



Public Scoping and NEPA Process for Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site Fire Management Plan

Project Scoping for Environmental Assessment

November 18, 2013

The National Park Service (NPS) is starting the process to update the Fire Management Plan (FMP) for Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site (SAND). Before this update occurs, 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. A focus of this planning is to protect and enhance Park cultural and natural resources, and to create and improve defensible space. This process will be utilized to gather public input and suggestions for this planning effort. This brochure initiates the public scoping for the EA.

Background

SAND encompasses the site of the Sand Creek Massacre of 1864 where more than 200 Cheyenne and Arapaho were killed in the attack by U.S. Army Volunteer Cavalry. The site of the Sand Creek Massacre is of great significance to descendants of the massacre victims and their respective tribes and commemoration of ancestors at the site. The site is also a reminder of the tragic extremes reached during the 500 years of conflict between Native Americans and the U.S. Government. SAND was established to help protect, memorialize and enhance cultural understanding about the site of the 1864 Sand Creek Massacre. SAND is a nationally significant element of frontier history as well as a symbol of Native American struggles to maintain ancestral homelands.

During these historic periods, the vegetation of the area was more open as a result of intense human activities; wood gathering by Cheyenne and Arapaho had removed most trees near the site. As human use of the land changed after 1864, dead and down woody debris, sand sage, and exotic species increased, due to the suppression of wildfires and increased domestic livestock grazing practices. The increased vegetation has developed fuel loading that lends itself to high severity wildfires that could threaten visitors, staff and firefighters, cultural sites, park structures, and neighboring lands. The NPS wants to take planned steps to manage the vegetation in a responsible way. A new FMP will assist the NPS in meeting SAND management goals.

SAND plans to continue to suppress all wildfire ignitions on its 1,200 acres of federal land, and also to engage in active vegetation management activities. These active measures will better protect cultural sites, facilities, neighboring properties, and natural resource values. A new FMP will also include current national fire policy

and terminology. The Categorical Exclusion that was utilized in support of the 2006 FMP is no longer available. This EA will be completed in support of a new Fire Management Plan.

Updating the Fire Management Plan

SAND plans to adhere to the following broad goals as it updates its Fire Management Plan:

1. Firefighter and public safety is the first priority in all wildland fire management activities.
2. Park investments (infrastructure) and cultural and natural resources will be protected from wildland fire and fire suppression activities.
3. Park management actions will take place to restore and maintain the park's cultural and natural resources to meet park management goals as outlined in park management plans.
4. The park will work toward establishing and maintaining formal cooperative relationships with local, state, federal, and tribal cooperators and partners.
5. The NPS will consider actions that minimize the threat to adjacent property related to wildfire risks. Adjacent communities will be informed about park fire management activities.
6. Wildfire whether human caused or from a natural ignition, will be suppressed. This includes actions taken for fires starting on NPS administered lands or from fire burning onto NPS administered lands from other lands.

The EA process started with internal scoping by NPS specialists and staff on April 25, 2013. 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.

A "No Action Alternative" includes suppression of all wildfires. Under this alternative, no planned projects would occur. Potential adverse effects of implementing

the “No Action Alternative” could include continued accumulations of hazardous fuels and the associated risk to human structures, people, and to park natural and cultural resources.

Elements of a “Proposed Action Alternative” could include:

- prescribed burning in designated areas for the purposes of maintaining defensible space around improvements and cultural sites, protecting existing cottonwood galleries, restoring natural habitat, and controlling invasive plant species;
- utilizing manual and mechanical equipment and limited grazing for fuel reduction work for the same purposes; and
- targeted herbicide use and bio-agents to reduce existing non-native plant species.

Additional objectives and mitigation tactics would be developed as part of this EA process to minimize impacts to people, park resources and manmade improvements. Prescribed burn projects would have formal objectives developed under a separate burn plan, and would only be implemented by qualified fire personnel.

There are two formal opportunities for the public to comment: during this initial project scoping, and again following the release of the EA document for public comment. You are invited to participate in this scoping process by voicing your ideas, suggestions, comments, or concerns related to SAND 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 (November 18, 2013–December 18, 2013)***
- Preparation of the EA
- **Public Comment Period during 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 preliminary list of resources including:

Human Health and Safety, Vegetation, Species of Special Concern, Archeological Resources, Cultural Landscapes, Ethnographic Resources, and Visitor Use and 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, alternatives, or information that you think should be considered?
- Do you have other comments and suggestions for us to consider in the SAND Fire Management Program?

