



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

Newsletter #3, Spring 2018

Greetings,

Oregon Caves National Monument and Preserve is inviting public comment on the management plan and environmental assessment for the recently designated national preserve, as well as a wild and scenic river study. The legislation that created the 4,070 acre preserve was signed into law on December 19, 2014. This plan addresses management of roads, trails, commercial activities, hunting, hiking, use of pack animals, and backcountry camping, among other things. The preserve contains a campground, nearly 20 miles of gravel roads and 17 miles of trails. There is a federally listed threatened 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 rot disease which will need to be kept contained.

The preserve planning process is happening at the same time as the wild and scenic river study authorized in the December 2014 legislation. The study examines 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, the National Historic Preservation Act, and the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, the NPS is announcing a 90-day public review period to solicit public comments on this planning project and study. We look forward to your involvement in our planning for the preserve and will ensure that your concerns and ideas are considered and evaluated. During this review period, the public is invited to identify any issues or concerns they might have with the preferred alternative, environmental analysis, and wild and scenic river study so that the NPS can appropriately consider them.

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. In 2014, River Styx, the underground segment of Cave Creek, was designated by Congress as a wild and scenic river. It is the first and only underground river to be part of the National Wild and Scenic River System.

The original monument 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.

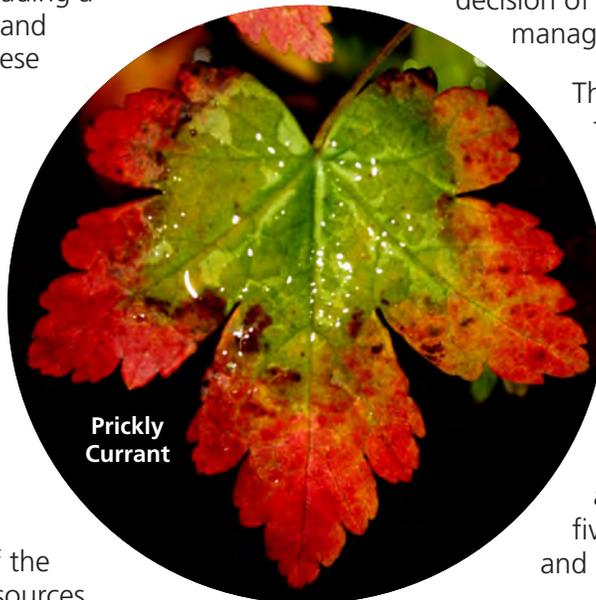
The addition of the 4,070-acre national preserve, by an Act of Congress signed into law on December 19, 2014, included the surrounding watershed and forest, adding new visitor opportunities and cultural and natural resources to the park unit. Visitors to the national monument and preserve will see more and larger natural waterfalls and mountain meadows, as well as, for the first time, subalpine meadows, alpine rock gardens, dozens of additional 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 are the Preserve Management Plan / Environmental Assessment and Wild and Scenic Rivers Study?

When the monument was expanded in 2014, the new preserve lands surrounding the existing monument included a variety of facilities including a campground, roads, water lines, and trails. In addition to managing these new facilities, the National Park Service (NPS) took on additional responsibilities for natural and cultural resource stewardship and visitor use management within the preserve. The preserve management plan considers all of these issues and provides comprehensive guidance for managers at the monument and preserve. All strategies and actions must be consistent with the National Park Service's Organic Act of 1916, providing for protection of the preserve's natural and cultural resources while inviting appropriate visitor use and enjoyment.

To comply with the National Environmental Policy Act and NPS policy, the preserve management plan has been evaluated through an Environmental Assessment

(EA). The plan identifies issues and concerns and presents two management alternatives for public review. The EA also analyzes the environmental consequences of each of the alternatives, and identifies a preferred alternative. 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 of the selected alternative for managing the preserve.



The 2014 legislation that created the preserve also requires the NPS to study five stream segments for potential designation within the wild and scenic rivers system: Cave Creek, Lake Creek, No Name Creek, Panther Creek, and Upper Cave Creek. The Wild and Scenic River Study has been developed concurrently with the preserve management plan, and provides an analysis of these five stream segments using the wild and scenic rivers system criteria.

The drafts of these documents are currently available to the public for review and comment for a period of 90 days, after which comments will be considered, the documents will be revised, and the plan and study will then move toward the next stage of the process (see "Steps in the Planning Process").

Draft Wild and Scenic River Study

Summary of Draft Findings

On December 19, 2014 through Public Law 113-291, Congress directed the National Park Service (NPS) to study five creeks in the Oregon Caves National Monument and Preserve for possible inclusion into the Wild and Scenic Rivers (WSR) system under Section 5(a) of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (WSRA). The creeks listed in the legislation are Cave Creek (downstream of River Styx), Lake Creek, No Name Creek, Panther Creek, and Upper Cave Creek (upstream of River Styx). The NPS also studied Waterfelt Creek through Section 5(d)(1) of the WSRA. Below is a summary of the draft findings.

