



Agate Fossil Beds National Monument



YOU'RE INVITED ...

You are invited to participate in the planning and preservation of Agate Fossil Beds National Monument in Harrison, Nebraska. Please join us at the one of the upcoming open houses to learn about this new and exciting project.



SATURDAY, MAY 31, 2008 **9 a.m. – 6 p.m.**

Community Open House
Agate Fossil Beds National Monument
301 River Road
Harrison, Nebraska

MONDAY, JUNE 2, 2008 **6 p.m. – 8 p.m.**

The Mari Sandoz Center
Chadron, Nebraska

TUESDAY, JUNE 3, 2008 **5 p.m. – 7 p.m.**

Hampton Inn
301 West Highway 26
Scottsbluff, Nebraska

A Message from the Superintendent...

Dear Friends of Agate Fossil Beds National Monument,

A new and exciting project is underway at Agate. The National Park Service is beginning the development of a general management plan (GMP) which will guide our efforts in protecting and preserving the park for the next 15 to 20 years. This will be the first management document created for Agate since the 1960's. Agate Fossil Beds National Monument is relatively unknown by the American public, yet those who do visit are impressed by all that it has to offer—world-renowned Miocene fossils, a sizeable and important collection of Native American artifacts, and scenic vistas resonating with silence. At the turn of the 20th Century, the area now known as Agate Fossil Beds National Monument was a hotbed of scientific discovery. Thousands of fossilized bones from mammals that had lived during the Miocene Epoch were unearthed. Visitors today can view the historic fossil quarries while hiking the paved trails in the park.

Agate also tells the story of a friendship between “Captain” James Cook, owner of the Agate Springs Ranch, and Chief Red Cloud, a leader of the Lakota people. As a way of honoring Cook, Chief Red Cloud and his followers presented the Cook family with many gifts. These gifts included intricately beaded moccasins, parfleche bags, ceremonial pipes, and many other hand-made Native American items that are now on display in the Visitor Center.

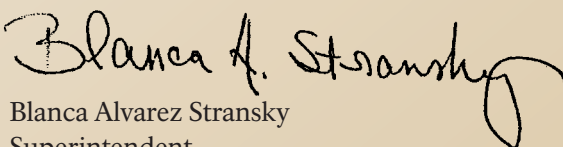


The park will work closely with federal, state, and local agencies; tribes; and the general public to identify common interests and goals for the park. These ideas (alternatives) for protecting the park, meeting the needs of the visitor, and addressing public concerns will be presented in the draft GMP. The final document will be combined with an environmental impact statement (EIS) that will analyze the impacts of each alternative on the park.

We need your participation in this very important project. Please join us in this effort by attending one of the upcoming public meetings. You can also participate by mailing back the enclosed response card with your thoughts about the park and getting your name on the GMP mailing list. We will keep you informed throughout the entire process and if you have any questions or comments please contact us.

I look forward to hearing from you as we proceed through the planning process. Thank you for your interest in Agate Fossil Beds National Monument.

Sincerely,


Blanca Alvarez Stransky
Superintendent

General Management Planning

The General Management Plan (GMP) is the basic plan for all park units in the National Park System. A GMP provides a foundation to help park managers guide programs and set priorities for resource stewardship, visitor understanding and appreciation, partnerships, and facilities and operations for the next 15-20 years. All concepts, strategies, and actions in a GMP must be consistent with the reasons the unit was established – its purpose, significance, and mission. Federal legislation and NPS policies also direct what the plan can and cannot consider.

The Agate Fossil Beds National Monument GMP will not resolve all the issues facing the park or guarantee funding. The plan will identify desired resource conditions and visitor experiences that would be appropriate, and the strategies for achieving those conditions. It also will identify general locations

where certain types of activities and development would be appropriate. Specific designs and methods for achieving these conditions will be addressed in new or revised implementation plans, such as resource management plans and interpretive plans, that will be prepared after the GMP has been completed.

To comply with the National Environmental Policy Act and NPS policy, the GMP will be combined with an Environmental Impact Statement. The GMP/EIS will identify significant issues and concerns, present a reasonable range of management alternatives, and analyze the environmental consequences of each of the alternatives.

Participation in the planning process by the park staff, partners, neighbors, and the general public is crucial to the success of this planning effort.



A General Management Plan:

- Provides general direction and basic management philosophy
- Identifies resource and visitor use management strategies and actions
- Can identify infrastructure requirements, functions, and locations
- Satisfies statutory and policy requirements
- Identifies funding and staffing requirements
- Does not guarantee funding
- Will not solve all problems

The Purpose and Significance of Agate Fossil Beds National Monument

PURPOSE

Purpose statements reaffirm the reasons for which the Monument was set aside as a unit of the National Park System and provide the foundation for the park's management and use. Purpose statements are based on the park's legislation and legislative history.

