

November 2003

Issue 2



# Great Sand Dunes

## *National Park and Preserve General Management Plan Newsletter*

Dear Friends,

Over the past several months the Great Sand Dunes planning team, with assistance from the Great Sand Dunes Advisory Council, has been laying the foundation for the park's new general management plan. As the last newsletter described, the general management plan will set the direction that the National Park Service intends to follow in managing the Great Sand Dunes for the next 15 to 20 years. Included in this newsletter are key elements of the park's planning foundation: park purpose, significance, and mission; primary interpretive themes; special park mandates; and fundamental resources and values.

The newsletter also includes a summary of what we've heard from the public to date and "Central Questions of the General Management Plan." The central questions should reflect what the team and the public believe the plan for the park should address. Other items in this newsletter include an update on the Great Sand Dunes Advisory Council and an update on the general management plan planning steps and schedule.

Over the next several months, the planning team will study and map significant resource and visitor opportunity areas. This step will prepare us for the next task: developing concepts for management alternatives and a "menu" of management prescriptions for the park and preserve.

We urge you to read this newsletter and then take a few minutes to fill out the enclosed comment form, or you can write to the planning team at the address below or visit our Web site (<http://planning.nps.gov/plans.cfm>).

Great Sand Dunes General Management Plan Team  
c/o Suzy Stutzman  
National Park Service – Intermountain Support Office  
PO Box 25287  
Denver CO 80225

Your input will continue to play an important role in the direction of the general management plan and the future of the Great Sand Dunes. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Steve W. Chaney, Superintendent  
Great Sand Dunes National Monument and Preserve

### Contents

<b>What We Heard from You</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Foundation for Planning</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Primary Interpretive Themes</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Special Park Mandates</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Update: Great Sand Dunes Advisory Council</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Fundamental Resources and Values</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Central Questions of the GMP</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Planning Steps Update</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Update: Wilderness Review</b>	<b>12</b>

## *What We Heard From You*

About 70 written comments were received in response to general management plan Newsletter 1, issued in January 2003, and at public meetings held in mid-February 2003 in Alamosa, Crestone, Golden, and Westcliffe, Colorado. Some responses were from organizations, but many came from individuals.

### *Comments from Organizations*

Several organizations expressed opposition to a northern entrance or access to the park via, or near, the Baca Grande / Crestone area. Concerns were related to potential impacts to quality of life, including increased noise, traffic, road maintenance needs, recreational activity, scenic impacts, and changes in spiritual energy. The following organizations expressed similar concerns: The Shumei International Institute, Baca Grande Property Owner's Association, Crestone Healing Arts Center, Inc., San Luis Valley Tibetan Project, Haidakhandi Universal Ashram, Chamma Ling, and Saguache County Board of Commissioners.

A letter from the San Luis Valley Ecosystem Council expressed concerns about public access (particularly regarding protection of key sensitive areas), access to the park from the north, and access to/around Deadman's Creek and Medano and Music Passes. Other concerns included capacity of the land to handle public use and baseline resource inventories.

Colorado Mountain Club submitted a lengthy letter with attachments on behalf of members of the following organizations: Colorado Mountain Club, Center for Native Ecosystems, Colorado Environmental Coalition, The Wilderness Society, San Luis Valley Ecosystem Council, and Sierra Club. The letter advocated the following: protection of native ecosystems; baseline inventories and monitoring; designation of Research Natural Areas; acquisition of water rights to protect surface and groundwater; restoring natural flow regimes; wilderness suitability assessment; preservation of natural quiet; concentration of recreational activities in frontcountry areas; hiking access along Sand Creek; and allowing wildfire to proceed unimpeded unless park structures, private property, or human safety are threatened.

