

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
CANYON RIM DRIVES, ROAD REHABILITATION
YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK**

The Canyon Rim drives are Class 2 and 3 roads that include the North Rim Drive (including Inspiration Point Road), the Brink of the Upper Falls access road, and the South Rim Drive. These roads, along with their associated parking areas and pullouts, are in need of repairs to the pavement surface, drainage features, retaining walls, and associated walkways and curbing. These roads are popular and provide access to viewpoints, trailheads, and a picnic area. The Canyon Rim drives road rehabilitation project will improve the driving surface of the roads, improve drainage to help maintain the road, make improvements to features and parking areas along these roads, and change the traffic flow direction on the North Rim Drive. The first phase of the job is scheduled to begin in the 2007 construction season and will include work on the North Rim Drive, Inspiration Point Road, and the Artist Point parking area and the pedestrian overlooks (listed on the National Register of Historic Places). During construction, portions of either the north or south rims will be open to park visitors to allow for viewing opportunities into the canyon and of the Upper and Lower Falls of the Yellowstone River.

An environmental assessment (EA) was prepared in 2006 that examined two alternatives: Alternative A, a no action alternative that is the status-quo as to the maintenance and use aspects of the described road segments, and Alternative B, the preferred action, which will rehabilitate the road surface, drainage features, parking areas, and change traffic flow direction on the North Rim drive.

PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

The preferred alternative consists of resurfacing, restoring, and rehabilitating approximately 4.93 miles (7.94 km) of road, as follows: North Rim Drive 2.17 miles (3.49 km), Inspiration Point Road 0.90 miles (1.45 km), South Rim Drive 1.43 miles (2.3 km), and Brink of the Upper Falls access road 0.43 miles (0.7 km). Associated parking areas, including Artist Point, Uncle Tom's Trail, Wapiti Picnic Area, Inspiration Point, Grandview, Lookout Point, Glacial Boulder, the Brink of the Upper Falls, Canyon Village, and the Camper Services area will also be included. There will be no widening of these existing roadways, though some minor expansion of select parking areas will occur as detailed in the EA. The two-way portion of the North Rim Drive will be rehabilitated at 30 feet wide (9 meters), with 11-foot lanes (3.3 meter) and 4-foot (1.2 meter) paved shoulders. The one-way portion of the North Rim Drive will be constructed at 17 feet wide (5.1 meters), a single 11-foot (3.3 meter) lane with 3-foot (0.9 meter) shoulder on each side of the travel lane. Inspiration Point Road will be rehabilitated to two 10-foot (3.0 meter) lanes with no shoulders, and the South Rim Drive will be rehabilitated with two 11-foot (3.3 meter) lanes and 1-foot (0.3 meter) shoulders. The Brink of the Upper Falls access road will have two 10-foot (3.0 meter) lanes with no shoulders.

MITIGATING MEASURES

Under the preferred alternative, the construction project will have the following conditions:

- Any water pulled from the Yellowstone River drainage to be used for dust control or other construction purposes, such as water for aggregate or asphalt production, will not be used where it could potentially run into any tributaries other than the Yellowstone River.
- Impacts to wetlands will be avoided, minimized, or mitigated by delineation of construction limits, and by stockpiling wetland soils for regeneration after construction.
- Blasting is not anticipated for this road project, but in the event a need arises to blast, no blasting will occur from April through August to prevent impacts to nesting bald eagles and peregrine falcons.
- Standard erosion control measures such as silt fences and/or sand bags will be used to minimize potential soil erosion.
- Traffic flow on the road segments within the construction areas will be maintained as much as possible during the construction period. Construction delays will normally be limited to 30 minutes. There may be periods when the nature of the construction work may require temporary road closures. All efforts will be made to reduce these as much as possible. Visitors will be informed of construction and associated delays. Some road closures may occur while still allowing viewing into the canyon and the falls at various overlooks on the opposite rim drive.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

Alternatives considered included no action (status-quo) and preferred action, which would rehabilitate the road surface, drainage features, parking areas on the North Rim Drive, the South Rim Drive (including the Inspiration Point Road), and the Brink of the Upper Falls Road. The preferred alternative will change the traffic flow direction on the North Rim Drive.

