

Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



SCOPING NOTICE

*The National Park Service is preparing an Environmental Assessment (EA) for a proposed Interim Visitor Center Plan. You are invited to attend a **Public Scoping Open House** being held on **December 20, 2005** from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Visitor Center at Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument Crow Agency, Montana.*

The public is encouraged to attend at any time during the three-hour open house session. No presentations are scheduled. Instead, the open house format is intended to promote more informal interaction with exhibits and opportunities to make written and verbal comments. Park staff will be available to provide information and answer questions.

Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument Interim Visitor Center Plan Big Horn County, Montana

Background

Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument's *Interpretive Prospectus* states that the park's purpose is "To preserve and protect the historical and natural resources pertaining to the battle, and provide visitors with an improved understanding of the events leading up to the battle, the sequence of activities by both military and Native American contingents on June 24-27, 1876, and the historical consequences of the results of those fateful days."

The **purpose** of the project is to provide a quality NPS experience that is safe and accessible to all visitors. Existing conditions are so crowded that visitors are unable to obtain the full story including information about the events leading up to the battle, the battle, the life of a soldier in the cavalry, or the life of the Native Americans living in the area before and after the battle.

The visitor center was constructed in 1952 for an annual visitation of about 100,000. Today the annual visitation has reached approximately 400,000. For the last four years, an average of 24,879 visitors annually, have been able to view the park's film. Most of the large volume of visitors cannot view the park's film or appreciate the interpretive presentations due to inadequate space in the visitor center.

The 1986 (GMP) General Management Plan, revised in 1995, calls for an expansion of the boundaries of the Monument and for the construction of a new larger visitor center in a location where the story of the battle can be better illustrated. This interim alteration project is viewed as a short-term solution to an immediate problem and is not intended to disrupt the momentum of meeting the goals established in the GMP.

The project **needs** to solve many issues. Park visitors currently gather underneath a fiberglass overhang that is attached to the observation room. This roof overhang helps to provide shade on hot sunny days. Although the overhang is noisy and leaks, it does help during a rain shower. Visitors must endure high winds and other weather phenomena along with noise and air pollution associated with the main park road that is less than 65-70 feet from this location. During the summer season up to 200 visitors try to crowd into this small space to observe one of thirteen daily interpretive presentations.

During the fall and spring, the park film is shown in a converted storage room in the basement of the visitor center. The public access the space using an exterior stairway. The stairs leading down into this room are uneven and there is a false landing at the base that always trips visitors who take a few steps and believe that they have reached the bottom only to discover that there is one more step at the interior door threshold. During the winter the stairs are icy and slippery. The 45 seat audio visual room cannot accommodate the current daily visitation during the summer months. For these reasons, the audio visual room is only available in the spring and fall during nice weather.

Proposed Action

Three alternatives will be considered to resolve the immediate problem of over-crowding and lack of safe location to show the park film.

Alternative 1A – Long Term implementation of the 1986 and 1995 revised General Management Plan

This alternative would continue efforts to seek Congressional Legislation to expand the boundary of Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument, acquire adjacent lands, remove existing facilities, and build new facilities and supporting infrastructure. This alternative is considered a long term goal.

Alternative 1B – Construct a new Visitor Center off the existing Battlefield Boundary at either Garryowen or the junction of I-90 and Highway 212.

Under this alternative the National Park Service would reinitiate efforts through the General Services Administration to design a new Visitor Center, lease or acquire lands, construct infrastructure and new facilities and lease back to Little Bighorn Battlefield.

Alternative 2 – Replace Observation Room & Interpretive Area with Multipurpose Room (Proposed Action)

In this alternative, a multipurpose room would be constructed on the same area as the existing observation room and fiberglass overhang. The space between the existing visitor center and the existing sidewalk in front of the visitor center would be included and provide a waiting area for the multipurpose room and additional exhibit space.

Alternative 3 – No Action Alternative

There would be no change in the park's actions. Day to day business would be conducted as usual.

Overview of the Process

Project milestones include:

- Public scoping period (closes _____)
- Preparation of environmental assessment
- Public review of environmental assessment
- Analysis of public comment
- Preparation of decision document

- Announcement of decision for the Interim Visitor Center Plan

Resources and Concerns

Initial internal project scoping identified the following resources and other concerns for consideration in the environmental assessment (EA).

Topography, Geology and Soils
Vegetation
Wildlife
Threatened, Endangered, or Special Concern Species
Water Resources
Wetlands
Floodplains
Archeological Resources
Ethnographic Resources
Cultural Landscape
Museum Collections
Air Quality
Soundscape Management
Lightscape Management
Socioeconomic Resources
Historic Structures
Visitor Experience
Visual Resources

What does the scoping period mean? Scoping is done in the initial phase of a project to seek input from a variety of sources. The input is used to identify issues, areas requiring additional study, and topics that will be analyzed in the EA process. This is an opportunity for you to provide us with your suggestions, comments, and concerns regarding this Interim Visitor Center Plan at Little Bighorn Battlefield.

Is scoping my only opportunity to comment on the project? No, once the EA is developed, the document will be made available for public review for a 30-day period.

Please be aware that names and addresses of respondents may be released if requested under the Freedom of Information Act. Our practice is to make comments, including names and home addresses of respondents, available for public review during regular business hours. Individual respondents may request that we withhold their home address from the record, which we will honor to the extent allowable by law. There also may be circumstances in which we would withhold from the record a respondent's identity, as allowable by law. If you wish us to withhold your name and/or address, you must state this prominently at the beginning of your written comments. We will make all submissions from organizations or businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses, available for public inspection in their entirety.

Please let us know by January 9, 2006 :

1. Do you have any ideas to share about issues or concerns related to this Plan?

2. Are there any other alternatives that you think should be considered?

3. Do you have other comments and suggestions for us to consider in the environmental assessment?

If you wish to comment on the scoping brochure or on any other issues associated with the project, you may submit your comments by any one of several methods.

- You may submit written comments to:
Superintendent, Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument
P.O. Box 39
Crow Agency, MT 59022-0039
- You may also comment via electronic mail (e-mail) to <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/LIBI> . *Please submit e-mail comments as a text file avoiding the use of special characters and any form of encryption. Please also include your name, e-mail address and return mailing address in your e-mail message. If you do not receive a confirmation from the system that we have received your e-mail message, contact Linda Clement at 303/987-6691.*
- Finally, you may hand-deliver comments to Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument.

Please check the box if you would like to remain on the mailing list to receive additional information concerning this proposal.

Name: _____ **E- Mail:** _____

Street/Box #: _____

City, State, Zip Code: _____

**Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument
Visitor Center Expansion EA
P.O. Box 39
Crow Agency, MT 59022-0039**

Fold along line and tape closed



Interim Visitor Center Plan Environmental Assessment (EA)

**Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument
Big Horn County, Montana**

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