



Preserve Management Plan / Wild and Scenic River Study / Environmental Assessment

Newsletter #1, Spring 2016

Greetings,

Oregon Caves National Monument and Preserve is inviting public comment on a proposal to prepare a management plan for the newly designated *national preserve*. The legislation that created the 4,070 acre preserve was signed into law on December 19, 2014.

As a new unit of the National Park Service (NPS), the preserve presents new management opportunities and challenges. This plan will address management of roads, trails, commercial activities, hunting, hiking, use of pack animals, and backcountry camping, among other things. The new preserve contains a campground, close to 20 miles of gravel roads and 17 miles of trails. There is a federally listed endangered species (spotted owl) and a species of concern (fisher). The area contains a number of rare plants as well as areas that have Port-Orford-cedar root disease which will need to be kept contained.

The planning process also includes the wild and scenic river study authorized in the December 2014 legislation. The study will examine whether five creek segments on the monument and preserve should be included in the national wild and scenic rivers system.

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act and the National Historic Preservation Act, the NPS is announcing a 30-day public scoping period to solicit public comments on this planning project.

Scoping is the first step for involving individuals, organizations, agencies, and other interested parties in the planning process. Public scoping is designed to obtain input on issues and areas of concern related to the project, including a suitable range of alternatives, the nature and extent of potential environmental impacts and benefits, and appropriate mitigation strategies. Because the environmental assessment (EA) will analyze many important issues, your participation is encouraged and needed. We look forward to your involvement in our planning for the preserve and will ensure that your concerns and ideas are adequately considered and evaluated.

During this scoping period, the public is invited to identify any issues or concerns they might have with the proposed action so that the NPS can appropriately consider them in the preparation of the EA. Public review and comments on the EA will also be invited when it is released next year.

Sincerely,

Vicki Snitzler
Superintendent

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Brief Monument and Preserve Overview

Located in southwestern Oregon in the Siskiyou Mountains at 4,000 to 4,360 feet in elevation, there exists a dynamic system of marble caves with limestone formations that started forming over a million and a half years ago. In 1909, by presidential executive order, Oregon Caves and its surrounding environment were identified as nationally significant and designated as a national monument for the enjoyment of future generations.

The original designation was 480 acres. This small size almost immediately led to legislative proposals and plans for monument expansion so that the entire watershed that supports the caves, including old-growth mixed coniferous and deciduous forests, would be preserved.

The addition of the 4,070-acre national preserve, signed into law on December 19, 2014, by an act of Congress, included the surrounding watershed and forest, adding new visitor opportunities and cultural and natural resources to the park unit. Visitors to the national monument and preserve will see more and larger natural waterfalls and mountain meadows, as well as, for the first time, subalpine meadows, alpine rock gardens, dozens of more vegetation communities, glacial cirque lakes, and vistas of Mount Shasta. The area is one of the most concentrated examples of geodiversity in this hemisphere due to the presence of tilted rock slabs from back-arc and forearc basins, mid-ocean ridges, island arcs, and rifting volcanism from sinking seafloors, all stacked by massive tectonic forces against the continent and soldered by granitic welding.

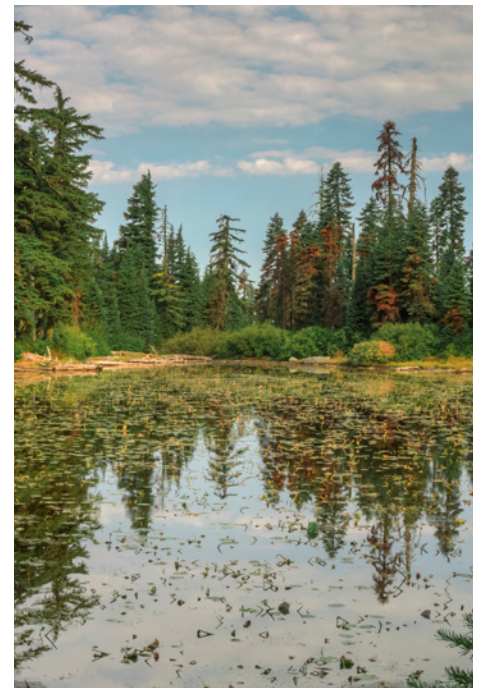
What is the Preserve Management Plan/Wild and Scenic Rivers Study and Environmental Assessment?

