

**National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior**

**Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area
Georgia**



General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement

Record of Decision

Approved:

Date:

David Vela
Southeast Regional Director
National Park Service

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE**

RECORD OF DECISION

**GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area

Georgia

The Department of the Interior (DOI), National Park Service (NPS), has prepared this Record of Decision (ROD) on the General Management Plan (GMP) / Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area (CRNRA). This ROD includes a description of the background of the project, a statement of the decision made, a synopsis of other alternatives considered, the basis for the decision, findings on impairment of park resources and values, a description of the environmentally preferable alternative, a listing of measures to minimize environmental harm, and an overview of public and agency involvement in the decision-making process.

BACKGROUND OF THE PROJECT

The purpose of the GMP is to provide a comprehensive direction for resource preservation and visitor use and a basic foundation for decision making for the park for the next 15 to 20 years. The plan prescribes the resource conditions and visitor experiences that are to be achieved and maintained in the park over time. The clarification of what must be achieved according to law and policy is based on a review of the park's purpose, significance, and special mandates.

DECISION (SELECTED ACTION)

Description of the Selected Action

The preferred alternative (selected action, Alternative F) would increase opportunities for the DOI to expand use to local visitors and increase connectivity to neighboring communities through trail linkages, partnering, and expanded interpretive, education and outreach activities. Increased reliance on cooperative efforts with local organizations and agencies is necessary to enhance the levels of connectivity, avoid resource degradation, and increase resource protection through educational outreach activities.

Alternative F promotes partnering as a means to increase park stewardship, promote knowledge, understanding, and protection of park resources, improve park conditions and visitor experiences, and support the park in meeting its mission. Partnering opportunities would be sought to help defray costs for projects or programs. Partnering opportunities would be made possible by park staff dedicated to promoting such activities. Developing partnerships would aid connectivity and promotion of shared facilities and programs.

Alternative F provides increased opportunities for "hardened" types of access and facility development, such as boat ramps, paved trails, parking areas, and restrooms where these facilities are zoned as being appropriate. Facilities for the park would be necessarily distributed throughout the 48 mile corridor, based on availability of funding resources and local community support. A larger and more diverse population of visitors would be served. Newly acquired areas (from willing sellers, assuming funding is available) would be managed in accordance with the management zones identified, providing for protection of resources while increasing access where appropriate. Boating and fishing would be appropriate activities throughout the park wherever possible, and in accordance with State laws and private property rights.

The preferred alternative incorporates six management zones, and provides for protection of resources while increasing access. Each of the six management zones is briefly described in the paragraphs that follow.

Natural Zone - This zone would provide a relatively undisturbed environment that visitors interested in nature and natural settings could enjoy. The concept of this management zone is to allow visitors to experience a relatively natural environment with a relatively low probability of encountering many people during a given visit to the park. Hiking on unpaved trails and nature observation would be typical activities. This management zone would feel farther away from comforts and conveniences.

Natural Area Recreation Zone - The concept of this zone is to allow certain types of recreation in a relatively undisturbed natural environment. At certain times of the day or season, opportunities for solitude would occur, but in general the probability of encountering other visitors would be moderate to high. The degree of isolation and feeling of closeness to nature would be low to moderate, and would be limited by the presence of other people. A high diversity of experiences would be possible in this management zone.

Developed Zone – The developed zone would provide access and the “built environment” to support a wide variety of recreational and educational opportunities. Visitors would have convenient access to park buildings and other facilities with ample opportunity for social experiences, and a high probability of encountering other visitors or park staff. The developed zone is a core area for services, transportation features such as roads and parking areas, information, and facilities.

River Zone - The concept of the river zone is to provide visitors with a river experience to fish, boat and recreate on the Chattahoochee River. Access would primarily be by boat ramps and step down facilities for canoes, rafts, kayaks and motorized vessels (personal watercraft are not allowed). This zone would provide a moderate degree of solitude on stretches of the river and enable visitors to appreciate the natural values of the Chattahoochee River environment.

Historic Resource Zone – This zone was established with the specific goal of protecting cultural resources within the park, while allowing the public to enjoy and understand the value of these resources. The number of visitors to this zone would be moderate, but variable, depending on the type of resources and location. Facilities within this management zone would be in context with the historical or archeological resources while allowing for an optimal visitor experience.

