BANNACK STATE PARK
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
&
MANAGEMENT PLAN

February 2001

BANNACK STATE PARK MANAGEMENT PLAN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 1999, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks began the ambitious process of developing a comprehensive Management Plan for Bannack State Park. Over the years, various plans have been developed for Bannack. Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks has long recognized the need for preparation of a comprehensive long-range Management Plan for Bannack that consolidates these plans and involves the public in setting long range goals and objectives for the park. The purposes of this comprehensive Management Plan are to:

PURPOSE OF THE PLAN:

1. Establish the long-range direction for the protection and preservation of Bannack's historic, cultural, recreational, and natural resources; the provision of visitor services; and development of all associated facilities and programs, over the next ten years.

2. Establish policies for the preservation, operation, interpretation and management of Bannack. Translate these policies into actions necessary to achieve the identified goals and objectives, and to further enhance and protect the park resources.

3. Provide a basis for management decisions and actions.

4. Provide a guide for the day-to-day operation of Bannack.

PLANNING PROCESS:

In an innovative approach to the planning process, twenty-four individuals were invited to join the planning team. Planning team members not only included employees from all Divisions within Fish, Wildlife and Parks but also private citizens from a wide range of backgrounds and interest levels. The group was led by Cossitt Consulting. While at times, a group of this size was challenging to coordinate and schedule, in the end the result was well worth the extra effort involved. Together, with the public comments gathered during the scoping phase of the process, this diverse group was able to tackle difficult and complex issues, and come to consensus on the best alternatives for the long-range management and operation of Bannack State Park.

BANNACK MISSION:

Initially, the planning team had to determine and develop the mission of Bannack State Park. From public scoping it was learned that the Bannack most people envisioned in the future was exactly (or almost exactly) what Bannack is today. The Bannack mission is presented in the box below.

Bannack State Park Mission

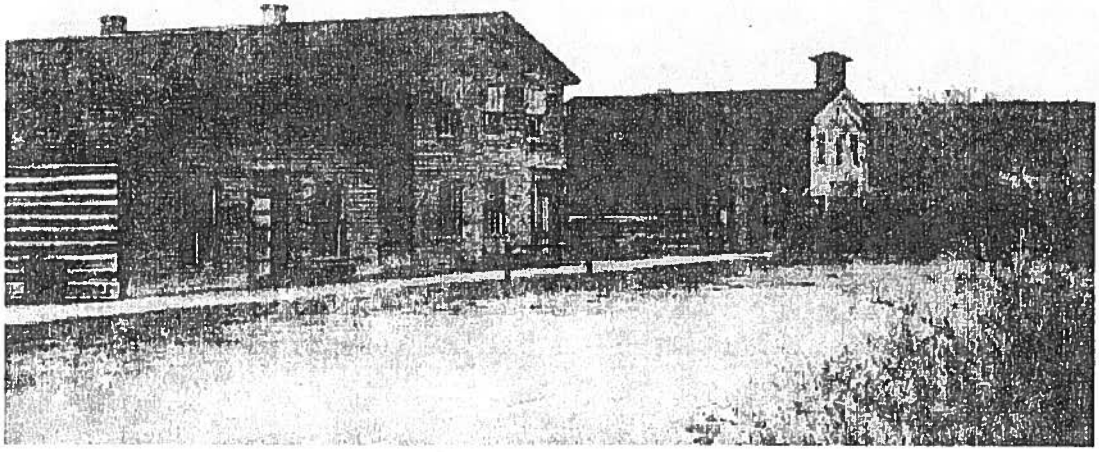
The mission of Bannack State Park is to preserve and protect its historic integrity, fabric, resources, landscape and atmosphere, from its beginnings as an isolated frontier mining boom town through its evolution as a slowly dying, abandoned community. Through education, preservation and interpretation, Bannack will provide and perpetuate the unique "Bannack Experience" in order to spark current and future visitors' imaginations and enrich their opportunity to understand the history made in Bannack and the lives of the people who lived and worked there.

BANNACK EXPERIENCE:

The next step was then to verbally define what it was about Bannack that visitors loved and wanted to preserve. The result was the Bannack Experience statement.