While the monument's general management plan (GMP), completed in 2000, proposed expansion of the monument, it was not prescient in addressing the new management responsibilities that Congress included when it designated the addition as a preserve in 2014. The new preserve surrounds the existing monument and includes a variety of facilities including a campground, roads, water lines, and trails. There are new National Park Service (NPS) management responsibilities, including management of hunting opportunities. In addition, the 2014 legislation requires the park to study five stream segments for potential designation within the wild and scenic rivers system (See map on page 10). Planning will be conducted by a multidisciplinary team, including staff and planners from the NPS and subject matter experts. The team will consult with other knowledgeable people inside and outside the NPS and with the general public. Public involvement throughout the planning process will play an essential role in the development of both the preserve management plan and the wild and scenic river study. Concerns, expectations, and values of all interested individuals and entities will be seriously considered and reviewed for inclusion in the plan.

All strategies and actions must be consistent with the National Park Service's Organic Act of 1916, providing for protection of its natural and cultural resources while inviting appropriate visitor use and enjoyment of the preserve. To comply with the National Environmental Policy Act and NPS policy, the plan and study will be evaluated through an Environmental Assessment (EA). The plan will identify issues and concerns and present a reasonable range of management alternatives for public review. The EA will also analyze the environmental consequences of each of the alternatives, and can be used to identify a preferred alternative, which will then become the final plan. At the end of the EA process, the NPS will issue a "Finding of No Significant Impact" which is the document that finalizes the decision on the preserve management plan.



Hiker on Mount Elijah



Upper Bigelow Lake

What Issues Should Be Addressed?

Primary issues, needs, and opportunities to be considered during preparation of the Preserve Management Plan/Wild and Scenic River Study/Environmental Assessment are discussed below. The expected result will be to provide long-term guidance for the listed issues. Consultations with stakeholders and the public during public review periods may add to this list of issues and opportunities.

Natural Resources

The plan will define priorities and management direction for natural resource protection, invasive species management, restoration, research, and monitoring, and address the balance between visitor use and enjoyment and the protection of natural resources.

Climate Change and Sustainability

The plan will consider mechanisms to address climate change through interpretation and education, ongoing monitoring, adaptation and instituting energy conservation practices.

Fire and Fuels Management

A separate new fire management plan will be developed for the park. The preserve management plan will outline factors to be considered in the fire management planning effort. These include managing wildland fire to protect the public; park communities and infrastructure; conserving natural and cultural resources; and maintaining and restoring natural ecosystems and processes.

Cultural Resources

Preservation and protection of sensitive cultural and historical resources is an important concern of the plan. The plan will help define priorities and management direction for cultural resources protection, research, and monitoring.

Visitor Uses

The plan will address changing patterns in visitor use trends and demographics and identify appropriate visitor access and experiences, opportunities for interpretation and education, and safety.

Commercial Services

The plan will explore potential opportunities for local partners and business entities to provide commercial services in the expansion area. These potentially include guided hiking and photography tours, group camping services, education programs at the Bigelow Lakes' and riparian areas, workshops, seminars, horseback riding, and guided hunting.



Cave Creek Campground

Education and Interpretation

Oregon Caves National Monument & Preserve is an exceptional place for visitors and other stakeholders to learn about local and regional geology, biology, climate, and cultural history and prehistory. The plan will explore new educational opportunities within the preserve and with partner agencies, schools, institutes, and gateway communities.

Hunting

Hunting and fishing are allowed within the preserve in accordance with applicable state and federal laws. The park may, in consultation with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, designate zones and periods where hunting is permitted. The plan will consider these options.

Facilities

The land added to the park through the boundary expansion is relatively undeveloped. The potential for additional facilities, including expanding the campground, adding restrooms and improving the water supply systems, will be considered.

Campground

Desired conditions for the Cave Creek campground, including resource protection, visitor experience, and special uses, need to be established.

Roads

The boundary expansion added 19.11 miles of gravel roads to the park. Many of the roads are in poor shape and may be candidates for decommissioning.

Decisions must be made on which roads to maintain and which to decommission, as well as determining the method to decommission them. A recent U.S. Forest Service environmental assessment evaluated road conditions in the preserve areas and NPS will explore using these results to inform decisions. The Forest Service will continue to retain the use of certain road segments.

Trails

16.75 miles of trails were added to the park. The trails are in variable condition and many require extensive restoration and maintenance. The planning effort will evaluate the condition of existing trails and the potential need for new ones.

Partnerships

The plan will seek new ways in which the monument could coordinate efforts with federal, state, tribal, local agencies, and other organizations.

Wild and Scenic Rivers

Congress has directed the park to study five creek segments for possible inclusion into the Wild and Scenic Rivers system. This planning effort will include determinations of eligibility and suitability for these segments.