### *Consolidated Responses to Questions from Newsletter 1:*

Responses to "What planning issues and opportunities do you think should be addressed by the Great Sand Dunes General Management Plan?" covered the following topics:

- condition of facilities
- type, amount, and location of facilities
- trail and road access (e.g., suggestions to develop or eliminate particular roads, trails, or routes of access)
- water management, conservation, watershed and wetlands protection, and water rights
- providing opportunities for primitive experiences
- impacts to neighbors (e.g., noise, traffic, scenic quality), especially from new routes of access and changes in land use
- appropriateness (by type and/or location) of certain recreational uses (ATVs, horses, hiking, etc.)
- crowding, overuse, and how to manage increasing numbers of visitors
- hunting and gun safety, especially near residential areas
- involving and informing neighbors and community members
- how to protect resources (e.g., geologic, biologic, cultural) while making them accessible for education, interpretation, and research
- impacts on plants, animals, and other resources from visitor use, roads, oil and gas exploration / extraction, etc.
- determining what resources (e.g., plants, animals, archeological resources) are in the expanded park/preserve, and trends in the health of those resources
- wildlife management (especially bison and reintroduction of native species)
- fire management
- protection of wilderness values
- protection of ecological systems (processes and function)
- preservation of natural quiet
- consistency and coordination of planning among federal agencies
- use and management of Baca Ranch
- universal accessibility

Responses to "*What makes Great Sand Dunes National Monument and Preserve Special?*" are listed below. Numbers in parentheses indicate the number of respondents who mentioned that particular characteristic:

- uniqueness (8)
- sand dunes against backdrop of mountain peaks (8)
- wildlife / plants (8)
- combination of ecosystems / ecological diversity (7)
- beauty / scenery (6)
- dunes (5)
- Medano Creek surge flow (5)
- geology / landforms (5)
- complex hydrologic system (4)
- unspoiled / undisturbed (4)
- endemic insects (4)
- historic and prehistoric features (3)
- solitude (3)
- beach in the mountains (2)
- sky / sunsets (2)
- contrast between sand and water (2)
- opportunities for recreation (2)
- freedom (1)
- easy access (1)
- creeks (1)
- quiet (1)
- not a destination park (1)
- resiliency of the sand (1)
- minimally managed (1)
- wilderness (1)

Many responses to the question "*What other thoughts or ideas would you like to share with the planning team?*" were related to issues or opportunities, and thus were included in the issues and opportunities summary above. Additional responses are as follows:

- no access through Baca Grande (mentioned by numerous respondents); concerns about traffic, noise, crime, costs of road maintenance, impacts to scenery and wildlife
- no vehicle access through or near spiritual centers
- someone could provide access to the dunes from the north via a special vehicle as a small business
- no fees on public lands
- need more enforcement of laws and rules (hunting, littering, quiet times, parking, etc.)
- consider merging Sand Luis Lakes State Park with National Park Service lands for maintenance and patrol
- provide an emergency call box in the middle of the dunes
- support the local economy
- the park should be staffed with locals; people take better care of things if they have ownership
- improving trail conditions (e.g., removing downed trees) would encourage people to stay on trails
- provide more trails and access points in different areas to disperse use
- trailheads, campgrounds, and other developments should be added only if they serve to mitigate resource damage—not to encourage or foster additional use



*The Many Faces of Great Sand Dunes  
National Park and Preserve*



# Foundation for Planning

## Purpose

Park purpose statements convey the reasons for which the park was set aside as part of the national park system. They are grounded in a thorough analysis of park legislation and legislative history, and provide fundamental criteria against which the appropriateness of plan recommendations, operational decisions, and actions are tested.

The purpose of Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve is to:

- *preserve spectacular and unique sand dunes and their high elevation watersheds, and to perpetuate the entire system for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations*
- *provide long-term protection of the geological, hydrological, ecological, scenic, scientific, cultural, wilderness, educational, wildlife, and recreational resources of the area, including the sand deposits associated with the dune mass and the groundwater system on which the sand dune and wetland systems depend, and the remarkable biodiversity evident in the landscape from the valley floor to the mountain crest*
- *provide opportunities for visitors to experience, understand, enjoy, and gain a sense of stewardship of the park's natural and cultural resources*
- *facilitate research to support park management and to promote scientific knowledge and education*

## Significance

Park significance statements capture the essence of the park's importance to the nation's natural and cultural heritage. They describe the park's distinctiveness and describe why an area is important within regional, national, and global contexts. This helps park managers focus their efforts and limited funding on protection and enjoyment of attributes that are directly related to the purpose of the park.

Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve:

- *Contains the tallest dunes in North America and one of the most fragile and complex dune systems in the world.*
- *Protects a globally significant, water- and wind-driven system that includes creeks that demonstrate surge flow—a rare hydrologic phenomenon.*
- *Provides tremendous scenic settings that, for many, provoke strong emotional responses. These settings (including massive dunes surrounded by alpine peaks, a desert valley, creeks flowing on the surface of the sand, pristine mountains, and rural rangeland) offer spacious relief from urban America, exceptional solitude and quiet, and a remarkably unspoiled day and night sky.*
- *Hosts a great diversity of plants and animals, including insect species found nowhere else on earth. The system, which spans high desert to alpine life zones, supports rare biological communities that are mostly intact and functional.*
- *Contains some of the oldest (9,000+ years before present) known archeological sites in America. The dunes have been identified as having special importance by people of various cultures, and the area is recognized for the culturally diverse nature of human use.*
- *Provides special opportunities for recreation, exploration, and education in the highly resilient dune mass and adjoining creek environments.*



---

## *Mission*

The mission statement is a visionary summary that conveys the essence of the qualities to be protected and understood, forging an intellectual and emotional connection between people and the national heritage.

- *Majestic and austere, the Great Sand Dunes rise from a high mountain valley flanked by some of the tallest peaks in the Rocky Mountains. Great Sand Dunes National Monument and Preserve celebrates the entire natural system of the Great Sand Dunes as well as a rich and living connection with ancient and modern peoples. Our mission is to offer visitors opportunities for learning, solitude, and a growing sense of stewardship in an accessible and undeniably enticing natural setting. The National Park Service works with park partners, neighbors, and the American public to protect this treasure forever.*
- 



## *Primary Interpretive Themes*

Primary interpretive themes are the most important ideas and concepts communicated to the public about the park. They are the core of all interpretive programs and media provided to park visitors.

*The unexpected combination of massive dunes surrounded by alpine peaks, a desert valley, and creeks flowing on the surface of the sand makes Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve a unique landscape that inspires awe, mystery, and wonder.*

*Although the active dune field appears stark, in reality, Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve is a rich and complex environment ranging from desert valley floor to snow-capped mountain peaks, where many different plants and animals live in a variety of distinct natural communities.*

*The tall dunes and the life they support are the most visible indicators of the health of the natural system that extends*

*beyond park boundaries. To protect the ecological health of the park, the National Park Service must partner with the larger community.*

*Just as human survival is dependent upon water, this complex, dynamic dune system, with its distinctive geological and biological character, is dependent on the area's unusual, fragile, and near-pristine water system for its continued existence.*

*The same physical characteristics that influenced the formation of the sand dunes created a cultural crossroad, resulting in a landscape of special significance to many people over thousands of years.*

*The wilderness areas within Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve offer spacious relief from urban America, exceptional solitude and quiet, and a remarkably unspoiled day and night sky.*

## Special Park Mandates

Special park mandates are legal requirements and administrative commitments that apply to a specific unit of the national park system. They are mandated by Congress or by signed agreements with other entities. They help form the “sideboards” for planning by indicating what the National Park Service must do or must not do. Special mandates for Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve are listed below. (It’s worth mentioning here that many resource conditions, park uses, and other aspects of park management are also prescribed by legal mandates and policies (e.g., the *Endangered Species Act*, the *National Historic Preservation Act*, and National Park Service *Management Policies*) that are applicable to all units of the national park system. These are referred to as servicewide laws and policies; they are not included in this newsletter.)

### Advisory Council

The Secretary of Interior has responsibility for establishing a “Great Sand Dunes Advisory Council.” The council is to advise the Secretary with respect to preparation and implementation of a management plan for the national park and preserve. The advisory council is to dissolve upon completion of the general management plan (*Great Sand Dunes Act of 2000*, Public Law 106-530).

### Water Resources

The Secretary of the Interior is to obtain and exercise water rights required to fulfill the purposes of the national park and preserve, provided:

- A. Such water rights are managed according to Colorado state law.
- B. The purposes and other substantive characteristics of water rights are established according to state law, except that the Secretary is specifically authorized to appropriate water exclusively for maintaining groundwater levels, surface water levels, and stream flows on, across, and under the national park and preserve, to accomplish the purposes of the national park and preserve, and to protect park resources and park uses.
- C. Water rights are established without interfering with: (1) any exercise of a water right for a nonfederal purpose in the San Luis Valley that existed when the *Great Sand Dunes Act of 2000* was passed; and (2) the Closed Basin Division project.
- D. Except as provided below, no federal reservation of water may be claimed or established for the national park or preserve.

