

PROPOSED

**MISSOURI
BREAKS**

NATIONAL RIVER ● MONTANA

ON MICROFILM

A SUMMARY

From Coal Banks Landing in north-central Montana, through a ribbon of eroded land, to the western border of the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Range, the Missouri flows in its most natural, unspoiled state. Lewis and Clark would have seen it this way, and this hundred-mile stretch remains the last significant, essentially undisturbed segment of this great river. Here the Missouri has cut a gorge-like valley to a depth of 500 to 1000 feet below the average level of the plains; and the tributary drainages have shaped the adjoining lands into a harsh area of badlands and breaks, possessing weathered forms of unusual interest and beauty.

Upstream from Coal Banks Landing to the old river town of Fort Benton, the Missouri's course is dotted with picturesque islands and sandbars. Downstream from the landing, the scenery gradually changes. The flood plain narrows, the valley becomes canyon-like, and the river moves more rapidly. Few evidences of man are seen from Coal Banks Landing to the mouth of the Judith River. But nature provides spectacular vistas, for here is located the White Rocks section of the Missouri, where glistening sandstone masses - some 200 to 300 feet high - compose the wild landscape. The green of pine and juniper nestled among the rocks adds color to the otherwise stark scene. The valley widens substantially just before the Missouri is joined by the Judith River.

The rapids become swifter, the badlands harsher. But farther downstream, from Cow Island to the wildlife range, the topography changes from the rugged badlands to more open terrain. The flood plain broadens. The bluffs are lower. More vegetation grows on the islands and along the banks. Wildlife sightings are more numerous.

Events important in the growth of the Nation took place along this reach of the Missouri. Every bend in the river contains features which are reminders of incidents of the great Lewis and Clark journey of discovery. Names such as Kipps and Dauphin Rapids recall the brief but violent era of the Missouri fur trade. The flatlands opposite the mouth of the Judith provided the meeting place for two important Indian peace councils during the waning days of the fur trade. Gold was found near Bannack City and Virginia City in the early 1860's, precipitating a frantic rush to Montana; and the Missouri River became a major transportation route to the gold fields, with the amazing shallow-draft paddle wheel steamboat the principal mode of travel. For a time, Fort Benton was the commercial capital of Montana - the riverbank retains the character it had in the heyday of the steamboat, and much of the old town is admirably preserved. During the steamboat era, as Indians became increasingly hostile to the more rapid encroachments of westward expansion, Camp

Cooke and Fort Claggett were established to maintain the Missouri River line of communication. When the Indians were finally subdued, settlement became more intense. Fortunately, these historic events may be commemorated and interpreted in their still unspoiled setting.

To preserve the river in its present free-flowing state and to prevent damage to its important geological features, to its excellent wildlife habitat, or to its significant historical and archeological sites, the Park Service urges that Missouri Breaks be designated a national river. To make these resources of the Missouri Breaks available to the public, the Service recommends that this section of the river and its environs be administered as a recreation area in the National Park System.

Without question, the recreation values of the proposed national river are of primary importance. Within the area, a hundred-mile stretch of the river passes through a land of semi-wilderness. Numerous rapids, more choppy than swift, while not hazardous, add to the excitement of floating down the river. Upstream navigation by motorboat is also possible. Fishing can increase the pleasure for the river travelers. The varied and plentiful wildlife affords exceptionally fine hunting. Scattered cottonwood groves on the river's banks provide sites for camping and picnicking.

Missouri Breaks will offer a somewhat different type of recreation than normally associated with reservoirs and seashores. Here the quality of the dominant recreational activity, river boating, is based on the area's great historical significance and outstanding scenery. A traveler on the river will be treated to a semi-wilderness experience as he floats through the canyon, for he will be unable to see the major agricultural operations on the flatlands above. The river itself will be the main avenue of transport and the focus for all activities. The varied attractions can be fully appreciated only through the experience of a leisurely boat trip.

The riverway will be managed to enrich the visitor's recreational experience by interpreting its natural, historical, and archeological resources. Much emphasis will be placed on the geological features and other elements of the natural setting, which have changed little since the days of Lewis and Clark. Historical interpretation will be devoted to the area's associations with the eras of exploration, the fur trade, Indian and military affairs, and steamboat navigation. Particular emphasis will be placed on the Lewis and Clark Expedition, the importance of the river and Fort Benton in the steamboat era, and the river as an artery of westward expansion.

This plan recognizes that a creative program for the preservation and interpretation of the resources is necessary if a high-quality recreational experience is to be attained by the visitor. To achieve the objective of both preservation and recreation use, the national river will be managed to protect its semi-wilderness character, while concurrently providing opportunities for hunting and fishing. Within the boundaries of the national river, grazing, existing types of agricultural activities, and leasing of mineral rights will be continued as appropriate uses.

Although recreation developments will be oriented toward boating, opportunities will also be provided for the use and enjoyment of this area by those in automobiles. A graded road off U.S. Highway 191 near Robinson Bridge extends along the rim of the breaks and crosses the rolling wheat country to Stafford Ferry Road. This affords excellent scenic driving. Liaison with the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, the Bureau of Land Management, and the county will insure an integrated program of interpretation and development that will convert this route into a very fine, low-speed road for sightseeing.

An administrative headquarters and visitor center will be located at Fort Benton where there is an opportunity to work cooperatively with that community in the preservation and interpretation of this historic riverfront town. Two district headquarters will be constructed: one at Coal Banks Landing and another at Judith River Landing. Personnel will be stationed and facilities provided at Kipp State Park. Visitor contact stations, launching ramps, boat docks, picnic areas, and campgrounds will be developed at all these sites.

Visitor services which are contemplated for concession operation will include food service, groceries, camping and fishing supplies, boat rentals and tour boats, and shuttle service between river launching sites and points of disembarkation.

The national river will be divided into two management zones. Land and water rights in the *public-use and development zone* will be acquired in fee simple. This zone is comprised of 11,900 acres, 6663 acres of which are in private ownership. The area will be totally devoted to public use; however, specific routes within this sector for cattle access to the river will be provided. In the *preservation-conservation zone*, comprised of 119,068 acres, the objective will be to protect the environment and prevent adverse development and use, detrimental to the full enjoyment of the recreation area. Land acquisition in this zone will be by easements which will permit existing use, while preserving the natural scene. Many of the landowners in this division or adjacent to it are dependent on grazing of Federal and State lands for an economic livestock operation. This presents little difficulty, since it is desirable to maintain the present pastoral character of the scene.

A complex management situation exists because of the long and narrow shape of the proposed national river, the existence of privately owned base properties, and the administration of adjoining lands by State and other Federal agencies. Of the total acreage, 68 percent is federally owned — administered by the Bureau of Land Management — 25 percent is privately owned, and 7 percent is State-owned. Specific cooperative programs with private landowners, the State, and other Federal agencies must be worked out if the resources are to be employed and administered properly.

Missouri Breaks National River will help to satisfy the Nation's ever-increasing demands for more and varied recreational opportunities. Designating this segment of the Missouri as a national river will attract thousands of visitors to the area, thus benefiting the region economically.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR / NATIONAL PARK SERVICE