The Bannack Experience

Experience the past. Walk the quiet, dusty, deserted street past buildings weathered and worn by the ravages of time. Rusty tin cans, an old bottle, square nails. Imagine the past. An old bedstead, a broken chair, a well used wood cook stove, bits and pieces of the past fill in the spaces and spark the imagination, free from modern day intrusions and commercialization. Touch the past. Sit in the school desks, empty and abandoned since the 1950s. Step inside the Courthouse vaults. Run your hand along the hand-hewn logs crafted 120 years ago. Hear the past. An old door, one hinge missing, creaks and groans in the wind. A cold draft edges through the cracks in the missing chinking and sends shivers up your spine. Quiet. Solitude. Discover the past. First major gold rush, first territorial capital, first county seat of Beaverhead County. Sidney Edgerton, Henry Plummer, Chief Snag, Vigilantes and Road Agents, miners, business men, Chinese immigrants, women and children. Interpret the past. Boom and bust, fortunes won and fortunes lost, birth and death, disease and prosperity, law and order, good and evil. Relive the past. Experience history where it actually happened. Touch History. Bannack, an era in time, preserved and protected, for now and forever. This is the "Bannack Experience."



MANAGEMENT PLAN OUTCOMES:

From this, the planning team determined that all actions or policies recommended by the plan would have to meet at least one of the three Management Plan Outcomes:

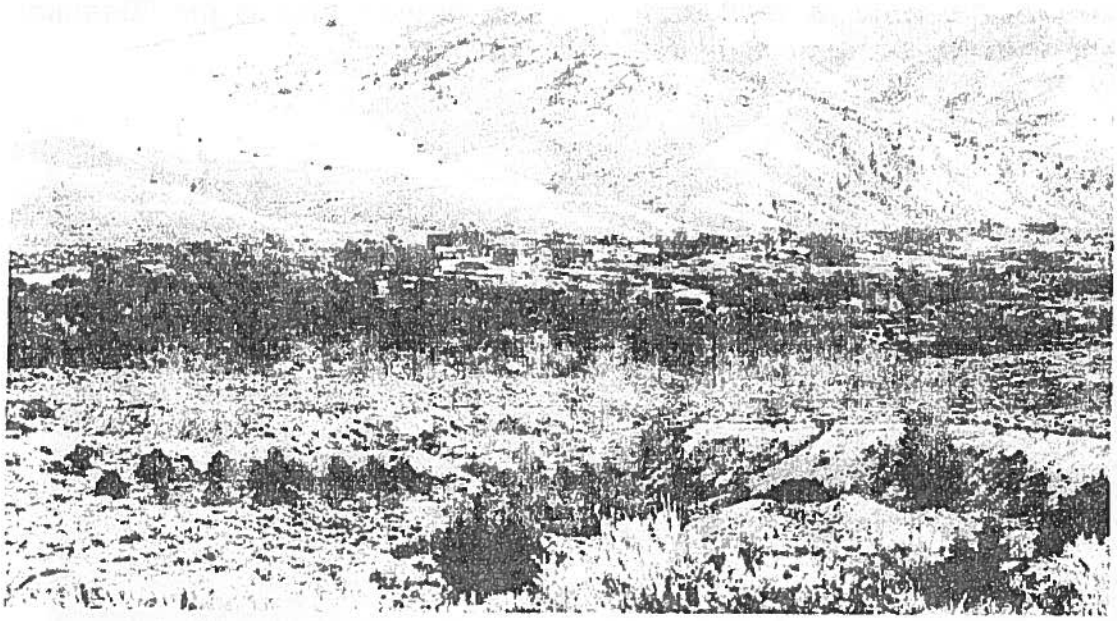
1. Preserve and protect Bannack's unique cultural, historical, recreational, and natural resources for current and future generations.

2. Provide the opportunity to safely enjoy the Bannack Experience for current and future visitors to Bannack.

3. Provide outstanding educational, interpretive, and recreational opportunities for current and future park visitors, while maintaining the Bannack Experience.

