



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Bryce Canyon National Park
Bryce, Utah

Finding of No Significant Impact Wildlife Viewing Pullouts Project

Background

In compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act, the National Park Service prepared an environmental assessment to examine various alternatives and environmental impacts associated with the proposal to develop wildlife viewing pullouts at Bryce Canyon National Park (BRCA). Wildlife pullouts and associated interpretive panels will increase opportunities for park visitors to learn about the wildlife and their habitat including both large and small mammals such as elk, pronghorn, and the Utah prairie dog, a federally listed threatened species in the park. Currently, there are no pullouts in areas with high densities of wildlife and visitors frequently pull off the road. This has resulted in ruts along the road shoulder and increasing disturbed areas, especially in the park's meadow habitat. Visitors also stop in the middle of the road which is a recognized safety issue and law enforcement challenge. Wildlife viewing pullouts adjacent to meadow habitat along the main park road will enhance visitors' park experience as well as protect roadside natural and cultural resources impacted from unauthorized vehicle parking.

Selection of the Preferred Alternative

The environmental assessment evaluated three alternatives: a no-action alternative (Alternative A), an action alternative to construct five wildlife viewing pullouts (Alternative B), and a modified action alternative that avoids all meadow habitat within close proximity to active Utah prairie dog colonies (Alternative C). The no-action alternative is used as a baseline assessment, while the action alternatives address the environmental impacts associated with construction of wildlife viewing pullouts.

Alternative B is the National Park Service's preferred alternative because it best meets the purpose and need for the project as well as the project objectives to: 1) improve visitor safety while viewing wildlife along the main park road; 2) enhance visitor knowledge and awareness of park resources and increase visitor satisfaction during their visit to Bryce Canyon National Park; and 3) protect sensitive meadow habitat along the main park road.

Under Alternative B, five wildlife viewing pullouts will be constructed along the main park road between the Mixing Circle Junction and mile post 5 (four pullouts on the west side and one on the east side of the main road). Two of the viewing pullouts will be constructed in the vicinity (within 350') of colonies of Utah prairie dogs within the park and will allow the public better access to observe this federally listed threatened species with greater educational opportunities to learn about the species via wayside exhibits. Educational signs/exhibits will be developed at a minimum of three of the pullout locations addressing topics such as the Utah prairie dog, other wildlife species in meadow habitats, the importance of meadows as wildlife feeding and movement corridors, and other topics. The following text further describes the components of Alternative B:

- **Pullout Designs** – Pullouts #1, #2, #3, and #5 will be designed to accommodate approximately 3 vehicles, parked in a parallel manner, along the edge of the roadway. The width of the pullout will be approximately 15' wide from the edge of the road to the edge of the pullout. The length of the pullouts will be approximately 60' long with another 15' of sloping toward the road for ease of pulling vehicles into and out of traffic. All pullouts (except Pullout #4) will be asphalt sealed to prevent further damage to the shoulder and stabilize erosion. Pullout #5 will require the

construction of a retaining wall to minimize erosion into surrounding meadow habitat due to the steepness of the incline off the shoulder. Pullout #5 is adjacent to a small colony of Utah prairie dogs in a meadow that is currently demarked using double rail wooden fencing. The pullout will be constructed adjacent to the fence line to deter visitors from entering the meadow; wetland vegetation is also adjacent to this pullout. Wetland impacts will be avoided by installing pre-construction silt fencing and establishing erosion control measures (such as straw wattles) to contain sediment. Signage along the fence line will be placed to discourage visitors from entering the meadow. Pullout #4 will be a constructed vehicle turn-around 100' long and 75' wide from the shoulder to the edge of the turn-around with a natural island in the center. An asphalt approach for approximately 5' will be poured with a natural aggregate base used over the remainder of the turn-around. Several downed ponderosa pine trees in the area, in addition to 5-10 standing trees (<24" DBH) that will be cut, will be used as a natural boundary to the turn-around. The total project impact area for direct effects is anticipated not to exceed 0.5 acres.

