

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

RECORD OF DECISION

FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT  
GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN

Glacier National Park  
A Unit of Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park  
A World Heritage Site

Flathead and Glacier Counties, Montana

The Department of Interior, National Park Service (NPS) has prepared this Record of Decision on the *Final General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement* for Glacier National Park, Montana, a unit of Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park. This Record of Decision is a statement of the decisions made as a result of environmental and socioeconomic analysis and in consideration of public input. It also describes the background of the planning effort, other alternatives considered, the basis for the decisions, the environmentally preferable alternative, measures to minimize environmental harm, and public involvement throughout the entire planning effort and in the decision making process.

**BACKGROUND OF THE PROJECT**

The trend since the 1977 *Master Plan* has been toward increased visitation, which could affect the quality of visitor experiences and the ability to preserve park resources. Scientific research and management experience in the park has increased what is known about the natural and cultural resources and visitor use. It is apparent that Glacier is part of a broader and more complicated ecosystem. Land uses adjacent to the park boundary have changed in the last two decades and a cooperative spirit is necessary for managing shared resources.

The National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978 (Public Law 95-625) requires that all units in the national park system have a current general management plan. Glacier's *Master Plan*, which was approved in 1977, is not in accordance with current NPS policy and has not been updated. The process that led to the development of the final *General Management Plan* provided the public with an opportunity to review and comment on a comprehensive management strategy for Glacier National Park.

The *Final Environmental Impact Statement* is a programmatic statement in many respects. Site specific details, recommendations and analysis are not included except for the eight critical issues. Consequently, the statement presents an overview of potential impacts of the preferred alternatives and other alternatives. Implementation of specific actions included in the final *General Management Plan* may require the preparation of more detailed environmental analysis. These would be tiered from this *Final General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement*.

## **DECISION (SELECTED ACTION)**

The National Park Service will implement the preferred alternatives as described in the *Final General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement* issued in July 1999. Below is a summary description of the selection actions.

The overall guiding philosophy is to manage the park predominantly for its wild character and for the integrity of Glacier's unique natural and cultural heritage, while continuing traditional visitor services and facilities. Visitors will be able to enjoy the park from many vantage points. Visitor use will be managed to preserve park resources along with a broad range of opportunities for people to experience, understand, learn about and enjoy the park. Cooperation with park neighbors will be emphasized in managing use and resources. The *General Management Plan* provides a management strategy to address issues and guides decisions through the park's centennial and beyond. The management strategy incorporates the purpose and significance of Glacier National Park and guiding principles for management of the park. The park is divided up into six well-known geographic areas, each with its own management philosophy: Many Glacier, Goat Haunt-Belly River, the Going-to-the-Sun Road Corridor, Two Medicine, Middle Fork, and the North Fork. The six geographic areas have four management directions: the visitor service zone, the day use zone, the rustic zone, and the backcountry zone. Each of the four management zones has a different set of desired resource conditions, visitor experiences, types of management activities and development. A description of the zones, philosophies and desired resource conditions for each geographic area and the preferred alternatives for the critical issues facing Glacier National Park follows.

### **Management Zones for Glacier National Park**

The "visitor service" zone will include developed areas, paved roads, and campgrounds with potable water and sanitation facilities. Natural resources will be managed to protect visitor health and safety; promote enjoyment of the setting, and mitigate the effects on surrounding areas. Natural resources along road corridors will be managed to allow safe travel and a high quality experience. In this zone a range of services and facilities will continue to be provided to support the visitor's ability to experience the park. Educational and interpretive opportunities will be provided. Lakes in the visitor service zone are characterized by having one or more of the following attributes: accessibility by paved roads, tour boats, formal docking facilities, no limits on motorboat horsepower, or impoundment structures. Lakes in this zone will be managed to tolerate a high level of use, including large tour boats and motorized craft. Facilities will be accessible. Cultural resources will be managed to preserve historic values. Visitors can expect congested conditions.

