



IN REPLY REFER TO:

United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Pacific West Region

1111 Jackson Street, Suite 700

Oakland, California 94607

L7617 (PGSO-PP)

JUN 03 2003

Memorandum

To: Superintendent, Pinnacles National Monument

From: Regional Director, Pacific West

Subject: Environmental Compliance for the Relocation of the
Westside Maintenance\Visitor Contact Facilities

The *Finding of No Significant Impact* (FONSI) for this long awaited facility replacement initiative is approved. To complete the conservation planning-impact analysis process for this project, the park should send its notice of the decision (along with copy of approved FONSI) to all organizations and individuals who received the supporting environmental assessment.

Patricia L. Newbaker

for Jonathan B. Jarvis

Attachment

CC:

DSC-PM



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FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
Relocate Westside Maintenance Facility and Visitor Contact Station
Pinnacles National Monument, California

Summary

Current facilities on the west side of Pinnacles National Monument at Chaparral are located within a 20-year flood plain and require modification of the drainage channel to keep them from being undermined. In addition, they are 40 to 55 years old, are obsolete, inadequate for their intended purposes and rapidly deteriorating. The Chaparral area has flooded 3 times in the last 20 years. The visitor contact station is a small converted garage and employee housing consists of one aging trailer.

Congestion in the area during peak season and lack of sufficient room for interpretive displays lead to unsatisfactory visitor experiences. Office space, maintenance workspace, indoor storage, and employee housing are inadequate for efficient monument operations.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of this project is to relocate/rebuild the deteriorated visitor contact, ranger support and maintenance facilities from their current location in an active floodplain in a small box canyon to a more suitable location. This will protect park resources, improve the visitor experience, and maintain professional land stewardship. Having updated facilities and improved communications will improve the ability of monument staff to perform their duties.

Selected Action – Alternative B

West District operations and visitor service facilities will be relocated from the environmentally-sensitive Chaparral location to a larger, less sensitive site near the monument boundary southwest of Chaparral. This alternative will provide for the construction of a new visitor contact/ranger station, a maintenance building with fire/EMS cache, entrance station, parking, housing, monument communications antenna, and related utility lines (electrical, sewer and water). Water will be provided by an existing well.

Key features of the selected alternative include the following:

- A visitor contact station to serve visitors to the West District of the monument
- Added public restrooms, interpretation, outdoor viewing opportunities
- 32 added visitor parking spaces
- Improved park operations facilities (entrance station, office space, maintenance building, communications, and emergency equipment storage)
- Improved employee housing

The site of the selected alternative is on previously-disturbed monument land along the West District road approximately ¼-mile from the monument boundary.

Construction will include 6 new buildings, parking areas, water storage tanks and infrastructure. On the east side of the road will be a 1,970 square foot visitor contact/ranger station with public restrooms (total of 6 stalls) and a parking area. West of the road will be the monument operations building, maintenance yard, employee housing, employee parking, water storage tanks, communications tower, utility lines, and the photovoltaic system. The operations building will be

3,509 square feet and include a cache for fire suppression equipment and emergency medical supplies. Water tanks will be partially buried in the hill west of the proposed operations building. The communications tower will be comprised of a 2 x 3-foot wide microwave dish antenna mounted on a 20 foot high pole on the hill near the water tanks. A 14x24-foot utility shed with solar panel array will be constructed in the Chaparral area, out of the floodplain. An 80-square foot entrance station will be constructed in the entrance road. Housing will consist of one duplex and one dormitory unit built according to current NPS standards. These residences will be connected to utilities installed for the maintenance facility.

Maintaining scenic viewsheds from the High Peaks trail, a wilderness area, was a concern for this project. To address this, the visitor contact station will be located so that it is mostly hidden by a low hill while the parking area will be located completely behind the hill. The maintenance facility and emergency services building will be located behind another rise on the west side of the road to shield it from view.

