



Current Issues

Controversial issues face many of our national parks today. Changing attitudes about land management, disagreement over how to control non-native plants and animals, and controversies regarding land use are but a few of the issues challenging park managers. These are some of the issues at Devils Tower National Monument.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?



Historically, American Indians living on the plains in northeastern Wyoming honored a towering rock formation that they considered sacred. They called the rocky tower Bear's Tipi, Grizzly Bear's Lodge, Bear Lodge Butte, and other related names. Early fur trappers, too, called the tower the Bear's Lodge.

In 1875, Colonel Dodge led an expedition into the area, looking for gold. In his book titled, **The Black Hills**, Colonel Dodge explained, “the Indians call this shaft *The Bad God's Tower*, a name adopted with proper modification, by our surveyors.” Dodge “modified the name to a better form of English, calling it Devils Tower.” There is evidence, though, that the initial translation was done incorrectly. The Indian words for the Tower should have been translated into “Bear Lodge” and not into “Bad God's Tower.” In 1906, President Theodore Roosevelt created Devils Tower National Monument, the first national monument. The US Board of Geographic Names affixed the name Devils Tower to the geologic formation itself in 1930.

Northern Plains Indian tribes have objected to the name Devils Tower, considering it offensive to a site they regard as sacred. They have formally expressed their desire to have the name “Bear Lodge” restored to the Tower.

Local citizens are equally emphatic that the name remains Devils Tower, citing that the name is well known, thus encouraging tourism, vital to Wyoming's economy.

It has been suggested as a compromise that the name of the Tower itself be changed to Bears Lodge while the name of the monument remains Devils Tower. But neither group can agree.

A monument name change would require legislation and congressional action. Names of geologic features can be changed administratively through the US Board of Geographic Names and the Wyoming Board of Geographic Names. Both actions would require a public input process. It will likely be some time before any name change is formally considered.

SACRED TOWER OR CLIMBING MECCA?

Northern Plains Indians have long considered Devils Tower a sacred site, a place for meditation, offerings, sweat lodges, and ceremonies.

Climbers have acclaimed Devils Tower as one of the premier technical climbing areas in North America. Devils Tower was first climbed in 1893, and climbing today is considered a historic recreational use. Many American Indian tribes would prefer that all climbing be banned from the Tower; climbers would like to climb year-round.

The Climbing Management Plan, implemented by the Park Service in 1995, promotes compromise between the two groups. The plan allows for management of Devils Tower as a cultural resource as well as a natural and recreational resource. Out of respect for American Indian beliefs, climbers are asked to voluntarily refrain from climbing during the month of June. Since the adoption of this plan, June climbing has been reduced by approximately 85%.

Federal courts reviewed the Climbing Management Plan in March 2000 and upheld this policy. The park will continue to review and update the Climbing Management Plan, recognizing the Tower's importance to all visitors.

NATURAL QUIET

Many visitors seek the quiet and solitude of our national parks and monuments. Visitors to the Tower enjoy listening to the natural sounds of wind blowing through the pines, prairie dogs barking and falcons screeching. Increasingly, even these once quiet areas are being inundated with human noise. The unnatural sounds of airplanes, cars, buses, motorcycles and generators disrupt the quiet and solitude that so many visitors value.

Some campers enjoy electric lights and modern conveniences; others are bothered by the noise of generators. Although some people enjoy viewing the scenery from the air, other visitors and wildlife are frequently disturbed by the noise. So far, Devils Tower has been spared from conflicts with overflights that are occurring at places like Grand Canyon National Park. As interest in Devils Tower continues, there will be additional demands in making the Tower accessible.

Devils Tower National Monument and the Town of Hulett have signed an agreement concerning a new airport being constructed 8 miles from the park. This agreement, which has been approved by the Federal Aviation Administration, includes a 2-mile No Fly Advisory that will hopefully reduce air traffic over and nearby the tower.

A BURNING QUESTION

Fire has long been a natural part of the ecosystem. Here in the Ponderosa pine forest, fires occurred naturally every 15 to 30 years - clearing dead pine needles and branches from the forest floor, thinning trees, and creating nurturing mineral soil for plants.

When European Americans arrived on the scene, they believed that fire was "bad," that it destroyed a useful forest, and all fires should be suppressed. More recently, resource managers have rediscovered the benefits of fire. Fire has become a primary tool in managing a healthy ecosystem.

Today, trained Park Service staff intentionally set fires. *Prescribed fires* can be set when weather conditions, humidity, and other factors are most favorable. Through prescribed fires, the Park Service is able to remove fuel build-up on the forest floor, thus preventing potential disaster in the case of accidental fire. Opening the forest canopy promotes forest diversity and improves the health of the ecosystem.

Prescribed fires set in 1998, 1999 and caused the burned areas visible in the monument.

The National Park Service will continue using prescribed fires according to the natural fire cycle that occurs in the Black Hills of Wyoming.

PAYING THE PRICE THE PRICE

In 1997, Devils Tower National Monument increased entrance fees from \$4.00 to \$8.00 under the Fee Demonstration Program.

Before 1997, all entrance fees were sent to the general treasury. Now, 80% of the fees collected are returned to Devils Tower National Monument to be used on projects benefiting the monument and our visitors. Some of these projects include:

- ◆ Upgrading visitor center and wayside exhibits
- ◆ Stabilizing the Tower Trail
- ◆ Preserving historic structures
- ◆ Resurfacing the lower parking lot and Joyner Ridge road

Approximately 400,000 people visit Devils Tower National Monument annually. Present facilities are inadequate for such large numbers. Future Fee Demonstration Program funds will be used to repair and improve facilities and preserve and protect natural and cultural resources.

For more information, visit the Devils Tower website at www.nps.gov/deto.