

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
COMPREHENSIVE DESIGN PLAN
BARTLETT COVE
GLACIER BAY NATIONAL PARK

INTRODUCTION

The National Park Service (NPS) has prepared a plan for the future of the Bartlett Cove developed area of Glacier Bay National Park. Details of the plan were included in the Comprehensive Design Plan/Environmental Assessment (CDP/EA) published in September 1997.

The 1984 General Management Plan for Glacier Bay National Park designated Bartlett Cove as the only developed area within the park. Since that time visitation has increased and visitation patterns have changed, management responsibilities and associated information needs have increased, and utilities have aged. The CDP/EA was undertaken to examine these new conditions and outline a preferred course of action for the future.

PROPOSAL

The preferred alternative in the CDP/EA called for upgrading existing utility systems, and constructing a new maintenance facility, visitor access center, research center, tribal house, and additional lodging. The alternative also recommended removing some developments from sensitive areas, accommodating the increased needs of administration by adapting existing facilities, and moderately expanding Glacier Bay Lodge visitor facilities.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

In addition to the proposal, a no action alternative and an alternative that implemented the actions outlined by the 1984 General Management Plan were considered. Alternative A (no action) outlined the status quo; no facilities beyond those existing would be constructed and all existing facilities would remain as is. Alternative B would implement those actions described in the 1984 General Management Plan. This alternative included the construction of a new maintenance facility at the old landfill site, upgraded utilities, additional accommodations (up to 15 visitor rooms and a 30-bed hostel), expansion of the lodge to accommodate increased visitor use, construction of 6 additional seasonal beds and 1 additional single family house, and construction of a recreational facility for park staff.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Initial scoping meetings were held in Bartlett Cove in fall 1996 to identify potential issues and needs. These meetings were attended by park staff, planning staff from the NPS Denver Service Center, and representatives from Glacier Bay Lodge, Inc., the

community of Gustavus, and the Hoonah Indian Association. Information gathered at these meetings was used to develop three alternatives for consideration.

The CDP/EA was released for public review on October 1997. The public review period closed on December 31, 1997. Public workshops were held in Gustavus and Hoonah on December 15 and 16, 1997 respectively. A total of 42 people attended both meetings. The NPS received a total of 51 written comments during the comment period. Public comment focused on the need to approach additional development at Bartlett Cove cautiously and only after integrating development plans with backcountry access plans (i.e., vessel management and backcountry permitting). Many commentators noted that Bartlett Cove is an integral part of many visitor's experience in Glacier Bay National Park and expressed interest in preserving opportunities for Bartlett Cove visitors to experience quiet and a sense of solitude. Many were also concerned that construction of additional facilities – in particular those not directly related to visitor access – would detract from the natural setting surrounding Bartlett Cove and could potentially impact sensitive habitats.

FINAL ALTERNATIVE DESCRIPTION

The NPS decision regarding future development addresses public concern regarding the need to verify the carrying capacity for Bartlett Cove and coordinate all public access strategies. Numerous actions proposed in the preferred alternative have been revised to better address resource and public concerns. The final alternative incorporates public concerns by limiting future development at Bartlett Cove to that deemed essential to carrying out NPS mandates. In addition, site reviews will be conducted prior to all construction to ensure that both cultural and natural resource concerns are addressed. In general, construction activities will be planned to minimize ground disturbance and vegetation, wildlife and visitor impacts.

Specific actions described in the CDP/EA, public comment regarding those actions and the NPS decision for each component are addressed below. All proposed construction is subject to funding availability in future years.

Park Headquarters: Public comment regarding park headquarters was largely in favor of the preferred alternative's action which calls for maintaining headquarters at the existing location and converting the maintenance building into additional office space. Conversion of the maintenance facility to office space will proceed following construction of a new maintenance facility. All existing cabins and maintenance/storage sheds will be removed from the headquarters area.

Research Facility: The preferred alternative included the placement of modular units at the lagoon area near the existing park headquarters to support research functions. Many commentators expressed concern about the construction of a research facility at this location. Comments focused on concerns about additional construction in a sensitive resource area and potential duplication of facilities (construction of an interagency

marine research facility in Juneau is currently being considered). Several commentors recommended that the research facility should be smaller than proposed.

