

DeSoto and Boyer Chute National Wildlife Refuges sustained considerable flooding during the summers of 2010 and 2011. Initially the thought was to stay put but as the predictions for water levels increased, the decision was made to evacuate the collection.



Refuge staff and volunteers worked to evacuate the DeSoto Visitor Center including the Steamboat Bertrand museum collection. The artifacts were packed and transported to a secure off-site storage facility. More than 130 volunteers assisted in the effort logging more than 900 volunteer hours. The evacuation would not have been possible without the hard work of these dedicated community volunteers.



Two Reasons for Delay in Returning Steamboat Bertrand Collection to the DeSoto Visitor Center

1. Restoration of the DeSoto Visitor Center/ Steamboat Bertrand Museum climate control, security and fire suppression systems.
2. Time for inventory and inspection of a collection carefully cared for and curated over a 40 year period that was removed in a hurry in 2011 in 9 days.



DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge is located 25 miles north of Omaha, Nebraska on U.S. Highway 30, between Missouri Valley, Iowa and Blair, Nebraska.

Boyer Chute National Wildlife Refuge is located on the west side of the Missouri River, 3 miles east of Fort Calhoun, Nebraska and 15 miles north of Omaha, Nebraska.



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DeSoto & Boyer Chute
National Wildlife Refuges

Where is the Steamboat Bertrand Collection?



For the past 30 years, visitors to DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge have been able to view thousands of artifacts recovered from the Steamboat Bertrand which sank on the Missouri River in the waning days of the American Civil War.



This image, taken summer 2011, shows the visitor center and museum completely surrounded by water. The center was only accessible by boat for several months. It sustained significant damage to the heating, air conditioning, climate control and ventilation systems that are housed in the basement. The main floor did not flood and reopened to the public on January 22, 2012.



After looking into various options, the decision was made to lease space in the “temporary” warehouse, set up security and environmental controls, and house the collection there until the time came to return it to the DeSoto Visitor Center.

The Steamboat Bertrand Collection is a nationally significant archeological collection. There are guidelines refuge staff follow to keep the collection properly stored and curated. While in the secure off-site storage facility museum staff and volunteers are sorting, inventorying, cataloging, photographing and repacking the museum artifacts. This complete inventory is long overdue and space at the warehouse facility will allow for this important work to be completed.



Cataloging a museum collection is a time consuming process. It involves writing a detailed written description of each artifact, taking measurements including height, width, length, weight, and high quality digital photographs of the artifacts from multiple angles.

All of this information goes into a computerized cataloging system. For the first time as a result of this effort, each artifact will have its own catalog record. The catalog record includes information such as where the artifact was found on the Bertrand, what conservation treatments it has had, whether it has ever been on display or loan and where it is currently found.



When the Bertrand Collection cataloging and inventory effort is complete, it will provide a computerized database of all objects. This will make it easier to find artifacts for researchers and the interested public. It will also allow for the museum staff to easily complete required inventories and reports.



For more information about DeSoto and Boyer Chute National Wildlife Refuges, find us on Facebook (search DeSoto and Boyer Chute National Wildlife Refuges) or visit our websites at www.fws.gov/refuge/Desoto/ and www.fws.gov/midwest/boyerchute/

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