

General Management Plan Amendment for Park Addition Lands

Newsletter Issue 2: Management Concepts

July 2008

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Petrified Forest National Park
Arizona



Dear Friends,

As you may know, the National Park Service (NPS) is engaged in a new planning effort at Petrified Forest National Park. We are developing an amendment to the park's current management plan. The amendment will address management of 129,000 acres added to the national park boundary by the Petrified Forest National Park Expansion Act of 2004 (Public Law 108-430) as these areas come under NPS management.

The first general management plan (GMP) amendment newsletter, published in February 2008, introduced the planning effort; summarized the 2004 park expansion legislation; presented statements describing the expanded park's purpose, significance, and fundamental resources and values; and answered frequently asked questions. The first newsletter also announced a public scoping meeting (conducted in March 2008) and included a comment form encouraging public input on the planning effort. The first newsletter is available online at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/>.

This newsletter includes a summary of public comments received so far, an update on the direction of the planning project, and two alternative concepts for managing the addition lands. By continuing to provide input about how newly acquired lands should be managed, you can help the National Park Service shape the direction of the expanded Petrified Forest National Park.

Park Purpose

The purpose of Petrified Forest National Park is to preserve, protect, and provide opportunities to experience globally significant Late Triassic paleontological resources, nationally significant archeological sites, and scenic and natural resources, including the Painted Desert, and to foster scientific research and public understanding and appreciation of park resources.

Please provide comments via the National Park Service's online site: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/> (preferred), fill out the enclosed comment form, or write to us at

Petrified Forest National Park GMP Amendment Team
c/o Miki Stuebe
National Park Service Denver Service Center
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, CO 80225-0287

We'll continue to keep you informed about the planning process via mailings and the Internet. Thank you for your interest in Petrified Forest National Park.

Sincerely,

Cliff Spencer, Superintendent
Petrified Forest National Park

What We Heard from You

A public scoping meeting for the addition lands GMP amendment was held in Holbrook, Arizona, on March 3, 2008. Twenty-two people attended, and several people submitted comments about the future of the addition lands. Thirteen additional comments were submitted via mail or the Internet. The public comments, grouped according to topic and summarized below, reflected strong passion and interest in the addition lands.

Resource Protection — Several people suggested that the park's main focus should be on protecting and preserving resources on the addition lands, especially paleontological and archeological resources. Many expressed concern about theft and vandalism of resources.

Visitor Use and Opportunities — Several people said that recreational opportunities should be expanded. There were suggestions for new hiking opportunities, for public participation in archeological or fossil "digs," for tours to see petroglyphs, and for other new interpretive

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Next Steps

The planning team's next steps are as follows:

- read and consider the public's response to the information in this newsletter
- refine and develop the management concepts into full management alternatives
- determine whether an environmental assessment (EA) or environmental impact statement (EIS) should be prepared
- prepare the environmental assessment or draft environmental impact statement to disclose the likely environmental consequences of the alternatives

Petrified Forest National Park



opportunities. One person said “the first concern is protection and preservation, but visitors also deserve to experience special new areas.”

Access — Several points of view were expressed on this topic. Some people suggested that visitors should be given full access to the addition lands as soon as possible. Others



said there should be no public access until resource inventories and research can be conducted on the addition lands. Still others suggested that public access to sensitive areas be allowed only via guided tours or permits to limit loss of resources such as petrified wood and archeological artifacts. Several people suggested using or improving existing roads for visitor access.

Development — Suggestions for new facilities on the addition lands included hiking trails, a campground, a visitor center, and a research center.

Operations and Management — Suggestions included the following:

- management of addition lands should be well integrated with management of existing park lands
- the park’s paleontological program should be strengthened
- funding for resource management should be increased
- costs associated with land management should be reasonable

- road access is needed for research and operational activities

Research — Many people mentioned research in their comments. Comments included the following:

- stress research parkwide, with an emphasis on paleontological research
- make research a core operation
- allow researchers access to the addition lands
- make research findings available to the public
- base land management decisions on the potential for scientific study

Other — One person expressed concern about potential effects of a proposed nearby casino on the addition lands.

Comments beyond the Scope of the GMP Amendment — A few comments were received on topics that will not be addressed by the GMP amendment; examples include the following:

- use of the Painted Desert Inn (The GMP amendment will not address management of lands or facilities that are within the pre-expansion park area.)
- designating wilderness areas within the expansion area (A wilderness study for the addition lands will not be conducted at this time.)
- suggestions for further boundary expansions (The GMP amendment will focus exclusively on management of areas that were added to the park by the 2004 expansion legislation.)
- pronghorn antelope-friendly fences (This topic would be better addressed by a more specific resource or action plan.)



