



Public Scoping and NEPA Process for Pecos National Historical Park Fire Management Plan

Project Scoping for Environmental Assessment

March 21, 2013

The National Park Service (NPS) is starting the process to create a new Fire Management Plan (FMP) for Pecos National Historical Park (Pecos NHP). Before the new FMP is created, the NPS is preparing an Environmental Assessment (EA). This EA is part of the process to update management strategies, manage vegetative fuels, and update terminology. The NPS is seeking public suggestions and comments on the proposed project. This brochure initiates the external (or public) scoping for the EA.

Background

Pecos NHP is situated on the passage around the southern end of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. Pecos NHP contains evidence of use and occupation during the last 12,000 years. Early campsites, later pit structures, and a small number of scattered 13–14th century pueblo settlements have been documented within the park. By the 15th century, the valley's Pueblo population began to settle together at Pecos Pueblo, a multi-storied ridge-top village with commanding views of the surrounding valley. The Pueblo society reflected cultural complexities that included religion, government, warfare, and trade. Spanish contact and settlement brought changes to Pecos life and culture, and Mission structures were added to the landscape.

The Santa Fe Trail brought Americans and others. A ranching economy developed, trading continued, and armies clashed during the US Civil War on these lands that now make up Pecos NHP. All these stories left an incredible assortment of archeological, historic, and ethnographic resources that the NPS is mandated to interpret and protect.

During these historic periods, the area was more open and less forested, a result of the intense human activities. As human use of the land changed, the Pecos area became more forested. Current conditions exhibit more vegetation than during historic periods; current fuel loads lends itself to more intense wildfires that can threaten visitors, cultural and natural resources, park structures, and neighboring lands. The NPS recognized the need to manage the vegetation at Pecos NHP. A new FMP will assist the NPS in meeting Pecos NHP management goals.

Pecos NHP proposes to continue to suppress all wildfires, and continue vegetation management activities. As part of this planning process, Pecos NHP is considering additional actions in the new FMP to better protect

cultural resources, facilities and infrastructure and natural resources. A new FMP will also address updates in national fire policy and terminology. The Categorical Exclusion that was used in support of the 2004 FMP is no longer available for use. This EA process is essential to completing a new FMP.

The Fire Management Plan

Pecos NHP plans to adhere to the following broad goals in the FMP:

1. Protection of human life is the first priority in all wildland fire management activities.
2. Park infrastructure and cultural and natural resources will be protected from wildfire and fire suppression damage.
3. Activities will occur to restore and maintain the Park's vegetation communities and protect natural and cultural resources.
4. The Park will work to ensure formal working relationships are maintained with appropriate federal, state, and local cooperators.
5. The NPS will consider in-park actions that minimize the threat to adjacent private property. The Park will ensure adjacent communities are informed about park fire management activities and that fire-related concerns are considered.

Internal scoping by NPS specialists and staff started the EA process on November 30, 2012. 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 Park objectives, 2) evaluates potential impacts to Park resources and values, and 3) identifies mitigation measures to minimize the degree of these impacts. The EA will evaluate a "No Action Alternative" and at least one "Action Alternative".

A "No Action Alternative" would continue the policy of suppressing all wildfires utilizing the appropriate response. No fuel reduction, defensible space, or prescribed burning activities would occur. The attendant negative effects would include accumulations of hazardous fuels and the associated risk both to humans, structures, and to park natural and cultural resources.

The NPS is considering a variety of components of an "Action Alternative". As a result of internal scoping

efforts, these components are being considered at this time:

- Suppress wildfires, utilizing a most appropriate response (same as “No Action Alternative”)
- Plan non-fire and prescribed fire projects for fuel reduction projects for protection and ecosystem restoration and maintenance
 - broadcast prescribed fire
 - pile burns
 - manual and mechanical fuel reduction projects
- Application of herbicide to prevent the encroachment of invasive and/or exotic plant species

Additional objectives and mitigation tactics would be developed as part of this EA process to minimize the impact to people, park resources and manmade improvements.

These components as well as additional ones identified during public scoping will be considered in developing action alternatives for analysis.

There are two opportunities for the public to comment: during this initial project scoping, and again following the release of the EA document. You are invited to participate in this process by voicing your ideas, suggestions, comments, or concerns related to Pecos NHP fire management activities. These comments will be considered during preparation of the EA and FMP.

Overview of the Process

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

- **Public scoping period (March 21, 2013–April 21, 2013)***
- **Public scoping meeting, open house format, April 4, 2013 5:30 PM until 7:30 PM, at Pecos National Historical Park.***
- Preparation of the EA, (public release expected summer 2013)
- **Public review of the EA***
- Analysis of public comment on the EA
- Preparation of decision document
- Announcement of decision

*** indicates formal opportunities for public comment**

Resources and Concerns

The Environmental Assessment will analyze potential impacts to a number of resources, which may include:

Soil, Water Resources (including Floodplains and Wetlands), Air Quality, Vegetation (including invasive exotic species), Wildlife, Species of Special Concern, Cultural and Historic Resources, Ethnographic Resources, Public Health and Safety, and Visitor Use & Experience.

