



Glacier National Park

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# Glacier National Park

Swiftcurrent Area Water, Road and Parking Improvements

Civic Engagement

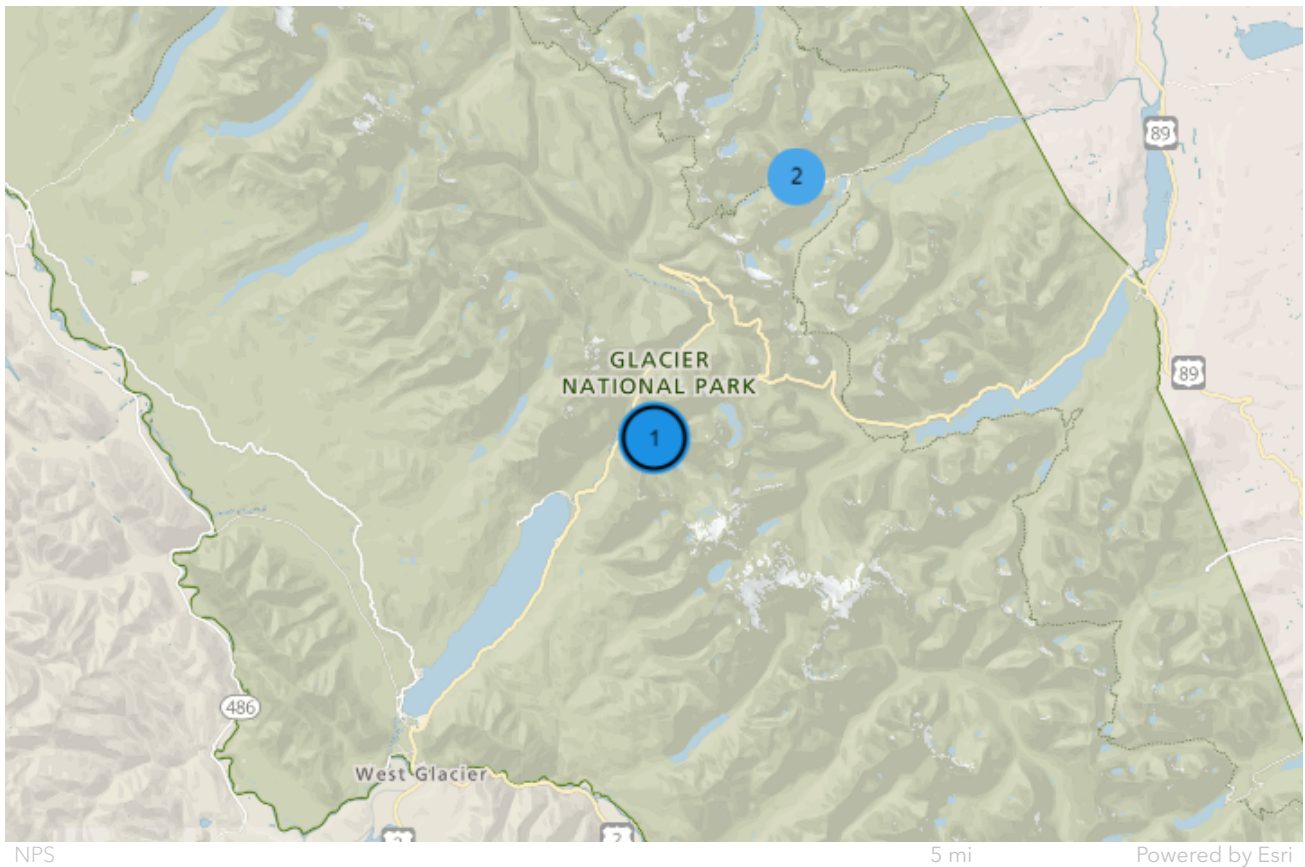


## Introduction

## Glacier National Park

Glacier National Park is an approximately one-million-acre park in the Northern Rockies of northwestern Montana, along the United States-Canadian border. The park straddles the rugged mountains of the Continental Divide and is at the center of the Crown of the Continent Ecosystem. Together with Canada's Waterton Lakes National Park, Glacier National Park forms the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park, the world's first international peace park.

From meadows to glistening lakes and the mountain peaks, there is something for everyone to discover with over 700 miles of hiking trails and incredible wildlife viewing opportunities, scenic driving experiences on historic roadways, wilderness camping and 13 front country campgrounds that host overnight visitors.



