

# Tsankawi Unit Management Plan Bandelier National Monument

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

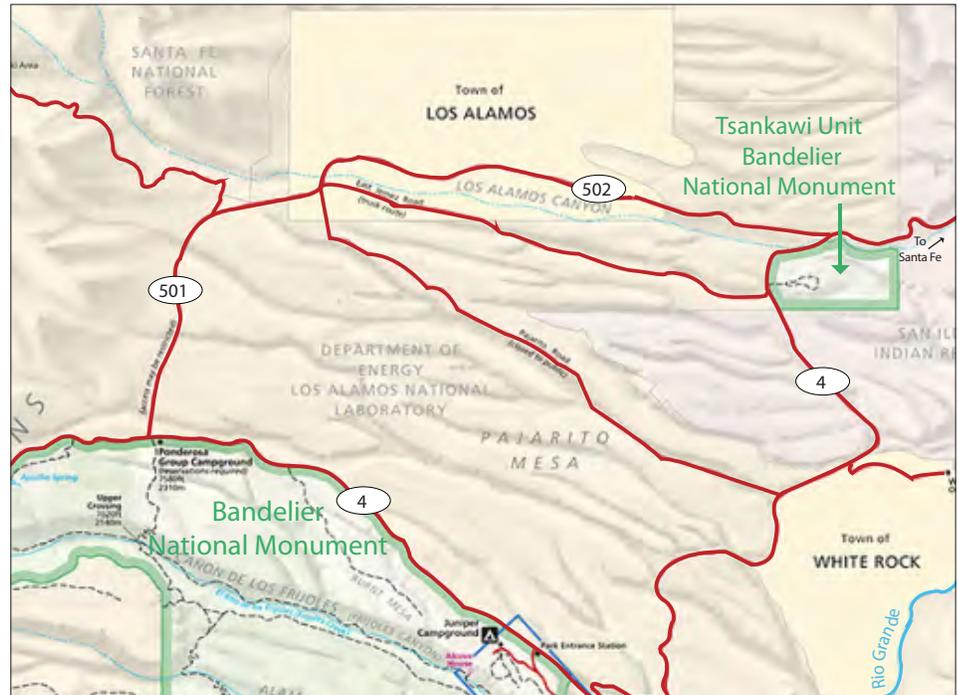


April 2012

The Tsankawi unit is an 826-acre area that is geographically separated from the main portion of Bandelier National Monument. Tsankawi is home to more than 150 archeological sites dating from Ancestral Pueblo occupancy of the Pajarito Plateau. Sites include cavates (a class of prehistoric habitations of the southwestern U.S. consisting of an excavated cave in the cliff face with the entrance often closed with masonry), masonry pueblos, Ancestral Pueblo and Spanish contact period petroglyphs, and other significant cultural resources.

## Project Background

The Tsankawi unit is of critical importance to the cultural heritage, beliefs, customs, practices, and history of a living community of people. The nearby San Ildefonso Pueblo is home to the direct descendants of the people who inhabited the area now referred to as the Tsankawi unit and whose culture is represented there. The people of San Ildefonso Pueblo continue to live in the area today and maintain a continuity of use that supports cultural identity and heritage, religious and spiritual values, and traditional practices. The Tsankawi unit forms a key component in their living cultural system and they believe that the area remains alive with the spirits



Area Map. - Photo Credit: NPS

of their ancestors. Ongoing cultural traditions, beliefs, and values are maintained through traditional, religious, and ceremonial uses and practices within the unit. Such living traditions and values enhance and enrich the cultural heritage of all Americans.

The National Park Service assumed management of the Tsankawi unit in 1932. At that time, land use practices such as grazing and firewood gathering were discontinued. However, long-term planning associated with visitor access and resource protection did not begin until recently.

Because the area is separated from the main portion of Bandelier

National Monument, the Tsankawi unit is one of the few parts of the monument not directly impacted by the Las Conchas fire that burned approximately 60% of the monument in June 2011. Because of the severe fire damage, subsequent flooding, and continued threats to cultural and natural resources, portions of the monument were closed to visitors for extended periods of time. As a result, visitation at the Tsankawi unit increased by 68% over 2010 figures—a trend that is expected to continue. This plan seeks to identify an appropriate management strategy and visitor amenities (i.e., infrastructure

Project Background cont. on page 2



Photo Credit: NPS

**Project Background cont. from page 1**

contact station, trails, etc.) that would enhance the visitor experience while increasing resource protection.

Currently, designated visitor access to the Tsankawi unit is on the east side of State Road 4. The parking area is within the highway right-of-way and is not owned or maintained by the National Park Service. Heavy traffic on this road as well as East Jemez Road makes access to the Tsankawi unit parking area challenging, particularly during the morning and evening rush hour when traffic volumes are high.

A short path from the parking area leads to visitor orientation and restroom facilities. The Tsankawi Loop Trail ascends east from the visitor facilities area to Tsankawi Mesa. Parking and visitor facilities do not currently comply with accessibility regulations for persons with limited mobility. The Tsankawi Loop Trail, parking area, and visitor facilities are the only developed areas of the Tsankawi unit. Remaining areas of the site are open to visitation and are treated as self-guided facilities without designated trails or interpretation.