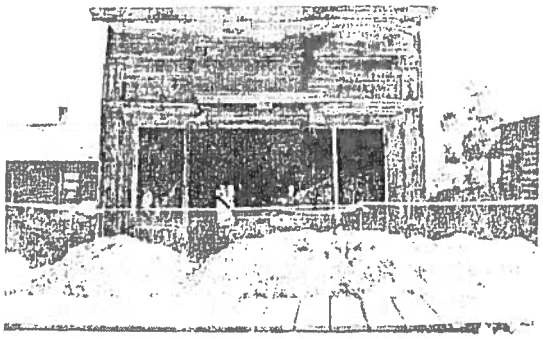
MANAGEMENT PLAN ISSUES & IMMEDIATE PRIORITIES:

The planning team examined a broad range of issues and ultimately grouped them into eight major categories. Planning team members formed separate work groups to address each issue, develop an issue statement and preliminary recommended actions that were then reviewed by the entire planning team. The issues are discussed below, and the immediate priorities are identified.



Issue 1. Building Preservation & Stabilization

ISSUE STATEMENT: Buildings at Bannack are deteriorating from weather, use, and time. Over the years, preservation and stabilization work on these buildings has taken a wide range of approaches, from restoration to arrested decay, often resulting in a conglomeration of treatments, with no consistency. Preservation and stabilization work should be high quality, consistent, and well documented in its approach. Access to buildings is a major unique characteristic of Bannack. People want to continue to wander in and out of the buildings, but at the same time this use is contributing to the deterioration of the structures.



APPROACH: The planning team placed stabilizing and preserving Bannack buildings as a top priority and recommends the implementation of a Preservation Philosophy developed specifically for Bannack. The Preservation Philosophy categorizes buildings into preservation types based on use, historic integrity and public safety, and prescribes levels of treatment for each category.

1. Basic Preservation. The majority of Bannack buildings will be maintained in this category. The focus of work on buildings in this category will be to slow down the deterioration of the buildings and prevent their collapse through the least invasive means.

2. Core Buildings. The primary core historic buildings (no more than seven total buildings, and currently the Church, Hotel Meade, School/Masonic Lodge, jail and Skinners Saloon) will be maintained to a higher level than the remainder of the buildings due to their high level of use and historic integrity.

3. Adapted and New Buildings. The Adapted Use or New Buildings (no more than six total buildings and currently the Visitor Center, State House, Thompson House, Manager's Residence, and New Work Shop) will be modernized to accommodate current use.

The buildings will retain and reflect their unique layers of history from Bannack's beginnings as a mining camp through its abandonment in the 1950s. The Planning Team recommends an in-house preservation crew to ensure consistent, high quality work on the historic resources.

Visitors will always be able to access some buildings. The park manager will retain the flexibility to determine the method and number of buildings that should be closed to public access, based on preservation work in progress, public safety and retaining the Bannack Experience.

IMMEDIATE PRIORITIES:

- Begin implementing the Bannack Preservation Philosophy
- Work on the acquiring the funding/FTE to hire & train an in-house preservation team
- Complete a Historic Structures Report on all Bannack Buildings

