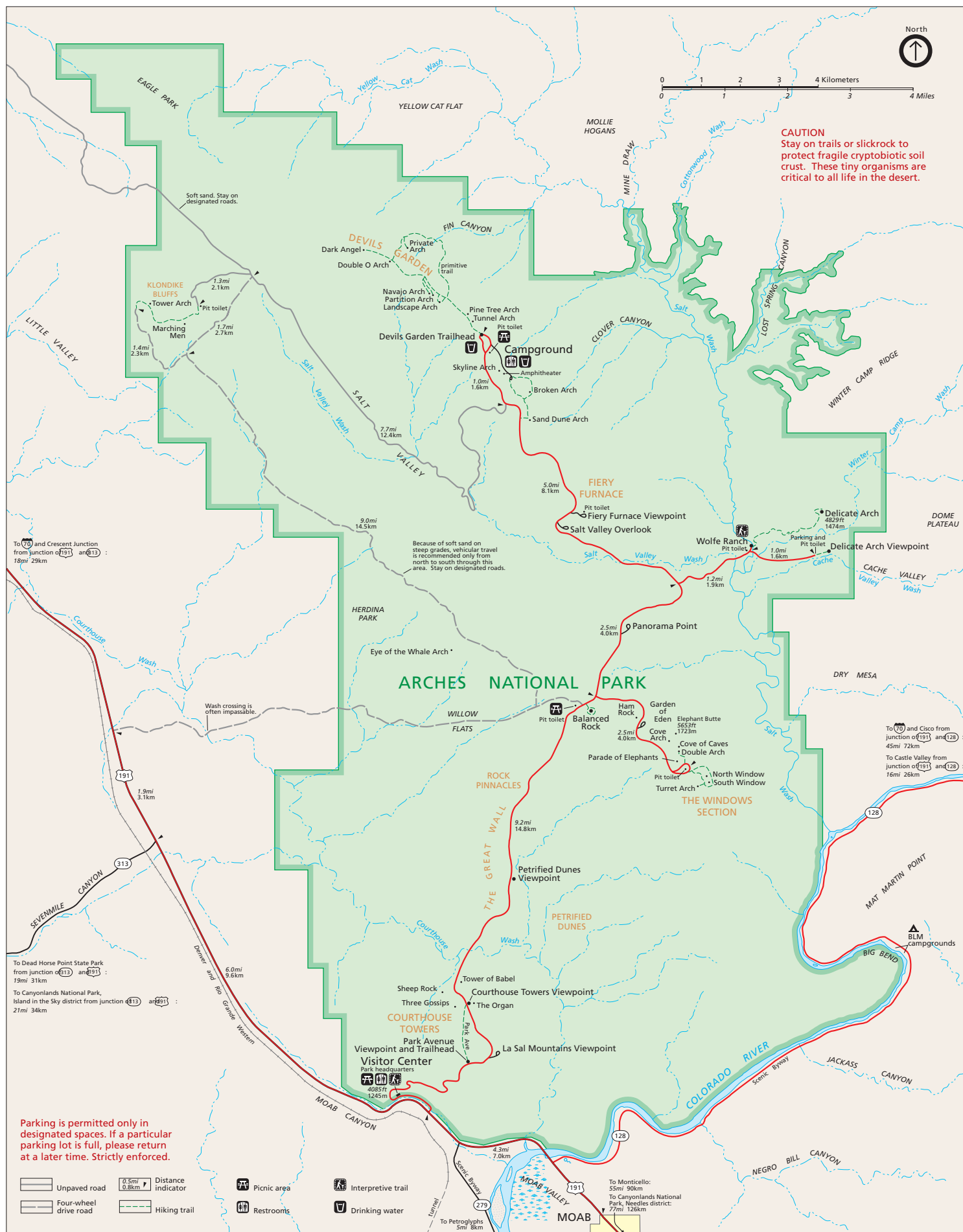




Climbing and Canyoneering Management Plan

Preliminary Alternatives Newsletter





Introduction

As most of you know, we have been working on a Climbing and Canyoneering Management Plan for Arches National Park. The purpose of this plan is to document current conditions and present a strategy for responding to the increasing visitor use, possible resource impacts, and potential user conflicts associated with rock climbing and canyoneering in areas within Arches National Park. This plan will provide direction for the management of natural and cultural resources and wilderness values within the context of visitor use and impacts from climbing and canyoneering activities.

