

The Condition and Future of Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site

Stakeholder Engagement
August–October 2026



National Park Service
Intermountain Regions 6, 7, 8



History and Significance

- **1833–1849**

Bent St. Vrain operate fort to trade with Southern Cheyenne and Arapaho
Staging ground for US military during Mexican-American War

- **1849–1920**

Abandonment and deterioration of fort

Partial remains used as stagecoach stop and line camp from 1861-1881

- **1920–1953**

DAR La Junta Chapter becomes steward of the site

Great Pueblo Flood of 1921 obliterates the ruins of the historic fort

- **1953–1960**

Declared a State Historical Monument and conveyed to Colorado in 1954

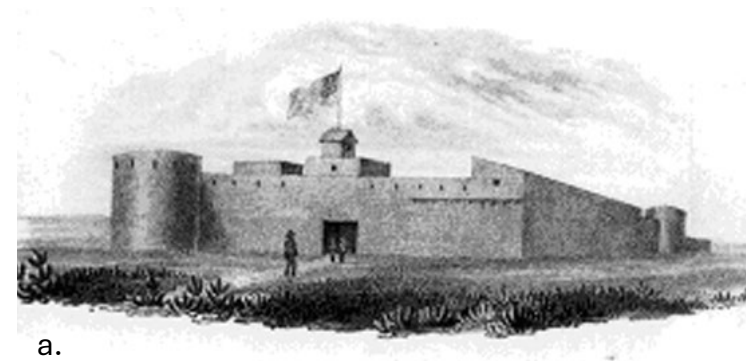
- **1960–1975**

National Historic Site is authorized and then established in 1963

To commemorate the role of “such fort in the opening of the West”

- **1976–Present**

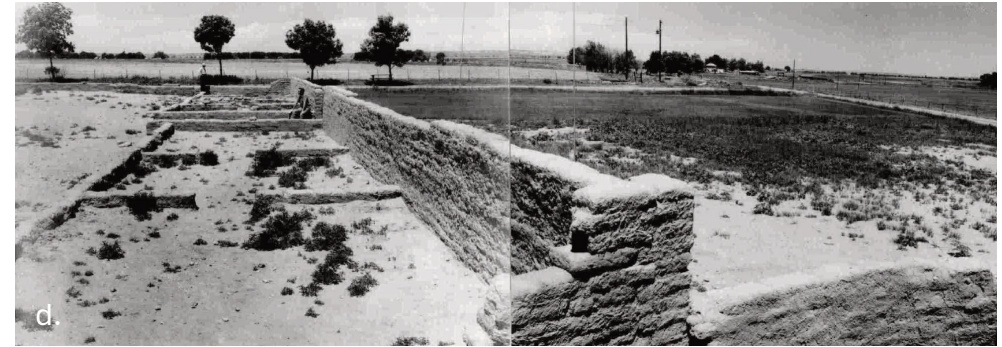
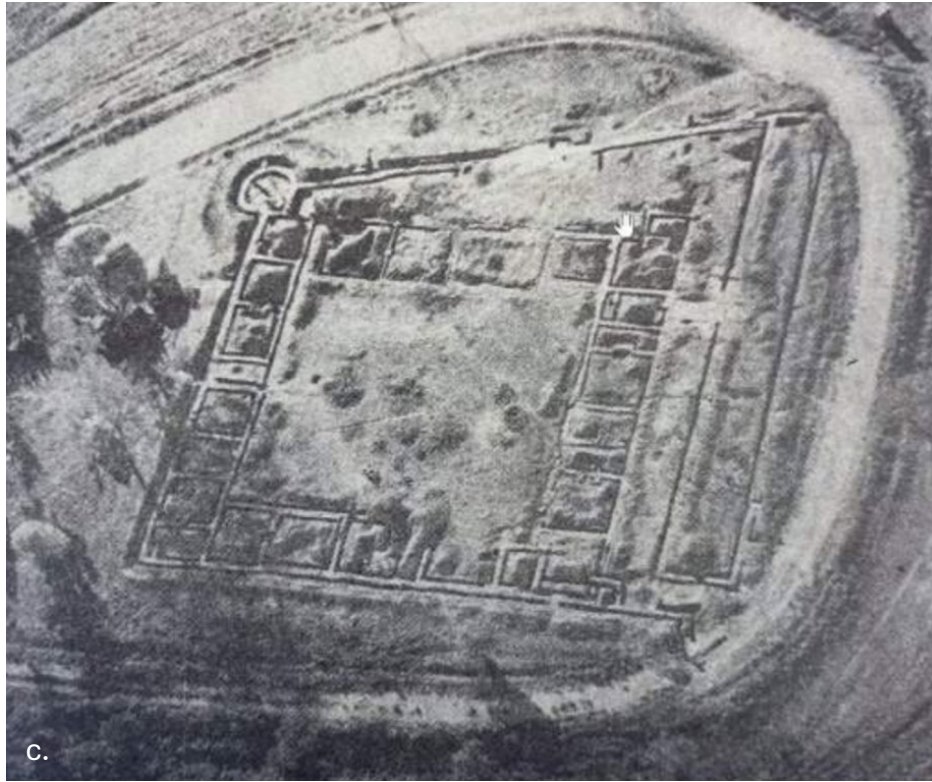
National Park Service constructs and operates replica fort