## 1 Glacier National Park





Glacier National Park was legislated into being on May 11, 1910. Annual visitation has climbed to 3,000,000 per year with the majority visiting June to September.

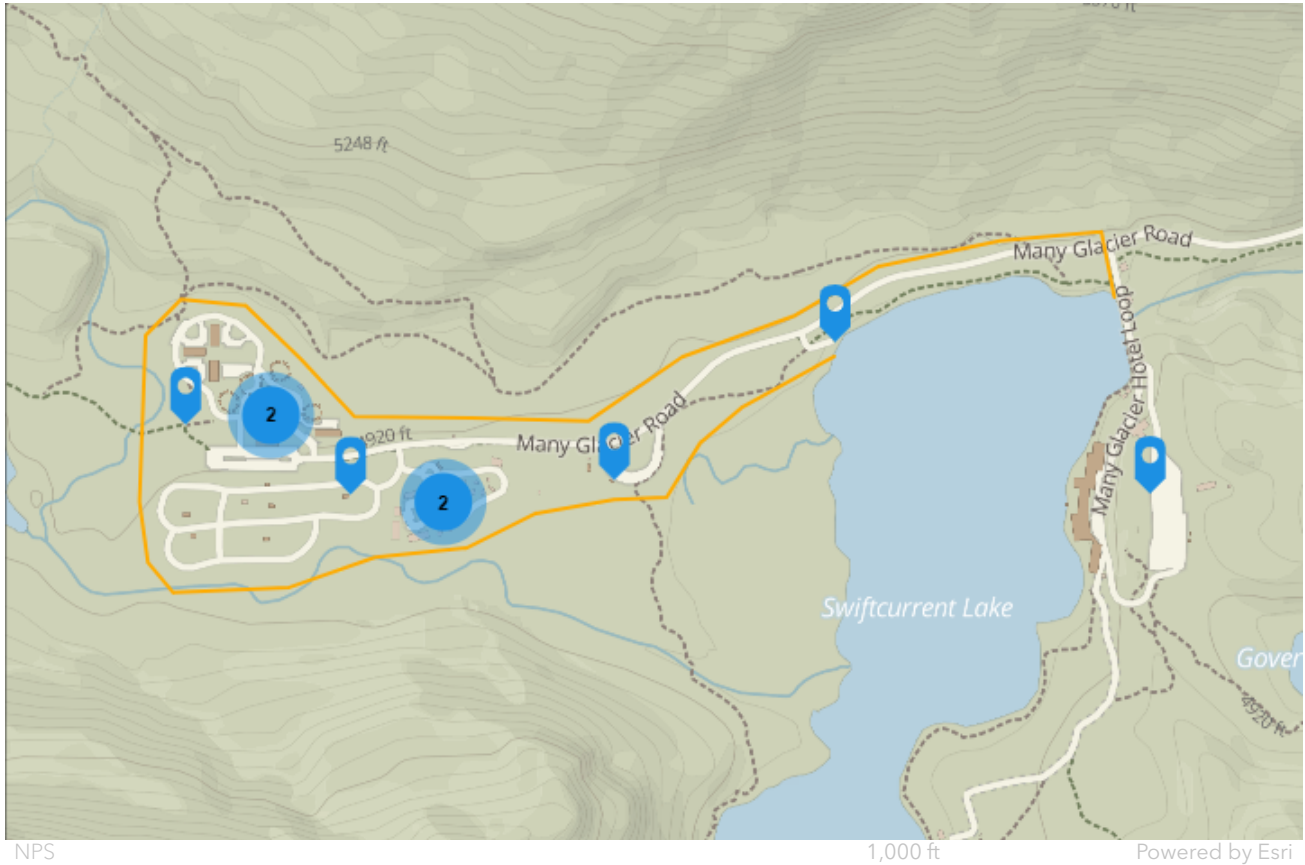
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### Project Location





The Swiftcurrent Valley is located west of the Many Glacier Valley on the east side of Glacier National Park, approximately 12 miles west of Babb, MT, from the intersection with U.S. Highway 89, as shown on the map. The area ranges in elevation from about 4,920 to 5,045 feet above sea level.



## Swiftcurrent Developed Area

The Swiftcurrent developed area is in the Swiftcurrent Valley located west of the Many Glacier Valley on the east side of the park.

