



Mesa Verde National Park
P.O. Box 8
Mesa Verde, CO 81330-0008

Project Schedule

Spring 2014 – Public Scoping Period; solicit feedback and ideas on the Visitor Distribution and Transportation Plan.

Summer 2014 – Develop preliminary alternatives and collect data.

Fall 2014 – Public meetings(s) to present alternatives and solicit feedback.

Winter 2015 – Select preferred alternative and complete environmental analysis.

Spring 2015 – 30 day public comment period on planning and environmental documents.

Fall 2015 – Determine implementation process and distribute the Final Mesa Verde Visitor Distribution and Transportation Plan.

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Mesa Verde National Park

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Visitor Distribution and Transportation Plan / Environmental Assessment

Public Scoping Newsletter • June 2014



A Note from the Superintendent

Dear Friends:

In 1906 when Congress designated Mesa Verde National Park, access to certain cultural, natural, and scenic resources, including the amazing cliff dwellings for which the park is famous, was considered essential for the visitor experience. The connection to these resources is just as important today and tomorrow as it has been for the last 100 years.

Over the years, a system of narrow and winding roadways has developed in the park primarily for visitors in private motor vehicles. In recent years, increasing visitation, along with the changing demographics of park visitors, has resulted in a constrained and outdated circulation system. This system currently lends itself to high concentrations of visitors in some locations during certain times of the year, while leaving other spectacular sites and areas of the park virtually unvisited. Also, opportunities for visitors to access the park via any means other than their own vehicles are limited. Visitors coming to the park during the summer months may face long waits, disappointment, and frustration instead of the great experience they had expected.

Less obvious but equally important is the fact that as visitors drive throughout the park, tailpipe emissions from their cars turn into haze and air pollution which can diminish views and harm plants, animals, and archeological sites across the landscape – the very landscape the National Park Service is charged with protecting.

Can we better distribute visitation and provide alternate means of transportation in Mesa Verde National Park? We believe that we can, and we have launched the Visitor Distribution and Transportation Plan to develop solutions.

We hope you will join us in this effort. Please read this newsletter and share any thoughts, ideas, or comments you may have to help us design a more efficient, earth-friendly, multi-modal transportation system while allowing visitors to see more of what Mesa Verde has to offer in less crowded conditions. Your input is valuable to us and essential to the planning process!

Cliff Spencer
Superintendent, Mesa Verde National Park

How to Comment

Your feedback on the proposed project and ideas for how the park can better distribute visitation is important. Throughout the 30-day public scoping comment period, there are several ways you can provide input.

Submit comments electronically at:
<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/MEVE>

Submit written comments by mail to the following central address for this project:

National Park Service
Denver Service Center
c/o Treff Alexander
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, CO 80225

The public scoping comment period will be open through July 14, 2014.

Please provide us with feedback related to:

1. What do you value about your visits to the park?
2. What do you like about the park transportation system?
3. What transportation issues do you think NPS should address?
4. Do you have any ideas for improving transportation in the park?