Rustic Zone - The rustic zone is a land-based zone that would provide a relatively undisturbed environment that the visitor interested in nature and natural settings could enjoy. Opportunities for closeness to nature, tranquility, and the application of outdoor skills would be common. Visitors would be able to have a large variety of outdoor experiences, but this zone would feel farther away from comforts and conveniences than the developed zone, with somewhat limited access.

Mitigation Measures / Monitoring

Measures to be taken to protect natural and cultural resources include siting new facilities in previously disturbed areas while also avoiding sensitive resources whenever feasible to avoid impacts. Boardwalks, fences, signs, and similar measures would be used to route people away from sensitive resources such as wetlands, riparian habitats, or historic resources, while still permitting access to important viewpoints. Wetland and sensitive riparian habitats would be delineated by qualified specialists, clearly marked, and avoided before construction work proceeded.

Construction zones would be identified and fenced with temporary fencing or a similar material prior to any construction activity. The fencing would define the construction zone and confine activity to the minimum area required. All protection measures would be clearly stated in construction specifications, and workers would be instructed to avoid areas beyond the fencing. Measures to control dust and erosion during construction would be identified and could include the following: watering dry soils; using silt fences and sedimentation controls; stabilizing soils during and after construction with specially designed fabrics, certified straw or other materials; covering haul trucks. Following completion of construction activities, all areas of disturbed soils and vegetation would be re-graded and re-vegetated as soon as possible. Natural topographic features would be restored to the extent possible using excavated soils from other park projects, and native species would be used in all re-vegetation efforts. Restoration efforts would be maximized by using salvaged topsoil and native vegetation and by monitoring re-vegetation success for several growing seasons as appropriate. Undesirable species would be monitored and control strategies initiated if needed.

Mitigation measures would also be taken prior to construction to minimize immediate and long-term impacts to rare, threatened, and endangered species. Surveys would be conducted prior to construction to determine whether these species are present on a particular site. Facilities would be sited and designed to avoid adverse effects whenever possible. If avoidance is not feasible, adverse effects would be minimized and compensated for, as appropriate, and in consultation with appropriate resource agencies.

Standard noise abatement measures would be implemented during park operations and construction activities. These measures could include scheduling activities to minimize impacts, use of the best available noise control techniques, use of hydraulically or electrically powered tools, and keeping construction activities at the proper distance from sensitive uses or resources.

Efforts would be made to avoid adverse impacts to cultural resources by identifying historic properties prior to an undertaking, avoiding effects to historic properties where possible, following the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Archeology and Historic Preservation and by using visual screens and/or sensitive designs that are compatible with historic resources. Studies carried out in advance of undertakings to identify historic properties and assess effects will comply with the requirements of Sections 106 and 110 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), 36 CFR 60, 36 CFR 800, and *DOI Director's Order-28 and 28A: Archeology*. Mitigation measures, developed in consultation with the Georgia State Historic Preservation Officer (GSHPO), may include data recovery of identified National Register (NR) eligible archeological sites and documentation of built resources in accordance with Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record standards. If, during construction, any previously unknown archeological resources are discovered, all work in the immediate vicinity of the discovery would be halted until the resources could be identified and documented, and an appropriate mitigation strategy developed in accordance with 36 CFR Part 800.13.

The DOI will conduct additional background research, resource inventory, and NR evaluations where information about the location and significance of cultural or natural resources is lacking. Results of site specific studies will be incorporated into planning and compliance documents. Whenever possible,

projects would be located in previously disturbed or existing developed areas and designs would be completed that avoid known or suspected resources of concern.

Future planning efforts addressing cultural resources would include other more detailed studies and plans such as a Cultural Landscape Inventory, Cultural Landscape Reports, Historic Structure Reports; and a Collections Management Plan (CMP). A resource stewardship strategy would address both cultural and natural resources and provide details on the strategies and actions necessary to address the park's most important resource management problems and research needs. Integral to this strategy would be the need to address invasive species and watershed management recommendations. The long-range strategies will integrate the best available science and prescribe inventories, research, monitoring, restoration, mitigation measures, resource protection measures, education and management of resource uses. The ever-increasing demands on the Chattahoochee River as a water source drive the need for Chattahoochee River flow studies. These studies are needed to address flow requirements within park boundaries that take into consideration resource protection and recreation needs. In addition, other resource management plans include an Integrated Pest Management Plan and a Fisheries Management Plan (FMP). Visitor and commercial services planning efforts include a Commercial Services Plan, partnering planning, an easement study, and a Comprehensive Interpretive Plan.

