



PEA RIDGE NATIONAL MILITARY PARK TRAIL MASTER PLAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

INTRODUCTION

In compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) and implementing regulations published by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) and the Department of the Interior, the National Park Service (NPS) prepared a Trail Master Plan and Environmental Assessment (Trail Plan/EA) for Pea Ridge National Military Park (henceforth "the park"). The Trail Plan/EA presents three alternatives, including two action alternatives and the no-action alternative, and analyzes the environmental consequences of implementing the alternatives. The NPS seeks to improve visitor access to the park's historical and interpretive sites while avoiding or minimizing impacts to these sites by consolidating and restructuring the existing trail network. Furthermore, the NPS seeks to improve multi-modal trail connections within the park while linking to a regional trail network outside of the park. This Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) describes the alternative the NPS has selected for implementation, provides the rationale for its selection, and explains why it will not have significant impacts on the human or natural environments. A non-impairment determination is included in Attachment A.

BACKGROUND

Established in 1956 and opened to the public in 1963, the park preserves and commemorates the site of the March 1862 Civil War battle that helped Union forces maintain physical and political control of the State of Missouri. Administered by the NPS, the 4,300-acre battlefield is situated in the foothills of the Ozark Mountains 10 miles north of Rogers, Arkansas, directly accessible from US Highway 62. The park is divided into two sections: the main portion of the park is located north of US Highway 62 and encompasses the majority of the historic battleground. The main portion consists of a dedicated series of soft surface trails for equestrians and pedestrians, as well as the tour road, which bicyclists share with vehicle users. The second, smaller portion is located to the south of US Highway 62 along the bluffs of Little Sugar Creek and contains the Federal Trenches of the Union troops. This non-contiguous section is currently accessible from a small parking lot along Sugar Creek Road, which intersects with US Highway 62, with an eroded trail leading to the trenches.

The park contains a portion of the northern route of the Trail of Tears, including campsites along the trail at Elkhorn Tavern and Ruddick's Field. This segment is one of the few places the Trail of Tears passes through Arkansas. Eleven Cherokee Removal contingents used this route in 1837 through 1839. The Trail of Tears generally followed the route of Telegraph Road through the park, which is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR THE ACTION

The purpose of the Trail Plan is to: 1) improve multi-modal connections within the park; 2) make external connections for the regional trail network; 3) develop procedures and priorities for the proposed changes to the current trail network; 4) improve accessibility within the park; 5) reduce the need for trail maintenance; and 6) enhance interpretation opportunities throughout the park.

The proposed Trail Plan is needed in order to address the following issues:

- **Resource Degradation.** Many equestrian and hiking trails are experiencing extensive damage from erosion. These issues should be addressed to sustain a trail network that protects and enhances cultural and natural resources within the park and provides for an enjoyable visitor experience.
- **Interpretive Opportunities for Multi-Modal Users.** Most of the existing transportation infrastructure at the park was designed to accommodate automobiles; therefore, pedestrian and bicycling visitors must use a shared roadway with vehicles and wayfinding between interpreted sites is limited.
- **Regional Growth.** Local and regional changes, including the relocation of United States (US) Highway 62 and the Northwest Arkansas Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan (2015), have created opportunities for increased visitation and changes to how people can access the park.
- **Operational Efficiency.** The park has limited resources for park maintenance of the trail network. Where feasible, there is an opportunity to combine trails or locate trails adjacent to other types of facilities (e.g., water, restrooms, phones) to maximize park maintenance efficiency. By removing duplicative trails and related facilities, the park can reduce overall maintenance needs.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

The Trail Plan/EA considered a no action alternative and two action alternatives. These alternatives are discussed below. Elements common to all alternatives also follow.

ALTERNATIVE 1 (NO ACTION)

Under Alternative 1, the no-action alternative, the NPS would maintain the current conditions at the park, including the US Highway 62 Mitigation Project improvements that would be implemented in the near future. Additionally, improved wayside interpretive signage would still be implemented for the Federal Trenches. The NPS would continue to conduct maintenance to resolve drainage

problems at certain low lying areas of the park. The equestrian trail along the northeast portion of the park would continue to close during rain events. The park wayfinding and circulation needs would not be addressed fully. The park would still have very limited ABA-accessible trails to many of the key interpretive areas. Trailheads and connections to the regional trail system would not be accommodated. No other improvements are proposed, including the improvements or additions of any trailheads.

ALTERNATIVE 2: ENHANCED TRAIL NETWORK FOCUSED ON INTERPRETATION

Alternative 2 provides for an enhanced trail network, including expanded and enhanced opportunities for pedestrian trail interpretation, construction of additional trailheads, modification of trail loops for simplicity and interpretive value, construction of additional ABA-accessible trails, installation of signage for the Trail of Tears, improvements to multi-use trails, installation of bicycle racks, and improvements to equestrian trails to avoid erosion prone areas. Trails built in accordance with ABA guidelines require additional surface disturbance and trail materials as compared with off-road hiking trails, which may result in a higher level of impacts to the environment.

This alternative provides expanded and enhanced opportunities for pedestrian trail interpretation throughout the park. Unnecessary trails would be removed and trail access would be provided along existing historic roads and trails, increasing the interpretive opportunities within the park. New trail segments would establish trail connections between significant locations within the park and would follow historic trails and fence lines where possible.