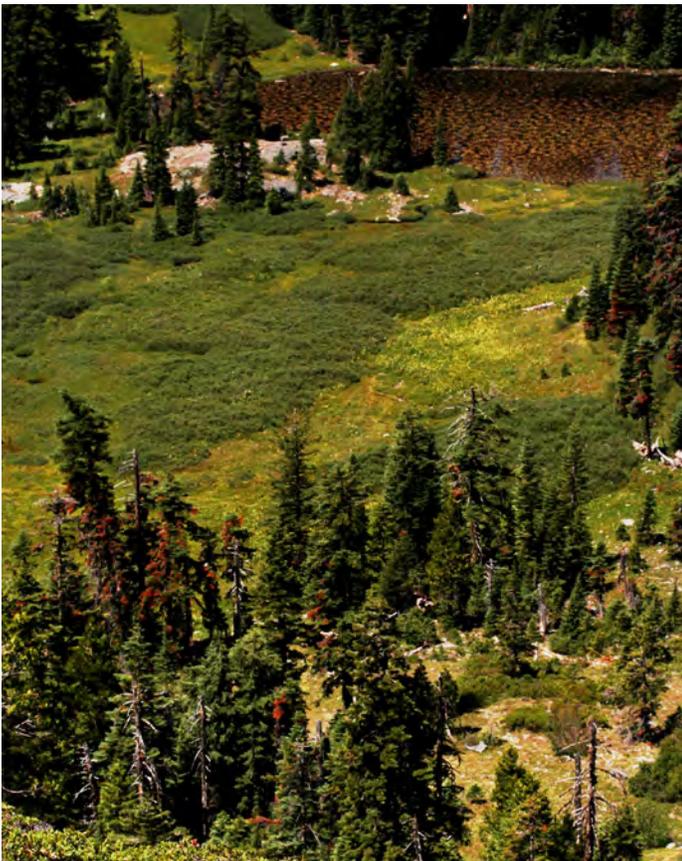
Draft Eligibility Findings

The NPS found two of the creeks eligible for WSR designation based upon their free-flowing condition and presence of at least one outstandingly remarkable value (ORV). The eligible Lake Creek segment extends from its headwaters at Upper and Lower Bigelow Lakes to its confluence with Lower Cave Creek. The eligible Upper Cave Creek segment begins in the headwaters and extends to the boundary of

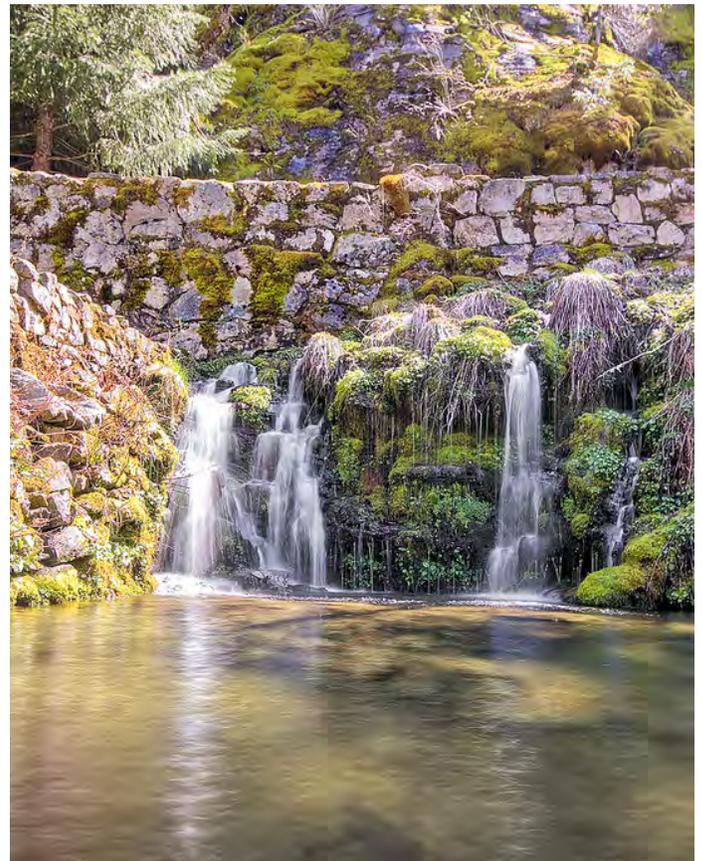
the subterranean River Styx WSR. Both Lake Creek and Upper Cave Creek were found to contain an ecological ORV. Lake Creek was also found to contain a geological ORV. NPS found the other creeks, Lower Cave Creek, Panther Creek and its tributary Waterfelt Creek, and No Name Creek, to be ineligible.

Draft Outstandingly Remarkable Values

- Lake Creek's ecological ORV is due to its majestic old growth riparian forests of Port Orford cedar and outstanding macroinvertebrate biodiversity. Lake Creek also contains a geologic ORV because of its rare combination of glacially carved lakes, karstic cave dissolved out of marble and granitic rock occurring together.
- Upper Cave Creek's ecological value is driven from its connectivity and formation of River Styx, an already designated WSR, and its hydrologic complexity. The stream's main distinction 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.



