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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Shoshone-Bannock Tribes Support BLMs Decision to Protect Cultural Resources

Fort Hall, Idaho – On August 17, 2023 the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) issued a decision to close the American Falls Archaeological District and a portion of the Lake Channel area to rock climbing and off-highway vehicle use in Power County, Idaho.

“The Shoshone-Bannock Tribes (Tribes) are pleased with the decision as it is not often that a federal agency closes public lands to specifically protect cultural resources,” stated Lee Juan Tyler, Fort Hall Business Council Chairman. The Tribes want to thank Mike Courtney, the Twin Falls District Manager, and Ken Crane, the Burley Field Office Manager, and all staff involved in the efforts to navigate the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process to change the Monument Resource Management Plan to protect tribal cultural resources.

Since the early 1990s, the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes have been working with the BLM and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) managers to protect the archeological resources along the Snake River. The Fort Hall Business Council and the Land Use Policy Commissioners, have appealed to the BLM and BOR to make every effort to preserve the tribal cultural resources. As public use of the area by rock climbers, hikers, and off-highway vehicle users increased throughout the past few years, controversy increased. Public land use managers implemented closures and restrictions to specific public recreational users to protect the archeological resources.

According to Carolyn Boyer Smith, Cultural Resources Coordinator for the Tribes’ Heritage Tribal Office/Cultural Resources (HeTO/CR) this has been a thirty-year process. She described the damage made to the rocks in the area from rock climbers’ bolts and spikes, and that campers were destroying cultural features on the surface of the land. “Many artifacts have been picked up and not returned,” explained Smith.

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According to a BLM news release, “The area will remain open for compatible recreation uses, including big game and waterfowl hunting, fishing, horseback riding, camping and hiking. More than 300 routes remain available to rock climbers on adjacent state lands and public lands in the Lake Channel area. Off-road enthusiasts will retain motorized opportunities on public lands immediately north of the Archaeological District.”

The Tribes have fully supported the public land managers’ efforts to prevent further damage to those cultural resources that is important to the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes and are pleased to see Federal agencies upholding their trust responsibility. “Since precontact, the Tribes have been protecting our history and culture throughout our ancestral territory,” expressed Ladd Edmo, FHBC Treasurer. The Tribes’ presence in this area dates back thousands of years.

The BLM issued a Record of Decision based on the analysis provided in the Cedar Fields Plan Amendment and Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Monument Resource Management Plan. Those and other documents are available at BLM National NEPA Register <https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/36660/510>.



(Photos courtesy of the Tribes’ Heritage Tribal Office/Cultural Resources (HeTO/CR) Department)

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