Proposed Action

The *proposed action* is the initial National Park Service (NPS) proposal to address the issues. It represents the framework of one alternative that will be considered during the planning process. In addition to the proposed action, the NPS will consider a no-action alternative and other alternatives that are suggested during the scoping period, as appropriate. The NPS will not select an alternative for implementation until after environmental compliance is completed under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). This will occur after the NPS responds to public comments following the release of the draft planning document in 2017.

Your comments on the specific proposals below are appreciated and will be used to improve the proposed action or develop new alternatives, as appropriate.

Natural Resources

Native Species

The National Park Service (NPS) would continue to monitor ecological processes and strive to prevent adverse impacts to ecosystems, using appropriate tools such as restoration and mitigation. Ecological and evolutionary studies of native species would be encouraged. Old growth trees would be protected through tools such as fuel reduction. A high level of biodiversity would continue to be maintained on the preserve.

Non-native species

The spread of non-natives, especially invasives in native ecosystems, would be limited and minimized to avoid adverse ecological impacts. The NPS would conduct increased surveys and inventories for early detection of invasive species to effectively manage them before they reduce native biodiversity.

Fire

The full range of strategies for fire management would be considered, including suppression by a variety of means. Any methods used to suppress wildland fires would minimize the adverse impacts of the suppression action and the fire, commensurate with effective control and resource values to be protected. The NPS would work collaboratively among all stakeholders to make progress towards maintaining biodiversity, enhancing ecological resiliency to fire-related disturbances, and developing safe, effective, efficient risk-based responses to wildfires.



Hikers at Bigelow Lakes

Hydrology

Preserve wetlands would be re-surveyed in order to assess current conditions and compare to historic conditions. Based on the results of a Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment, the NPS would mitigate the effects of climate change on both surface and subsurface hydrology and adapt with changing hydrological conditions to preserve habitat diversity, especially wetlands.

Cultural Resources

An archeological inventory would be completed for the preserve. Trails would be surveyed for potential national register eligibility, especially Cave Creek Trail.

Interpretation and Education

Education

Because road access presents significant challenges for formal ranger-led educational programs on the broader preserve, educational programming would focus on classroom support such as rangers in the classroom, curriculum development, and electronic lesson plans in order to reach wider and more diverse audiences. Opportunities for partner-provided education on the preserve would be explored and promoted and some formal education programs could potentially be provided at Cave Creek campground.

Interpretation

Due to staffing constraints, outreach, print, and electronic media would be emphasized over personal ranger contact on the preserve lands. Opportunities for partner-provided interpretation on the preserve, however, would be encouraged and promoted. Electronic media would include increased web content as well as mobile device solutions that could be accessed in the field by visitors. Wayside signs on preserve lands would be limited and would primarily focus on resource protection and appreciation at Cave Creek Campground, where Port

Orford cedars are vulnerable to visitor impacts.

Information

Web-based and print maps, including the official brochure, would be updated to include the preserve lands. Improved directional signage throughout the preserve, focusing on trail intersections and boundaries, would be provided. Safety messages to visitors and hunters during hunting and high fire danger seasons would be emphasized.

Facilities

Cave Creek Campground

Cave Creek Campground would be retained to provide a traditional tent

and intimate camping experience. The campground's footprint, alignments, number of sites, aesthetics, and host site would be kept. The NPS would protect sensitive resources, including Port Orford cedar, through a variety of management actions including temporary and seasonal closures.

Trails

The existing system of trails would be maintained for designated uses. While the NPS would explore the potential for new trails, especially on decommissioned roads, no major expansion or upgrades of the system would be anticipated. Partners would be engaged to assist with trail maintenance. A hardened trail and boardwalk would be considered at Bigelow Lakes to protect resources.

Roads

In conjunction with the selected alternative of a previous US Forest Service environmental assessment of roads in what is now the preserve, the NPS would update a condition assessment of all roads to determine proper uses or decommissioning. The portions of the following roads that lie within the park unit boundaries would be maintained as public roads, as well as access and egress for U.S. Forest Service permitted commercial activities, and fire management access:

- 4613000 (Buck Creek Road)
- 4614000 (Cave Creek Road)
- 4611960 (Lake Creek Road)
- 4611070 (Bigelow Lakes Road)
- 4611079 (Lake Mountain Road)

Ark Road (4611964) is a less than 1/10 mile road that would be upgraded for safety to access the public water intake but which would be gated to help secure the intake. The remaining roads will be assessed for maintenance, abandonment, restoration, or transfer to trail use as part of this planning effort.

