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Bent's Old Fort

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Bent's Fort gets grant of \$15,900 for improvements

By DAVID VICKERS

The Pueblo Chieftain

LA JUNTA — Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site has received \$15,900 from the National Park System to improve operations, conduct research and help repair the adobe structure. Superintendent Don Hill said Wednesday.

Hill also was notified Wednesday of his appointment as superintendent of the restored fur trading post, where the 1840s come to life every day. Hill, 41, has served as acting superintendent since October when former superintendent Derrek Hambly retired.

Hill and several other park service employees at Bent's Old Fort are working on a program to ensure continuous maintenance of the adobe structure.

Three employees will work 40 hours each week instead of 32 in order to replace timbers and add adobe to walls, which were reconstructed in 1976. That phase of the project will cost \$3,700.

Hill said Don Currie, chief of maintenance, has developed an adobe maintenance program "which appears to be working at this time." Currie is attempting to stabilize the adobe without use of modern building materials like concrete.

Another \$2,000 will be used to hire a seasonal museum aid to help curator Jim O'Barr catalog the museum collection. Most of the collection is not on display currently. In addition, \$5,200 will be earmarked for the curatorial staff to bring the library, photo collections and archeological records up to museum standards, Hill said.

"Original material must be maintained," Hill said. "We want educational institutions to have access to our collection in the future."

The remaining \$3,000 from the \$15,900 incentive payment will be

used to hire an interpretive aide, who will work three days each week.

Hill said the aide will help stage "living history" programs, which make the fort a unique experience for visitors.

Replacement of clothing used in living history re-enactments will cost the fort \$1,000. A new video recorder will be purchased to show the movie "They Came to Build," which documents the reconstruction of Bent's Old Fort.

Hill said the national park had \$15 million in "enhancement dollars" to allocate this year for improvement of park's resource management, research and interpretation.

"Because of limited funding from the federal government, those are the areas our national director feels we must concentrate on," Hill said.

Bent's Old Fort's budget for 1987 is nearly \$500,000, but about \$390,000 is dedicated to salaries.

The enhancement dollars are tied directly to recreation fee legislation, which authorizes increasing fees at National Park System areas, or in the case of Bent's Old Fort, the initiation of a fee schedule. The legislation provided a \$58 million advance from the National Treasury, which the National Park System must return by the end of 1987. There are 337 areas in the system, Hill said.

Bent's Old Fort anticipates generating about \$30,000 from the 32,000 paying customers. Hill predicts about 11,000 cars will enter the park.

Fees will be \$1 for people who walk, ride a bicycle or enter as part of a bus tour. A carload of visitors will be charged \$3 for the group.

A season pass can be purchased for \$10 by local people, which allows unlimited access to all people in the pass holder's vehicle.