



AREA MASTER PLAN



Public Outreach for the Development of Alternatives

Dear friends of Bering Land Bridge National Preserve,

In the Fall of 2011, a NPS planning team began work on a master plan for the Serpentine Hot Springs area. This plan will guide management decisions and potential future development on lands in and around Serpentine Hot Springs.

In the winter of 2009-2010, we held public meetings as part of the Serpentine Hot Springs Access Study and asked for your ideas and concerns regarding Serpentine Hot Springs. Taking your feedback into account, we have identified a range of potential changes and improvements the NPS may consider as part of this plan. In this newsletter, we would like to share with you these potential changes.

The potential improvements and changes presented in this newsletter are guided by Bering Land Bridge National Preserve's legislated purpose and its significance to all people, primary interpretive themes, administrative mandates and commitments.

Later in the planning process, after we receive additional feedback from the

public, the planning team will package these potential changes and improvements as alternatives and then analyze them in an Environmental Assessment (EA) document. We will compare these alternatives against a "no-action" alternative where management would remain unchanged and would not address current or near-term planning needs.

Please review the potential changes and improvements identified in the workbook section of this newsletter. Please tell us whether they identify an appropriate range of options for future management of Serpentine Hot Springs. It is possible that you may like some, but not all, of the elements identified in the newsletter, or maybe you have an entirely different vision that would address the area's needs. Please share with us your likes, dislikes, and other ideas. This feedback is essential for us to formulate the future direction for Bering Land Bridge National Preserve.

After reviewing the potential changes and improvements, you will have a variety of options for sending us your comments : you can return the enclosed comment form or mail a letter to the park; submit your

comments electronically via the internet or e-mail; or if you live in the area, you can provide your comments at one of the open houses we will conduct this spring (please see the 'How to be Involved' section of this newsletter for more details). You are always welcome to call the Superintendent or staff to provide comment.

The planning team will review all comments submitted; however, comments received by June 30th, 2012 will be most helpful for this phase of planning.

I appreciate your interest in the management of Serpentine Hot Springs and Bering Land Bridge National Preserve, and look forward to your continued involvement in this important planning process.

Jeanette Pomrenke

Superintendent
Bering Land Bridge National Preserve

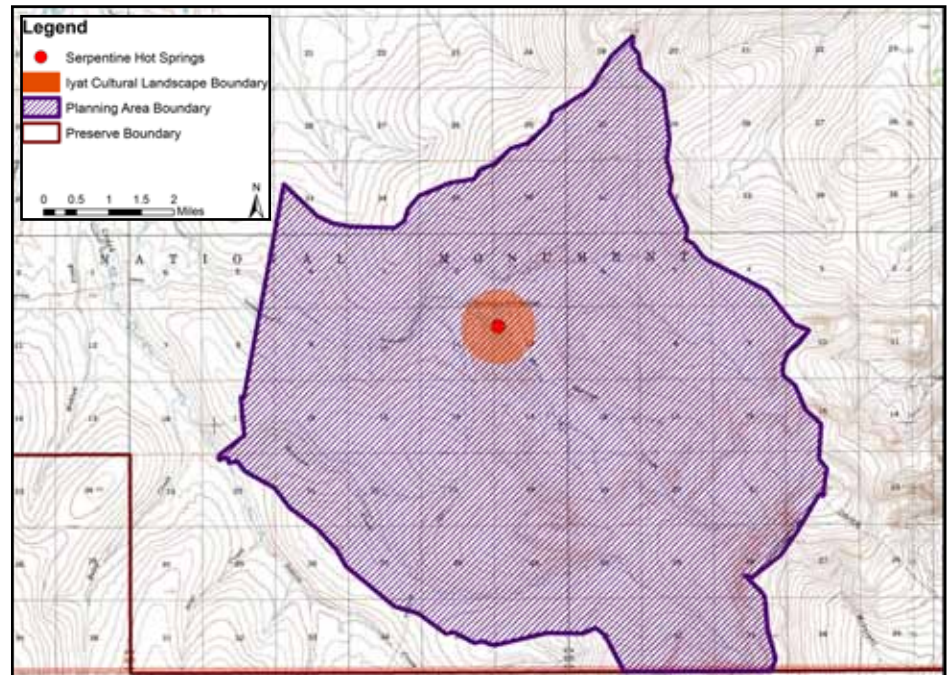
Project Overview

Project Overview:

Serpentine Hot Springs is one of the most revered places on the Seward Peninsula. It is a site that has been used continuously by residents of the region for at least 12,000 years. Serpentine Hot Springs contains significant archeological, historic, natural, recreational, spiritual, and subsistence values. The hot springs are located approximately 13 miles from the end of the Nome-Taylor Highway and eight miles north of Bering Land Bridge National Preserve's southern boundary. 2010 visitation to the site is estimated to be 2,145 visitor use days.

