough. Adding a historian, archaeologist, and archivist would enable the park to adequately research, identify, evaluate, and protect cultural resources.
- **Boundary development threatens park resources:** Logging, agriculture, dikes, dams, water diversions, channel manipulation, and urban development have affected the region surrounding the park for the last 200 years, making the protected habitats within the park of even greater value. But these surrounding uses affect the park and have the potential to degrade some resources. As much as possible, park staff must strive to protect park resources and guard against damage caused by activities outside park borders.
- **Invasive species a growing threat:** Invasive plants are present throughout the park. Park staff are developing a plan to prioritize non-native plant management activities, and have successfully initiated control of noxious weeds in several areas.
- **Illegal water withdrawals threaten park water:** Illegal shallow wells, levees, dikes, and withdrawals in the dry season lower water flows in the Lewis and Clark River, with the potential to affect fish populations. Freshwater flow through Lewis and Clark National Historical Park is necessary to maintain and restore natural aquatic systems, and this flow is

threatened by the over-appropriation of water for human uses.

#### RESOURCE MANAGEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

- In November 2005, the park completed the Fort to Sea Trail, a 6.5-mile trail from Fort Clatsop to Sunset Beach on the Pacific Ocean. The trail winds through a diverse landscape of wetlands, deep woods, coastal lakes, sand dunes, and grasslands. It was constructed through a partnership of private businesses, federal, state, and county governments, nonprofit organizations, and with local community support and many hours of volunteer labor.
- After many years of planning, the Park Service has acquired two parcels adjacent to Fort Clatsop on the south—the Weyhaeuser and Ness tracts. By including these lands within the park, additional wildlife habitat is protected, as is the park's viewshed.
- Over the last two years, the park has completed extensive vegetation restoration and landscaping at Netul Landing on the Lewis and Clark River. Diking, road construction, and industrial activity heavily impacted the site, and non-native plants competed for space with native plants. Staff, volunteers, and local school children helped with the restoration by planting hundreds of trees. A largescale estuarine restoration project has also been initiated that will reconnect 45 acres of diked pasture to the Columbia River estuary.
- With funding from the National Park Service, and with collaboration and support from the Clatsop-Nehalem Confederated Tribe, the park produced a new film for the visitor center. *A Clatsop Winter Story* recounts the Corps of Discovery's stay at Fort Clatsop as told by Celiast, Chief Coboway's daughter. The film

educates visitors about the Corps of Discovery and the cultural and political changes endured by the Clatsop Nehalem people as a result of the expedition.

#### ABOUT NPCA AND 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.

NPCA 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 resource 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 Lewis and Clark National Historical Park (within the *National Parks Along the Lewis and Clark Trail* report) published by NPCA's Center for State of the Parks, to get copies of reports on other parks, or for more information about Center for State of the Parks, visit [www.npca.org/stateoftheparks](http://www.npca.org/stateoftheparks) 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 Lewis and Clark National Historical Park, contact the park at 503.861.2471 or visit the park online at [www.nps.gov/lewi](http://www.nps.gov/lewi). To learn more about what the public and our elected officials can do to help improve the health of our national parks, visit [www.npca.org/take\\_action](http://www.npca.org/take_action).