Construction: Implementing this alternative will involve vegetation removal, earthwork (cutting, filling and grading), excavation for building foundations, trenching for utility lines (electric, water and sewer), erecting the structures and laying asphalt driving surfaces, concrete walkways and retaining walls. Utilities to be constructed include the partially buried water tanks, one leach field plus connecting pipelines, communications and electrical wiring. The water system will require excavation of about 350 linear feet of buried pipe and an area about 50 by 100 ft for the tanks that will be accessed by a temporary road.

The area of new ground disturbance is estimated as follows:

Visitor Contact Station and parking	125,000 sq. ft.
Maintenance buildings, housing, and utilities	158,000 sq. ft.
Utility shed and solar panel structure at Chaparral	<u>1,200 sq. ft.</u>
Total	284,200 sq. ft. = 6.52 acres

Design features such as stone facing on exterior walls and aesthetically compatible colors will make the new visitor/ranger facility visually pleasing and not detract from the surrounding scenery. The entrance station will also be designed so that it does not stand out when viewed from a distance. The communications antenna and any visible portions of the water tanks will be painted so they do not detract from the scenery.

The existing picnic area, restroom and trailhead parking will remain in the Chaparral area. A small structure, approximately 14' x 24', to house/support the solar photovoltaic equipment will be constructed on the hillside near the existing parking lot, out of the floodplain at Chaparral. The photovoltaic system now on the maintenance building will be moved and reused as part of the project. The existing residence trailer, visitor contact station, maintenance building and yard will remain until the new facilities are completed and then they will be removed and the sites restored to more natural conditions. Approximately 3 acres of riparian zone will be restored. Some noise and visual intrusions to nearby wilderness will be eliminated by removing the generator and structures.

Sustainability: The objectives of sustainability are to design facilities to minimize adverse effects on natural and cultural values, to reflect their environmental setting and to maintain and encourage biodiversity; to construct and retrofit facilities using energy-efficient materials and building

techniques; to operate and maintain facilities to promote their sustainability; and to illustrate and promote conservation principles and practices through the sustainable design and ecologically sensitive use. The selected alternative is an active demonstration of these principles and the various elements of the design features will be part of the interpretative displays at the Visitor Contact Station as well as at the restored Chaparral area where there will be a solar photovoltaic panels serving a double function as a shade cover for a picnic site and providing the electrical energy needed there. The goal is to have a "see-through" panel system at this site and provide interpretative information.

The selected alternative's design attains a Certified-Gold Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Rating.

The following are sustainable design features:

- Trombe/Thermal Mass Walls (Visitor Contact Station)
- Orientation of buildings to maximize solar exposure (Visitor Contact Station and Maintenance buildings)
- Natural Day-Lighting - Clerestory windows (Visitor Contact Station and Maintenance buildings)
- Photovoltaic electricity with clean fuels generator backup (All new structures and facility at Chaparral)
- Site selection and building orientation to maximize solar exposure, minimize encroachment on ecological systems present in the area; and minimize visual intrusions to the wilderness viewsheds.

Other Alternatives Considered

Three alternatives were analyzed in the Environmental Assessment (EA): Alternative A, No Action; Alternative B, Preferred; and Alternative C, Reduced Scope.

In Alternative A, No Action, the existing, inadequate structures would remain and continue to be used until they are deemed unsafe. Threats from flooding and impacts to the riparian area would continue.

Alternative C, Reduced Scope, would have included four buildings, a parking area, water storage tanks and infrastructure as in Alternative B (preferred) but with reduced size. On the west side of the road would be a maintenance building with caches for fire suppression and emergency medical equipment of 2,312 square feet instead of the 3,509 square foot building in the selected alternative. An entrance/fee station would be constructed in the entrance road. East of the road the visitor contact/ranger station with public restrooms would be a 1,920 square feet rather than 1,970 square feet and have 4 stalls instead of 6 as in the preferred alternative. The fourth building would be a smaller 20'x10' equipment shed constructed in the Chaparral area out of the floodplain. In this alternative the new facilities would be powered by diesel generator rather than a solar photovoltaic system.