The 1986 General Management Plan stated that Serpentine Hot Springs is the most frequently visited area of Bering Land Bridge National Preserve. At that time the existing development was a 1,110-foot landing strip, a 20- by 54- foot cabin, a 15-square-foot bathhouse, and an outhouse. The plan proposed the construction of a new NPS administrative cabin that would also be available for public use. In accordance with the plan, if the existing structures cannot be repaired or if they are destroyed by wind or fire, the Park Service will replace them with structures similar to the existing structures. The plan also suggested the Park Service not make any improvements to access such as improving the trail from Taylor, constructing an off-road vehicle trail, or allowing recreational use of helicopters.

Since 1986 facilities at Serpentine have deteriorated to the point where they will soon need to be replaced and there has been some public support for improved access to the site. The purpose of the Serpentine Hot Springs Master Plan will be to update the 1986 GMP with guidance and direction for the future development and management of the Serpentine Hot Springs area of Bering Land Bridge National Preserve.



This map shows the plan's two study areas. The purple demarcates the Tors Area (approximately 28,000 acres). The inventoried cultural landscape (500 acres), the Iyat Area, is identified by the orange band, and Serpentine Hot Springs is marked with the red dot.

Planning Area:

The planning team has divided the lands under consideration as part of this planning process into two distinct study areas. Each area will have different, yet complementary, desired visitor and resource conditions (grounded in the preserve's fundamental resources and values that were identified in the 2008 Foundation Statement), levels of development, and management goals.

Iyat Area: This plan will focus primarily on the area immediately around the hot springs features at Serpentine Hot Springs. This area is defined by the boundary of the area identified in the Cultural Landscape Inventory (CLI) completed in 2003 (approximately 500 acres). This area is identified in the map above by the orange circle.

Based on historical and existing uses and the current levels of development, the NPS is considering removing the acres within the Iyat Area from Wilderness Eligibility. This means that while the NPS would continue to protect the resources and landscape, this area would be excluded from future Wilderness proposals.

Tors Area: A secondary area considered in the development of this plan is referred to as the Tors Area (approximately 28,000 acres). This area includes the geologic features that figure prominently in the scenery of the area. The Tors Area has been studied as part of this project because it adds significantly to the character and experience of Serpentine Hot Springs, and it also is one of the most popular areas for dispersed uses in the preserve.

Project Issues and Major Goals

Issues:

Access: The legislation that created Bering Land Bridge National Preserve (ANILCA section 201(2)) states that one of the preserve's purposes is "to provide outdoor recreation and environmental education, including public access for recreation at Serpentine Hot Springs."

Current access is primarily by fixed-wing aircraft in the summer months and snowmachines in the winter. While winter access is aided on some routes by the use of trail markers, summer visitors are limited in their options. Some visitors walk in from the end of the Nome-Taylor Highway, but the majority fly. The existing airstrip is short (1100') and it is infrequently maintained. Few commercial operators will fly into Serpentine Hot Springs. There has been an ongoing dialogue about how to improve access to Serpentine Hot Springs since the preserve's inception in 1980. This plan needs to identify how the NPS can improve access to ensure visitation can continue in a safe and efficient manner.

Facilities: Existing facilities include a 1940's bunkhouse, a cedar hot tub enclosed in a wood frame structure, and an outhouse. There are reports of occasional crowding and conflict between groups converging on the site. Sanitation issues have arisen in the past, and the transportation and storage of heating fuel is an ongoing concern. Additionally, the bunkhouse rests on an island between the main branch of Hot Springs Creek and a secondary branch and seasonal high water is an issue of concern. These facilities will need to be replaced in the near future and this plan is an opportunity to recommend new locations at the site for the facilities as well as to possibly recommend new types of facilities.



