

Kate
Mark MM



United States Department of the Interior

IN REPLY REFER TO

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Southeast Utah Group
Arches and Canyonlands National Parks
Hovenweep and Natural Bridges National Monuments
2282 S. West Resource Boulevard
Moab, Utah 84532-3298

L34

October 12, 2012

Larry Crist, Field Supervisor
US Fish and Wildlife Service, Utah Field Office
2369 West Orton Circle, Suite 50
West Valley City, Utah 84119

<input type="checkbox"/>	Concur No Effect
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Concur Not Likely to Adversely Affect
<input type="checkbox"/>	No Comment
<i>L. Crist</i>	
U.S.F.W.S. - Utah Field Supervisor	
Date <u>10/22/12</u>	

RE: Lost Spring Canyon area in Arches National Park and presence of Mexican spotted owl

Dear Mr. Crist,

Arches National Park is currently undergoing a management planning process and an Environmental Assessment (EA) to determine which impacts technical rock climbing, canyoneering, and associated activities, commercial and noncommercial, have at the park, and to consider whether the National Park Service (NPS) should further manage or limit those activities.

The increasing popularity of climbing and canyoneering activities has raised questions both about impacts to other park resources and potential conflicts between visitor groups. The park is concerned about possible impacts to biological soil crusts, plant and animal species, and cultural resources. Park visitors have complained of conflicts between commercial use groups, nonprofit groups (scouts, school groups, and church groups), and individual climbers. Also, as climbing and canyoneering increase in popularity, so will the need for additional staff time to monitor and manage the activity of commercial, group, and individual use.

The purpose of this plan is to document current conditions and present a strategy for responding to the increasing visitor use, possible resource impacts, and potential user conflicts associated with rock climbing and canyoneering in areas within Arches National Park. This plan will provide direction for the management of natural and cultural resources and wilderness values within the context of visitor use and impacts from climbing and canyoneering activities. This Climbing and Canyoneering Management Plan (CCMP) will provide management guidance for five to ten years, and will be revised as monitoring and research data are acquired and updated, as use patterns change, or as new impacts are observed.

The only area in Arches National Park that has the potential to have listed species impacted by climbing and canyoneering activities is within the Lost Spring Canyon area of the park where canyoneering has become a popular activity. Canyoneering is defined as traveling across land and into canyons using a variety of techniques that are associated with technical descents — those that require rappels (abseils) and ropework, technical climbing or down-climbing, technical jumps, and/or technical swims. This area is not a high use area currently with canyoneers but with these routes published on the internet, the potential for increased use is a great possibility. This area of the park is extremely remote and is only accessible via 4 wheel drive roads from Bureau of Land Management land. Canyoneers typically recreate during spring (March-June) and

fall (September-November) months in groups of 4-15 people.

Arches National Park has potential habitat for Mexican spotted owl as determined by several polygons from the 1997 and 2000 Spotskey and Willey models for Mexican spotted owl habitat. The majority of potential habitat is along the Colorado River, mainly beyond park boundaries. However, Mexican spotted owl may be present within the Lost Spring Canyon area within the park as this area displays characteristics of Mexican spotted owl habitat. Lost Spring Canyon is an area composed of narrow drainages bounded by high cliffs with running and standing water. Numerous microsites, alcoves and owl roosts were noted in the area during a brief survey of the area in 2010, by Bill Sloan, a NPS wildlife technician. Although it was not possible to determine visually, by the whitewash, the species using the roosts, Sloan noted that even though the habitat is better than marginal it was less than good habitat for Mexican spotted owl and recommended that formal surveys be conducted to officially determine the presence or absence of Mexican spotted owls within Lost Spring Canyon.

In 2011 and 2012 under Federal Fish and Wildlife Permit TE-047808, Sloan, surveyed the MMI and Undercover canyoneering routes in the Lost Spring Canyon drainage to determine Mexican spotted owl presence or absence following established USFWS protocols. Surveys were conducted in 2011 on 14-15 March, 28-29 April, 16-17 June, and 28-29 July. In 2012, surveys were conducted on 5-6 March, 9-10 May, May 16-17 and August 14-15. No Mexican spotted owls were detected during these surveys, and habitat conditions were judged to be marginal. Data sheets and a map of calling locations are attached to this memo.

The presence of Mexican spotted owls was not detected during the two year survey work. Due to fact the habitat is marginal (supported by lack of response in the surveys), impacts from the proposed action will be discountable to the owls. Impacts will also be insignificant because the routes do not traverse over nesting habitat and will only occur during the day. Overall, canyoneering activities will not have a measurable effect on the breeding, feeding and sheltering on the Mexican spotted owls and will not reduce the numbers, reproduction, and distribution of this species. If Mexican spotted owls are detected in the future, the park will either limit access into that area or implement some other conservation measure to keep impacts at insignificant and discountable. The park is seeking US Fish and Wildlife concurrence to which impacts of canyoneering activities "*may affect, but not likely to adversely affect*" the Mexican spotted owl.

Sincerely,



Kate Cannon
Superintendent
Southeast Utah Group
National Park Service

Attachments: Lost Spring Canyon Map
MSO inventory data sheets

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
SOUTHEAST UTAH GROUP

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