Utilities and Infrastructure

The NPS would investigate methods to provide adequate and cost-effective staff communication infrastructure throughout the preserve, especially in Cave Creek campground. The public water system for the monument

would be improved to enhance safety, increase reliability, and decrease operational costs.

Recreational Uses

Camping

Backcountry camping would be allowed under permit. No vehicle dispersed camping would be allowed.

Access

All areas would remain open to hiking, skiing and snowshoeing. Snowmobiling would continue to be prohibited.

Biking

Biking would be permitted on paved and unpaved park and administrative roads, unless posted. Bicycles would not be permitted on single-track trails.

Pack Animals

Seasonal equestrian use would be appropriate if under permit and on designated routes and trails. However, no additional facilities would be constructed to accommodate such uses.

Hunting

Hunting would continue to be allowed under state regulations. However, the NPS would explore restricting hunting in areas surrounding the Cave Creek Campground, the Big Tree Trail, and No Name Trail for visitor safety.

Dogs

Leashed dogs would be permitted in Cave Creek Campground on campsites and paved surfaces, as well as public and administrative roads, unless otherwise posted.

Special Events and Commercial Services

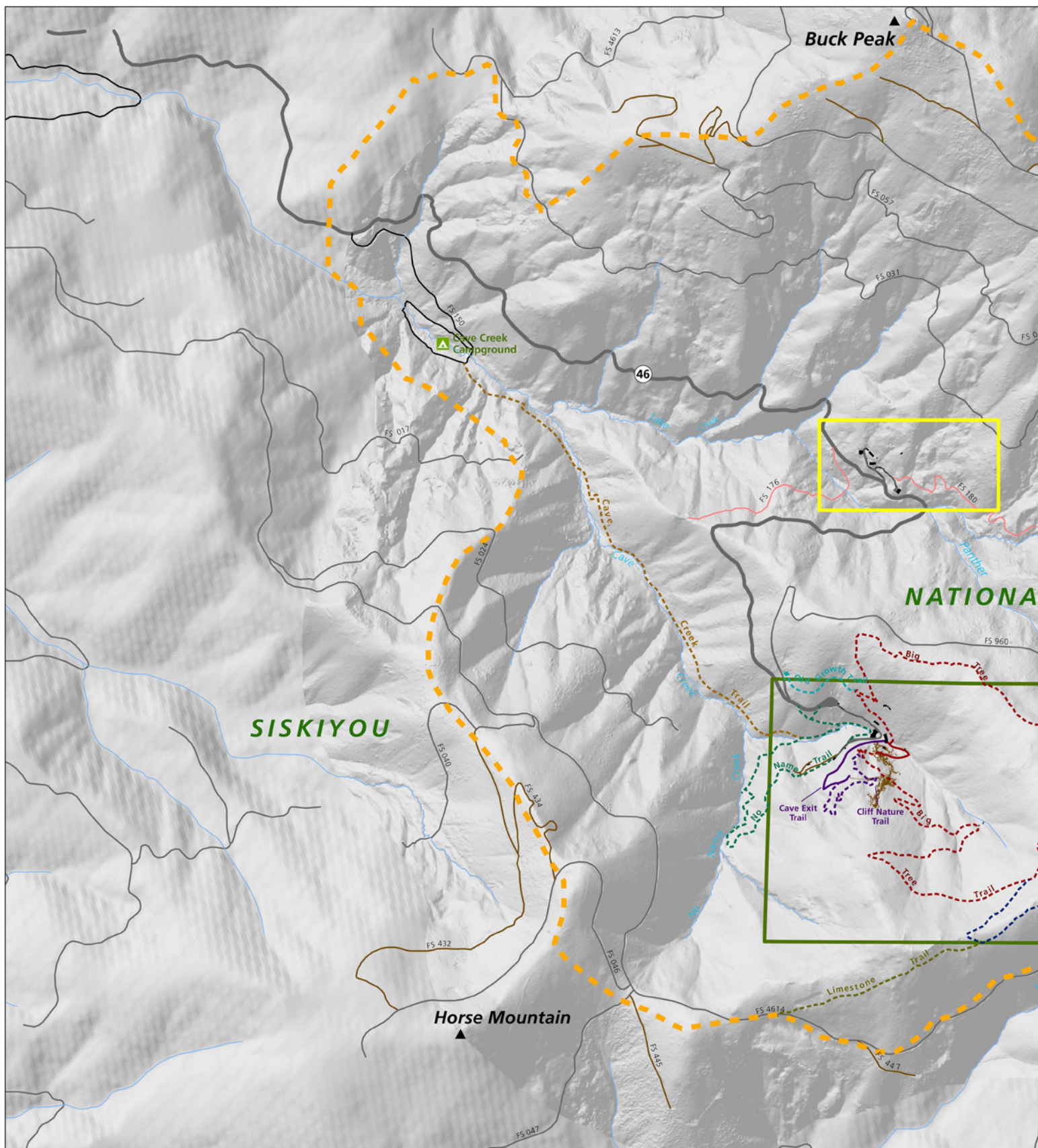
All special events and commercial services would continue to be subject to commercial use authorizations or special use permits. Appropriate special events and commercial services could include guided hiking, biking, horseback riding, skiing, snowshoeing, educational programs, filming, photography, wildlife observations, organized runs and walks, shuttle services, campground firewood sales, and catered picnicking.