The "day use" zone will include selected areas generally with specific destinations that visitors can reach easily. Natural resources will be managed to ensure a high degree of resource integrity, enhanced by the proper location and design of trails and facilities. Natural processes will be managed to continue unimpaired to the extent possible with relatively high levels of use. Parts of this zone may be in the park's proposed wilderness, where natural sounds predominate. Travel may be by boat, foot or horseback. Access may be developed for visitors with disabilities where appropriate, and the standards of trail maintenance will be high. Wider travel surfaces and tread improvements will accommodate a higher level of use and present a lower level of difficulty while protecting resources. Visitors can expect to meet more people in this zone than in the backcountry. Lakes in the day use zone may have tour boats and launch facilities. There may be limits on motorboat horsepower where motors are permitted. Docks will be provided on selected lakes. Conflicts between visitors and wildlife will be managed by exploring a range of strategies from education to closure. The goals are to protect wildlife and provide visitor safety. Activities that connect visitors to Glacier's values will be emphasized. Interpretive hikes and other educational interpretation will be encouraged. Cultural resources will be preserved and protected.

The "rustic" zone will include primitive facilities and campgrounds representative of early western National Park development and traditional visitor experiences in them. Modest impacts on natural resources will be tolerated, mostly near campgrounds and facilities. Travel along roads is intended to be slow. Facilities also serve as staging areas for the use of the surrounding backcountry zone. While modest in scale, this zone will allow visitors to understand and appreciate the human and natural histories of the park. Most facilities in this zone will be fully accessible. Visitors will experience a slow-paced atmosphere and less formal visitor programs. Natural quiet will predominate. Fewer visitors will be encountered than in the visitor service zone. Cultural resources will be managed to preserve historic values. Conflicts between visitors and wildlife will be managed by strategies ranging from relocation and aversive conditioning (causing wildlife to want to avoid an area) to closure. Concession facilities will not be permitted.

The "backcountry" zone will be characterized by predominantly pristine natural conditions. There will be some primitive facilities such as trails, bridges, and campsites. Natural resource management in this zone will focus on protection and restoration of resources and natural processes. Information about the nature, status and trends of natural resources in this zone will be emphasized. Outstanding opportunities will be offered for visitors seeking solitude. Natural quiet will predominate. The expectation of visitors will be for few encounters with other visitors most of the time and to have a variety of hiking, horseback riding, wilderness and climbing experiences. Impacts on natural resources will be confined to trails and designated camping areas. Cultural resources will be preserved and protected. Formal interpretive and educational opportunities will be minimal, and in keeping with the qualities desired for this zone. Conflicts between visitor and animals in this zone will be managed to minimize disturbance to wildlife, yet provide for visitor safety. In most cases, areas will be closed to visitors when dangers arise. Natural processes will prevail. Animals will rarely be removed from the area. No commercial activity will be allowed off trail. Most of the proposed wilderness lands are zoned as backcountry and will be managed in accordance with NPS policy on proposed wilderness areas.

#### Geographic Areas in Glacier National Park

The Many Glacier area will be managed to preserve its wild character while providing visitors with opportunities to experience such activities as observing wildlife, hiking, camping, and sightseeing. Nationally significant historic resources will be preserved and managed to maintain the grand hotel and family lodge traditions. Resources will be managed to prevent degradation of the high-quality wildlife habitat and to manage visitor use. Two separate developed areas (Swiftcurrent and the Many Glacier Hotel) will be maintained and managed to provide traditional visitor services as well as support services for NPS and concession operations. The area will be managed to accommodate high levels of day use, yet provide opportunities for solitude. The Many Glacier area will be divided into a visitor service zone, a day use zone, and a backcountry zone.

The Goat Haunt-Belly River area will be managed for its wild character and wildlife and for the shared natural and cultural resources of adjoining nations. As in other areas of the park, management actions will emphasize cooperation and coordination in the spirit of the international peace park, world heritage site, and man and the biosphere designations. Park resources will be managed to preserve the pristine character of the area and the integrity of biologic communities. No commercial overnight accommodation or food services will be provided. Visitor services will be supported by the full range of services in Waterton Lakes National Park. Boat landings, visitor orientation, information and interpretation services, backcountry access and administrative facilities will be available in Waterton, at Goat Haunt and along the Chief Mountain Highway. The international peace park and world heritage site values will be emphasized as primary interpretive themes. The Goat Haunt-Belly River area will be divided into a visitor service zone, a day use zone and a backcountry zone.

