

Ethnography Program

PROJECT

Intertribal Information Exchanges

The Intertribal Information Exchange is an annual two-day event for tribal delegates and members to discuss issues related to ethnographic resources with managers of Yellowstone and Grand Teton national parks and the National Elk Refuge. During Intertribal Information Exchanges tribal members and park staff can express opinions, interact, and maintain relationships with each other. The information presented at these meetings also helps all park divisions make decisions that are inclusive of traditional knowledge and tribal perspectives, aiding in the fulfillment of the park's American Indian Trust Responsibility. Guided by various federal laws and the ensuing National Park Service guidelines and policies, Yellowstone National Park is legally mandated to identify and protect those sites and resources within the park that are associated with American Indian cultural and religious heritage, as well as to solicit tribal opinions regarding resource management and incorporate recommendations into management decisions.

The first Intertribal Information Exchange was held in Yellowstone in 1999. Now more than 400 people from 80



Levi Holt, member of the Nez Perce tribe, addresses attendees at the 2004 Intertribal Information Exchange about bison management practices at Yellowstone National Park.

Ethnography Intertribal Information Exchanges Project
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Representatives of traditionally associated tribes, the Park Service, Forest Service, and Intertribal Bison Cooperative engaged in a roundtable discussion about the Interagency Bison Management Program in 2004.

tribes and 3 government agencies are invited to participate every year. Over the course of many phone conversations with dozens of participants, the park's ethnography staff refine the agenda to reflect the strongest and most common concerns relating to the park's ethnographic resources. As a result, final agendas are peppered with presentations, speakers, and questions designed to incite lively discussion about resource issues and encourage interaction among participants. Information Exchanges often include fieldtrips to resource-related sites, and traditionally conclude with a community potluck. Salient standpoints and concerns expressed in the meeting are carefully recorded and transcribed. Through further dissemination to park staff, those perspectives are integrated into park planning, management, and interpretation.

In response to feedback from the previous year, the 2005 Intertribal Information Exchange was devoted entirely to the topic of bison management in the Yellowstone ecosystem. Several representatives from the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, Kiowa Tribe of Oklahoma, Oglala Sioux Tribe, Sisseton-Wahpeton Sioux Tribe, and the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes participated. Representatives from the Inter-Tribal Bison Cooperative (ITBC) as well as managers and scientists from Yellowstone, Grand Teton, and the Gallatin National Forest also attended. In response to tribal requests, presentations and discussions covered these topics: a history and review of the Interagency Bison Management Plan; bison management in the field; the parks' current relationships with the governors of Montana and Wyoming; public affairs and bison management; bison interpreted in Yellowstone's science-based management as compared to tribal interpretations of bison as intrinsically

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intermingled with tribes' cultural, spiritual, and religious identity; the history and role of the ITBC; and management of bison at the National Elk Refuge and Grand Teton.

During the meeting tribal representatives expressed their concerns and opinions to park staff regarding bison management. Most commended Yellowstone staff for their hard work and dedication to the resource, but continued to voice frustration regarding the test and slaughter program. Park staff provided technical information and scientific explanations for current bison management practices. In response to tribal concerns, several alternative strategies were then debated.

Following the meeting, the customary community potluck, co-sponsored by the Bear Creek Council and the National Park Service, was held at the Gardiner Community Center in honor of the tribes. Over 100 people attended, including a group from De La Salle

Blackfeet School in Browning, Montana. The students shared a presentation on Blackfeet buffalo culture and, as is tradition, stories and comments were shared by participants. On the following day, several individuals participated in a fieldtrip to the bison quarantine facility.

Ethnography staff considered the 2005 Intertribal Information Exchange a success, as the meeting generated increased awareness of both tribal and park perspectives regarding bison management. By means of the intellectual and social interaction developed through the exchange, all participants left with new ideas and a better understanding of our cultural differences. Perspectives and concerns expressed in the meeting continue to shape bison management decisions in Yellowstone National Park.

The 2006 Intertribal Information Exchange will be held in Grand Teton National Park.