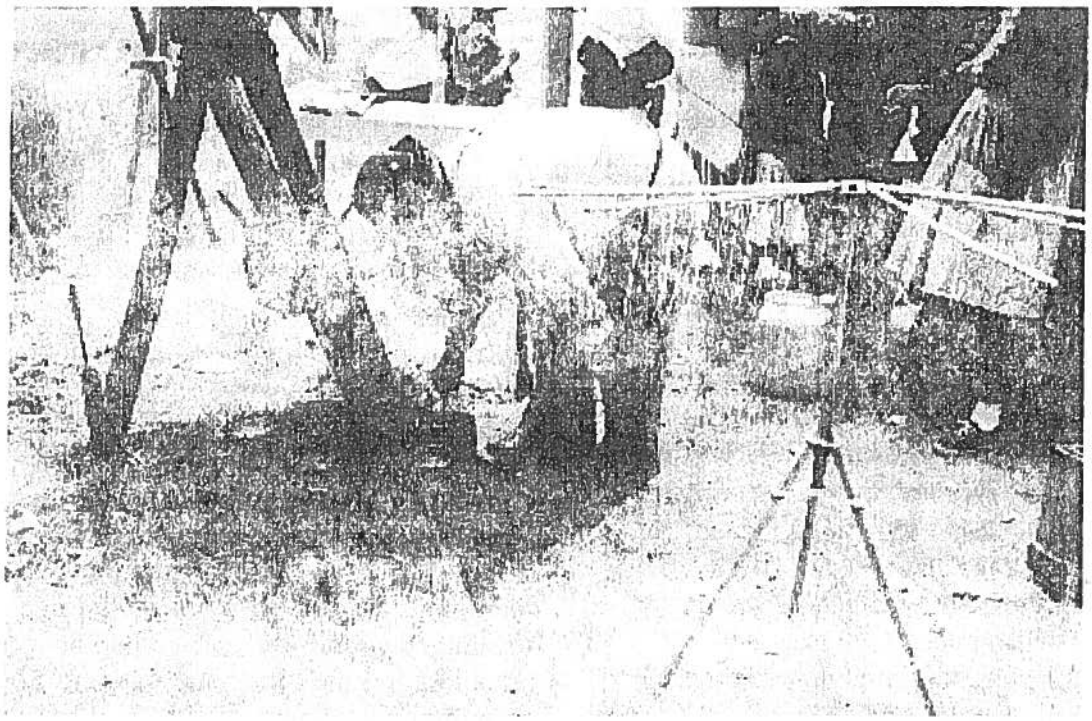
Issue 2. Visitor Management

ISSUE STATEMENT: More and more visitors are attracted to Bannack State Park each year. Bannack State Park needs to be managed so that the Bannack Experience is available to visitors while still preserving the park for future generations, limiting impact on the resources and providing a safe experience for all visitors.

APPROACH: Recommendations for visitor management address the need to disperse visitors over time and throughout the park, provide better access for visitors with disabilities, limit special events to those that are historically relevant, address park security issues, and establish an approach for the carrying capacity of the park.

The planning team recommended several specific actions for dispersing visitors:

- Encourage visitation during the "off-season" and limiting promotion of summer season,
- Limit promotion of Bannack Days,
- Expand interpretive trail development outside the town site,
- More guided tours of the mill and development of interpretive facilities for self-guided tours,
- Improvements to the mine as necessary for public safety so that mine tours can be offered, and
- Building a new Visitor Center.



The planning team looked at identifying a carrying capacity as a maximum limit of persons at any one time, but this did not appear to be a reasonable solution for Bannack at this time. Instead of a blanket "close the gates" policy, the planning team suggested a flexible approach that stresses the condition of the visitor experience and condition of the park resources. Existing experience indicates that the park has reached maximum carrying capacity in some situations (Bannack Days) and is approaching maximum capacity in other situations (holiday weekends). Management actions to maintain acceptable standards will be reviewed on an annual basis and the first year actions include limiting tour groups to a 100 person per group maximum with no more than two such groups per day, retain the existing number of campsites, limit parking for special events to designated parking areas, and no expansion of park spaces beyond those planned for the existing parking lot (as outlined in the Capital Improvements Plan).

It was interesting, and also reaffirming, that many of the work groups, working independently and with varying issues, came up with the same recommended actions for meeting the issue goals. Most work groups determined that the foremost challenge facing Bannack was accommodating the steadily increasing numbers of visitors to Bannack, while still allowing visitors to enjoy the type of Bannack Experience as defined in the Management Plan. The primary action proposed to overcome this challenge was constructing a new, multipurpose Visitor Center, on the edge or outside of the town site. This new Visitor Center would, in some form, address almost all of the issues brought up.

It would:

- Decrease the pressure on the historic resources by providing interpretive resources about the buildings.
- Disperse the park visitors from concentrating at the entrance to the town site.
- Provide more detailed information and interpretive programming for visitors with disabilities.
- Provide more control over visitor activities and increase security.
- Increase fee compliance by having the Visitor Center/fee collection area and offices in the same area.
- Expand interpretive offerings for all visitors.
- Provide a location for proper artifact storage, documentation, research and maintenance.
- Provide for the increasing needs of visitors including more restrooms and more room to view the Bannack videos.

Another common recommendation throughout the work groups was dispersing visitors out of the town site through offering a variety of interpretive, educational and recreational activities. These included developing hiking and interpretive trails along the mining areas, increasing the guided tours of the mill, opening the mill for self-guided tours, rehabilitating the mine, and opening the mine for guided tours.

