

Clarification of Relationship
Big Hole National Battlefield & Nez Perce National Historical Park

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Big Hole National Battlefield has been a preserved site since 1880 and a federal site since 1910. It has usually been under the wing of another larger park such as Yellowstone or more recently Grant Kohrs Ranch NHS. In 1992, it became one of the newly authorized sites of Nez Perce National Historical Park, under the jurisdiction of the Rocky Mountain Region and did not lose its own identity. It is still listed as a separate site in the green book, has its own budget, etc . . . On June 10, 1994 the site officially became part of this park when the RMR and PNR Regional Directors exchanged the management of the Oregon Trail and the three Nez Perce NHP sites in Montana. We converted the fiscal part of that park in FY 1995. One change is that the Superintendent of Big Hole National Battlefield is now also the Montana Unit Manager for the Nez Perce NHP sites in Montana including Bear Paw Battlefield near Chinook, the Canyon Creek site near Laurel, and the Camas Meadows site near Kilgore, Idaho. It is seven hours from Spalding to Big Hole and thirteen hours from Spalding to Bear Paw, Canyon Creek or Camas Meadows, all in three different directions.

When the former Rocky Mountain Regional Director Bob Baker proposed exchanging the management of the Oregon Trail for the management of the three Montana sites of Nez Perce, it seemed to make good sense for everybody. It tied these sites together that had several common themes including the 1877 Nez Perce Campaign. The RMR was just starting to do a separate GMP and other planning that really needed to be tied into a bigger picture. Some of the ideas of tying Big Hole and Nez Perce came together in the April 1993 during a Management Assessment Workshop held in Wisdom, Montana.

Big Hole occupies a unique niche in the Nez Perce structure -- tied together by the 1992 legislation, but still a separate unit of the National Park Service. We had originally considered Big Hole just part of the Montana Unit and sent former Curator Sue Buchel over there as the first Unit Manager in June 1994. As we realized that Big Hole really was a separate park and that it was an eight hour drive from Spalding, we began to look at the concept differently. In September 1995 the Montana Unit Manager position became both the Superintendent of Big Hole National Battlefield and the Montana Unit Manager of Nez Perce National Historical Park.

Nez Perce almost serves the role of an SSO or lead cluster park for Big Hole, providing technical assistance (natural resources, cultural resources, computers, library, etc.); certain aspects of administration; coordination of historical themes and interpretation and supervision and direction of the Big Hole Superintendent/NEPE Unit Manager by the Nez Perce Superintendent. Big Hole provides management activities in support of Nez Perce sites in Montana and Southeastern Idaho (Bear Paw, Canyon Creek and Camas Meadows) by performing maintenance, management support, administrative support, community relations and supervision of personnel. Due to the proximity of Big Hole to the USFS Region 1 office in Missoula, the Big Hole Superintendent assists the Nez Perce Superintendent as the NPS coordinator for the USFS managed Nez Perce National Historical Trail.

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