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BADLANDS NATIONAL PARK, S.D. — Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar and National Park Service Director Jon Jarvis today announced the release of the final General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement for the South Unit of Badlands National Park, recommending the establishment of the nation's first tribal national park in partnership with the Oglala Sioux Tribe.

"Our National Park System is one of America's greatest story tellers," Salazar said. "As we seek to tell a more inclusive story of America, a tribal national park would help celebrate and honor the history and culture of the Oglala Sioux people. Working closely with the Tribe, Congress, and the public, the Park Service will work to develop a legislative proposal to make the South Unit a tribal national park."

The South Unit of Badlands National Park is entirely within the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in southwestern South Dakota. The Park Service and the Tribe have worked together to manage the South Unit's 133,000 acres for almost 40 years. If a tribal national park is enabled by Congress through legislation, the Oglala Sioux people could manage and operate their lands for the educational and recreational benefit of the general public, including a new Lakota Heritage and Education Center.

The GMP/EIS reflects the goals of the National Park Service's recently released "A Call to Action" plan for the Service's next 100 years that emphasizes a system of parks and protected sites that more fully represent our nation's natural resources, history and cultural experiences. The tribal national park would seek to promote an understanding of Oglala Sioux history, culture, and land management principles through education and interpretation.

"Continuing our long-standing partnership with the Tribe, we plan to focus on restoration of the landscape, including the reintroduction of bison that are integral to the cultural stories and health of the Oglala people," said NPS Director Jon Jarvis. "We will offer expanded access and opportunities for visitors to experience the beauty and utility of the prairie as the Oglala Sioux have for centuries."

The National Park Service, Oglala Sioux Tribe, and the Oglala Sioux Parks and Recreation Authority have been cooperatively developing the GMP/EIS for the South Unit of Badlands National Park since early 2006. The management plan acknowledges the important partnership between the National Park Service and Oglala Sioux Tribe and establishes a common vision for managing resources and visitor use in the South Unit.

Under the plan, the National Park Service and the Tribe will focus on restoring the health and vibrancy of the prairie to enhance wildlife habitat, expanding bison into the South Unit, providing roads and trails and providing greater opportunities for visitors to experience the natural grandeur of the South Unit and the heritage of the Oglala Sioux people.

The National Park Service is expected to sign the Record of Decision for the GMP/EIS this summer; however, congressional legislation is necessary before the Service can implement the Plan's Preferred Management Option. In the meantime, the Park Service and Tribe may prepare for and implement appropriate parts of the plan and identify the components of a tribal national park that need to be

addressed by legislation.

Depending on Congressional action, the South Unit could be being administered through a variety of options, including as a unit of the National Park System managed by tribal members hired as NPS employees or managed by tribal members as employees of the Tribe. The plan proposes no change in overall responsibility or management absent Congressional legislation.

The “Call to Action” goal of engaging youth has already begun at Badlands where tribal and non-tribal students will work together as seasonal NPS employees this summer, receiving training and experience in the responsibilities of being National Park Service rangers.

“These are our future rangers,” said Badlands Superintendent Eric Brunnemann. “These are the young people that may lead a tribal national park into the future. I do see a time when our rangers will routinely work side-by-side with tribal biologists, archeologists, and paleontologists.”

In 2010, nearly 1 million visitors traveled to Badlands National Park and spent $23 million in the Park and surrounding communities. This spending supported more than 375 area jobs. With expanded future opportunities for recreation and education in the South Unit, a tribal national park is an exciting prospect for South Dakota.

During World War II, the War Department established the Pine Ridge Aerial Gunnery Range from lands within the Reservation. In 1968, the Gunnery Range was declared excess, and Congress conveyed most of the lands to the Tribe with the provision that the South Unit be administered by the National Park Service.

In 2003, the Tribe formally requested government-to-government negotiations regarding management control of the South Unit, and the Park Service, the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Tribe agreed to use the general management plan process to explore options for greater involvement in the South Unit.

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