

BANNACK STATE PARK MANAGEMENT PLAN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 1999, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks began the ambitious process of developing a comprehensive Management Plan for Bannack State Park. In an innovative approach to the planning process, twenty-four individuals were invited to join the planning team. Planning team members not only included employees from all Divisions within Fish, Wildlife and Parks but also private citizens from a wide range of backgrounds and interest levels. The group was led by Cossitt Consulting. While at times, a group of this size was challenging to coordinate and schedule, in the end the result was well worth the extra effort involved. Together, with the public comments gathered during the scoping phase of the process, this diverse group was able to tackle difficult and complex issues, and come to consensus on the best alternatives for the long-range management and operation of Bannack State Park.

Initially, the planning team had to determine and develop the Mission of Bannack State Park. From public scoping it was learned that the Bannack most people envisioned in the future was exactly (or almost exactly) what Bannack is today. The Mission of Bannack is:

Bannack State Park Mission

“The mission of Bannack State Park is to preserve and protect its historic integrity, fabric, resources, landscape and atmosphere, from it’ beginnings as an isolated frontier mining boom town through its evolution as a slowly dying, abandoned community. Through education, preservation and interpretation, Bannack will provide and perpetuate the unique “Bannack Experience” in order to spark current and future visitors’ imaginations and enrich their opportunity to understand the history made in Bannack and the lives of the people who lived and worked there.

The next step was then to verbally define what it was about Bannack that visitors loved and wanted to preserve. The result was the Bannack Experience statement. From this, the planning team determined that all actions or policies recommended by the plan would have to meet at least one of the three Management Plan Outcomes:

1. Preserve and protect Bannack’s unique cultural, historical, recreational and natural resources for current and future generation.
2. To provide for current and future visitors to Bannack the opportunity to safely enjoy the Bannack Experience.
3. To provide outstanding educational, interpretive and recreational opportunities for

current and future park visitors, while maintaining the Bannack Experience.

Finally, the issues that arose were grouped into eight major categories. An issue statement was written by each focus group that served to define and explain the nature of the issue. The eight categories and statements were:

ISSUE #1. Building Preservation & Stabilization

ISSUE STATEMENT: Buildings at Bannack are deteriorating from weather, use and time. Over the years, preservation and stabilization work on these buildings has taken a wide range of approaches, from restoration to arrested decay, often resulting in a conglomeration of treatments, with no consistency. Preservation and stabilization work should be high quality, consistent, and well documented in its approach. Access to buildings is a major unique characteristic of Bannack. People want to continue to wander in and out of the buildings, but at the same time this use is contributing to the deterioration of the structures.

Issue # 2. Visitor Management

ISSUE STATEMENT: More and more visitors are attracted to Bannack State Park each year. Bannack State Park needs to be managed so that the “ Bannack Experience” is available to visitors while still preserving the park for future generations, limiting impact on the resources and providing for a safe experience for all visitors.

Issue #3. Interpretation.

ISSUE STATEMENT: There is a need to enhance and expand the range of interpretation and educational opportunities for the increasing number and expectations of visitors. There is also a need to spread this interpretation out over the entire park to better disperse visitors. All interpretative and educational programs at Bannack should honor the Bannack Experience.

Issue #4. Cultural Resource Management

ISSUE STATEMENT: The capability to manage, record, organize, store and acquire artifacts at Bannack needs improvement. Currently, there is inadequate artifact storage; not all artifacts are documented; labeled and inventoried; some artifacts may be at risk from pothunting and vandalism; archaeological work needs standardized guidelines; and there is no acquisition policy. Protecting cultural resources at Bannack is critical and involves not only the artifacts found there but also the Bannack cemeteries and the historic landscapes.

Issue #5. Facilities and Infrastructure

ISSUE STATEMENT: There is a need to keep up with increasing demands on the site from normal wear and tear, increased visitation and changing codes and regulations. This

will involve maintaining what currently exists, making improvements and upgrades as needed and planning for new facilities and infrastructure.

Issue #6. Public Health and Safety

ISSUE STATEMENT: There is a continued need to address public health and safety at Bannack, to stay in compliance with applicable codes and regulations, and to balance these needs within the context of the “Bannack Experience.”