As a part of the planning effort, the park is considering a range of alternatives to resolve pertinent visitor use, resource and management issues. These alternatives are presented in this newsletter. There is a

“no action” alternative (basically business as usual, which is required by law) and three “action” alternatives. The National Park’s preferred course of action, the preferred alternative, has not yet been identified. This alternative will be developed after we hear your reactions to this newsletter and include them as part of the analysis process. The preferred alternative could be one of the following alternatives, or it could be a combination of elements from any of the alternatives. The preferred alternative will be included in the Environmental Assessment for public review.

We encourage you to be involved in this planning process by providing your comments. For more information about how to comment, please see page 10.

What Are Alternatives and Why Do We Develop Them?

Developing a vision for the future of how we want to manage visitor use activities in a national park is the primary role of a management plan. Several visions for the park unit’s future (called alternatives) are developed and analyzed before a preferred direction is selected. Evaluation of a set of alternatives enables the National Park Service and the public to compare the advantages and disadvantages of one course of action over another. This evaluation also provides a sound approach to decision-making that is required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

The preliminary alternative concepts presented in this newsletter were developed by identifying different ways to address issues identified during scoping, management issues, and resource concerns within the context of the national park’s legislation, its identified purpose and significance statements, and other laws and policies. The alternatives help to examine ways to address the following questions:

Are existing climbing and canyoneering activities appropriate and sustainable, or are changes needed to protect resources or protect different types of desired visitor experience?

What are the desired conditions for the national park natural and cultural resources and what management strategies need to be implemented to ensure the long-term sustainability of those conditions?

Once we have received your input about these preliminary concepts, the planning team will develop a Climbing and Canyoneering Management Plan/ Environmental Assessment that will describe the alternatives and their potential impacts in greater detail.

Preliminary Alternatives

The following is a presentation of the preliminary alternative concepts, including access trails, group size limits/permits, hardware replacement and route establishment, visual impacts, commercial use, monitoring and closures/regulations.

Alternative A: No-Action

Alternative B: Active Management

Alternative C: Regulatory

Alternative D: Minimum Requirements



Alternative A

CONTINUE WITH CURRENT MANAGEMENT (NO ACTION)

This alternative describes the action of continuing the present management operation and condition. The No Action Alternative is required under NEPA and establishes a baseline for comparing the present management direction and environmental consequences of the other alternatives.

Currently rock climbing and canyoneering are only regulated by the Superintendent's Compendium as authorized by 36 CFR 1.5(a). Climbing and canyoneering activities will likely increase in popularity over time. Associated impacts will remain unknown and potential impacts will remain un-mitigated.

Access Trails

There will be no delineation of access trails to the base of rock climbing routes or to and through canyoneering routes. Travel on designated trails, slickrock, and dry washes are encouraged in areas where no designation of a trail is present.

Group Size Limits/ Permits

There are no established group limits for private rock climbing and canyoneering groups. No permits are required for climbers and canyoneers outside the Fiery Furnace. Permits are required for all entry into the Fiery Furnace.

Hardware Replacement and Route Establishment

No new permanent climbing hardware may be installed in any fixed location. If an existing hardware item (sling, runner etc.), bolt or other hardware item is unsafe, it may be replaced. The use of motorized power drills is prohibited. This will limit all climbing to existing routes or new routes not requiring placement of fixed anchors.

Visual Impacts

Software that is left in place shall match the rock surface in color. The use of white chalk for climbing is prohibited. Chalk or substitutes must be of a color that blends with the native rock. Fixed ropes may not be left in place for more than 24 hours. Fixed ropes left in place longer than 24 hours shall be considered "abandoned property" and removed.

Commercial Use

Commercial rock climbing is not authorized.

Commercial canyoneering has been authorized to one company for the last eleven years first under a Commercial Use License (CUL) then under a Commercial Use Authorization (CUA). The CUA permit set group size limits to 12 along with other restrictions and limitations. A CUA is issued for one year and the park is not required to renew it.

