

History



Historic Devils Gate, an important landmark along the Mormon, California, Oregon and Pony Express Trails.

Martin's Cove is a several hundred acre cove located adjacent to the Mormon, California, Oregon and Pony Express Trails in the center of Wyoming. It is located on the Sweetwater River just west of Independence Rock and Devil's Gate, two other important historic landmarks. The area is historically significant not only because of its association with the Mormon Trail, but because of its close proximity to Devil's Gate--another major historic landmark--and a large number of other sites associated with the Pony Express, The Fur Trade era, the Oregon Trail, and the California Trail. The site was listed on the National Register of Historic Sites in 1977. Numerous emigrant graves, emigrant camp sites, a pony express station, a trading post, and prehistoric sites associated with Native Americans, are located in the immediate vicinity.



Chronology of Events

1997 - The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS church) acquired adjacent property through the purchase of the Sun Ranch. BLM and the LDS church entered into a cooperative agreement to build a trail into Martin's Cove and for the management and interpretation of the cultural resources in the general area. This agreement also provided for a non-exclusive easement across the Sun Ranch to Martin's Cove.

December 2003 - Public Law 108-137 directs the Secretary of the Interior to lease for 25 years approximately 940-acres of Federal land—the Martin's Cove area—in Natrona County, Wyoming, to the Corporation of the Presiding Bishop of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The BLM and the Mormon Church prepared an environmental assessment as directed by PL 108-137. The law requires a number of conditions be added to the lease, chief among these that the Corporation would give the United States a lease covenant to ensure public access, consistent with the historical purposes of the site, across private land owned by the Corporation to both Martin's Cove and the nearby Devil's Gate site. Lease rental payments would be fair market rental value of the lands to be leased, reduced by the fair market rental value of public easements granted by the Corporation. The law further specifies that the Secretary shall comply with NEPA in carrying out these provisions.

October 2004 - The BLM signs the lease agreement with the LDS church, authorizing management of the Martin's Cove area for 25 years. The LDS church also has a right of first refusal for renewing the lease.

March 2005 - The ACLU and four Wyoming plaintiffs file suit in Cheyenne seeking an injunction to block the lease. Saying a federal lease agreement unfairly gives "complete and unfettered control" to the Mormon Church, the American Civil Liberties Union filed suit to block the leasing of Martin's Cove to the LDS church. The lawsuit, filed in U.S. District Court in Cheyenne, names Interior Secretary Gale Norton and Bureau of Land Management Director Kathleen Clarke as defendants.

May 2006 - A settlement agreement is reached between parties in the regards to the ACLU lawsuit which results in assuring that distinction will be made between the Bureau of Land Management signage and interpretation, and that of the LDS church, resolving the suit filed in March of 2005.

For more information, visit: www.wy.blm.gov