NATIONAL PARK SERVICE • U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Foundation Document Overview

Nez Perce National Historical Park

Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington

Contact Information

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Purpose

The purpose of Nez Perce National Historical Park is to facilitate protection and offer interpretation of Nez Perce sites in Idaho, Oregon, Washington, Montana, and Wyoming that have exceptional value in commemorating the history of the United States; to preserve and protect tangible resources that document the history of the Nez Perce peoples and the significant role of the Nez Perce in North American history; and to interpret the culture and history of the Nez Perce peoples and promote documentation to enhance that interpretation.

Significance

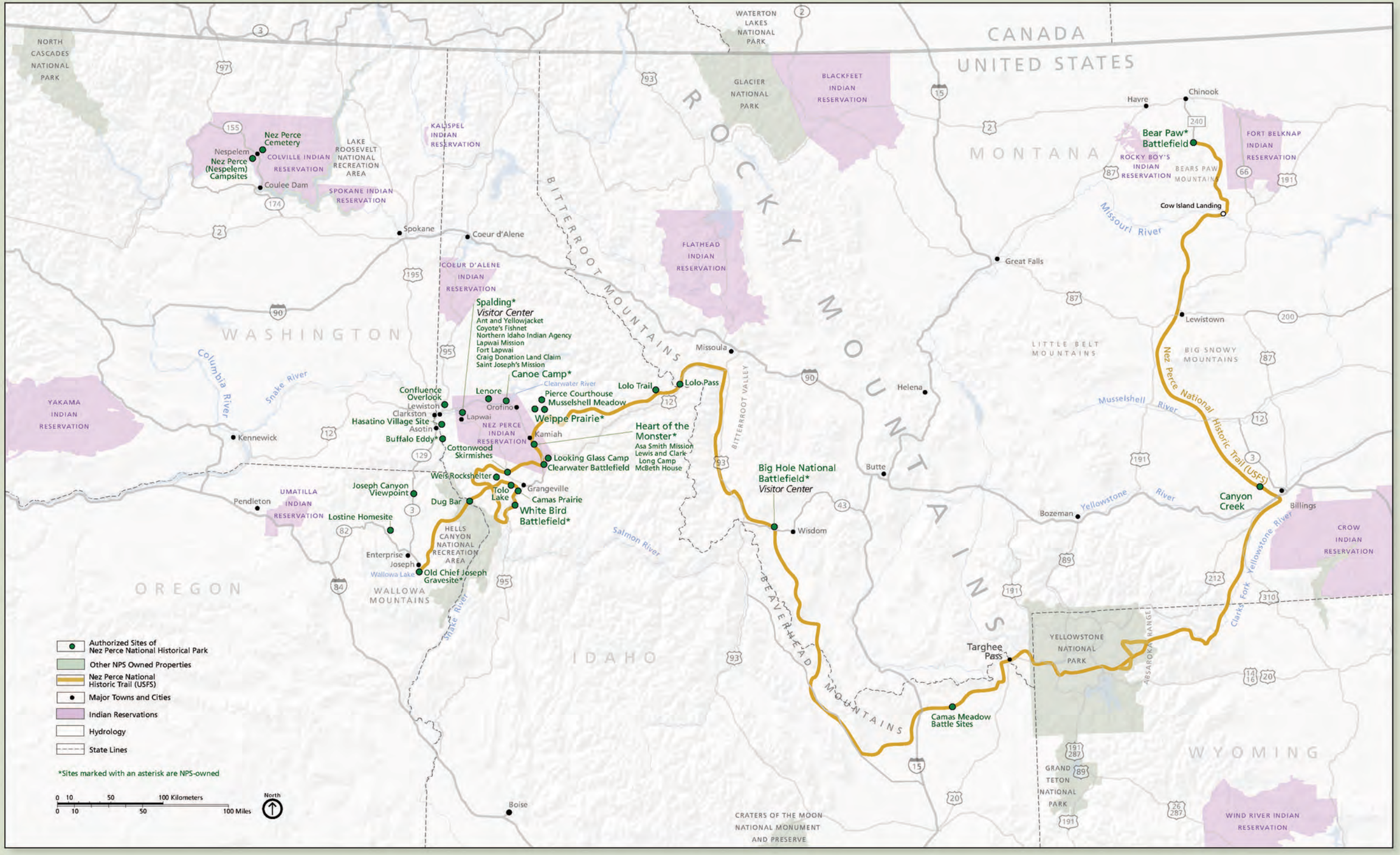
Significance statements express why Nez Perce National Historical Park resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- The park preserves a continuum of at least 11,000 years of Nez Perce culture. Its archeological record, museum collection, cultural landscapes, and structures are of national significance. The park contains historical and cultural landmarks that are of legendary significance to the Nez Perce people. The Nez Perce (Nee-Me-Poo) National Historic Trail commemorates a significant event in the history of the Nez Perce people.
- Nez Perce National Historical Park offers a unique opportunity for visitors to gain an understanding of present-day Nez Perce culture within and outside the Nez Perce homeland and to learn about important events of the past.

