

Death Valley National Park Invites Public Input On Wilderness & Backcountry Stewardship Plan

The National Park Service is initiating a combined Wilderness and Backcountry Stewardship Plan for Death Valley National Park. The purpose of this Wilderness and Backcountry Stewardship Plan is to guide the National Park Service and to make decisions regarding the future use and protection of the park's vast wilderness and backcountry lands. This planning process addresses all Congressionally designated wilderness lands within Death Valley National Park. It also includes non-wilderness backcountry concerns, such as: backcountry road corridors and campsites, backcountry cabins near roads, and non-wilderness backcountry lands. It does not include the Furnace Creek, Scotty's Castle, Stovepipe Wells, and Panamint Springs developed areas or visitor attractions accessed directly from paved roads (e.g. Zabriskie Point), or short, graded gravel roads (e.g. Mosaic Canyon), developed campgrounds, paved roads, private inholdings or other non-NPS lands. It also will not include the Saline Valley hot springs and the non-wilderness lands surrounding them as this area will be addressed in the future in a site-specific plan as per direction of the Park's approved General Management Plan.

The National Park Service originally initiated the planning process in March 2009 for a Wilderness Stewardship Plan that did not include non-wilderness backcountry. The scoping period was open from March through June of 2009 and we received many insightful comments from members of the public and organizations. The comments received highlighted the geographic and experiential relationship between the extensive network of backcountry road corridors and the adjacent wilderness lands. Park Superintendent Sarah Craighead listened to the concerns raised and decided to expand the scope of the current planning effort to include the park's 3.1 million acres of designated wilderness as well as 225,000 acres of adjacent backcountry lands and 800 miles of backcountry dirt road corridors as shown on the attached map. When considering how best to proceed Superintendent Craighead said "While reviewing public comments on the Wilderness Plan, it was very clear that our park visitors often do not distinguish between the use of Wilderness and how they reach those areas. We felt that it would be more effective and efficient to combine the Wilderness Plan and Backcountry Plan and consider the area as a whole. Also by expanding the scope of the current planning effort to include both wilderness and non-wilderness backcountry lands we can consider a broader range of visitor uses and experiences offered in the vast and varied landscapes of Death Valley National Park."

As part of the planning effort, the National Park Service will be completing an environmental analysis consistent with the National Environmental Policy Act. It is anticipated that this process may take 3-4 years to complete. Throughout the planning process there will be several times where we will actively invite public input; this is the first such occasion.

We want to hear what you value about the Death Valley Wilderness as well as any issues or concerns you have regarding how the wilderness resource is used and managed. We also want to hear what you value about the park's non-wilderness backcountry lands and network of backcountry roads as well as any issues or concerns regarding how these backcountry lands and roads are used and managed. And, finally, we would like to hear any concerns you have

regarding the relationship between wilderness and adjacent non-wilderness backcountry. Your comments are important to us. While we will welcome your input throughout the planning process, your early comments will be most beneficial to our planning effort if we received them by November 15th, 2009. All comments previously submitted during scoping for the Wilderness Stewardship Plan will be considered and people who previously commented may submit additional comments during this scoping period. We prefer comments via the electronic public comment form on the NPS Planning, Environment and Public Comment System at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/deva>, or by email to DEVApplanning@nps.gov. You may also submit comments in writing to: Superintendent Death Valley NP - Wilderness Plan, P.O. Box 579, Death Valley, CA 92328.

For more information, contact Park Wilderness Coordinator Charlie Callagan at 760-786-3282.

Notice Regarding FOIA

It is the practice of the NPS to make all comments, including names and addresses of respondents who provide that information, available for public review following the conclusion of the environmental assessment process. Individuals may request that the NPS withhold their name and/or address from public disclosure. If you wish to do this, you must state this prominently at the beginning of your comment. Commentators using the website can make such a request by checking the box "keep my contact information private." NPS will honor such requests to the extent allowable by law, but you should be aware that NPS may still be required to disclose your name and address pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act. We will make all submissions from organizations, businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses available for public inspection in their entirety.

-NPS-