

Little Bighorn
visitor center
expansion
dropped

MONTANA (AP) — The National Park Service on Tuesday dropped its plan to expand the visitor center at Little Bighorn Battlefield, saying the \$1.1 million project would have blemished historic Last Stand Hill.

The expansion had been slated for the base of the hill where Lt. Col. George Armstrong Custer and other members of the U.S. Army 7th Cavalry were killed by Sioux Indians in 1876.

Long-term plans for the battlefield, a national monument, call for a new \$11 million visitor center at another location. But since Congress has not provided money for that larger project, park officials had sought to add a 200-seat theater at the existing center built in the 1950s.

A large group of historians and former park employees pressured the agency to drop the expansion.

They filed a lawsuit last month claiming its approval in April had violated environmental and historical regulations.

“Sometimes you just have to admit that you didn’t do your homework as well as you might have thought,” Park Service Regional Director Mike Snyder said in announcing the decision to abandon the project.

Snyder said his agency would come up with another way to accommodate crowds, possibly by altering the existing visitor center without making it bigger.

A Park Service spokeswoman said no timeline or potential cost estimates were available.

Former Park Service Chief Historian Robert Utley, the lead plaintiff in the lawsuit, said Snyder made the right decision.

“This is really good news. It was more than I expected,” said Utley, 78. He worked as a seasonal ranger at the monument in 1952, when the visitor center was dedicated.

“At that time, the National Park Service had a somewhat different philosophy about where to place visitors centers. It was to put them as close as possible to historic resources,” Utley said. “We don’t do that anymore.”

Prior to the lawsuit, filed by Utley and 11 others in partnership with the Washington, D.C.-based Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, Snyder already had agreed to review the expansion.

Spokeswoman Karen Breslin said the service had long recognized the visitor center was an “intrusion” on the rolling, grass-covered hills that make up the monument.

“Blemish is the right way to think about it,” she said.

“Had the expansion gone forward, that would be the issue. It would be a bigger blemish.”

She said the expansion had been proposed out of “frustration” on the part of park employees who deal with large crowds of visitors to the monument every summer.

Yakama tribe holds
confab over trust issues

Yakima Herald-Republic

TOPPENISH, Wash. — Yakama tribal members will have a chance to voice any concerns over trust issues such as federally managed Indian money and lands during a two-day listening conference beginning Wednesday.

The Intertribal Monitoring Association on Indian Trust Funds based in Albuquerque, N.M., and the Yakama Nation are hosting the conference at the Cultural Heritage Center situated behind the Yakama agency at 401 Fort Road.

The monitoring association began holding listening conferences in 2004. It’s a

federal entity responsible for assuring competent and efficient management of Indian trust assets.

The conference begins at 9 a.m. Wednesday and ends at noon on Thursday.

Some issues of concern include federally managed Indian trust funds and trust assets, including Individual Indian Money accounts, land leases, trespass on tribal land, probate and returning fee land back to tribal trust land.

Information gathered will be used to inform Congress and help develop policy reforms.

Special Trustee for American Indians Ross O. Swimmer will attend.

Wyo. tribe mourns 3 teens, loss of cultural ties

WIND RIVER INDIAN RESERVATION, Wyo. (AP) — Rows of rundown houses sit among stunted trees on a bleak, wind-swept plateau. The nearest mountains are a faint smudge on the horizon, and a boarded-up house marks the end of the road.

Three teenage girls died here, at the Beaver Creek housing complex, in early June. All three were members

of the Northern Arapaho Tribe.

Federal authorities have not said what killed them, although tribal leaders say the deaths highlight the scourge of drugs and alcohol on the reservation. And the leaders say the deaths show the price the tribe continues to pay for the slow evaporation of its culture, native language and traditional ways.

“At this point, it seems that we’re losing it,” said Harvey Spoonhunter, co-chairman of the Northern Arapaho Business Council, the tribe’s governing body. “I think the youth, from 12 to 18, are kind of lost. They don’t know their place in the tribe.”

Ohetica Win Elyxis Gardner, 13, Winter Rose Thomas, 14, and Alexandria “Alex”

Whiteplume, 15, were all found dead on the morning of June 4. Authorities have declined to release details on the circumstances surrounding their death.

Autopsies have been performed. The FBI says the investigation is ongoing.

Meanwhile, young people on the Wind River Reservation say drugs and alcohol are prevalent. And they say children need more supervision.

Whitney SunRhodes, 16, addressed a community meeting two weeks after the girls were found dead.

“What happened to the girls over at Beaver Creek, sad to say, it woke everybody up, right? It’s sad to say that it took their deaths to bring our tribe together as one,” said SunRhodes, who knew one of the girls.

The tribe’s youth need more help, she said.

“We need more parental supervision. We need more guidance. We need more activities out there that will keep kids involved,” SunRhodes said.

Margaret Washington, Elyxis’ grandmother, would agree. She said Elyxis and other children at the housing complex were frequently out on the streets at night, unsupervised. She said people from outside the community commonly cruise through the complex.

“We need a recreation area around here, where kids can play basketball,” Washington said. “Kids drop out of school, and don’t finish their education.”

Loreal Bell, Elyxis’ mother, said she has been trying to make a better life for her family. She enlisted in the Army in July 2007 and is stationed at Ft. Knox, Ky. She said her superiors have delayed her deployment to Iraq so she can grieve for her daughter.

Bell, 31, said Elyxis had a difficult time adjusting to life on the reservation after living off of it for some time.

“I think my daughter tried a little too hard to try to fit in, she was an impressionable age,” Bell said. “That seems to be like a normal thing on the reservation, like drugs and alcohol. And she was exposed to it more, and I don’t know that she knew how to handle it.”