- **Buffer Zones** – In addition to the impact area, a buffer zone of up to 30 feet was measured around each pullout to account for any resource damage associated with project construction. This area may be impacted by construction vehicle movement and soil disturbance/displacement, but is anticipated to recover within 3 to 5 years of construction. The buffer zone around proposed Pullout #5 will be reduced in size and flagged to avoid any impacts to wetland habitat in the adjacent meadow. Revegetation of the project area using native seeds collected within or adjacent to BRCA and appropriate to high altitude meadow habitat will occur following construction. The total impact from indirect effects of construction in the buffer zone is anticipated not to exceed 0.8 acre.
- **Wayside Exhibits** – Pullouts #1, #3, and #5 will contain educational wayside exhibits related to the importance of meadow habitats for wildlife with different focus themes. Additional funding may also be available to install exhibits at the other pullouts. One exhibit will highlight the importance of the Utah prairie dog as a keystone species within the park and the need to protect this species throughout its range. Another exhibit will focus on the importance of meadows in highland regions with an emphasis on vegetative and animal diversity as well as the function of meadows as water purifiers, wildlife movement corridors and foraging areas. In addition to these wayside exhibits, Pullout #5 (adjacent to the colony of Utah prairie dogs) will have resource protection signs placed along the existing wooden fence line informing visitors not to enter the meadow and disturb the prairie dogs.
- **Vegetation Rehabilitation** - Areas currently impacted by unauthorized vehicle pullouts will be rehabilitated throughout East Creek Meadow to restore native vegetation and habitat quality. Vegetation surrounding newly constructed pullouts will be monitored to detect and treat the spread of non-native vegetation and will be revegetated with native meadow species as necessary to improve vegetative diversity and health along the meadow.

Mitigation Measures

The following mitigation measures were developed to minimize the degree and/or severity of adverse effects associated with project implementation throughout the project area:

- To minimize native plant disturbance, areas of existing low vegetation cover and disturbance (resulting from ongoing vehicle impacts) were prioritized as wildlife viewing pullout areas.
- Impact areas and buffer zones will be flagged prior to construction to ensure that resource damage (as determined by the project footprint and buffer zone surrounding the construction area) will not be exceeded during construction.

- Only one wildlife viewing pullout will be constructed at a time to minimize impacts on visitor experience and wildlife; signs will be posted at the Visitor Center to inform visitors of construction activities along the main park road.
- Revegetation and recontouring of disturbed areas in the buffer zone will take place following construction and will be designed to minimize impacts on native vegetation and deter the possible spread of invasive species. Revegetation efforts will strive to reconstruct the natural spacing, abundance and diversity of native plant species found in meadows of the park. All disturbed areas surrounding constructed pullouts will be restored as nearly as possible to pre-construction conditions shortly after construction activities are completed. Weed control methods will be implemented to minimize the introduction of noxious weeds including power-washing of all contractor vehicles brought into the park. Some trees (5-10) will be removed at Pullout #4 to create a natural border of the pullout area, but other existing vegetation (outside the pullout footprint) at each pullout location will not be disturbed to the extent possible.
- To minimize the spread of exotic species, pullouts with the highest current densities of invasive plants will be constructed last to avoid spread into relatively non-affected roadside areas.
- To reduce the spread of whitetop (*Cardaria draba*), a Utah state listed noxious weed growing in the vicinity of proposed Pullout #1, a pre- and post-construction treatment of the area will be conducted using herbicides targeted for that species (e.g., Telar XP or Escort – EPA Category 3 herbicides).
- Following completion of the project, signs may be erected along the road (on both ends of the project area) directing visitors to "Please Use Established Pullouts" to assist visitors in selecting and using the pullouts. Installation of those signs will be based on park leadership review of the project and visitor use patterns.
- Because disturbed soils are susceptible to erosion until revegetation takes place, standard erosion control measures such as silt fences, straw wattles and/or sand bags will be used to minimize any potential soil erosion, especially in pullout areas with a steep incline at the edge, and adjacent to areas upstream of restored wet meadow habitat (proposed Pullout #1) and wet meadow habitat (proposed Pullout #5).
- To minimize negative impacts to nesting birds, trees required to form a border at proposed Pullout #4 will not be cut between March 15th and August 1st.
- Fugitive dust generated by construction will be controlled by spraying water on the construction site, if necessary.
- To reduce noise and emissions, construction equipment will not be permitted to idle for long periods of time.
- To minimize possible petrochemical leaks from construction equipment, the contractor will regularly monitor and check construction equipment to identify and repair any leaks and have a spill kit on site.
- Should construction unearth previously undiscovered cultural resources, work will be stopped in the area of any discovery and the park will consult with the State Historic Preservation Officer and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, as necessary, according to §36 CFR 800.13, Post Review Discoveries. In the unlikely event that human remains are discovered during

construction, provisions outlined in the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (1990) will be followed.