This alternative also proposes two additional trailhead locations within the park intended to serve pedestrians, bicyclists, or equestrians. The visitor center currently serves as a trailhead but has no clear signage or logical trail termini. The planned US Highway 62 Mitigation Project would further enhance the visitor center area to include bicycle racks, a bicycle lane, and reconfiguration of the parking lot; however, there is a need to create clear trails to and from the visitor center.

A second trailhead is proposed at the West Overlook. Due to the rise in topography, many bicyclists dismount and walk their bicycles up the hill to stop at the overlook, and the area is a natural respite zone for bicyclists and pedestrians. The proposed trailhead would include an ABA-accessible expanded interpretive area with bicycle racks.

As part of Alternative 2, the following hiking trails would be modified for simplicity and interpretive value:

- **Leetown Hamlet** – The trails would be clearly defined and simplified. A defined loop using Leetown Road would take users to Leetown Battlefield. The bridge near Leetown Hamlet would be removed.
- **Leetown Battlefield** – Leetown Road would connect to Foster's Lane and Leetown Hamlet.
- **Morgan's Woods** – A proposed trail would provide a loop trail connecting Leetown Hamlet, Leetown Road, Leetown Battlefield, and Foster's Lane.

- **Foster's Battlefield and Lane** – This interpretive path would also include a spur that takes people west of Arkansas Highway 72 toward Foster's Battlefield.
- **Ford Road** – This trail would continue to provide east-west access past the orchard, cemetery, and several fields.
- **Ford Road to East Overlook** – The trail segment from Ford Road to the East Overlook would be removed due to flooding and erosion problems.
- **Artillery Barrage** – A loop would take a visitor to Welfley's Knoll and an interior view of the battlefield.
- **Elkhorn Tavern and Clemens Farm** – In addition to the US Highway 62 Mitigation Project improvements at Elkhorn Tavern, a loop trail is proposed connecting the tavern to Clemens Farm. A portion of this trail would be on the historic Huntsville Road. This trail also connects back to the visitor center using the historic South Road.
- **Broad and Narrow Ridge** – This loop trail would extend along Old Wire Road north to the tanyard and hospital site. The loop trail would also connect to Clemens' field.

The following ABA-accessible trails are also proposed for this alternative:

- **Leetown Hamlet** – An ABA-accessible trail is proposed at Leetown Hamlet. This trail may be constructed of concrete that can be colored to minimize impact, compacted stone dust, or bituminous pavement. The trail would lead from the parking lot to an enhanced interpretive area with signage. This experience may be enhanced if the historic building footprints of Leetown are highlighted.
- **West Overlook** – ABA-accessible parking and interpretive elements would be included with the proposed construction of the West Overlook.
- **East Overlook** – The existing asphalt path is proposed to be replaced with a colored concrete path.

Additional signage would be installed along the Trail of Tears under Alternative 2. The Trail of Tears would be clearly delineated running along Telegraph Road at the northern end of the park past Elkhorn Tavern, where the trail then travels southwest until it exits the park. Signage would be installed periodically along the trail so that the trail is clearly marked. Signage would include a post-in-ground sign with the Trail of Tears logo. Where the Trail of Tears follows the tour road, the signs would be located adjacent to the road, and would be designed to minimize visual intrusion in the landscape.

A multi-use (i.e., non-motorized uses including bicyclists and pedestrians) trail option that conforms to the park's general management plan (GMP) is proposed along the western boundary of the park, continuing to provide access to both the park and the regional trail system. This trail connects Arkansas Highway 72 to the north then heads south using existing roads on the boundary of the park. The trail then follows Lee Road to enter the park where the GMP identifies the location of the future visitor center. This multi-use trail would provide interpretive opportunities for the restored prairie, Foster's Field, and Leetown Battlefield. This alternative would direct all traffic on multi-use trails to enter in one location at the future new main entrance to the park.

Additionally, Ford Road would continue to be used as an east-west path for equestrians, hikers, and bicyclists. Rehabilitation of the existing culverts are planned on the western side of Ford Road to allow for better drainage and intermittent stream flow. The eastern and western ends of Ford Road would be resurfaced with compacted earth with a stone base to allow for better drainage and avoid dips in the road. Bicyclists would continue to use the tour road, Ford Road, or the multi-use trail. Other planned improvements include the installation of bicycle racks at some tour road stops.

The equestrian trails would be rerouted to avoid erosion-prone locations, which would limit disturbance in environmentally sensitive areas. Specifically, a northwest trail segment would be removed due to flooding and erosion problems. The equestrian trails would also be removed from the Elkhorn Tavern area to avoid damaging the historic resources while also minimizing potential conflicts between equestrians and other users. Two equestrian trail loops are designed in a 'figure-8' to allow equestrian riders a shorter and a longer trail option for touring the park.