North of Tsankawi Mesa are Duchess Castle—an early 20th century cultural site—and North Mesa, which is home to rock formations containing cavates, petroglyphs, and other features. These areas are undeveloped, with no designated trails or parking areas. Currently, informal parking occurs along the State Road 4 shoulder, near the State Road 502 access ramp. When visiting these areas, visitors often use the commuter parking lot on the opposite side of State Road 4 making it difficult for park staff to know when visitors are accessing this portion of the Tsankawi unit. This presents both a visitor safety issue because the site is remote and has no designated access, and a resource protection issue because this area contains sensitive cultural resources.

The purpose of this project and unit management plan is to develop alternatives for site access, infrastructure, and visitor experience for the entire Tsankawi unit. The resulting environmental assessment and preferred alternative would most appropriately support resource protection, a high-quality visitor experience, and efficient unit operation.

## Purpose of and Need for Action

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The Tsankawi Unit Management Plan will provide guidance and direction for the next 10 years regarding visitor safety, accessibility, and resource protection. The purpose of developing a unit management plan for the Tsankawi unit is to:

- Reduce impacts to cultural and natural resources and provide safe, accessible visitor services in response to increasing visitor presence at Tsankawi due to the Las Conchas fire.
- Provide safe access to the site as traffic conditions on State Road 4 change. Because State Road 4 also provides access to the monument's neighbor, Los Alamos National Laboratory, activities at the lab, such as construction and commuter traffic, have the potential to limit safe access to Tsankawi.
- Identify desired future conditions for resources and visitor experience at Tsankawi.
- Develop and implement an adaptive management strategy that identifies a range of management options available to achieve the established desired conditions, and includes resource and visitor experience monitoring and thresholds for action to ensure that objectives are being met.
- Move facilities, such as parking areas, onto National Park Service land while improving the safety and accessibility of these facilities.

# Objectives

Objectives are what must be achieved to a large degree for the action to be considered a success. Alternatives developed for this project must meet the objectives to a large degree and resolve the purpose of and need for action. The following draft objectives were developed for this project:

- Guide management decisions consistent with protection of resource values.
- Reduce visitation impacts on cultural and natural resources.
- Support long-term ecosystem restoration that will continue for decades.

- Provide improved visitor understanding, respect for, and appreciation of the unique resources of the Tsankawi unit while honoring requests of our Pueblo neighbors.
- Improve visitor safety and provide a reasonable amount of accessibility to cultural and natural resources.
- Define the relationship between the natural resources present on the Pajarito Plateau and the associated history of human habitation and use.

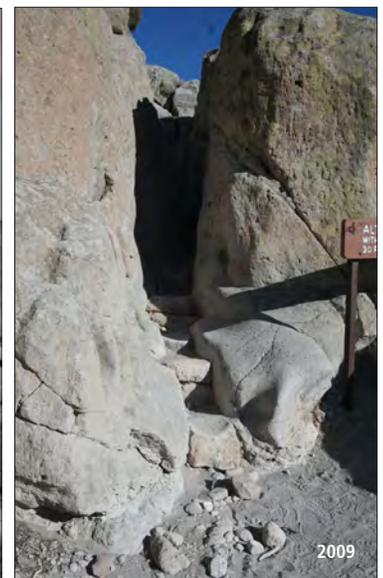
# Issues

In addition to the visitor access issues mentioned above, changes in the management of Tsankawi are necessary to address a variety of other concerns, including:

- Tsankawi unit resources are showing signs of wear that reflect visitor use and natural erosion processes. Trails used by Ancestral Pueblo residents are eroding and incising into the landscape as a result of heavy visitation. This is also true for cavates and other sensitive resources.
- Interpretive information and programming does not support a full understanding of the history, cultural and natural resources, and sensitivity of the Tsankawi unit. The site of the Ancestral Pueblo village overlooks a landscape that has been subject to thousands of years of human use—a valuable park feature not currently presented to visitors.
- During the summer months, temperatures are high, often accompanied by afternoon thunderstorms. With few visitor amenities, visitors should bring water, sun protection, and other items to help shield them from the elements.
- The interpretive experience should address resource protection and the fragile nature of the site’s cultural and natural resources.



Above: Loss of cavate entry features over time. - Photo Credit: NPS  
Below: Incising of trail over time. - Photo Credit: NPS





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**Your Participation Will Help Shape the Plan**

The National Park Service needs your input to develop a plan that will meet project objectives. When commenting on the future of the Tsankawi unit, please consider the following questions.

- What type of visitor experience(s) would best match the unparalleled resources of the Tsankawi unit?
- What type of development would be most appropriate at the Tsankawi unit—paved or unpaved trails, staffed ranger station or automated fee machine?
- Are there particular resources that are important to showcase for visitors? Why?
- Are there particular resources that the public should not have access to? Why?

**Public Scoping Meeting**

On *May 9, 2012*, the National Park Service will hold two public open house meetings at the Fuller Lodge Art Center to provide an opportunity for the public to learn more about the project, have discussions with park staff, and provide comments.

*The meetings will be held from 11:00 a.m.—1:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m.—7:00 p.m.*

Maps and displays will provide information about the project. There will be opportunities to provide input in writing or during the public comment portion of the meeting.

Fuller Lodge Art Center is located at:  
 2132 Central Avenue, Los Alamos, NM 87544  
 Phone: 505-662-1635

Comments will also be accepted on the National Park Service’s Tsankawi project website at:

*<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/Tsankawi>*

**Plan and Environmental Assessment Schedule**

Public Scoping	Spring 2012
Alternatives Development	Summer 2012
Analyze Impacts of Alternatives	Fall 2012/Winter 2013
Environmental Assessment for Public Review	Spring 2013
Decision Document	Summer 2013
Implementation	Summer 2013 and Beyond