

Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument

General Management Plan Civic Engagement

July 20 to August 19, 2022

PUBLIC COMMENT SUMMARY REPORT

Summary

The National Park Service (NPS) conducted civic engagement to seek public comments, concerns, and ideas related to the General Management Plan (GMP) for Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument (TUSK or “the monument”). This report summarizes all public comments received during the July to August 2022 civic engagement period.

The general management plan for Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument will provide a framework to guide decisions for long-range park management. The plan will also define the desired resource conditions and visitor experiences that should be achieved and maintained based on the park's purpose and significance and as described in the park's authorizing legislation and foundation document. This plan will set the direction for subsequent and more focused planning efforts, as well. The National Park Service will work with its partners, stakeholders, and the public to develop the plan and to comply with legal and policy requirements.

In July 2022, the National Park Service released a newsletter to the public describing the general management planning process and seeking their feedback on planning efforts thus far and other important values related to the monument for plan development. The newsletter included descriptions of desired conditions for natural and cultural resource conditions and visitor experiences, management zones, and draft management concepts. There were also maps showing the two possible zoning options.

The monument hosted an in-person public meeting at the Clark County Shooting Complex on August 4, 2022, to share details about the planning process, answer questions from the public, and receive public comments. There were twenty-four attendees at that session. A separate stakeholder meeting was held earlier in the day presenting similar information to the park's partners and stakeholders. At that session, there were 12 attendees that included individuals representing the Moapa Band of Paiute Indians, Protectors of Tule Springs, Nevada Division of State Parks, Parashant National Monument, Pacific Oak SOR Park Highlands TRS, LLC (f/k/a KBS SOR Park Highlands TRS, LLC, a representative from Council Woman Fiore's office (Ward 6), Desert National Wildlife Refuge Center/U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the City of North Las Vegas. The meetings started with a presentation from the planning team and then turned to an open question and answer session. During the discussions, notes were taken by NPS staff to record the topics discussed. Following the larger group discussions, NPS staff were present at two smaller stations that displayed posters of the draft desired conditions and draft zoning map and were available for additional one-on-one questions.

The project website on the NPS's Planning, Environment & Public Comment (PEPC) <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/TUSKgmp> provided information about the general management plan and offered an online option for receiving public comments on five questions about the future of the monument. Participants in the meetings were invited to provide their comments on the PEPC page or via mail to the superintendent. The following report includes a summary and analysis of the comments received. Discussion topics from the stakeholder and public meetings are summarized below.

Methodology and Correspondence Analysis

An interdisciplinary team of NPS personnel read every correspondence received and analyzed the comments. The analysis does not contain direct quotes from comments received, but rather identifies common themes expressed by multiple commenters, as well as viewpoints that were expressed only once. Collectively, the content of the comments, rather than the number of times a comment was received will be used to inform the development of the general management plan.

A total of eleven correspondences were collected through the online PEPC site, by email, and via direct communication with NPS staff. The monument received nine correspondences through the PEPC site and email. Comments from the civic engagement meetings were compiled into two documents (one for each meeting) and entered into the PEPC system for review and analysis.

Summary Information

Comment period: 7/20/2022 – 8/19/2022

The summary includes the written correspondences submitted to PEPC and the discussions at both the stakeholder and public meetings.

Total number of correspondences in PEPC: 11

Geographic distribution:

Most of the commenters were from Nevada, with one each from Utah, New Jersey, and North Carolina.

Organizations Represented:

- Protectors of Tule Springs
- Olympia Land Corporation
- Great Basin Bird Observatory
- Desert Tortoise Council

Definition of Terms

Commenter: An individual or group that submitted a correspondence through the PEPC site or via oral participation in the public and stakeholder meetings.

Correspondence: A correspondence is the entire document received from a commenter. It can be in the form of a letter, written comment form, note card, or meeting transcript.

Comment: A comment is a portion of the text within a correspondence that addresses a single subject or issue. It could include such information as an expression of support or opposition to content included in the GMP newsletter, additional data regarding the existing condition, or an opinion debating the adequacy of an analysis.

Comment Summary: A grouping that is centered on a common subject. Comment summaries combine similar comments.

Comment Summary

The National Park Service shared five questions to gather targeted feedback from the public. These questions were included in the PEPC site as well as in the public and stakeholder meetings. These questions were:

1. What experiences in Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument are most important to you? What kind of experiences do you want future visitors to have when they come to the park?
2. What are your thoughts on the draft desired conditions and management zones for the park? Is there anything that is missing?
3. What are your thoughts on the two alternative management zones maps? Do you prefer one over the other, and if so, why?
4. What activities, wayfinding tools, interpretive/educational material, and services would make you feel more welcome, safe, or satisfied with your experience in the park?
5. Other thoughts you'd like to share with the project team?

The summaries below present major concepts that were expressed.

What experiences in Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument are most important to you? What kind of experiences do you want future visitors to have when they come to the park?

Commenters mostly described their desired experience as having minimal impact on the environment and minimal contact with other visitors. A variety of walking/hiking trails that meander throughout the landscape would allow individuals to appreciate unique resources, like in-progress excavations and the viewshed. The trails should be managed in a way that minimizes visitor impacts on resources. There should also be opportunities to learn about the monument and its resources through both self-guided learning and ranger-led programming. Suggested programs, multi-media educational materials, and informational signage could include the following topics: TUSK's historic and current scientific work, climatic and geologic history, flora, fauna, the protection of natural resources, the endangered desert tortoise, indigenous history and traditional uses, and leave no trace principals. A few commenters suggested having a building to display this information with a variety of media to connect to different audiences.