Monitoring

Annual monitoring of raptor species will continue. There is no established monitoring program (long-term or short-term) to evaluate natural or cultural resource impacts along climbing and canyoneering routes. The park has no data on the trends in visitor usage regarding climbing and canyoneering activities nor does it have trends on the impacts to the parks resources.

Closures/Regulations

Any arch or natural bridge named on the United States Geological Survey 7.5 minute topographical map covering Arches National Park is closed to climbing year-round. Balanced Rock is closed to climbing year round. The rock climb known as "Bubo" is closed from January 1- June 30th. The rock climb known as "Industrial Disease" on the Devil Dog Spire is closed from January 1st through June 30th.



Alternative B

ACTIVE MANAGEMENT

This alternative will base management actions on monitoring and visitor use information. This alternative will establish a variety of monitoring approaches and tools to manage climbing and canyoneering activities. This alternative will also establish a free permit system and impose group size limits that will either increase or decrease based on resource assessments. This alternative will provide a balance between recreational use and resource protection.

Access Trails

Maintenance and rehabilitation of trails will be based on resource assessments and monitoring. Access trails to the bases of well-known and heavily used climbing routes and access trail to canyoneering routes may be identified and delineated in order to prevent further erosion and loss of vegetation. Travel in high use areas may be on established access trails and corridors. Social trails that have developed over long periods of time, but currently see infrequent use, will be rehabilitated to discourage future travel.

Group Size Limits/ Permits

Group size limits for both rock climbing and canyoneering will be initially established at 10 people per group. Group sizes may be adjusted (increased or decreased) based on monitored resource conditions and visitor experience. The NPS will continue to conduct research to determine the types, amount, frequency, and seasonality of rock climbing and canyoneering that occurs at Arches National Park. The park will implement a free self-issued climber and canyoneers registration as an effort to collect more information about climber numbers, routes, access points, and times when climbing is taking place. Trail counters will also be implemented to assist with use numbers. This self-registration system allows the park to maintain levels of backcountry use consistent with a high quality visitor experience, safety, and resource protection.

Hardware Replacement and Route Establishment

Users must apply for a permit to establish new routes, place new fixed hardware, and use motorized drills through an application process. Park staff will review each application to ensure the proposed new route will not significantly impact natural and cultural resources of the park, wilderness character, and adhere to park service federal regulations. Some of the basic principles for the establishment of new routes or hardware placement under the application process may include but are not limited to the following:

- would not have the potential to lead to significant resource impacts,
- would have minimal impact on the experience of other park visitors,
- would be evaluated through a minimum requirements analysis, if proposed in wilderness.

These and any additional criteria would have to be met prior to approving the placement of new fixed anchors or establishing a new route.

As a condition of the permit, specific standards for fixed anchor hardware will be required for consistency, safety and resource protection.

Visual Impacts

The park would increase its efforts to educate visitors about the impacts of chalk and since the nature of the Entrada sandstone lends itself to not requiring chalk, no chalk at all is preferred. The use of white chalk for climbing is prohibited. Chalk or substitutes must be of a color that blends with the native rock.

Software that is left in place is recommended to match the rock surface in color. Chains should be painted the color of rock surface or primed brown. Fixed ropes may not be left in place for more than 24 hours. Fixed ropes left in place longer than 24 hours shall be considered “abandoned property” and removed. If anchors detract from the aesthetics of the cliff faces of Arches and thus the general visitor’s experience, additional management actions will be taken. Replacement of bolts or chains shall be camouflaged to match the rock surface color.

Commercial Use

Commercial guiding will be limited to specific designated areas or routes based on natural resource assessments and/or areas that have the potential to provide unique wilderness-experience opportunities. In areas outside these areas or routes, all commercial use will be prohibited.

