National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Theodore Roosevelt National Park

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Theodore Roosevelt National Park
Medora, North Dakota

Theodore Roosevelt National Park

Elk Management Plan

Environmental Impact Statement

Public Scoping Meetings

You're Invited!

Your participation is vital to our analysis process. Because of your interest in Theodore Roosevelt National Park, we are requesting your input for developing an Elk Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (plan/EIS). The National Park Service (NPS) requests your participation in the project planning process to identify potential environmental impacts, issues, concerns, and alternatives. The NPS would like to discuss the proposal and gather any thoughts, ideas, or comments that you may have.

For more information…

More detailed information will be available at any one of five public meetings scheduled for this project. You can also find information updates for this project at: www.nps.gov/thro.

Public Scoping Meetings

Scoping is the first step to involve the public in the environmental impact analysis process. Because the EIS will analyze many complex social and environmental issues, your participation is encouraged and needed.

Meeting Schedule

Monday, November 29, 2004
5:00 to 8:30 p.m. MST
(presentations at 5:30 and 7:00)
Hospitality Inn
532 15th Street West
Dickinson, North Dakota

Tuesday, November 30, 2004
5:00 to 8:30 p.m. CST
(presentations at 5:30 and 7:00)
International Inn
1505 North Broadway
Minot, North Dakota

Wednesday, December 1, 2004
5:00 to 8:30 p.m. CST
(presentations at 5:30 and 7:00)
Ramada Plaza Suites and Convention Center
1635 42nd Street SW
Fargo, North Dakota

Thursday, December 2, 2004
5:00 to 8:30 p.m. CST
(presentations at 5:30 and 7:00)
Best Western Ramkota Hotel
800 South Third Street
Bismarck, North Dakota

Monday, December 6, 2004
5:00 to 8:30 p.m. MST
(presentations at 5:30 and 7:00)
Medora Community Center
465 Pacific Avenue
Medora, North Dakota

The petrified forest - Theodore Roosevelt National Park

Elk Management Plan Theodore Roosevelt National Park (TRNP)

The NPS seeks to complete an environmental impact statement (EIS) to address elk management at TRNP. An elk management plan is needed at TRNP because past and current actions within and beyond the park have created conditions that allow the TRNP elk population to increase with little or no control. The increasing elk population may be detrimental to several other resources and wildlife within and beyond the TRNP boundary. Through this planning process, the NPS seeks to identify potential elk management options that also protect natural and cultural resources within the park. NPS and TRNP policies and other related requirements, as well as the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), will guide development of this plan and EIS.

History of Elk Management at TRNP

Elk were reintroduced to the South Unit (SU) of TRNP in 1985 to restore an extirpated native species. The SU is surrounded by a 7-foot-high woven-wire fence with specially designed crossings to allow for movement of most wildlife, yet confine bison and feral horses to TRNP.

Since the elk were reintroduced, the population has increased rapidly because it has experienced very low mortality. Large predators have been extirpated since the late 1800s so effective natural predation on elk is limited to that which occurs on young elk by coyotes, mountain lions, and bobcats. Additionally, public hunting outside of the park has been ineffective as a population control method because the elk stay primarily within the park. Other factors include a lack of significant winter kill and other environmentally-caused elk mortalities plus high reproductive and survival rates. Consequently, the elk population doubles in size approximately every 3 years.

Research was initiated in 1985 to provide insight into the forage requirements of elk and other grazers in the SU. The research resulted in a model that identifies the sizes of populations of grazers the park can support long term. Specifically, the model suggests the park could maintain up to 360 elk.

Since 1993, the population has exceeded 360 elk several times. TRNP has responded to these levels by providing elk to American Indian tribes and governmental agencies through translocation to reduce the population. The most recent removal was scheduled for January 2003, but was canceled due to concerns about chronic wasting disease (CWD).

Although CWD has not been detected in North Dakota, the NPS policy dictates that translocation of elk may only occur if the animals are statistically free of the disease. As a result, the elk herd now numbers over 550 animals, well above the level suggested by the forage model.

The Purpose of and Need for Taking Action

The purpose of this plan/EIS is to identify a range of elk management strategies that are compatible with long-term protection of other park resources and natural ecosystems and processes.

An elk management plan is needed to manage the elk population within acceptable levels. High densities of elk may adversely affect rangeland and other resources in the park. The plan is also needed to test elk for CWD. Furthermore, this plan is needed because a 2003 agreement related to the reintroduction of elk among the NPS, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), and the North Dakota Game and Fish Department states that the NPS is responsible for managing the elk population within the park at an acceptable level.

Elk Management Plan Objectives

The following objectives were developed to guide the elk management planning process. According to NPS policy, objectives are "what must be achieved to a large degree for the action to be considered a success." Objectives for managing elk populations must be grounded in the enabling legislation, purpose, significance, and mission goals of TRNP, and must also be compatible with direction and guidance provided by the TRNP general management plan. Given these requirements, the following elk management objectives have been developed for this project:

Policy

- Be consistent with NPS policies and mandates (including policy on translocation of elk), and TRNP enabling legislation.

Resources Management

- Consider physical and biological components of TRNP and surrounding environments.

Management

- Establish action indicators to guide management of elk. An action indicator is an environmental value that is measured and monitored. If an action indicator is reached, elk management actions are implemented to prevent major adverse impacts to environmental resources.
- Minimize the frequency and need for manipulating the elk population within TRNP, while maintaining long-term viability of the elk population.
- Identify specific objectives for management of elk within TRNP (such as maintaining the role of elk as an herbivore and providing for visitor enjoyment).
- Incorporate flexibility for management strategies as information is obtained regarding wildlife disease (for example CWD) or other factors influencing elk demographics.

Visitor Experience and Public Interest

- Engender public support, education, and appreciation of the complexity of managing elk within TRNP.
- Consider and evaluate the varied input from interested parties, such as other federal agencies (USFS and Bureau of Land Management), State of North Dakota, and private entities.

Environmental Impact Analysis

A determination of the effects of the elk management plan will be conducted in accordance with NEPA regulations, other appropriate federal regulations, and NPS procedures and policies for compliance with those regulations. The North Dakota Game and Fish Department and the USFS will serve as cooperating agencies in the preparation of the plan/EIS, per NEPA guidelines.

Submit comments regarding this project to:

Superintendent
Attn: Elk Management Plan
Theodore Roosevelt National Park
P.O. Box 7
Medora, North Dakota 58645

Comments may also be sent by email to thro_forum@nps.gov or by using the Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) website at http://parkplanning.nps.gov. In the PEPC website, you should search under park name for Theodore Roosevelt National Park. There you will find information on the Elk Management Plan/EIS and a location to submit comments.

Please submit your comments by December 31, 2004. Please note that names and addresses of people who comment become part of the public record. If you wish us to withhold your name and address, you must state your request prominently at the beginning of your comments. The NPS will make all submissions from organizations, businesses, and from individuals who identify themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses, available for public inspection in their entirety.

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