Federal Trenches

Due to the isolated nature of the Federal Trenches, the proposed changes to this portion of the park are common to all action alternatives. Currently, the Federal Trenches are accessible from a small parking area along Sugar Creek Road with a steep, asphalt path to the top of the trenches. The steep topography of the area has caused severe erosion and deterioration, creating challenging conditions for trail users. To address this concern, a reconstructed hiking path is proposed for the Federal Trenches. For the portion of the path with the steepest slopes, a series of stairs and boardwalks would be constructed on top of the existing paths, improving drainage and access. This structure is estimated to be less than 150 feet long, and would remain less than 5 feet above the ground. In addition to improved access to the trenches, the design would reduce staff maintenance requirements in this area of the park. The structure may be composed of various materials, including steel grate, pressure treated wood, or a wood substitute such as permatrak. No improvements to the parking lot or access to the trail are proposed under this plan.

Although not part of the implementation of this plan, it should be noted that if land acquisition became feasible, the park's future plans include a new parking area on the north side of the trenches for better access to the trenches. The parking lot would be accessible from US Highway 62 and would include a visible entrance sign into the site. In addition, an expanded trail network would include a new hiking loop around the Federal Trenches and additional interpretive signs. This long-term plan cannot be implemented at this time as the NPS does not own the property providing the needed access. Possible land acquisition is identified as a desirable condition to protect park resources as outlined in the GMP (NPS 2006).

ALTERNATIVE 3: ENHANCED TRAIL NETWORK FOCUSED ON INTERPRETATION WITH EXPANDED OPPORTUNITIES FOR RECREATION (SELECTED ALTERNATIVE)

Alternative 3 is the selected alternative. Alternative 3 would have the same primary objectives as Alternative 2, which include enhancing the trail network to allow for increased interpretation of the Battle of Pea Ridge. All elements proposed in Alternative 2 would be implemented in Alternative 3 with the exception of an alternate configuration for the multi-use trail along the park's western

boundary. Alternative 3 also would add an additional level of focus on recreational opportunities for hiking and biking within the park. Alternative 3 would provide additional trails that are not directly connected to the interpretive elements within the park, but are connected to significant landforms and natural features that expose the natural beauty of the area. Specifically, the following hiking trails are proposed:

- **Little Mountain** – A new hiking trail to Little Mountain is proposed. Although it would be a primitive hiking trail, the trail may offer additional interpretive viewsheds not previously provided for the battlefield.
- **Headwaters Creek Trail** – A nature path is proposed that creates a short loop north of Elkhorn Tavern and ties into Telegraph Road. This was previously a nature trail but was never maintained and eventually became overgrown.
- **Nature Trail and Overlook Access** – This trail would originate off of Ford Road past Ford Cemetery intersecting with, and continuing along, the tour road to the East Overlook.

A multi-use trail option that conforms to the GMP also is proposed along the western edge of the park, continuing to provide access to both the park and the regional trail system. This option is being considered as an alternate route to the multi-use trail shown in Alternative 2. This route was chosen to prevent another uncontrolled access point into the park. This route would follow existing public roads on the west side of the park and provide access to the park along US Highway 62. Under Alternative 3, widened areas to accommodate bicycles would be provided along certain narrow curves north of Ford Road on both the east and west segments of the tour road and over Lee Creek near Leetown Hamlet. These areas would provide an additional paved shoulder to enhance bicycle safety by increasing sight lines around the curves and providing ample space for vehicles and bicycles to pass one another. This option is preferred to Alternative 2 because it eliminates a second uncontrolled entry into the park, and implementation of a future site for the visitor center is not programmed for the foreseeable future.

ELEMENTS COMMON TO ALL ALTERNATIVES

The park has a number of other ongoing projects that influenced the development of alternatives and are treated as an existing condition to the Trail Plan. Each alternative considered the planned mitigation efforts from the relocation of US Highway 62, which would be implemented and constructed in the near future. These plans, which are currently in design, also are considered an existing condition for the purpose of the Trail Plan. The key mitigation activities from the US Highway 62 Mitigation Project that influence the program alternatives include:

- **Improvements at Elkhorn Tavern** – Conversion of the tour road to a two-way road between the visitor center and Elkhorn Tavern, a new parking and trailhead location, and a trail expansion consistent with the requirements of the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968 (ABA)¹ *Accessibility Guidelines for Outdoor Developed Areas* (2014);

¹ These guidelines ensure that facilities, such as trails, picnic and camping facilities, and viewing areas, are readily accessible to and usable by people with disabilities (39 CFR 1191).

PEA RIDGE NATIONAL MILITARY PARK TRAIL PLAN/EA FONSI

- A new equestrian trailhead located off the new US Highway 62 entrance into the park; and
- A redesign of the entrance road and parking area around the visitor center which includes pedestrian and bicyclist trail elements.

The removal of the Boy Scout Bridge over Lee Creek and relocation of the associated trail, which was completed in 2017, is also considered as an existing condition to the Trail Plan/EA. This action included removing the wooden bridge and eliminating a stream crossing on this segment of the trail which was proposed for abandonment. Previously, this trail had been closed due to the condition of the bridge. This portion of the trail was routed across the roadway bridge over Lee Creek and had no direct impacts to the stream.

MITIGATION MEASURES

The following mitigation measures were recommended in the Trail Plan/EA and will be required for implementation of the selected alternative.

