

# Center for State of the Parks



## THE STATE OF NEZ PERCE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK: SUMMARY

### AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PARK

Nez Perce National Historical Park was established in 1965 and expanded in 1992 to facilitate the preservation and interpretation of sites pertaining to Nez Perce culture, the Lewis and Clark expedition, the fur trade, missionary activities, gold mining, logging, and the Nez Perce War of 1877. The park encompasses a total of 38 sites across Idaho, Montana, Washington, and Oregon. Nez Perce National Historical Park administers nine sites, while state, tribal, local, or other federal agencies manage the remaining 29 sites; the Park Service partners with these landowners to facilitate resource protection.

Park sites preserve, interpret, and commemorate the history of the Nez Perce or, as they call themselves in their language, the "Nimiipuu." According to archaeologists, the Nez Perce have lived in the territory centered on the middle Snake and Clearwater rivers and the northern portion of the Salmon River basin in central Idaho, and the neighboring territory of Washington and Oregon, for the past 11,000 years. Interpretation is a key focus at Nez Perce National Historical Park, and the park offers a variety of opportunities to learn about the history of the Nez Perce and cultural and natural resources of the park.



COURTESY OF NATIONAL PARK SERVICE/NEZ PERCE NHP

Nez Perce leader Chief Joseph posed for this photo on July 4, 1901.

### KEY FINDINGS

- **Cultural resources in fair condition, natural resources in poor condition:** Protecting resources and enforcing park regulations are difficult at Nez Perce National Historical Park, in part, because the park is spread across four states. In spite of the geographic challenges, cultural resources at the park are in fair condition, with an overall rating of 75 out of 100. Park stewardship of cultural resources has provided adequate protection and no particular

resource is in danger at the current time. Natural resources, conversely, are in poor condition, scoring 59 out of 100. This score was calculated with just 57 percent of the information generally required by the Center for State of the Parks methodology to determine overall resource conditions. Information on some criteria is not available.

- **Additional funds needed for museum exhibits:** The park requires additional funding to redesign museum exhibits to more accurately convey the significance and culture of the Nez Perce people, improve accessibility to the artifacts, and enhance interpretive efforts. Redesigned exhibits would allow the park to



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meet museum management standards and protect valuable Nez Perce collections by rotating display objects, properly displaying clothing artifacts, and reducing lighting levels to prevent deterioration.

- **Research needed on historic structures:** Research on the historic use of structures at the Spalding Site (Watson's Store, the Agency Log Building, and the Agent's House) would allow the park to more thoroughly understand the history of the reservation period and the allotment period on the Nez Perce Reservation. Additionally, the Agency Log Building and Watson's Store could be adapted for visitation and interpretation.
- **Invasive plants, water quality, oil and gas operations, and adjacent development of concern:** The most apparent natural resource issue for the park is the encroachment of invasive plant species into park sites. Degradation of water quality, encroachment by oil and gas operations, and adjacent land development are also concerns for some of the park sites. In general, air quality is good, dark night skies and scenic vistas are maintained, and populations of many species appear sustainable. Additional research is needed to develop a more comprehensive understanding of natural resource conditions.

#### RESOURCE MANAGEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

- Park staff are partnering with museum management staff in Washington, D.C., to develop a virtual exhibit that will contain high-resolution photographs of more than 200 artifacts.
- Park staff supported the Nez Perce people in their efforts to purchase the Spalding-Allen Collection, a rare and remarkable assemblage of Plateau

American Indian artifacts that encompasses many facets of traditional Nez Perce culture. The collection is on loan to the park and is the main focus of museum exhibits.

- In 1998, the Park Service funded construction of the Nez Perce National Historical Park Research Center to house administrative history records; donated manuscript collections; 3,000 bibliographic items including books, theses, dissertations, reports, reprints, audio/video tapes, microforms, subject and biographical files, maps, and periodicals; and a rare historic photograph collection documenting Nez Perce life over the past century.
- The park has worked closely with the Upper Columbia Basin Network to develop a camas lily-monitoring project at Weippe Prairie. American Indian students from the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry's Salmon Camp program help park managers with data collection. Information from this monitoring effort will guide development of long-term management planning for the site.
- In 2005, park staff presented 319 interpretive programs to 4,830 people and provided 100 educational off-site programs to 4,570 students. The park also offers teaching materials to educators. School groups visit the park year round and children are encouraged to participate in many hands-on activities, including assembling a ten-foot tipi and learning about a traditional Nez Perce home. An interpretive program entitled *A Child's Life* offers fourth-graders an opportunity to learn about what life was like for Nez Perce children in the past. Students handle replica items and learn Nez Perce stories that would have been told to native children.

#### 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 Nez Perce 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 Nez Perce National Historical Park, contact the park at 208.843.7001 or visit the park online at [www.nps.gov/nepe](http://www.nps.gov/nepe). 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).