It includes:

- [Swiftcurrent Motor Inn and General Store](#)
- [Swiftcurrent lodging](#)
- [Many Glacier Campground](#)
- [Swiftcurrent Picnic Area](#)
- [Swiftcurrent Lake boat launch](#)
- [A popular trail system](#)
- [The Many Glacier Ranger Station](#)
- [National Park Service \(NPS\) housing](#)

**The Many Glacier Hotel and associated concessioner services are not part of the project area.**

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See map of project area for details.

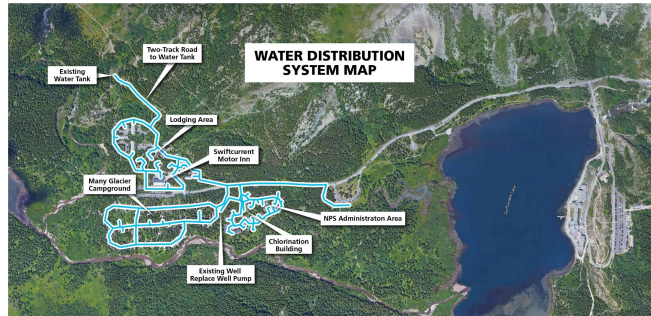
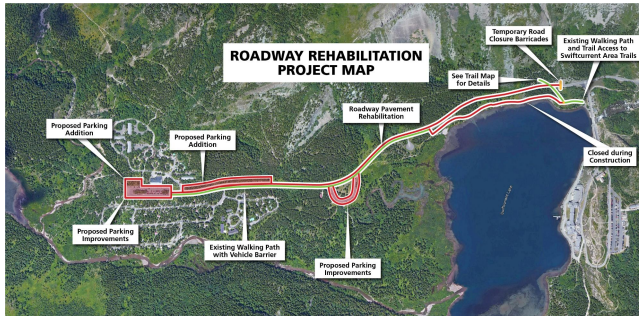


## **Project Overview**

The Glacier National Park Swiftcurrent Area Water, Road, and Parking Improvements Project would rehabilitate the roadway, improve parking into Swiftcurrent Area, and replace the water system at the Swiftcurrent developed area.

The park is proposing to close the Swiftcurrent developed area during the construction period, from the fall of 2024 until spring of 2026. The area closure would include the summer of 2025, during which time the public would not have access to the Swiftcurrent developed area. Public use of the trail system would remain available.

Closing the area and performing the work for one visitor season would reduce the overall impact on visitors by not prolonging construction over multiple seasons.



## Roadway Rehabilitation Project Map

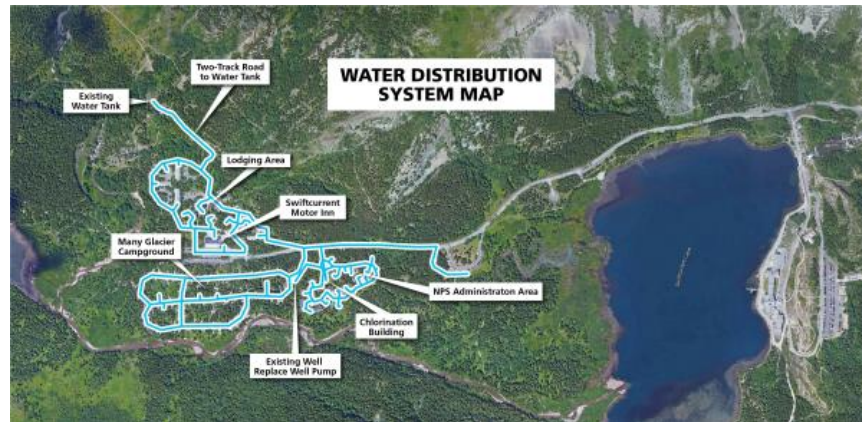
The road between the Many Glacier Hotel intersection and Swiftcurrent developed area will be rehabilitated, including pavement and drainage improvements. Parking will also be improved, as illustrated on this map.



## Water Distribution System Map



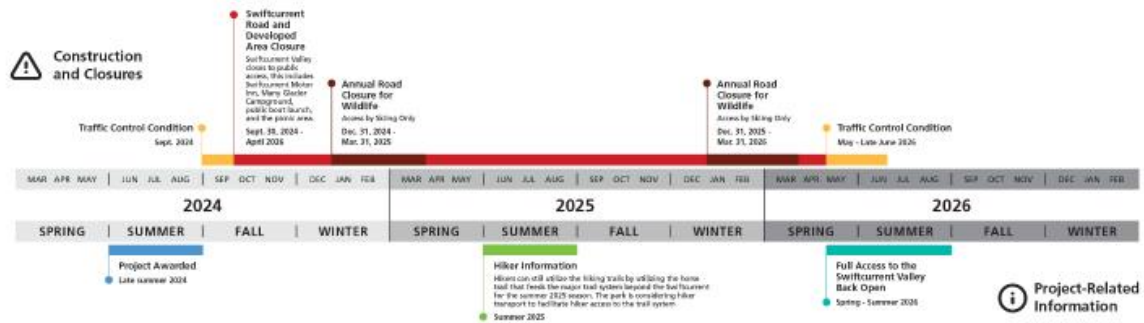
Improving water infrastructure: This map shows the improvements to the water system that will be completed as part of this project including replacing water lines, rehabilitating the existing well, and creating a new well for a backup water source.