- The National Park Service will ensure that all contractors and subcontractors are informed of the penalties for illegally collecting artifacts or intentionally damaging paleontological materials, archeological sites, or historic properties. Contractors and subcontractors will also be instructed on procedures to follow in case previously unknown paleontological or archeological resources are uncovered during construction.
- To the extent possible, the development of the viewing pullouts will emphasize environmental sensitivity in construction, use of nontoxic materials, resource conservation, recycling, and will complement the natural and cultural environment of the park.

The following additional mitigation measures will be used to minimize impacts to Utah prairie dogs located near pullouts #2 & #5:

- Wait to initiate work until June 15th, after the pups have emerged. Pullouts must be constructed before August 31st.
- Ensure a biologist from the Bryce Canyon National Park Resources Management Division will be onsite during all excavation activities adjacent to active Utah prairie dog colonies.
- Pullout #5 will be fenced and signed to encourage visitors to stay out of the meadow prior to the beginning of construction.
- Construction vehicles will not be allowed to park within meadow habitat.
- Construction work within meadow habitat will be limited to the minimum amount to reduce impacts on active colonies.
- Construction workers and supervisors will be informed about the status of the Utah prairie dog and appropriate activities around active colonies. Contract provisions will require the cessation of construction activities that have a detectably detrimental effect on Utah prairie dogs in the project area, until the park's Resources Management Division re-evaluates the project and its impact on the prairie dog. This may include modification of the contract for any protection measures determined necessary.

Alternatives Considered and Environmentally Preferred Alternative

Three alternatives were evaluated in the environmental assessment including: Alternative A (No Action) – no development of wildlife pullouts along the park's main road; Alternative B (Preferred Alternative) – development of five wildlife viewing pullouts along the main park road between the Mixing Circle Junction and mile post 5; Alternative C - similar to Alternative B but would avoid pullout development near Utah prairie dog colonies.

Alternative B (Preferred Alternative) – development of five wildlife viewing pullouts along the main park road between the Mixing Circle Junction and mile post 5, is also the Environmentally Preferred Alternative. The Council on Environmental Quality defines the environmentally preferred alternative as "...the alternative that will promote the national environmental policy as expressed in the National Environmental Policy Act's §101." Section 101 of the National Environmental Policy Act states that "... it is the continuing responsibility of the Federal Government to ...

- (1) fulfill the responsibilities of each generation as trustee of the environment for succeeding generations;
- (2) assure for all Americans safe, healthful, productive, and aesthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings;
- (3) attain the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation, risk to health or safety, or other undesirable and unintended consequences;
- (4) preserve important historic, cultural, and natural aspects of our national heritage, and maintain, wherever possible, an environment which supports diversity, and variety of individual choice;
- (5) achieve a balance between population and resource use which will permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life's amenities; and
- (6) enhance the quality of renewable resources and approach the maximum attainable recycling of depletable resources.”

Alternative B, Construct 5 Wildlife Viewing Pullouts, is the environmentally preferred alternative because it best addresses the six evaluation factors listed above. Alternative B will establish five wildlife viewing pullouts in appropriate locations along the main park road that have been assessed for minimal disturbance to natural and cultural resources, while allowing visitors to experience important park natural resources in a manner that improves public safety and minimizes widespread negative impacts on roadside resources and meadow wildlife. Establishment of wildlife viewing pullout locations will assist with channeling visitors into safe areas to view wildlife and will likely decrease random parking along the roadsides.

