

Pinnacles National Park

West Side Trail Construction

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Public Review of Environmental Assessment



Dear Friends,

Pinnacles National Park has completed an environmental assessment (EA) to construct two new trails on the west side of the park. The purpose of the proposed action is to enhance the overall visitor experience on the west side of Pinnacles NP by providing trail connections in accordance with the GMP. The project would also provide safe and increased visitor services, sustainable trails, and interpretative opportunities about the park's wide range of physical, natural, and cultural resources. This newsletter provides an overview of the proposed action and a summary of effects of the action.

I invite you to review and provide comments on the EA. The review period for the EA will extend from **April 1-April 30**. Please join us for a public meeting on the project on **Monday, April 11, 2016**. You may provide your thoughts at the public meeting, by mail, or online on the project website at: <http://parkplanning/nps.gov/westsidetrails>. Page three of this newsletter contains additional information about the meeting and how to comment.

We look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

Karen Beppler-Dorn
Superintendent

Proposed Action

The proposed action would construct two new trails on the west side of the park: an accessible loop trail from the West Side VCS and a connector trail from the accessible loop to the Chaparral area and trailheads. Interpretive waysides and directional signage would also be installed. The accessible loop trail would be approximately two-thirds of a mile in length, in a lollipop design for a total of approximately two acres of ground disturbance. It would be designed to meet the Architectural Barriers Act Accessibility Standards (ABAAS) for Outdoor Developed Areas. The trail would have two overlooks; one at the beginning of the loop, and another along the loop with a view of the High Peaks. The connector trail would be approximately one mile long and connect the VCS to the existing trailheads at the Chaparral area. In Alternative B, the Proposed Action, the connector trail would start on the accessible loop and descend approximately 600 feet through Jawbone Canyon, approximately 1500 feet is within the Hain Wilderness. The connector alignment in Alternative C is outside of wilderness.

Need for the Project

The Pinnacles National Park General Management Plan and other planning documents direct the park to develop new trail connections on the west side of the park, particularly a trail to link the new visitor contact station with the existing trail system. Action is needed now because there are no formal trails that start from the recently constructed West Side VCS. The absence of trails impacts visitors' safety, overall experience, and park resources. Without a formalized trail, visitors create their own 'social' trails, which damages native vegetation, contributes to erosion, and threatens cultural resources. In addition to causing resource damage, the lack of trails at the VCS is dangerous for park visitors since there is no safe access on foot to the other hiking trails within the park. The road that connects the visitor contact station and Chaparral Area is a narrow, curvy road without shoulders or sidewalks that is unsafe for hiking. In addition, opportunities for an accessible visitor experience are limited in the park. Providing an accessible trail with informational panels will open up the visual, cultural and natural resources to those unable to negotiate the park's more strenuous trails.

Summary of Environmental Impacts

Geology and Soils. Impacts to soil differ between the connector alignments. Alternative B has some steep sections but has primarily gradual grades. Alternative C is steep on the entire alignment requiring multiple stacked switchbacks which could increase erosion and shortcutting the trail.

Vegetation. No substantial effects to quality or quantity of vegetation because plants to be removed are common throughout the park. Mitigation will help control invasive species and protect mature trees. Confining visitors to an established trail would benefit vegetation and reduce trampling.

Special Status Wildlife. Little to no effect to federally listed California condor, red-legged frog or tiger salamander because none of these species is known to occur or to possess habitat within the project site. Training for construction crews would further reduce effects to listed species.

Cultural Resources. Minimal impacts because the trail will be routed to: 1) reduce impacts to the Proposed Lyons Homestead Historical Archeological District and 2) avoid the one archeological resource that exists in the project area. The non-wilderness connector alignment would avoid archeological resources. There would be benefits from interpretation of the area's history.

Wilderness. Portions of Alternative B alignments would be visible from the Hain Wilderness but the connector is largely hidden from view. Alternative C is exposed and in full view from wilderness, impacting integral Wilderness vistas. A section of trail within wilderness would be built with hand tools and designed to require minimal future maintenance.

Visitor Use and Access. Substantial benefits would result from new hiking and interpretive opportunities. Although the VCS parking lot may fill up more often since visitors would spend more time in that lot while hiking the new trails, this is not a significant impact because the addition of the new trails is not expected to dramatically increase the existing low levels visitation on the west side of the park. The Alternative B connector alignment is more gradual and shaded while Alternative C is steep and exposed to hot summer sun for its entire length.

How to Comment

Please share your thoughts on the project. The NPS website, listed below, has been set up to receive your input. The site will also provide updates about the project's progress and other related documents. Please provide comments by **April 30**. You may provide comments in the following ways:

1. Attend the public meeting on Monday, **April 11, 2016** in the at the Soledad City Council Chambers, 248 Main Street, Soledad, CA. You will be able to discuss the project with park staff from 5:00-6:00 p.m. A presentation will begin at 6:00 p.m.
2. Submit comments electronically on the NPS planning website:
<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/westsidetrails>
3. Send comments by mail to:

National Park Service, Attn: Karen Cantwell
333 Bush Street, Suite 500
San Francisco, CA 94104-2828

Project Schedule

- ☐ March-April 2016: Public review of the EA
- ☐ April-May 2016: Analysis of public comments
- ☐ May-June 2016: Finding of No Significant Impact/Project approval
- ☐ Summer 2016: Completion of construction documents
- ☐ Fall 2016: Begin construction of accessible trail

Trail Alignments