Water Resources

- During more detailed design and prior to construction activities, the NPS would conduct site specific investigations to determine the presence, extent, location, and classification of any wetlands or other jurisdictional waters of the US located within and adjacent to proposed trail alignments.
- The NPS would utilize stormwater best management practices to reduce soil erosion and loss from construction areas into nearby wetlands.
- The NPS would identify appropriate permits and, if necessary, compensatory mitigation in coordination with the US Army Corps of Engineers and the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality in the event of an unavoidable loss of wetlands, wetland conversion, or other permanent disturbance.

Archeology

- For the protection of archeological resources, follow the process and provisions identified in the project Archeological Resource Protection Plan. The Archeological Resource Protection Plan addresses the superintendent's responsibility to notify culturally affiliated Tribes upon discovery of cultural items (human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, or objects of cultural patrimony) in compliance with the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990.

Visitor Use and Experience (Wayfinding)

- **Develop maps and brochures of the improved trail network that would identify trails by user group, provide safety instructions, and provide other information to help visitors get the most out of their visit to the park.**

SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA REVIEW

The intensity or severity of impacts resulting from implementing the selected alternative is evaluated using the ten criteria listed in 40 CFR 1508.27. Key areas in which impacts were evaluated include water resources, vegetation, archeological resources, and visitor use and experience. As defined, in 40 CFR 1508.27, significance is determined by examining the following criteria.

(1) Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse; a significant effect may exist even if the NPS believes that on balance the effect would be beneficial.

The selected alternative will result in both beneficial and adverse impacts. In general, the alternative provides beneficial effects on water resources and visitor use and experience. Trail improvements (i.e., maintenance and/or culvert rehabilitation) along Ford Road over Lee Creek would allow for better drainage and intermittent stream flow, as well as fix drainage issues on Ford Road. Restoration efforts along closed equestrian trails would result in improved water quality at those locations, as the areas that are proposed for closure currently have flooding and erosion issues. Benefits on visitor use and experience will result from enhanced interpretation and recreational opportunities, wayfinding, and amenities, and improved circulation and accessibility for the various user groups within the trail network.

Adverse impacts on water resources, vegetation, and visitor use and experience will be local and short- and long-term. Short-term adverse impacts on water resources, vegetation, and visitor use and experience will result from construction and maintenance activities, temporary facility and trail closures, and revegetation activities. With the implementation of the provisions in the Archeological Resource Protection Plan, effects to archeological resources would be minor and would not diminish the integrity of these resources to the extent that they would be rendered ineligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Best management practices (BMPs) for erosion and noxious weed control would be implemented to minimize impacts to native vegetation. Additionally, new trails would be sited to avoid clearing of trees.

(2) The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.

Temporary facility and trail closures will keep the public away from areas where potentially harmful construction activities are occurring. Because the public will not be exposed to construction activities, the level of adverse effects from the proposed activities will not be significant.

(3) Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

As described in the Trail Plan/EA, the selected alternative will not affect wild and scenic rivers, prime farmlands, or ecologically critical areas because those resources do not exist in the project area.

Select trails may be constructed near wetlands, potentially resulting in impacts to wetlands. However, the total impact to wetlands is anticipated to be minor (less than 0.1 acre). The NPS would seek appropriate Clean Water Act Section 404 permits, if necessary, during the design phase when more design detail is available. However, at less than 0.1 acre for pedestrian/bicycle trails, these impacts are expected to be small enough to be excepted from a Statement of Findings under the NPS *Procedural Manual #77-1* (NPS 2016).

Numerous archeological resources exist within the park boundaries, including both prehistoric and historic sites. The park also contains a segment of the northern route of the Trail of Tears and two associated campsites at Elkhorn Tavern and Ruddick's field. The selected alternative will result in minor impacts on the archeological resources within the park. The NPS has prepared a project-specific Archeological Resource Protection Plan and would follow the provisions of this plan to further minimize the likelihood of impacting archeological resources.

Additional mitigation measures and BMPs will be used to reduce the adverse impacts of the selected alternative on archeological and wetland resources within the park. Therefore, with mitigation measures, and use of BMPs, the level of adverse effects will not be significant.

(4) The degree to which effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

Short-term adverse effects on the quality of human environment will result during construction, but are not anticipated to affect the quality of the human environment over the long term. As described under criterion 1, the selected alternative provides beneficial effects on visitor use and experience through enhanced interpretation and recreational opportunities, wayfinding, and amenities, and improved circulation and accessibility for the various user groups within the trail network. As evidenced by the public input during public outreach activities, beneficial and adverse effects on the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial or significant.

(5) The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

The activities under the selected alternative will not result in highly uncertain effects or involve unique or unknown risks. As presented in the Environmental Assessment and associated consultations under ESA Section 7 and NHPA Section 106, the potential impacts of the selected action on the human environment are well understood and are being mitigated, as appropriate. Furthermore, public input (as described below) did not identify any new or uncertain risks associated with the action. Therefore, the degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks will not be significant.

(6) The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

No future actions are planned that will result from implementation of the selected alternative; therefore, the selected alternative will not result in significant effects from a future action.

(7) Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.

As described under criteria 1 and 3, with the implementation of mitigation measures, BMPs, and the project-specific Archeological Resource Protection Plan to reduce adverse impacts on vegetation and archeological resources within the park, the level of impacts will not be significant. When added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions, as evaluated in the EA, the incremental impact of selected action will not result in a significant cumulative effect.