Balancing visitor use with protection of park resources is an ongoing challenge for the National Park Service. Consideration of impacts to a federally listed species must be weighed with the overall benefits possible from project implementation. Wayside exhibits will assist visitors with interpreting their surroundings and help to educate the public on the park's federally listed species, the Utah prairie dog, a valuable park resource that visitors frequently want to observe in their native habitat but have limited viewing opportunities in the park. Through consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the development of wildlife pullouts in proximity to Utah prairie dog colonies will be executed in a manner that reduces negative impacts on the species. Based on the size of Utah prairie dog colonies adjacent to two of the proposed pullout locations and the level of human habituation displayed by those colonies, the cumulative effect on the park's populations will be minimal with an overall benefit to the species through controlled access and increased educational outreach. Alternative B will also decrease soil erosion along the main park road by concentrating vehicle activity, reduce widespread vegetation damage and potentially lessen negative impacts on wildlife by creating permanent locations where visitors can stop along the road. Stress to wildlife will likely be reduced over the long-term by establishing areas of predictable human activity while reducing ad hoc pullout locations over several miles of meadow habitat.

Why the Preferred Alternative Will Not Have a Significant Effect on the Human Environment

As defined in 40 CFR §1508.27, significance is determined by examining the following criteria:

Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that on balance the effect will be beneficial.

Resource topics that were addressed in the environmental assessment because the resultant impacts may be greater-than-minor included soils, wildlife, special status species, vegetation and visitor use and experience. All other resource topics were dismissed because the project will result in negligible or minor effects to those resources. No major effects are anticipated as a result of this project.

Implementation of the preferred alternative will result in some adverse impacts to park resources; however, the overall benefit of the project outweighs these negative effects. The adverse effects are summarized as follows: Short-term, minor adverse impacts to soil resources from construction activities as roadside areas are disturbed and reconfigured to create permanent pullout locations. The permanent paving of soil resources in four of the pullout locations will be adverse and long-term, but contribute an

overall benefit to soil resources in the surrounding area because of reduced roadside erosion. Construction disturbances (noise, dust, human activity) will have a minor, short-term adverse effect on wildlife as animals are disturbed from roadway habitat. Pullout construction may negatively impact wildlife outside of the project corridor depending on the species and the individual animal's disturbance tolerance. Construction disturbances (noise, dust, human activity) will have a minor to moderate, short-term adverse effect on Utah prairie dogs.

The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety

The preferred alternative was developed to address a public safety problem in the park – visitors parking along the road shoulder to take photographs of wildlife. The current road shoulder does not have sufficient clearance for cars to pull off completely on paved surfaces while allowing other vehicles to pass safely. Construction of wildlife viewing pullouts is anticipated to reduce some ad hoc parking problems. Additionally, Utah prairie dogs, like many wildlife species, can contract and be a vector for sylvatic plague which is a zoonotic disease and a human safety concern. By concentrating visitors at a safe distance from prairie dog burrows, coupled with providing educational material on the threat of plague to the public at those pullouts, this safety issue can be ameliorated.

Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas

The preferred alternative will not impact unique characteristics of the geographic area including historic or cultural resources, prime farmlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas because these resources do not exist in the project area. A jurisdictional delineation was completed for the proposed project to assess wetland resources at the request of the Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE), Sacramento District (letter dated May 11, 2010). Wetland vegetation was identified adjacent to proposed Pullout #5 within the construction buffer zone; however, the ACOE did not assert jurisdiction within the project area (letter dated March 3, 2011). Regardless of the ACOE determination, the National Park Service recognizes the values of wetland habitat and its importance to ecosystem functions as outlined in DO 77-1 Wetland Protection. Bryce Canyon reevaluated the construction footprint at proposed Pullout #5 and determined that it could be constructed without any temporary or permanent impacts to wetland habitat using fencing and erosion control structures to contain sediment. Because the project will avoid impacts to wetlands, a Wetlands Statement of Findings was not required for this project.

The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial

Throughout the environmental process the proposed development of wildlife viewing pullouts for the park was not highly controversial, nor are the effects expected to generate future controversy. The initial 30-day scoping period for the project did not generate controversy. The park received one supportive comment (with no non-supportive comments) on the project during 30-day public review period, and one comment requesting additional information on the project area from the ACOE.