To the extent that a water right is established or acquired by the United States for Rio Grande National Forest, the water right will be (1) considered to be of equal use and value for the national preserve; and (2) retain its priority and purpose when included in the national preserve. To the extent that a water right is established or acquired by the United States for Great Sand Dunes National Monument, the water right will be (1) considered to be of equal use and value for the national park; and (2) retain its priority and purpose when included in the national park (*Great Sand Dunes Act of 2000*).

Two irrigation ditches in the headwaters of Medano Creek are associated with water rights senior to those of the monument. The Hudson Ditch was constructed in 1886, and probably falls under the Ditch Act of 1866. The Medano Ditch was constructed in 1892 and probably falls under the Ditch Act of March 3, 1891.

### Wilderness

Great Sand Dunes Wilderness Area, comprised primarily of the main dunes within Great Sand Dunes National Park, was established in 1976 by Public Law 94-567. It is 33,450 acres in size. The Sangre de Cristo Wilderness Area was established by the Colorado Wilderness Act of 1993 (Public Law 103-77). It is 226,420 acres in size. In 2000, 39,686 acres of the Sangre de Cristo wilderness was administratively transferred from the U.S. Forest Service to the National Park Service (*Great Sand Dunes Act of 2000*). Total designated wilderness in Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve amounts to 75,641 acres (this figure includes an additional 2,505 acres of potential wilderness).

### Hunting, Fishing, and Trapping

Hunting, fishing, and trapping\* shall generally be permitted on land and water within the preserve in accordance with applicable federal and state laws. Areas may be designated where, and limited periods established when, no hunting, fishing, or trapping are permitted for reasons of public safety, administration, or compliance with applicable law (*Great Sand Dunes Act of 2000*).

[\*A state constitutional amendment passed in 1996 made it generally unlawful to take wildlife with any leghold trap, any instant kill body-gripping design trap, or by poison or snare in the state of Colorado (*Colorado Revised Statutes 33-6-203*).]

(Continued on page 7)

(Continued from page 6)

### ***Domestic Livestock***

On former state or private land where grazing was permitted when the 2000 Act was passed and which is acquired for the national park or preserve, the Secretary of the Interior, in consultation with the lessee, may permit continued grazing by the lessee at the time of acquisition. Where grazing was permitted on federal land when the 2000 Act was passed, the Secretary may permit continued grazing unless it would harm the resources or values of the national park or preserve. The Secretary may accept voluntary termination of leases or permits for grazing within the national park or preserve (*Great Sand Dunes Act of 2000*).

### ***Closed Basin Project***

The Closed Basin Division, San Luis Valley Project (Closed

Basin Project) is located in a topographic depression (the Closed Basin) in the San Luis Valley. The purpose of the project is to pump and deliver unconfined groundwater and available surface flows in the Closed Basin to the Rio Grande River via a 42-mile conveyance channel. The project helps Colorado meet its water delivery commitment to New Mexico and Texas under the Rio Grande Compact of 1939, and helps the United States meet its water delivery commitment to Mexico under a treaty dated May 21, 1906. The project also delivers water to the Alamosa National Wildlife Refuge.

Features of the Closed Basin Division Project within the national park are not to be affected by the park expansion. Management responsibility for the Closed Basin Project features within the national park is to remain with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (*Great Sand Dunes Act of 2000*).

## ***Update: Great Sand Dunes Advisory Council***

The Great Sand Dunes National Park Advisory Council was appointed by the Secretary of Interior in May 2003. Establishment of the council was authorized by Congress when it approved the Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve Act of 2000. The council's role is to advise the Secretary of Interior regarding development of the general management plan for the national park and preserve.

The advisory council members represent a variety of interests related to the management of Great Sand Dunes. Three members speak for organizations that Congress directed to be included on the council: Friends of the Dunes, Alamosa County Commission, and Saguache County Commission. Advisory council members, all from Colorado, are as follows: **Dr. Hobart Dixon**, **Robert Zimmerman**, and **Herry Andrews** of Alamosa; **Bill McClure** of Center; **George Whitten** of Saguache; **Robert Ogburn** of Monte Vista; **Mike Tetreault** of Steamboat Springs; **Terry Sandmeier** of Fairplay; and **Christine Canaly** and **Robert Philleo** of Crestone.