The type and level of visitor use that can be accommodated while sustaining the desired resource conditions and visitor experience are addressed through a set of indicators and standards that provide limits of acceptable change for the park. The DOI will monitor the indicators and take management action to assure that standards to address potential damage to cultural resources, unauthorized trails, visitor experiences (on the land and on the river), river access, and parking are met.

OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

Alternative A. Alternative A, No Action, consists of a continuation of existing management patterns into the future, and provides a baseline for comparing and evaluating the changes and impacts of the other action alternatives. Under Alternative A, there would be no major changes in resources management, visitor services, interpretive programs, or facilities. There would be no expected increase in the level of public/private partnership activity conducted by the park. Limited construction and continued maintenance would be conducted, and would include repair and maintenance of roads, boat ramps, trails, parking lots, and buildings.

Alternative B. Alternative B, Focus on Solitude, would implement management programs to minimize development in the park and maximize the opportunity for visitors to experience solitude in natural settings that are relatively insulated from the surrounding urban conditions, particularly in newly acquired areas. This alternative would involve reducing or minimizing recreational sites and facilities within newly acquired areas of the park, but would allow continued use of existing facilities. Alternative B would redirect visitation patterns to provide experiences in relatively natural areas with few visitors. Motorized boating would not be appropriate in several zones under Alternative B. This alternative would have the following features:

- Visitors would experience the natural environment, wherever feasible, through a system of non-paved walking trails, primitive areas of beauty, and locations along the riverbanks defined as river solitude zones where no trails or structures would be allowed near the river. Areas designated as river solitude zones could be viewed from the river in non-motorized vessels.
- This alternative would allow few new facilities to be constructed within park boundaries. Additional access could be provided by partnering with public and private entities. Newly acquired areas (from willing sellers, assuming funding is available) would be managed to provide maximum resource protection and solitude for visitors. River use would be encouraged through canoes, rafts, non-gasoline powered motorized vessels, and other recreation opportunities. Visitors would be provided with a quality experience in a wide variety of

environments available in the park, with an emphasis on environmental education. Through various public/private partnering efforts, the visitor experience would be highly facilitated through learning.

- Parcels added to the park under the newly expanded boundaries would remain in, or be restored to, a largely natural state. Areas with significant cultural resources would be managed to protect values in accordance with Section 106 and 110 of the NHPA. Limited facilities would be added; for example, small gravel parking lots, primitive trails, and interpretive signage.

Alternative C. In this alternative, visitors would be drawn toward a system of relatively developed hubs in which administrative and interpretive facilities are located. Hubs, at a minimum, would provide visitor information, restrooms, parking lots and roads, trail heads, and access to the river. These types of facilities would be minimized in areas outside hubs. The hubs would be placed at strategic locations (north, central and south) along the 48-mile-long park to optimize the visitors' experience and understanding of the park. Motorized boating would not be appropriate in several zones under Alternative C. This alternative would have the following features:

- Visitor experiences would be focused on interpretive activities and facilities available in the hubs. Visitors, in lower numbers could enjoy the natural habitats and cultural resources available in the undeveloped portions of the park.
- Visitor services would be expanded while simultaneously maintaining green space throughout the park by coordinating public/private partnerships at carefully selected centers (hubs).
- The opportunity for instituting DOI education and interpretive programs, visitor services, and connectivity at key regional locations would be enhanced. This alternative would allow the DOI to concentrate limited resources into the hubs. This alternative would discourage expanded new entrances to the park and would encourage DOI supervision, education, and monitoring where use is greatest.
- The visitor experience would provide more opportunity for socializing and involvement in group activities and less opportunity for solitude in the vicinity of the hubs. However, the opportunity for solitude would still exist at park locations outside the hubs. A nine-mile river solitude zone would be established between McGinnis Ferry Road and Highway 20 that would provide visitors with the opportunity to experience the river in a relatively natural condition.
- Motorized vessels (gasoline-driven motors) would be defined as an appropriate use in the upper portion of Bull Sluice Lake. Bull Sluice Lake is the only lake within the 48-mile park that provides a unique recreation opportunity for the use of motorized vessels.