Commercial guiding will remain under the Commercial Use Authorization (CUA) system. Additional training and certification will be required for guides and companies to ensure proper stewardship of the resources. Including but not limited to a safety record standards, interpretive skills, NPS sanctioned training, a pre-guided assessment. All commercial guides leading trips into the wilderness should attend Leave No Trace (LNT) workshops and be required to incorporate LNT into their trips. Commercial guiding will have a client to guide ratio of 4:1 and will be, as a minimum, limited to two guides with four clients each for a total of 10 people. There will be an annual commercial CUA meeting/workshop of NPS staff, owners, operators, and managers to discuss climbing and canyoneering issues and resource management issues pertaining to these activities. A maximum of three CUA’s for each activity may be authorized. If significant impact to resources is validated through resource monitoring, limits to the number of CUA’s may be implemented and/or permits may be revoked or not renewed.

Monitoring

Initial monitoring needs will be determined on the basis of resource assessments, route characteristics, and visitor-use patterns. A long-term monitoring program will be implemented that will focus on the aspects of climbing and canyoneering that could affect the park’s resources, such as, the creation of social trails, impacts on soil and vegetation at the base of climbs and access trails to canyoneering routes and impacts on microhabitats, including flora and fauna found on rock surfaces and potholes. Annual raptor surveys for

occupancy and productivity will be conducted. Closures of all areas historically used by raptors will occur in early spring. Raptor activity will be monitored and those areas or routes with current raptor use will remain closed and all other areas will be opened. Other areas where activity is discovered will also be closed. Closures will be in effect long enough to ensure protection and non disturbance of the birds. Visitor use patterns will be monitored utilizing the free permit process and trail counters. Use restrictions may be adjusted on the basis of monitoring data of resource conditions and on visitor-use patterns.

The National Park Service and volunteers, including the climbing and canyoneering community, will work in partnership to aid in data collection and expanded inventories and monitoring for sensitive and rare species.

Closures/Regulations

Arches National Park contains the world's largest concentrations of arches and was established by Presidential Proclamation to "protect extraordinary examples of wind erosion in the form of gigantic arches. . ." The definition of an arch has to have an opening of at least 3 feet and where light can shine through. Therefore, it is prohibited to climb up, scramble up, or walk up any arch (named or unnamed) that has an opening greater than 3 feet. It is also prohibited to wrap webbing or rope around any arch, named or unnamed.

All routes with historic or current raptor nesting sites will be closed until routes are monitored and cleared on an annual basis. Routes within known bighorn sheep lambing and rutting habitat will be closed seasonally until cleared.



Alternative C

REGULATORY

The emphasis of this alternative will use more of a regulatory approach and less of a monitoring approach to protect park resources and to control climbing and canyoneering activities. It will seek to mitigate climbing and canyoneering- related impacts to the resources by restricting specific climbing and canyoneering activities equally throughout the park. Due to established visitor use limits, maintained trail systems, hardware restrictions, as well as other restrictions imposed, monitoring efforts will not be as extensive.

Permits will be required for all canyoneering and climbing in the park. Permits will have a yet to be determined fee and will be issued at the VC. Permit fees will assist with funding necessary for additional staff for permit issuing, monitoring or patrolling.

Access Trails

Access trails will be developed, signed and maintained to all climbing and canyoneering routes.

Group Size Limits/Permits

Group size for canyoneering will be initially established at five people per group. This number may be reduced for specific routes based on resource conditions. Group size for rock climbing will also be five people. This number will ensure that these groups remain small. A mandatory park-issued permit will be required and will be available at the VC desk or on-line. A daily use limit on sensitive resource routes will be set at 20 people.

Hardware Replacement and Route Establishment

No new permanent fixed anchors will be permitted. Any bolts placed illegally will be removed. Replacement of existing bolts will be allowed with a permit by the Superintendent. Motorized drills will be prohibited in wilderness. Motorized drills will require a permit in non-wilderness areas.

Visual Impacts

Software will not be allowed to be left on routes. Chains painted the color of rock will be used to replace software. No chalk will be allowed. Replacement bolts or chains shall be camouflaged to match the rock surface color.

Commercial Use

No commercial services for rock climbing and canyoneering will be allowed.

Monitoring

Due to the increased restrictions for visitor use levels, there will be less frequent and/or extensive monitoring efforts. The park will focus more on compliance monitoring (i.e. law enforcement) and less on resource monitoring. Monitoring efforts would primarily consist of reviewing permits to determine areas of recurrent use and to determine additional monitoring needs. Since all access trails will be delineated and maintained, less monitoring of park resources along these trails will be required. However, popular routes may be monitored more frequently. Law enforcement patrols would increase

in areas where climbing and canyoneering activities occur.