The degree to which the possible effects on the quality on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks

Under the preferred alternative, there are no highly uncertain, unique or unknown risks to the quality of the human environment. Visitors will continue to have opportunities to enjoy, learn about, or be inspired by park resources and values. Implementation of the preferred alternative will not change the quality of the human environment available to visitors including interpretive talks, evening programs, hours of operation, scenic drives, or access to facilities. Conversely, visitors will be provided with additional opportunities to safely interact with park resources including meadow scenery and unique and endemic wildlife.

The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration

The proposed action is a site-specific attempt to improve visitor safety while decreasing negative impacts on wildlife, soils and vegetation. The proposed project is a result of visitor use of the park. Balancing visitor services and park development needs with conservation of park resources is an on-going challenge. However, the proposed project was developed to minimize negative impacts to the environment by adding a use to an already established developed corridor (the park's main road). Pullout locations were selected based on current level of impact and visitor use of those locations. The proposed action is consistent with the park's General Management Plan and the management directives of the National Park Service. The action is limited in scope and does not establish a new precedent for future actions with the potential to significantly affect future considerations of park uses.

Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts. Significance exists if it is reasonable to anticipate a cumulatively significant impact on the environment. Significance cannot be avoided by terming an action temporary or by breaking it down into small component parts.

Cumulative effects were analyzed in the environmental assessment, and no significant cumulative impacts were identified.

The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

After applying the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation's criteria of adverse effects (36 CFR Part 800.5, Assessment of Adverse Effects), the National Park Service concludes that implementation of the preferred alternative will result in a "no adverse effect" determination to historic properties. The State Historic Preservation Officer concurred with this determination in a letter dated April 26, 2010.

The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

Formal consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was initiated on February 24, 2010 and resulted in a biological opinion for the threatened Utah prairie dog (signed on July 9, 2010). Mitigation measures were developed and included in that document (as outlined above) to ensure that adverse affect to Utah prairie dogs will be minimized during and after project implementation.

Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment

The action will not violate any federal, state, or local laws or environmental protection laws.

Appropriate Use

Sections 1.5 and 8.1.2 of NPS Management Policies underscore the fact that not all uses are allowable or appropriate in units of the National Park System. The proposed use was screened to determine consistency with applicable laws, executive orders, regulations, and policies; consistency with existing plans for public use and resource management; actual and potential effects to park resources; total costs to the Park Service; and whether the public interest would be served. The development of wildlife viewing pullouts is a common feature to most national parks. Proper location, sizing, construction timing/materials, and methods will ensure that unacceptable impacts to park resources and values will not occur. The proposed project is consistent with the park's General Management Plan. With this in mind, the NPS finds that development of 5 wildlife viewing pullouts is an acceptable use at Bryce Canyon National Park.

Impairment

National Park Service's Management Policies (2006) require analysis of potential effects to determine whether or not actions would impair park resources. The fundamental purpose of the national park system, established by the Organic Act and reaffirmed by the General Authorities Act, as amended, begins with a mandate to conserve park resources and values. National Park Service managers must always seek ways to avoid, or to minimize to the greatest degree practicable, adversely impacting park resources and values.

However, the laws do give the National Park Service the management discretion to allow impacts to park resources and values when necessary and appropriate to fulfill the purposes of a park, as long as the impact does not constitute impairment of the affected resources and values. Although Congress has given the National Park Service the management discretion to allow certain impacts within parks, that discretion is limited by the statutory requirement that the National Park Service must leave park resources and values unimpaired, unless a particular law directly and specifically provides otherwise. The prohibited impairment is an impact that, in the professional judgment of the responsible National Park Service manager, would harm the integrity of park resources or values, including the opportunities that otherwise would be present for the enjoyment of these resources or values. An impact to any park resource or value may, but does not necessarily, constitute an impairment, but an impact would be more likely to constitute an impairment when there is a major or severe adverse effect upon a resource or value whose conservation is:

- necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation or proclamation of the park;
- key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park; or
- identified as a goal in the park's general management plan or other relevant NPS planning documents.