**The Going-to-the-Sun Road Corridor** will be managed to provide all visitors with an opportunity to experience the scenic majesty and historic character of the park through a wide range of visitor activities, services, and facilities. The cultural significance and traditional use of the Going-to-the-Sun Road will be emphasized. The tremendous biological diversity found in this corridor, which encompasses all park eco-regions, will be managed to ensure its overall integrity. A full range of visitor services will be provided at Apgar Village, Lake McDonald Lodge, Rising Sun and in the vicinity of St. Mary. Sperry and Granite Park Chalets will provide traditional accommodations for backcountry visitors. As a national historic landmark, the Going-to-the-Sun Road will be managed to retain its historic character and to allow opportunities for visitors to experience the park's magnificent scenery and historic character. The Going-to-the-Sun Road Corridor will be divided into a visitor service zone, a rustic zone, a day use zone, and a backcountry zone.

**The Two Medicine area** will be managed to preserve its wild character, culturally significant resources and important wildlife habitat. Frontcountry and backcountry camping will continue. Traditional visitor services will be available in the Two Medicine Valley. Resources will be managed to protect the wild character of the area, particularly the area of transition between the plains and the mountains. While Two Medicine is a developed area, it will remain small. The Two Medicine area will be divided into visitor service, day use, rustic and backcountry zones.

**The Middle Fork area** will be managed to preserve its remote and wild character through a range of primitive visitor experiences. Visitor and administrative facilities will occur only along US Highway 2. Visitor access and trail facilities will be limited and challenging in most of the area. Trails, sanitation facilities, hitching posts, primitive signs, patrol cabins, and campsites will be the only development provided in the backcountry. Key wildlife areas and trail corridors will be protected and interpreted through cooperation with others (such as Burlington-Northern Environmental Stewardship Area) where appropriate. The Walton Ranger Station will continue to serve management and visitor needs in the area. The backcountry will be managed to allow for camping in undesignated areas and to provide opportunities for off-trail travel. The Middle Fork area will be divided into a visitor service zone and a backcountry zone.

**The North Fork area** will be preserved to maintain the primitive character of this transboundary watershed. Management actions will reflect the importance of interagency and international cooperation. Visitor facilities will be rustic and will preserve a national park quality and style of development that has become increasingly rare. Management actions will preserve that primitive character. Commercial development or new commercial activities will not be permitted. Small primitive auto campgrounds will continue at Kintla Lake, Quartz Creek, Bowman Lake and Logging Creek. North Fork roads will remain narrow and unpaved. The North Fork will be divided into a visitor service zone, a rustic zone, and a backcountry zone.

#### **Final Decisions on Critical Issues Facing the Park**

**Visitor Use on the Going-to-the-Sun Road.** The National Park Service will continue to protect the Going-to-the-Sun Road as a national historic landmark, retaining the historic character of the road and thus maintaining its traditional use. Visitors will continue to have the freedom to drive personal vehicles. An efficient public transportation system will continue and be improved. A comprehensive use plan will be developed to address the increasing use of the road corridor.

**Preservation of the Going-to-the-Sun Road.** The National Park Service will continue to protect the Going-to-the-Sun Road as a national historic landmark. The road's historic character and significance will be preserved, and the needed repairs will be completed before the road fails. The National Park Service will minimize the impacts on natural resources, visitors and the economy. Until additional studies can be completed, the National Park Service will continue its current program to perform critical road reconstruction so as to preserve the road and address safety and structural concerns.

**Preservation of Historic Hotels and Visitor Services.** The National Park Service will insure the integrity of the historic structures and provide for the preservation of these important elements of America's cultural heritage. Funding will be sought for a comprehensive rehabilitation effort to preserve the national historic landmarks and the park's other historic lodging. The National Park Service will explore alternatives for funding the rehabilitation of the buildings. A visitor services plan will be developed that will incorporate the economic feasibility of rooms, room numbers and services. The value of the concessioner's possessory interest will be determined. The National Park Service will ensure the design integrity of any new facilities with the historic structures and will upgrade utilities, housing for concession employees, accessibility, and infrastructure where applicable.