(8) The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed on the National Register of Historic Places; or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

As discussed under criterion 1, the selected alternative will have long-term adverse impacts on archeological resources due to earth disturbance necessary for construction. However, the impact would be minor in nature because the changes to the trail system would not diminish the integrity of the archeological resources to the extent that they would be rendered ineligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Additionally, the NPS has prepared a project-specific Archeological Resource Protection Plan and would follow the provisions of this plan to further minimize the likelihood of impacting archeological resources. The NPS initiated consultation with the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program with a scoping letter sent on April 7, 2016. The Arkansas Historic Preservation Program also received copies of the Archeological Resource Protection Plan, National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 assessment of effect, and the draft Trail Plan/EA for review and comment. A letter response was received from Arkansas Historic Preservation Program on August 30, 2017 stating their concurrence of *No Adverse Effect on Historic Properties* with regard to the implementation of the selected alternative.

(9) The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its critical habitat.

Consultation under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973 was initiated with the USFWS in 2016. Eight species were determined to have the potential to be impacted by the selected action: gray bat (*Myotis grisescens*), Indiana bat (*Myotis sodalis*), northern long-eared bat (*Corynorhinus townsendii*), Ozark big-eared bat (*Corynorhinus townsendii*), piping plover (*Charadrius melodus*), Ozark cavefish (*Amblyopsis rosae*), cave crayfish (*Cambarus aculabrum*), and Neosho mucket (*Lampsilis rafinesquenana*). The USFWS concurred with the NPS "may affect, not likely to adversely affect" determination for these eight threatened or endangered species in a letter dated January 25, 2017 (USFWS 2017). USFWS also stated that there would be no direct or indirect effects to the rabbitsfoot (*Quadrula cylindrica cylindrica*) because this species does not occur in the project area. There are no state-listed species known to be present in the project area. Therefore, the selected alternative is not anticipated to have an adverse effect on federally listed and candidate species.

(10) Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

The selected alternative will not violate any Federal, State, or local laws or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

As part of public and agency scoping, the park sent a scoping letter on April 7, 2016 to the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program to solicit input on issues of concern. The park continued to consult with the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program throughout the EA development process to determine the effects of the action alternatives on eligible historic resources and to develop mitigation for impacts on historical features, if any, from the preferred alternative. The NHPA Section 106 assessment of effect, along with the final Archeological Resource Protection Plan and summaries of the NPS archeological investigations conducted in spring 2017, was submitted to the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program for review on August 8, 2017. On August 30, 2017, the NPS received a letter from the Archeological Historic Preservation Program stating its concurrence of *No Adverse Effect on Historic Properties* with regard to the implementation of the NPS preferred alternative.

The park also sent a scoping letter to the USFWS on April 8, 2016 to initiate consultation under Section 7(c) of the Endangered Species Act and to solicit input on issues of concern. Through the consultation process, the USFWS concurred with the NPS determination that the project "may affect, but not likely to adversely affect" the gray bat, Indiana bat, northern long-eared bat, Ozark big-eared bat, piping plover, Ozark cavefish, cave crayfish, and Neosho mucket (USFWS 2017). Further, the USFWS determined that rabbitsfoot does not occur in the project area and/or there will be no direct or indirect effects due to the absence of suitable habitat within the project footprint and areas outside the project footprint (USFWS 2017).

The EA was made available for public review and comment on the park website and the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment website during a 30-day period beginning November 22, 2017. The park received 12 correspondences on the EA from the public during the review period.

No comments expressed opposition to the project, although one commenter expressed a concern for ensuring that the historical significance of the park is maintained with the addition of recreational opportunities. In addition, nine commenters made suggestions for plan improvements related to equestrian amenities as well as the allowance of mountain bikes.

TRIBAL CONSULTATION

As part of tribal consultation, scoping letters were sent to federally recognized Tribes and organizations on April 7, 2016, soliciting informal consultation on the Trail Plan/EA. The Tribes and governments that received letters are:

- Absentee Shawnee Tribe
- Caddo Nation
- Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma
- The Chickasaw Nation
- Jena Band of The Choctaw Indians
- United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians
- Muscogee (Creek) Nation
- The Osage Nation
- Quapaw Tribe of Oklahoma
- Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma

Subsequently, during EA development, representatives from the Osage Nation conducted a site visit with park staff in May 2017 and identified additional sites to be surveyed. The results of these additional NPS archeological investigations, as well as the final Archeological Resource Protection Plan, were submitted with the NHPA Section 106 assessment of effect to tribal representatives for review on August 8, 2017. To date, the NPS has received letters from Absentee Shawnee of Oklahoma, the Osage Nation, and the Caddo Nation of Oklahoma stating their concurrence of *No Adverse Effect on Historic Properties* with regard to the implementation of the NPS preferred alternative.

The park also sent copies of the Public Review Draft of the Trail Plan/EA and solicited further comments from the same set of American Indian Tribes via letter dated November 17, 2017. No additional comments regarding the Trail Plan/EA have been received from these Tribes.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Based on the review of the facts and analysis contained in the Trail Plan/EA, the NPS has selected Alternative 3 for implementing the Trail Plan/EA at the Pea Ridge National Military Park. The selected alternative will not have a significant impact either by itself or in consideration of cumulative impacts. Accordingly, the requirements of NEPA, regulations promulgated by the CEQ, regulations promulgated by the Department of the Interior, and provisions of Director's Order 12 and the 2015 *National Park Service NEPA Handbook* have been fulfilled.