The purpose of Agate Fossil Beds National Monument is:

- To protect the Miocene fossils and associated quarries and related geological phenomena.
- To provide a center for continuing paleontological research and for the display and interpretation of Miocene Epoch fossils.
- To curate, exhibit, and protect the James H. Cook-Red Cloud Native American collection.
- To protect the cultural landscape and to reveal the interaction between cultures, landscapes, and science, especially the early reservation/pioneer ranching period.
- To preserve the short-grass prairie and the Niobrara riparian ecotone as a regionally important part of the high plains ecosystem.

SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENTS

Significance statements capture the essence of the Monument's importance to our country's natural and cultural heritage. Significance statements do not inventory park resources; rather, they describe the park's distinctiveness and help to place the park within its regional, national, and international contexts. Defining the park's significance helps managers make decisions that preserve the resources and values necessary to accomplish the park's purpose. The following significance statements were created for Agate Fossil Beds National Monument.

The "Great Bone Bed at Agate" is world-renowned as one of the earliest discoveries that helped define the Miocene Epoch. The thousands of densely packed bones deposited into an ancient watering hole are revered for their quality of preservation and completeness.

The discovery of Bear Dog dens in the 1980s showed the earliest known denning behavior of carnivores.

This and other important discoveries at Agate include animals new to science, as well as traces of the actual environments they lived in.

Daemonelix or "Devil's corkscrews" is a name locally given to enormous sandstone spirals – sometimes up to 10 feet tall. Early researchers were both fascinated with and confounded by these gigantic trace fossils, developing several theories as to their origin. It was later determined that these deposits were natural casts of rodent burrows.

The *Stenomylus* Quarry is unique because it contains multiple skeletons of the little gazelle-camel, one of the smallest of the North American camels. Other occurrences of *Stenomylus* are limited to isolated specimens. Many of the skeletons are fully articulated and are preserved in great detail. The site is thought to be a mass death assemblage.

The history of research at Agate provides important data needed to better understand the climate and ancient mammals that lived during the Miocene. The scientific story includes important examples of cooperation, competition, near misses, rediscovery, and detailed problem solving, all significant components of scientific understanding.

The Cook papers provide valuable insights for future generations regarding the development of a 19th century frontier ranch and the discovery of the fossil quarries, and paints an intimate portrait of a long-lasting friendship between Cook and Red Cloud. The Cook-Red Cloud collection, an accumulation of beautiful gifts bestowed on James H. Cook and his family over many years, illustrates the Plains Indian tradition of gift giving, and is a symbol of friendship between cultures not often found in the combative settlement of the west.

The upper Niobrara River valley at Agate provides a pastoral glimpse into a special riverine environment valued by prairie animals, Native Americans, early settlers, and fossil hunters at the Miocene quarries.

The historic Bone Cabin complex illustrates the time period when Harold Cook homesteaded 640 acres, including the Fossil Hills, in order to protect the quarries from uncontrolled development or exploitation. His desire to work with the paleontologists led to one of the earliest efforts in fossil preservation.

The Planning Process

HOW WILL THE PLAN BE PREPARED?

Five major steps will be taken to produce the GMP:

Step 1. The planning team reaffirms the Monument's purpose, significance, and mission, identifies issues and concerns for the Monument, and collects necessary information. This step establishes the context for the Plan.

Step 2. Efforts during this step focus on determining alternative approaches to achieving desired future conditions and resolving issues. Typically, three to five management alternatives are identified. One of these alternatives will be chosen as the National Park Service's preferred alternative, which will be the alternative the NPS believes best fulfills its statutory mission and responsibilities.

Step 3. The planning team will compile the management alternatives and an analysis of the effects of implementing each alternative into a draft GMP/EIS. This document will be distributed to the public for review and comments.

Step 4. The team will consider public comments, make appropriate changes to the draft GMP/EIS, then prepare and distribute a final GMP/EIS.

Step 5. The final step of the GMP process is to issue a Record of Decision, the official approval of one of the alternatives as the plan for managing the Monument. The National Park Service can then begin implementing the GMP as funding permits.

The Planning Team

WHO IS WRITING THE PLAN?

A multi-disciplinary team has been assembled to prepare the GMP/EIS for Agate Fossil Beds National Monument. The team includes specialists in national resources, cultural resources, paleontology, interpretation, law enforcement, facilities/maintenance, ethnography, and planning, and is made up of staff of the Monument, the Midwest Regional Office, and Harpers Ferry Center (an interpretive planning office). Geographic information system specialists, editors, visual information specialists, and others will provide support to the planning team. The team will consult with other knowledgeable people inside the NPS, federal, state, and local governments and agencies, Native American Tribes, and with the general public.