Protection of park resources depends on a solid understanding of physical, biological and sociological factors. Comprehensive inventories, long-term monitoring, and research programs are important to sound management of Glacier Bay National Park. Glacier Bay National Park's enabling legislation notes its importance to the scientific community as a unique laboratory where studies related to successional processes should occur.

A research field station located in Bartlett Cove will allow scientific information to be effectively collected and readily shared with park managers. In response to concerns about additional large-scale development, NPS will combine several research and administrative facility components (i.e., conference room, multipurpose room, GIS station, library, and storage space) to minimize the footprint of the research station. A small research facility will provide work areas and some common space and storage for sensitive gear for up to 10 researchers, including other federal, state, and university personnel, will be constructed near the administrative headquarters. This facility will effect less than ½ acre.

Maintenance Facility: Most public comment supported the preferred alternative that relocated all maintenance facilities to the site of the old park landfill. Facility relocation will increase operational efficiency, improve employee safety, and enhance the shoreline scenic quality and the visitor's experience in Bartlett Cove. The facility will house plumbing, electrical and carpentry shops; vehicle and boat maintenance, boat storage, a wash station, a paint shop, storage bays, a warehouse, and service space. A separate building will house flammable and hazardous materials. The construction footprint of this facility will be less than 6 acres.

Fire Cache: NPS received minimal public comment regarding the relocation of the fire cache to an area near the existing seasonal housing. Some commentors suggested that the facility be located near the old landfill site or closer to permanent housing.

Effective emergency response requires that emergency equipment be located near park housing in Bartlett Cove. To minimize habitat disturbance the fire cache will be constructed on the site of the existing electrician's shop (northeast of seasonal housing).

Utility Upgrades: Commentors consistently noted that the top priority at Bartlett Cove should be renovation of the sewage treatment plant; water collection, treatment, storage and distribution; and fuel storage facilities. The utility upgrades are the highest priority and will be completed prior to construction of additional facilities.

Visitor Accommodations: The preferred alternative included construction of up to 30 units (60 pillows) to the existing lodging. The alternative also recommended conversion of the concession employee dormitory to a 50-room budget accommodation (100 pillows). Numerous commentors expressed concern regarding the construction of

additional lodging in Bartlett Cove; most suggested that these facilities would be more appropriately provided in Gustavus.

The NPS is mandated to protect park resource and provide for visitor enjoyment of parklands and waters. Ensuring that visitor's have adequate accommodation in or near park units allows the public the opportunity to experience public lands. The NPS will continue to gather information from members of the community, Glacier Bay Lodge management and others to (1) further refine the social and biological carrying capacity of Bartlett Cove, and (2) determine whether the community of Gustavus could provide any additional visitor lodging needed. If the NPS determines that such lodging can appropriately be accommodated in Bartlett Cove and it cannot be provided in the community, the NPS will authorize 15 additional units (up to 30 pillows) at Glacier Bay Lodge for overnight visitor use. Construction of up to 15 units would require approximately ½ acre.

The NPS is interested in ensuring that budget accommodations are available to park visitors. Should budget accommodations be deemed appropriate, necessary, and not available in Gustavus, they will be provided for within the parameters described above.

Lodge Expansion: Several commentors indicated that the proposal to expand visitor facilities at the Glacier Bay Lodge was unnecessary. The NPS does not agree; current facilities do not adequately accommodate existing visitation needs. NPS will authorize moderate expansion of the dining and kitchen facilities and parking lot and renovation of laundry and shower facilities (primarily used by campers). The majority of expansion and renovation work will be within existing space, but additional parking will require about 0.3 acre.

Concession Employee Housing: The preferred alternative proposed moving Glacier Bay Lodge, Inc. concession employee housing offsite and converting this facility to a budget lodging facility and cafeteria. Numerous commentors, including the current concessioner, indicated that relocation of concession employee housing was not desirable. NPS agrees. Employee housing will not be relocated.

Park Housing: The preferred alternative proposed that 18 additional seasonal employee beds, a 10-bed bunkhouse, and 2 additional permanent employee houses be constructed in Bartlett Cove. Many commentors indicated that no additional housing for park employees should be constructed; other recommended that fewer units be constructed.