Partnerships

The NPS would pursue using Service First authority to formalize and expand the partnership with the Rogue-Siskiyou National Forest to institutionalize strong interagency collaboration and coordination in cross-boundary natural resource, fire, roads, visitor protection, boundary surveys, search and rescue, and recreation management. Partnerships with other entities, such as local governments, tribes, and educational institutions, would be increased and enhanced.







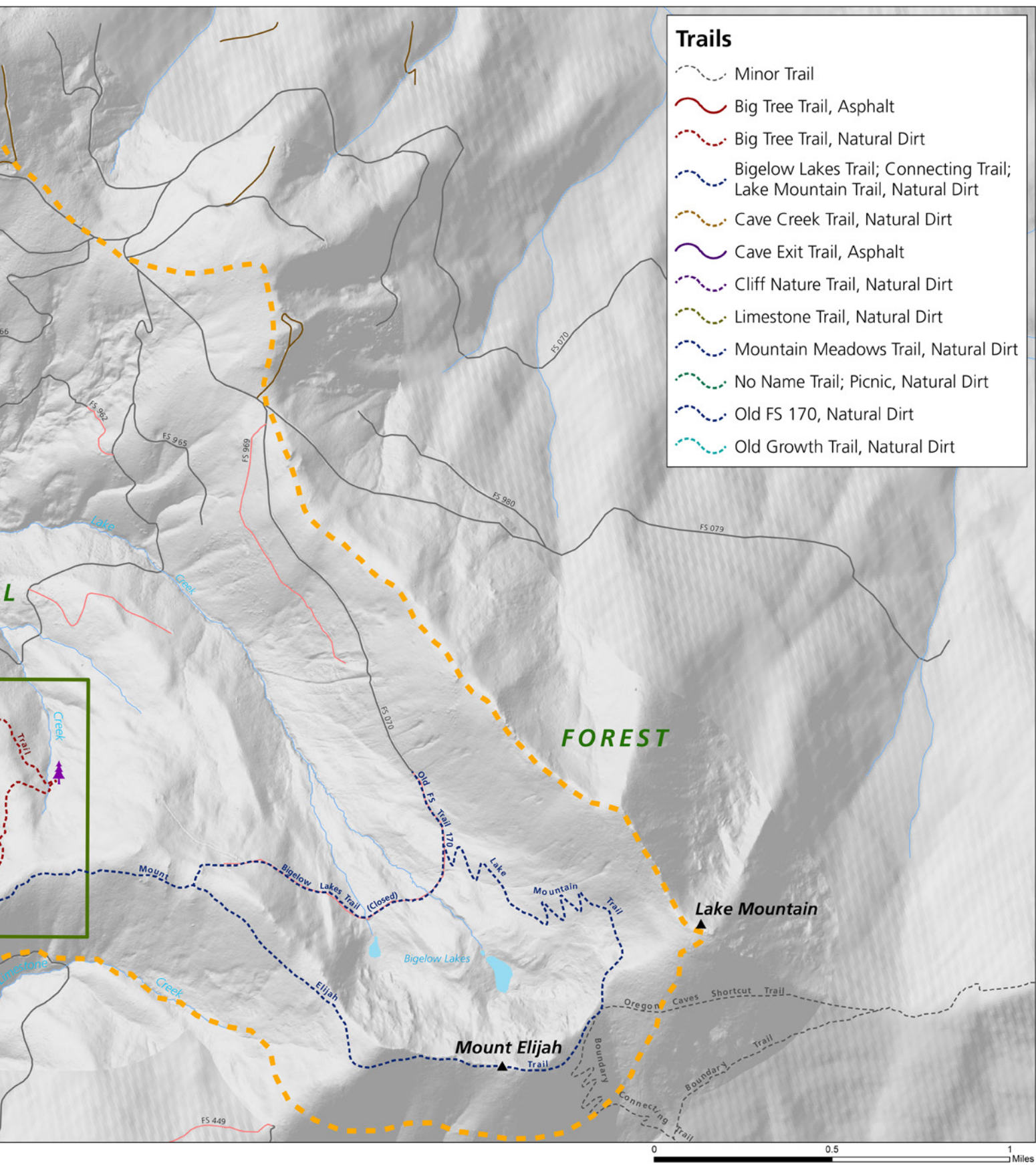
Bigelow Meadow



Overview of Oregon Caves National Monument and Preserve Oregon

Legend

-  Monument Boundary
-  Preserve Boundary
-  Administration Area
-  Building



Wild and Scenic River Study

The five creek segments shown on the map on page 11) are being studied for possible inclusion into the Wild and Scenic Rivers system. The preserve management planning process will include determinations of eligibility and suitability for these segments. If any segments are found eligible, their outstandingly remarkable values will be described and suitability will be analyzed. Because the areas to be studied comprise more than half of the preserve, integration of the study into the preserve management plan benefits each effort.

Eligibility • Preliminary Findings

The pristine waters of the Oregon Caves National Monument and Preserve are part of the headwater tributaries of the Illinois River, one of the last major undammed rivers in the Pacific Northwest. The complex, dynamic cave and riparian ecosystems of the monument and preserve are dependent on the continued existence and integrity of these waters. Port Orford cedar, the ecologically dominant riparian species, provides dense shading that contributes to cold temperatures and outstanding water quality. As a consequence, the aquatic macroinvertebrate communities are healthy and display high biodiversity rates.

The study team's preliminary findings are that Upper Cave Creek and a portion of Lake Creek are eligible for inclusion in the national wild and scenic river system. These preliminary findings concerning eligibility may change if new information comes to light during this public review period. Suitability has not yet been analyzed.