Alternative D. In this alternative, expanding and distributing access throughout the park, including newly acquired parcels, would provide diverse types of visitor experiences. New facilities would be developed or existing facilities would be refurbished. Connectivity to existing neighborhoods would be optimized, providing similar types of visitor experiences throughout the park. This alternative would have the following features:

- Because this linear park is located adjacent to the most densely developed neighborhoods and business communities of the metropolitan Atlanta area, access to the park could be expanded in the future for current and new visitors.
- The DOI could expand the range of available experiences for local visitors and day use visitors from business parks and neighborhoods, and would provide trail linkages to city- and county-funded and supervised parks.

- Trails from existing and proposed developments would be managed to encourage use by an expanded group of visitors. This would require a higher level of self-help and individual reliance on a wide range of sources.
- A proactive DOI outreach program would de-emphasize solitude and emphasize a more social, community-based group experience. Expanding uses and access would require a redefinition of gathering spaces surrounding the national park, which would be used for picnics, celebrations, neighborhood meetings, and family walks. Visitor experience would be characterized as one of convenience and personal attachment.
- Facilities would be necessarily distributed throughout the 48 miles of the park, based on availability of resources and local community support to serve a greater and more diverse population of residents. This alternative would have the potential to strengthen community involvement in environmental protection of the park and its resources. Local self-help education and voluntary public/private partnerships could enhance park stewardship.

Alternative E. Like the Preferred Alternative (F), Alternative E was developed by extracting some features of both Alternatives C and D and by creating new zone types and management prescriptions that responded to public comments on the May 2004 Draft. Alternative E provides expanded access to the park while at the same time maintaining substantial acreage with less “hardened” forms of access (for example, new parking and roads, trails and other structures typically associated with the built environment), therefore potentially more opportunities for relative quiet and solitude. Under Alternative E, boating and fishing would be appropriate throughout the park wherever possible, and in accordance with State laws and private property rights.

Visitor experience would focus on interpretive activities and other facilities available in the developed zones, as well as enjoyment of the natural habitats and cultural resources in the remainder of the park in other zones. Increased opportunities for partnering with local organizations and agencies would provide for increased stewardship of park resources. The opportunity for instituting DOI education and interpretive programs and visitor services would be enhanced.

BASIS FOR DECISION

The proposed action, Alternative F, was selected using the Choosing by Advantages process. Alternative F best balances the park’s need to provide high-quality visitor experiences and protect park resources. This alternative addresses public comments and concerns received, as summarized in the section entitled, Public and Agency Involvement. Alternative F, the preferred alternative, would provide the greatest total advantage of the six alternatives.

The first step in the Choosing by Advantages process is to decide the factors to be used in the decision. The factors used in the decision making process are: 1) Protect Cultural and Natural Resources; 2) Provide for Visitor Enjoyment and 3) Improve Efficiency of Park Operations.

For each of the 6 alternatives under consideration, including the no-action alternative (continue current management policies and strategies), the planning team discussed the alternatives for each factor and reached a consensus regarding how each factor should be characterized. The following is a summary of the criteria which the team used as a basis for discussion and building consensus on the attribute of each factor.

1. Protects and enhances water quality.
2. Preserves and enhances biodiversity.
3. Preserves and enhances cultural resources.
4. Provides visitor services and recreational opportunities

5. Provides interpretive and educational opportunities.
6. Provides access for a variety of users.
7. Extent to which the alternative benefits operational efficiency and effectiveness.

A preference chart was developed which applies cost to the decision making process. Alternative F was selected as the Preferred Alternative for future management of the CRNRA.

FINDINGS ON IMPAIRMENT OF PARK RESOURCES AND VALUES

Alternative F would have a greater relative amount of land disturbing activity and more access with support facilities in comparison to Alternative A. The effects of these activities on water resources, aquatic resources, wetlands, floodplains, and prime farmland would generally be long- and short-term, minor, and adverse. Effects to threatened and endangered species would be long-term, negligible to minor and adverse. Alternative F would have long-term and short-term, minor to moderate, adverse effects on terrestrial resources. The effects of these activities and uses would be offset somewhat by implementation of a resource stewardship strategy, cultural resource studies reports and plans, a FMP, an Integrated Trail System Study, river flow studies; and increased staffing, educational opportunities, and partnerships.

Protection of cultural resource sites within historic resource zones, implementation of a CMP and resource stewardship strategy, use of mitigation measures to reduce potential effects of development, increased ranger presence and site monitoring would have long-term, moderate to major, beneficial effects by preserving archeological resources for the future. Construction activities associated with implementation of Alternative F would have long-term, minor, adverse effects on archeological resources. However, implementation of Alternative F would help protect and rehabilitate and reuse buildings, structures, landscapes, and objects within the historic resources zones. Increased ranger presence, monitoring, interpretation, and implementation of a resource stewardship strategy and a CMP would have long-term, moderate to major, beneficial effects on preserving these resources for the future as compared with Alternative A. Effects from visitor use and natural processes would be long-term, minor, and adverse.

