

# Environmental Assessment Process



for  
National Park Service  
Mount Rushmore National Memorial

Yellow Wolf Trail



February 6, 2009



## Environmental Legal Framework



National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ)

Federal Agency Regulations

Relevant Executive Orders

## Environmental Assessment Process



### Public Review of EA

PEPC Site <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/publicHome.cfm>

Rapid City and Keystone Public Libraries

Comment period (30 days) - February 15, 2009

### Final EA

Address public comments

Prepare Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

Schedule of EA Completion—Spring 2009

## Environmental Assessment Content



Purpose and Need for Action

Alternatives

Affected Environment

Impacts

Consultation and Coordination

## Purpose and Need



The Memorial proposes to add a backcountry trail system by 2016, that would provide new opportunities for education, interpretation and recreation and improve opportunities for visitors to discover the diversity of the park's ecosystem and cultural resources.

The proposed project is part of the Centennial Initiative for Mount Rushmore, which seeks to become a center of excellence for sharing the story of America, for providing visitor opportunities, and for protecting resources and people

## Alternatives



**No Action**

**Single Loop Trail**

**Multi-Loop Trail (Preferred Alternative)**

## No Action Alternative



### Existing trail systems would remain

- Presidential Trail
- Blackberry Trail
- Social trail south of Old Baldy Mountain
- Ongoing maintenance and rehabilitation of Blackberry Trail required



## Single Loop Alternative (6.7 miles)



Encompass Memorial with one large loop (4.3 miles)

### Two parking areas

- Concession Operated Parking Facility
- Profile Parking Area

### Five trailhead locations

- Presidential Trail
  - Lot 7 (Across from Concession Operated Parking)
  - Profile Parking
  - East and West Trailheads

### Three Scenic Vistas

### Day Use Areas (Select Locations)

- Includes a wayside exhibit, bench or picnic table

Requires 2 crosswalk areas (east and west)

## Multi-Loop Alternative (9.8 miles)



Retains single loop concept with several shorter sub loops and trails of varying length and difficulty.

Proposed in five phases to reflect priorities and funding and includes:

- potential
  - Horse comfort station at Blackberry Trail
  - Greenway to the east boundary of the park for connection with Keystone
  - 7 trailheads with day use
  - 5 scenic vistas
  - 5 sub loops (0.5 miles to 1.5 miles)
  - 4 crosswalks
  - 4 additional parking areas
  - 6 emergency access points



## Key Issues to be Addressed

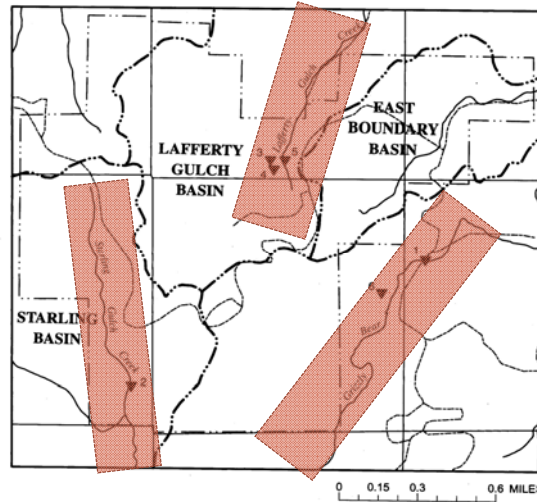


- Issue 1. Erosion of Trails near Water Resources
- Issue 2. Disturbance to the Ecological and Wildlife Resources
- Issue 3. Accessing the Trail System
- Issue 4. Securing the Memorial and Providing for Personal Safety
- Issue 5. Protecting Cultural Resources

## Water Resources - Affected Environment

Three water bodies (Starling Gulch Creek, Lafferty Gulch Creek and Grizzly Creek) contribute to the biological diversity of the Memorial.

These water bodies are considered waters of the state and are protected under the South Dakota Water Quality Standards.



## Water Resources - Impacts

### Beneficial

Protection of water resources with use of engineered structures, including existing trails

### Adverse

Heavily used horse trails adjacent to Starling Gulch Creek could increase organic enrichment.

Runoff from the trails could also send silt/clay into the stream, resulting in changes to the rates of erosion and sediment supply, turbidity and total suspended solids



## Water Resources - Mitigation



### Use of Engineered Structures

elevated walkways, footbridges, log/rock checks, water bars

### Use of Best Management Practices

sediment and erosion control

### Compliance with flood plain management criteria and 404 Permit

Pennington County

State of South Dakota

US Army Corps of Engineers

### On-going Monitoring

MRNM Resource Management Division

Northern Great Plains Inventory & Monitoring Network

## Ecological and Wildlife Resources Affected Environment



The backcountry areas provide a diverse and abundant habitat for many species of mammals, invertebrates, reptiles, amphibians, plants, and birds.