(Continued on page 9)

A tentative schedule for future advisory council meetings is provided below:

Tentative Meetings	Probable Location	General Topics
Jan 12-13, 2004 (2 days)	Blanca/Ft. Garland, CO	Workshop — Resources and Opportunities Analysis
April 5-7, 2004 (3 days)	Alamosa, CO	Workshop — Goals and Alternatives
May/June 2004 (1 day)	Mosca, CO	Information and Education
Summer 2004 (1 day)	Crestone, CO	Evaluate elements of alternatives
Fall 2004 (1 day)	Alamosa, CO	Review public comment on conceptual alternatives
Jan/Feb 2005 (2 days)	Alamosa, CO	Workshop — Weighing Alternatives — Choosing by Advantages

More information about the Advisory Council and its activities is available via the Great Sand Dunes Web site (follow the General Management Planning link): [www.nps.gov/grsa](http://www.nps.gov/grsa).

## Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are systems, processes, features, visitor experiences, stories, scenes, etc. that warrant primary consideration during planning and management because they are critical to achieving the park's purpose and maintaining its significance. Resources or values that are nationally significant in their own right—even though they are not related to the park's purpose and significance—are also identified.

### Dunes System

The dunes system is complex, fragile, and dynamic due to interactions of sand, wind, streams, groundwater, vegetation, and mountains. Main components of the dunes system must be protected to ensure that the system remains intact. Main components that can be feasibly managed are listed below. Sand particles, wind, and the geologic setting are important components, but were not included in the list because they cannot be feasibly managed.

- **dunefield** (complex, tall, inland dunes)  
[*transport of sand by streams must be protected*]
- **sand sheet** (relatively flat sand sheet stabilized by vegetation)  
[*natural vegetation patterns must be protected*]
- **sabkha** (sand deposit hardened by minerals)  
[*groundwater aquifer must be protected*]
- **Sand Creek** (recycles sand)  
[*watershed and groundwater aquifer must be protected*]
- **Medano Creek and its surge flow** (recycles sand)  
[*watershed and groundwater aquifer must be protected*]
- **groundwater aquifers** (integral to sabkha, vegetation on sand sheet, surface water flows)  
[*natural water table levels must be maintained*]

### Natural Diversity

Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve contains remarkable natural biological diversity, largely due to its range of elevation zones and mix of wet and desert habitats. The following key resources help contribute to the dunes' unusual species diversity.

- **insects that are endemic to the Great Sand Dunes**  
[*e.g., Great Sand Dunes Tiger beetle*]
- **Medano Creek's outstanding water quality and closed system**  
[*serves as a genetic refuge / breeding area for native*

- fish such as the state-endangered Rio Grande sucker]*
- **genetically pure cottonwoods**  
[*located along creeks (e.g., Sand Creek) — up to 340 years old, oldest cored*]
- **sand sheet wetlands**  
[*e.g., interdunal ponds, Big Spring Creek, Little Spring Creek increases the variety of flora and fauna*]
- **balanced and sustained populations of native wildlife and plants**  
[*important habitat and natural processes, including fire, must be protected*]
- **tundra**  
[*highly erosive, fragile (highly vulnerable to damage from visitor use)*]

### Human Connections

The Great Sand Dunes have served as a prominent visual and cultural marker, drawing people physically and spiritually, for thousands of years. Cultural resources and values that are key to maintaining the park's purpose and significance include the following:

- **early archeological sites**  
[*associated with Folsom Man, 9,000 years before present; prime examples include Big Spring, Stewart Cattle guard sites*]
- **dunes area—important to contemporary American Indians and other people**  
[*e.g., traditional hunting and gathering place, sacred and spiritual place*]
- **scarred ponderosa pines**  
[*inner bark of scarred trees used by native peoples for food (mid-1800s) listed in the National Register of Historic Places*]
- **contemporary community ties to the dunes**  
[*emotional connection, support for park expansion*]