Approximately 66 percent of the park would be zoned in a manner that is readily accessible to visitors and would therefore provide a more facilitated visitor experience. The dispersed nature of access would result in long-term, moderate and adverse effects on transportation. Continuation of the current levels of partnering to enhance trail connectivity throughout the park would have a long-term, moderate and beneficial effect. In addition, off-road bicycling would be appropriate on designated trails in the developed zone, natural area recreation zone, and rustic zone.

In comparison with Alternative A, Alternative F would provide visitors with a lower relative potential for experiencing solitude and isolation, and an expanded opportunity for more active forms of recreation experiences such as motorized boating, bicycling, horseback riding, and walking and hiking. The result would be a long-term, moderate to major, adverse effect on visitors who value solitude and isolation, and a long-term, moderate to major, beneficial effect on visitors who value more facilitated experiences and park use.

The traditional character of the park would be maintained under Alternative F through changes in management policy, resulting in a long-term, major, beneficial effect on traditional character and experiences in the park. However, this alternative also has a simultaneous potential for having a long-term, minor to moderate, adverse effect on traditional park character, since a higher degree of isolation and solitude and similar values would not be as achievable as compared to Alternative A.

Effects on park operations would have overall long-term, negligible, beneficial effects due to strengthening of park partnerships, implementation of stewardship strategies, completion of Chattahoochee River flow studies, implementation of other plans, and increased staffing levels.

As described in the mitigation section, all practical means to avoid or minimize environmental effects from the selected alternative have been adopted. Because there would be no major adverse impacts to resources whose conservation is (1) necessary to fulfill specific purposes in the establishing legislation or proclamation for the CRNRA; (2) key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or to opportunities for

enjoyment of the park; or (3) identified as a goal in relevant DOI planning documents, there would be no impairment of the park's resources or values. After a review of these potential effects, the DOI has determined that the alternative selected for implementation will not impair park resources or values and will not violate the DOI Organic Act.

ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

The environmentally preferred alternative is determined by applying the criteria suggested in the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), which is guided by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ). The CEQ provides direction that "the environmentally preferable alternative is the alternative that will promote the national environmental policy as expressed in NEPA §101: (1) fulfill the responsibilities of each generation as trustee of the environment for succeeding generations; (2) assure for all Americans safe, healthful, productive, and aesthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings; (3) attain the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradations, risk to health or safety, or other undesirable and unintended consequences; (4) preserve important historic, cultural, and natural aspects of our national heritage, and maintain, wherever possible, an environment which supports diversity, and variety, of individual choice; (5) achieve a balance between population and resource use which will permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life's amenities; and (6) enhance the quality of renewable resources and approach the maximum attainable recycling of depletable resources."

Alternative E is the environmentally preferred alternative in its ability to best meet the six national environmental criteria as described in the paragraphs that follow.

1. Alternative B would best protect the environment by limiting the level and intensity of use of the built environment. The amount of acreage in developed zones and natural area recreation zones would be less than other alternatives. In addition, the river solitude zone would be provided and greater focus would be placed on the restoration of natural resources, with a lower potential for new facilities. All other alternatives would fulfill this criterion to a lesser degree.
2. Each of the alternatives would meet criterion 2 by providing visitors with safe, healthful, productive, esthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings. Under Alternative A, there would be increased challenges to meet and maintain such conditions, however, because staffing and funding levels would not be expected to change dramatically. For example, the diversity of educational opportunities would continue to be limited, and the park's ability to respond to the ever-increasing demand to address resource protection compliance issues would continue to be a challenge. Alternatives E and F would allow more diverse types of use than the other alternatives, increased staffing, as well as increased potential for river access and boating and other types of access throughout the park, thereby creating increased opportunities to enjoy more of the park. Therefore, Alternatives E and F would better serve criterion 2.
3. Overall, Alternatives E and F would allow for the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment and would allow visitors to observe and appreciate resources with a minimum of inadvertent or unintentional damage. In comparison between Alternatives E and F, Alternative E would have a larger area zoned as rustic zone as compared to Alternative F, thereby allowing for less of a hardened landscape, a smaller area zoned for facility development, and less of a facilitated experience. In addition, the opportunities for the built environment are lower in Alternative E than F, since Alternative F features a larger developed zone and natural area recreation zone. For these reasons, it is estimated that there would be less inadvertent or unintentional damage under Alternative E than F. Alternative F, however, provides increased access for a greater variety of park visitors than Alternative E.