## **National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Compliance**

The NPS is carefully reviewing the project. Completion of environmental review and civic engagement will occur. A decision on the project is anticipated in the winter of 2023/2024.

New parking west of the Swiftcurrent Motor Inn was included in Glacier National Park's 2004 Commercial Services Plan Environmental Impact Statement. For other improvements, the NPS is anticipating utilizing a categorical exclusion (CE) to document its decision under NEPA. A CE describes the documentation for a category or type of action that does not cumulatively or individually have the potential for significant environmental impacts.







## **Project Awarded**

Late summer 2024

## **Traffic Control Condition**

Sept. 2024, and May - late Jun. 2026

## **Swiftcurrent Road and Developed Area Closure**

Swiftcurrent Valley closes to public access, this includes Swiftcurrent Motor Inn, Many Glacier Campground, public boat launch, and the picnic area.  
Sept. 30<sup>th</sup>, 2024 - Apr. 2026

## **Annual Road Closure for Wildlife**

Access by Skiing Only.  
Dec. 31, 2024 - Mar. 31, 2025, and  
Dec. 31, 2025 - Mar. 31, 2026

## **Full Access to the Swiftcurrent Valley Back Open**

Spring - Summer 2026



## **Project Purpose**

The project would replace the water system at the Swiftcurrent developed area. Most of the infrastructure providing water to the area was originally installed in the 1960s and has been updated as needed over the past 50 years. Updating this outdated infrastructure would reduce the need for costly ongoing repairs and provide a backup water supply that is not currently existent.





Photo of the Swiftcurrent Motor Inn during the summertime

The project would also rehabilitate the road including pavement and drainage improvements, between the Many Glacier Hotel intersection and the Swiftcurrent developed area, and address parking concerns and pedestrian safety.



Photo of a parking lot in the project area.

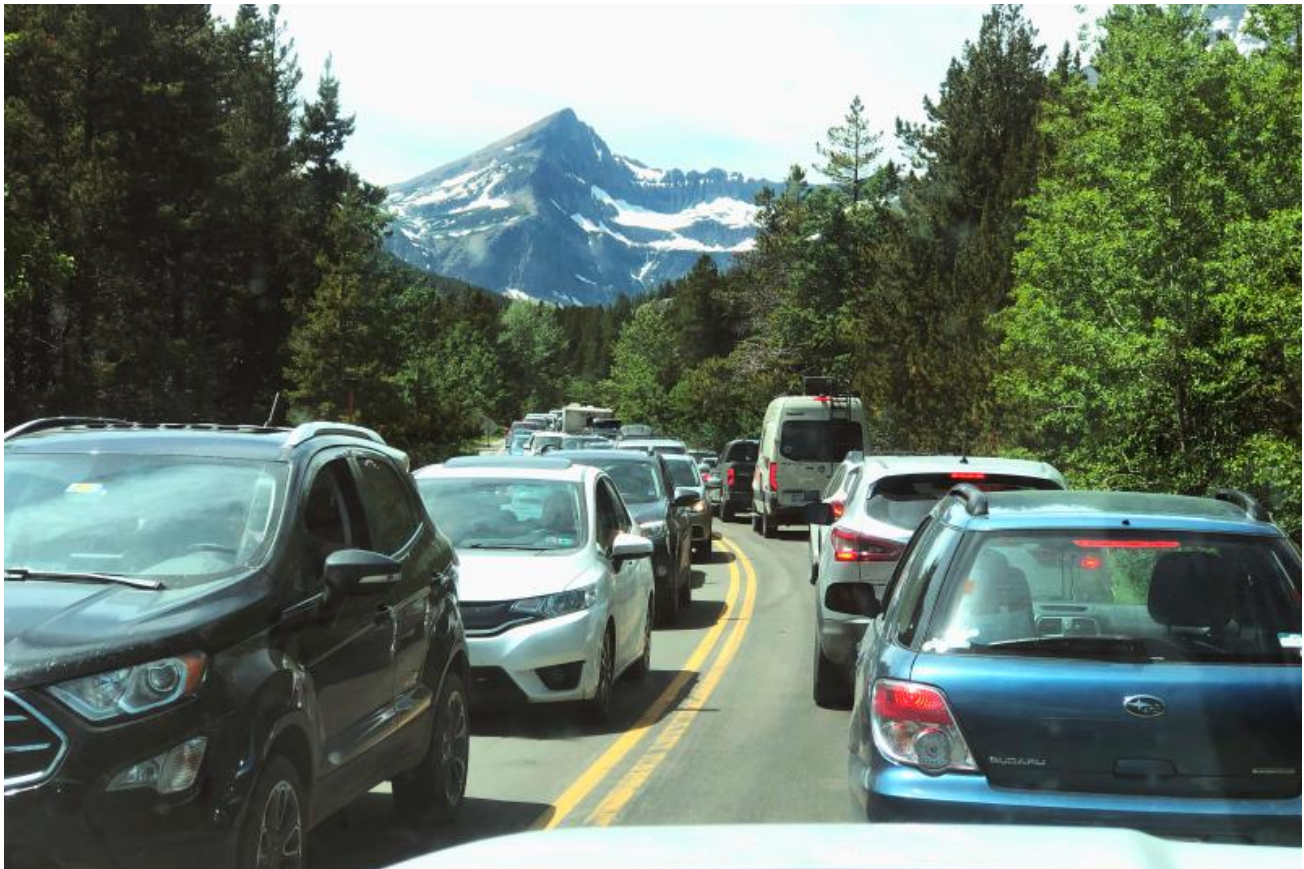
The project has additional value in that it could help inform future planning for the area.