IMMEDIATE PRIORITIES:

- Begin to secure the funding to build a new Visitor Center
- Complete the EA process to locate a new Visitor Center
- Develop hiking trails that interpret the mining history of Bannack and disperse visitors

Issue 3. Interpretation

ISSUE STATEMENT: There is a need to enhance and expand the range of interpretation and educational opportunities for the increasing number and expectations of visitors. There is also a need to spread this interpretation out over the entire park to better disperse visitors. All interpretative and educational programs at Bannack should honor the Bannack Experience.

APPROACH: The focus of interpretive programming at Bannack should be wide-ranging. Interpretive programs should be creative and innovative instead of static and fixed, and should not detract from the Bannack Experience. Within the town site, the planning team recommended interpretation methods that would keep intact the site's environment of abandonment and that would promote self-discovery. Town site interpretation would thus include printed material for walking tours and availability of guided tours, but would avoid use of interpretive signs or modern technology, such as videos, that would detract from the ghost town atmosphere. Expanded interpretation, using a variety of techniques, interaction, and hands-on activities could be provided at a new or expanded Visitor Center.

IMMEDIATE PRIORITIES:

- Increasing the guided tours of the mill
- Rehabilitate and open the mill for self-guided tours
- Rehabilitate and open the mine for guided tours

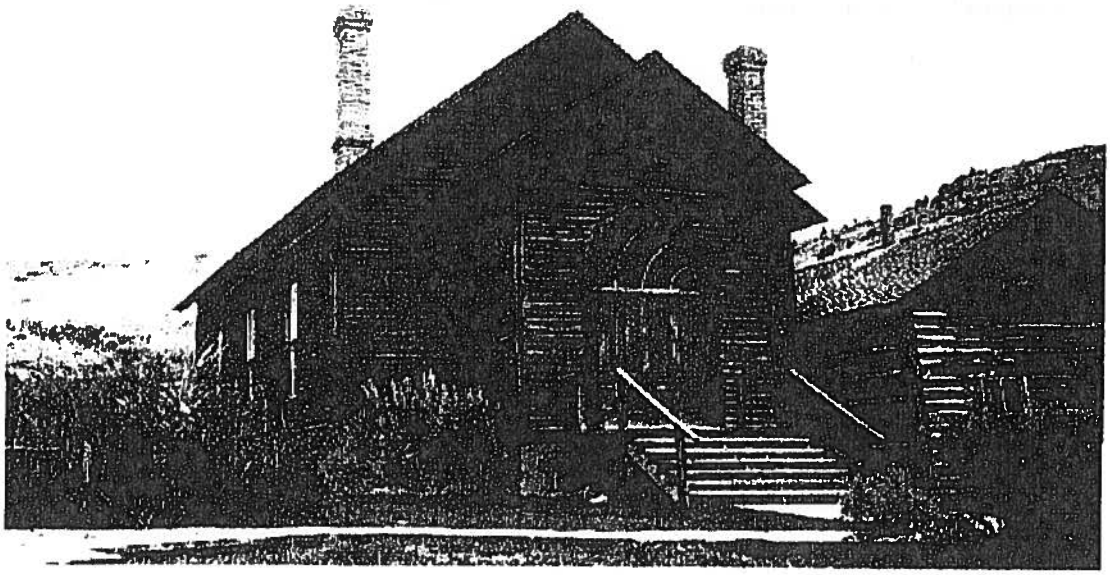
Issue 4. Cultural Resource Management

ISSUE STATEMENT: The capability to manage, record, organize, store and acquire artifacts at Bannack needs improvement. Currently, there is inadequate artifact storage; not all artifacts are documented; labeled and inventoried; some artifacts may be at risk from pot hunting and vandalism; archaeological work needs standardized guidelines; and there is no acquisition policy. Protecting cultural resources at Bannack is critical and involves not only the artifacts found there but also the Bannack cemeteries and the historic landscapes.

APPROACH: Recommendations for cultural resource management address a variety of needs including archive and artifact management, archaeology, an acquisition and collection policy, cemetery management, and the cultural viewshed.

