



# United States Department of the Interior



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
Death Valley National Park  
P.O. Box 579  
Death Valley, CA 92328

IN REPLY REFER TO:

DEVA CRP No. 11-036  
PEPC No. 39438

May 10, 2019

**Subject: Release of the Saline Valley Warm Springs Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement**

Dear Interested Party:

The National Park Service announced on May 10 that it has finalized the Saline Valley Warm Springs Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (plan/EIS). The document outlines the agency's plan for managing visitor use, natural resources, cultural resources, and facilities at this backcountry site.

Saline Valley Warm Springs are located in a remote northwest corner of Death Valley National Park, 35 miles from the closest paved road. Recreational users developed soaking tubs and art installations starting in the 1950s. The site was managed by the Bureau of Land Management until it was transferred to NPS with the California Desert Protection Act in 1994.

The NPS started working on a management plan for the site in 2012. Inyo County, the BLM, and the Timbisha Shoshone Tribe participated in the plan as cooperating agencies. Several organizations were heavily involved in providing comments, including the Saline Preservation Association and Recreation Aviation Foundation.

There were opportunities for the public to provide feedback on the plan's direction in 2012, 2014, and 2018. The NPS received and analyzed a total of 1,696 pieces of correspondence during these comment periods. The NPS made changes to the plan at every stage of the process reflecting the feedback received from the public, organizations, and agencies.

"What we heard loud and clear from many of the recreational users was a desire to 'leave it like it is.' We feel this management plan will maintain a feeling of unconstrained recreation while protecting natural and cultural resources," said Death Valley National Park Superintendent Mike Reynolds.

Things staying the same under the plan:

- Existing soaking tubs at Lower Spring and Palm Spring would remain in use.
- Upper Spring would remain undeveloped.
- All art installations that were in place by January 1, 2019 in non-wilderness areas would be allowed to stay.
- Airplane use of the Chicken Strip, in use for decades, would be authorized by a separate (pending) special regulation.
- NPS would establish memorandums of understanding (MOUs) with user groups for maintenance and management of Saline Valley Warm Springs.
- Public nudity is common at the site, and the plan is silent on this topic. Public nudity is not against Federal regulations, but lewd behavior is.

Things that would change under this plan:

- Three camping zones would be established: 1) car camping areas; 2) walk-in camping with an associated parking area separate from the camping area; and 3) areas where camping is prohibited, including within 100 feet of source springs.
- Artistic fencing would be added around source springs to prevent access by nonnative burros.
- Existing mature palm trees will stay at Lower Spring and Palm Spring until they die of natural causes. No new palm trees will be allowed to grow and native plants will be added to provide shade.
- All nonnative plants, including palm trees, at Upper Spring will be removed.
- New artwork will be allowed only if it does not disturb natural or cultural resources, is of a temporary nature, and is removed by the visitor when he or she leaves.
- The vehicle support facility would be removed.
- The NPS would address concerns about water quality, storage of hazardous materials, and wastewater.

The National Park Service made the following notable changes to the preferred alternative based on internal deliberations and public comments:

Category	Draft plan/EIS Preferred Alternative	Final plan/EIS Preferred Alternative
Art	Remove non-historic artwork from wilderness and backcountry area; no manipulation of natural or cultural resources for the purposes of art.	Remove non-historic artwork from wilderness; retain existing artwork (as of January 1, 2019) in non-wilderness areas; new art in non-wilderness allowed if natural and cultural resources are not manipulated, the art is not a permanent fixture, and the art is removed from the site when the visitor creating the art leaves the site
Camping	No camping within 200 feet of source spring; Dispersed camping within designated camp areas defined by appropriate elements, such as delineation of roadways or signposts, with area use maps posted at the campground and online.	No camping within 100 feet of source spring; Three camping zones: -Dispersed camping area with the ability to camp next to vehicles -Overflow walk-in camping area and an associated parking area separate from the camping area -Areas where camping is prohibited
Fencing	Install fencing around the developed portion of the warm springs area to prevent access to water, vegetation, and campsites by feral burros.	Install artistic fencing around the source springs to prevent access to water sources by feral burros.
Nonnative Vegetation-Palm Trees	As nonnative invasive palms tress age and die at Lower and Palm	Retain existing mature palm trees at Lower Spring and Palm Spring and

	Spring, allow the area to naturally revegetate. Remove palms from Upper Spring.	remove as they die naturally, add native species. Remove palms from Upper Spring.
Nonnative Vegetation-Lawn	Remove the lawn and allow the area to naturally revegetate or replant with native vegetation.	Retain the lawn in its current footprint with no expansion.
Permits and Fees	Mandatory no-cost permit system modeled after the Visitor Use Permit system proposed in the <i>Death Valley National Park Wilderness and Backcountry Stewardship Plan</i> (appendix E); sign-in log would be maintained for campers; overnight camping fee could be implemented in the future and would include an independent public process	Complete formal visitor use surveys to gather data on visitor use patterns and impacts; future changes to permit or camping fee requirements for developed backcountry campgrounds in the park would apply, consistent with the established framework in the <i>Death Valley National Park Wilderness and Backcountry Stewardship Plan</i> (appendix E).

The plan will become effective when the NPS signs the Record of Decision (ROD), which will be on or after June 10, 2019. However, some aspects of the plan may not be implemented immediately.

The plan and associated documents can be viewed at [parkplanning.nps.gov/SalineValleyWarmSprings](http://parkplanning.nps.gov/SalineValleyWarmSprings).

Sincerely,

  
(for) Mike Reynolds  
Superintendent