Del Iron Cloud, a member of the Hunkpapa Sioux Tribe, is one of many artists who participates in Agate Fossil Beds' Artist-in-Residence program.

Issues to Be Addressed in the GMP

The following topics and issues will be addressed in the GMP. Other issues may be identified during the public scoping process.

- How will visitors access the site's resources?
- What are the desired visitor experiences related to park information, interpretation, and education services, and what opportunities are there to enhance availability of these services for the public?
- Is there a need for any additional infrastructure?
- What are the options for increasing access to, upkeep, and interpretation of, the Agate Springs Ranch? What is the importance of Red Cloud and the Cook family in the story of the park?
- What impacts do the changing dynamics of the Niobrara River have on the natural and cultural resources of the park?

Purpose and Need to Study the Eligibility and Suitability of the Niobrara River as Part of the Wild And Scenic Rivers System

The 10-mile reach of the Niobrara River that is contained within the park is listed on the National Rivers Inventory, which requires the NPS to study its eligibility for inclusion in the Wild and Scenic Rivers System. The GMP team, with assistance from the regional river coordinator and the NPS' Water

Resources Division, will conduct the eligibility assessment. If the river is deemed eligible, the park will consult with the Midwest Regional Office to determine whether to conduct a suitability study as part of the GMP or at a later time.

Schedule for GMP Process

	Step	Time Frame	Planning Activity	Public Involvement
	1	Completed	Initiate Project The planning team assembles and begins to identify the project's scope, customize the planning process, and establish contacts with participants.	
WE ARE HERE	2	Summer 2007– Summer 2008	Define Planning Context and Foundation The team examines WHY Agate Fossil Beds National Monument was established, affirms purpose and significance, and presents potential issues to the public in Newsletter #1. Team members collect and analyze relevant data and public input.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read the newsletter. • Send us your ideas and comments. • Attend public meetings.
	3	Fall 2008– Spring 2009	Develop and Evaluate Alternatives. Using staff and public input, the team explores WHAT Agate's future could look like, and proposes a range of alternatives in Newsletter #2.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read the newsletter. • Send us your ideas and comments. • Attend public meetings.
	4	Summer 2009– Summer 2010	Prepare and Publish Draft Document A Draft General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement is published. The draft document describes the alternatives and impacts of implementing each alternative. Based on the impacts and public input, a preferred alternative is identified in the document.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read the draft plan. • Send us your ideas and comments. • Attend public meetings.
	5	Fall 2010– Summer 2011	Revise and Publish Final Document The team will analyze comments by agencies, organizations, and the public, revise the plan, and distribute a Final General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement. The final plan is approved in a published Record of Decision.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read the final plan, including NPS responses to substantive public comments and official letters.
	6	Summer 2011 and Beyond	Implement the Approved Plan After the "Record of Decision" is issued, begin implementing the plan as funding permits.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with the national monument to implement the plan.



Artist Mark Marcuson's depiction of a Moropus herd nearing the Agate Fossil Beds death scene where hundreds of Menoceras died during a drought.



The artwork was enlarged more than tenfold to form the eastern backdrop for the Agate Fossil Beds' diorama.

How You Can Get Involved

Public involvement is critical to the success of the planning effort. Public input will help the planning team learn about the concerns, issues, expectations, and desires of visitors, interested citizens, people with traditional cultural ties to the park, interest groups, and others. The planning team will share information and seek public input at key points in the GMP process. A variety of methods will be used to encourage public feedback, including newsletters, press releases, public meetings, and posting updates on the internet.

You can begin providing feedback by completing the enclosed Comment Form. You can also log onto Agate Fossil Beds National Monument's home page at <http://www.nps.gov/agfo> or the National Park Service Planning web page at <http://www.nps.gov/planning>. All newsletters will be posted on the web sites.

For those of you who live in the vicinity of the park, the planning team will be holding public open houses Saturday, May 31 at the park, Monday, June 2 in Chadron, Nebraska and Tuesday, June 3 in Scottsbluff, Nebraska. At the open houses, you will be able to learn more about the planning process, talk with planning team members, and voice your interests and concerns. The locations, dates, and times of the open houses are listed on the front page of this newsletter.

The planning team welcomes public input at any time in the process. Besides logging onto the websites listed above, you may, at any time, mail or drop off a letter to:

Superintendent
Agate Fossil Beds National Monument
301 River Road
Harrison, NE 69346

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