Upper Cave Creek

The team's preliminary finding is that Upper Cave Creek, from the headwaters to the start of the subterranean River Styx, possesses an ecological ORV due to both its connectivity to the River Styx, an already designated wild and scenic river, and its hydrologic complexity.

Water flowing into the creek mixes with carbon dioxide in the forest floor and soils of the watershed. This feeds the River Styx with a weak acid solution that continues to enlarge the cave and thus provide more habitat for rare, endemic species only found here. The stream's main distinction, though, is that it is one of the only known streams in the Klamath-Siskiyou region that is intermittent and at the same time disappears into a cave. A disappearing stream is rare in this region with few soluble rock areas. The combination of a disappearing and intermittent stream is rare far beyond the region.

Lake Creek

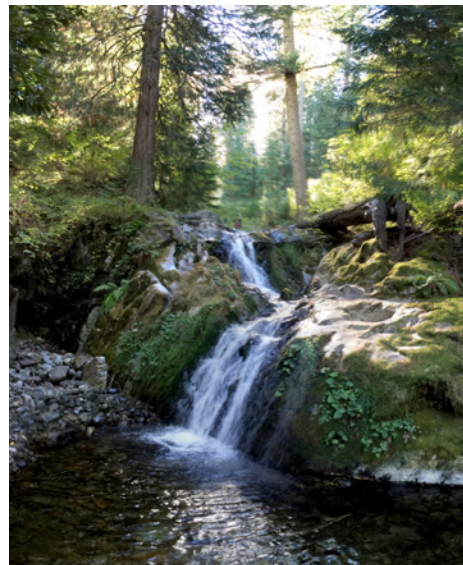
Lake Creek from its headwaters at Bigelow Lake to its intersection with road 960, contains an ecological ORV due to its majestic riparian forests of Port Orford cedar and outstanding macroinvertebrate biodiversity. This segment of Lake Creek contains exemplary contiguous groupings of old-growth Port Orford cedar. Port Orford cedar is almost entirely found, in the wild, within the Klamath-Siskiyou bioregion. Port Orford cedar is a relic species, meaning that its geographic range has shrunk to an area less than a tenth of its original range in prehistoric times.

In addition, the stream's macroinvertebrate biodiversity was found to have one of the highest biodiversity rates among measured streams in the region.

Eligibility and Suitability

To be found **eligible**, a river segment must be free-flowing and possess one or more outstandingly remarkable value (ORV) in fish, wildlife, geological, recreational, scenic, historic, cultural, or other similar value. An ORV is a river dependent value that is unique, rare, or exemplary at a regional or national scale.