a. Lithograph based on 1845 JW Abert account
b. Fort ruins, 1903

Making the Fort Visible

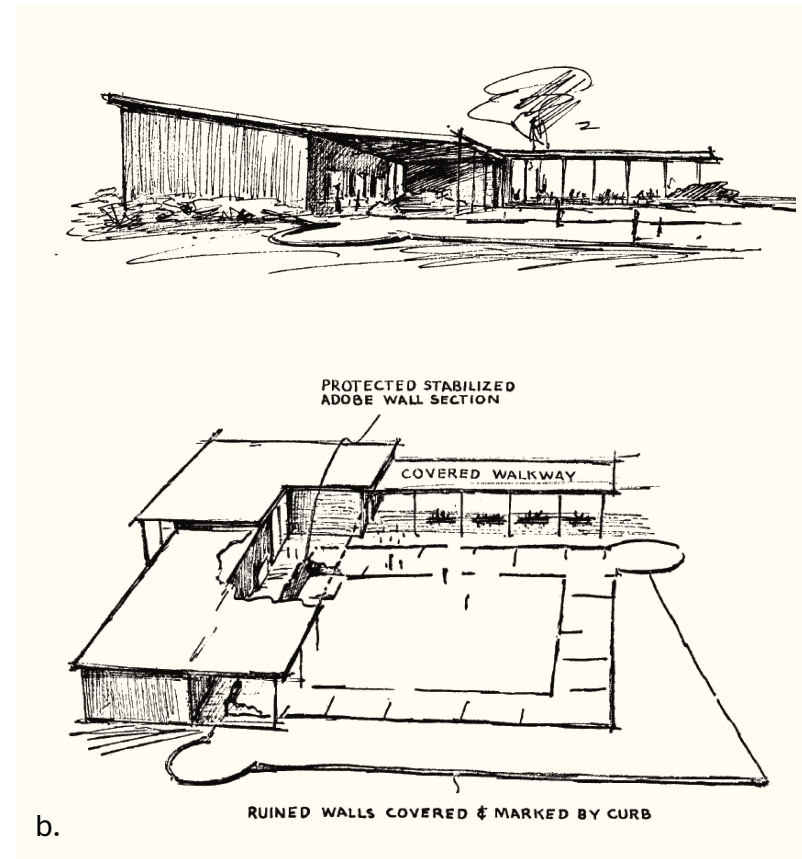
1912–1973



- a. Dedication of DAR marker, 1912
- b. DAR entry arch (constructed in 1930)
- c. Excavated foundations, 1954
- d. Partial adobe reconstruction of walls, 1957
- e. Stabilized historic ruins, 1970