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/sand>

Comments may also be sent via email to the superintendent, alexa_roberts@nps.gov. If you are unable to submit comments electronically, then you may submit written comments to:

Attention: Superintendent
Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site
P.O. Box 249
Eads, CO 81036-0249

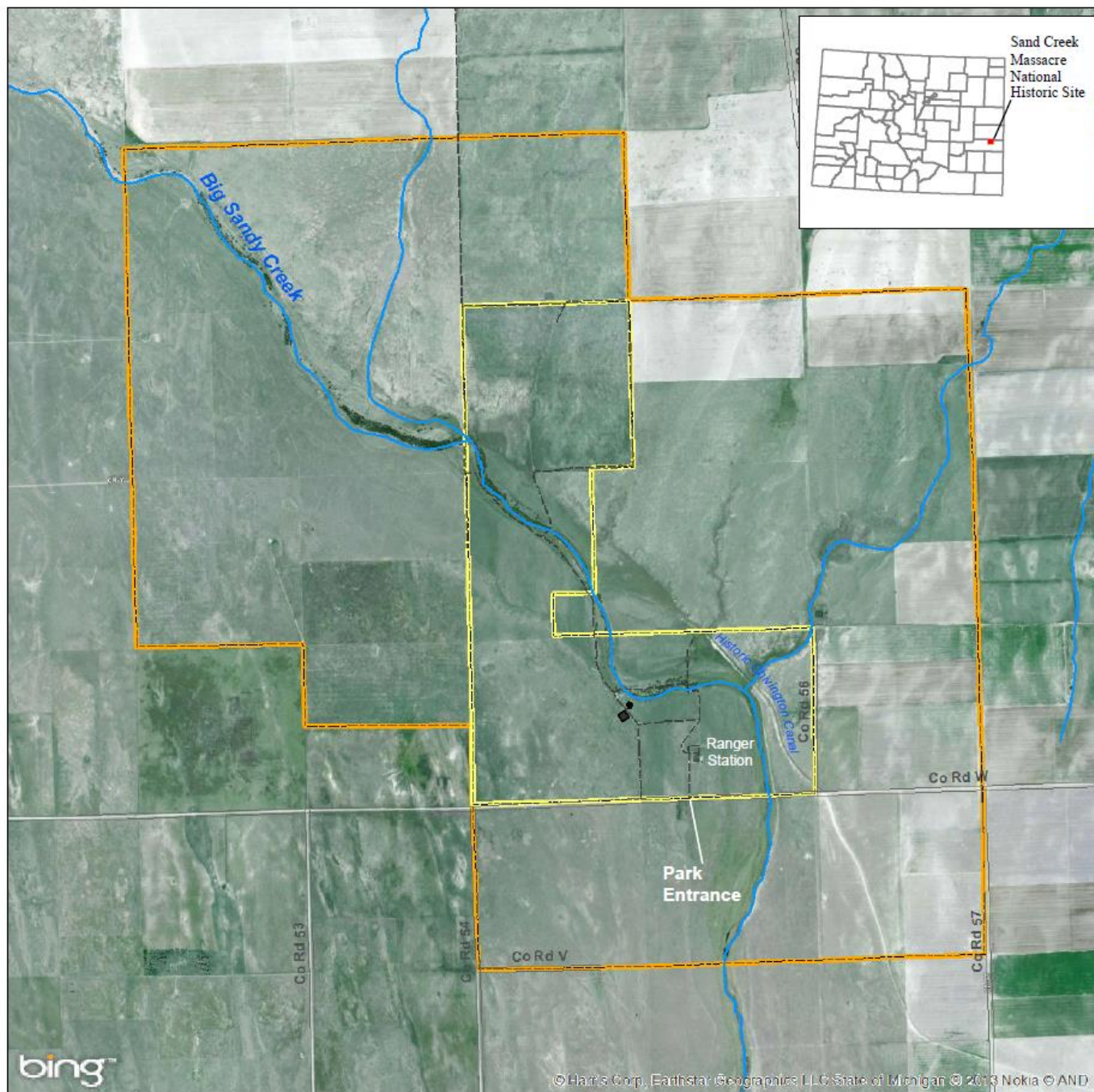
You may also hand-deliver written comments to the Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site ranger station at 910 Wansted Street, Eads CO 81036-0249.

**Please provide all public scoping comments by
December 18, 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.

Sand Creek Massacre
National Historic Site
Colorado

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Legend

- Established Boundary
- Authorized Boundary
- Monument and Overlook
- Repatiration Site
- Park Roads
- Major Roads
- Streams



1:50,000

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Datum: NAD 83 13 UTM
DSC/November 2013