Upper Bigelow Lakes from Lake Mountain



Waterfall on Cave Creek

Preliminary Classification

The WSRA provides for three possible classifications of eligible river segments: wild, scenic, and recreational. The criteria distinguishing these classifications are primarily based on the degree of human modification of the river and its adjacent shorelines. Based upon the applicable criteria, the best preliminary classifications for Oregon Caves National Monument and Preserve segments are as follows:

- Lake Creek: Recreational
- Upper Cave Creek: Scenic

Draft Suitability Findings

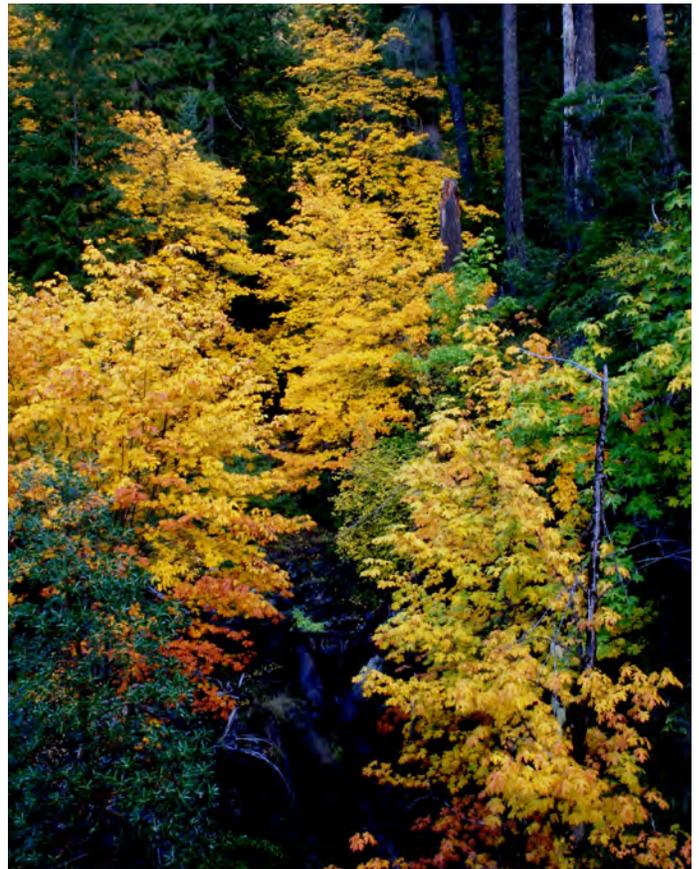
The suitability analysis was primarily based on the following factors:

- The characteristics that make the river segments worthy of designation.
- The ability of the NPS to manage the river segments to protect their ORVs, water-quality, and free-flowing character.
- The compatibility of WSR designation with other potential uses of the river segments.
- The public's opinion on designation.

WSR protection and management is compatible with the NPS management of the waterways, existing protections in place, and continued recreation use of Oregon Caves National Monument and Preserve.