### **Improving Visitor Experience: Water**

The water system supplies drinking water to facilities that serve visitors, concessioners, restaurants, and an NPS housing and administrative area. This area is one of the premier camping spots in the park with a campground hosting over 100 sites. Improving the water system would maintain a reliable water supply to these essential services in one of the most popular areas in the park.





## **Improving Visitor Experience: Parking and Roadway**

High visitation in Swiftcurrent Valley currently results in filled parking lots and visitors parking in undesignated areas along the sides of this road segment. This has damaged vegetation along the roadway, puts pedestrians in the road with cars, and hinders wildlife crossing. Proposed parking options would allow for a safer visitor experience, prevent damage to park resources, and remove barriers to natural wildlife movements.

Roadway rehabilitation including pavement and drainage improvements would preserve this road for continued access for the 21st century.



Photo of a congested parking lot in the project area with many people standing between cars.



## **Improving Visitor Experience: Safety**

Many of the improvements would increase visitor safety:

- Road improvements would facilitate better access to area attractions including trails.



- Walking paths separated from the roadway would create a safer experience for pedestrians.
- The updated water system would reduce water outages from water line breaks.
- A new well would ensure a reliable backup water supply for the area.
- Backup power generation would guarantee water supply during power outages.
- Rehabilitating the water storage tank to ensure reliable fire protection.



## **Improving Infrastructure**

### **Water System**

The project would replace the outdated water system in the Swiftcurrent developed area to include:

- Replacing water lines
- Rehabilitating the existing well
- Drilling a new well for a backup water source



Photo of the current water system within the project area.

The backup water supply would be connected to the water system serving the entire area, and a new backup generator would enable water service during power outages. The existing water storage tank would be rehabilitated to ensure the system has adequate fire suppression storage.



Photo of the current well system in the project area.





## Road

Challenges in the Swiftcurrent developed area include a road that terminates in a high-visitor-use area with overflow parking in informal areas on a narrow road. The NPS, with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), would rehabilitate the road entering Swiftcurrent and replace some of the informal parking with formal parking.

This would prevent resource damage and create parking where it is most needed. Separating pedestrian paths from the roadway would provide safer pedestrian access. Accessible parking also would be improved where needed.



## **Visitor Impacts**

The park is considering how to minimize impacts to visitors and park operations during construction.

The Swiftcurrent Valley is a very popular visitor destination. To minimize effects to visitors from construction and area closures for multiple seasons, including the Many Glacier Campground and other popular sites, the park is considering a one-time closure of the Swiftcurrent developed area. This would enable the work to be consolidated into a much shorter timeframe, rather than prolonging impacts to visitors for three or more years.