Visitor Experience: The Serpentine Hot Springs area contains significant park resources. The unique environments created by the hot springs also provide habitat for some rare aquatic plant species. Serpentine Hot Springs is also a site of great importance to the residents of the Seward Peninsula. This landscape provides for the continued use by a broad spectrum of people; soakers, hunters, and traditional healers, to name a few.

Wilderness Eligibility: All lands in the national park system must be assessed to determine if they are eligible or ineligible for inclusion in the national wilderness preservation system. To meet this requirement, Bering Land Bridge National Preserve included a wilderness suitability review as part of its 1986 General Management Plan (GMP). That plan found the area around Serpentine Hot Springs "suitable" for wilderness. However, designated Wilderness is managed primarily for specific social and resource conditions (solitude, untrammelled, undeveloped, and naturalness). There is the potential for administrative conflicts with the requirements of Wilderness if Serpentine Hot Springs is to continue to be managed in a manner consistent with its history.

Goals and Objectives:

Listed below are some of the major goals and objectives of this plan that have been identified thus far. These ideas have been identified through internal and public scoping and through the work of the NPS planning team.

- Facilities should be of a scale and design that does not dominate or detract from the area's natural setting.
- If relocated, facilities should be moved to maximize site opportunities and minimize site constraints and negative impacts.
- Facilities should embrace sustainable technology and techniques.
- Improvements to access should make Serpentine safer to access.
- Improvements to access should not degrade park resources or visitor experience at Serpentine Hot Springs.
- Access improvements should respect the existing policies which guide management of the preserve.
- Improvements to access should be fiscally feasible.
- The plan should identify opportunities for interpretation, education, and outreach.
- The plan could update the preserve's Wilderness status and propose to remove the 500 acre Iyat Area (the Cultural Landscape) from eligibility because of a documented history of uses and developments not typically considered compatible with Wilderness designation.

Workbook Exercise #1: Potential Access Options

Background: Serpentine Hot Springs is a difficult place to access. Current access is primarily by fixed-wing aircraft in the summer months and snowmachines in the winter, and there are several months in the spring and fall where conditions impede both means of access. While winter access is aided on some routes by the use of trail markers, summer visitors are limited in their options. Some summer visitors walk in from the end of the Nome-Taylor Highway, however, the majority fly. The existing airstrip is short even by bush Alaska standards (1100') and it is infrequently maintained. There have been some reported aircraft mishaps and few commercial operators will fly into Serpentine Hot Springs.

Some potential access improvements currently under consideration as part of this plan include:

- **Minor Extension of the Runway:** The runway would maintain the same basic orientation. There could be extensions at either end to lengthen the runway. Extensions would equal up to 400' total and would likely not require stabilizing or rerouting Hot Springs Creek.
- **Major Extension of the Runway:** The runway would maintain the same basic orientation, but would be extended primarily to the west. This level of extension would likely require stabilization and/or rerouting of Hot Springs Creek, and the extension could be up to 1000' (based on existing site conditions).
- **Increased Trail Markers for Winter Access:** This is an expansion of the existing system of trail markers. The NPS would continue to maintain markers to both Shishmaref and the Kougark Road and could, when feasible, add markers to other communities on the Seward Peninsula.
- **Improvements for Summer Hike-In Visitation:** The NPS could make improvements to things such as wayfinding, route brushing, and safety amenities to create more opportunity for people to hike in from the Nome-Taylor Highway.

Access Improvements Not Moving Forward in the Planning Process: The **2011 Serpentine Hot Springs Access Study** (available online at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/projectHome.cfm?projectID=36603>) studied several other access improvements that the NPS does not consider viable alternatives for this planning process. Dismissed from consideration at this time are: the construction of a 13 mile gravel road that would connect Serpentine Hot Springs to the Nome-Taylor highway; a 3400' long runway approximately 1.2 miles from the hot springs; and a geogrid trail that would follow a route similar to the gravel road option. The NPS is not pursuing these options further at this time for many of the same reasons. It was felt that the impacts to resources would be too great, these options would change the experience at Serpentine Hot Springs in a way not favored by the majority of the public, and the costs associated with each option were not viewed as being realistic in the current fiscal climate. Commercial access by helicopter is not being studied as part of this planning effort because it is a permitting issue and not a site planning issue.



