



PUBLIC SCOPING for a proposal to Construct Replacement Park Housing at Many Glacier and in East Glacier Environmental Assessment

Background—Ten National Park Service (NPS) owned trailers in the St. Mary District employee housing area on the east side of Glacier National Park are severely deteriorated and in need of replacement. Set up in the 1960's, the trailers were intended to be temporary, and using trailers for temporary housing was common throughout the NPS at the time. Lack of funding for permanent housing has led to their continued use, and the trailers have finally deteriorated from age, rodent infestations, mold, and other factors. One has been condemned, and three others can no longer be used and have been removed from the park's housing inventory.

An NPS-wide trailer replacement initiative in 2004 approved the removal and replacement of the St. Mary trailers. The park considered several areas where new housing could be constructed, including Rising Sun, the Swiftcurrent employee housing area at Many Glacier,

and the NPS ranger station compound in East Glacier, among others. Leasing private land outside the park through the General Services Administration was also considered, but this would likely require additional funds to develop water and sewer utilities. The park also thoroughly explored leasing excess housing from U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and/or co-locating new housing with the CBP at Piegan. The CBP later determined that they required all of their housing, but gave the park the option to build on a piece of their land. The park decided not to pursue this option due to a high water table at the site and because the NPS would be responsible for a number of high cost infrastructure upgrades.

The Swiftcurrent housing area at Many Glacier and the NPS compound in East Glacier were initially dismissed due to longer commuting distances for employees. Currently, these areas are considered the best options for replacement housing. Both have adequate existing utilities and building at the sites would cause the least amount of new disturbance. Therefore, the park is proposing to construct new housing at Swiftcurrent and in East Glacier to replace the St. Mary trailers. Both of these areas are historic districts.

In accordance with Executive Order 11988 (Floodplain Management) and NPS policy, the park will not rebuild at the existing site in St. Mary because it is located in the Divide Creek floodplain (Figure 1). E.O. 11988 states that proposed facilities must be located outside the 100-year floodplain unless there is no alternative location, and the NPS 2006 *Management Policies* require the NPS to manage for the preservation of floodplain values and minimize potential flood hazards.

By removing the St. Mary trailers, the park will begin implementing a decision from the 1999 *General Management Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision* (GMP) to relocate all St. Mary infrastructure out of the Divide Creek flood hazard zone. Divide Creek floods frequently, usually as a result of rain-on-snow events, putting human safety and government property at potential risk. The park has a flood warning system and evacuation/response plan in place, and the stream channel has been stabilized by the Blackfeet Tribe and the NPS to minimize flood risk. But as stated in the GMP, "Stabilization... is in direct conflict with NPS policy on resource management" and does not adequately ensure the safety of park employees and visitors.



Figure 1: Aerial view of the Divide Creek floodplain, with the St. Mary NPS employee residential trailers shown in the lower right corner (circled).

Objectives

- Replace deteriorated NPS employee housing with safe, sanitary, functional housing.
- Minimize new disturbance and tie into existing infrastructure as much as possible.
- Minimize impacts to park employees as much as possible.
- Use green building practices.
- Use building designs that are compatible with adjacent historic buildings within the Many Glacier (Swiftcurrent) Ranger Station Historic District and the East Glacier Ranger Station Historic District.
- Begin implementing a 1999 *General Management Plan* decision to relocate park infrastructure out of the Divide Creek floodplain.

Alternatives Identified to Date

- *No Action*—do not replace employee housing once the St. Mary trailers are condemned and removed.
- *Alternative A*—construct replacement housing in the Swiftcurrent housing area at Many Glacier and at the NPS ranger station compound in East Glacier.
- *Alternative B*—construct replacement housing behind the 1913 St. Mary Ranger Station, above the St. Mary Campground, at Rising Sun, or outside the park.

Concerns and Issues

- Human safety.
- Natural floodplain function.
- Risks to government property and infrastructure.
- Impacts to park employees.
- Effects on historic districts and cultural resources.
- New disturbance to vegetation, soils, and wildlife.



NPS residential trailers at St. Mary, NPS photo.

Environmental Assessment Process

- Public Scoping
- Preparation of Plan/Environmental Assessment (EA)
- Public Review of Plan/EA
- Analysis of Public Comments
- Decision Document

Public Comments During Scoping

Your comments will help identify issues, concerns, and other alternatives to evaluate in the EA. There will be another opportunity for you to comment when the plan/EA is completed. Please post your scoping comments online at:

www.parkplanning.nps.gov/EastSideHousing

Or send comments to:

Superintendent, Glacier National Park

Attn: East Side Housing EA

PO Box 128

West Glacier, MT 59936

Phone: 406-888-7901

Please provide comments by

August 6, 2012