



NATIONAL CONSERVATION LANDS

Montana / Dakotas
2021: Annual Manager's Report

Pompeys Pillar National Monument

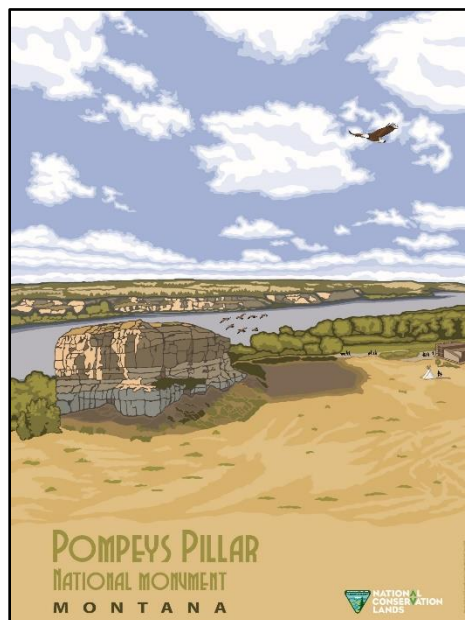


Accomplishments

Pompeys Pillar National Monument (PPNM) had a very successful 2021. This year was the 20th Anniversary of Pompeys Pillar becoming a National Monument on January 17, 2001.

Some noteworthy accomplishments and enhancements added this year are as follows.

- New amphitheater shade structure completed June 2021.
- New and improved riverwalk signs (Clark's Journey Home) – In association with the Friends of Pompeys Pillar.
- New virtual tour ([360-degree tour](#)) of Pompeys Pillar.
- New PPNM staff and volunteer handbook – introduces and outlines all aspects of PPNM.
- New trail bridge – Eagle Scout project.
- New trail benches and picnic tables.
- New trail construction and trail posts for an expanded trail system.
- New videos created in 2021 are featured on the [Montana Dakotas YouTube PPNM Playlist](#) – these help us tell the many stories of PPNM and connect with the public virtually.
- New lighting upgrades to interpretive center, maintenance buildings and fee station – all new LED light conversion throughout means lower energy use.
- New vintage poster created, which is part of the BLM's National Conservation Lands series highlighting National Monuments and National Conservation Areas.



Challenges

One of our higher priorities is the work we continue to do to stabilize the rock formation (Pillar) at Pompeys Pillar National Monument. As of right now we are wrapping up stage three, design, and hope to begin stage four, construction, in the summer of 2022 after the Environmental Assessment is finished in the spring. This is a very important and complex project and the one and only of its kind. More specific information is outlined under the Science heading.

Other challenges that we worked through this past season were the decrease in volunteers, especially for those who assist in the gift shop. This led to decreased hours of operation and a few discouraged visitors. We were able to bring in some long-term site host volunteers through Volunteer.gov, who alleviated this staffing challenge.

Like other locations, our seasonal staff are challenged with finding affordable housing for the season. The spike in rental prices in the spring/summer of 2021 dissuaded a few candidates but having some local interest helped alleviate this issue. This will continue to be a challenge and we are looking at temporary quarters for seasonal employees to address this challenge.

Another challenge is the need for indoor meeting space for school groups and additional office space for staff. We look forward to taking the next step to meet these needs.



Visitors

Visitors from across this country and around the world come to the Pillar to discover one of the most moving chapters in American history. We were very fortunate to see visitation rebound from the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, and over 29,000 visitors came to the Monument. Visitors to PPNM include local school groups, out of state travelers (first time visitors), adult groups and couples, seniors, families with children, visitors from foreign countries, and residents who often bring out-of-area visitors. Visitation does include those that use the Area of Critical Environmental Concern (381 acres) adjacent to PPNM, which includes hunters and wildlife viewers and other recreationists.

We continued to deliver thousands of interpretive and educational programs/talks to the visiting public. Some of these talks were offered at the Pillar, the interpretive center, along walkways and trails or at the amphitheater. This year we also offered daily formal programs which covered topics like sandstone and geology, cottonwoods, owls, beavers, and survival on the expedition. We also had 383 new Junior Rangers this year who completed the Junior Ranger activity book.



Partnerships

We work very closely with our partners and look for opportunities to make new connections with partner organizations. This year, PPNM fostered existing relationships with our great partners including the Friends of Pompeys Pillar, NPS Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail, Billings Public Library, Western Heritage Center, Boy Scouts of America, Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation and Montana Conservation Corps. One highlight this year was the Western Heritage Center. Historian Lauren Hunley provided onsite National Association for Interpretation (NAI) Certified Interpretive Guide (CIG) Certification to staff and volunteers. Their Executive Director, Kevin Kooistra, presented a Crow Agency talk to staff and volunteers. The WHC also provided entry free of charge for staff orientation field trips.

New connections were made with Montana State University Billings, Indian Battle tours, Montana Historical Society, Pretty Shield Foundation and Rocky Mountain Tribal Council Members, and Montana Office of Public Instruction – Indian Education for All. One highlight this year was how we partnered with the Montana Historical Society to create text for their webpage, and they also provided a new interpretive sign (Montana’s Historical Society’s National Register property sign) for Pompeys Pillar.

These partnerships helped us broaden our understanding and enhance our ability to create more connections between our visitors and the amazing resources found at the Monument.