The one-season closure would be in place during the fall of 2024, spring and summer of 2025, and spring of 2026. During winter, work would not be underway and the Swiftcurrent developed area would remain open to non-motorized winter recreation (such as skis and snowshoes).

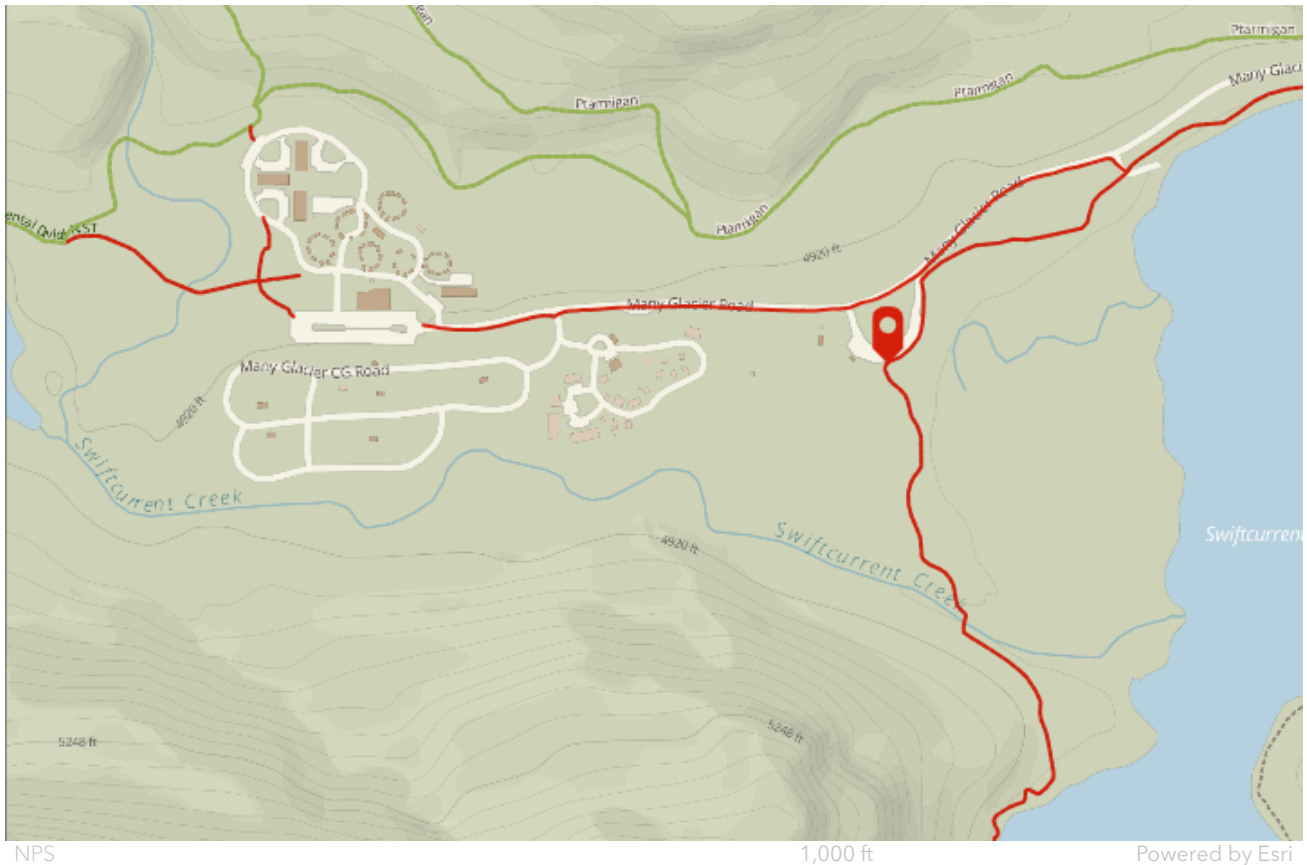
During the full closure, October 2024 through April 2026, there would be no public vehicle access into the Swiftcurrent Valley.



## The Swiftcurrent

Motor Inn, Many Glacier Campground, Swiftcurrent Lake boat launch, and picnic area would be closed.

Impacts to visitors would be most noticeable during July and August of 2025, when services that are typically open to the public would be closed (there would be little change to the availability of services during the fall and spring shoulder season, since services in the area are normally closed during these times).