It is my determination that the selected alternative does not constitute a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment. Therefore, in accordance with NEPA and CEQ regulations (40 CFR 1508 et. seq.), an environmental impact statement is not required and will not be prepared for implementation of the selected alternative.

Recommended:


Gregory K. Eads, Superintendent


Date

Approved:


Cameron H. Sholly, Regional Director
Midwest Region


Date

REFERENCES

National Park Service (NPS)

- 2001 DO-12: *Conservation Planning, Environmental Impact Analysis, and Decision-making*. Washington, DC.
- 2006 *Pea Ridge National Military Park General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement*. Pea Ridge, Arkansas.
- 2015 *National Park Service NEPA Handbook*. Washington, DC.
- 2016 *Procedural Manual #77-1: Wetland Protection*. Natural Resources Stewardship and Science, Water Resource Division. Fort Collins, Colorado.

Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission

- 2015 *NWA Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan*. Prepared for the Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission. Prepared by Alta Planning + Design. Springdale, Arkansas.

US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)

- 2017 Letter correspondence from USFWS to Gregory Eads, Superintendent, Pea Ridge National Military Park. January 25.

ATTACHMENT A
NON-IMPAIRMENT DETERMINATION
PEA RIDGE NATIONAL MILITARY PARK
TRAIL MASTER PLAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

PEA RIDGE NATIONAL MILITARY PARK TRAIL MASTER PLAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT NON-IMPAIRMENT DETERMINATION

The National Park Service (NPS) *Management Policies 2006* require analysis of potential effects to determine whether or not actions would impair park resources. The fundamental purpose of the national park system, established by the Organic Act and reaffirmed by the 1916 General Authorities Act, as amended, begins with a mandate to conserve park resources and values. NPS managers must always seek ways to avoid, or to minimize to the greatest degree practicable, adversely impacting park resources and values.

However, the laws do give NPS managers discretion to allow adverse impacts to park resources and values when necessary and appropriate to fulfill the purposes of a park, as long as the impact does not constitute impairment of the affected resources and values (NPS 2006). Although Congress has given the NPS the management discretion to allow certain impacts within parks, that discretion is limited by statutory requirement that the NPS must leave park resources and values unimpaired, unless a particular law directly and specially provides otherwise. The prohibited impairment is an impact that, in the professional judgment of the responsible NPS manager, would harm the integrity of park resources or values, including the opportunities that otherwise would be present for the enjoyment of those resources and values (NPS 2006). To determine impairment, the NPS must evaluate "the particular resources and values that will be affected; the severity, duration, and timing of the impact; the direct and indirect effects of the impact; and the cumulative effects of the impact in question and other impacts" (NPS 2006).

This determination on impairment has been prepared for the NPS selected alternative (Alternative 3 as described in the Trail Master Plan/Environmental Assessment) described in the Finding of No Significant Impact. An impairment determination is made for all resource impact topics analyzed for the selected alternative. An impairment determination is not made for visitor use and experience because impairment findings relate back to park resources and values, and this impact area is not generally considered to be park resources or values according to the Organic Act, and cannot be impaired in the same way that an action can impair park resources and values.

WATER RESOURCES

The NPS selected alternative will have minor, short-term adverse impacts to water resources from the maintenance and/or rehabilitation of culverts at the Ford Road crossing over Lee Creek. In the long term, these improvements would allow for better drainage and intermittent stream flow, as well as fix drainage issues on Ford Road. Select trails also may be constructed near wetlands, potentially resulting in impacts to wetlands. However, the total impact to wetlands is anticipated to be minor (less than 0.1 acres). Overall, the selected alternative would contribute small adverse and beneficial incremental impacts to the cumulative impacts to water resources. The selected alternative would not substantially change the overall cumulative impacts, which are minor in the context of the park and regional water resources.

The selected alternative will not result in impairment of water resources because of the short-term, temporary nature of the impacts and because the construction methods will include best management practices for erosion and sediment control to minimize impacts to water quality. In addition, the NPS would seek appropriate Clean Water Act Section 404 permits, if necessary, during the design phase. At less than 0.1 acre for pedestrian/bicycle trails, these impacts qualify as an excepted action from a Statement of Findings under the NPS *Procedural Manual #77-1* (NPS 2016).

VEGETATION

The selected alternative will result in short-term adverse impacts to vegetation from construction and maintenance activities, temporary facility and trail closures, and revegetation activities. Impacts to vegetation would be small in scale (a few tree or shrubs) and localized to the trail edge. No historic trees will be impacted. The selected alternative would have minor long-term adverse impacts to vegetation. However, the abandonment and consolidation of trails would result in benefits to vegetation by allowing the NPS to reestablish vegetation in accordance with the NPS Vegetative Management Plan (NPS 2014). Overall, the selected alternative would contribute small adverse and beneficial incremental impacts to the cumulative impacts to vegetation, but would not substantially change the overall cumulative impacts.

