

CHAPTER 4

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

In August 1996, the Bureau of Land Management approved an amendment to the Billings Resource Management Plan for the Pompeys Pillar EA. Public participation was a significant factor in developing that amendment, and BLM efforts to involve the public are highlighted in the decision record for the amendment as well as in Appendix 9 of the actual amendment environmental analysis.

Part of the 1996 amendment was the decision to build a moderate sized interpretive center of approximately 12,500 square feet east of the actual Pillar and just south of the riparian zone. This was based on visitation projections of approximately 250,000 annually and a construction cost estimate of \$3 million. This preliminary cost estimate was made using figures from the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center in Great Falls. Our plan was for a building about half the size of the Great Falls facility so 50 percent of the cost of that center was used for preliminary planning. However, when more detailed aspects of construction at the site were investigated, BLM learned that infrastructure needs at Pompeys Pillar would triple costs.

At about the same time, BLM was presented with the possibility of co-locating the new interpretive center with a Montana Department of Transportation highway rest area, a concept that offered the potential to share some of the infrastructure costs with the State. BLM felt the only responsible course of action was to study the co-location scenario through this environmental assessment. This environmental assessment also allowed BLM to again formally involve the public in the planning for Pompeys Pillar and to review the 1996 decisions as they relate to a new interpretive center.

Public scoping for this EA was initiated on November 1999 through filing of a Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Assessment on construction of an interpretive center and other facilities at Pompeys Pillar National Historic Landmark. The notice was published in the Federal Register on November 26, 1999. The Notice of Intent did not contain a specific agency proposed action, but did identify that the EA would analyze the possibility of a Montana Department of Transportation highway rest area at the site.

Two public scoping meetings to gather comments on the scope of the environmental analysis for the project were

held on January 4 and January 5, 2000. A summary of the scoping comments, gathered from the meetings and written comments, is provided below.

SCOPING SUMMARY

Two public scoping meetings to gather comments on the scope of the environmental analysis for the project were held on January 4 and January 5, 2000. Over 60 people attending these meetings. Many of the comments made at these meetings were related to the rest stop and will not be discussed because the rest stop was eliminated from consideration. Comments collected at the scoping meetings fell into three categories: the special features of the area, issues and concerns and ideas. Comments on the importance of the natural resources of the area gathered at the scoping meetings included: the rural setting, the naturalness of the area, wildlife, clear air, openness of the area, peace and quiet, scenic qualities, and the River. Comments on the importance of the cultural/historic resources also gathered at the scoping meetings included the connection to Lewis & Clark, seeing the area as a focal point for Yellowstone Valley history, the petroglyphs, and the long association with Native Americans. Issues and concerns included: desecrating the site, wildlife habitat/riparian protection, maintaining visitor control to preserve vegetation, and concern about wetlands, air pollution, sanitation and traffic. Ideas on how the facilities should be designed included: facilities should not detract from the natural setting, the interpretive center structure should be compatible with the setting, no building over two stories, use natural building materials to blend in with the surroundings, and the interpretive center should not overwhelm but should complement the Pillar. Many of the ideas discussed at the scoping meeting revolved around the placement of the visitor facilities, how to plan for the bicentennial and afterwards, and suggestions for recreation and interpretation.

Over fifty letters and comment forms were also received during the scoping period. Of the letters and comment forms that discussed the new interpretive center, almost all supported the center. However, many people qualified their support by indicating it should be designed to maintain the visual qualities, naturalness, historical aspects and tranquility of the area and to emphasize the educational value of the site. Commenters were also concerned about commercializing the area, the size of the interpretive center, and keeping development away from the Pillar and out of the

river, floodplain and riparian areas. Several comments suggested that the center should be built away from the Pillar itself. A few commenters mentioned concern for school children and traffic/safety.

AGENCY AND TRIBAL COORDINATION

Agency and Tribal coordination have been ongoing since the initiation of this analysis. Agencies were contacted by

letter at the start of this project in an effort to inform and collect information pertinent to the analysis. Agency briefings regarding this analysis were conducted on May 22, 2001, in an effort to get critical feedback and information from agencies. Tribal consultation has also been ongoing. Most recently, the BLM consulted with the Crow Tribe in January 2001. The BLM provided written information and additional outreach to the Crow and Northern Cheyenne Tribes regarding this analysis and the preferred alternative in May 2001.