Closures/Regulations

It is prohibited to climb up, scramble up, or walk up any arch (named or unnamed) that has an opening greater than 3 feet. It is also prohibited to wrap webbing or rope around any arch, named or unnamed.

All routes with historic or current raptor nesting sites will be closed until routes are monitored and cleared on an annual basis. Routes within known bighorn sheep lambing and rutting habitat will be closed seasonally until cleared.



Alternative D

MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS

This alternative proposes to remove the climbing restrictions currently regulated by the Code of Federal Regulations as expressed by the Superintendent's Compendium prior to May 9, 2006. Restrictions to canyoneering and climbing activities will be limited and only implemented if there is a significant threat to natural or cultural resources. Monitoring efforts will also be limited under this alternative. This alternative will have a higher climber/canyoneering education component to ensure climbers and canyoneers are sensitive to park resources and the impacts their activities may have on these resources.

Access Trails

Undesignated trails, some constructed but most established by climbers and canyoneers, will continue to be used. The trails will not be maintained and access points will not be designated. Travel on designated trails, slickrock, and dry washes will continue to be encouraged in areas where no designation of a trail is present.

Group Size Limits/Permits

There will be no restrictions on group size limits for either activity. Groups will be expected to self regulate themselves and to be informed of all route closures and park regulations prior to entering the park.

Hardware Replacement and Route Establishment

New permanent fixed anchors may be installed in any fixed location. However, bolts should be considered a tool of last resort. If an existing bolt or other hardware item is unsafe, it may be replaced. This will not limit all climbing to existing routes or new routes not requiring placement of fixed anchors. However, new fixed anchors will require a permit and must be placed judiciously in wilderness areas and may be closely managed to prevent the degradation of wilderness resources and character. Motorized drills will be allowed for the installation of bolts in non-wilderness areas. The use of a motorized drill in wilderness will be prohibited.

Visual Impacts

Climbers will be encouraged to wear clothing and use protection, slings and other equipment that will blend with the natural surroundings. The use of chalk will be allowed, however climbers will be encouraged through education to be sensitive to visual and environmental impacts that could occur. It is the climber's responsibility to ensure that their ropes are not left on walls for long periods of time.

Commercial Use

No commercial rock climbing will be allowed.

Commercial canyoneering will remain under the Commercial Use Authorization (CUA) system. Commercial canyoneering will have a client to guide ratio of 4:1 and will be, as a minimum, limited to two guides with four clients each for a total of 10 people. There will be an annual commercial CUA meeting/workshop of NPS staff, owners, operators, and managers to discuss canyoneering issues and resource management issues pertaining to canyoneering.

If significant impact to resources is validated through resource monitoring, limits to the number of CUA's may be implemented and/or permits may be revoked or not renewed.

Monitoring

Overall, this alternative is less restrictive in both resource and law enforcement monitoring. The use of educational information is the preferred method to convey to climbers and canyoneers to be cognizant of their activities on park resources and to self-regulate. This education material will focus primarily on the impact of visitors on park resources, minimum impact techniques, and preventative search and rescue. Park patrols will still enforce applicable laws and regulations when necessary and appropriate.

Closures and Restrictions

Any arch or bridge named on the United States Geological Survey 7.5 minute topo map is closed to climbing. Specific climbing and canyoneering routes will be closed (seasonal or permanent) to address specific resource concerns.



Actions Common to Alternatives B, C and D

The following are actions that were recommended to be applied to all action alternatives regardless of the specifics of each alternative.