An impact would be less likely to constitute an impairment if it is an unavoidable result of an action necessary to pursue or restore the integrity of park resources or values and it cannot be further mitigated. The park resources and values that are subject to the no-impairment standard include:

- the park's scenery, natural and historic objects, and wildlife, and the processes and conditions that sustain them, including, to the extent present in the park: the ecological, biological, and physical processes that created the park and continue to act upon it; scenic features; natural visibility, both in daytime and at night; natural landscapes; natural soundscapes and smells; water and air resources; soils; geological resources; paleontological resources; archeological resources; cultural landscapes; ethnographic resources; historic and prehistoric sites, structures, and objects; museum collections; and native plants and animals;
- appropriate opportunities to experience enjoyment of the above resources, to the extent that can be done without impairing them;
- the park's role in contributing to the national dignity, the high public value and integrity, and the superlative environmental quality of the national park system, and the benefit and inspiration provided to the American people by the national park system; and
- any additional attributes encompassed by the specific values and purposes for which the park was established.

Impairment may result from National Park Service activities in managing the park, visitor activities, or activities undertaken by concessioners, contractors, and others operating in the park. The NPS's threshold for considering whether there could be an impairment is based on whether an action would have major (or significant) effects. Impairment findings are not necessary for visitor use and experience, socioeconomics, public health and safety, environmental justice, land use, and park operations, because impairment findings relates back to park resources and values, and these impact areas are not generally considered park resources or values according to the Organic Act, and cannot be impaired in the same way that an action can impair park resources and values. After dismissing the above topics, topics remaining to be evaluated for impairment include soils, wildlife, special status species, and vegetation.

Fundamental resources and values for Bryce Canyon National Park are identified in the park's enabling legislation and the General Management Plan (1987). According to those documents, of the impact topics carried forward in this environmental assessment, soils, wildlife, special status species, and vegetation are considered necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation of the park; are key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park; and/or are identified as a goal in the park's General Management Plan or other relevant NPS planning document.

- **Soils** - Bryce Canyon National Park was established, in part, for its "unusual scenic beauty" including the geologic features known as "hoodoos" in the park. This project involves the temporary and permanent disturbance of approximately 1.3 acres within the park. Construction will be contained to within the park's main road right-of-way and will not impact any of the park's outstanding geologic features. Although soils are a fundamental resource at the park, the preferred alternative will result in short-term minor, adverse direct impacts on soil. The permanent paving of soil resources in four of the pullout locations will be adverse and long-term, but contribute an overall benefit to soil resources in the surrounding area because of reduced roadside erosion. There will be no impairment to the park's soil resources.
- **Wildlife** – Wildlife resources are key components to the park's natural integrity. The construction of five wildlife viewing pullouts will have minor, short-term adverse direct impacts on wildlife during construction as a result of human activity and disturbances (noise, dust) and the loss of some marginal roadside habitat. The preferred alternative will have minor, long-term beneficial indirect impacts on wildlife and their habitat as it would reduce unofficial pullouts along the meadow (thereby reducing broader-scale habitat degradation) and by educating park visitors on the diversity of wildlife in the park and the importance of conserving wildlife habitat via wayside exhibits. Species that inhabit the project area will also likely benefit from a predictable location where people would congregate, rather than the existing condition of unofficial pullouts throughout the meadow. There will be no impairment to the park's wildlife resources.
- **Special status species** – The Utah prairie dog is the only federally listed species in the park with a breeding population. As the only park service unit where Utah prairie dogs exist, Bryce Canyon has a unique opportunity to support recovery efforts of the species in southern Utah. There is a high demand from visitors to see Utah prairie dogs during their visit to the park. Enhancing visitor opportunity to safely view this species in addition to providing visitors with up-to-date information on Utah prairie dog recovery is consistent with the park's goal to assist with conservation efforts as well as specific recovery goals for the species. Under the preferred alternative, the development of five wildlife viewing pullouts would have a minor to moderate, long-term beneficial effect on the Utah prairie dog as two of the pullout locations would be adjacent to active colonies and visitation would be concentrated in those areas. Harassment of the species is anticipated to decrease with the establishment of specific areas to view colonies. A wayside exhibit focusing on the conservation status of this species would also provide a greater opportunity for the park to educate visitors on Utah prairie dogs throughout their limited range.