A Debate: Ruin vs. Reconstruction

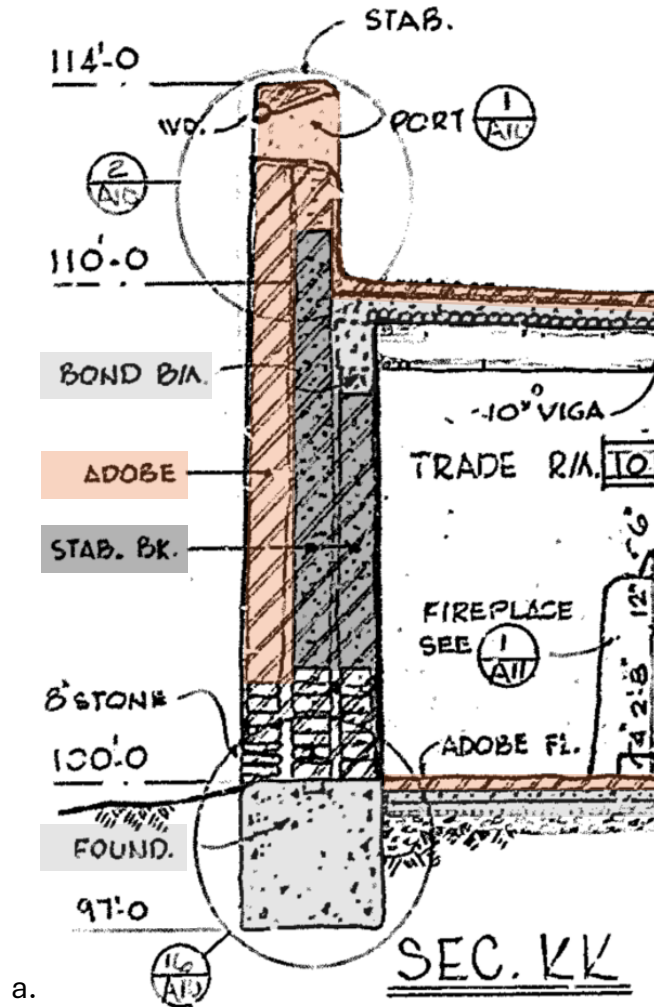
1965–1967



- a. School trip during NPS excavations, 1966
- b. Bierly-Wagers visitor center proposal,
Committee Report on Western Military Forts,
November 1965
- c. The Fort Restaurant in Morrison CO,
constructed 1963

Not a Traditional Adobe Building

1974–1976



What was built:

- Mud adobe veneer
Exterior walls, roof, and floors
- Concrete bond beam & deck
Poured around vigas
- Cement stabilized block
All walls
- Cottonwood structures
Vigas, stairs, bridges, & portals
- Concrete subfloors
With ducts and radiant heat
- Concrete foundations
Replaced all historic remains

- a. Typical wall section, 1976 as-built drawings
- b. Construction in progress, 1976
- c. Opening day, 1976

Failures and Ad-hoc Repairs

1976–2023



Alterations before 1991:

- Exterior walls
Adobe veneer replaced with CMU and cement stucco or asphalt stabilized veneers
- Roof
Adobe replaced with built-up system, then modified bitumen
- Wood elements
Posts and bridges rebuilt and multiple features removed
- Systems
Failure of electrical twice and heating system abandoned

- a. Emergency mud plaster repairs, July 1976
- b. Replacement of adobe veneer with CMU, 1981
- c. Separation of CMU veneer, 2025
- d. Complete loss of adobe veneer, 2025
- e. Failed repair w/ cement stabilized block, 2025

Stabilization and Preserving Access

2023–PRESENT

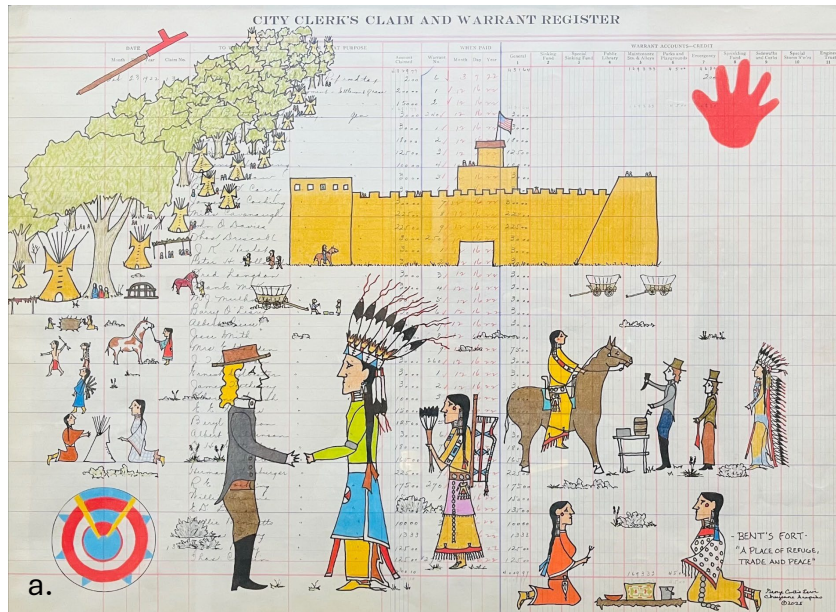


- a. Adobe veneer failure at East Corral, 2024
- b. Structural stabilization at Plaza, 2025
- c. Ongoing visitor access to Plaza, 2026
- d. Ongoing visitor access to historic site, 2025
- e. Visitors in Trade Room, 2026

