



Foundation Document Overview

Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site

North Dakota



Contact Information

For more information about the *Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site*, contact: knri_superintendent@nps.gov or 701-745-3300 or write to:

Superintendent, Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site, P.O. Box 9, Stanton, ND 58571-0009

Purpose



The purpose of KNIFE RIVER INDIAN VILLAGES NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE is to preserve, protect, and interpret archeological and natural resources as they relate to cultural and agricultural lifestyles of Northern Great Plains Indian peoples, and to conduct research to further understand how these lifestyles have changed over time.

Significance

Significance statements express why Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site 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.

- Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site contains some of the best-preserved examples of remnant earthlodge villages along the Missouri River in the Dakotas. The three main sites are Big Hidatsa National Historic Landmark (Hidatsa Village), Lower Hidatsa (Awatixa Xi'e) Village, and Sakakawea (Awatixa) Village sites.
- Park resources represent the extensive history and development of Northern Great Plains communities and cultures on the Knife and Missouri Rivers through the mid-19th century. These resources continue to be an essential part of the heritage and contemporary culture of the Three Affiliated Tribes as their traditional homeland.
- Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site is a cornerstone of Plains Indian archeological and ethnographic research and the park continues to offer an outstanding opportunity for study of the archeological, ethnographic, and museum resources.
- Abundant ethnographic information on Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara peoples adds unparalleled detail to the park's historic record. This record includes primary accounts of art, scientific observations, and anthropological writings. Notable travelers Alexander Henry, John Bradbury, George Catlin, Karl Bodmer, Prince Maximilian, John J. Audubon, David Thompson, Lewis and Clark, and later anthropologists such as Gilbert Wilson provided much of this information by documenting life in the villages during the 19th and 20th centuries.
- Sacagawea was living in Awatixa Village when Lewis and Clark recruited her husband to guide and interpret for the Corps of Discovery expedition. The park is one of the few sites along the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail where the explorers' presence is well documented.

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.

- **Archeological resources**
- **Cultural landscape**
- **Museum collection**
- **Traditional and contemporary cultural significance**
- **Interdisciplinary scholarly research and traditional ecological knowledge**



Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park— they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from — and should reflect — park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- Archeological remains of earthlodge village sites provide tangible evidence of the size, dominance, resilience, persistence, and culture of the Northern Great Plains peoples who lived beside the Knife and Missouri Rivers for hundreds of years.
- Access to plentiful natural resources and a fertile environment enabled Hidatsa and Mandan people to develop prosperous, semi-permanent, agricultural communities that flourished for centuries.
- Situated on the Missouri River transportation corridor, the villages were an integral part of a vast trading empire: a crossroads of culture where trade goods, ideas, technology, spirituality, and world views were shared.
- Sacagawea became a symbol of peace for the Corps of Discovery on their expedition giving her status as one of one of the most famous and mysterious figures in U.S. history.
- The Hidatsas and Mandans welcomed 18th and 19th century explorers, traders, artists, travelers, and other visitors who produced some of the most well-known images of the life of Northern Great Plains Indians in both the United States and Europe.
- Amahami Village, one of the villages recorded by Lewis and Clark, was destroyed by modern development, making imperative the preservation of the remaining villages and their invaluable historic and cultural insight into the heritage of Northern Plains Indians.
- Present-day members of the Hidatsa, Mandan, and Arikara Tribes remain connected spiritually and culturally to the homeland of their ancestors where the resources, topography, and landscape features sustained the villages both spiritually and physically.

Description of Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site

Situated on river bluffs and floodplains along the Knife and Missouri Rivers, Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site tells the story of thousands of years of habitation by people who made central North Dakota their home. The park protects village remains which are among the best surviving examples of native villages in the Missouri River ecosystem of the northern Great Plains. The park contains archeological evidence reflecting the continuum of community development and lifeways from sporadic use of the area by prehistoric hunter-gatherer groups to the establishment of permanent agricultural communities with sophisticated trade economies. The landscape comprising the park remains sacred to the descendants of the village inhabitants today. Additionally, the history of the villages is integral to the story of the Euro-American exploration and settlement of the western United States.