Housing opportunities for full-time year-round employees are generally available in the community of Gustavus. Opportunities for seasonal housing, however, are limited. Travel to and from Gustavus is difficult for seasonal employees whose work schedules vary and who do not, for the most part, have ready access to transportation. Housing for up to 18 additional seasonal employees and a 10-person bunkhouse to accommodate visiting researchers and other NPS employees will be constructed. Construction of seasonal units would affect about 1 acre. No additional housing will be constructed in Bartlett Cove for permanent employees.

Recreation Building: The preferred alternative includes a recreational facility to be constructed in Bartlett Cove for park employees. Several commentors suggested that this facility was not necessary. The health and well being of park staff is important for effective park operations. A multi-use facility, up to 2,000 square feet, will serve as a gathering area for off-duty employees as well as a facility to accommodate meetings and training sessions. The facility will affect about ½ acre of land.

Visitor Center: The preferred alternative includes the construction of a visitor center near the outer dock. Most commentors felt that some type of visitor facility was necessary and appropriate.

The existing visitor facilities are inadequate. Interpretive displays are limited to a small area on the second floor of the Lodge. Visitor information facilities (dispatch, backcountry information, kayak rental information, etc.) are dispersed, resulting in visitor confusion and lack of coordination between information specialists. To ensure that park visitors have the opportunity to learn about park resources and have the information necessary to safely enjoy parklands and waters, the NPS will construct a visitor center near the head of the outer dock. The facility will be constructed to minimize impacts to sensitive coastal resources. This facility and associated parking will occupy about 1 acre of largely previously disturbed land.

Hoonah Tribal House/Cultural Center: The preferred alternative recommended construction of a traditional Tlingit Tribal House on the shore of Bartlett Cove. While commentors expressed concern about additional construction along the sensitive shoreline, most recognized the importance of the Hoonah Tlingits' cultural connection to Glacier Bay.

The NPS agrees and further recognizes that Bartlett Cove, in particular, was the site of Tlingit settlement. The Tlingit story is important to the public's understanding and appreciation of Glacier Bay. A traditional longhouse east of the Lodge will be constructed for visitor use, interpretive programs, and special events held by the Hoonah Tlingit. The facility will occupy approximately 1 acre of land along the Bartlett Cove shoreline.

Road Realignment: The preferred alternative includes rerouting the Bartlett Cove road to minimize shoreline impacts and further separate park visitors from employee housing. In general, commentors were supportive of this proposed action. The NPS will realign the existing road, within the boundaries of the Bartlett Cove developed area, and convert the old roadbed into a coastal trail. Road reconstruction and/or upgrade outside of the Bartlett Cove area will be further analyzed in a separate environmental assessment.

Trails: The preferred alternative recommended that the existing coastal trail be extended to Cooper's Notch and linked to the park road to provide a loop trail. Some commentators indicated that additional trails should not be constructed in Bartlett Cove, while others indicated that a loop trail to Cooper's Notch would benefit both visitors and the residents of Gustavus.

An informal trail to Cooper's Notch has become popular with both local residents and Bartlett Cove visitors. Importantly, the route is frequently chosen for naturalist-led walks of groups that exceed the 12-person limit which apply to the Bartlett Lake Trail and the Bartlett River Trail (as both these trails pass through designated wilderness). The trail also provides opportunities to interpret the unique geology of the Bartlett Cove area. Frequent use of this trail has resulted in rutting, side-trails and impacts to vegetation. The NPS will formally designate – and maintain – a trail from the shoreline to Cooper's Notch, but will not construct a loop along the glacial moraine to the park road.

Campground: The preferred alternative did not describe any actions associated with the existing Bartlett Cove Campground. The campground will remain in its existing location and configuration.

CONCLUSION

The proposed action complies with the Endangered Species Act, the National Historic preservation Act, and Executive Orders 11988 and 11990. There will be no significant restriction of subsistence activities as documented by the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, Title VIII, Section 810(a) Summary Evaluation and Findings.

I find that the proposed action does not constitute a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment. The proposal will not have a significant effect on the human environment. Environmental impacts that would occur are minor and temporary in nature. Therefore, in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 and the regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality (40 CFR 1508.9), an environmental impact statement will not be prepared for this project.

Recommended: James M. Brady 3.10.98
Superintendent, Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve Date

Approved: Robert G. ... 3/11/98
Director, Alaska Region Date