



Dear Friends,

The National Park Service, in cooperation with the Federal Highway Administration, is in the planning phases of a road improvement project at Mesa Verde National Park, which would rehabilitate Mesa Top Loop, Cliff Palace Loop, and Sun Temple Loop roads, improve physical accessibility at adjacent overlooks, improve sidewalks and parking areas, improve the current Visitor and Research Center intersection, and possibly widen the two-way sections of Mesa Top Loop and Sun Temple Loop roads to accommodate a bike lane. This newsletter includes information on the preliminary concepts being considered and the environment at Mesa Verde National Park that could be affected by this road improvement project.

At this time, we are initiating a 30-day comment period, and we invite you to participate in the planning process by submitting your ideas for this road improvement project. We would like to hear your thoughts on the preliminary range of concepts, potential issues with park resources, and any other ideas you feel are relevant and important for this planning process. We hope that you will join us in this important discussion regarding the future of your public lands by submitting comments.

Once we have received and considered your comments, we will move to the next phase, which will include assessing compliance needs under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other environmental regulations. As we move forward with planning for the improvement of the roads at Mesa Verde National Park, we encourage you to stay connected and be an active participant in this planning process.

Thank you for your interest and participation.

Cliff Spencer
Superintendent

Why are These Improvements Needed?

Loops Roads

Most of Mesa Verde National Park's 600,000 annual visitors travel the Mesa Top Loop, Cliff Palace Loop, and Sun Temple Loop roads, which were last resurfaced in 1998. Since then, the road base has been damaged by years of use, as well as water infiltration, resulting in pavement that is settling, cracking, and breaking apart. The traction course is gone, making surfaces slick during snows. Years of patching and applying overlays have created steep and uneven shoulders.

Entrance Intersection

There is currently a four-way intersection at the park entrance for accessing the Visitor and Research Center, the entrance station/kiosks, Highway 160, and the park's water treatment plant. The four-way intersection is off-set (the roads do not intersect at 90-degree angles). The off-sets and stop signs can be confusing for drivers and have led to several near-miss accidents.

Range of Preliminary Concepts

Three concepts are described here and presented in the table below. The figures on pages 4 through 7 help illustrate these concepts.

- Under the current conditions concept, the loop roads would not be rehabilitated, failing sections would continue to be patched, and the Visitor and Research Center intersection would not be altered.
- The 3R concept is a resurfacing, restoration, and rehabilitation project. 3R projects typically involve pavement improvement work and targeted safety improvements. This proposal would also include improvements to overlooks, the Balcony House shade structure, and Visitor and Research Center intersection.
- The 3R + Bike Lane concept would be the same as the 3R concept with the addition of bike lanes on the shoulder along the two-way sections of Mesa Top Loop and Sun Temple Loop roads.

Comparison of the Concepts

Element	Current Conditions Concept	3R Concept	3R + Bike Lane Concept
Loop Roads Improvements	The loop roads would not be rehabilitated. Failing sections would continue to be patched.	The Cliff Palace Loop, Mesa Top Loop, and Sun Temple Loop roads, sidewalks, and parking areas would be rehabilitated.	Same as 3R Concept
Visitor and Research Center intersection	The Visitor and Research Center intersection would not be altered.	The current Visitor and Research Center intersection with a roundabout would be replaced.	Same as 3R Concept
Accessibility	N/A	The physical accessibility at adjacent overlooks would be improved where possible.	Same as 3R Concept
New Bike Trail	N/A	N/A	The two-way sections of Mesa Top Loop and Sun Temple Loop roads would be widened for a bike lane.
Shade Structure	N/A	The deteriorating shade structure adjacent to the Balcony House parking area (Cliff Palace Loop Road) would be replaced.	Same as 3R Concept
Parking Lot at the Infield Area	N/A	The existing gravel parking lot in the Headquarters "infield" area would be replaced (to accommodate longer dwell times).	Same as 3R Concept
Staging Areas	N/A	Staging areas for equipment and materials would be established along the road and in parking lots.	Same as 3R Concept
Change in Traffic Flow	N/A	One-way traffic flow direction around Headquarters Loop may be changed - during construction only - to reduce traffic conflicts.	Same as 3R Concept

Park Resources that Could be Affected

The table below presents information on some of the resources that could be affected by this road improvement project. The figures on pages 4 through 7 present the project area, which is comprised of two areas associated with the entrance intersection and the loop roads.