Wiggin's Lily, a regionally endemic species



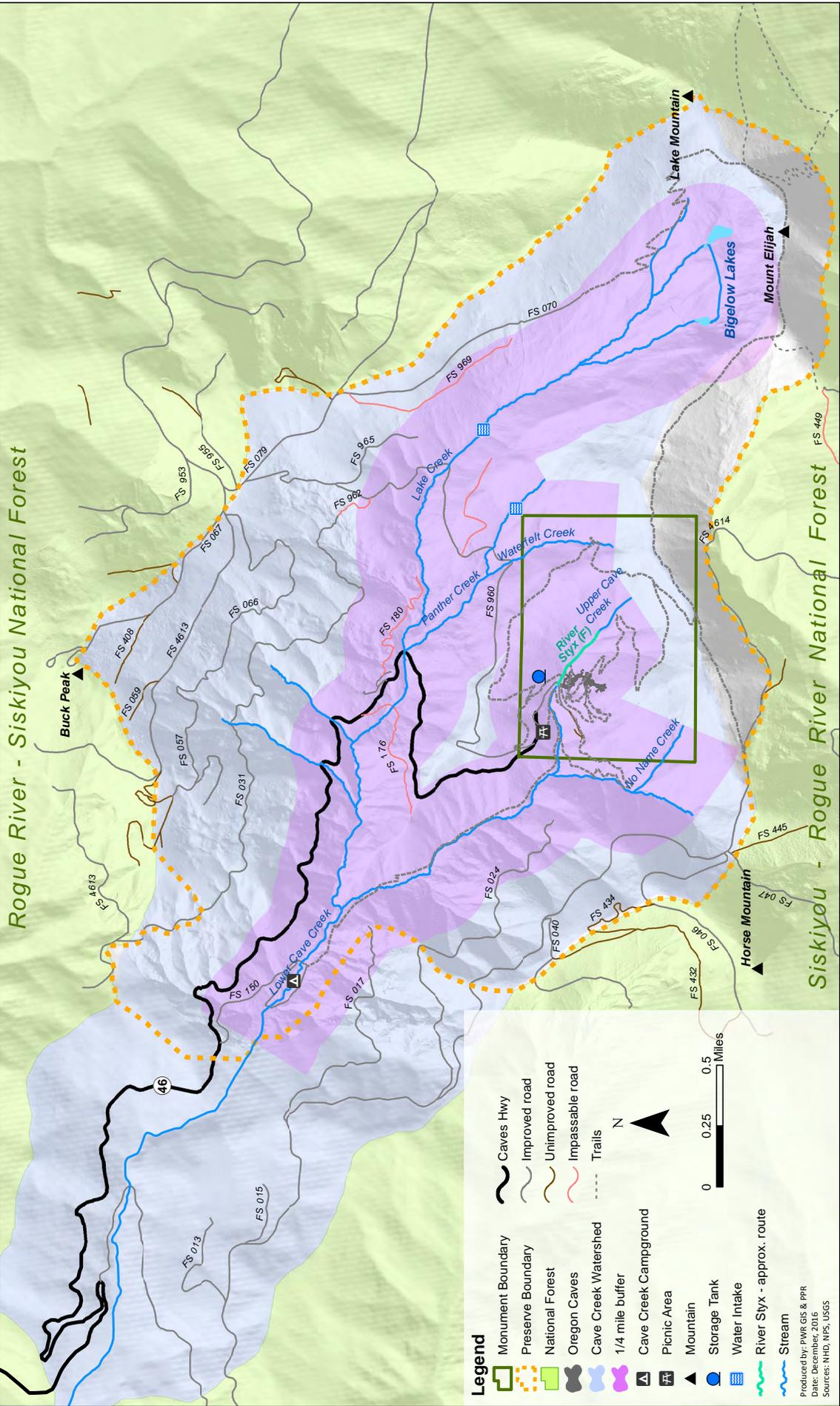
Lake Creek view from Highway 46

WSR designation would offer an additional layer of protection through Section 7 of the WSRA and provide opportunities to focus on river values and watershed protection. WSR designation would also offer recognition of the creeks as a special place bringing more attention to the river values of these headwater streams and their role in providing clean water downstream.

The majority of the individuals and organizations, who provided input on WSR designation through the public meetings and comment period, responded that they were supportive of designation. Those who were not supportive were primarily concerned about potential impacts to recreation access and hunting opportunities. The NPS found that WSR designation is compatible with the existing recreation uses of the Oregon Caves National Monument and Preserve and designation is not expected to change public access opportunities currently enjoyed in the monument and preserve.

Draft Conclusion

The NPS's draft findings conclude both Lake Creek and Upper Cave Creek are eligible and suitable for WSR designation.



Draft Preserve Management Plan

The 2014 act of Congress added 4,070-acres of national preserve to the existing Oregon Caves National Monument footprint. This included the surrounding watershed and forest previously managed by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). Addition of these lands to the monument has added new visitor opportunities to the park unit, as well as cultural and natural resources. The new preserve surrounds the existing monument and includes a variety of facilities including a campground, roads, water lines, and trails. There are also new management responsibilities, including management of hunting.

This draft preserve management plan presents two alternatives for management of the preserve (continuation of current management and a preferred action alternative) based on information about the preserve's resources, visitor use, and visitor preferences gathered from National Park Service information, the public, government agencies, and stakeholder groups. Each of these alternatives would support the purpose and significance of the preserve and monument. The concepts and subsequent actions for each alternative comply with NPS park planning requirements and were evaluated to ensure consistency with current laws, regulations, and policies.

The approved preserve management plan will guide the long-term management of the preserve. It will provide a framework for managers to use when making decisions about resource protection, visitor uses and experiences, and facility development. The preserve management plan provides an analysis of environmental impacts to the preserve's resources. Impact topics to be considered include:

- Natural resources
- Hydrologic resources and processes, including wetlands and floodplains
- Geological resources and processes
- Vegetation
- Wildlife and wildlife habitat, including special status species
- Cultural resources
- Visitor opportunities and access
- Preserve operations
- Socioeconomics