Environmentally Preferred Alternative

The environmentally preferred alternative is Alternative B. It relocates permanent Monument improvements from sensitive riparian habitat to previously disturbed land and restores the riparian area. The new facilities incorporate many sustainable and renewable energy features.

Visitor use and enjoyment will be enhanced without detriment to the environment. Alternative C does not serve the visitor as well, utilizes a diesel generator for power generation, and while the appearance of the buildings would be similar the structures would not include as many sustainable design features.

Basis for the Decision

The analysis in the EA concluded that the selected alternative will cause minor adverse impacts to soils, vegetation and wildlife in the project area. However, floodplains, visitor experience and safety will receive long term beneficial impacts.

Implementation of this alternative will have beneficial effects on public health and safety by replacing the current substandard visitor facilities, moving most of the facilities out of a dead-end canyon and improving emergency radio communications.

This project is not within the designated wilderness. No cultural resources, farmlands or wetlands will be affected. Stream/riparian restoration qualifies under Nationwide Permit #27 under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. This project will have no effect on any known historic, ethnographic or archeological resources, or on any cultural landscapes.

The project is not directly related to any larger proposal. It is prescribed in existing monument plans and so does not establish a precedent or constrain any future considerations of use in the area. Other present and foreseeable future projects associated with the West District involve maintenance of existing facilities and removal of past impacts. These actions may include control of exotic vegetation, riparian restoration, and road maintenance.

The project will have no effect on any federally listed species currently in the monument. It will cause negligible, long term adverse impacts to species of concern identified in the project area and a negligible, long term beneficial impact to species using the restored riparian area.

Mitigations

The project is designed to rest lightly on the land through the use of sustainable design concepts, re-using existing solar photovoltaic panels, and use of "green" construction materials. Viewsheds have been considered and protected as much as possible. Specific impact mitigations are listed in the following matrix along with the responsible party.

General construction mitigations include defining the construction zones to minimize the area impacted; stating all protection measures in contract specifications; educating workers as to the need to minimize the construction footprint as well as what to do if unexpected archeological or other finds are made during construction; pressure washing all construction equipment that will leave the road to minimize spread of exotic vegetation; any fill materials will be approved by Monument biologists; all disturbed areas will be re-vegetated using native seed and plants.

Impact/Mitigation Matrix

Impact Issues	Potential Impacts	Mitigation	Responsible Party
Air Quality	Short term impacts to local air quality during construction long term, negligible adverse impacts from increased use at the new facilities.	Water or other reasonably available control measures will be applied as necessary to mitigate dust impacts. Idling of construction vehicles will be limited. In addition, signs will be posted in the construction zone asking visitors to turn off their engines during any traffic delays to reduce noise and air quality impacts on site.	Contractor NPS – Monument staff
Soils	6.5 acres of soil disturbed	To minimize soil erosion and possible flushing of sediment at the project site, standard erosion control measures including silt fencing and sandbags will be used. Trenching operations will save excavated material for re-use All trenching restoration operations will follow guidelines approved by park staff.	Contractor
Vegetation	Short term loss of grasses and shrubs in construction area	Areas of disturbed vegetation and/or compacted soils will be rehabilitated with native species. Spreading saved topsoil will permit natural native revegetation via seeds in soil. Post-project exotic plant monitoring	Contractor NPS – Monument Staff
Wetlands and Floodplains	Seasonal wet area south of Maintenance construction area	The boundaries of the seasonally wet area will be marked on the ground by monument staff and will be avoided by construction activities.	NPS – Monument Staff Contractor
Wildlife	Temporary behavior modification due to noise and activity of construction activities	Construction expected to take 4-6 months. Most wildlife expected to return after completion	Contractor NPS – Monument Staff
Special Species Status	No effect on any federally listed species currently in the monument. American Badger, California species of special concern, minor loss of denning habitat due to construction of facilities	Construction workers and supervisors will be informed about special status species. Contract provisions will require the cessation of construction activities if a species were discovered in the project area until park staff re-evaluates the project.	Contractor
Cultural Resources	Unmanaged visitor access to nearby historical site	Public visitation not encouraged until a plan for site is developed.	NPS – Monument Staff
Visitor Use	Construction activity may conflict with visitor enjoyment.	Variations on construction timing will be considered. Options may include conducting the majority of the work in the off-season (summer) and/or inserting a no construction on weekends clause.	NPS – Monument Staff
Scenic Quality	Short term construction impact. Limited view of buildings from High Peaks trail	Aboveground utilities such as the water tanks and communications antenna will be painted with color(s) approved by park staff that blend into the scenery. Buildings situated to utilize hills to block views from wilderness areas	Contractor NPS – Monument Staff