Renewed Park Purpose

2025 FOUNDATION DOCUMENT UPDATE

Strategically situated along the Santa Fe Trail, Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site preserves a pivotal trade and military location within the Arkansas River watershed and interprets the site's impact on Native American Tribes, the United States, and Mexico.



- a. Ledger art drawing, 2025
NPS/George Curtis Levi (southern Cheyenne and Arapaho/Oglala Lakota)
- b. High Plains Group of Parks



Concept Alternatives

2024–2026



Concept alternatives are part of an early pre-planning effort focused on *ideas* and *the future* of Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site.

Objectives:

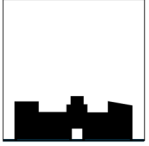
- Establish a full range of investment options
- Preserve and protect the significance of the historic site, not just the replica fort
- Consider sustainable operation with limited staff and financial resources

Unique to Each:

- Level of investment in buildings vs. site
- The type of visitor experience provided

Common to All:

- Treat site, buildings, and interpretation holistically
- Address outstanding structural, accessibility, fire and life safety deficiencies

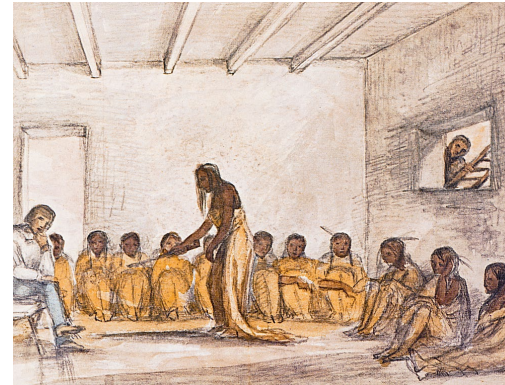


Rehabilitate/Reconstruct

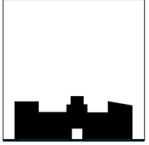
TREATMENT OF FORT



Through rehabilitation OR reconstruction, provide a complete replica of the 1840s fort as the focus of the visitor experience.



- a. Replica fort, constructed 1976
- b. J.W. Abert sketches, 1845



Rehabilitate/Reconstruct

TREATMENT OF FORT



REHABILITATION with compatible materials

Example: Presidio San Augustin del Tucson Museum, 2007
Cement stabilized mud adobe (CSMA) exterior



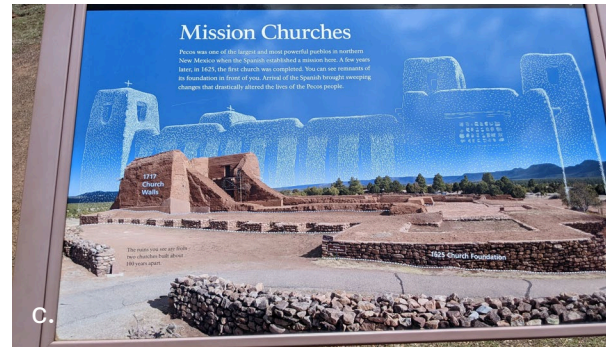
RECONSTRUCTION with contemporary methods

Example: Santa Fe Community Convention Center, 2008
Steel frame with cement stucco over metal studs and insulation



Beyond the Walls

TREATMENT OF THE FORT



Through partial rehabilitation or partial reconstruction, reduce the physical footprint of the fort and improve its connection to the surrounding cultural landscape.