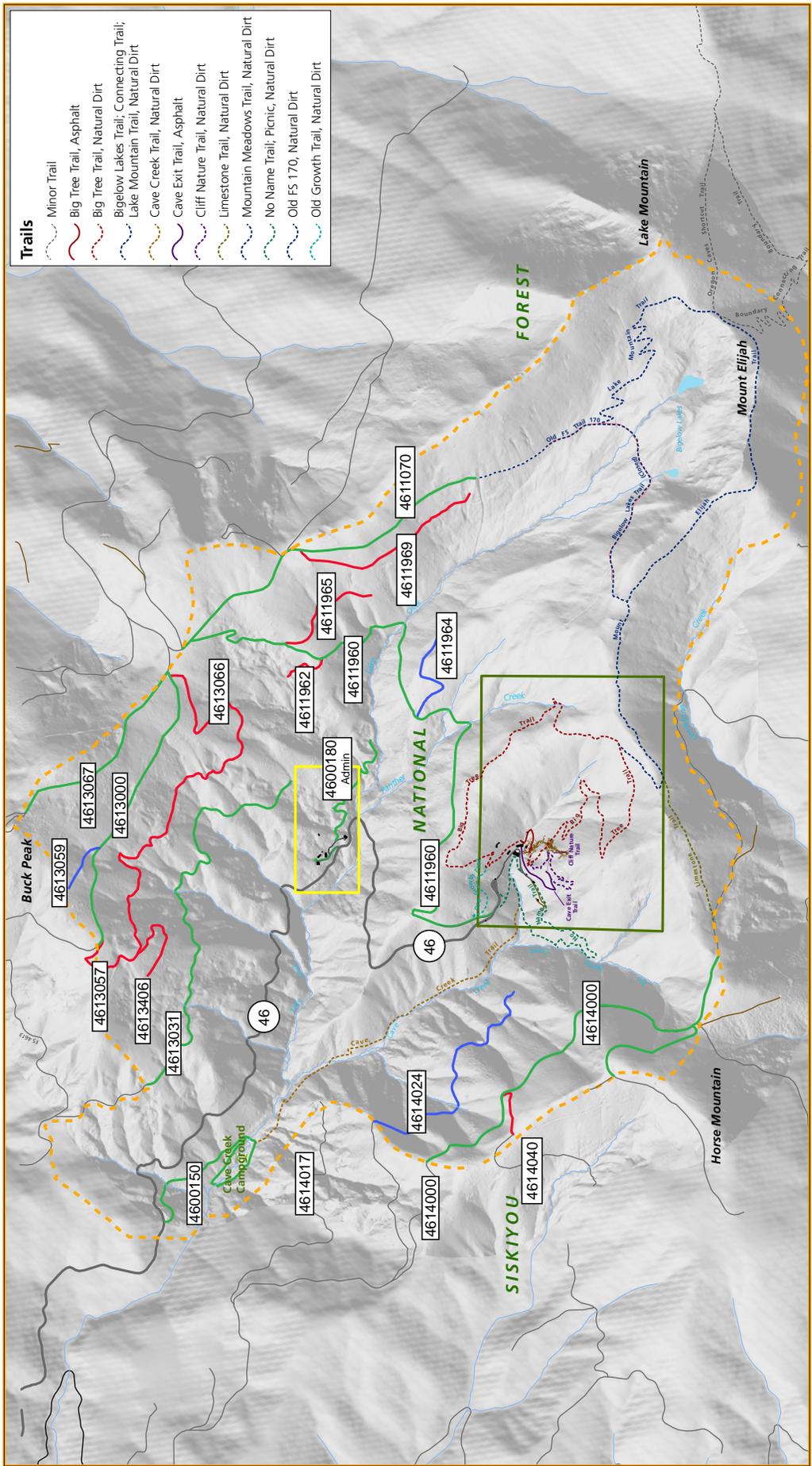


Top: Sunrise at the preserve.

Bottom: Rangers look out at views of the monument.

Alternative A: Continue Current Management

Alternative A is the “no action” alternative and assumes that existing management, programming, facilities, staffing, and funding would generally continue at their current levels. A no action alternative is required by the National Environmental Policy Act and serves as a baseline for comparison in evaluating the changes and impacts of other alternatives. The emphasis of alternative A would be to protect the values of the preserve without any increases in staff, programs, funding support, or facilities. Resource preservation and protection would continue to be a high priority for the management of the preserve. Staff would continue to work on preserve-related projects as funding allows. Management of visitor use and facilities would generally continue under existing levels and types of services and regulations. No new facilities would be constructed. Existing visitor facilities, such as buildings, structures, roads, parking areas, camping areas, and trails, would be maintained to the extent possible.



**Alternative A: Continue Current Management
Oregon Caves National Monument and Preserve**

Alternative B: Preferred Alternative

Alternative B is the alternative preferred by the National Park Service for management of the national preserve. For reasons of economic feasibility and the desire to maintain time-honored traditional experiences on the preserve lands, the preferred alternative has much in common with alternative A, with some exceptions. Alternative B proposes some improvements to existing facilities, additional camping opportunities, expanded outreach and partnership opportunities, some area-specific hunting guidance for public safety reasons, and additional resource protection measures to mitigate potential adverse effects from increased visitor use.

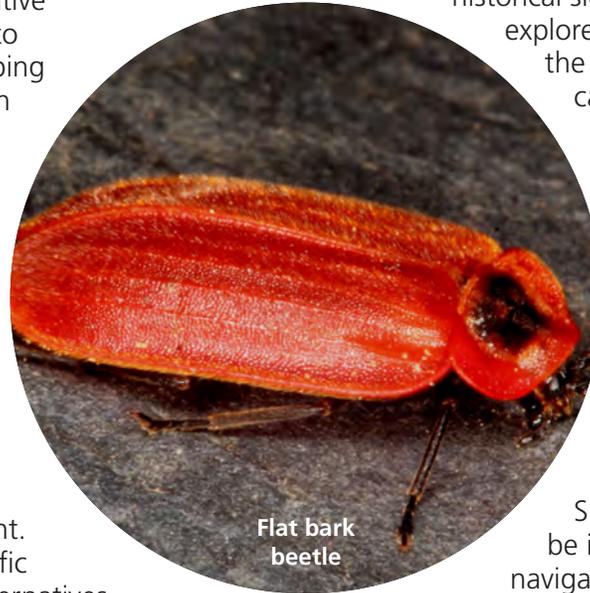
Under alternative B, site-specific management of some areas would be enhanced compared to current management. For a full description of site-specific management, see Chapter 3: Alternatives. Below are a few examples of the management approach under alternative B.

Cave Creek Campground

The NPS would institute a reservation system for campsites, if feasible. Accessibility would be

enhanced, with improvements to pathways, parking, and individual camp sites. The NPS would strive to maintain the aesthetic qualities and secluded atmosphere unique to Cave Creek Campground, with no additional expansion or modifications that would degrade such qualities.