The selected alternative will not result in impairment of vegetation because of the short-term, localized, and temporary nature of the impacts and because the construction methods will include best management practices for erosion and noxious weed control to minimize impacts to native vegetation. Additionally, new trails would be sited to avoid clearing of trees, and no large-scale clearing of vegetation is proposed for any location.

ARCHEOLOGICAL RESOURCES

The selected alternative will have short-term impacts to archeological resources due to earth disturbance necessary for construction. The construction of new trail alignments will result in limited disturbances to archeological resources; however, there would not be a noticeable change in future trail use compared to current trail use and the impact would be minor. In addition, minor long-term adverse impacts from the construction and usage of trails in areas with archeological resources would likely occur. Overall, the selected alternative would contribute a small adverse incremental impact to the cumulative impacts to archeological sites.

The selected alternative will not result in impairment of archeological resources as the changes to the trail systems would not diminish the integrity of the archeological resources to the extent that they would be rendered ineligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. In addition, the NPS has prepared a project-specific Archeological Resource Protection Plan and would follow the provisions of this plan to further minimize the likelihood of impacting archeological resources.

REFERENCES

National Park Service (NPS)

- 2001 **DO-12: Conservation Planning, Environmental Impact Analysis, and Decision-making.** Washington, DC.
- 2006 **NPS Management Policies 2006.** Available online: <https://www.nps.gov/policy/mp/Index2006.htm>.
- 2014 **Pea Ridge National Military Park Vegetative Management Plan and Environmental Assessment.** Garfield, Arkansas.
- 2016 **Procedural Manual #77-1: Wetland Protection.** Natural Resources Stewardship and Science, Water Resource Division. Fort Collins, Colorado.



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Pea Ridge National Military Park
15930 US Hwy 62 East
Garfield, AR. 72732

IN REPLY REFER TO
I.A.2 (PERI Trail Master Plan EA)

Memorandum

To: Regional Director, Midwest Region

From: Superintendent, Pea Ridge National Military Park

Subject: Written Determination: Bicycle Use on the Proposed Multi-use Visitor Trails

Pea Ridge National Military Park (PERI or park) prepared a Trail Master Plan Environmental Assessment (EA) that analyzed the impacts of the proposed construction and use of two new non-motorized, multi-use trails at PERI. These would be constructed with the purpose of connecting the park with other proposed trail routes in adjacent communities linking to the regional trail network identified in the Northwest Arkansas Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan. One trail is proposed to be approximately one half-mile in length and run along the western boundary of the park, and the other would be just over one mile in length and run along the southern park boundary north of US Highway 62. Currently, bicycle use in the park is limited to the tour road, which connects visitors to the park's key interpretive sites, and Ford Road, which is currently designated as an administrative road.

The Regional Director signed a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for this project concurrent with the signature of approval on this written determination. Designating these new trails as routes open to bicycle use requires a written determination that such use is consistent with the protection of the park area's natural, scenic, and aesthetic values; safety considerations and management objectives; and will not disturb wildlife or park resources (36 CFR 4.30(e), as discussed below). The EA and the FONSI provide information and context for this written determination—including specific analysis of the potential effects of bicycle use on park resources—and can be found on the park's planning website at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/per1>: select the link entitled "Trail Master Plan Environmental Assessment" and then select the link entitled "Document List."

A special regulation is also required before the Superintendent can authorize the use of bicycles on new trails outside of a developed area of the park (36 CFR § 4.30). Promulgation of the special regulation is proceeding.

PARK BACKGROUND

Pea Ridge National Military Park, established in 1956 and opened to the public in 1963, preserves and commemorates the site of the March 1862 Civil War battle that helped Union forces maintain physical and political control of the State of Missouri. The park is situated in the foothills of the Ozark Mountains 10 miles north of Rogers, Arkansas, just off of US Highway 62.

The park purpose, significance, values, and management objectives are summarized below to provide important context for this determination.

Purpose of the Park

The park's purpose statement, which reinforces the foundation for park management, administration, and use decisions, states that "Pea Ridge National Military Park was established to preserve and protect the landscapes and resources associated with the battle of Pea Ridge; to interpret the battle as an integral part of the social, political, and military history of the Civil War; to provide for historical education and professional study; and to provide roads, trails, markers, buildings, and other improvements and facilities for the care and accommodation of visitors as necessary" (2016 Foundation Document).

Significance of the Park

The park's significance statements express why the park resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Significance statements describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and system-wide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit. The park's Foundation Document identifies four significance statements for PERI:

- The Union victory at Pea Ridge prevented the Confederacy from gaining physical and political control of Missouri. Union control of Missouri subsequently provided a secure logistical base to embark upon a campaign to control the lower Mississippi River Valley.
- Pea Ridge was the first major battle outside Indian Territory in which a large number of organized troops from the Cherokee Nations fought.
- Pea Ridge National Military Park is one of the best-preserved Civil War battlefields in the United States encompassing nearly 90% of the combat sites of the Battle of Pea Ridge.
- The Federal trenches above Little Sugar Creek, the first entrenchments dug in the Civil War's Trans-Mississippi theater of operations, are the only constructed features remaining from the battle.

Values of the Park

The park's Foundation Document also identifies fundamental resources and values for the park. These are features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to warrant primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance. The Foundation Document identified the following fundamental resources and values for PERI: battlefield landscape, archeological resources, visitor access, and collections and archives related to the battle. The Foundation Document defines the value of providing visitor access as "the value of providing roads, trails, markers, buildings, and other improvements and facilities for the care and accommodation of visitors."