- a. Fort Laramie National Historic Site, WY
- b. President's House, Independence National Historical Park, PA
- c. Waysides at Church of St Augustine in Goa and Pecos National Historical Park, NM



Beyond the Walls

SITE DEVELOPMENT

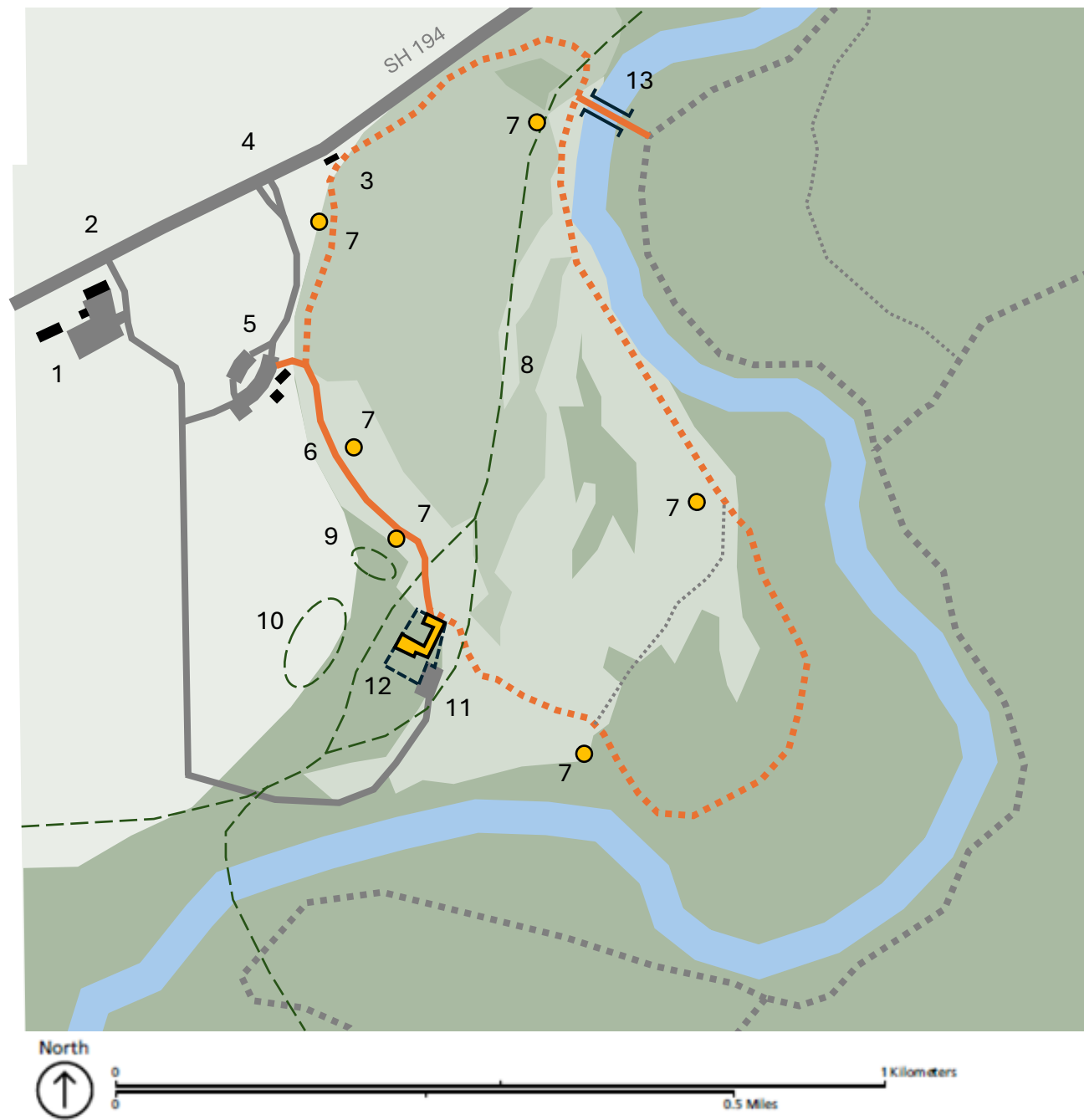
Rehabilitate features of cultural landscape – graveyard, racetrack, Santa Fe Trail, etc.

Improve trails and construct shaded outdoor interpretive spaces.

Provide accessible parking near fort footprint.