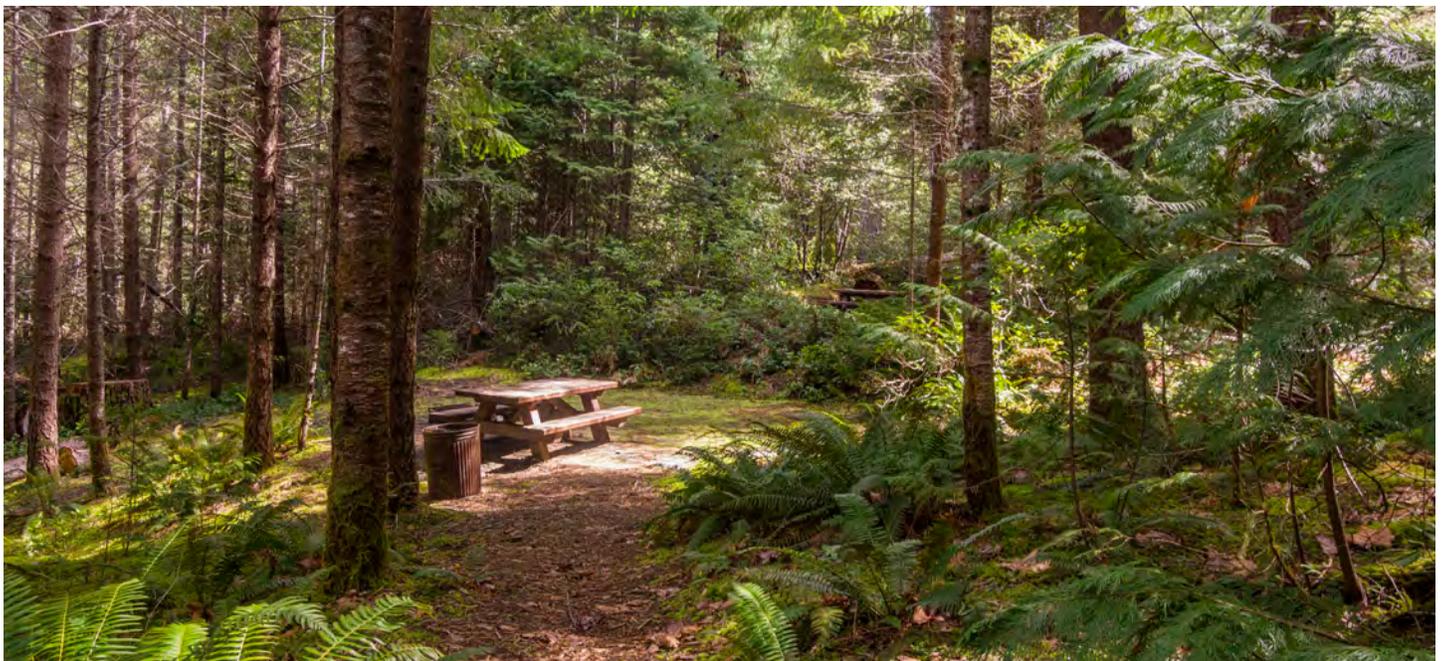
Subject to evaluation of the campground for its historical significance, the NPS would explore alternatives for the best use of the adjacent day use area. Group camping, amphitheater, and/or space for partner-based educational programming are potential uses to be explored. Finally, the NPS would explore the use of yurts and tent platforms at a few existing sites.



