



## NEPA Process for Mount Rushmore Rock Climbing Area Hiking Trails and Parking

### Project Scoping for an Environmental Assessment

February 29, 2012

Dear Friend of Mount Rushmore National Memorial:

The National Park Service (NPS) is initiating the process to address safety and environmental issues related to parking and hiking access to six rock climbing areas within the Mount Rushmore National Memorial (Memorial). The NPS plans to prepare an Environmental Assessment (EA) to analyze various alternative actions.

The Memorial encompasses 1,278 acres in the Black Hills in southwestern South Dakota. Currently, the majority of visitation to the Memorial is for seeing the carved mountain. A very small amount of visitors come for rock climbing, nature observation and hiking in the park. Although rock climbing, nature observation, and hiking comprise only a limited amount of visitation, the Memorial considers these opportunities sufficiently important to provide management oversight.

There are six climbing areas that will be addressed in this project: South Seas, Chopping Block, Olton's Shoulder, Monster, Middle Marker, and Emancipation. The South Seas and Chopping Block climbing areas straddle the boundary between the Memorial and the Black Hills National Forest (BHNF). The other four climbing areas are completely within the Memorial. All six of the climbing areas are accessible from the Peter Norbeck Scenic Byway while two (South Seas and Chopping Block) are also accessible from the adjacent BHNF. Although there are other climbing areas in the park, this project will be limited to the six areas named above because funding for management activities would be through a grant from the National Scenic Byways Program.

Internal scoping by NPS has identified the following elements that should be considered when analyzing alternatives that will be developed in this EA process:

- Coordinate management activities with the adjacent Hell Canyon Ranger District (BHNF) to provide as much consistency as each agency's policies will allow;
- Determine which user-created hiking trails provide adequate access – maintenance should follow wilderness standards for design and construction;
- For hiking trails identified as necessary access to climbing areas, consider providing route markers to prevent future spider web of user-created trails;
- Rehabilitate unnecessary user-created trails to reduce erosion;
- Consider re-designing steep and eroded trails for user safety and resource protection;

- Consider potential impacts to sensitive plants - *Viola selkirkii* (Great-spurred violet) is known to occur in the Black Hills;
- Many users park at the Mount Rushmore sign on Highway 244. There is limited parking and it is filled to capacity during summer months. Safety issues include: 1) pull-offs are designed for 15 minute parking not day use parking, 2) poor line of sight for oncoming traffic, 3) there is no pedestrian safety for crossing highway, and 4) parking, backing, and unloading issue next to highway; and
- Consider whether the three existing information kiosks provide adequate user information and are in a location which best serves visitors.

The NPS is preparing this EA in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to provide the decision-making framework that 1) explores management alternatives to meet Memorial objectives, 2) evaluates potential impacts to Memorial resources and values, and 3) identifies mitigation measures to minimize the degree of these impacts.

The NPS encourages public/neighbor comments and participation during this NEPA process. There are two formal opportunities to comment: during this initial project scoping and again following release of the EA. I invite you to influence this process by voicing your ideas, suggestions, comments, or concerns related to Memorial rock climbing area hiking trail/parking management activities. These comments will be considered during preparation of the EA.

Sincerely,  
Cheryl A. Schreier  
Superintendent, Mount Rushmore National Memorial

## Overview of the Process

The basic steps of the NEPA process for this project include:

- **Initial public scoping (closes March 28, 2012)\***
- **Open House Meeting (March 14, 2012)\***
- Preparation of the EA
- **Public review of the EA\***
- Analysis of public comment on the EA
- Preparation of decision document
- Announcement of decision
- Implementation

\* indicates opportunities for public comment

## Resources and Concerns

The Environmental Assessment will analyze potential impacts to a number of resources including:

Soils, Water Resources (including Floodplains and Wetlands), Air Quality, Vegetation, Wildlife, Species of Special Concern, Cultural Resources, Soundscapes, Socioeconomics, Public Health and Safety, Memorial Operations, and Visitor Use and Experience.

## Ideas to Consider

Following are a few ideas to consider as you develop comments on this project:

1. Are there any missing issues or concerns that should be addressed in the EA?
2. Are there other alternatives or options that you think should be considered?
3. Do you have other comments and suggestions for us to consider in the EA?

## How Do I Comment on This Project?

Please submit your comments online at the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment website:

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

If you are unable to submit comments electronically, then you may submit written comments to:

Attention: Bruce Weisman  
Mount Rushmore National Memorial  
13000 Highway 244 Building 31, Suite 1  
Keystone, SD 57751

You may also hand-deliver written comments to the visitor center at Mount Rushmore National Memorial.

You may also attend an Open House with NPS staff on hand to visit with you, answer questions, and to record your input. Open House will be on March 14, 2012 from 5-7 pm at the Keystone Community Center.

**Please provide all initial comments by  
March 28, 2012.**

If you wish to be added to or removed from the Memorial's mailing list for future correspondence, please indicate that in your response.

Thanks for your time and consideration