Resource	Description
Vegetation	There is little remaining piñon-juniper habitat in the park, with a large portion degraded by fire. The community is not stable – after loss from fire, piñon and juniper trees are not returning, resulting in a conversion from piñon-juniper natural habitat to a weedy herbaceous community. Other habitats present within the project area include grasslands, big sagebrush shrubland, Gambel oak shrubland, and Douglas-fir/Gambel oak forest; however, these communities are less abundant within the project area than piñon-juniper habitat.
Special-status Species	Chapin Mesa Milkvetch—Chapin Mesa milkvetch (<i>Astragalus schmollii</i>) is a flowering herb, endemic to a small part of the Mesa Verde cuesta of southwest Colorado. Chapin Mesa milkvetch is a candidate for protection under the Endangered Species Act. The main threats to Chapin Mesa milkvetch include degradation by fire and invasion by nonnative plants. Cliff Palace Milkvetch—Cliff Palace milkvetch (<i>Astragalus deterior</i>) is endemic to Mesa Verde National Park and the Mesa Verde landform, is tracked by the Colorado Natural Heritage Program, and is a park sensitive species. Cliff Palace milkvetch grows in overlook areas and near Cliff Palace adjacent to the road. Threats to Cliff Palace milkvetch are similar to those for Chapin Mesa milkvetch, but this species is also sensitive to erosion because it grows in very shallow soils.
Archeological Resources	It is estimated that Mesa Verde National Park contains over 4,700 archeological sites. There are buried archeological deposits and artifacts that had not been documented before the testing efforts for this proposed project. All archeological sites in the project area contribute to the Mesa Verde National Park Archeological District, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Archeological resources can be damaged by natural forces, such as wind, water, freeze/thaw cycles, rock falls, and rodents, but they can also be affected by trampling from livestock and human development.
Cultural Landscapes and Historic Districts	The project takes place within the boundaries of the Ruins Loop Historic District and the Entrance Corridor Cultural Landscape, which are eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The combined period of significance is 1914 to 1970 and contributing features include culverts, headwalls, Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) stone features, overlooks, vegetation, viewsheds, and the general alignment of the road. The landscape has been previously degraded from realignments, widening, and incompatible improvements along the road.



