



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area
FT Smith MT/ Lovell WY

Finding of No Significant Impact

Maintenance Facilities Construction

Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area

Background

In compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act, the National Park Service prepared an Environmental Assessment to examine various alternatives and environmental impacts associated with the proposal to construct a new maintenance building at the headquarters site of the Yellowtail Wildlife Habitat Management Area (YWHMA). Maintenance facilities within the Park are currently situated in two locations. The main shop and storage yard are located in the town of Lovell approximately 15 miles from the Park entrance. The new maintenance building would replace the existing leased maintenance shop. In addition, the Park's maintenance equipment storage yard would be moved from its current location near the Horseshoe Bend access road (immediately south of the sewage lagoon) to an existing storage yard in the YWHMA headquarters site. New maintenance and resource buildings, equipment storage sheds, and a fire suppression system consisting of a pump house and 33,000 gallon water tank would be constructed in the headquarters site storage yard. Provisions will be made for two above ground bulk fuel storage tanks, generator shed, and septic system. The yard will also provide sufficient storage and staging areas for boats, vehicles and materials. The entire storage yard would be fenced. Utility work related to these improvements would include providing water, sewer, electrical and natural gas service to the new maintenance and resource buildings, and storage sheds.

The proposal to remove the current maintenance function from the leased building and transfer it to a new building is needed in part to address human health and safety risks associated with the existing leased building. In particular, the existing maintenance shop does not comply with current building utility codes and OSHA regulations regarding workplace safety. It contains a number of structural deficiencies including: undersized electrical wiring, and lack of a fire detection and suppression system. The existing leased workspace and storage areas are inadequate to accommodate the requirements of Park facility operation and maintenance programs. Maintenance employees have no safety shower facilities in the shop. This action will reduce negative impact on the public's view by the removal of large equipment from the existing maintenance storage yard located near Horseshoe Bend to a central location just outside the Park. A new maintenance facility would minimize these health and safety risks, and would also consolidate maintenance functions into one permanent facility. The resource management division is currently in a 24x24 garage attached to the NPS residence located in the YWHMA. The garage is totally inadequate to the mission, and does not comply with current building utility codes and OSHA regulations regarding workplace safety. Resource management employees have no restroom or safety shower facilities available in the garage.

Selection of the Preferred Alternative

Two alternatives were evaluated in the Environmental Assessment /Assessment of Effect including Alternative A (No Action) and Alternative B (Construct New Maintenance Building). Alternative B is the National Park Service's Preferred Alternative because it best meets the purpose and need for the project as well as the project objectives to 1) meet federal and state health and safety recommendations for employee work areas, 2) consolidate maintenance functions into one building, 3) provide a permanent maintenance facility that meets current health and safety standards, 4) provide a convenient location for Park staff to work that facilitates the Park's operations, and 5) identify a site for the new maintenance building that minimizes impacts to Park resources and will not result in impairment to these resources. Alternative B consists of constructing a new maintenance facility located in the fenced storage yard at the headquarters site of the Yellowtail Wildlife Habitat Area, utility corridors, trails, and storage yards.

Alternatives Considered

A total of three action alternatives and the No Action Alternative were originally identified for this project. Of these, two of the action alternatives were dismissed prior to analyzing them in the Environmental Assessment. The two alternatives that are evaluated in the Environmental Assessment /Assessment of Effect include Alternative A (No Action) in which the maintenance building would not be constructed and Alternative B (Construct New Maintenance Building) which is the Preferred Alternative, as discussed in the previous section.

The two alternatives that were dismissed prior to analyzing them in the Environmental Assessment included two alternative locations for constructing the new maintenance building in other areas of the Park. These two alternatives were dismissed for various reasons including not meeting the purpose and need for the project, lack of feasibility, higher costs, and/or greater environmental impacts.

Environmentally Preferred Alternative

Alternative B (Construct New Maintenance Building) is the environmentally preferred alternative. The environmentally preferred alternative is determined by applying the six criteria suggested in §101 the National Environmental Policy Act. According to these criteria, the environmentally preferred alternative should 1) fulfill the responsibilities of each generation as trustee of the environment for succeeding generations; 2) assure for all generations safe, healthful, productive, and esthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings; 3) attain the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation, risk of health or safety, or other undesirable and unintended consequences; 4) preserve important historic, cultural and natural aspects of our national heritage and maintain, wherever possible, an environment that supports diversity and variety of individual choice; 5) achieve a balance between population and resource use that will permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life's amenities; and 6) enhance the quality of renewable resources and approach the maximum attainable recycling of depletable resources.

Alternative A, No Action, would only minimally meet these six evaluation factors because it would retain facilities that do not meet health and safety standards in terms of structural deficiencies and rodent problems. While it would minimize potential impacts to significant Park resources, it would not achieve a balance between these resources and the health and safety of Park staff. This alternative also does not meet the criteria for improving renewable resources because the existing maintenance facilities are inefficient with regards to energy and water use.

Therefore, Alternative B is the environmentally preferred alternative because it best addresses these six evaluation factors. Alternative B, *Construction of a New Maintenance Building*, will provide a working environment for Park staff that meets health and safety recommendations, while minimizing environmental impacts to the extent possible. As a permanent facility, the new maintenance building will be used by future generations. The new building will also be more energy efficient and more environmentally-friendly than the existing maintenance building. Removal of the various storage yards would likely be more visually pleasing to visitors in comparison to the existing scattered storage yards located throughout the Park.

Why the Preferred Alternative Will Not Have a Significant Effect on the Human Environment

As defined in 40 CFR §1508.27, significance is determined by examining the following criteria:

Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

Implementation of the Preferred Alternative would relocate the Horseshoe Bend storage yard outside the Park allowing for the restoration of the disturbed Park lands. Additionally this relocation would visually improve the Horseshoe Bend site resulting in a minor to moderate beneficial effect on visitor use and experience. Visitor use and experience would also be improved through the enhancement of the trail network in the project area.