Purpose of the Plan

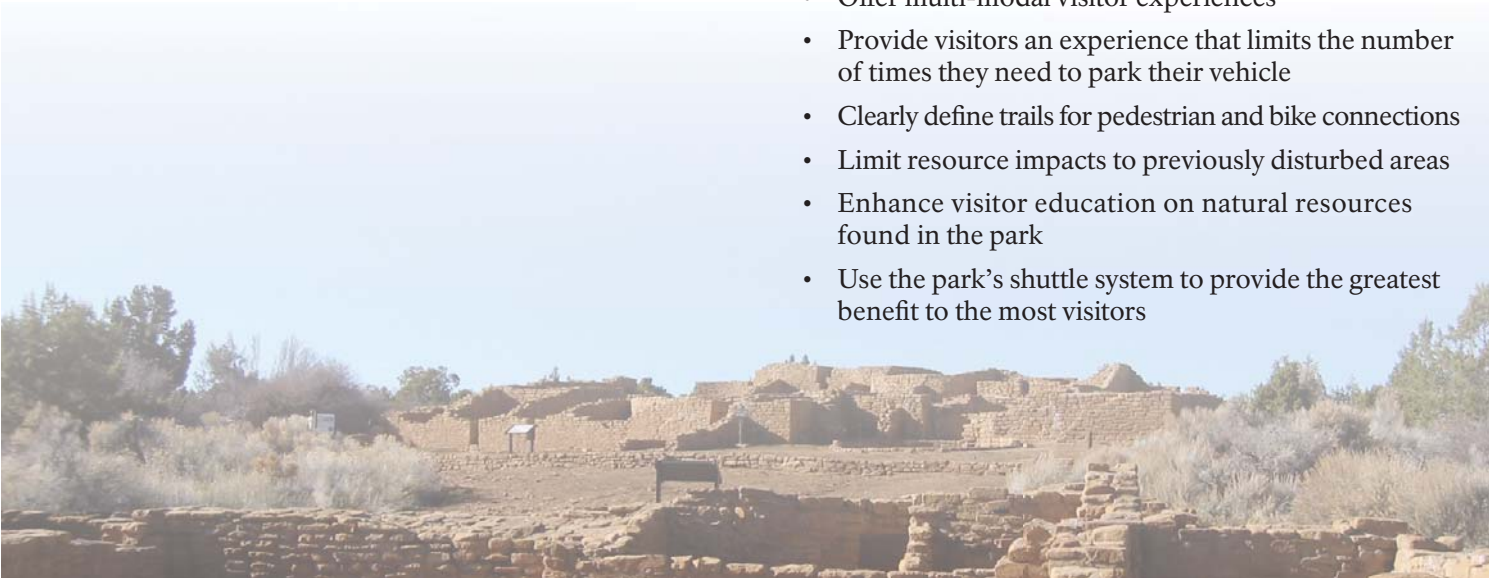
The purpose of the Mesa Verde Visitor Distribution and Transportation Plan is to reduce visitor congestion at key locations within the park, to protect the natural and cultural resources in the park, and to enhance the visitor experience and to develop a comprehensive and sustainable strategy for how visitors access and experience the park.

Need for Action

The Mesa Verde Visitor Distribution and Transportation Plan is needed due to a concentration of visitors within a constrained transportation system. Narrow and winding roadways provide access to the park and the majority of visitors use only their personal vehicle while in the park. The high visitor concentration results in traffic congestion and parking lots that are at, or exceed, capacity.

A visitor distribution and transportation plan is needed to:

- Offer additional visitor opportunities and help visitors understand those opportunities and constraints (congested conditions in certain times of the year)
- Reduce overcrowding at key locations and improve visitor orientation and wayfinding.
- Improve park roadways, to provide better emergency access, and to improve visitor safety.
- Protect the natural and cultural resources that may be damaged and degraded by unauthorized visitor use, social trails, and roadside pull-offs.
- Help increase visit time to cover multiple days in multiple areas within the park.



Existing Transportation System

The entrance road is the highest priority asset in the park as it facilitates access to nearly every activity and resource in the park. The entrance road has several overlooks and provides access to Morefield Campground, Far View Lodge, Far View Terrace, Chapin Mesa Road and Wetherill Mesa Road.

