



NEWS RELEASE

USDA Forest Service - - Dakota Prairie Grasslands

For Immediate Release

Date: May 7, 2008

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The Dakota Prairie Grasslands is responsible for the day-to-day management of over 1.2 million acres of national grasslands in North Dakota and northwestern South Dakota, including the Little Missouri National Grasslands, the Sheyenne National Grasslands, the Grand River National Grasslands, the Cedar River National Grasslands, and the Denbigh and Souris Experimental Forests. In addition to providing numerous outdoor recreation opportunities such as hiking, biking camping, bird watching, and hunting, the national grasslands also provide opportunities to area ranchers to graze livestock and energy companies to develop minerals resources.

Due to a need for greater efficiency and the reality of declining or static recreation program budgets, the USDA Forest Service has been evaluating its outdoor recreation facilities to determine how recreation sites might be managed to best meet the needs of the American public and local communities and be economically viable to operate. A Recreation Facility Analysis (RFA) process is being used to conduct the evaluation. The purpose of this letter is to explain the process and to get your input of the draft recommended course of action.

RFA includes campgrounds, trailheads, and interpretive sites where facilities such as restrooms, water developments, picnic tables, or information panels are provided. Trails are not included in RFA, nor are recreation sites that do not have facilities (restrooms, water, etc.).

RFA evaluates each recreation facility based on the following criteria: (1) amount of use, (2) maintenance costs, (3) needed repairs or improvements, and (4) how well the facility provides the recreation experiences and opportunities unique to each particular National Forest or Grassland.

The Dakota Prairie Grasslands has been working through this RFA process over the past year. This initial evaluation process has resulted in a list of preliminary recommendations for the unit's outdoor recreation sites and facilities. These preliminary recommendations were used to develop a Draft 5-Year Proposed Program of Work, which includes such actions as recreation fee changes, modifications in how

recreation sites are managed, site expansions and reductions, and new construction opportunities.

The preliminary recommendation includes the addition of two new campgrounds: one located at the Shadehill Reservoir in South Dakota on the Grand River National Grassland, the other associated with the North Country Trail on the Sheyenne National Grassland in eastern North Dakota. Another preliminary recommendation is the addition of two new picnic areas on the Grand River National Grassland.

For the Little Missouri National Grassland, proposed new facilities include a parking area with water and toilet facilities along the Maah Daah Hey II Trail.

Campgrounds on the Little Missouri National Grassland currently average around 6% use. This very low use makes it difficult to justify maintaining the number of sites and amenities currently available. In light of this information, preliminary recommendations include the conversion of Birnt Hills Overlook and Summit Campground to trailheads, and closing the showers at Buffalo Gap Campground.

Our hope is that through this evaluation process and projected program funding, the optimal mix and location of outdoor recreation facilities would be available to the visiting public while still contributing to local community opportunities and economic development. An expectation is that the Forest Service would, from both a cost and labor efficiency standpoint, be able to maintain these sites and facilities to national standards.

Your help in developing the recommended course of action is critical to the success of this process!

All the information about the process used to develop these preliminary recommendations including worksheets, occupancy rates, annual maintenance costs, and maintenance standards can be found on the Dakota Prairie Grasslands' website, <http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/dakotaprairie/>. Paper or CD copies of this information may also be obtained from Paula Johnston at the address below.

Comments can be e-mailed to comments-northern-dakota-prairie@fs.fed.us, and would be most helpful if received by May 22, 2008. Please put "Recreation" on the subject line of your comment message. You may also provide written comments to Paula Johnston.

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You are also welcome to contact your local National Grasslands office for more information.

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Thank you for your assistance with this very important process!