Exercise Questions:

What sort of changes or improvements to access to Serpentine Hot Springs would you like to see implemented over the coming years?

Which means of access do you feel are most appropriate for Serpentine Hot Springs?

Are there any access options listed above that you feel are not appropriate for Serpentine Hot Springs?

Do you feel there other options not mentioned here that the NPS should consider as part of this plan?

Workbook Exercise #2: Potential Facilities Options

Background: The facilities at Serpentine Hot Springs are old and starting to fail. Existing facilities include a 1940's bunkhouse, a cedar hot tub enclosed in a wood frame structure, and an outhouse. There are reports of occasional crowding and conflict between groups converging on the site. Sanitation issues have arisen in the past, and the transportation and storage of heating fuel is an ongoing concern. Additionally, the bunkhouse rests on an island between the main branch of the Hot Springs Creek and a secondary branch and seasonal high water is an issue of concern. These facilities will need to be replaced in the near future and this plan is an opportunity to recommend new locations at the site for the facilities as well as to possibly recommend new types of facilities.

Some potential facilities improvements under consideration as part of this plan could include:

- **Relocate the Bunkhouse:** Given the threats posed by the hydrology of Hot Springs Creek to the existing facilities, the NPS could relocate the bunkhouse.
- **Add Additional Bunk Space:** When it comes time to replace the Serpentine bunkhouse, the NPS could add space for more beds.
- **Add a Cabin:** A new cabin could be used for administrative purposes (to keep the bunkhouse available for the public when the NPS is on site for maintenance, patrols, or research). This cabin could also be available for reservation by the public.
- **Designate a Camping Area:** If the demand exists, the NPS could designate an area for camping and add amenities such as seating, fire pits, or food storage.
- **Arctic Hot Springs:** The Serpentine Hot Springs area has a second hot spring located approximately 1/4 mile from the existing bathhouse. Historically, this spring, known as Arctic Hot Springs, was a focus of use. As part of this planning process, the NPS could propose to reestablish some use of Arctic Hot Springs by visitors.



Current bunkhouse location at Serpentine Hot Springs.



One potential new location for the bunkhouse (on piers off the edge of the airstrip's apron).

Exercise Questions:

Is there the need for more bed space at Serpentine Hot Springs?

If the bunkhouse had to be relocated, where would be the best place to put it?

Would you like to have the option to book a public use cabin at Serpentine, in addition to the existing first come-first served bunkhouse? If there was a public use cabin, where should it be located?

Are you interested in seeing Arctic Hot Springs used again?

What other changes to facilities at Serpentine Hot Springs would you like to see? What changes do you feel are best avoided, and why?

Workbook Exercise #3: Safety and Other Improvement Options

Background: There are many things that could be considered as part of this planning process to make getting to Serpentine Hot Springs safer, and to make the experiences for visitors to the site more enjoyable. Any changes or improvements to safety or visitor experience will first be analyzed and weighed against the project goals of protecting the sense of place of Serpentine Hot Springs, the resources of the area, and those aspects of the experience that the public has expressed affinity for.

Potential safety and other improvements under consideration as part of this plan could include:

- **Aviation Safety Improvements:** The unimproved landing strip at Serpentine Hot Springs may benefit from having some safety improvements made. Brainstorming sessions have included ideas such as a web cam so people can check weather conditions and crowding before flying into the preserve, incorporating a weather station into the hot springs site for better information, and adding some infrastructure such as aircraft tie-downs or an equipment lean-to.
- **Bathroom Facilities:** The NPS is exploring options to improve toilet options at Serpentine Hot Springs. Some possible changes could include things such as building a single pit style outhouse to replace the existing one, adding an additional outhouse, and upgrading the current situation with a composting type toilet system.
- **Stream Stabilization:** Hot Springs Creek has shifted its course and now flows around both sides of the bunkhouse and bathhouse. This shift appears to be the result of natural river hydrology and changes to the upstream environment by beavers. Longterm use of the hot spring in its current location may require the stabilization of the river upstream of Serpentine Hot Springs and the periodic removal of beavers. Please note that there is some downstream stabilization and modification proposed if it is decided that the airstrip is to be expanded.
- **Interpretive Improvements:** Currently, the NPS maintains a minimal interpretive program at Serpentine Hot Springs. There is the opportunity to change this as part of this planning effort. For example, the NPS could increase information available at the Hot Springs for visitors, increase the interpretive program for the site to include more about the history of the area, or provide a hardened trail and signage at Arctic Hot Springs near the western end of the site.