Update on the Direction of the GMP Amendment

As we explained in the first newsletter, the new GMP amendment will establish the overall management direction (for the next 15 to 20 years) for lands added to the Petrified Forest National Park as they come under NPS management. Several important things came to light during the initial (scoping or “discovery”) phase of the project.

First, about 60% of the expansion area is privately owned, 28% is state-owned land, and 12% is NPS-owned land. (The NPS-owned lands consist almost entirely of Bureau of Land Management lands that were transferred to the National Park Service in 2007.)

Second, it could be as long as a decade before most of the addition lands are owned and/or managed by the National Park Service; Congress has yet to appropriate funds to acquire private lands in the expansion area, and it is taking longer than expected for the National Park Service and the state of Arizona to develop an agreement that would allow NPS management of state land within the expansion area, as authorized by Congress. The National Park Service recognizes private inholdings and other valid existing rights; the GMP amendment will focus on the management of the addition lands as the National Park Service assumes management responsibility for those lands.

Third, the planning team is doing its best to record and map what is known about natural and cultural resources, infrastructure, and conditions on the addition lands, but there are many information gaps and unanswered questions.



The planning team wants to maximize the National Park Service’ ability to make informed decisions in the future as addition lands are acquired by the Park Service and more is learned about the character, values, and condition of those lands. The team wants to avoid making ill-advised decisions, such as recommending new access or development in the wrong area, or rendering areas ineligible for wilderness before a required wilderness study is conducted. The team also hopes to avoid raising unrealistic public expectations about visitor opportunities on the addition lands when it could be as long as a decade (due to the lack of public ownership, lack of access, and other constraints) before the National Park Service can offer a full range of visitor opportunities there. The team also wants to use planning funds wisely and efficiently.

As a result of these considerations and public input, the planning team has identified two management concepts to be developed in more detail as the planning effort moves forward:

1. a no-action concept (required as an environmental baseline for comparison), and
2. a practical, common-sense preferred concept that focuses management (for now) on expanding understanding of the addition lands

These concepts are discussed in more detail in the following section. Based on the nature of these proposed management concepts and their likely environmental consequences, the National Park Service may decide to prepare an environmental assessment (rather than an environmental impact statement) for the GMP amendment.

Alternative Management Concepts

The “No-Action” Concept

The no-action management concept primarily reflects continuation of the existing situation; it provides a baseline against which to compare the

effects of any “action” alternatives. Under this concept the addition lands would remain a mix of private, state, and NPS ownership, with a relatively small proportion owned and managed by the Park Service. There would continue to be little public access to the addition lands. Existing infrastructure, such as ranch buildings, two-track roads, and stock tanks, would remain. There would be continued degradation and loss of resources due to human activities and natural processes. Current land uses and activities (authorized and unauthorized, beneficial and harmful) would continue. This would include responsible land stewardship by ranchers, other landowners, the state, and others; mining exploration; loss of petrified wood and archeological artifacts due to removal, theft, and looting; and loss of fossils due to erosion.

The Preferred Concept

Under the preferred management concept, the National Park Service would manage lands under its jurisdiction cautiously, while gathering as much information about them as possible. Resource inventories, condition assessments, and research would be conducted to increase understanding of the addition lands. Sensitive resources on the addition lands would be protected and preserved, with particular emphasis on paleontological and archeological resources. The preferred alternative would include no new actions that would degrade wilderness characteristics, pending completion of a future (required) wilderness study for the addition lands. The Park Service would provide attractive opportunities for visitors to learn about and experience the addition lands. These opportunities would be those that the Park Service could confidently and safely make available without risk of resource damage and without rendering lands ineligible for wilderness consideration.

Examples of actions that are consistent with the preferred

management concept and that might ultimately be included in the preferred alternative are provided below:

- conduct baseline surveys for paleontological resources, archeological resources, vegetation, animals, natural springs and seeps, disturbed sites, invasive exotics, etc.
- conduct infrastructure inventories (roads, buildings, fences, stock tanks, etc.)
- conduct condition assessments for specific resources (archeological resources, petrified wood, vegetation, etc.)



- allow and encourage visitor use as possible and appropriate, given access, resource, safety, and wilderness eligibility considerations
- provide educational and interpretive opportunities for visitors to learn about the addition lands and their special values
- evaluate structures, archeological sites, and landscapes to determine if they are eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places
- identify priority areas for managing and controlling invasive exotic species; undertake control measures in these areas
- clean up dump areas
- address public safety hazards
- call for a future combination general management plan/ wilderness study for the entire park, including the addition lands, once the Park Service has assumed management responsibility for most of the addition lands and when baseline inventories and condition assessments are complete