

Harpers Ferry Center  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



# Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Long-Range Interpretive Plan

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



September 2018

# The Trail of a Nation

One of the first four trails created under the National Trails System Act as amended by Congress in 1978, Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail commemorates an epic journey in the history of the United States: the 1804 -1806 expedition – 3,700 miles and 28 months – across the North American continent from Wood River, Illinois, to the Pacific Ocean and back again. The Lewis and Clark Expedition crossed the Great Plains, traversed high western deserts, and climbed the northern Rockies, ultimately reaching the temperate rain forest and windswept coastline of the Pacific Northwest. Along the way, the “Corps of Discovery” met with more than 50 Indian tribes, described vast landscapes, endured dramatic climates and weather variations, and documented hundreds of plant and animal species.

***The Lewis and Clark trail we know today runs through eleven states: Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, Iowa, Nebraska, South Dakota, North Dakota, Montana, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington, as well as 16 Indian reservations and 9 tribal trust lands.***

While clearly visible on a map or in a history book, the Trail is not always visible to visitors on the landscape it traverses. Its land areas are owned by hundreds of different public and private entities, and many visitor stops reflect other purposes, not only the Trail. The National Park Service is charged with administering the Trail, but owns and operates only a very small percentage of it and has minimal enforcement authority.

## **Planning for Future Visitors along the Trail**

In planning for the future of this remarkable resource, the NPS relies on collaboration with dozens of Trail partner organizations and individuals. The Trail’s first Long-Range Interpretive Plan, completed in fall of 2018, offers guidance for Trail stakeholders in developing and collaborating on a variety of visitor-focused services for the next generation of Lewis and Clark explorers.

In a series of facilitated workshops and webinars in 2017, Trail partners, tribal members, NPS staff, volunteers, and other interested stakeholders came together in workshops hosted by Trail partners in Omaha (NE), St. Charles (MO), Washburn (ND), Great Falls (MT), and Ilwaco (WA), as well as in a series of webinars. Altogether, 98 individual stakeholders representing dozens of partner organizations and communities provided valuable, first-hand input to the plan.

To help guide the planning process, the planning team drew on five primary interpretive themes developed in the Trail's 2012 Foundation Statement. These themes focus on the following areas:

- Growth of a Young Nation
- Documenting Observations of Natural Science
- Encountering Indigenous Peoples
- Unity through History
- Traces of the Past Observed Today

This Executive Summary presents key elements of the 2018 Long-Range Interpretive Plan for Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail.

## Major Recommendations

A synthesis of this input showed recommendations from Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail partners falling into six major categories:

- More communication among partners and the NPS
- Improved community awareness and audience development
- Greater tribal engagement
- Expanded development of interpretive media, including traditional wayside exhibits as well as social and digital media to reach new audiences
- Additional trailwide youth and educational programming
- Interpretive staff and assistance

The planning team then analyzed and identified specific projects in each category to be implemented in Phase 1 (the first three years), Phase 2 (four to six years) and Phase 3 (seven to ten years) of the plan, as funding and circumstances allow.

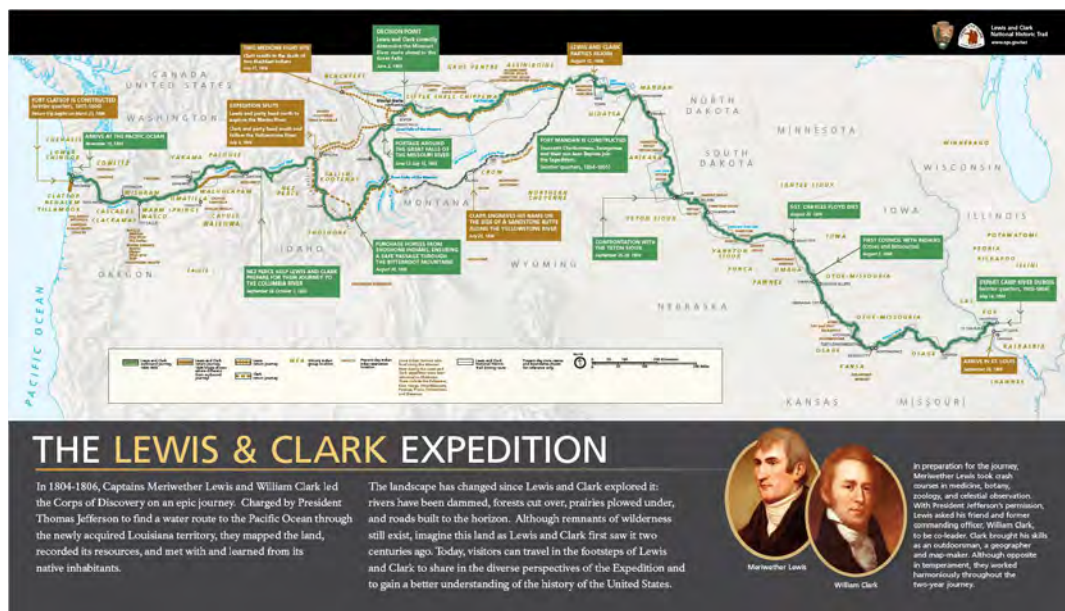
**Phase 1** recommendations included creating a directory of all partner sites across all eleven states and tribal lands, engaging widely in social media outreach, expanding strategies for replacing older wayside exhibits, and launching a trailwide Junior Ranger program.

**Phase 2** recommendations included developing traveling exhibits, creating topical trailwide content of Trail features such as ecosystems and geology, continuing to promote the Honoring Tribal Legacies program in schools, and continuing to support staff- and volunteer-focused initiatives such as Trail training conferences, AmeriCorps, and more recruitment and recognition for volunteers.

**Phase 3** recommendations included continuing the emphases on community outreach, audience development, and social media; developing collaborative wayside exhibits with other national trails that intersect Lewis and Clark; and commissioning a new visitor use survey of the Trail.

## Conclusion

To be successful, this plan will require time, funding, and skilled personnel, as well as administrative and management commitment across multiple partners and sites. Furthermore, a successful plan exists as a living document that can and should be altered or updated as circumstances change or unforeseen needs arise. The partners engaged in Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail have developed this Long-range Interpretive Plan as a new milestone in the inspiring history of this national historic trail.



To see the full plan and all recommendations, please see/contact:  
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