Traditional plant harvesting occurs at the Memorial.



Starling Basin

## Ecological and Wildlife Resources Impacts

### Beneficial

- Increase in interpretive and education opportunities
- Increased access for bird and nature observation
- Increased awareness of nature and cultural plants

### Adverse

- Increase in visitors may have impact on wildlife patterns
- Excessive tramping near sensitive species
- Introduction of exotic species
- Vandalism to the old growth forest
- Overuse and non-permitted harvesting
- Increased maintenance of rockslides and tree removal

## Ecological and Wildlife Resources Mitigation

Monitoring of species and wildlife will ensure continued health of the Memorial's ecology.

Trail design will avoid sensitive areas

Education of visitors regarding unique species



Old Growth Ponderosa



Spotted Coral Root Orchid



## Access - Affected Environment



Majority of visitation is for purposes of seeing the sculpture and associated visitor facilities.

The natural setting surrounding the Memorial provides an important part of the aesthetic and visual experience

Visitors can enjoy views of rock outcrops, steep canyons, cliff faces, scenic woodlands, old growth ponderosa pine forest, streams, scenic vistas, flowers, birds and wildlife



## Access - Impacts



### Beneficial

- Recreational and interpretive opportunities
- Increase in local retail, hotel and camping bookings
- Decrease in social trails with a designed trail
- Increased access throughout the Memorial
- Multiple trailheads allows more access for emergency vehicles

### Adverse

- Increase in traffic at Memorial and Keystone
- Increase in pedestrian crossings
- Traffic and privacy issues with Lafferty Gulch residents

## Access - Mitigation



Coordination and planning with SD DOT, USFS, Keystone and neighbors

Establish monitoring program to determine length of stay, trail use, and parking

Creation of new parking areas for trail users

## Security/Personal Safety Affected Environment



With construction of a new trail system and increased trailhead access, security of the mountain carving is a primary issue followed by personal safety issues (getting lost, injury from hiking and rock climbing).



## Security/Personal Safety - Impacts

The trail system will not place individuals any closer to Mount Rushmore than currently exists. Direct impacts on issues of personal safety are a function of the increased users on the trail.

### Beneficial

Multiple trailheads allows more entry points for emergency vehicles

### Adverse

Increase in vandalism in backcountry

Increase in souvenir collectors

Need for increased foot patrols

Increase in search and rescue from loss and injury



## Security/Personal Safety - Mitigation

Posting of emergency information at each trailhead

Posting of rules and regulations; brochure; maps

Visitors must assume a degree of risk and responsibility when using backcountry trails and scenic vistas

Reduce speed limits at highway crossings

Rangers would continue to patrol Memorial, including backcountry areas

## Cultural Resources - Affected Environment

Class III intensive cultural resource survey of the proposed recreational corridor in Mount Rushmore National Memorial conducted in 2006 to comply with Sections 106 and 110 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966.

All finds and features are of Euroamerican origin and relate to several historic episodes in the history of the area. No previously recorded archaeological sites or features noted during the survey will be impacted by any proposed construction.

NPS will pursue an open, consultative relationship with American Indian tribes to help tribes maintain their cultural and spiritual practices and enhance the Park Service's understanding of the history and significance of sites and resources in the parks.

## Cultural Resources - Impacts

### Beneficial

- Increase interpretive and educational opportunities
- Increase volunteer opportunities
- Opportunities for ethnography (connection to place)
- Professional and career development (NPS staff)
- Increased access to Tribes and other groups
- Increased partnerships with educational institutions

### Adverse

- Increase in souvenir collection

## Cultural Resources - Mitigation



Should any cultural resources be uncovered during trail construction, the contractor or trail project manager would contact the NPS Curator immediately, who would contact the South Dakota State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO).

It would be the responsibility of the contractor to protect archaeological resources from disturbance until a professional examination takes place or until a responsible authority authorizes clearance to proceed.

## Next Steps



The Multi-Loop Trail best meets the objectives of the project

Incorporate applicable comments from public/agency/tribal reviews into final EA (comments accepted through February 15)

Prepare and publish Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for NPS Midwest Region Signature

Move into design phase of trail, followed by construction phase

## Questions?



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