Public Involvement

Public scoping for this project was covered in the West Side Development Concept Plan approved in January 1991. The NPS Denver Service Center prepared the EA. The EA was made available for review and comment to the public and other agencies for a 30-day period ending April 3, 2003. The document was distributed to 3 main public libraries on the west side and the main county library on the east side; posted on the Pinnacles web site; and sent to the 4 city and county planning departments on the west side. Additionally, 211 notices of availability were mailed or electronically sent to interested parties including all landowners of record contiguous to the West District and the entrance road. Two public meetings were noticed in local papers and held in Soledad and King City, the gateway communities to the West District. A total of twelve comments were received (eleven by e-mail and one by US mail). Eight of the twelve were simple statements supportive of Alternative B (the NPS Preferred Alternative). One supported Alternative B and the use of solar power to minimize environmental damage. Another supported Alternative B and wanted more revegetation information in the document (provided by monument staff). One was from a neighbor expressing concern about monument visitors presently parking in front his gate when the existing lot is full. Moving the visitor contact facility closer to the entrance and providing more onsite parking should alleviate the problem he is experiencing. Lastly, one expressed preference that the buildings be designed to decrease both heating and cooling bills and use tube-type skylights to minimize sun damage to exhibits.

The comments received raised no issues that were not addressed nor caused substantial changes in the text of the EA.

Impairment of Park Resources

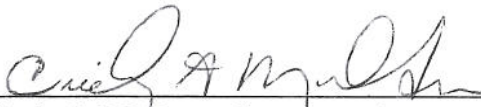
No project is allowed to impair National Park resources or values in keeping with the National Park Service Organic Act of 1916. Alternative B, the selected alternative, contains elements with the potential to have long term minor impacts that are limited in context. The National Park Service has determined that implementation of the selective alternative will not constitute impairment to Pinnacles National Monument's resources.

The selected alternative also results in beneficial effects to monument resources and provides opportunities for the enjoyment of monument resources without resulting in impairment.

Decision

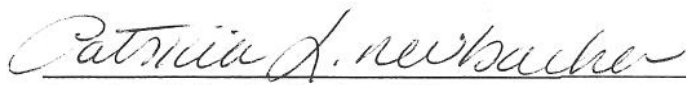
Based on the environmental impact analysis documented in the EA, the capacity of the mitigation measures to reduce or eliminate impacts and with due consideration of public comment, the NPS has determined that the proposed action is not a major federal action having the potential to significantly affect the quality of the human environment. There are no adverse cumulative effects or indirect effects foreseen. Therefore, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared and the proposed action will be implemented subject to the provisions of the mitigation plans described herein.

Recommended by:


Cicely A. Muldoon, Superintendent
Pinnacles National Monument

28 May 2003
Date

Approved by:


Jonathan B. Jarvis, Regional Director
Pacific West Region

June 3, 2003
Date