The preferred action alternative is the environmentally preferred alternative. The environmentally preferred alternative is the alternative that will promote the national environmental policy as expressed by §101 of the National Environmental Policy Act. This includes alternatives that:

- (1) fulfill the responsibilities of each generation as trustee of the environment for succeeding generations;
- (2) assure for all generations safe, healthful, productive, and esthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings;
- (3) attain the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation, risk of health or safety, or other undesirable and unintended consequences;
- (4) preserve important historic, cultural and natural aspects of our national heritage and maintain, wherever possible, an environment that supports diversity and variety of individual choice;
- (5) achieve a balance between population and resource use that will permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life's amenities; and
- (6) enhance the quality of renewable resources and approach the maximum attainable recycling of depletable resources.

The "preferred action" alternative (B) meets policies 1-6 to the extent of the "no-action" alternative (A), and would more fully meet policy by:

- 1) Staying within the existing footprint of the current roads and parking lots. Addressing the deteriorating paved surfaces, thus extending the life of the infrastructure in the area, and

reducing the need for more drastic reconstruction measures to maintain roads and sidewalks in the future.

- 2) Providing for safe, healthful, productive, and aesthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings. Redesigned parking and walkways will increase pedestrian safety. Clearly designated parking for cars, buses, and recreation vehicles will encourage safer parking and reduce accidents. Revegetation of various social trails will improve the visitor experience.
- 3) Attaining a more diverse range of visitor enjoyment without risk of public health or safety. Repaving sidewalks could increase pedestrian and disability access. Clearly designated bus and recreation vehicle parking could make parking safer and more accessible for visitors and for buses and recreation vehicles.
- 4) Maintaining the historic and cultural landscape of the project area. New culverts, walls, guardrails, and curbs will follow historic and cultural design standards.
- 5) Providing a variety of ways for the visiting public to experience the resource.

The preferred alternative (B) was selected for implementation. Alternative B is the environmentally preferred alternative.

WHY THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE WILL NOT HAVE A SIGNIFICANT EFFECT ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

As defined in 40 CFR §1508.27, significance is determined by examining the following criteria:

Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse

Effects to air quality, soils, and vegetation from construction activities will be short-term. Improvements to erosion control devices will have beneficial impacts due to reduced runoff in the future. Temporary impacts to jurisdictional wetlands will total 0.01 acres. Non-jurisdictional wetland impacts will be 0.074 acres from ditch cleaning operations. Food and garbage associated with the project will be strictly managed to avoid exposure and food conditioning of bears and other wildlife. Orientation sessions, including information on bears, will be conducted for construction personnel at the project sites to reduce the potential for conflicts.

Degree of effect on public health or safety

Parking area improvements and some minor redesign will increase pedestrian safety. Clearly designated parking for cars, buses, and recreation vehicles will allow for safer parking and should reduce accidents. Effects on health and safety will be beneficial and minor.

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 EA, the preferred alternative will stay mostly within the confines of the existing footprint of the current road prism. Effects to natural or cultural resources are all negligible or minor. There are no thermal resources that will be affected by this project. Minor but beneficial impacts will result in no adverse effect to the National Register eligible cultural landscape at Artist Point. None of the soils within the project area are classified by the Natural

Resource Conservation Service as prime and unique farmlands. There are no floodplains within the project area.

Degree to which effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial

There has been no indication that the effects on the quality of the human environment for the Canyon Rim Drives Road Rehabilitation project will be controversial. The EA generated three public comments that were all in favor of rehabilitating the road. One comment raised concerns about changing the traffic flow direction on the North Rim Drive due to potential wayfinding issues, and a strenuous trail at the first parking area visitors will encounter.

Degree to which the possible effects on the quality of the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks

Visitor use patterns on the North Rim will change minimally due to the reversed traffic flow direction on the North Rim Drive. Use of the Canyon developed area is not anticipated to change. There will be a need to change signing in the area to help with wayfinding and to inform visitors of the steepness and length of the Brink of the Lower Falls trail from the first parking area encountered on the North Rim Drive. No highly uncertain or unique or unknown risks have been identified.

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

This project is a road rehabilitation project similar to many projects already completed within Yellowstone National Park in the recent past, and similar to ongoing Federal Highway projects to repair and rebuild roads throughout the NPS.

Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts

Numerous construction projects have occurred in the past and more are planned for the future within and surrounding the Canyon developed area. Many of the projects, described in the environmental assessment, are related to road rehabilitation of some sort, or replacement or upgrading of infrastructure in the development. Projects for the most part are all occurring within the existing disturbed area of past or existing development. Very few new impacts are associated with these projects. These projects typically are staggered in terms of implementation dates, so it is rare to have more than one or two projects going at any given time. Given the staggered timing of implementation, these projects do not cumulatively lead to any significant impacts.