Significance

- Past and present Nez Perce culture has been shaped by the geography and the rich and varied resources of the Nez Perce homeland.
- The park includes parts of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail and the Lolo Trail, both of w hich were used by other cultures. The Nez Perce country, Nez Perce National Historical Park sites, and other American Indian cultures overlap but also differ in many ways.
- The park contains burial sites and sacred sites; it is also a focal point for current Nez Perce culture and allows for the continued traditional use of resources. The park honors the rights retained in the 1855 and 1863 treaties and will fully apply all applicable laws, executive orders, policies, and treaties related to the protection of cultural properties and sacred sites.

Park Map


NORTH CASCADES NATIONAL PARK
WATERTON LAKES NATIONAL PARK
CANADA
UNITED STATES
GLACIER NATIONAL PARK
BLACKFEET INDIAN RESERVATION
ROCKY MOUNTAINS
MONTANA
Havre
Chinook
Bear Paw* Battlefield
ROCKY BOY'S INDIAN RESERVATION
BEARS PAW MOUNTAINS
FORT BELKNAP INDIAN RESERVATION
Cow Island Landing
Missouri River
Great Falls
Lewistown
LITTLE BELT MOUNTAINS
BIG SNOWY MOUNTAINS
Nez Perce National Historic Trail (USFS)
Nez Perce Cemetery
Nespelem
Nez Perce (Nespelem) Campsites
COLVILLE INDIAN RESERVATION
LAKE ROOSEVELT NATIONAL RECREATION AREA
Coulee Dam
SPOKANE INDIAN RESERVATION
KALISPEL INDIAN RESERVATION
Spokane
Coeur d'Alene
COEUR D'ALENE INDIAN RESERVATION
BITTERROOT MOUNTAINS
FLATHEAD INDIAN RESERVATION
WASHINGTON
Spalding*
Visitor Center
Ant and Yellowjacket
Coyote's Fishnet
Northern Idaho Indian Agency
Lapwai Mission
Fort Lapwai
Craig Donation Land Claim
Saint Joseph's Mission
Canoe Camp*
Clearwater River
Missoula
Lolo Trail
Lolo Pass
Helena
Musselshell River
Columbia River
Snake River
YAKAMA INDIAN RESERVATION
Confluence Overlook
Lewiston
Clarkston
Hasatino Village Site
Asotin
Buffalo Eddy*
Lenore
Orofino
Lapwai
NEZ PERCE INDIAN RESERVATION
Pierce Courthouse
Musselshell Meadow
Weippe Prairie*
Kamiah
Heart of the Monster*
Asa Smith Mission
Lewis and Clark Long Camp
McBeth House
Cottonwood Skirmishes
Looking Glass Camp
Clearwater Battlefield
Kennewick
Wells Rockshelter
Joseph Canyon Viewpoint
Dug Bar
Tolo Lake
Grangeville
Camas Prairie
White Bird Battlefield*
Big Hole National Battlefield*
Visitor Center
Butte
Bozeman
Yellowstone River
Canyon Creek
Billings
CROW INDIAN RESERVATION
Pendleton
UMATILLA INDIAN RESERVATION
Lostine Homesite
Wisdom
Salmon River
HELLS CANYON NATIONAL RECREATION AREA
Enterprise
Joseph
Wallowa Lake
Old Chief Joseph Gravesite*
WALLOWA MOUNTAINS
OREGON
IDAHO
BEAVERHEAD MOUNTAINS
Targhee Pass
YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK
ABSAROKA RANGE
Clarks Fork Yellowstone River
Camas Meadow Battle Sites
WYOMING
GRAND TETON NATIONAL PARK
WIND RIVER INDIAN RESERVATION
Boise
CRATERS OF THE MOON NATIONAL MONUMENT AND PRESERVE
Authorized Sites of Nez Perce National Historical Park
Other NPS Owned Properties
Nez Perce National Historic Trail (USFS)
Major Towns and Cities
Indian Reservations
Hydrology
State Lines
*Sites marked with an asterisk are NPS-owned
0 10 50 100 Kilometers
0 10 50 100 Miles
North

Park Description

Nez Perce National Historical Park was established as a unit of the national park system on May 15, 1965, by Public Law 89-19. Since its establishment, the park has evolved into a model for working in partnership with public and private agencies, tribes, organizations, and individuals to achieve its goals. Unlike "traditional" parks, Nez Perce National Historical Park retains little NPS fee land; instead the park is managed and operated through collaborative processes, relying on cooperative agreements, memorandums of understanding, and other unconventional means for protecting and interpreting resources owned by others. Similarly, in order to understand and accurately interpret nɪ·mí·pu· culture, the park partners with the Nez Perce Tribe, the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, which represent significant nɪ·mí·pu· communities, as well as allied Palouse and Cayuse peoples.