If a river segment is found eligible, then the managing agency must analyze whether inclusion into the national wild and scenic river system is **suitable**. This analysis is based on the characteristics that make the river segment(s) worthy of designation, the ability of the agency to protect its outstandingly remarkable values, water quality, and free flow, the compatibility of designation with other potential uses, and the public's support for designation.



Waterfall on Lake Creek



The River Styx, A Wild and Scenic River

River Styx, the underground segment of Cave Creek, was designated as a wild and scenic river by Congress in December, 2014. It is the first and only underground river to be part of the National Wild and Scenic River System. While River Styx is outside of the preserve plan study area, requirements under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act led the park to develop preliminary findings on the ORVs and a wild and scenic river boundary for River Styx. The planning team is utilizing the preserve plan's public outreach opportunities to also share information about River Styx.

River Styx

Recommended Boundary

The River Styx was found to contain geologic, ecologic, recreational, and aesthetics ORVs. The planning team's proposed recommendation is for a ¼ mile wild and scenic river boundary on either side of the river. This boundary is recommended to allow maximum protection of the ecological and geological ORVs which rely on the surrounding surface lands and waters. The proposed boundary will be posted in the Federal Register.

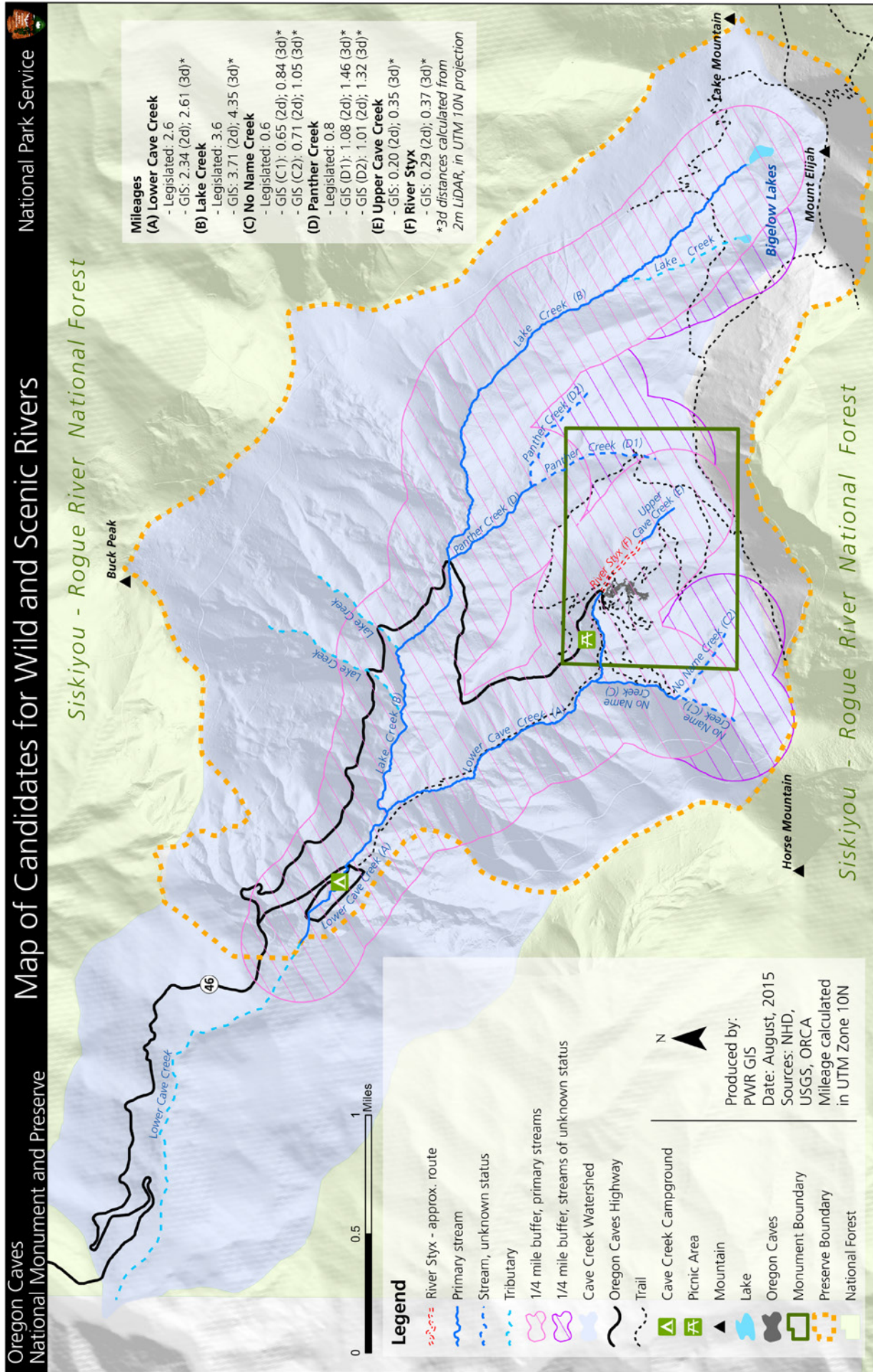
Outstandingly Remarkable Values

River Styx flows through a marble cave, a rare type of cave in the Pacific Northwest and one made even rarer by having a present-day stream in it. The cave contains a diverse geologic record, featuring a concentrated variety of types of rock and dramatic visual evidence of change spanning millions of years as the cave cut through hundreds of feet of rock.

The cave supports one of the highest concentrations of animal endemics than has been reported from any other cave in the Pacific Northwest. This complex, dynamic cave ecosystem is dependent on the pristine waters of the River

Styx and the surrounding watershed for its continued existence and integrity.

The cave attracts visitors from throughout the Pacific Northwest and around the world but especially from western Oregon and northwestern California. The tours through it offer the opportunity to observe beautiful and diverse cave formations and rare geologic features rarely so concentrated in the Pacific Northwest. The tight twisting and turning cave routes provide visitors with a sense of discovery, immersion, adventure, and amazement. It's a memorable experience leaving visitors, often those entering an attractive cave for the first time, with a sense of accomplishment and a renewed interest in nature. The immersive nature of the experience engages most senses, allowing visitors to feel water dripping in the cave, hear the echoing sounds of River Styx, and see the scenic splendor of the river and cave formations. The small group tours, led by National Park Service interpretive rangers, offer exemplary interpretive experiences and ample opportunities for personal challenge and memorable achievement, as well as learning about the complex rocks and hydrology of the cave environment and the mountain watershed.