**Scenic Air Tours.** The National Park Service will request that the Federal Aviation Administration prohibit all commercial sightseeing tours over the park. A scenic air tour management plan will be developed if provided for and directed by law.

**Personal Watercraft.** The National Park Service will permanently ban personal watercraft from all park waters.

**Winter Use.** The National Park Service will respond to an increase in winter use only within the existing facilities and/or infrastructure. Adequate parking and restroom facilities will be provided where appropriate. The National Park Service will mitigate impacts on wildlife that may result from increased visitor use during the winter.

**Divide Creek Flood Hazard.** The National Park Service will relocate employee housing, administration and maintenance facilities that are now in the Divide Creek flood hazard zone to a safe location(s) in or outside the park. The entrance road will not be moved. Divide Creek will ultimately be allowed to follow its natural channel to St. Mary Lake.

**West Side Discovery Center and Museum.** The National Park Service will construct a "discovery" center and museum inside the park in the vicinity of the T-intersection north of the West Glacier entrance station that will concentrate development in the Apgar area. Development at the historic CCC camp/Glacier Institute will be incorporated into the center. The center will also serve the educational community, and interpretive needs to introduce and educate visitors about park values.

## **OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED**

The management strategy includes purpose, significance, guiding principles, six geographic areas each with their own philosophy, management guidance and zoning. These were developed with numerous alternatives and options detailed through the initial stages of the plan's development, Newsletter 3, the *Draft General Management Plan* and other public input. No Action was the only other alternative analyzed for this section of the plan. Each of the eight critical issues had several other alternatives that were considered and analyzed, in addition to the preferred alternative. For the Visitor Use on the Going-to-the-Sun Road issue the other alternatives considered and analyzed were: Expand Visitor Opportunities Along the Going-to-the-Sun Road, Expand Logan Pass Parking Lot and No Action/Status Quo. For the Preservation of the Going-to-the-Sun Road issue, the other alternatives considered and analyzed were: Fast Track Reconstruction (4-6 Years), Accelerated Reconstruction (10 ± Years) and No Action/Status Quo. For the Preservation of Historic Hotels and Visitor Services issue, the other alternative considered and analyzed was No Action/Status Quo. A number of funding options was also considered. Those funding options that would require the NPS to give up ownership, or would necessitate new development to generate revenue were rejected. For the Scenic Air Tour issue, the other alternatives analyzed and considered were: Allow Commercial Sightseeing Tours only in Certain Parts of the Park and No Action/Status Quo. For the Personal Watercraft issue, the other alternative considered and analyzed was No Action/Status Quo. For the Winter Use issue the other alternatives considered and analyzed were: Expand Winter Opportunities to Include Overnight Accommodations and No Action/Status Quo. Additionally, two actions were removed from the preferred alternative as it appeared in the Draft Plan; these were to open a campstore at Lake McDonald Lodge and plow the Two Medicine Road to the park boundary. For the Divide Creek Flood Hazard Issue, other alternatives analyzed and considered were Channelize Divide Creek and No

Action/Status Quo. And for the West Side Discovery Center and Museum issue the other alternatives considered and analyzed were: Locate the Discovery Center and Museum Outside the Park and No Action/Status Quo.

### **ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERABLE ALTERNATIVE**

Environmentally preferable is defined as "the alternative that will promote the national environmental policy as expressed in the National Environmental Policy Act's section 101. Ordinarily, this means the alternative that causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment. It also means the alternative which best protects, preserves and enhances historic, cultural and natural resources" ("Forty Most Asked Questions Concerning Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) National Environmental Policy Act Regulations." 1981).

The environmentally preferred alternatives is every one of the preferred actions as well as those actions common to all alternatives identified in the *Final General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement* and discussed above. These best meet the full range of national environmental policy goals as stated in NEPA's section 101. The preferred alternatives maximize protection of natural and cultural resources while maintaining visitor use, as is the National Park Service's congressional mandate. It also provides the framework to maintain a balance between present visitor use and resource protection and the values to be preserved for future generations as required by law.