Ideas to Consider

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

- Are there any missing issues or concerns that should be addressed in the EA?
- Are there other options or information that you think should be considered?
- Do you have other comments and suggestions for us to consider in the Pecos NHP FMP?

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/PECO/>

Comments may also be sent via email to Lisa_Hanson@nps.gov.

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

Attention: Superintendent
Pecos National Historical Park
PO Box 418
Pecos, NM 87552

You may also hand-deliver written comments to the Pecos National Historical Park visitor center.

**Please provide all initial comments by
April 21, 2013.**

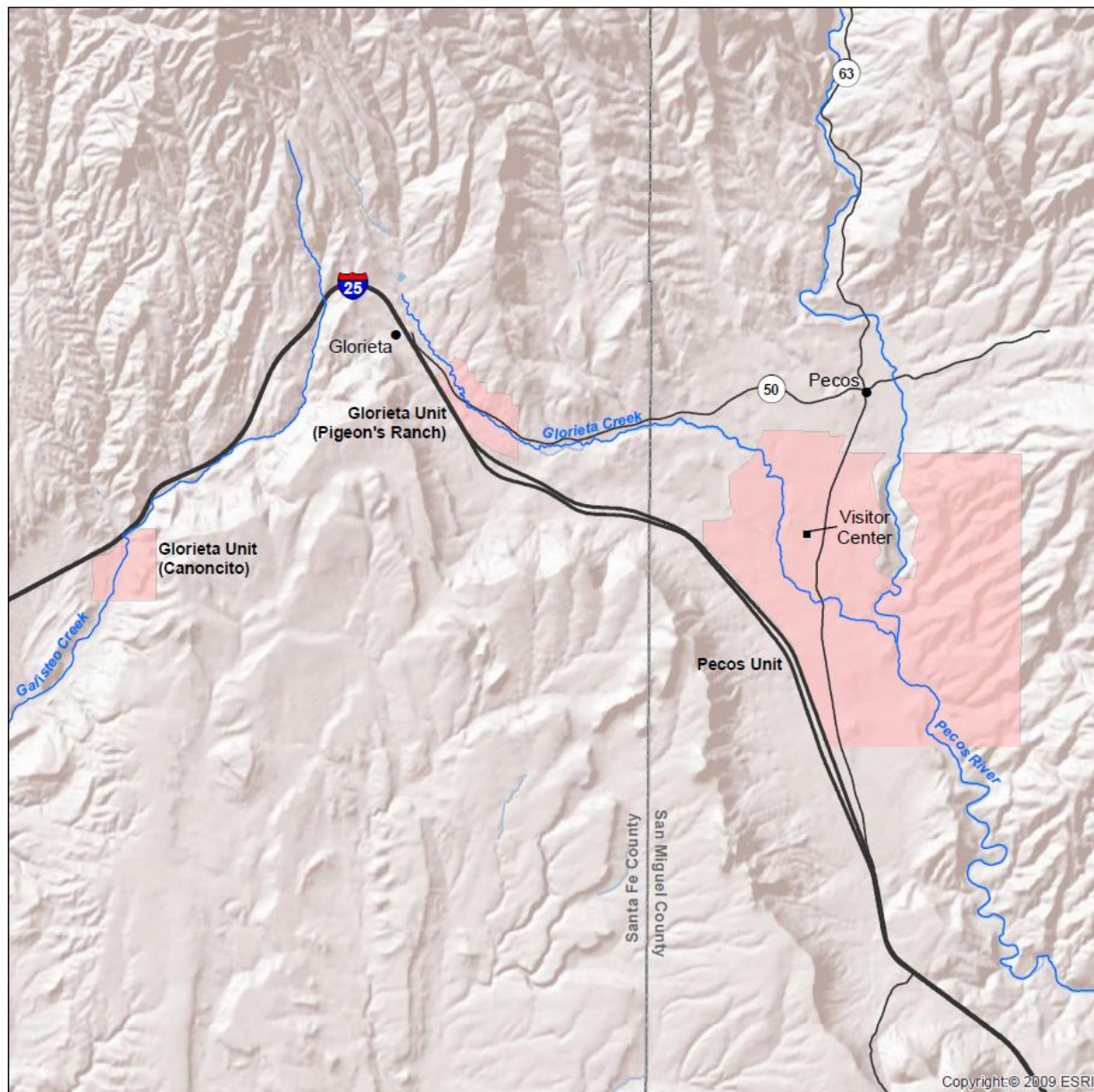
If you wish to be added to or removed from the Park’s mailing list for future correspondence, please indicate that in your response.

Pecos National Historical Park
New Mexico

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Pecos NHP Management Units



Legend

- Pecos NHP Boundary
- Streams
- Major Roads
- County Boundary
- Towns



1:95,000

0 1.5 3 Miles

Datum: NAD 83 13 UTM
DSC/February 2013

Pecos National Historical Park