Bannack has a limited amount of unique, original archival material consisting of original paper documents, one-of-a-kind photos, and audiotapes of oral histories. All archives and other artifacts (objects other than archival material) should be properly documented, cataloged, maintained, and stored. Members of the planning team strongly opposed permanent off-site storage of archives and preferred the archives stay at Bannack, provided that storage and maintenance of these materials meet long-term preservations needs. Until that time, members of the planning team recommended loaning the materials to the Beaverhead County Museum with the condition that the loan be temporary and that storage conditions meet standards.

Cemetery guidelines focus on preserving the cemeteries in a manner that retains the historic integrity, honors the memory of the deceased, and retains the "atmosphere of abandonment." No additional burials may occur in the Bannack cemeteries.



The planning team also recommended:

- Developing an archaeology plan for Bannack
- Implementing an Acquisition Policy that focuses on those items that have a primary emphasis on Bannack and Bannack history, within the limits of available resources for proper inventory, storage and handling
- Determining priorities and methods to preserve the integrity of the cultural viewshed at a baseline status of conditions in the year 2000

IMMEDIATE PRIORITIES:

- Apply for grants or secure funding to properly inventory the historic archives at Bannack
- Apply for funding/FTE to develop an archeology plan for Bannack
- Begin implementing the Acquisition Plan for Bannack

Issue 5.Facilities and Infrastructure

ISSUE STATEMENT: There is a need to keep up with increasing demands on the site from normal wear and tear, increased visitation and changing codes and regulations. This will involve maintaining what currently exists, making improvements and upgrades as needed, and planning for new facilities and infrastructure.

APPROACH: The planning team recommends that all improvements, new facilities, and infrastructure be designed to maintain the Bannack Experience, blend into the environment, avoid a commercialized look to Bannack, and meet the Secretary of Interior's Standards for New Construction in historic areas. In order to maintain the Bannack Experience, current and future camping will remain basic, without electrical or water hookups, flush toilets, or shower facilities.

IMMEDIATE PRIORITIES:

- Provide an outdoor drinking water facility in the Bannack Townsite
- Stabilize the creek banks in the upper campground

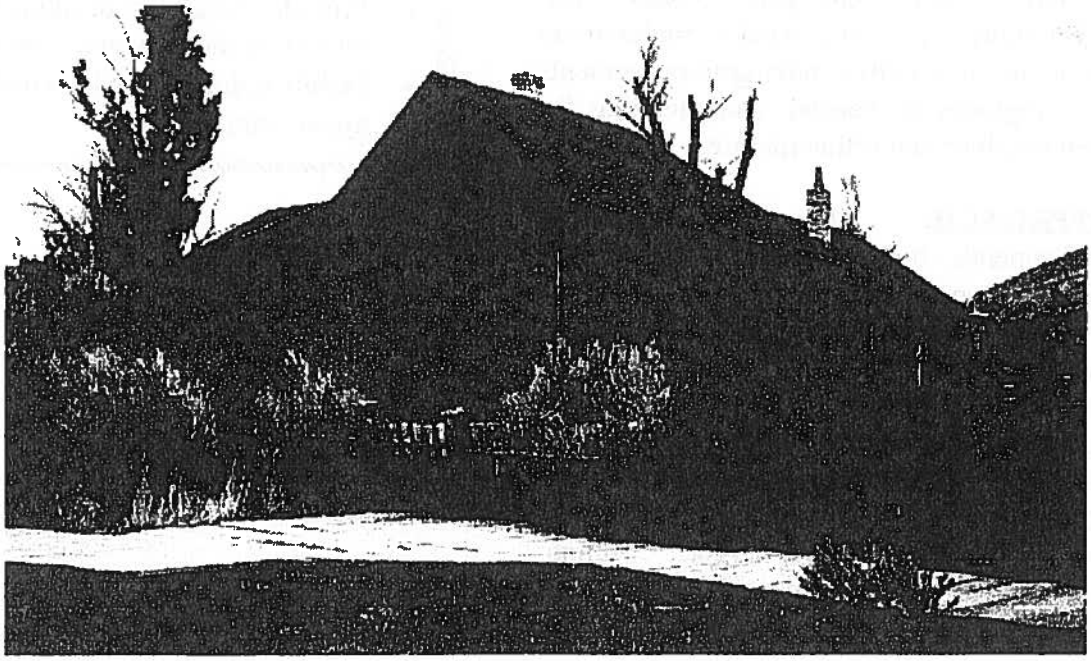
Issue 6. Public Health and Safety

ISSUE STATEMENT: There is a continued need to address public health and safety at Bannack, to stay in compliance with applicable codes and regulations, and to balance these needs within the context of the Bannack Experience.