*Note: the early Spanish influence, historic routes through mountain passes, mining and ranching history, national register buildings are all interesting and important, but they aren't critical to maintaining the purpose and significance of the Great Sand Dunes.*

(Continued on page 9)



(Continued from page 8)

## Visitor Opportunities

The Great Sand Dunes are attractive, inviting, and approachable. These qualities and certain inspirational, recreational, and educational opportunities must be managed and protected to maintain the park's purpose and significance:

- **climbing and descending the high dunes (get "sand in your shorts")**
- **experiencing surge flow, playing in Medano Creek near the foot of the dunes**
- **seeing "the heavens" (Milky Way, stars, planets, comets, etc.) at night**  
[dark night skies must be protected]
- **viewing the dune mass with backdrop of the high peaks and from the mountains**  
[key elements: views from west and south, viewing the dunes from the mountains, changing light conditions; shadow and contrast especially impressive in early morning and evening air quality and undeveloped mountain slopes must be

protected]

- **seeing wildlife in its natural setting (e.g., elk, pronghorn, deer)**  
[important habitat must be protected]
- **learning about the dunes system—its components and dynamic nature**  
[includes research, education, and stewardship opportunities]
- **experiencing quiet, solitude, isolation in a wilderness environment**
- **driving (4x4) in sand**

*Note: the high country wilderness experience is wonderful, but it is not peculiar to the Great Sand Dunes, and it is probably not critical to maintaining purpose/significance. The high country was added to the park to protect Sand and Medano Creek watersheds. Other opportunities / resources that are important but probably not critical to maintaining the park's purpose and significance include mountain trails, fishing and hunting, backcountry use, campgrounds.*



(Continued from page 7)

The advisory council meets several times per year in communities near the park. The meetings are open to the public and a portion of each meeting is set aside to hear public comments. The advisory council's first meeting was held May 29, 2003, in Alamosa. This meeting was devoted to introductions, briefings about the park and general management plan process, and a review of public comments to date. The second meeting was held on June 26, 2003, in Crestone, and covered the council's bylaws, how the council can provide input on general management planning, and a presentation on the geology and hydrology of the dunes system. The third meeting was held on September 5, 2003, in Westcliffe, Colorado. This meeting was devoted to reviewing and commenting on foundation statements for the general management plan. The fourth meeting was held on October 30, 2003, in Moffat, Colorado. It covered information about water rights and natural and cultural resources.

## *Central Questions of the General Management Plan*

Central questions of the general management plan help to focus the general management plan, and should therefore be a relatively short list. They address trends affecting fundamental resources and values, and they encompass public comments from the scoping or “discovery” phase of planning and other known issues. They should lead to a range of management alternatives later in the planning process. The list of questions should be able to pass this test: “If the central questions were addressed, would the general management plan be complete?”

Seven central questions are listed below for Great Sand Dunes. Questions nested underneath the central questions are examples of topics covered by that central question.

### *Central Questions for Great Sand Dunes*

1. *How do we protect the critical components of the dune system, especially the groundwater aquifer and sand sheet, from anticipated threats?*
2. *How do we ensure a healthy ecosystem and provide opportunities for visitors to experience natural settings?*
  - Where in the park should opportunities for experiencing wilderness be provided or maintained?
  - How should the National Park Service work toward balanced and sustainable wildlife populations?
3. *Where are the best opportunities to safely learn, play, recreate, enjoy, and connect to park resources, and what access and facilities are appropriate?*
  - What range of recreational opportunities should be provided, and where?
  - What commercial services are necessary and appropriate?
  - How should the National Park Service address crowding at park facilities?
  - Should additional trail or vehicle access be provided to new park lands? If so, what should be the location and nature of such access?
  - Should dogs and pack animals (e.g., llamas and burros) be allowed in the park?
4. *How do we ensure that unique and fragile components of the ecosystem and cultural resources are protected, restored, and/or perpetuated?*
  - How can dark night skies be preserved?
  - How should the National Park Service minimize potential impacts on vegetation and wildlife from human activities (recreational activities, vehicle use, oil and gas exploration, etc.)?
  - How should archeological sites be protected?
5. *How do we maintain and strengthen community connections, including American Indian spiritual ties?*
6. *What is the best direction to guide science and research?*
  - What are priorities for natural resource inventories?
7. *How do we maintain and strengthen stewardship and ownership by visitors, students, landowners, partners, and neighbors?*
  - How can the National Park Service promote stewardship for the park within the San Luis Valley community?
  - Should the park’s curriculum education program for schools be expanded? If so, what should be the general scope of the program?

