



LAKE MCDONALD CABIN MANAGEMENT PLAN NEWSLETTER

Dear Friends,

I would like to thank you for your input and ideas thus far on the development of a management plan for National Park Service owned cabins along Lake McDonald. I have appreciated reading your comments and I very much enjoyed meeting many of you at the public meeting last summer in West Glacier. Your letters and comments echoed many of our own concerns and provided us with some new ideas to consider as we proceed.

This newsletter is intended to share what we've heard to date, define the scope of the planning effort, and describe the next steps we will be taking in the planning process.

Next steps will include seeking funding to perform condition assessments of each structure and all utilities. For each property we may consider leasing, an appraisal must be completed. We have been and will continue to research other historic lease programs, particularly in the National Park Service, and examine the costs and benefits. We are assessing National Park Service administrative and concession needs for additional structures and will be preparing an environmental assessment (EA).

During scoping, some commenters stated their belief that an environmental impact statement (EIS) had to be prepared instead of an EA. At this time we do not anticipate proposing an action that would result in a significant impact to park resources. However, if the environmental analysis, which we have only just begun, indicates otherwise, we will initiate an EIS.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or Mary Riddle, the park's Environmental Protection Specialist. Thank you for your support and interest in Glacier's heritage. I look forward to future conversations as, together, we explore options for protecting our heritage.

Sincerely,

Chas Cartwright
Superintendent

Summary of Public Comments

Public scoping, an early period in the planning process when initial concerns and ideas are gathered, was held from July 30 to August 31, 2010. We received twenty-four comment letters and over 50 people attended a public meeting on August 25. In addition to hearing from many individuals, we also received letters from the National Trust for Historic Preservation, National Parks and Conservation Association, and the Montana Historic Preservation Alliance. The following is a summary of concerns and suggestions that we have heard to date.

Comments/Concerns:

Comments included concerns over possible commercialization of the lakeshore, intrusion into the natural landscape, and impacts to water quality based on the belief that existing septic systems are inadequate or leaking. Some comments asserted that private use of public property would set a poor precedent, that most of the structures lack interpretive value for the majority of the public, and that the NPS is deviating from original plans to purchase the properties and return the sites to a natural state. Other concerns focused on costs to the government for rehabilitation and/or continuous maintenance of the structures; the possible need for year-round heating and snow-plowing if the cabins are leased to the public; disrepair

of the buildings and associated safety hazards; vandalism; illegal camping; legal issues with leasing; and the necessity and challenges of providing accessibility for people of all ages. Concern was raised about the availability of lodging on the west side of the park, along with safety and maintenance issues with current Apgar Corral (horse concession) employee housing. Some comments also emphasized the importance of sharing the park's human history and the structures' cultural significance.

Alternative Suggestions:

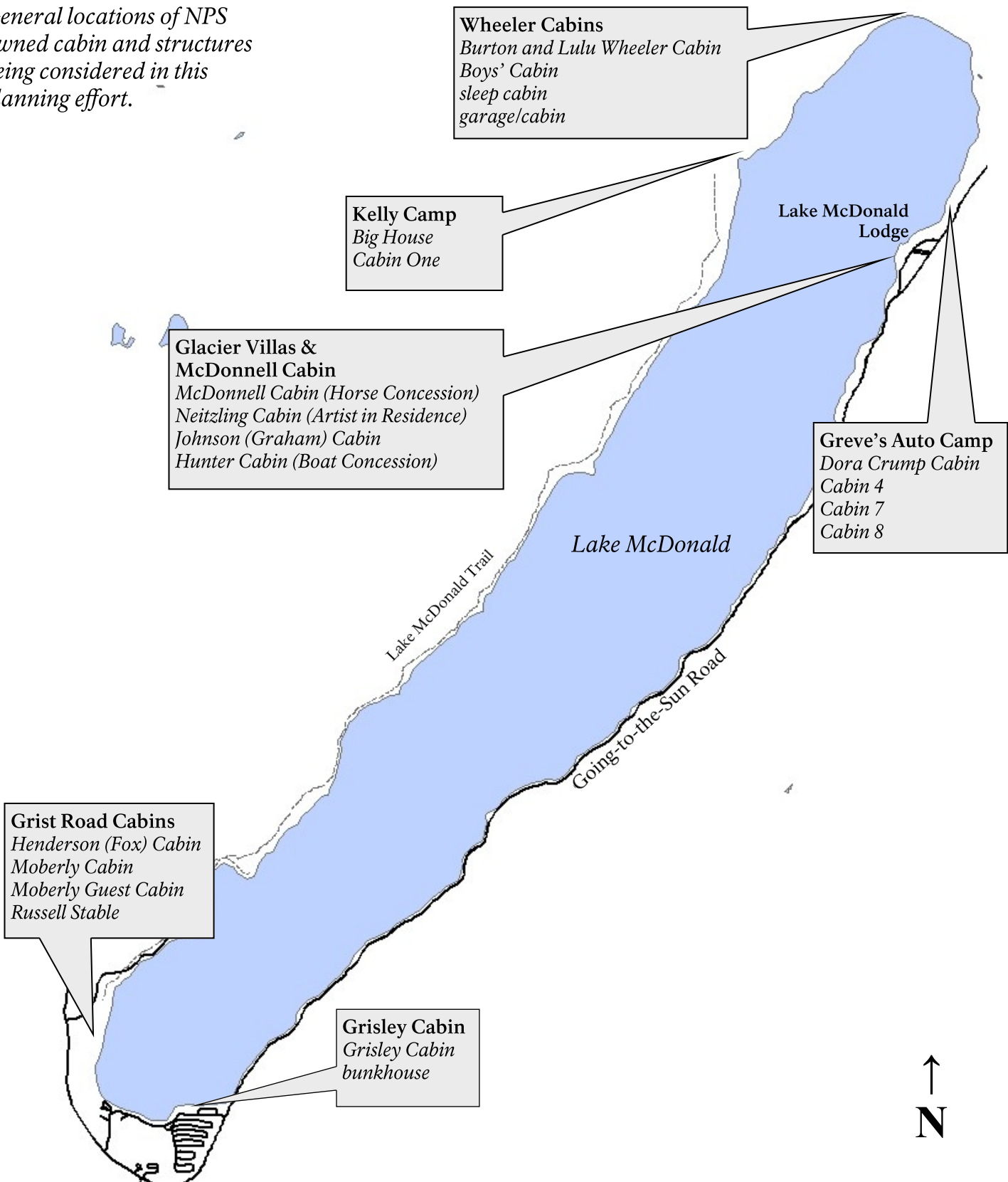
- Remove all cabins and structures.
- Remove all but the Charlie Russell cabin.
- Remove all structures between Fish Creek & Kelly Camp.
- Remove the Greve's cabin due to packrat infestation.
- Use a bidding and salvage process to remove cabins.
- Restore, preserve and continue use of the cabins, with regulations on use.
- Permit continued use of the cabins by current occupants after life estate agreements expire; extend long term leases to current estate holders.
- Provide long term public leases; require tenants to commit to long term maintenance.
- Consider implementing an NPS historic lease program.
- Lease properties to park partners.
- Form partnerships with nonprofits for use of the cabins & maintain structures under existing leasing authorities.
- Rent the cabins to visitors for nightly lodging.
- Maintain access to Kelly Camp in the fall and spring; place a lock on the gate in the spring to allow *landowner only* access.
- Repair the big cabin at Kelly Camp before it collapses, before the EA is complete. *Note: Repairs to the porch and roof were conducted in the fall 2010.*
- Retain the McDonnell Cabin for concession housing.
- Use one or more of the cabins as housing for concession employees; franchise fees would help maintain the structures, and the cabin(s) would receive regular attention to maintenance and upkeep.
- Consider an option for members of the public to purchase and remove a structure from the park.
- Investigate new uses for the structures that are compatible and meet revenue needs.
- Explore educational, research, and interpretive uses for the properties; interpret the history of the cabins.
- Preserve properties such as the Wheeler Estate as a museum, educational center, or conference center.
- Retain and interpret a sample of cabins from different eras and remove the rest.
- Manage the cabins to be financially self-sustaining.
- Establish a special fund to maintain the cabins; enlist volunteers.

(Continued on page 2)

(Continued from page 1)

- Restore Lake McDonald’s wilderness character.
- Preserve only structures with unique historical and interpretive value; preserve the historic integrity of the structures.
- Eliminate structures that are in poor condition or are not historically significant.
- Remove hazard trees and expand parking at the Trout Lake trailhead.
- Repair septic leaks.

General locations of NPS owned cabin and structures being considered in this planning effort.



The Next Steps...

- Develop a decision matrix that will help guide the management of current holdings and future acquisitions.
- Analyze the structural condition of each building and determine if utilities are available and functioning properly.
- Assess housing and administrative needs of the park to determine which cabins would be retained for NPS use.
- Complete research on lease programs and examine costs and administrative oversight to determine the viability of leasing.
- Appraise the value of each cabin and structure in order to identify suitable leasing rates.
- Determine the appropriate NEPA level for the plan (environmental assessment or environmental impact statement).

Several of you have asked for a copy of the slide presentation that was playing at the public scoping meeting. Please follow this link to view an updated version of the presentation, which contains photographs and histories of the structures:

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