### **MEASURES TO MINIMIZE ENVIRONMENTAL HARM**

All practicable measures to avoid or minimize environmental impacts that could result from implementation of the preferred actions have been identified and incorporated into the preferred actions. However, due to the programmatic nature of the general management plan, specific development projects will be reviewed as necessary for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act, National Historic Preservation Act, The Endangered Species Act, The Clean Water Act, the Clean Air Act, the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968 and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Wilderness Act and other applicable federal and state laws and regulations prior to implementation. Further consultation will be conducted and necessary concurrence and/or permits will be obtained from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the State Historic Preservation Officer, the Advisory Council for Historic Preservation, Montana State Department of Environmental Quality, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, other state offices, agencies and the public as appropriate as implementation begins.

## BASIS FOR THE DECISIONS

The alternatives selected (described above) are the best way, among the many alternatives considered, for protecting and preserving one of the world's most special places; a national park, the United States unit of the world's first International Peace Park, a biosphere reserve and a world heritage site. Four years of planning, analysis and extensive public involvement (including input from tribal governments, federal, state, local and international agencies) helped formulate these decisions. They protect Glacier's traditional visitor experiences and other natural, cultural and socioeconomic resources (including six national historic landmarks and five federally listed threatened and endangered species). These decisions are the best response to natural, cultural and socioeconomic resource concerns discussed in the Final General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement.

The purpose and significance, guiding principles, overall management philosophy and six geographic areas each with their own philosophy and zones provide the best and most comprehensive way for the National Park Service to meet Glacier's many mandates and provide guidance and strategic direction for decisions and issues yet to come.

**Visitor Use on the Going-to-the-Sun Road.** The best way to maintain the historic visitor experience along the Going-to-the-Sun Road and manage increasing use is to develop a comprehensive use plan for the Going-to-the-Sun Road. This plan will determine how to provide an efficient and historic transportation system, retain tour services on the road, enhance visitor opportunities and protect resources. The restrictions on vehicle length, width and bicycle use during peak use periods will continue. The other alternatives were not selected because they proposed development solutions (replacing pullouts that had been removed over the years, and expanding Logan Pass parking lot) Public comment received on this issue urged the park to consider other solutions that included visitor management and transportation.

**Preservation of the Going-to-the-Sun Road.** The selected alternative was chosen because it will preserve the historic character and significance of the Going-to-the-Sun Road; complete the needed repairs before the road fails; minimize impacts on natural resources, visitors and the local economy, and minimize the cost of reconstruction. As described in the *Final General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement*, additional studies developed with the public will be used to decide how the road will be reconstructed, how traffic will be managed and what mitigation will be necessary. Until such time as the additional studies can be completed, the National Park Service will continue its current program to perform critical road reconstruction actions and appropriate compliance to preserve the road and address safety concerns. The Fast Track (4-6 Year) Alternative was not chosen because of public concerns regarding the economic analysis and other alternatives considered were not selected because of public concern and distrust of the projected economic impacts of closing the west side of the Going-to-the-Sun Road for up to two years and then closing the east side of the Going-to-the-Sun Road for up to two years. The Accelerated Reconstruction (10± Years) was not selected due to public concern and urging to conduct additional studies.

**Preservation of Historic Hotels and Visitor Services.** The preferred alternative was selected because it will meet the NPS mission to provide for the preservation of these important elements of American history while continuing necessary and traditional visitor services and experiences. The No Action Alternative (the only other alternative evaluated) was not selected because it continued the current situation, which will eventually result in the loss of these historic properties due to lack of funding and a strategic plan to adequately maintain them.