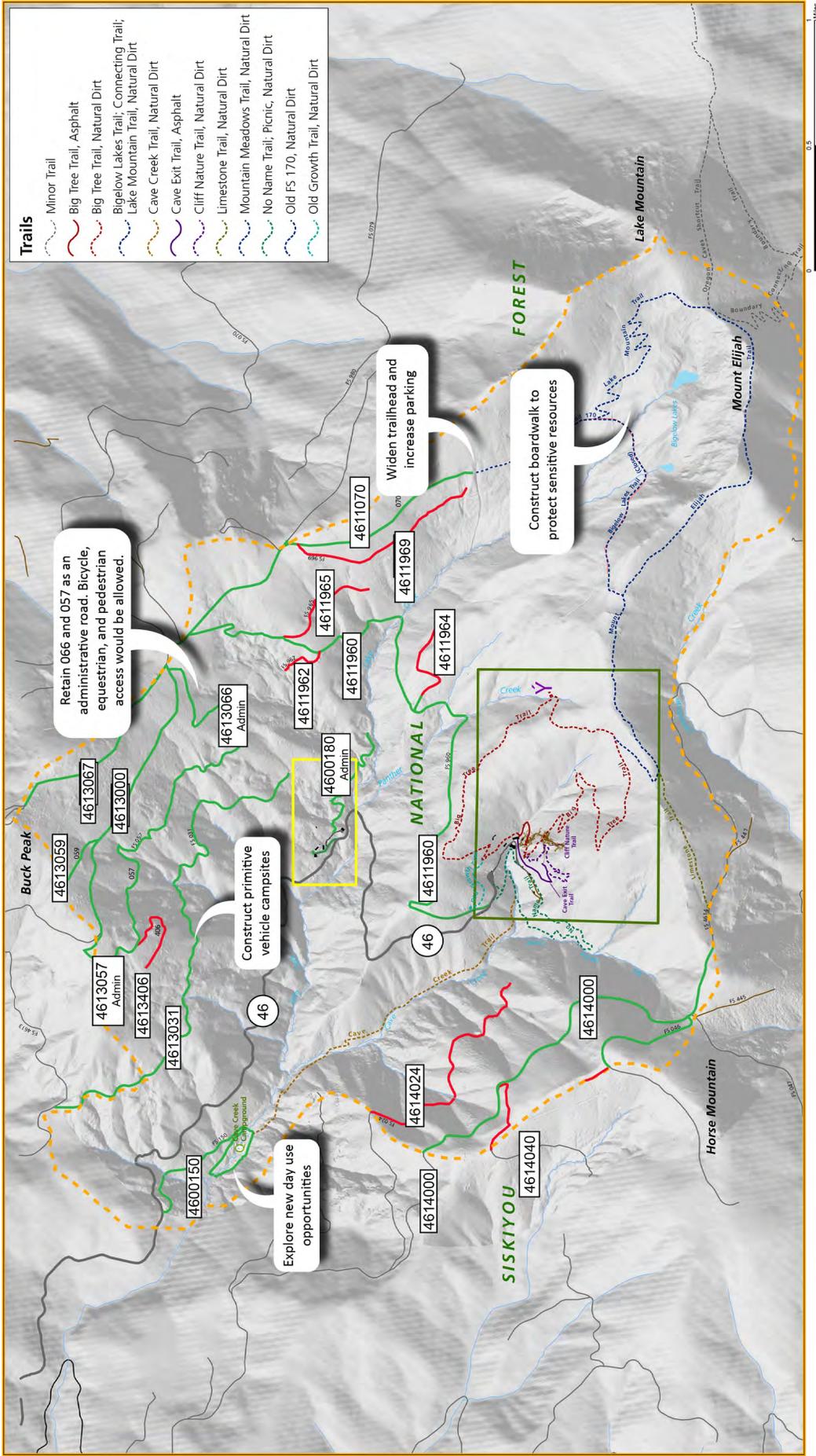
Flat bark beetle

Bigelow Lakes Trailhead and Basin

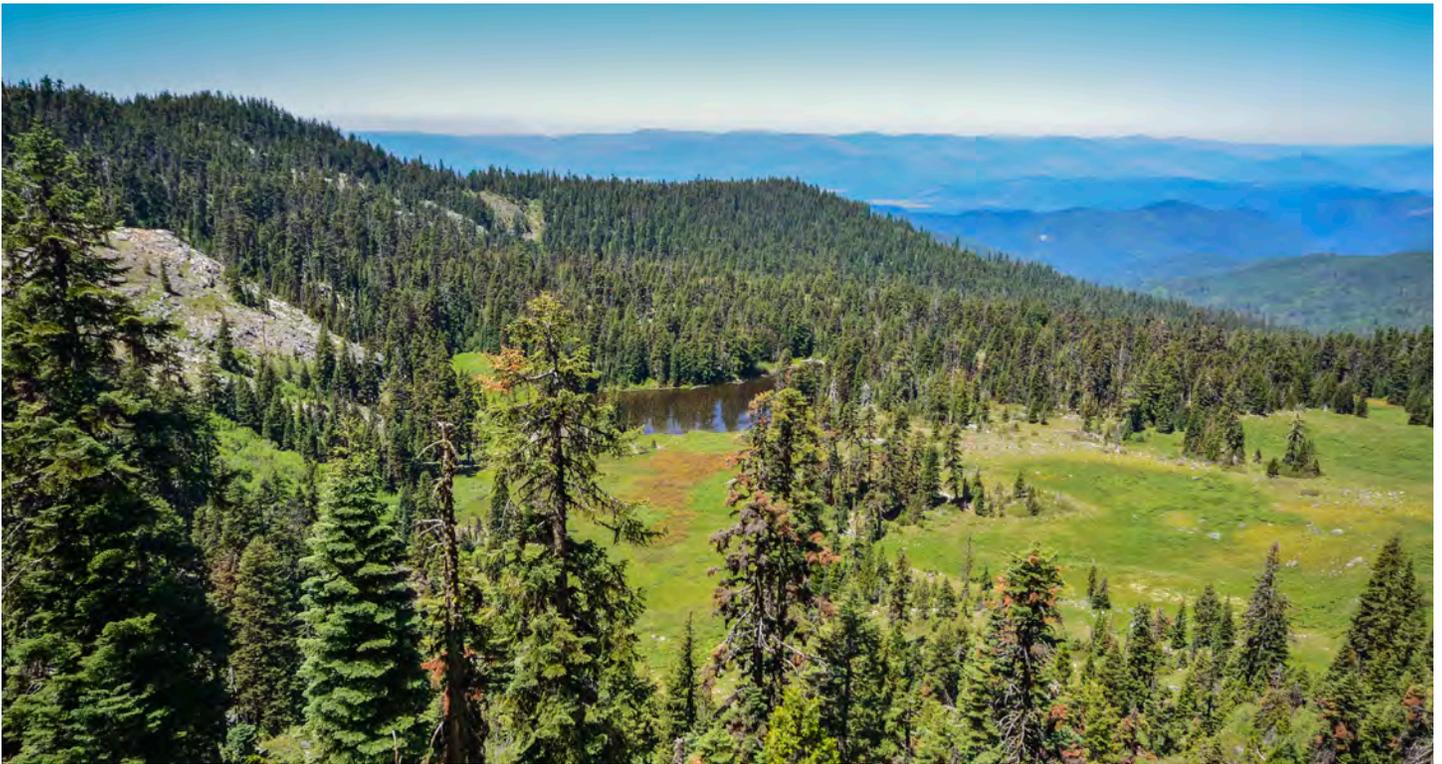
Signage and trails would be improved to provide better navigation, information, and resource protection. The Bigelow Lakes trailhead on Bigelow Lakes Road (4611070) would be widened to increase space for parking and keep the turnaround clear. The existing vehicle barriers would be maintained, as needed. An automatic system to record vehicular traffic would be installed on the last segment of the road to Bigelow Lakes in order to determine visitation patterns that have management implications,



A campsite in Cave Creek campground



**Alternative B: Preferred Alternative
Oregon Caves National Monument and Preserve**



Bigelow Meadow from Lake Mountain

such as installing boardwalks to protect sensitive sites if visitation exceeds a certain threshold.