The park consists of 38 sites dispersed throughout Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington. There are no designated sites in Wyoming; however, there are many sites there that are important to the Nez Perce people. These sites illustrate the historic role of the Nez Perce people in the westward expansion of the United States and include, but are not limited to, historic buildings, missions, battlefields, cemeteries, archeological sites, cultural landscapes, geological features, and trails. The sites provide opportunities for the interpretation of Nez Perce culture, the Lewis and Clark Expedition, the fur trade, missionaries, gold mining and logging, and the Nez Perce Conflict of 1877.

At its 1965 establishment, Nez Perce National Historical Park consisted of 24 sites. In October 1992, Congress passed new legislation expanding the park to include 14 sites in the states of Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington. As part of this expansion, Big Hole National Battlefield, a distinct unit of the National Park Service established in 1910 and designated a national monument in 1939, was added to Nez Perce National Historical Park as an administrative unit.

The 38 units of Nez Perce National Historical Park form a park unit about a people, for all people. It is not one place, but many. It is not one story, but a multitude. It is not one viewpoint, but many more than one. It is often controversial and emotional. Approximately 300,000 visitors annually come to Nez Perce National Historical Park to experience and understand the cultural heritage and history of the Nez Perce as well as to see the scenery along two national historic trails: the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail, a unit of the National Park Service, and the Nez Perce (Nee-Me-Poo) National Historic Trail, which is managed by the U.S. Forest Service in close partnership with Nez Perce National Historical Park. The majority of visitors discover Nez Perce sites as they travel to and from other destinations but are able to discover the many stories and legends inexplicably tied to this landscape.

Unlike some American Indian groups, nɪ·mí·pu· have no oral tradition regarding migration. The oral history of nɪ·mí·pu· traces their presence in this country since time immemorial. Because of the reliance on modern linguistics to translate an oral language into a written language, nɪ·mí·pu· is spelled in several different ways. This overview uses **nɪ·mí·pu·** *throughout, except when discussing the formally accepted and designated Nee-Me-Poo (Nez Perce) National Historic Trail.*

Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Nimipu·tímt, Culture, and Heritage.** The Nez Perce or ni·mí·pu· have been of this land since time immemorial. Their language, nimipu·tímt, intimately connects them with their homeland and culture, and this language similarly informs the park's resources management and public education programs. Nez Perce National Historical Park furnishes interpretive opportunities for visitors to engage with ni·mí·pu·, hear their spoken language, and learn from their perspective the timeless relationship with the land and events that shaped both them and the United States as a nation. In incorporating nimipu·tímt, the park supports language preservation while reinforcing its importance in connecting ni·mí·pu· with their homeland for future generations. In this way, the park exposes non-Indian audiences to the continuum of Nez Perce culture—past, present, and future.

- **Wétes (the Land).** The geography and rich and varied resources of the Nez Perce homeland have shaped and continue to shape Nez Perce culture. From rivers to meadows, mountains, and forests, the park protects diverse places that support traditional use and knowledge. The land itself, as well as the living resources this land supports (e.g., fish, wildlife, and plants) continue to provide physical and cultural sustenance to the ni·mí·pu·. Native plants, such as camas, are a key resource and illustrate the resilient relationships between the people, the land, and the resources.

- **Power of Place.** There is power in the Nez Perce homeland. Nez Perce National Historical Park protects and interprets 38 sites that hold profound cultural and spiritual value for the ni·mí·pu·. At the Heart of the Monster site, Coyote prophesied the coming of the people. At Bear Paw Battlefield in 1877, Nez Perce and allied Palouse and Cayuse people who did not cross into Canada in their flight from the U.S. Army negotiated an end to bitter fighting. Visitors to these authentic places can experience a range of emotions. Reaching from eastern Oregon to northern Montana, many sites are minimally developed, thus protecting sacred places and enabling their spiritual, cultural, and natural values to remain intact. Visitors to Nez Perce National Historical Park can experience the sights and sounds in much the same way the Nez Perce have for generations, inspiring understanding of a rich and sometimes tragic past.

- **Collections.** Nez Perce National Historical Park cares for rich collections of items related to Nez Perce culture and history. From archeological specimens to archival materials, the collections encompass over 10,000 years of history. Consisting of items owned by the Nez Perce Tribe, Big Hole National Battlefield, Nez Perce National Historical Park, and individual tribal members, the collections are a repository of knowledge for researchers, ni·mí·pu·, and others. Items on display in the two park visitor centers represent a small fraction of the park's collections.

- **Archeological Sites and Resources.** Nez Perce National Historical Park protects sensitive archeological resources that document the area's long history of Nez Perce habitation and use. These sites provide environments for traditional cultural activities and practices and allow Nez Perce and visitors alike to reflect on ni·mí·pu· culture.

- **Cultural Contact.** Nez Perce National Historical Park protects sites where events linking ni·mí·pu· with other Indian peoples and people from diverse cultures occurred. Events including the Treaty of 1855, the 1877 Nez Perce Conflict, the Lewis and Clark Expedition, and arrival of missionaries, settlers, and goldseekers in the Northwest shaped the course of Nez Perce and American history. Here visitors can learn ni·mí·pu· perspectives to which they may not otherwise have been exposed.

Nez Perce National Historical Park is a park about a people, for all people.