**Scenic Air Tours.** The preferred alternative was selected because it notifies the Federal Aviation Administration and the public that the National Park Service intends to work towards prohibiting all commercial sightseeing flights over the park. Glacier's enabling legislation requires the NPS to regulate activities in such a way as to "preserve a state of nature" while balancing visitor use. The visitor experience is diminished by scenic air tours continuing to operate in backcountry areas where peace and solitude have high value for visitors. Glacier's peacefulness and tranquillity were cited in the designation of "peace" in the area in 1932. The park's solitude and tranquillity were also recognized in its 1974 wilderness recommendation to Congress. The National Park Service believes that visitors to Glacier National Park's

backcountry should have the opportunity to experience Glacier's peacefulness and solitude without disruption by scenic air tours. This action applies only to scenic air tours and not to restrict private aircraft or commercial aircraft flying over the park. The other alternative (Limit Scenic Air Tours Over the Park) was not selected because of overwhelming public support to ban scenic air tours. It also wasn't selected because designating corridors over the park would result in having flights over more populated areas of the park, thus impacting most visitors to Glacier, or having flights over the backcountry, thus impacting those visitors who had worked the hardest to find peace, solitude and tranquility. Inasmuch as the Going-to-the-Sun road was developed six decades ago to allow access to the park's interior, and designed in such a way as to provide for scenic viewing in the park's back country for all visitors, it was felt the intrusiveness of scenic air tours was not an appropriate use for Glacier.

**Personal Watercraft.** The preferred alternative was selected because it will permanently ban personal watercraft from all park waters. The National Park Service considers the use of personal watercraft to be inconsistent with the purposes for which the park was established. The National Park Service is mandated by Glacier's enabling legislation, the Organic Act and other laws, regulations, and guidelines to ensure "the preservation of the park in a state of nature..." and to protect natural and cultural resources. The use of personal watercraft is contrary to preserving a state of nature and protecting resources while balancing visitor use. There are also many locations outside the park that allow personal watercraft. Because of the nature of personal watercraft and the high speeds used in their operation, their use provides little or no appreciation of park settings or heritage themes. The impacts on wildlife, water quality, and wetlands are also factors that weighed strongly against allowing personal watercraft activity in the park. The other alternative considered (No Action) would not have enabled the National Park Service to preserve Glacier National Park in a "state of nature" balancing the use of personal watercraft with other park uses.

**Winter Use.** The selected alternative identifies actions that would only be taken in response to an increase in winter visitation and use in Glacier National Park. This alternative was selected because it will perpetuate and provide for the continued enjoyment of traditional non-motorized activities in Glacier during the winter. Because winter in Glacier is a very stressful time for wildlife, this alternative provides the best way for the National Park Service to protect resources while providing for winter use. Responding to any increase in winter use only within existing facilities and or infrastructure will be the best way to address winter wildlife concerns and continue to provide a winter recreational experience. The other alternatives considered (Expand Winter Opportunities to Include Overnight Accommodations and No Action) were not selected due to the excessive cost of winterizing these facilities, questionable economic viability and the possible impacts to wildlife. The National Park Service is also concerned about future demands associated with opening these facilities in the winter including requests for snow coaches. Not providing winter overnight facilities is also more in accordance with the overall management philosophy. The No Action alternative was not selected because it did not allow the National Park Service to plan for potential increased use and would result in reactive rather than strategic management.

**Divide Creek Flood Hazard.** The preferred alternative was selected because it provides the best protection of resources, visitors and park staff and is in accordance with NPS policy. Moving the facilities provides the National Park Service with an opportunity to relocate east side operations to more efficient places since maintenance, housing and administrative facilities have no requirement to be in one location. The other alternatives considered (Channelize Divide Creek and No Action) were not selected because stabilization and channelization, particularly of this magnitude is in direct conflict with NPS policy on resource management in an active floodplain. The safety of park employees, their families and any visitors in this area cannot be adequately assured even with these actions.

