

United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site
Eads, Colorado 81036-0249



October 15, 2015

Dear Interested Party:

The National Park Service (NPS) is making available for public review and comment an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site Fire Management Plan. The EA evaluated a no action alternative and the preferred alternative. Under the no action alternative, the Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site (SAND) fire management program would not have a valid Fire Management Plan (FMP), and fire management activities would be restricted to emergency wildfire suppression actions, allowed under the National Fire Policy. The Preferred Alternative includes using prescribed burning, manual and mechanical tools and equipment for hazardous fuel reduction activities, assisted by limited grazing, biological agents, and targeted herbicide application. Wildfire suppression strategies would be the same as under the No Action Alternative.

SAND is proposing a new FMP to better protect and manage SAND natural and cultural resources, to address vegetation changes resulting from land use changes since the historic period, including fire suppression, drought events, and to address updates in national fire policy terminology.

Historically, the landscape was open grassland with low-density shrubs. Periodic wildfires helped to maintain this grassland system. The area was grazed by roaming bison and wild horses and later intense domestic livestock grazing. The grazing reduced the density and continuity of herbaceous fuels important to fire frequency and spread. These grazing practices reduced grasslands and favored increased shrub density and introduction of non-native invasive species (Grover and Musick 1990). Change in land use from Native Americans hunting the open plains for bison and grazing by roaming bison, then suppression of wildfires, followed by cessation of intense livestock grazing has resulted in more dense vegetation than historic periods and sand sage encroachment. Hazardous fuel loads have increased along SAND's boundary and the riparian corridor with increased shrub densities and accumulation of dead and down woody debris along the Big Sandy Creek riparian area. The current hazardous fuel loads increase the potential for intense wildfires and associated risk to visitors, employees, cultural and natural resources, NPS structures, and neighboring lands. The vegetation needs to be actively managed to reduce hazardous fuel loads and risk to life and property and to help perpetuate the vegetation conditions that developed during the historic period of cultural significance—1864—that NPS is mandated to interpret and protect.



Restoring vegetation communities in the park would also help to restore the ecological integrity of plant communities and their associated wildlife species. Periodic disturbances such as fire contribute to ecological diversity because moderate levels of disturbance provide opportunities for a larger number of species. A new FMP would provide SAND with a means to use prescribed fire and manual and mechanical vegetation treatments to manage hazardous fuel loads, protect sensitive sites, restore the cultural landscape, and control invasive plant species. Additional Methods SAND may also consider using, are limited herbicide application and grazing as additional management options to help maintain reduced hazardous fuel loads and to eliminate already present exotic plant species. Biological agents would be used to reduce exotic plant species such as field bindweed (*Convolvulus arvensis*) by a gall mite that feeds on the root buds and plant inhibiting growth and/or killing the plant. The use of prescribed fire, manual treatments, limited herbicide use, limited grazing, and biological agents as fire management tools would provide a means to continue protecting life, property and resources from unwanted wildland fire in a safe and efficient manner.

Because public participation is very important to the success of the project, the NPS encourages your review and comment on the EA. The EA will be on public review for 30 days, with comments accepted through November 20, 2015. The document is available electronically for review and comment online by visiting <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/sand> or at the ranger station at Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site. Comments also may be sent to the address below.

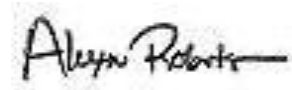
Superintendent
Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site
P.O. Box 249
Eads, CO 81036-0249

Commentors should be aware that their entire comment—including personal identifying information—may be made publicly available at any time. While commentors can ask that their personal identifying information be withheld from public review, the National Park Service cannot guarantee that this will be possible.

We appreciate your input on this project. If you have any questions, please contact Alexa Roberts, Superintendent, at alexa_roberts@nps.gov or (719) 438-5916.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Alexa Roberts
Superintendent