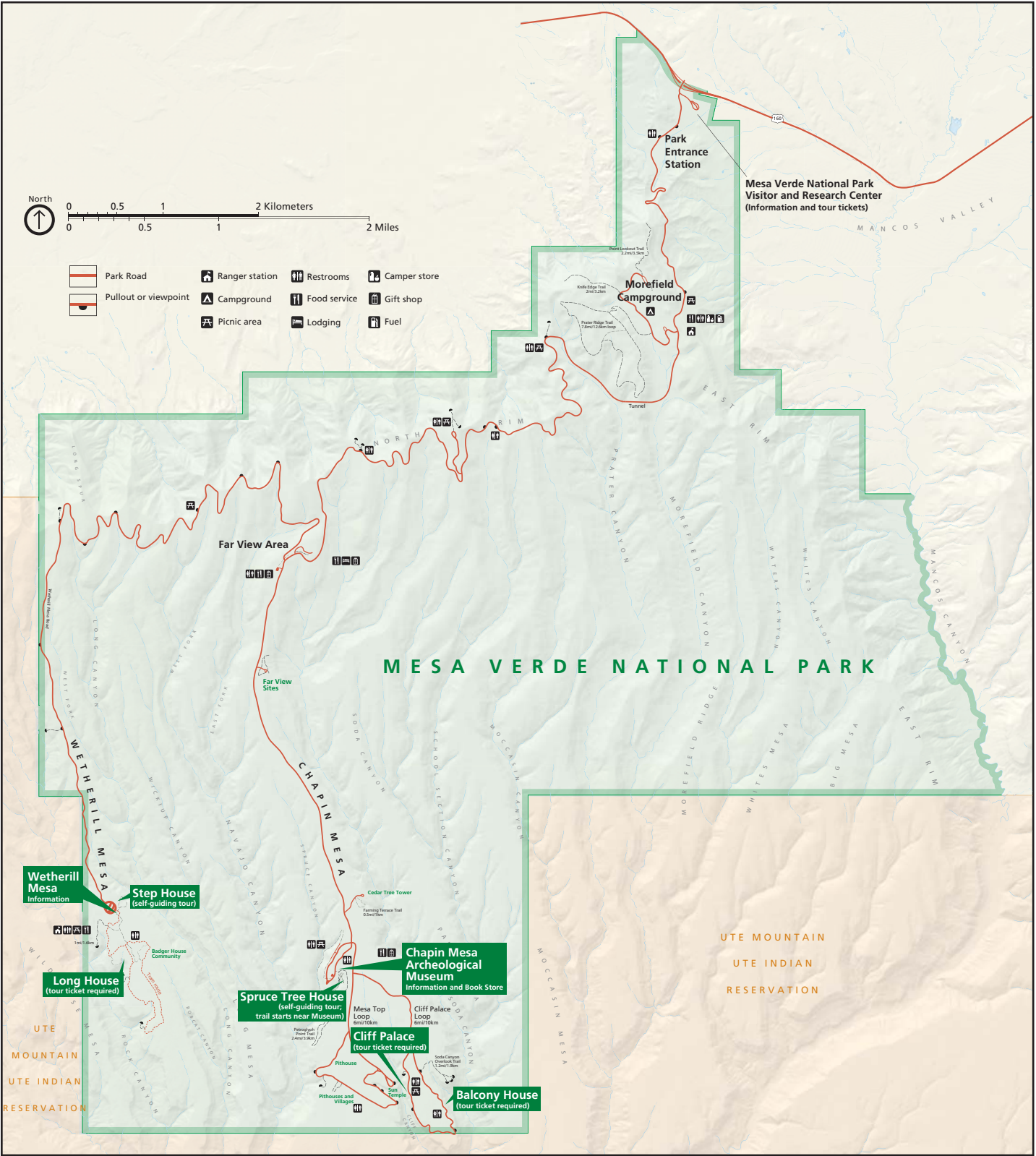
The Chapin Mesa experience is very dependent on private automobiles. Parking is available at the Chapin Museum and Spruce Tree House site as well as at Cliff Palace and Balcony House. Parking is insufficient at these popular destinations and looking for parking multiple times during the day can lead to visitor frustration. Mesa Top Loop provides a driving tour showing 600 years of ancestral Puebloan development. The loop has one 32 space parking lot, five small pullouts and limited parallel parking along the one way road.

Although the road to Wetherill Mesa is not in the best condition, without it few people would have access to resources in this area of the park. The shuttle system runs from the Wetherill Mesa information center around a loop that includes Long House, Badger House Community, and Kodak House overlook. The shuttle system is a result of a vision for Wetherill Mesa as a car less alternative to Chapin Mesa. Wetherill Mesa is accessed with personal vehicles, then the tram takes visitors along the loop allowing visitors to park once.

The existing transportation systems supports a cautious, preservation approach by limiting visitors to relatively small areas of the park. The concentration of visitors within these areas is beginning to impact park resources and values, and visitor experiences.

Desired Future Conditions

- Offer multi-modal visitor experiences
- Provide visitors an experience that limits the number of times they need to park their vehicle
- Clearly define trails for pedestrian and bike connections
- Limit resource impacts to previously disturbed areas
- Enhance visitor education on natural resources found in the park
- Use the park's shuttle system to provide the greatest benefit to the most visitors



Access to Mesa Verde is limited to one long, winding road in and out of the park, with two roads leading to Wetherill and Chapin Mesas