

Oregon Caves National Monument and Preserve

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Scoping Comments Summary

August 2016

Dear Friends,

Earlier this year, the National Park Service began the process of developing a management plan for the newly added preserve lands. In conjunction with this effort, we also initiated a study of the creeks on preserve lands to determine their eligibility and suitability for wild and scenic river designation. In April and May, we distributed a newsletter with some preliminary ideas and asked you to share your comments. Some of you attended our open houses in May, while others provided written comments by filling out our newsletter comment form, sending us letters, or providing comments electronically. Thank you for your interest in the preserve and for your many thoughtful comments and suggestions. This newsletter contains a short summary of what we heard from you, as well as information about what to expect next in the planning process.

Your input will assist us in the next phase of the planning process as we design alternatives to address

the anticipated challenges and opportunities we face at the preserve. We will explore a range of alternatives for managing and preserving the resources and for providing quality visitor experiences for current and future generations. The staff at Oregon Caves National Monument and Preserve is committed to fulfilling our responsibilities as stewards of this special landscape.

The national park system has been called one of America's best ideas and the tradition of protecting these places of natural and cultural significance for the public to enjoy remains strong. Please join us in helping safeguard the future of this outstanding resource by continuing to stay involved in the planning process.

Vicki Snitzler
Superintendent
Oregon Caves National Monument and Preserve

How Can I Be Involved in Planning for the Future of the Preserve?

Your continued involvement in the planning process is critical for the successful completion of the plan. There will be another opportunity for you to provide formal comments to the planning team—at the release of the Draft Preserve Management Plan/Wild and Scenic River Study/Environmental Assessment in 2017. In addition, you can always write or call to voice your concerns or insights and to check in on the planning process.

Here are several ways for you to participate throughout this planning effort:

- Attend public meetings, when available
- Access information about the plan at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/preserveplan>
- Sign up on the email list: <http://alturl.com/qq97w>

Public Scoping Newsletter

Last spring, Oregon Caves National Monument and Preserve announced the beginning of the Preserve Management Plan and Wild and Scenic River Study scoping comment period by distributing a newsletter to organizations and individuals on the park mailing list. In addition, newsletters were distributed at public meetings. The newsletter was also published and made available for comment on the National Park Service's Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) website. Press releases announcing the public comment period were distributed to local newspapers.

The purpose of the newsletter was to:

- announce the start of the planning process;
- inform the public on participation opportunities;
- present and obtain comments on the proposed actions; and
- solicit comments on issues that the plan should address.

The planning team encouraged the public to comment and share their thoughts, ideas, and concerns through public open houses, informal meetings, correspondence, and the web site. The newsletter contained information on the date, time, and location of public scoping open houses. June 10, 2016 was established as the close of the public comment period.

Public Meetings

In May 2016, the planning team held two public scoping open houses in Oregon, including one in Cave Junction and one in Grants Pass. Displays and stations were set up at the start of the meetings so that attendees could have one-on-one conversations with members of the planning team. Planning team members recorded comments on flipcharts as they were received. Comment forms were made available and collected.

Stakeholder Input

Many local, state, and national organizations, stakeholders, and agencies were invited by mail to participate in the scoping process. Throughout the scoping period and continuing into alternatives development, additional conversations with local organizations and agencies were and will be conducted by the superintendent and members of the planning team.

Written Comments

Oregon Caves received 19 written responses in the form of letters, emails, newsletter response forms, and web comments. The newsletter comment forms, letters, emails and website submissions were all analyzed together. The comments were grouped by subject area and summarized.

Next Steps

Your comments received during the public scoping period will provide the basis for developing possible scenarios (called alternatives) for the future of the preserve. Evaluating one set of alternatives over another helps the planning team to compare and contrast the advantages and disadvantages and provides a sound approach to decision making, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act. The NPS will issue responses to all substantive comments when the decision document is prepared in late 2017.

Summary of Public Comments

This section contains a summary of comments received during the public scoping period for the Oregon Caves National Monument Preserve Management Plan and Wild and Scenic River Study. The following topics received the most comments: natural resource issues, recreation, roads, equestrian use, trails, camping, fire, hunting, and wild and scenic river designation. The full list of comments is available upon request.