LEGEND

- | | | | |
|---|------------------------|-----|------------------------------|
|  | Existing structure | 1. | Administration |
|  | Arkansas River | 2. | Staff entrance |
|  | Vehicle roadway | 3. | DAR marker and arch |
|  | Unpaved trail | 4. | Visitor entrance |
|  | Improved unpaved trail | 5. | Visitor parking/arrival |
|  | Improved paved trail | 6. | ABAAS path |
|  | Interpreted resource | 7. | Interpretive shade structure |
|  | New structure | 8. | Sante Fe Trail |
| | | 9. | Graveyard |
| | | 10. | Racetrack |
| | | 11. | Accessible parking/entry |
| | | 12. | Partial fort reconstruction |
| | | 13. | Pedestrian bridge |





An Active Frame

TREATMENT OF FORT



Build a new interpretative reconstruction within the fort's footprint as the center of sensory and recreational activities across the broader site.



- a. Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, OH
- b. Wire Mesh Basilica of Siponto, Puglia, Italy
- c. Historic viewsheds at and near the fort, grasslands and riparian vegetation/habitat – from *Natural Resources Condition Assessment* (2015)



An Active Frame

SITE DEVELOPMENT

Rehabilitate features of natural landscape. Develop multi-use (hike/bike/horse) trails and construct pedestrian bridges.

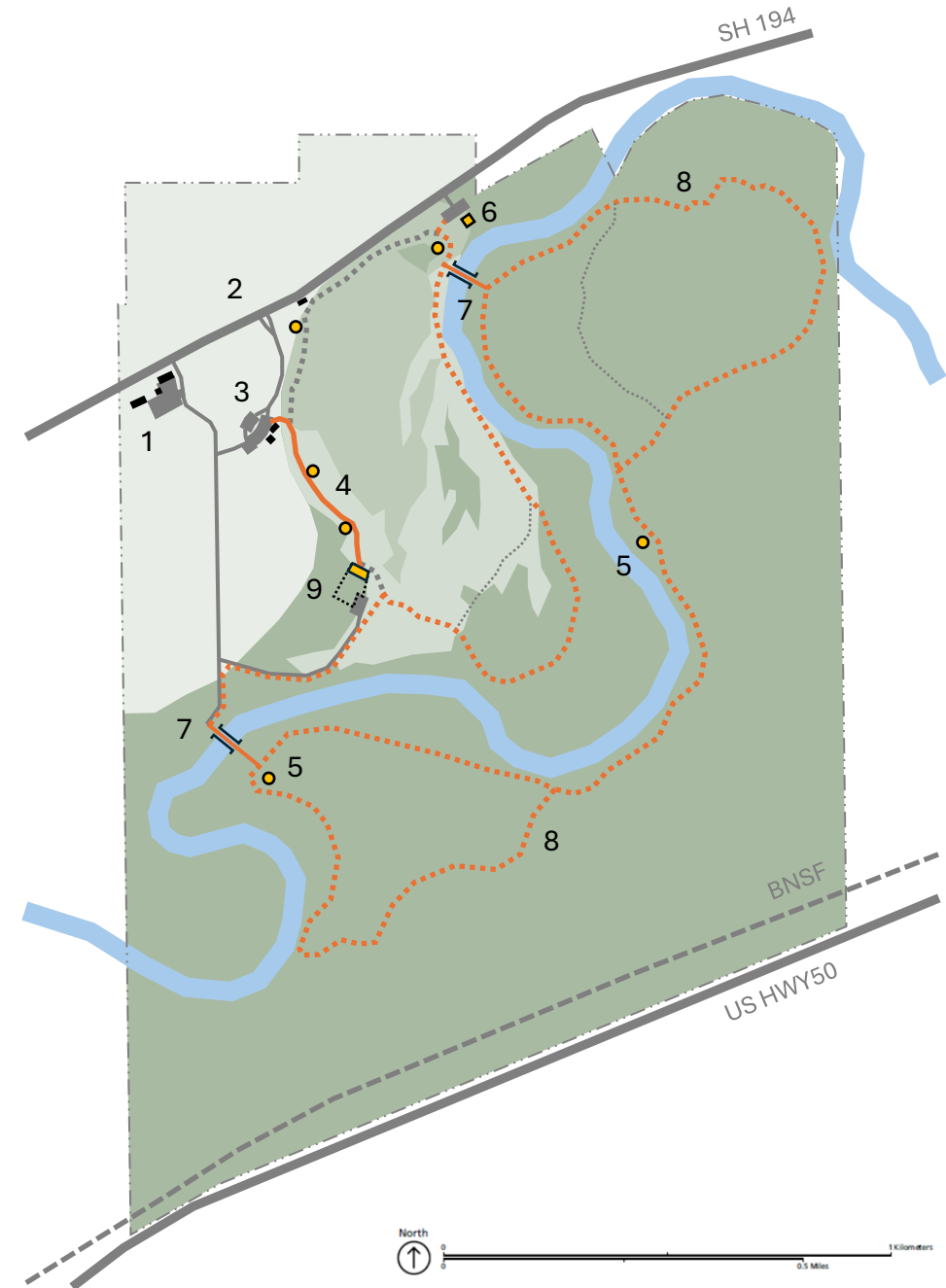
Construct new trailhead and parking area for recreational users.