The Swiftcurrent developed area includes trailheads to four popular trails:

- Iceberg Lake
- Ptarmigan Tunnel and areas beyond
- Swiftcurrent Pass to the Highline Trail
- Grinnell Glacier

While area trailheads would be temporarily closed during the one-time construction closure, the trails themselves would remain open:

- The Iceberg Lake, Ptarmigan Tunnel and Swiftcurrent Pass trails would be accessed at the west end of the project area via

the horse access trail that bypasses the construction. The park is considering hiker transport to facilitate hiker access to the trail system.

- The Grinnell Glacier Trail would not be accessible from the Swiftcurrent picnic area but could still be accessed from Many Glacier Hotel.



## Natural and Cultural Resources Impacts

*Click the right arrow to scroll through information about impacts to natural and cultural resources.*

The park is completing inventories of natural and cultural resources in the project area, including:

- Surveys for wetlands
- Special status plant species
- Archeological sites
- Historic landscape elements



Through careful assessment of the resources identified within the project area and the development of measures to mitigate impacts, the project is being designed to avoid negative effects to natural and cultural resources to the greatest extent possible. Project design and analysis of impacts is ongoing.



## **Wetlands and Aquatic Resources**

Wetland and riverine features are found throughout the Swiftcurrent Valley. The FHWA is completing a wetland study to assess and map wetland resources. If wetlands are found in the project area, the appropriate best practices and mitigation measures would be in place in accordance with NPS policy and the Clean Water Act.

Construction activity would not affect streams or lakes in the Swiftcurrent Valley because no work would occur in water.



## **Wildlife**

The Swiftcurrent Valley supports a diversity of wildlife. Grizzly bears and Canada lynx (federally listed under the Endangered Species Act as threatened) and wolverine (proposed for federal listing) are present. The valley also contains habitat for several state listed species, including birds protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

The analysis of impacts to wildlife and listed species is still underway. At this time, anticipated effects include the potential for disturbance during the construction period and some loss of adjacent forested habitat. For the longer term, concentrating parking in certain areas would maintain habitat connectivity for wildlife.

Measures to protect and mitigate impacts to wildlife and sensitive species would be in place throughout the project.

- To avoid impacts to migratory birds, vegetation and tree removal would not occur during the bird nesting season.



- Work areas would be monitored to ensure compliance with park requirements for the storage of food, garbage, and other wildlife attractants.



## **Vegetation**

The project area is an existing developed area, and much of the ground disturbance would occur within existing utility and road corridors. The analysis of impacts to vegetation is still underway. Anticipated impacts would include some loss of adjacent forested area.

