

Harbor Islands plan will have tribal input

By Della Klemovich
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MILTON — The National Park Service yesterday pledged to work with Native Americans on plans for the Harbor Islands national park.

The master plan for the new park, due in November 1999, will be formulated after researching which tribes used the islands historically, National Park Service officials promised.

The research will include a focus on the interment of Native Americans in camps on the islands in the 1600s at the time of King Philip's War.

Native Americans taken prisoner during the war were held on Deer Island, among others.

Even members of friendly tribes

who had converted to Christianity were eventually confined on the islands when the colonists suspended this civil liberties of all tribal people.

Yesterday, in a meeting at the Chickatawbut Hill Education Center in Milton, representatives of the National Park Service said they had budgeted an unspecified amount of money for the research.

"We'd like to work together with you on it," program manager Becky Joseph told representatives of several tribes, including the Wampanoag, Penobscot, Mohican and Delaware.

The tribal representatives are part of an alliance called the Muhheconnaw National Confederacy, a centuries-old alliance revived to protect sites, especially burial grounds, of importance to Native Americans.

Many are also involved in the

Muhheconnaw Intertribal Committee on Deer Island, which aims to protect Harbor Islands sites of importance to tribes historically connected to the region.

Gary McCann, a consultant to the Muhheconnaw Intertribal Committee of Deer Island, said the tribes appreciate the efforts the National Park Service has pledged to make.

He said the tribes believe the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority, which has built a massive sewage treatment plant on Deer Island, has illegally ignored the tribes' concerns.

"We don't feel that the MWRA or the (U.S. Environmental Protection Administration) has complied with the law," McCann said. "To have the Park Service comply is a step in the right direction."

Edith Andrews of the Wampanoag tribe of Gay Head said she hopes early discussions like yesterday's lead to permanent protection for Native American burial grounds on the Harbor Islands.

The Wampanoags, whose historical lands include southeastern Massachusetts, Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket and parts of Rhode Island, lost many to internment camps on Harbor Islands, Andrews said.

"We had a lot of 'praying Indians,' on the side of the English, who were nonetheless herded together in concentration camps, mainly on Deer Island," Andrews said. She said Wampanoags want to identify camp sites and burial places and ensure that burial places are protected and respected forever.

One of the saddest things, said Sam Saptel, coordinator of the Muhheconnaw Intertribal Committee on Deer Island, is that the tribes themselves are unaware of their history.

To remedy ignorance, the new national park could include Native American museums, a Deer Island memorial to genocide victims, a bookstore and a shop offering Indian-made crafts.

"This is history-making," said Linda Poolaw, an official of the Delaware tribe.

"This is the first time we've ever been consulted on something like this," she told National Park Service officials. She praised their policy of consulting with Native Americans affected by federal projects, commenting, "I wish you had consultation services 300 years ago."