Management Objectives for the Park

The PERI General Management Plan (2006) provides broad direction for management of the park and identifies actions to provide visitors with choices in the type, intensity, and duration of their experiences guided by a variety of interpretive programs. Additions to the park's trail system would be developed along the routes of historic trails and road traces wherever possible. Management objectives for the park are also guided by NPS Management Policies 2006. These policies direct Superintendents to develop management plans that ensure recreational uses in the park provide for visitor enjoyment, but do not cause unacceptable impacts on park resources or values. They also emphasize the need for alternative transportation systems, especially those that promote non-motorized means of accessing and moving within parks. Other park planning documents, including the Vegetation Management Plan (2014) and the Cultural Landscape Report (2014), provide guidance on reducing or avoiding impacts to natural and cultural resources.

CONSISTENCY WITH 36 CFR 4.30

Pursuant to 36 CFR 4.30, the Superintendent has examined the addition of bicycle use on the existing trail to ensure it is consistent with the protection of the park's natural, scenic, and aesthetic values; safety considerations; management objectives; and will not disturb wildlife or park resources.

Park Values and Management Objectives

Protecting natural, scenic, and aesthetic values is a major focus of management objectives for the park, as identified in the park's Foundation Document, the General Management Plan, the Vegetation Management Plan, and the Cultural Landscape Report. Integrating bicycle use on the proposed multi-use trails would result in a more effective visitor experience by increasing options for non-motorized access to the park, while continuing to protect natural, scenic, and aesthetic values. Visitors and residents of nearby communities would have more opportunities for a variety of non-motorized activities, including walking, jogging, and bicycling. Some of the management objectives to be accomplished by the proposed action are described below.

Visitor Experience

Bicycle use on the proposed multi-use trails would improve the quality of the visitor experience by:

- Connecting visitors to a trail network that incorporates internal wayfinding, improves interpretation opportunities, and maintains protection of the park's natural and cultural landscapes.
- Providing connections from the park to the regional trail network identified in the Northwest Arkansas Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan (2015).
- Increasing opportunities for active transportation and recreation in support of national health and well-being initiatives such as America's Great Outdoors and Let's Move Outside, as well as NPS efforts such as A Call to Action and Healthy Parks–Healthy People.

Protection of Resources

Management and protection of park resources will continue and will improve through the strategic design of multi-use trails, as follows:

- Designing and constructing the paths to avoid or minimize disturbance to sensitive resources.
- Incorporating design techniques to reduce the likelihood and presence of social trailing.
- Integrating the values of cultural landscapes and historic features into the path design and interpretation.
- Protecting clean air by offering another alternative to vehicular travel, thereby reducing future visitor motor traffic, parking congestion, and other related motorized transportation concerns.

Safety Considerations

Local and regional changes, including the relocation of US Highway 62 and the Northwest Arkansas Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan (2015), have created opportunities for increased visitation and changes to how people can access the park. Currently, US Highway 62 provides the only paved, motor vehicle public access to the park, which means vehicles, bicyclists, and pedestrians must all share the same access road. Visitor safety would be improved by separating motor vehicles from bicyclists, pedestrians, and other non-motorized user groups where possible. The NPS would also implement the following safety measures:

- Support compliance with state bike helmet regulations.
- Identify and develop access points for emergency response and future maintenance of the trails. Place advanced warnings at intersections of the trails with roadways in accordance with the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices.
- Maintain routine maintenance of the trails, which may include periodic resurfacing and stabilizing of slopes.

Wildlife and Park Resources

The proposed routes for the multi-use trails would run along the west boundary of the park and parallel to Highway 62. Analysis of potential impacts in the EA and FONSI concluded that nationally significant resources and values in the park, including cultural and natural resources, would not be impaired or significantly impacted by the construction of the trails, or the use of these trails by bicycles. The analysis included potential impacts on water resources, vegetation, archeological resources, and visitor use and experience. There are no expected impacts to water resources resulting from the new trails because the trails are not located near water resources in the park. Impacts to vegetation would be small in scale and localized; no large-scale clearing is proposed. There would be minor impacts to archeological resources due to earth disturbance necessary for construction. However, the multi-use trail alignments are primarily located within previously disturbed areas or have been surveyed and found not to contain significant archeological resources. The NPS has prepared a project-specific Archeological Resource Protection Plan and would follow the provisions of this plan to further minimize the likelihood of impacting archeological resources. The addition of the multi-use trails would further enhance and expand recreational opportunities in the park and therefore would be beneficial to the visitor use and experience.

FINAL DETERMINATION

Based upon the foregoing and as required by 36 CFR 4.30, the NPS has determined that bicycle use in PERI on the multi-use trails evaluated in the EA and FONSI is consistent with the protection of the park's natural, scenic, and aesthetic values; safety considerations; management objectives; and will not disturb wildlife or park resources.



Gregory K. Eads, Superintendent, Pea Ridge NMP



Date



Cameron Sholly, Regional Director, Midwest Region



Date

cc: WASO – Chief, Regulations, Jurisdiction, and Special Park Uses