Construction disturbances (noise, dust, human activity) would have a minor to moderate, temporary adverse effect on the species but would be of short duration. Based on the importance of educating the public on the status of this listed species as a "keystone species" in the ecosystem, the limited size of the potentially affected colonies, and the high demand of visitors to view this species in the park, the creation of two small wildlife viewing pullouts is considered to be a net benefit to the long-term recovery and conservation of this species. There will be no impairment to special status species in the park.

- **Vegetation** – The preferred alternative will construct wildlife viewing pullouts within meadow habitat in the park adjacent to the existing main park roadway. Meadows provide an important and relatively uncommon habitat type in the park for wildlife. Benefits to vegetation resources under the preferred alternative include the abatement of damage to roadside plants due to widespread vehicle pullouts along the meadow and the restoration of roadside meadow vegetation from rehabilitation efforts following project completion. Construction activities will result in a minor, short-term localized adverse direct impact to vegetation resources during construction with an overall minor, long-term beneficial indirect impact on vegetation resources in the park's meadow habitat. There will be no impairment to vegetation resources in the park.

In addition, mitigation measures for these resources will further lessen the degree of impact to and help promote the protection of these resources. Areas of existing low vegetation cover and high vehicle disturbance were prioritized as wildlife viewing pullout sites. The locations for wildlife pullouts will be flagged prior to construction to contain disturbance and pullouts will be constructed one at a time to minimize stress on wildlife. Vegetation treatments to control the spread of invasive species into the project area and habitat rehabilitation of areas not converted to permanent viewing pullouts will also assist in the recovery of wildlife habitat along the road and further discourage pullouts outside of the established areas. Additional mitigation measures specific to the conservation of Utah prairie dogs, such as restrictions on timing of construction, installation of signs to restrict access into colonies, and education of contractors on the federal status of the species will reduce negative impacts.

In conclusion, as guided by this analysis, good science and scholarship, advice from subject matter experts and others who have relevant knowledge and experience, and the results of public involvement activities, it is the Superintendent's professional judgment that there will be no impairment of park resources and values from implementation of the preferred alternative.

Public Involvement

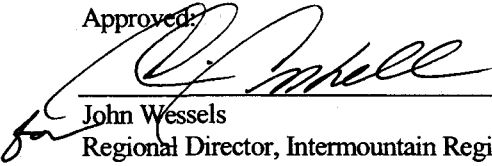
The environmental assessment was made available for public review and comment during a 30-day period ending May 15, 2010. To notify the public of this review period, a letter was mailed to stakeholders, Native American tribes, interested parties, newspapers and other media organization. Copies of the document were sent to government officials and public libraries state-wide; and posted on the internet at the National Park Service Planning, Environment, and Public Comment website (<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/>).

Two comments were received during the public comment period including one from a private citizen in support of the NPS preferred alternative. The second comment was from the ACOE requesting the preparation of a wetland delineation adjacent to proposed Pullouts #1 and #5. A letter was sent to the ACOE on June 3, 2010 with a determination that no wetlands will be impacted by the construction of proposed Pullout #1, including supporting photographs. A formal delineation was conducted on June 9, 2010 for the area surrounding proposed Pullout #5 and a report was submitted to the ACOE on August 3, 2010. The park re-designed the project to avoid any impacts to wetland habitat adjacent to proposed Pullout #5, therefore no further consultation is warranted between the ACOE and the park.

Conclusion

As described above, the preferred alternative does not constitute an action meeting the criteria that normally require preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS). The preferred alternative will not have a significant effect on the human environment. Environmental impacts that could occur are limited in context and intensity, with generally adverse impacts identified as localized, short-term, and negligible to moderate. There are no unmitigated adverse effects on public health, public safety, threatened or endangered species, sites or districts listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, or other unique characteristics of the region. No highly uncertain or controversial impacts, unique or unknown risks, significant cumulative effects, or elements of precedence were identified. Implementation of the action will not violate any federal, state, or local environmental protection law. Based on the foregoing, the National Park Service has determined that an EIS is not required for this project and thus will not be prepared.

Approved:



John Wessels
Regional Director, Intermountain Region, National Park Service

3/25/11

Date