APPROACH: The planning team looked at several critical issues related to public health and safety, including fire risk and emergencies. Two separate documents (included in the appendices to the plan) were developed to address these issues. Perspectives on controlling fire risk were broad ranging and it was clear from the outset that the planning team was faced with the challenge of managing fire risk while maintaining the quintessential ghost town atmosphere of Bannack. The end result was a detailed plan for fire risk management and suppression, reviewed by the planning team as well as fire control specialists working with Bannack, that specifies a number of methods and techniques, including selected removal of sagebrush.

IMMEDIATE PRIORITIES:

- Remove sagebrush as per the Bannack FirePlan
- Replace latrines in the lower campground
- Develop a pest control plan (for mosquitoes, rodents and other pests)
- Locate and secure mine adits and shafts in a manner that protects the general public but does not impact the viewshed or historic integrity of the landscape



Issue 7. Natural Resources

ISSUE STATEMENT: It is the mission of Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, the Parks Division and Bannack State Park to provide stewardship, preservation, and protection of Montana's significant and unique natural resources. Natural resources – including vegetation, wildlife, water, and air – are all part of the Bannack Experience. Mechanisms need to be put in place to protect and perpetuate Bannack's historic natural resources into the future, with consideration being given to preserving cultural and historic resources and preserving the Bannack Experience.

APPROACH: The planning team recommends maintaining, perpetuating, and interpreting a healthy, natural environment that reflects the historic, natural evolution of Bannack. Within the town site and primary use areas, vegetation will be maintained and replanted in similar amounts and proportions to those that existed in the baseline year 2000, with exceptions for vegetation that negatively affects historic resources or public health. The planning team also recommends developing a Natural Resource Management Plan for Bannack and incorporating information from that plan in the interpretive programs at Bannack.

Other recommendations include:

- Monitor the creek bank and determine, evaluate, and implement alternatives for stabilizing the creek in the campground and town site where resources are threatened,
- Maintain historic ditches and flumes to control flooding throughout the town site,
- Monitor levels of mercury in fish and investigate mitigation measures to reduce tailings runoff into the creek,
- Continue to permit limited livestock grazing on property obtained from the Bureau of Land Management as long as this activity promotes and maintains a healthy historic landscape and does not adversely impact Bannack State Park operations and maintenance,
- Continue to exclude livestock from all historic structures, the Bannack town site, botanical sites (as indicated by the Montana Natural Heritage Program), and all riparian areas utilizing a combination of fencing and natural barriers.

IMMEDIATE PRIORITIES:

- Begin work on a Natural Resource Management Plan for Bannack
- Repair the flume on the North side of Bannack
- Build a fence around the botanical site identified by the Montana Natural Heritage Program