Based on public input on action Alternatives B and C, restricting the type of boat use (motorized versus non-motorized) in the river solitude zone would be too limiting for many visitors.

Alternative D provides for expanding and distributing access throughout the park, including newly acquired parcels, thereby providing the widest opportunity for increased and diverse visitor experiences. Compared to other alternatives, the emphasis would be more on social experience than solitude. New facilities would be developed or existing facilities would be refurbished, and connectivity to existing neighborhoods would be optimized. However, Alternative D would be more dependent on the successful development of public/private partnerships than would other action alternatives and there would be a higher potential for inadvertent or unintentional damage to natural and cultural resources compared to all other alternatives.

There is no discernable difference across Alternatives D, E and F when comparing the level of risk of health or safety, particularly when evaluating the potential increase in park personnel available to respond or provide assistance to visitors. Staffing levels would be similar for Alternatives D, E and F. Two fewer new staff members would be proposed under Alternative C, and Alternative B would have the fewest new staff additions compared to all the action alternatives. In summary, Alternatives E and F would best meet the objective of this criterion.

4. Each of the alternatives preserve important historical, cultural and natural aspects of our national heritage and maintain, wherever possible an environment which supports diversity and variety of choice. In terms of access to areas that may allow greater choice in the fulfillment of this experience, Alternatives E and F offer a greater variety of recreational opportunities to explore the park through diverse means and accessibility than Alternatives A, B, C and D. Alternatives B, C and D limit the type of river access and use while Alternatives E and F provide additional choice in types of use and access while also providing additional opportunities for interpretive experiences and education.
5. Alternatives D, E and F provide additional opportunities for use of existing and new facilities along the corridor as compared with Alternatives A, B, and C. Facilities would be centralized in Alternative C. Alternative D provides the greatest degree of flexibility for locating facilities, and the greatest potential for related adverse effects. Each of the action alternatives provides equal opportunity for commercial services to operate in the future; however, Alternatives E and F provide more opportunities for river services due to fewer river use restrictions (a Commercial Services Plan would also be prepared in the future). Alternatives E and F balance resource use and visitor conditions, given the distribution of zones for each alternative, and river access and type of river use are the same for both alternatives (i.e. boating and fishing are appropriate in all park waterways). Opportunities for sharing park resources are similar under both Alternatives E and F, with differences described under criterion 3.
6. Alternative B would best meet this criterion, as it would improve renewable resource conditions for wildlife and vegetation. All other alternatives would maintain existing conditions or result in localized reductions in the quality of renewable resources through construction and subsequent alteration or loss of habitat. Where new facilities are constructed, sustainable design principles would be used where possible. None of the alternatives proposes a long-term change in use of depletable resources; therefore, no discernable difference exists between the alternatives for this factor.

Some specific actions under Alternative B may achieve similar, or in some cases greater, levels of protection for certain cultural and natural resources than under Alternatives E and F. However, based on potential resource and visitor impacts and in consideration of proposed mitigation measures for impacts to natural and cultural resources, Alternative E best meets the six criteria as defined above. Whereas Alternative F integrates resource protection with greater opportunities for an appropriate range of visitor use, Alternative E, however, provides an advantage for the protection of cultural and natural resources while concurrently attaining the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation or

other undesirable and unintended consequences.

PUBLIC AND AGENCY INVOLVEMENT

The general management planning process involves many steps including: identification and confirmation of the park purpose, significance and mission goals; acknowledgement of special mandates, laws, and policies; involvement of the public and identification of issues; development of alternatives; description of the existing environment, and impact analysis. Agencies and the public were invited to participate at various steps throughout the planning process, and this coordination and involvement is described herein.