Science

The rock stabilization project moved from Phase 1 and 2 (data gathering, analysis and modeling) and into Phase 3 (Design). We are anticipating Phase 4 (Construction) to be completed in the summer of 2022. The consulting firm Itasca Consulting Inc. (BLM contractor) is currently developing detailed plans to address key areas of the sandstone formation and protect them the effects of erosion. The work included in Phase 3 Design includes the following:

- Signature rock blocks scaling and stabilization - Protection, preservation, and public viewing of Clark's Signature
- Boardwalk protection - Protect existing and future structure from rockfall and unstable rocks
- Turtle Rock Blocks - Protection and preservation of the "Turtle Head", Block 1a
- Public Safety - Boardwalk, concrete sidewalks, education center, other areas not behind rockfall barriers and open to the public
- Finalize rock block monitoring system (RBMS) and the trigger action response plan (TARP). Currently there are ten crack meters, three disto-meters and four tiltmeters installed for the RBMS.

This design work is expected to be completed in the early Spring of 2022. The BLM conducted the Environmental Assessment concurrently for this project and it was completed on March 19, 2022.



Another focus this past year was our efforts to determine if PPNM would be eligible to be designated by the International Dark Sky Association (IDSA) as a Dark Sky Park. We

were very fortunate to have a volunteer, Paul Stomski, a retired Project Engineer for an Astronomical Observatory in Hawaii help us complete this effort. He took the lead in conducting research, coordinating with other parks and NPS staff, collecting data, planning outreach events (Citizen Science) and submitting the inquiry to IDSA. This is the first step, and it does require additional advocacy and community engagement and additional data collection and of course a favorable response from IDSA.

Climate Impacts

This year, the temperatures seemed warmer and there was less precipitation than last year. Fortunately, the area (Monument and ACEC), once farmland, is still connected to an irrigation system which reduced the impact of a dryer season on some of the vegetation. Some years, we do experience flooding from normal snow melt but this season, it was a gradual warming trend and flooding was not a factor. With the drought last year, the Yellowstone River is at historically low levels and will take time to rise to normal levels. The newly installed weather station associated with the rock block monitoring system (rock stabilization project) collects data regularly (temperature, rainfall, wind speed) and this data be utilized for future comparisons.

Climate Resiliency

As mentioned previously, the weather station data will provide additional insight into the weather conditions at the Monument. We will continue to monitor that data and river levels as we approach the Spring. We do not anticipate flooding this season, but time will tell. The only building that could be impacted by a major flood event would be the Education Center built in the early 1990's. We also conduct annual prescribed burning for the 432 acres and are on a three-to-four-year rotation

Social and Environmental Justice

During the summer, the Buffalo National Grasslands Alliance comprised of leaders from 15 Native nations in the Northern Great Plains held a workshop and discussed their plans for developing a conservation trust fund for grassland conservation in Native nations across the Northern Great Plains.

We also worked closely with the Pretty Shield Foundation and Rocky Mountain Tribal Council members including Bill and Karen Snell who taught and assisted PPNM staff on the building, structure, and meaning of the Crow style teepee. Our Park Rangers led

various programs and talks throughout the season for visitors and students about the significance of the teepee.



Events

As mentioned earlier, 2021 was the 20th Anniversary of Pompeys Pillar becoming a National Monument, and it was also the 30th Anniversary of BLM's acquisition of Pompeys Pillar. We promoted these anniversaries using banners, signs, and flyers at PPNM and on the website. We also planned and implemented several special events during the season. Here is a summary of those events.

The NPS Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail introduced a brand-new trail wide Junior Ranger program which included an activity booklet and a badge. As one of the premier locations on the trail, we helped promote this at our National Trails Day event on June 5, 2021, and throughout the season. We had 150 individuals participate.

Signature Day (July 25, 2021) was filled with an array of activities for the public. We hosted the traveling Map Exhibit "Reimagining America, the Maps of Lewis and Clark" for

a month which was made possible by the Lewis & Clark Trail Heritage Foundation. We had several living history presentations including “Sacagawea on the Expedition”, “Fur Trade on the Yellowstone River” and “Weapons of the L&C Expedition”. Presentations on the history of the Nez Perce Trail, Trade Goods of the L&C Expedition and the Bull Boat were offered. We had 336 visitors on July 25th.

PPNM held two star parties during the summer. One on June 18, 2021, and one on July 29, 2021. Both star parties featured Dr. Stuart Snyder and Dr. Steven Wiles, professors from Montana State University at Billings who provided and operated telescopes while providing astronomy interpretation and answering questions from our visitors. Each star party also featured a visiting Astro photographer with their equipment. Both star parties included ranger talks on nighttime wildlife like bats and moths, as well as ranger talks on astronomy, dark skies, and citizen-science. The astronomy talks on “How Dark is Dark?” and “In Astronomy, the Unknowns are the Constant”. The 7/29/2021 star party also included a member of the Crow Indian Tribe who came to tell “Star Stories” from the Crow Indian culture. The June star party was attended by over 100 visitors and the July star party had 50 visitors.



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Pompeys Pillar

National Monument

Eastern Montana / Dakotas District Office
Bureau of Land Management
Billings Field Office
5001 Southgate Drive
Billings, MT 59101
Phone: 406-896-5013

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Report compiled by: John Reffit, Monument Manager

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Pompeys Pillar National Monument (PPNM) encompasses 51 acres on the banks of the Yellowstone River with a massive sandstone outcrop covering about 2 acres at its base and rising 120 feet high toward Montana's Big Sky. The area's premier location at a natural ford in the Yellowstone River, and the Pillar's geologic distinction as the only major sandstone formation in the area, have made the site a celebrated landmark and outstanding observation point for more than eleven thousand years of human occupation. Hundreds of markings, petroglyphs, and inscriptions left by visitors have transformed this geologic phenomenon into a living journal of the American West. A National Historic Landmark since 1965, the land was acquired by the Bureau of Land Management in 1991 and was designated as a National Monument in January 2001. There are over 432 acres of public land associated with the monument, located about 25 miles east of Billings, Montana.