Issue #7. Natural Resources

ISSUE STATEMENT: It is the mission of Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, the Parks Division and Bannack State Park to provide for the stewardship of, preserve and protect Montana’s significant and unique natural resources. Natural resources -- including vegetation, wildlife, water, and air – are all part of the Bannack Experience. Mechanisms need to be put in place to protect and perpetuate Bannack’s historic natural resources into the future, with consideration being given to preserving cultural and historic resources and preserving the Bannack Experience.

Issue #8. Recreation

ISSUE STATEMENT: A variety of recreational opportunities needs to be maintained at Bannack and balanced within the context of maintaining the “Bannack Experience”.

It was interesting, and also reaffirming that many of the work groups, working independently and with varying issues, came up with the same recommended actions for meeting the issue goals. Most work groups determined that the foremost challenge Bannack was facing was accommodating the steadily increasing numbers of visitors to Bannack, while still allowing visitors to enjoy the type of Bannack Experience as defined in the Management Plan. The primary action that was developed to overcome this challenge was to construct a new, multipurpose Visitor Center, on the edge or outside of the townsite. This new Visitor Center would in some form, address almost all of the issues brought up. It would:

- ! Decrease the pressure on the historic resources by providing interpretive resources about the buildings.
- ! Disperse the park visitors from concentrating at the entrance to the townsite.
- ! Provide more detailed information and interpretive programming for visitors with disabilities.
- ! Provide more control over visitor activities and increase security.
- ! Increase fee compliance by having the visitor center/fee collection area and

offices in the same area.

- ! Expand interpretive offerings for all visitors
- ! Provide a location for proper artifact storage, documentation, research and maintenance.
- ! Provide for the increasing needs of visitors including more restrooms and more room to view the Bannack videos.

Another common recommendation throughout the work groups was dispersing visitors out of the townsite through offering a variety of interpretive, educational and recreational activities. These included developing hiking and interpretive trails along the mining areas, increasing the guided tours of the mill, opening the mill for self-guided tours, rehabilitating the mine and opening the mine for guided tours.

This Management Plan recommends the completion of several additional plans. Those plans include a Natural Resource Management Plan, a Mosquito Control Plan, a Rodent Control Plan, a Fire Control Plan and an Archeology Plan. All of these planning efforts will involve considerable time and research as well as the assistance of experts in each field.

As a way of directing future management actions and decisions and in order to achieve the goals established for each issue, many policies were recommended as a part of this planning effort. They are listed on page 30 of this plan.

The plan is very ambitious in its recommendations for action. It became obvious to the planning team early in the process that the two determining factors for achieving the goals of the plan would be staffing levels and funding levels. Without substantial improvements in both of these areas, it will be difficult to move forward with the recommended actions. Innovation and creativity will also play a role here, in applying for grants, in researching and applying for alternative funding, increasing admission fees for special events and retaining those funds for Bannack, in working with volunteers and in forming partnerships.

The direction for the future of Bannack is set. Together, the actions and policies established in this plan will serve to meet the Management Plan Outcomes and provide an opportunity for our children, grandchildren and hopefully our great grandchildren to enjoy the Bannack Experience

Experience the past. Walk the quiet, dusty, deserted street past buildings weathered and worn by the ravages of time. Rusty tin cans, an old bottle, square nails. Imagine the past. An old bedstead, a broken chair, a well used wood cook stove bits and pieces of the past fill in the spaces and spark the imagination, free from modern day intrusions and commercialization. Touch the past. Sit in the school desks, empty and abandoned since the 1950's. Step inside the Courthouse vaults. Run your hand along the hand hewn logs

crafted 120 years ago. Hear the past. An old door, one hinge missing, creaks and groans in the wind. A cold draft edges through the cracks in the missing chinking and sends shivers up your spine. Quiet. Solitude. Discover the past. First major gold rush, first territorial capital, first county seat of Beaverhead County. Sidney Edgerton, Henry Plummer, Chief Snag, Vigilantes and Road Agents, miners, business men, Chinese immigrants, women and children. Interpret the past. Boom and bust, fortunes won and fortunes lost, birth and death, disease and prosperity, law and order, good and evil. Relive the past. Experience history where it actually happened. Touch History. Bannack, an era in time, preserved and protected, for now and forever. This is the "Bannack Experience".