**West Side Discovery Center and Museum.** The preferred alternative was selected because it is the best way to provide required and needed visitor education, resource protection and informational messages to communicate the purpose and significance of Glacier National Park and the world's first International Peace Park to over 60 percent of Glacier's visitors. The current visitor contact station in Apgar is a converted two-bedroom house, is too small and is out of the way and does not adequately serve the public. A new "discovery center" and museum will be more effective located near the main park entrance where the majority of visitors enter the west or Camas entrances of the park. The area between Apgar Village and the T-intersection is adjacent to development and utilities and minimizes impacts on wildlife. By placing



the center near the already developed portion of a corridor rather than in the middle of the corridor, a primary wildlife corridor is not divided between the Belton Hills and the Apgar Mountains. Consolidation of services now provided at park headquarters and the Glacier Institute will allow the discovery center to serve visitors all year round with overnight accommodations served by development in the adjacent Apgar Village. The other alternatives (Locate Discovery Center and Museum Outside the Park and No Action) were not selected because the current converted two bedroom house is unacceptable in the long term and placing a center outside the park boundary was evaluated in 1989. Several of the most favored locations have already been developed. Further, building a federal facility outside the park would mean either buying the necessary land (loss of property tax dollars) or working through the General Services Administration to have a building constructed and leased for use. Either option would be more expensive than building a center on land the government already owns. Based on experience in other parks, we also know that visitors are more willing to seek out educational messages once they are inside the park than before they enter. The nature of visitors' questions can be different at a center outside the park than inside the park. Hence the discovery center and museum will become a place to "connect with the park" and not just a stopping point before entry. No location outside the park is so strategically located that it would be convenient for visitors to pull into a center and receive critical park messages. A key use of the center will be to offer educational programming for youth. Nearly 5,000 students attend educational programs, many based out of the existing, but cramped Apgar visitor contact station and/or the environmental education cabin in Apgar. A new center in the park will allow the National Park Service to serve students better, with improved classroom space, and they continue the educational opportunity out the back door and into the park. Locating a center outside the park would not have the same effectiveness and would mean that students would start their educational experience in the center and then re-board the bus to go into the park. Around 20 years of planning has gone into trying to pick a suitable location, find a suitable partner or partners with whom to develop a center. In the end nothing has been built to serve the needs of visitors to Glacier National Park, in the "crown of the continent" ecosystem. No other organization has offered to join with us in a combined facility during this planning process. Visitors to the park deserve and desire a well-designed, effective learning center, and a center in the park can best meet the objective of providing the highest level of visitor service. Developing an effective center in the park with adequate space for the sale of interpretive and educational materials would allow for the reduction or elimination of that activity at Logan Pass Visitor Center which now serves as the defacto west side visitor center for many visitors because they miss the existing contact station in Apgar.

## **PUBLIC, INTERNATIONAL AND INTERAGENCY INVOLVEMENT**

Public comment and involvement has been requested, considered and incorporated throughout the development of the Glacier National Park General Management Plan. Public involvement began in March 1995 with scoping meetings. Initially two newsletters were sent to the public and nine open houses were held regionally. Consultation was conducted with the Montana State Historic Preservation Officer, the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council, the Salish-Kootenai Tribal Council and Salish and Kootenai Culture Committees. Waterton Lakes National Park staff, staff from the Flathead National Forest and the Lewis and Clark National Forest among others were also consulted. Over 2300 comments were received during scoping. In July, 1996 Newsletter 3 was released to the public and twelve public meetings were held in Montana and Canada. Approximately 1600 comments were received on Newsletter 3. In response to public concern and comment expressed park managers reevaluated many of the thoughts and ideas in Newsletter 3. The *Draft General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement* and an *Overview* were released in August, 1998 for a 90 day review period. A series of open houses and public hearings were held in Montana, Canada, Washington, Minnesota and Colorado. By the end of the comment period, 2709 written comments including testimony was received. In contrast to Newsletter 3, most of the comments received were very supportive of the Draft Plan. However, the public expressed concern about four main subjects: the economic impacts of reconstructing the Going-to-the-Sun Road; a concern that too many of the alternatives represented a move toward more development in the park; concern about the proposed new zoning system; and a perception that the preferred alternative for Winter Use was simply inviting more use to the park. In response to public comments, the preferred alternatives for the two Going-to-the-Sun Road issues were changed.