Natural Resource Issues

Several commenters advocated protection of natural resources, particularly the integrity of natural ecosystems. Invasive species, clean water, fire, and climate change were cited as primary natural resource issues. Commenters suggested involving local expertise in resource management work. Active restoration of ecological processes, thinning of uniform Douglas fir stands, and a reduction of sediment sources into waterways were encouraged by several commenters. Some commenters envisioned opportunities to provide living laboratory demonstrations of natural selection relationships through restoration work.

Recreation

Commenters advocated for a wide variety of recreational activities and suggested ways to limit the impacts of visitors on natural resources and recreational experiences. Equestrian use, hiking, mountain biking, nature-based tourism, and camping were all supported by various commenters. New infrastructure, including



Cave Junction Public Open House, May 2016

signage, picnic areas, scenic overlooks, wheelchair-accessible amenities, and rest areas, were suggested. One commenter suggested allowing leashed dogs on selected trails.

Roads

Several commenters opposed decommissioning any roads, stating that it would reduce access and increase costs. Improved signs and maps were widely desired. Some commenters asked that off-road, cross-country motorized travel be prohibited, citing vegetation, wildlife and other impacts. Some commenters asked that previously planned sediment abatement work continue under NPS management. Conversion of some roads to trails, especially for stock, mountain bikes, and accessibility was supported by several commenters.

Equestrian Use

Commenters encouraged continuation or expansion of equestrian opportunities on the preserve. Analysis of horse trailer parking, turnaround needs, and camping at trailheads was requested. Conversion of some roads to trails allowing equestrian use was supported, especially when such trails could be turned into connected loops. Commenters were interested in retaining equestrian access to Bigelow Lakes and on the Limestone Trail, as well as on former Forest Service roads. Specific research regarding the relationship of equestrian use to natural resource protection and visitor experience was shared. While some commenters cautioned the NPS to closely monitor impacts, no commenters were opposed to retaining some level of stock use on preserve lands.

Trails

Many commenters suggested improved trail maintenance as a priority, including reestablishment of routes, rerouting for resource protection and the use of volunteer groups for maintenance work and consulting. Potential new opportunities for equestrian users and mountain bikers were described. Maintenance of all existing trails was emphasized by several commenters, including all those depicted on the Wild River District Map. Improved signage, both for directional purposes and to indicate allowed uses, was requested.

Camping

One commenter felt that additional campgrounds were needed on the preserve. Several suggested improved management of the Bigelow Lakes camping to reduce and monitor natural resource impacts, while another expressed a desire that no permit system would be used to manage camping.

Fire

Some commenters encouraged the NPS to consider controlled burning to remove fuel. Natural processes to restore late successional and fire resilient natural community ecosystems were encouraged. Some

commenters suggested that fire suppression should be minimized and fuel reduction limited to areas immediately surrounding infrastructure or along roads. Immediacy of response was mentioned as having a greater impact on fire safety than wildland fuel treatment. Active management of California Globe Mallow, which is fire dependent, and white oak, which is vulnerable to fire impacts, was also requested. The Crater Lake National Park fire plan was suggested as a model for the preserve.

Hunting

Several commenters requested that hunting continue to be allowed. Most comments regarding hunting were also related to access issues, including roads and trails. No commenter was opposed to hunting on the preserve, but several requested restrictions related to congested areas and off-road motorized retrieval of game - an activity supported by others. Another commenter was opposed to any restrictions at all.

Wild and Scenic Rivers

Congress directed the NPS to study five creek segments for possible inclusion into the wild and scenic rivers system. The scoping newsletter shared the team's preliminary findings that Upper Cave Creek and the upper portion of Lake Creek were eligible for designation and invited comment. Some commenters opposed wild and scenic river designation on the preserve because they felt that the creeks under study were already well-protected and that designation might lead to access restrictions. Others favored designation, saying that special recognition would help bring more attention to the outstandingly remarkable values of headwaters and their role in providing clean water downstream. A couple of commenters asked the NPS to further describe both the benefits and drawbacks to designation. Some commenters provided information on potential outstandingly remarkable values or additional creeks for the planning team to consider.

Contact Information

Mail:

Oregon Caves National Monument and Preserve
19000 Caves Highway
Cave Junction, OR 97523

Park Website:

<http://www.nps.gov/orca>

E-mail:

orca_superintendent@nps.gov

Phone:

Vicki Snitzler, Superintendent
(541) 592-2100