Provide shaded outdoor interpretive spaces and accessible parking at fort.

LEGEND

-  Existing structure
-  Arkansas River
-  Vehicle roadway
-  Unpaved trail
-  Improved unpaved trail
-  Improved paved trail
-  Park boundary
-  New structure

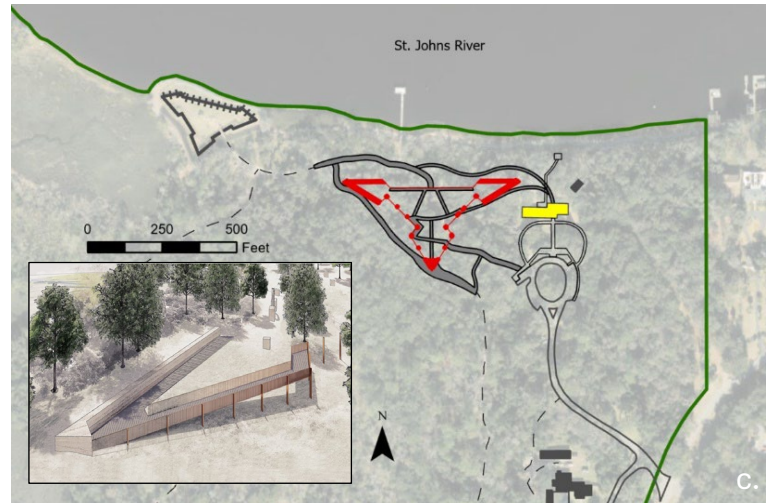
1. Administration
2. Visitor entrance
3. Visitor parking/arrival
4. ABAAS path
5. Interpretive shade structure
6. New parking/trailhead and vault toilet
7. New bridge
8. Multiuse trail
9. Interpretive fort structure





The Eras

TREATMENT OF FORT



Mark the many configurations of the fort and surrounding cultural landscape over time – using low walls, paving elements, or minimalist interpretive structures.

- a. Franklin Court, Independence National Historical Park, PA
- b. Fort Union National Monument, NM
- c. Proposed relocation of Fort Caroline, Timucuan Ecological and Historical Preserve, FL 2025