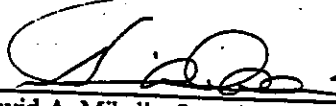
The National Park Service also heard from 1513 individuals who sent in pre-addressed post cards that had been sent out by one of the Park's concessioners, Glacier Park Incorporated. Comments were split about half-and-half on whether the hotels should be rehabilitated using private funds or public funds. Most of the commentators also supported making improvements to the hotels such as improving the heating system, soundproofing and access for visitors with disabilities. A much smaller number supported creating family suites and larger bathrooms. Very few supported hostel accommodations, TV/VCR in the rooms or swimming pools. Only a handful of comments were received that wanted health club facilities and computer access


Throughout the entire planning process all letters and comments have been read and reviewed by members of the park staff and planning team. For both Newsletter 3 and the comments on the Draft Plan, a database was created and the comments were entered to enable easier analysis and tracking of comments.

All substantive comments that were received on the *Draft General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement* were responded to in Volume 2 of the *Final General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement*. The *Final General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement* was released in July 1999 and made available for a 30-day no-action period that ended August 23, 1999. Approximately 700 copies of the *Final General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement* (Volume 1 and 2) were distributed and approximately 6500 copies of The *Final General Management Plan* (a 69-page version) were distributed. The US Fish and Wildlife Service sent a letter on August 30, 1999, saying that they would rely on further site-specific consultation as stated in the *Final General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement*. The Environmental Protection Agency Region VIII wrote that they support the selection of all the preferred alternatives identified in the Final. As they requested specific concerns that were too detailed to address in a General Management Plan will be carried forward and addressed in operation plans as they are developed and or revised.

Eighteen comments were received on the Final Plan and Environmental Impact Statement. Ten letters were supportive of the plan or elements of it and thanked the park for listening to public comments. One letter was received from the Alliance for the Wild Rockies (AWR) that asked for clarification on some aspects of the plan. Their first concern was about additional pullouts along the Going-to-the-Sun Road. In response, additional pullouts may be one of the alternatives considered in the Comprehensive Use Plan for the Going-to-the-Sun Road to be developed in the future. If they are considered in this plan, acreage and appropriate areas will be identified at that time. Another concern was in regards to reconstruction of the Going-to-the-Sun Road and their concern about preservation of natural and cultural resources during construction. In response, further studies on how to reconstruct the Going-to-the-Sun Road will be done with an environmental impact statement that will assess impacts to natural and cultural resources. The AWR urged the park to accommodate any increases in use during the winter only if monitoring of impacts was fully funded. They also stated that while they supported the construction of a west side discovery center and museum, that additional analysis on impacts to wildlife will need to be done. In response, the National Park Service will conduct the necessary compliance on this development. AWR strongly supported the ban on scenic air tours and personal watercraft. One letter from an individual opposed the ban on personal watercraft, one opposed the ban on scenic air tours. Another letter from an individual opposed the current restrictions on bicycles on the Sun Road between 11 and 4pm between June 15-Labor Day. Another letter from an individual felt that the National Park Service did not go far enough to preserve the park and felt that the plan is going too far in opening up the park to visitors. Another letter from an individual was supportive of all aspects of the plan except wanted motorboats banned on lakes. It also urged that the discovery center and museum be placed outside the park boundary, wanted to ban the use of power tools in the backcountry and felt that bicyclists should have higher priority on the road than visitors in cars. A letter from Flathead Wildlife Incorporated felt that the plan "properly reflected public input and will help preserve traditional park uses," but was concerned that there wasn't much discussion of fishing in the park. In response, fishing is a traditional use in Glacier National Park and the Plan does not change the ability of the public to fish in the park within the existing regulations.

All comments received throughout the planning effort are on file at park headquarters in West Glacier, Montana. Public comment, input and participation were a major factor in the success of this entire planning effort. Without overall public support of the Plan, the National Park Service would not be able to complete this planning effort or expect to implement the Plan.

Recommended:  Date: 8/31/99  
David A. Mihalic, Superintendent  
Glacier National Park  
National Park Service

Approved:  Date: 9/2/99  
John E. Cook, Regional Director  
Intermountain Region  
National Park Service

cc:  
Washington National Park Service Office of Environmental Policy  
Record of Decision mailing list