Northern Arapaho leaders say children on the reservation commonly fall through the cracks. They say that drugs and alcohol combine

with a tattered social fabric leave many young people without support.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ 2001 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse, American Indians and Alaska natives had the highest rate of any racial group, at 9.9 percent. The rate among whites was 7.2 percent.

Denied a reservation of their own, the Northern Arapaho were herded onto the reservation they now share with the Eastern Shoshone. In the 20th century, many Northern Arapaho youth were forced to attend government boarding schools where they were forbidden to speak their native language. The federal government, for a time, even banned the celebration of the tribe’s Sun Dance, its main religious ceremony.

Although there are programs in the schools to teach the Northern Arapaho language to children, experts say the youngest people fluent in the Northern Arapaho language are about 60 years old.

“Lives are filled with despair,” said Sergio A. Maldonado, Sr., director of tribal education for the Northern Arapaho. He said he sees his tribe still working through the effects of its historical grief. And rather than assimilating into mainstream America, he said he sees many tribal members suffering from, “a complete identity loss. A social dysfunction.”

While Maldonado said some Northern Arapaho families are flourishing and their children succeeding, he said far too many are not. He estimated the dropout rate on the reservation at 40 percent.

Richard Brannan serves as CEO of the Wind River Service Unit, which manages two health clinics serving more than 10,000 people, both Northern Arapaho and Eastern Shoshone, on the reservation.

Brannan said the center has a contract with each tribe to provide substance abuse treatment. “But it’s so underfunded it’s almost ridiculous,” he said. “We have a long waiting list of people waiting to go to treatment.”

Brannan said the average age of death on the Wind River Indian Reservation is 49 years old. “So we basically have the same life expectancy as somebody in Africa,” he said.



Associated Press

Margaret Washington holds a portrait of her granddaughter, Ohetica Win Elyxis Gardner, 13, at her home on the Wind River Indian Reservation in Wyoming, June 17. Elyxis and two other teenage girls were found dead, all three members of the Northern Arapaho Tribe, in early June, though federal officials have not said what killed them. However, tribal leaders say the deaths highlight the scourge of drugs and alcohol on the reservation.

Tribe plans campground, RV park on rezoned property

By Patricia Ecker

Mt. Pleasant Morning Sun

MT. PLEASANT, Mich. — The Migizi Economic Development Co., who handles all non-gaming business interests for the Tribe, submitted the rezoning requests for two parcels of land on East Airport Road.

“We’d like to zone them agricultural for the purpose of creating a campground and an upscale RV park for this area,” Business Systems Analyst for Migizi Lisa Dar-

nell said. “The main plan for the park is to have it run by the Soaring Eagle Inn.

“We will be creating a path somewhere through the golf course. Probably around around the edge.”

Darnell said during the first phase of the development, the Tribe would like to create 60 recreational vehicle sites on the property located at 5050 E. Airport Road.

The property has a lakefront home which will be converted into a clubhouse with a convenience store,

game room, sitting room and food service.

“We may be looking into the treeline for phase two,” Darnell said. “The pole barn that sits here will be created into the bath house, shower system and public laundry.”

She said that Bemay Lake will be utilized for motorized and non-motorized watercraft.

The property is adjacent to agricultural property, Planning Commission Chairman Ken Schaeffer said.

In the plan, each site will

have utility hookups, sewer, a picnic table, landscaping and a fire ring, according to Migizi’s request.

Other amenities that would be available will include fishing, swimming, a walking trail, picnic area, a pavilion, and a children’s play area.

Zoning Administrator for Union Township Woody Woodruff said he received two phone calls from people who were curious about the Tribe’s plans.

“New planning mandates

that any rezoning not create any further non-conformities with the local airport,” Woodruff said.

He said he spoke to the Mt. Pleasant director of planning and community development and the director of public works and they had no comments or concerns.

There were no comments during the public hearing portion of the meeting, and there were no additional questions following Darnell’s presentation by the planning commission.

Native American Finance Officers Assoc.
applauds Cobell’s plan to appeal ruling

Glacier Reporter

BROWNING, Mont. — The Native American Finance Officers Association Aug. 15 applauded the decision to appeal the Aug. 7 Cobell vs. Kempthorne federal court ruling. Bill Lomax, president of NAFOA, said that he was, “flabbergasted by the decision that awarded Native American plaintiffs \$455 million, less than one percent of the \$47 billion they were seeking.”

The 12-year battle has been championed by

Elouise Cobell, a member of the Blackfeet Nation from Browning. She sued the U.S. Departments of the Interior and Treasury to end 120 years of trust mismanagement by making the government accountable to Indian people by providing a proper accounting of all Individual Indian monies.

The case stems from the Dawes Act of 1887 under which the federal government parceled out millions of acres of Native lands. Land was placed into trust accounts belonging to individual Native Americans,

under a trust relationship between the U.S. government and Native people. Plaintiffs argued that the government had not honored its trustee responsibilities and failed to provide accurate accounting records. Decades passed with no accounting records. Leases went unrecorded and monies were not properly paid.

Cobell said, “It’s amazing that the United States government could get away with this for so long. We sued the United States government for fixing the sys-

tems that manage our money.”

Commenting on the discrepancy between treatment of Native Americans and other private citizens, Cobell said, “Normally, if you’ve behaved like the United States government in the management of our trust funds, you would not be walking the streets. You would be in jail.”

NAFOA has urged tribal leaders to donate financial resources to the cause and has urged lobbying groups to inform Congress of the decision.