Minor, temporary, adverse impacts to visitor use and experience would result from construction activities. The project area is currently seldom used by visitors, and during construction, portions of this area would be limited to visitor use. Noise and dust from construction activities would also adversely affect visitor use and experience; however all construction-related impacts would be temporary and cease following construction activities. Visually, the changes to the project area would have a minor to moderate adverse effect on visitor experience. The location, size, and aesthetics of the new maintenance building were chosen so as not to visually interfere with the habitat area; however, changes to the visual environment would be noticeable. The primary visual changes would result from the construction of a new maintenance building; removal of the existing hay stack and bee yards; reconfiguration of the trail system in the project area; excavation for utility connections; and the temporary presence of construction equipment, materials, and crews. Despite these changes to the visual environment, the new maintenance facility would likely be more visually pleasing to visitors in comparison to the existing scattered storage yards located in the Park.

The degree of effect on public health or safety.

The construction of a new maintenance building under Preferred Alternative would provide a working environment for Park employees that meet current health and safety standards. Structural deficiencies associated with the existing maintenance building would not be present in the new building. Because of the improved integrity of the building, maintenance crews would likely have a shorter transit times than if the existing maintenance building were to continue to be used. Similarly, the new maintenance building would remedy the rodent infestation problem that the existing maintenance building has. The new building would be more secure and less apt to allow rodents to enter, thereby improving the working conditions for all employees. These impacts would have a moderate beneficial effect on the health and safety of employees and the efficiency of Park operations.

Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, Park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

The Preferred Alternative will not impact unique characteristics of the area including Park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas because these resources do not exist in the project area. The Preferred Alternative will impact the Bighorn Ditch and will be discussed later in this document.

Degree to which effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

Throughout the environmental process, the proposal to construct a new maintenance building was not highly controversial, nor are the effects expected to generate future controversy.

Degree to which the possible effects on the quality of the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

The effects of constructing a new maintenance building are fairly straightforward and do not pose uncertainties. The environmental process has not identified any effects that may involve highly unique or unknown risks.

Degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

The Preferred Alternative is not expected to set a precedent for future actions with significant effects, nor does it represent a decision in principle about a future consideration.

Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.

Cumulative effects were analyzed in the Environmental Assessment, and no significant cumulative impacts were identified.

Degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed on National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

Minor adverse effects may occur to the 1888 Bigfork Ditch during construction activities. These potential adverse effects will be eliminated by informing the contracted construction company of the sensitive and historic nature of the ditch, by providing a twenty foot minimum buffer along the ditch and having Park Service staff monitor the construction activities. Consultation with the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Officer affirmed that with the above mitigations in place the proposed project will have no adverse affect on any historic properties. A letter dated 3 October 2005, was sent to the Wyoming State Preservation Office and as per their policy letter dated 23 August 2004 WYSHPO will no longer send out letters of concurrence. if WYSHPO disagrees with the agency official's findings a letter stating their objections will be sent within the 30-day time frame if no response has been received after thirty days the agency may proceed to the next step in accordance with 36 CFR § 800.3(c)(4). Therefore WYSHPO concurs with our decision of "no historic properties adversely affected" determination under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (WYSHPO 2004).

Degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its critical habitat.

An e-mail from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service dated 7 December 2005 indicated that there are no records of threatened or endangered species in the project area, and that no further consultation under §7 of the Endangered Species Act is necessary. Likewise, a statement from the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission and a survey by Park personnel indicated there are no state-listed species or designated critical or essential habitat in the proposed project area.

Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, state, or local environmental protection law.

The action will not violate any Federal, state or local environmental protection laws.

Impairment.

The National Park Service has determined that implementation of the proposal will not constitute an impairment to the resources and values at Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area or the Yellowtail Wildlife Habitat Management Area. This conclusion is based on a thorough analysis of the environmental impacts described in the Environmental Assessment, the public comments received, relevant scientific studies, and the professional judgment of the decision-maker guided by the direction in NPS *Management Policies* (December 27, 2000). Although the plan/project has some negative impacts, in all cases these adverse impacts are the result of actions taken to preserve and restore Park resources and values. Overall, implementation of the plan would benefit Park resources and values, provide opportunities for their enjoyment, and would not result in their impairment.

Public Involvement

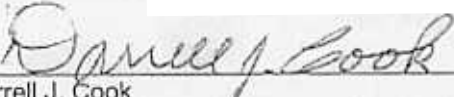
The Environmental Assessment was made available for public review and comment during a 30-day period ending January 18, 2006. To notify the public of this review period, a press release was sent to local news organizations, and it was posted on the National Park Service's Planning, Environment and Public Comment internet website. Copies of the document were sent to certain agencies and affiliated Native American tribes, and interested parties. No comments were received during this review period.

Conclusion

The Preferred Alternative does not constitute an action that normally requires preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The Preferred Alternative would not have a significant effect on the human environment. Negative environmental impacts that could occur would be negligible, minor, or moderate in intensity. There would be no significant impacts on public health, public safety, threatened or endangered species, sites or districts listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, or other unique characteristics of the region. No highly uncertain or controversial impacts, unique or unknown risks, significant cumulative effects, or elements of precedence were identified. Implementation of the action would not violate any federal, state, or local environmental protection law.

Based on the foregoing, the National Park Service has determined that an EIS is not required for this project and thus will not be prepared.

Recommended:



Darrell J. Cook
Superintendent, Bighorn Canyon NRA, National Park Service

1/20/06

Date

Approved:

 FOIL

Michael D. Snyder
Regional Director, Intermountain Region, National Park Service

1/24/06

Date