The Eras

SITE DEVELOPMENT

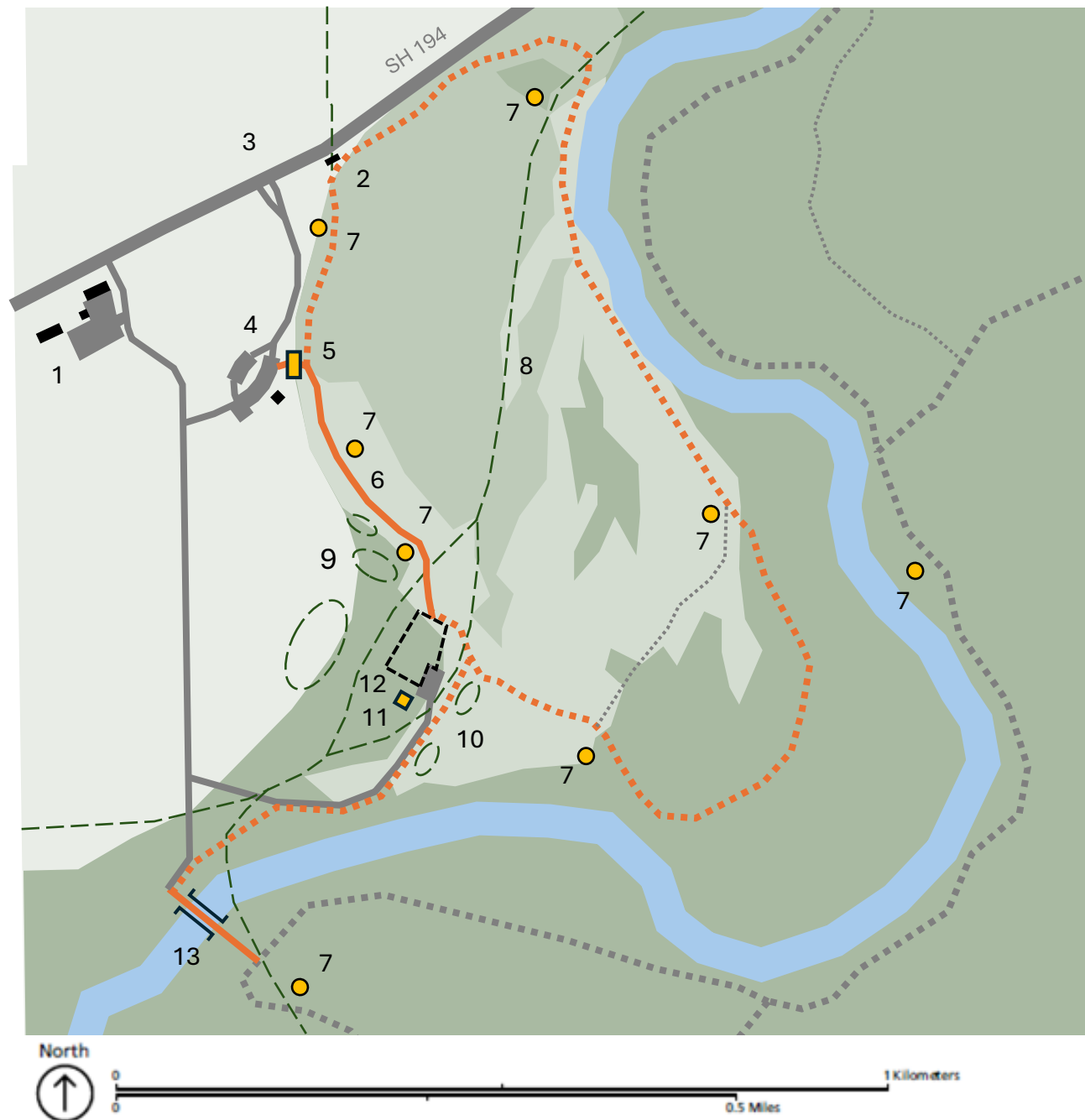
Construct new visitor contact/park store at visitor arrival. Provide new restrooms and accessible parking near fort footprint.

Rehabilitate features of cultural landscape. Improve trails and construct shaded outdoor interpretive spaces and pedestrian bridge.

LEGEND

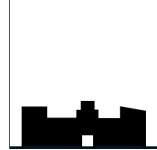
-  Existing structure
-  Arkansas River
-  Vehicle roadway
-  Unpaved trail
-  Improved unpaved trail
-  Improved paved trail
-  Interpreted resource
-  New structure

1. Administration
2. DAR marker and arch
3. Visitor entrance
4. Visitor parking/arrival
5. New visitor contact building
6. ABAAS path
7. Interpretive shade structure
8. Sante Fe Trail
9. Graveyard and Racetrack
10. Possible structures
11. Accessible parking/restrooms
12. Marked fort footprint
13. Pedestrian bridge



Concept Summary

\$30M - \$40M



Rehabilitate/Reconstruct

Rehabilitate or reconstruct the replica fort as focus of visitor experience
Minimal site improvements

\$5M - \$20M



Beyond the Walls

Retain and rehabilitate portions of the replica fort
Enhance access and interpretation of surrounding cultural landscape

\$10M - \$15M



An Active Frame

Build a new interpretive reconstruction within the fort's footprint
Rehabilitate and develop the larger natural site for active visitor engagement

\$5M - \$10M



The Eras

Mark the fort's historic footprint and relocate visitor contact facilities
Develop cultural landscape as index of eras before, during, and after Bent

What Happens Next?

Public Comment:



<https://parkplanning.nps.gov/beolalternatives>

Your feedback will inform future proposals.

Respond by October 23, 2026!

Questions:

1. Imagine Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site 50 years from now.
 - What do you hope visitors will be able to do, understand, and experience?
 - What might they take away from their visit?
2. Consider all of the early concepts we have described.
 - Are there aspects of these alternatives that are appealing?
 - Are there other ideas that you would like to see us explore?