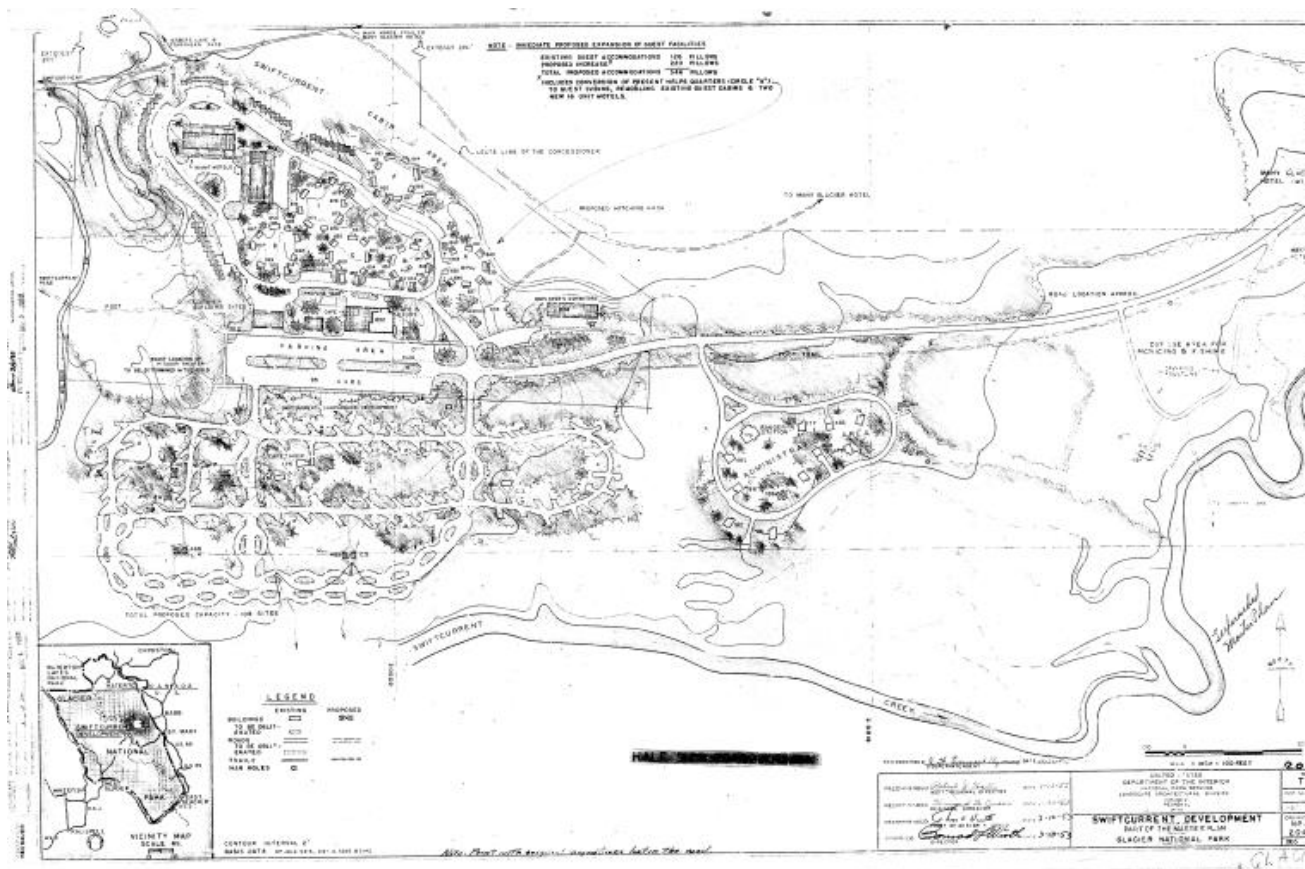
Impacts to undisturbed ground would be minimized to the greatest extent possible. Rare or sensitive vegetation would be marked and avoided or salvaged as feasible. Trenchless methods for pipe installation would be used if feasible. Disturbed areas would be restored with native vegetation and weeds would be controlled.



## Noise

The analysis of impacts to natural soundscapes is still underway. At this time, while construction noise would affect natural soundscapes, it is not expected to notably change existing conditions given the existing amount of human activity and vehicle traffic. Project noise would likely carry across the lake and be audible at the hotel and to visitors on hiking trails.





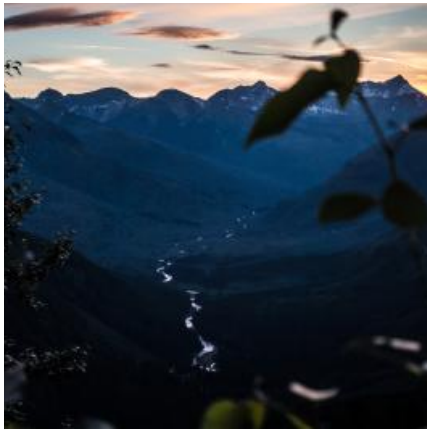
## Cultural Resources

People have used the Swiftcurrent Valley for thousands of years. Archeological resources are present within the project area. The Swiftcurrent developed area includes two historic districts, the Swiftcurrent Auto Camp Historic District and the Swiftcurrent Ranger Station Historic District (or the Many Glacier Ranger Station). Several structures within these historic districts are listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The Many Glacier Road, including the portion within the project area, is of historic age.

The analysis of impacts to cultural resources is still underway. At this time, impacts to historic buildings are not expected to adversely effect the National Register status of historic resources. The park is communicating with tribal partners and the Montana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) as project design develops.

Archeological survey is still ongoing. Continued archeological research for the project may provide opportunities to learn more about the history of the area. Archeological monitoring would be likely during excavation. Any newly discovered resources would be

carefully documented and consultation with tribes and the SHPO would continue as needed.





# Give Feedback

**We want to hear from you.**

**Please provide comments by July 30, 2023.**

To provide comments and provide your valued insight,  
please visit the project website:

<https://parkplanning.nps.gov/Swiftcurrent>.

Questions to consider include:

- **Question 1:** How would the proposed one-season closure of the Swiftcurrent Valley affect your experience as a visitor to Glacier National Park?
- **Question 2:** How would the proposed improvements at the Swiftcurrent developed area affect your experience as a visitor to the Swiftcurrent Valley?
- **Question 3:** How can the park mitigate impacts to the visitor experience during the construction period?

For general information about the park, visit our **website**.