## Planning Steps Update

### Great Sand Dunes General Management Plan and Wilderness Review

#### Step 1: Project Start-up      September 2002 - January 2003

- Assemble the interdisciplinary planning team and advisory council
- Conduct a wilderness suitability assessment
- Conduct internal scoping and preliminary consultation

#### Step 2: "Discovery" (initial idea gathering)      January - May 2003

- Consult with the public, agencies, and tribes
- Develop preliminary issue statements

#### Step 3: Foundation and Analysis      May 2003 - January 2004

- Reaffirm park purpose, significance, and mission
- Reaffirm park interpretive themes
- Identify special mandates, laws, and policies
- Identify fundamental resources and values
- Gather relevant data from park, agencies, tribes, experts, public
- Map fundamental resources and visitor opportunities

#### Step 4: Goals and Alternatives      February 2004 - March 2005

- Develop fundamental goals
- Develop management prescriptions (desired future conditions)
- Develop a range of alternative concepts with zoning schemes, wilderness alternatives
- Identify and analyze impacts
- Consult with the public, advisory council, agencies, and tribes
- Select a preferred alternative

#### Step 5: Draft GMP / EIS      April 2005 - March 2006

- Prepare a Draft GMP/Wilderness Study\*/ Environmental Impact Statement
- Consult with the advisory council, public, agencies, and tribes
- Prepare a Final GMP/Wilderness Study\*/ Environmental Impact Statement
- Consult with the public

#### Step 6: Final GMP / EIS      April 2006 - July 2007

- Prepare a Final GMP / Wilderness Study\* / Environmental Impact Statement
- Consult with the advisory council, public, agencies, and tribes
- Prepare the Record of Decision and implement the plan

*\* The wilderness study process has its own requirements for Federal Register notices and public hearings. If this process lags too far behind the General Management Plan process, the wilderness study will be completed separately at a later time.*

*[Note: Dates shown are approximate.]*



## *Update: Wilderness Review*

The planning team is looking for ways to combine the formal Wilderness Review Process (Wilderness Suitability Assessment plus Wilderness Study) into the Great Sand Dune general management plan. Wilderness value (including solitude) is one of many special values identified in the Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve Act of 2000, and it will be addressed during development of general management plan alternatives.

### ***Related News from the U.S. Forest Service***

The Forest Service, in coordination with the National Park Service and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, is working on two interim management strategies associated with the Baca Ranch acquisition. In case Great Sand Dunes National Monument does not receive the remaining funds needed to acquire the Baca Ranch in 2004, a general agreement has been drafted between The Nature Conservancy and the Colorado State Land Board that provides a framework for management of the Baca Ranch while under joint undivided interest ownership. In case Great Sand Dunes National Monument does receive the remaining funds to acquire and close on the Baca Ranch in 2004, the National Park Service, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and U.S. Forest Service are developing a coordinated interim interagency strategy for managing the lands each agency will receive upon closing. Planning for lands to be transferred to the Rio Grande National Forest will begin in 2005.

### ***Related News from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service***

While we are awaiting the purchase of the Baca Ranch and ultimate acquisition by the federal government, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has compiled some accomplishments. On April 10, 2003, the Baca National Wildlife Refuge was officially established with the transfer of the 3,300-acre White Ranch from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This tract is in the heart of the acquisition boundary for the Baca National Wildlife Refuge. In addition, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has initiated an Interim Management Plan for the Baca National Wildlife Refuge. This planning process, while far short of a full Comprehensive Conservation Plan, sets the tone for management of the new refuge while the refuge is being expanded and before a major planning effort can be started. The Interim Management Plan will be very conceptual in nature. Public meetings for the interim plan will be announced.



**Suzy Stutzman  
National Park Service  
Intermountain Support Office  
PO Box 25287  
Denver CO 80225**

**FIRST CLASS MAIL  
POSTAGE & FEES PAID  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
PERMIT NO. G-83**