Steps in the Planning Process

The planning process will involve the following steps:

- Public Scoping – Identify goals and issues that need to be addressed in the planning process, as well as describe the proposed action. This is where we are right now.
- Eligibility Analysis – Determine the eligibility of stream segments for wild and scenic river status.
- Develop Alternatives – Develop reasoned alternatives to the proposed action, based on public input, safety considerations, visitor opportunities, and resource analysis. Consider but dismiss those alternatives that are unreasonable or unrealistic.
- Suitability Analysis – Determine the suitability of wild and scenic river status for the five creek segments
- Prepare/Distribute Draft Preserve Management Plan/ Wild and Scenic River Study and Environmental Assessment
- Prepare/Distribute Finding of No Significant Impact

How can I be involved?

Your involvement in the planning process is critical for the completion of a successful plan. There are two time periods when you can provide formal comments. The first one is underway and ends on June 10th. The next opportunity will be when the draft plan is released in 2017. You can always write or call us to voice your concerns or insights and check in on the planning process. Here are several ways for you to participate:

- Attend an open house in May (Scoping) and again in 2017 (Draft Plan)
- Sign up on the mailing list to receive publications about the planning process
- Complete and mail the response form included with this newsletter
- Send a letter to the Superintendent, Vicki Snitzler
- Comment online at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/preserveplan>
- Email your comments to orca_superintendent@nps.gov
- Telephone the Superintendent at (541) 592-2100.



You are invited to an open house!

In May, we are holding two open houses to give you an opportunity to tell us what you would like to see considered in the preserve management plan or wild and scenic river study. At the open houses, you will be able to meet members of the National Park Service planning team, learn more about the planning process, and discuss your ideas, thoughts, and concerns about the future of the preserve. Your ideas and comments are important to the development of a successful plan.



Bigelow Meadow

Cave Junction County Building

Tuesday, May 3, 6-8pm
102 South Redwood Highway
Cave Junction OR 97523

Grants Pass Interagency Office

Rogue Room
Thursday, May 5, 6-8pm
2164 N.E. Spalding Ave
Grants Pass, OR 97526

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National Park Service
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Oregon Caves National Monument and Preserve
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EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA™

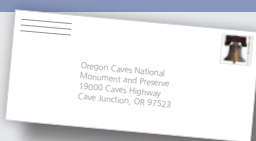
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National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



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Project Website:

[http://parkplanning.nps.gov/
preserveplan](http://parkplanning.nps.gov/preserveplan)