Establishment of mountain biking trails were suggested. In addition, it was proposed that the park anticipate and allow for compatible development to occur on adjacent lands as Las Vegas Valley grows. Finally, the comments received also suggested that the monument be totally closed at night and barriers be put in place to prevent resource damage and prevent vehicles from accessing roads at night.

What are your thoughts on the draft desired conditions and management zones for the park? Is there anything that is missing?

It was noted that both management zone options have too much development and that there should be as much backcountry as possible in order to limit development. Some commenters favored an option that has the least impact on the environment. They commented that these lands were set aside to protect natural resources for future generations. It was also stated that extensive restoration is needed in some areas of the monument and those areas should be a special zone.

What are your thoughts on the two alternative management zones maps? Do you prefer one over the other, and if so, why?

Zoning Option B was identified as the preferred option most frequently. However, concern was expressed that both options do not offer enough resource protection and preference was expressed for whichever option is most protective of resources. A couple of commenters thought that Zoning Option A seemed to offer more protection of the area's resources, mostly because Zoning Option B lacks a resource protection zone in the southern section of the monument. Commenters suggested that the zones be designated based on resource presence and that assessments would provide baseline information for the park. There was even a desire to designate the backcountry zone as large as possible so that it is contiguous and connects with Desert National Wildlife Refuge. It was also suggested that the monument consider flexibility in the location of the administrative use area, to align more with the local land use plan, the City of Las Vegas 2050 Master Plan.

What activities, wayfinding tools, interpretive/educational material, and services would make you feel more welcome, safe, or satisfied with your experience in the park?

Commenters stated that some recreational activities may be inappropriate in areas with fragile resources and that user types should be clearly indicated on trail markers. Suggested interpretative materials include providing information on the Mojave Desert Tortoise, producing a tactile map of the whole monument, and providing visitor resource options in brail. Other suggestions included displaying a mammoth skeleton, or other species once found in the area in a formal location, such as a visitor center. Restrooms were requested to accommodate growing visitor use. It was mentioned that the monument should coordinate with adjacent land management agencies to communicate available services and facilities, or lack thereof, at the monument. Commenters also wanted to ensure that there will be adequate staff presence,

specifically law enforcement, to protect the resources. Finally, some comments suggested management needs are minimal, except clean up in certain areas.

Other thoughts you'd like to share with the project team?

A couple people noted how important the fossils are and that protecting those resources are of utmost concern. Due to these concerns, it was suggested that the monument put effort into exploring the area for more potential fossils and make sure to avoid fossil rich areas when placing trails. Commenters warned of keeping an eye out for fossil collecting as awareness of the resources grow and discussed the imperative need to educate the public about prehistoric resources and other resources throughout the monument in an effort to protect them.

It was noted that the terrain within the monument, with minimal modifications, would be ideal for primitive/backcountry mountain biking. It was suggested to create well marked trails for mountain biking, to potentially minimize occurrences of off-trail use. Establishing good communication tools with the community to educate everyone on appropriate uses and utilizing staff or volunteers on trails to monitor unauthorized use were suggested as ways to establish and maintain a sustainable trail system.

Related to natural resources, several commenters noted the need to clean up and restore areas within the monument and to engage volunteers and citizen-scientists to conduct work, when feasible. They asked the planning team to consider emerging science around climate change to ensure effective protection of connected landscapes and promote biological diversity. Hope was expressed that the monument will protect its expanse of a triplex saltbush, which is important for the LeContes Thrasher, a rare bird found within the monument.

The need to connect recreational trails to address increasing access needs was mentioned along with a request to coordinate amenities and other resources with the adjacent proposed Master Planned Community Developer to ensure public access, particularly for the Villages of Tule Springs planned housing development.

Summary of topics from the public and stakeholder meetings

Many people commented on the development of the monument and adjacent lands. Several stakeholders and members of the public expressed concern around the Eglington Preserve and other sensitive areas that face increasing threats with planned and expanding urban development. Adjacent areas to TUSK are vulnerable and it was mentioned that the end of Kyle Canyon Road is also a vulnerable area.

Several commenters expressed concern and asked questions about the boundary fence. Some commenters expressed desire for more access points in specific locations and others shared concern over continued cuts in the fencing. Other comments about fencing were outside the scope of this project regarding specific recommendations on fencing compliance, design, and placement. There is also a concern around illegal vehicle access at a couple locations. It was noted that it will be essential for the general management plan to identify what uses are

appropriate and where. A suggestion was made to put up game cameras to document and prevent illegal activities and document wildlife. It was suggested that higher protection should be afforded to areas that haven't been as disturbed.

Trail opportunities and connections were discussed broadly at the stakeholder and public meetings. For development adjacent and up to the monument, stakeholders brought up that there was some trail management planning started with Rivers Trails and Conservation Assistance at Moccasin. A representative from the City of North Las Vegas offered to send those plans to the park to inform the next stages of planning. In addition, the City of North Las Vegas mentioned their planning efforts with trail interface design themes (signage, markings, trail icons) that could connect into or correlate with some of the trails in the park. One specific example given was the 'Mammoth Miles' and the Beltway Trail in the City of Las Vegas. The City of North Las Vegas has previously completed imaging for some of those trail connections. In addition, the old Las Vegas-Tonopah Railroad was brought up as a trail route consideration.

Finally, there were suggestions for recreation opportunities that included allowing scenic driving in the backcountry and horseback riding. The Band of Moapa Paiute Tribe stated their interest in developing and contributing to interpretation kiosks, assisting with monitoring activities in the Southeast area through a memorandum of understanding, and would like to offer a cultural sensitivity presentation to provide more awareness to the park and interested public.