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## National Park Service News Release

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### **NPS ANNOUNCES INTENT TO PREPARE AN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT FOR REVISIONS TO NONFEDERAL OIL AND GAS REGULATIONS**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – On December 30, 2010, the National Park Service published in the *Federal Register* (75 *FR* 82362) its Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for a Proposed Revision to the 9B regulations that govern nonfederal oil and gas development within the boundaries of units of the National Park System. Nonfederal oil and gas rights exist in units of the National Park System because 1) the rights predate the creation of the units, 2) the rights are encumbrances on lands added to parks through boundary expansions, or 3) in Alaska, they are part of land interests conveyed to Native corporations under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, or held by the State of Alaska and other private landowners. Currently, 11 of the 392 units of the National Park System have active non-federal oil and gas operations occurring within their boundaries. The current regulations at 36 CFR Part 9, Subpart B have been in effect for over 30 years and have not been substantively updated during that period. The National Park Service seeks to revise the regulations to update them to reflect current policies, legal requirements, and practices; improve the ease of applying the regulations for the NPS and industry; and to increase the effectiveness of the regulations in order to ensure that all nonfederal oil and gas operations conducted in National Park System units avoid or minimize, to the greatest possible extent, adverse effects on natural and cultural resources, visitor uses and experiences, park infrastructure and management, and protect public health and safety.

The publication of the Notice of Intent initiates public scoping, which is an opportunity early in the environmental planning process for the public, organizations, and other agencies to suggest issues and alternatives that the NPS should consider in preparing the EIS. The EIS will analyze at a programmatic level the potential environmental impacts of a range of reasonable alternatives associated with changes to the existing

regulations for regulating nonfederal oil and gas development in park units. Impact topics analyzed could include threatened and endangered species, water resources, soils, vegetation, wetlands, air resources, night skies, wildlife, cultural resources, and soundscapes. Effects on oil and gas operators, visitor experience, public safety, adjacent lands, and park operations may also be analyzed.

The Notice of Intent can be found on the Federal Register website at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/> or on the NPS Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) website at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/WASO>.

To be most useful in the planning process, comments should be mailed or entered in the PEPC website, <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/WASO> by February 28, 2011. NPS does not plan to hold public scoping meetings for this DEIS due to the programmatic, nationwide nature of the regulations and the widely dispersed locations of the 11 parks that could be affected by the revisions. Depending on the interest generated during the public scoping period, the NPS would decide whether, and if so where, to hold public meetings in conjunction with the release for public comment of the draft Environmental Impact Statement. The 11 units of the National Park System currently with by nonfederal oil and gas operations occurring in their boundaries are Alibates Flint Quarries National Monument (TX), Aztec Ruins National Monument (NM), Big Cypress National Preserve (FL), Big Thicket National Preserve (TX), Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area (TN, KY), Cuyahoga Valley NP(OH), Gauley River National River (WV), Lake Meredith National Recreation Area (TX), New River Gorge National River (WV), Obed Wild and Scenic River(TN), and Padre Island National Seashore (TX). Based on available data, the National Park Service estimates that an additional 31 park units could have nonfederal oil and gas development in their boundaries in the future.

For further information on the planning process please contact Pat Walsh, Branch Chief, Environmental Quality Division, National Park Service, 303-987-6620, or Sandy Hamilton, Project Manager, Environmental Quality Division, National Park Service, 303-969-2068.

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