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

As stated earlier, moderate beneficial impacts will result in no adverse effect to the National Register eligible cultural landscape at Artist Point. The National Register eligible Canyon Lodge archeological site will be fenced and monitored to ensure complete avoidance of any impact to the site. There will be minor beneficial effects to the North Rim Drive, the Canyon Village Historic District, and the walkway and associated roadbed that is sloughing towards the canyon near Grandview Point due to failing timber crib walls.

Compliance with §106 of the National Historic Preservation Act was completed with a concurrence of NPS determination of “no historic properties adversely affected” by the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation through their consultation with the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Officer in August 2006.

Degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its critical habitat

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with the determination of “may affect, but not likely to adversely affect” threatened bald eagle, Canada lynx, grizzly bear, and gray wolves under § 7 of the Endangered Species Act in August 2006.

Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, state, or local environmental protection law

This action violates no federal, state, or local environmental protection laws.

Impairment

In addition to reviewing the list of significance criteria, the National Park Service has determined that implementation of the preferred alternative will not constitute an impairment to any of Yellowstone National Park’s resources and values. This conclusion is based on a thorough analysis of the environmental impacts described in the *Canyon Rim Drives, Road Rehabilitation Environmental Assessment*, the public comments received, relevant scientific studies, and the professional judgment of the decision-maker guided by the direction in *NPS Management Policies* (December 27, 2000). Although the implementation of the preferred alternative will have some negligible to minor adverse impacts, in all cases these impacts are the result of actions taken to preserve and restore other park resources and values. Overall, the plan results in benefits to park resources and values, opportunities for their enjoyment, and it does not result in their impairment.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The EA was made available for public review and comment during a 30-day period ending July 3, 2006. A total of six responses were received. Most comments clearly stated a position for repairing the roads. One letter expressed concerns specific to changing the direction of travel on the North Rim Drive. This total includes one letter from an agency (Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality), two letters from tribes (the Comanche Tribe and the Rosebud Sioux Tribe), one letter from an individual, and two individual comments received from the PEPC website.

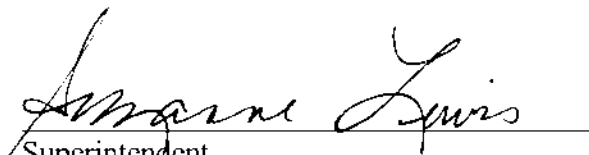
Substantive comments to the EA centered on three topics: safety risks, significant cultural findings, and visitor orientation. These concerns resulted in no changes to the text of the EA but are addressed in the responses to comments sheets attached to this FONSI. The FONSI and responses to comments sheets will be sent to all commentors.

CONCLUSION

The preferred alternative does not constitute an action that normally requires preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS). The preferred alternative will not have a significant effect on the human environment. Negative environmental impacts that could occur are minor or moderate in intensity. There are no significant impacts on public health, public safety, threatened or

endangered species, sites or districts listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, or other unique characteristics of the region. No highly uncertain or controversial impacts, unique or unknown risks, significant cumulative effects, or elements of precedence were identified. Implementation of the action will not violate any federal, state, or local environmental protection law.

Based on the foregoing, it has been determined that an EIS is not required for this project and thus will not be prepared.

Recommended:  9.7.06
Superintendent Date

Approved:  9/15/06
Intermountain Regional Director Date

SUBSTANTIVE COMMENTS

Safety Risks

Comment: I fear reversing traffic flow could pose a serious safety hazard. If visitors stop at the first parking area when flow is directed south to north, they will be at the Brink of the Lower Falls. How many unsuspecting visitors will take the trail from that parking lot and become a safety risk?

Response: The trail to the Brink of the Lower Falls is a steep trail with many switchbacks. The trail drops dramatically in elevation and makes the return hike back to the parking lot a strenuous one. Information signs will be placed at the beginning of the trail to inform visitors about the trail condition and alternative viewing opportunities so that they can make the proper decision about whether to attempt the trail or not.

Significant Cultural Sites

Comment: If there are any finding of cultural significant of burial sites and/or artifacts, please notify the tribes in the surrounding areas immediately.

Response: The tribes will be notified of significant findings that may be related to Native American sites or burials.

Visitor Orientation

Comment: I believe changing the direction of traffic flow could lead to orientation and way-finding problems for visitors as well as pose potential safety risks.

Response:

These issues were considered during the planning of this project. Confusion currently exists with visitors trying to find their way to the North Rim Drive. The team felt that the benefits of encountering the larger parking lots, and flush toilets early in their drive on the North Rim will outweigh any potential confusion about how to find the entrance to the road.