The Limestone Trail would be maintained, with appropriate screening at the Elijah Trail intersection to protect resources. At Bigelow Lakes, a hardened trail and/or boardwalk, along with interpretive signage, would be installed to protect resources and block and reduce the number of user-created trails. The trail to Lake Mountain would be reestablished. Efforts to engage partners in the maintenance of trails would be increased.



Hiker on Mt. Elijah

Preserve Road System

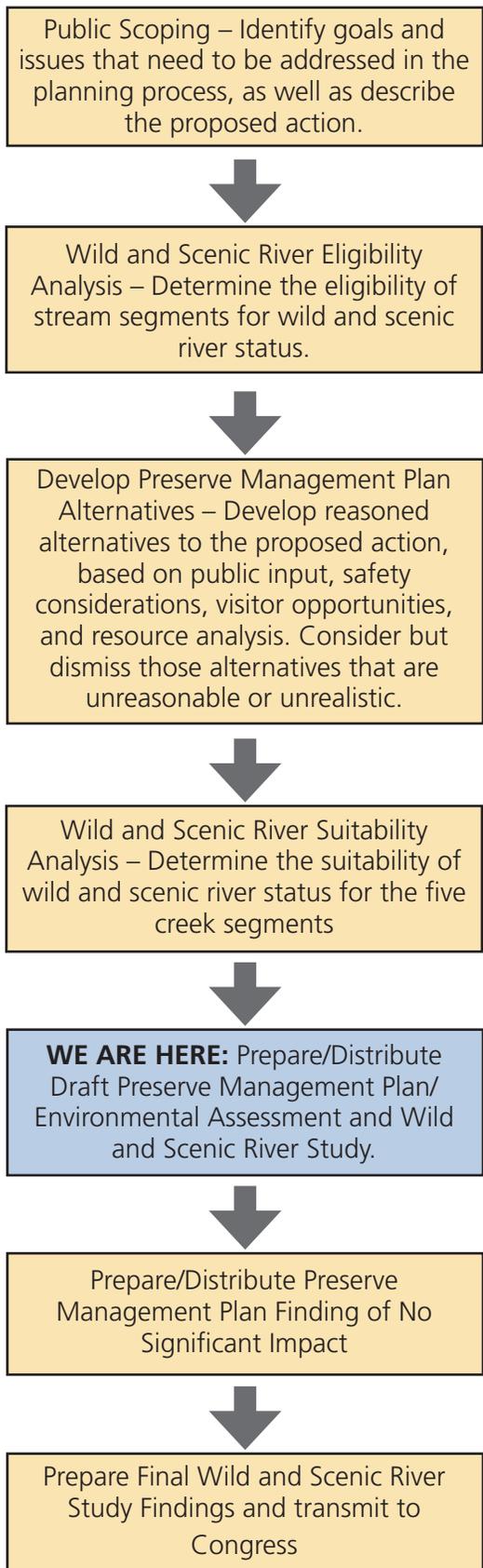
The NPS would explore designation of up to five primitive drive-in campsites on Buck Road (4613031), including sites designed for accessibility. These sites would be available through the camping permit system to hunters and others during the times when the preserve road system is open.

Tankia Road (4613066 & 4613057) would be maintained as an administrative road. As such, it would be closed to public vehicle traffic, but open to cyclists, equestrian use, and hikers. Those who wished could use it to complete a loop with Buck Peak Road (4613000). Directional and interpretive signage would be provided. In addition, a potential trail connection between Tankia Road and Buck Road (4613031) would be explored for feasibility.

A portion (approximately 0.10 miles) of Ark Road (4611964) would be upgraded for administrative use and to preserve eligibility for historic nomination by maintaining the original footprint.

Biking would be permitted on paved and unpaved park and administrative roads unless posted.

Steps in the Planning and Study Processes



How can I be involved?

Your involvement in the planning and study processes is critical for the completion of a successful plan. The 90-day public comment period for these documents is underway and ends on July 2, 2018. Here are several ways for you to participate:

- Attend a public meeting to learn more about the plan and study and submit your comments. See details below.
- Comment online at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/preserveplan>. The full draft documents are also available at this site. This is the preferred method for receiving comments.
- Additional written correspondence may be addressed to:
Superintendent
Oregon Caves National Monument and Preserve
19000 Caves Hwy
Cave Junction, OR 97523
- Emails may be sent to orca_superintendent@nps.gov



Winter on Mt. Elijah

You're Invited to a Public Meeting!

We will be holding two public meetings to give you an opportunity to learn about the proposed actions and findings of the preserve management plan and wild and scenic river study and to share your comments. Your feedback is important to the development of a successful plan. We look forward to seeing and hearing from you!

Grants Pass

April 17, 5-7pm

The Lodge at Riverside, Oak Room 1
900 SE 8th Street
Grants Pass, OR 97526

Cave Junction Area

April 18, 5-7pm

RCC Kerby Belt Building
24353 Redwood Highway
Kerby, OR 97531



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

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

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Preserve Management Plan /
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(541) 592-2100

Project Website:

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

