

- 2 Action: Remove or reduce lawn panels on east side of visitor center and replace with native species, following one of three options:**



- 2A Option: Immediate removal of the lawn and replacement with native shrub-steppe species**

Positive Impacts

The proposed action would remove the visually and ecologically incongruent lawn areas and replace them with congruent native plants. The redesigned irrigation would only supply water to the existing trees, thus saving water to be used elsewhere. It would also remove an artificial food source for cottontail rabbits. The current rabbit population in PISP appears to be higher than the population in adjacent native habitats. Rabbits are doing significant damage to native grasses, new Indian rice grass plantings and orchard stock. Eliminating the lawn panels (artificial food source) could reduce the rabbit population in PISP.

It is likely that the rabbit population would have to be curtailed or plantings protected to give new plantings a chance to survive. This could require the construction of rabbit exclosures around new plantings, individual plant protection and/or a reduction of the rabbit population to levels consistent with levels found outside the monument. The role of gophers and other burrowing rodents on new plantings is unknown but they may have also played a role in the decimation of previous grass plantings. Further research is needed.

Negative Impacts

The removal of the lawn panels would disturb the soil surface and require the redesign of the irrigation system to accommodate new plantings and sustain existing cottonwood trees. These activities would stress the large cottonwood trees in the lawn panels, a potential negative impact since the trees shade and cool the VC. Turf areas shaded by cottonwoods and used by picnickers would be lost.

2B Option: Phased removal and revegetation

Positive Impacts

The positive impacts would be similar to those discussed under option A. The phased removal would limit the size of the space disturbed and thereby reducing the magnitude of the negative impacts associated with soil disturbance and cottonwood stress.

Negative Impacts

As with option A, the removal of the lawn panels would disturb the soil surface and require the redesign of the irrigation system to accommodate new plantings and sustain existing cottonwood trees. These activities would stress the large cottonwood trees in the lawn panels, a potential negative impact since the trees shade and cool the VC. Turf areas shaded by cottonwoods and used by picnickers would eventually be lost.

2C Option: Removal of the lawn except for patches left beneath existing shade trees (area that could be used for picnics)

Positive Impacts

Option C would save the major lawn areas now used by picnickers because of the turf and shade provided.

Negative Impacts

Would retain visually contrasting and historically incongruous patches of green lawn, as well as maintaining an artificial food supply for rabbits. Because of previous construction disturbance, it is unlikely that cultural artifacts would be unearthed in any of these options.