- All canyoneering and climbing within Arches National Park should be free climbing (also known as “traditional” climbing) or clean-aid climbing. Clean-aid climbing involves the use of temporary equipment (e.g. slings, cams, nuts, chocks, and stoppers) that can be placed and removed without the use of bolting gear, pitons or other gear that scars the rock or becomes fixed after the ascent. Entrada Sandstone is extremely friable and easily degraded. Thus aid and sport climbing are not allowed in Arches National Park for purposes of resource protection.
- The use of pitons is prohibited due the friable nature of the Entrada sandstone. Insertion and removal of hammer-driven pitons have resulted in permanent damage to sandstone.
- The park will establish a proactive educational and outreach program. There will be a climber/canyoneering educational display at the Visitor Center to display closures and regulations, promote “Leave No Trace” techniques and sound climbing and canyoneering ethics. The park will provide information to climbers and canyoneers before they arrive. This will be accomplished through the development of climbing/canyoneering-specific educational literature that could be distributed at visitor centers, mailed, or posted on the park’s web page. Additional efforts will be made to distribute this information to local outdoor gear shops and guide services, near Arches National Park. The park staff will work with journalists to develop articles for periodicals and guidebooks to provide educational information and foster a better appreciation of the resources. The park will ensure information posted on internet websites about climbing routes and canyoneering routes will be accurate and up-to-date regarding closures.
- Travel on designated trails, slickrock, and dry washes will continue to be encouraged in areas where no designation of a trail is present.
- Permits are required for all entry into the Fiery Furnace.
- Balanced Rock is closed to climbing.
- Any arch or natural bridge named on the United States Geological Survey 7.5 minute topographical map covering Arches National Park is closed to climbing.
- Specific climbing and canyoneering routes will be closed (seasonal or permanent) to address specific resource concerns. Examples include hanging gardens, sensitive wildlife or plant species, or cultural sites. Buffers (seasonal or spatial) may be implemented to protect birds of prey in the park, implementing guidelines from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Utah Field Office *Guidelines for Raptor Protection from Human and Land Use Disturbances*.
- The physical altering of rock faces such as chiseling, glue reinforcement of existing holds, and gluing of new holds is prohibited.
- The intentional removal or “gardening” of lichen or plants from rock is prohibited.
- Bouldering is prohibited.
- Slacklining and highlining is prohibited.
- BASE jumping, Wingsuit flying and Paragliding is prohibited.
- Zip lining and pendulum swings are prohibited.
- Bivying overnight requires a backcountry permit and adheres to the same rules and regulations set forth for backcountry camping. Bivying overnight must be at least one mile from any designated road and one-half mile from any designated trail.
- If existing software, bolts, and other hardware seem unsafe, it may be replaced on existing routes, or for emergency self-rescue.



How Do I Comment on this Project?

Please submit your comments online at the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov>. Scroll down and click on **Preliminary Alternatives for Climbing and Canyoneering Management Plan**. Click on the “open for comment” project link on the left to view this newsletter and provide a comment.

If you are unable to submit comments electronically through this website, then you may also submit written comments to the *National Park Service, Attention: Planning and Compliance 2282 SW Resource Blvd, Moab, UT 84532*.

Please provide all comments by March 13, 2011. If you wish to be added to the park’s mailing list for future correspondence, please indicate that in your response.

Topic Questions to Consider

Is one of the four preliminary alternatives (A-No Action, B-Active Management, C-Regulatory, D-Minimum Requirements) already close to your idea of the best way to manage climbing and canyoneering activities in Arches National Park? If so, which one, and how might you modify it to make it closer to your ideal?

Which parts of any of the preliminary alternatives do you feel strongly should be included in the management of climbing and canyoneering?

Which parts of any of the preliminary alternatives do you feel strongly should not be included in the management of climbing and canyoneering?

Do you have any other thoughts, ideas or comments regarding climbing and canyoneering activities in the park?

Next Steps

- Once we have heard what you have to say about these preliminary alternatives, the planning team will continue to develop a Climbing and Canyoneering Management Plan/ Environmental Assessment that will describe the alternatives and their potential impacts in greater detail.
- The Climbing and Canyoneering Management Plan/EA will be published and released for public review sometime this fall. The team will again analyze public comments to the EA, prepare substantive comments, and make appropriate revisions to the document.
- A decision document will then be prepared and submitted for regional review and approval to adopt the management plan.
- This decision document will then be distributed to the public along with the approved Climbing and Canyoneering Management Plan.
- The approved Climbing and Canyoneering Management Plan will then be implemented as funding allows.