



Selected Alternative Summary and Map

Introduction

The National Park Service (NPS) completed its finding of no significant impact (FONSI) on the effects of adjusting the boundary of Joshua Tree National Park to include lands in the Eagle Mountain area of Riverside County. The NPS recommends adding more than 20,000 acres of federal, state, and private lands to the boundary of Joshua Tree National Park.

It follows a study and environmental assessment conducted jointly by the NPS and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to look at the feasibility of adding lands to the national park. The agencies also evaluated the potential effects of transferring administrative jurisdiction of Bureau of Land Management lands to the NPS, which would afford greater protection of the area's natural characteristics and could offer new opportunities for public enjoyment.

Recent studies have documented the particular importance of the Eagle Mountain area for bighorn sheep and desert tortoise populations. The study area contains prehistoric and historic resources that expand on the national park's cultural themes; and contains areas important for maintaining Joshua Tree's wilderness values.

Selected Alternative

As fully described in the NPS FONSI, the Selected Alternative is a modification of Alternative C from the environmental assessment and recommends an approximately 20,005 acre-addition to Joshua Tree National Park. This would include approximately 17,670 acres of federally owned and managed lands that would be considered for administrative transfer to the NPS. Also recommended would be approximately 2,000 acres of privately owned lands, and 335.7 acres of State School Lands that have been determined feasible for addition to Joshua Tree National Park. Lands recommended for inclusion in the park boundary do not include those lands and rights of way associated with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission license withdrawal area for the Eagle Mountain Pumped Storage Hydroelectric Project. The Selected Alternative, if fully implemented, could allow for greater protection of existing habitat, restoration opportunities, and landscape connectivity for wildlife such as bighorn sheep, as well as new visitor opportunities.

Private land could be acquired when available, through donation or purchase by a third party from a willing seller (in fee) and donated to NPS. Eagle Crest Energy Company, which owns a substantial interest in such lands, has indicated that it would consider donating lands not needed for the pumped storage hydroelectric project to the NPS following construction of the project and at such time that the outstanding promissory note for the private parcels is secured. State School Lands could be acquired through a

land exchange with the California State Lands Commission. The California State Land Commission would consider a land exchange, when and if the surrounding private lands and mineral interests are transferred to the NPS for management.

The long-term vision of the NPS would be to include in the park boundary all of the lands determined suitable for addition to Joshua Tree National Park, if and when such lands would become available to the NPS. This would include an additional ~8,600 acres associated with the Eagle Mountain Mine and Townsite, if existing uses of those lands change and subsequently become available to the NPS through willing sellers. Lands associated with the rights of way for the pumped storage hydroelectric project could be considered for transfer to the NPS at a later time, if not needed for the operation of the facility. Additional feasibility analysis and environmental site assessments for the remaining lands may be necessary at such time that the lands become available.

Next Steps

Implementing the agency's recommendation, or selected alternative, will require additional agency or Congressional action. The Department of the Interior has already initiated the process to withdraw up to approximately 22,500 acres from Bureau of Land Management's jurisdiction and transfer them to the NPS. A notice temporarily segregating these federal lands from availability under various public land laws was published in the Federal Register on November 18, 2016. The segregation is intended to preserve the status quo while the withdrawal process is under review. The non-federally owned lands could become a part of Joshua Tree if and when the property owners choose to sell or donate them to the NPS.

Comments on the proposed withdrawal and land transfer will be accepted through February 16, 2017. The NPS and BLM will host a public meeting in Palm Desert, California on January 18, 2017 to discuss the withdrawal and solicit thoughts and comments. The Secretary of the Interior will make the final decision on the proposed public land transfer. Prior to that decision the BLM will initiate a separate decision document after public comment and further evaluation.

For more information view the project web site at:

<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/eaglemountain>

The final study documents and more information about the proposed federal land withdrawal including public meeting location and comment opportunities are available here.

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Selected Alternative
Modified Alternative C: ~20,005 acre boundary addition
 Joshua Tree National Park
 Eagle Mountain Boundary Study

National Park Service
 U.S. Department of the Interior