Scoping letters were mailed in the Spring of 2002 to local, state and federal agency representatives including the GSHPO and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), tribal representatives and the public, that contained information on the function of a GMP, statements of the park purpose and significance, information on the planning team and the process for planning, and methods available to the public for communicating with the team and participating in the planning effort. A newsletter was published announcing the initiation of the planning process, and the public was invited to voice issues and suggest ideas for the future of the park at six public scoping meetings held in October 2000 over a 60 day comment period. Over 200 written comments were received. A majority of the comments expressed concerns about access, facility needs throughout the park, habitat preservation, environmental impacts, different types of use, trails, education, boundaries, fisheries and fishing, and enforcement. In addition, over 20 meetings were also held with more than 50 area Planning and Greenspace Directors and local, State, and Federal agency representatives.

Information from the scoping meetings was used to develop a range of desired future conditions and prescriptions for the park. Based on the results of the planning process, three management alternatives were developed: Alternatives B, C and D. In addition, Alternative A, the No Action alternative, was also included for analysis.

Information regarding the preliminary alternatives was posted on the park's website and a newsletter was also distributed to announce the availability of the Draft GMP and EIS in June, 2004. The Draft GMP and EIS was released in May, 2004, and there was a 60 day comment period. Public meetings were conducted on June 14, 15 and 16, 2004. Copies of the May, 2004 Draft Plan were also made available at 10 local libraries and at Island Ford, Park Headquarters. The Draft plan was made available for review in a variety of means: electronic format on the park's website and approximately 40 CDs were mailed out, as well as a limited number of hard copies from the park or regional office. In addition, approximately 300 copies of the executive summary were distributed to the mailing list and e-mailed.

Many criticisms were voiced during the public comment period regarding prescriptions for boating and fishing within the park, off-road bicycle use and other types of recreational use and access. In response to the input received, additional meetings were conducted with stakeholders in the community. The park conducts on-going stakeholder meetings on a quarterly basis to provide information regarding the general management planning status, other projects in the park, and general information sharing.

Based upon the input received, two additional alternatives, Alternatives E and F, were developed to address concerns that were raised. A newsletter was published in November of 2005 to update the public on the status of the plan, describe the new Alternatives E and F, and invite the public to attend meetings to discuss the new alternatives. Public meetings were announced and conducted on December 12, 13 and 20, 2005, with comments requested by January 31, 2006. Coordination letters were also sent to reviewing agencies to update them on the status of the plan in the spring of 2006.

Stakeholder meetings were held October 6, 2008 along with a final round of public meetings (October 27 and 30, 2008) to allow the public to comment on the Supplemental Draft GMP / EIS. Over 145 individuals provided comments on the Supplemental Draft GMP / EIS. Comments received were sorted by issue and addressed in the Final GMP / EIS.

Public service announcements were distributed, newspaper notices were published, flyers were distributed and signs were posted prior to each of the series of public meetings. In addition, newsletters were distributed prior to each set of public meetings. The public had many avenues by which it participated during the development of the plan, including participation at public meetings, responses to newsletters, written letters, comment cards, and comments on the park's planning website.

Agency and American Indian Consultation and Coordination

In addition to the consultation described above, additional consultation with agencies was conducted prior to completing the 2004 Draft GMP / EIS and again during the development of the 2008 Supplemental Draft document.

In accordance with 36 CFR 800 and the Programmatic Agreement between the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers and the DOI, a letter was sent to the GSHPO and to the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation to initiate consultation. The letters invited them to participate in the planning process and informed them that the DOI plans to use this EIS to fulfill the requirements of Section 106 of the NHPA, as well as comply with provisions of NEPA.

In accordance with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.), the DOI contacted the USFWS by letter to initiate consultation and to provide a list of threatened and endangered species, critical habitats, and species of concern. The Georgia Department of Natural Resources Natural Heritage Program was also contacted to provide a list of threatened and endangered species.

Consultation letters were also sent to the Environmental Protection Agency, Region 4 and the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Environmental Protection Division. In addition, letters were sent in January 2001 to Federally-recognized American Indian Tribes with ancestral lands in Georgia requesting feedback concerning the GMP. These letters were followed up with individual phone calls and a subsequent letter identifying the purpose and need of the project and requesting input.

CONCLUSION

As described in the Mitigation section, all practical means to avoid or minimize environmental harm from the selected alternative have been adopted. Because there would be no major adverse impacts to resources whose conservation is (1) necessary to fulfill specific purposes in the establishing legislation or proclamation for the CRNRA; (2) key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or to opportunities for enjoyment of the park; or (3) identified as a goal in relevant DOI planning documents, there would be no impairment of the park's resources or values. After a review of these effects, the alternative selected for implementation will not impair park resources or values and will not violate the NPS Organic Act.