Issue 8. Recreation

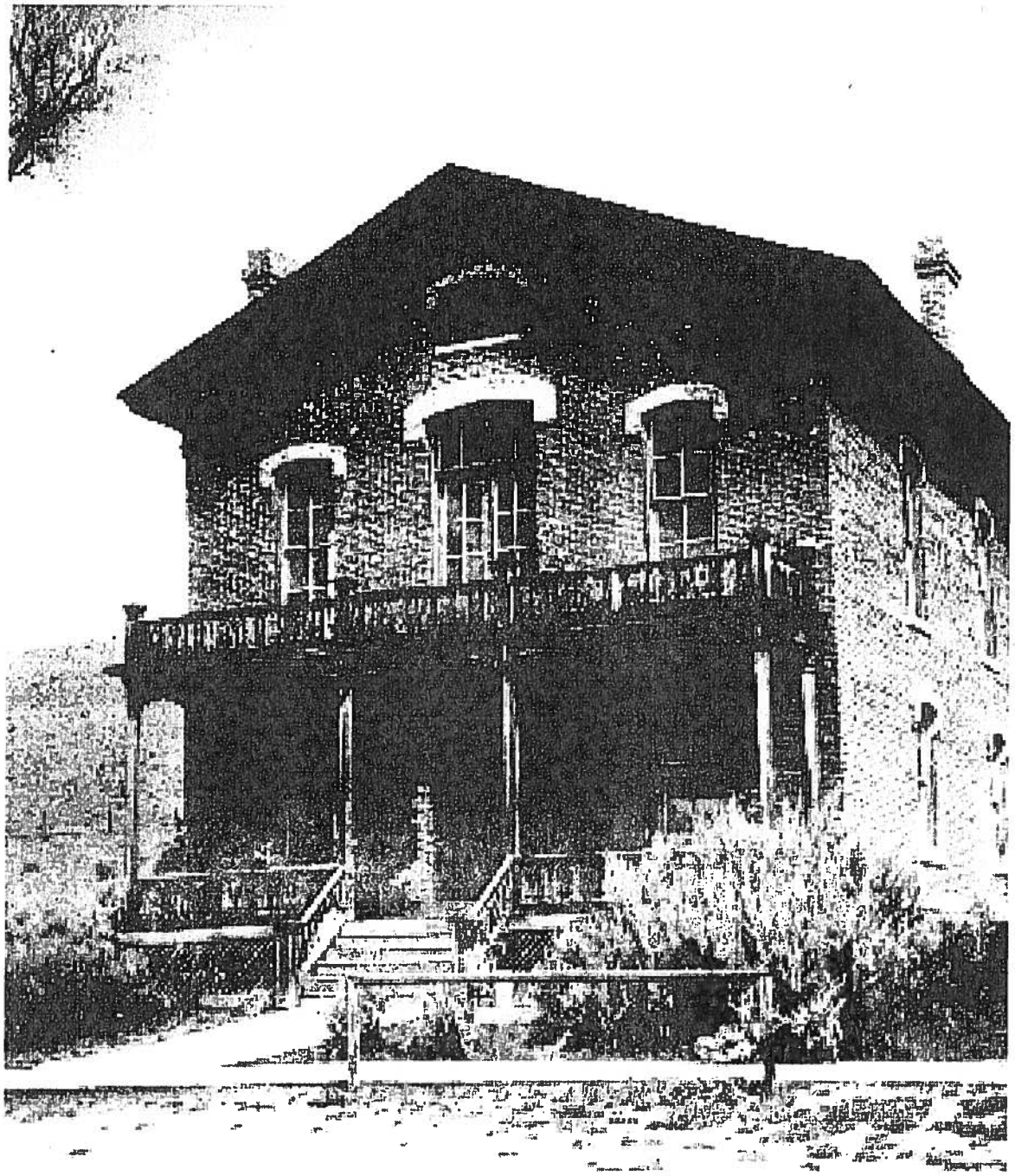
ISSUE STATEMENT: A variety of recreational opportunities need to be continued at Bannack and balanced within the context of the "Bannack Experience."

APPROACH: Specific recommendations include:

- New recreational opportunities should serve to disperse park visitors both temporally and seasonally,
- Basic camping will continue at Bannack,
- Motorized vehicles will not be allowed in Bannack off of designated roads,
- Bicycles are limited to existing trails and roads and are not allowed in the town site,
- No hunting will be allowed in Bannack in order to protect the resources and the visitors,
- Horses are restricted to existing trails and roads, are not allowed in the campgrounds or picnic area, and only certified weed-free feed is allowed,
- Construct an amphitheater for evening programs in the picnic area, and
- Research and develop a way to offer recreational gold panning in a manner that doesn't harm park resources.

IMMEDIATE PRIORITIES:

- Develop drinking water at the picnic area
- Construct a picnic shelter in the picnic area
- Replace a current latrine with a handicapped accessible sealed vault latrine



In Closing

The management plan also details many additional actions and policies for the next ten years at Bannack. These actions and policies are all spelled out in the text of the plan.

The direction for the future of Bannack is set. Together, the actions and policies established in this plan will serve to meet the Management Plan Outcomes and provide an opportunity for our children, grandchildren and hopefully our great-grandchildren to enjoy the Bannack Experience.