Chapin Mesa Milkvetch



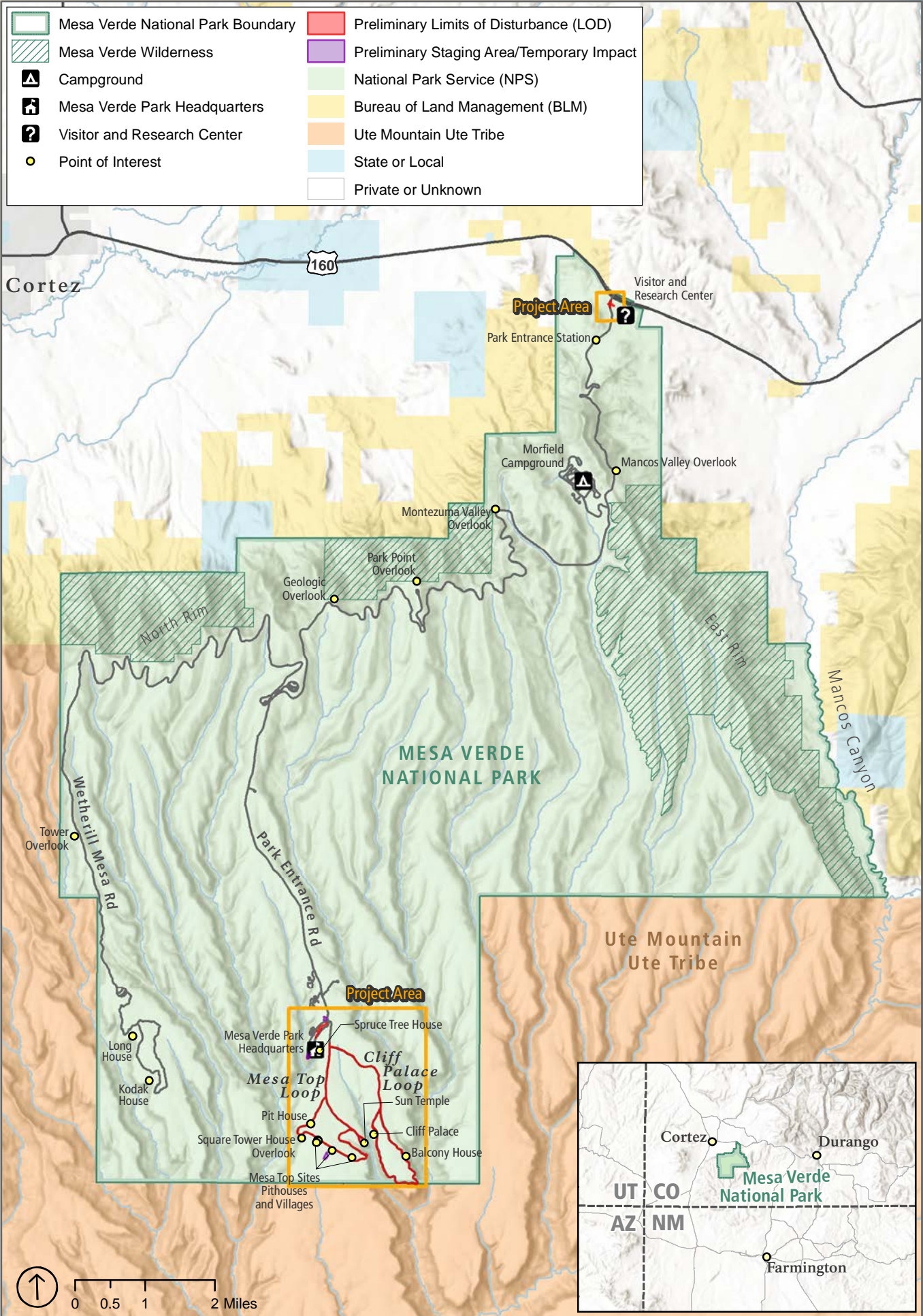
Cliff Palace Milkvetch



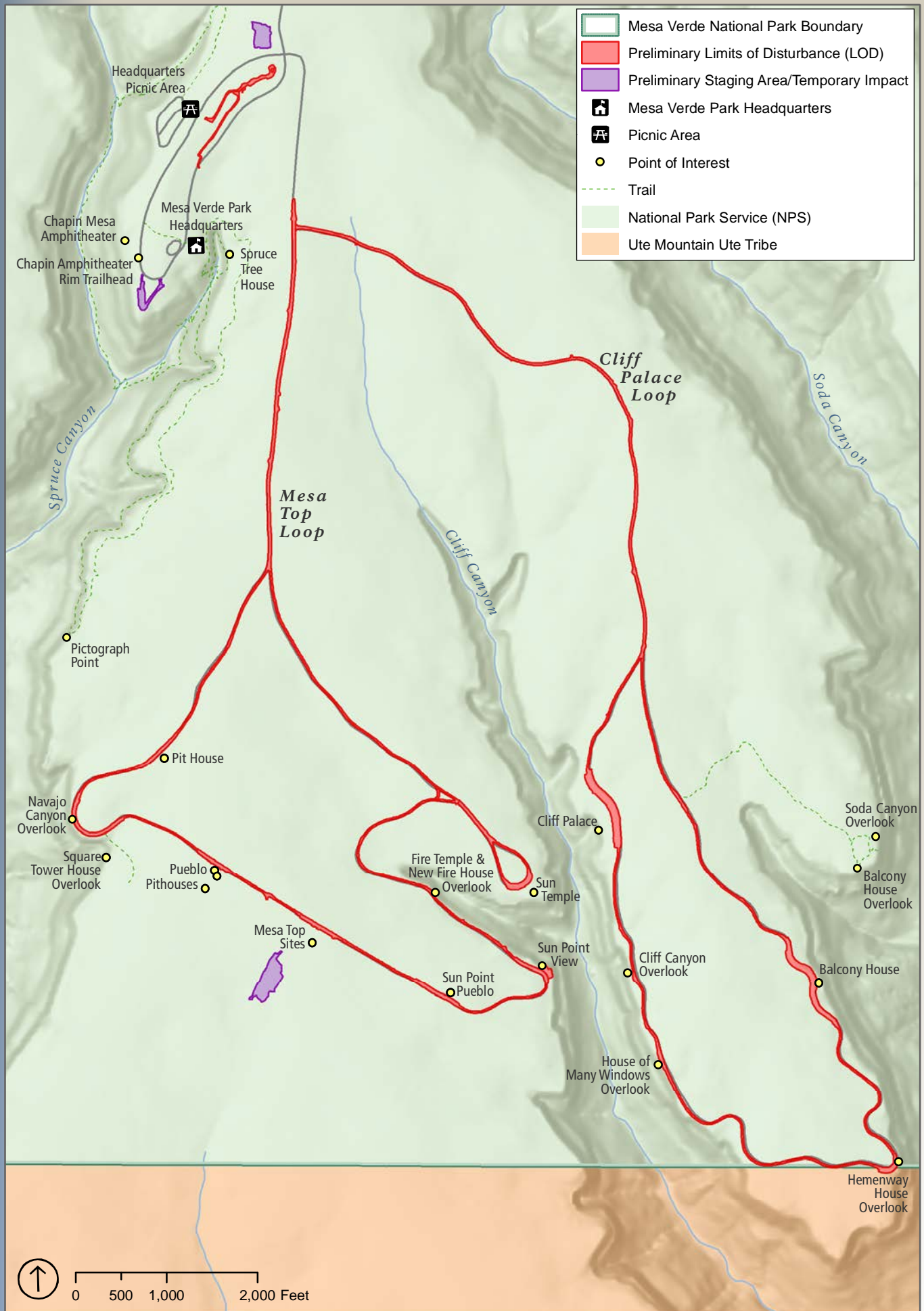
Oak Tree House Overlook



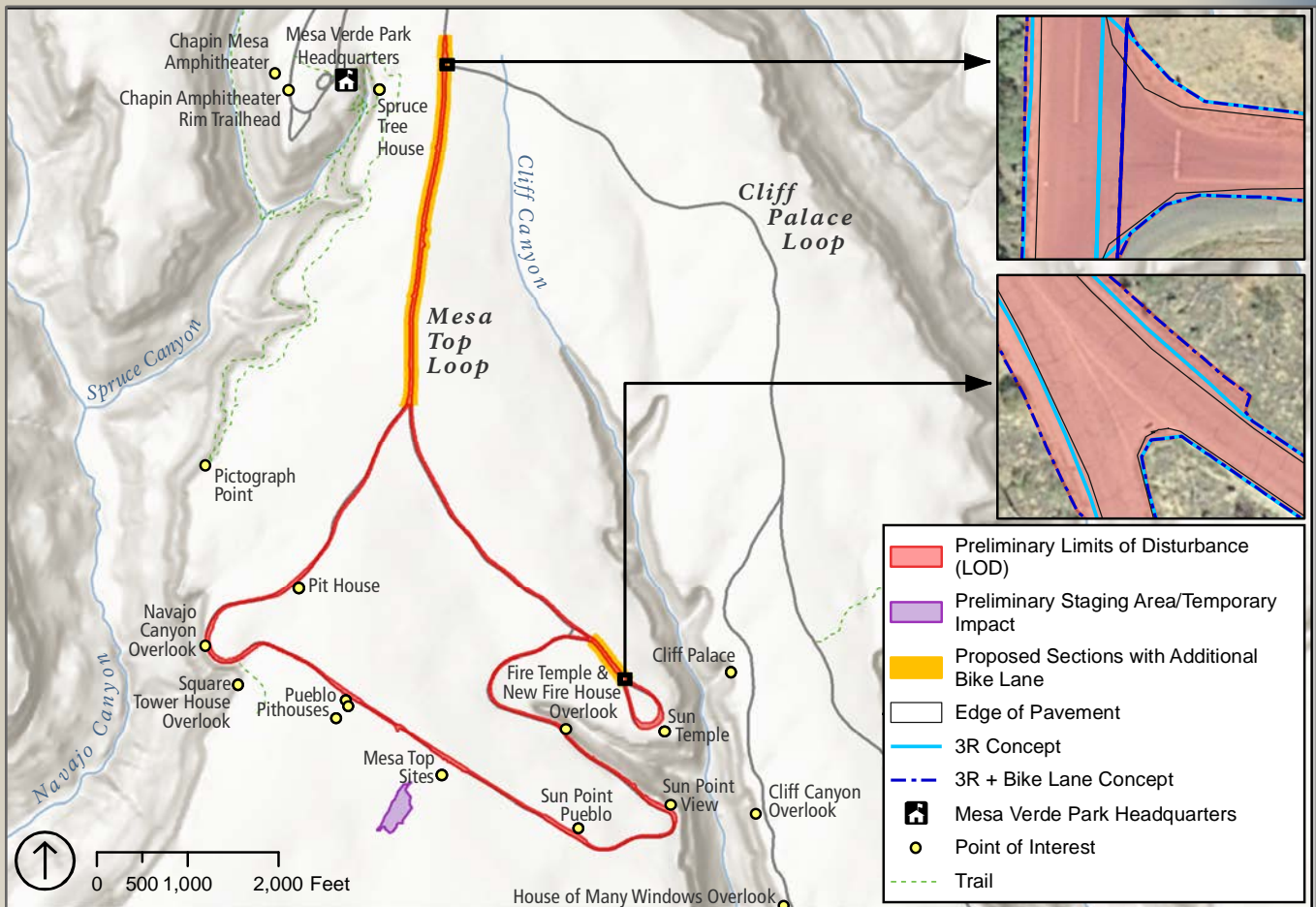
Stone Drop Inlet



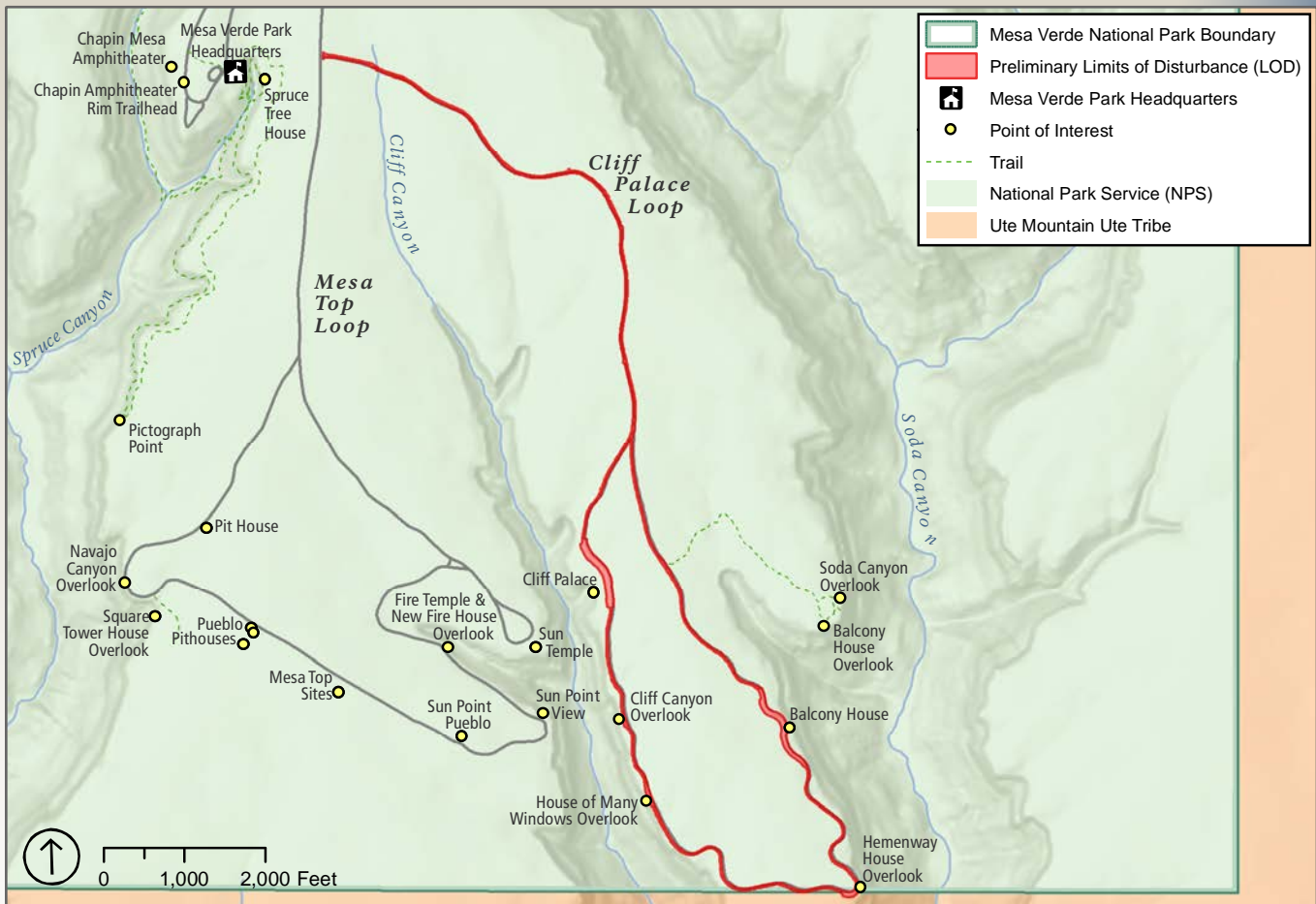
Potential Project Location



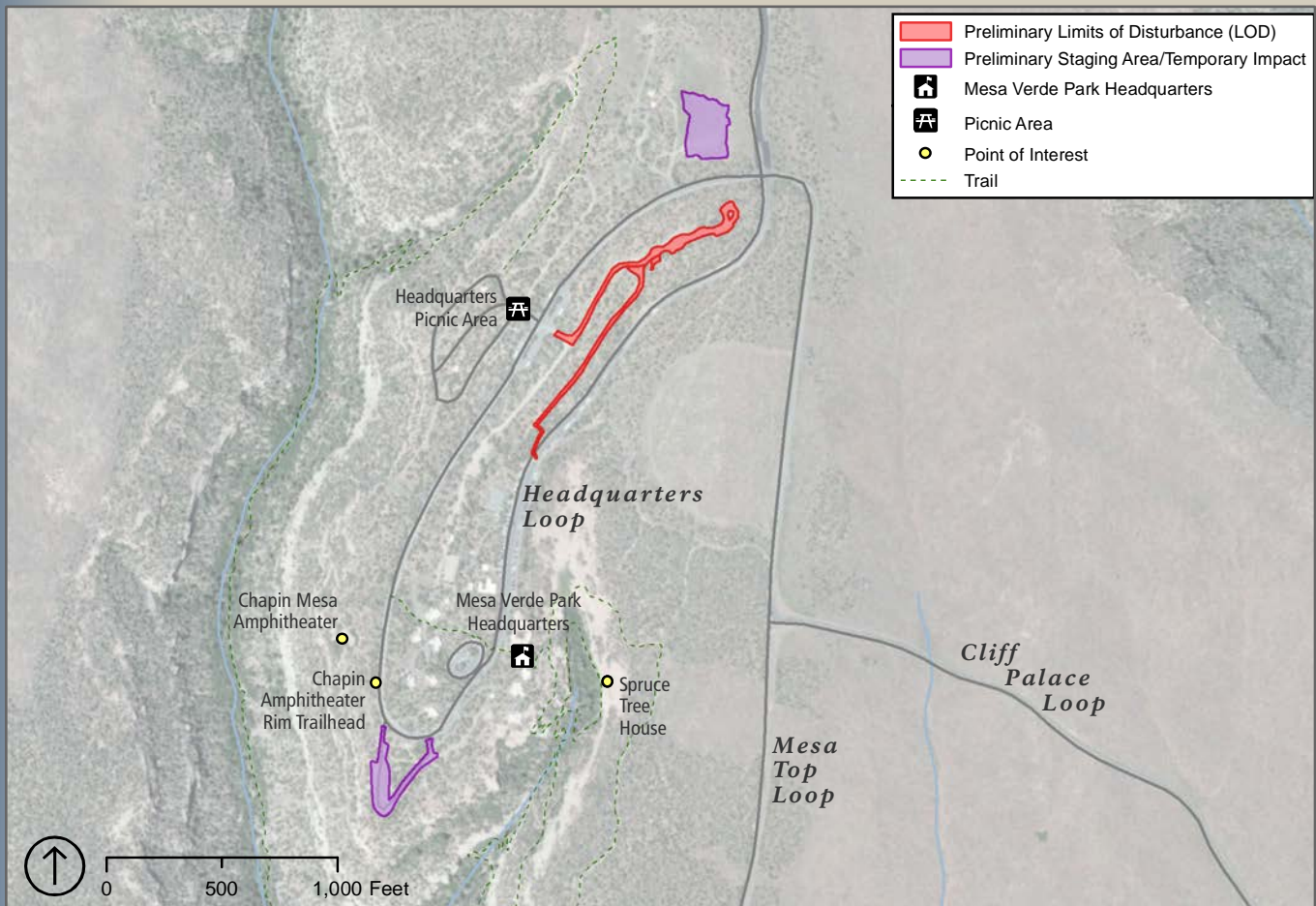
Preliminary Loop Roads Improvements



Preliminary Mesa Top Loop Road Improvements



Preliminary Cliff Palace Loop Road Improvements



Preliminary Infield Improvements



Preliminary Entrance Intersection Improvement

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service
Mesa Verde National Park
PO Box 8
Mesa Verde, CO 81330
OFFICIAL BUSINESS
PENALTY FOR PRIVATE USE \$300

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



Mesa Top Loop Roads

Newsletter 1, January 2020

Mesa Verde National Park
Colorado
National Park Service
US Department of the Interior



How to Comment

Public participation is an important element of the planning process, and we welcome your ideas, concerns, issues, suggestions, and potential topics for consideration.

Please share your comments online through the Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website *no later than January 30, 2020*.

<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/MEVE>

Before you include your address, phone number, email address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment, including your personal identifying information, may be made publicly available at any time. You may request that the NPS withhold your name and/or address from public disclosure. If you wish to do this, you must state this prominently at the beginning of your comment and make such a request by checking the box “keep my contact information private” on the website. The NPS will honor such requests to the extent allowable by law, but individuals should be aware that the NPS may still be required to disclose personal identifying information.