

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National Park Service is proposing to improve and/or construct new environmental education facilities at the Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont (hereinafter referred to as “Tremont”) using sustainable design principles. The purpose of the proposed project is to redesign the facilities to be more energy efficient, flexible, environmentally friendly, and sustainable. This would create a facility with appropriate design and features for a high quality environmental learning center within the most visited national park in the United States. This action is needed because the buildings at Tremont are over 40 years old and were not designed for their present purpose and uses. The facilities were retrofitted to provide adequate space for program needs, but limit the organization and its potential in numerous ways.

The buildings and campus at Tremont were never designed to function as an environmental education facility and do not function well in meeting current programmatic, visitor, or employee needs. Facilities are not sustainable and were not designed to fit with the park environment, either in function or aesthetically. The campus buildings and grounds do not demonstrate the principles that Tremont teaches and do not embody the core philosophies of the National Park Service related to ecology, biodiversity, and environmental stewardship through sustainable designs. The existing designed campus landscape needs improvement to support natural and cultural resources and to meet National Park Service mandates and policies.

This Development Concept Plan and accompanying Environmental Assessment describe and analyze five alternative concepts for the proposed project and the potential effects of each alternative on natural resources, cultural resources, and the man-made environment. The improved and/or new facilities would allow Tremont to meet its long-term objectives to serve as the primary residential environmental education center for the park.

The following action alternatives are assessed:

- Alternative A involves continuation of the existing facilities and programs at Tremont. Problems associated with deteriorating buildings and facilities would continue to occur. Existing buildings would remain, and the environmental programs provided at Tremont would continue to be offered.
- Alternative B includes minor upgrades, modifications, additions, and spatial reconfiguration to existing facilities and infrastructure to optimize functionality and potential utilization.
- Alternative C - the Preferred Alternative - includes moderate upgrades, modifications, additions, and spatial reconfiguration to the infrastructure and existing facilities, and an option to reconstruct the dormitory. The concept of this Alternative is to optimize class room and office space efficiency, utilization, functionality, energy conservation, and visual quality.



- Alternative D includes moderate site redevelopment and major modifications, additions, and spatial reconfiguration to the site and existing facilities to increase facility function, utilization, energy conservation, and visual appearance.
- Alternative E consists of complete site redevelopment, including new and upgraded facilities that meet current and future needs of Tremont. All site development, facility design, and construction would become a model of sustainable design principles and development. The site development would become an integral part of the educational opportunities at Tremont.

This environmental assessment is prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 and implementing regulations, 40 Code of Federal Regulations, Parts 1500-1508, and National Park Service Director's Order #12 and Handbook, *Conservation Planning, Environmental Impact Analysis, and Decision-Making*.

None of the alternatives analyzed in this environmental assessment would result in major, adverse impacts or impairment to park resources or values.

PUBLIC COMMENT

If you wish to comment on the environmental assessment, you may mail comments to the name and address below or post comments online at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/>. Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment – including your personal identifying information – may be made publicly available at any time. While you may ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee we will be able to do so.

This document will be on review for 30 days. Please address written comments to:

Great Smoky Mountains National Park
Attn: Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont
107 Park Headquarters Road
Gatlinburg, TN 37738



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