

Briefing Statement

Bureau: National Park Service

Issue: Bighorn Canyon NRA and Little Bighorn Battlefield Legislation

Park Site: Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area

Background: The present boundary of Bighorn Canyon includes approximately 56,000 acres of Crow Indian Reservation lands. There was controversy when the lands were included, and controversy continues today. As a consequence of these actions, Bighorn Canyon NRA has been restricted in park planning, management, and development on the Crow Reservation lands. The General Management Plan for the park, completed in 1981, conceded this point and limited park planning to those lands originally included in the 1966 Act of Congress (P.L. 89-664), which specifically excluded Crow Tribal lands. The impasse has left the recreation area in the precarious situation of having lands within its boundaries that are unmanageable in accordance with its enabling legislation.

Little Bighorn Battlefield NM's approved General Management Plan (1995) calls for expanding the park boundary from its current 765 acres to 11,800 acres. The land surrounding the Monument has seen markedly increased commercial developments in recent years. Such developments threaten to intrude on the experience of visitors and irrevocably alter physical features of the landscape that are crucial for understanding what took place at the Battle of the Little Bighorn. Expanded land base would add important elements of the battle, including Reno's first skirmish line and the Indian encampment, to the monument for protection and preservation.

Legislation is needed to add certain key lands within the Crow Reservation to Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument and to withdraw certain Crow Lands from Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area. The legislation would be developed as one piece, with two distinct titles. Linking the two boundary changes--an addition to Little Bighorn Battlefield and a subtraction from Bighorn Canyon NRA--will help to enlist support for the legislation from Crow Tribal Council and other stakeholders.

Current Status:

- Legislation for a boundary expansion at Little Bighorn was introduced by Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell in the 107th Congress (S1338).
- Consultations between the Crow Tribe and Park have taken place over the last four years to review the proposal. General maps with tract locations were furnished to the Crow Tribe including copies of public documents.
- The Park briefed the Montana Congressional delegation staff and the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks on a proposed legislative change for both Park units.
- The Parks and Crow Tribe have reached a tentative agreement on a draft legislative package. The draft legislation is awaiting action by the Crow Tribal Administration and Legislators.
- The Park and Regional Offices are generally supportive of the draft bill and have participated with the Crow Tribe in negotiations.
- Public meetings held in Fort Smith and Billings, Montana.