Aircraft parked at Serpentine Hot Springs.



The creek now flows heavily behind the bunkhouse during high water events.

Workbook Exercise #3: Safety and Other Improvement Options (Continued)

- **Tors Area Shelter Cabin:** The NPS could build and maintain a small shelter cabin away from the Hot Springs area. The primary purpose would be to provide emergency shelter for people traveling to and from Serpentine Hot Springs via the route from the Nome-Taylor Highway, but it could also be available for recreational use by people who want to engage in dispersed activities.

Exercise Questions:

What sort of aviation improvements would you like to see at Serpentine Hot Springs?

If a shelter cabin were to be built in the Tors Area, where do you think it should be located?

Please feel free to provide any additional comments using this workbook, online, or with a phone call to the preserve.

How to Get Involved

The goal of this part of the planning process is to generate and test ideas to help inform the alternatives that will be developed as part of the Master Plan/EA. After this round of public involvement, the NPS will draft a set of alternatives and share them with the public before writing the Master Plan/EA.

Your ideas and concerns are welcomed and encouraged. Comments can be sent by mail, shared at an open house, or submitted electronically (email address listed below). Please consider the questions listed in the workbook portion of this newsletter in addition to any other thoughts and ideas. Receiving your input before June 30th, 2012 will allow us to learn from you before we continue to refine the Serpentine Hot Springs Master Plan.

Share your comments electronically:

<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/projectHome.cfm?projectID=36603>

Share your comments at an open house:

You can provide your comments (verbally or in writing) at the upcoming open houses. We invite you to attend one of the open house meetings to talk with the planning team firsthand about your ideas, experiences, and questions. The open house schedule is listed on the right.

Mail your comment form or letters to:

Serpentine Hot Springs Planning Team
Environmental Planning and Compliance
240 W. 5th Ave
Anchorage, AK 99501

Email your input to:

zachary_babb@nps.gov



Please join us at an Open House!

This spring, the park will host meetings with the public to hear your ideas, concerns, and thoughts. Open houses will be held in Nome, Shishmaref, and Kotzebue, Alaska.

OPEN HOUSES:

May 23rd, 2012

11:00am to 5:00pm

Shishmaref, AK

May 24th, 2012

4:00pm to 7:30pm

Kotzebue Location TBD

May 26th, 2012

11:00am to 5:00pm

Mini-Convention Center

Nome, AK



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Bering Land Bridge National Preserve
PO Box 220
Nome, AK 99762

First Class Mail
Postage and Fees
P A I D
City, State
Permit number

EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA™



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

The purpose of Bering Land Bridge National Preserve is to protect and provide opportunity to study and interpret the landscape which contains an invaluable record of floral, faunal, and human migration between Asia and North America and which supports an ongoing traditional subsistence culture.

Bering Land Bridge National Preserve
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<http://www.nps.gov/bela/index.htm>

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The National Park Service cares for the special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

Master Plan Timeline

This Master Plan will update the 1986 General Management Plan to fulfill the mandate to provide for outdoor and environmental education and public access for recreational purposes (ANILCA 201(2)). The master planning process for Serpentine Hot Springs is expected to take almost two years to complete. There will be an environmental assessment (EA) completed in conjunction with the master plan to ensure that the National Park Service is in full compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act.

Planning Timetable			
	NPS Planning Activity	Dates	Description
Step 1	Collect public input	Fall 2010, Winter 2011	Public meetings were held as part of the Access Study.
Step 2	Develop potential changes and improvements that could occur as part of this plan.	Fall 2011 to Winter 2012	Grounded in public input and information gathered from the Access Study, park staff and the planning team started to identify what future options might exist for Serpentine Hot Springs.
Step 3 (We are here)	Share Potential Changes with the Public	Spring 2012	Newsletter #2 released, and public meetings held to share ideas, gather further input from the public, and to start to shape alternatives.
Step 4	Prepare Master Plan/EA Distribute to the Public	Summer 2012 to Winter 2012	The planning team will prepare the plan/EA and share it with the public.