

Tule Springs Fossil Beds

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

National Monument
Nevada



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Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument General Management Plan Newsletter

You're Invited!

The National Park Service is releasing a general management plan and environmental assessment (“the plan”) for Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument for a 30-day public review and comment period. The Tule Springs Fossil Beds general management plan is the first plan to guide park management since it was established as a unit of the national park system in 2014. The plan and environmental assessment provides broad guidance for managing the park over the next 15 years and beyond. This newsletter provides a short summary of the plan. To access the full and plan and environmental assessment and for more information about the project, please visit the park planning website at <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/TUSKgmp>.

The plan defines 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 enabling legislation and foundation document. This document also examines two possible management strategies or “alternatives” and analyzes the impacts of their implementation.

The project was initiated in the winter of 2021/2022. The first round of public engagement took place in the summer of 2022 to solicit feedback on desired natural and cultural resource conditions, visitor experiences, and other important values related to the monument.

This 30-day public comment period is the second round of public engagement and begins on February 15, 2024. Public meetings are scheduled for February 28th (virtual) and February 29th (in person) to present and discuss the general management plan and environmental assessment. This comment period is the public’s final opportunity to provide comments on the general management plan and environmental assessment to help guide the future of Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument.

Thank you for being involved in this process!

Developing a Management Framework for the Park

To establish goals for allocating resources and prioritizing management actions, this plan identifies desired natural and cultural resource conditions, visitor experiences, and other important values related to the monument. Desired conditions are statements of aspiration that describe resource conditions, visitor experiences and opportunities, and facilities and services that park managers would strive to achieve and maintain. The plan also examines two possible management strategies or “alternatives” and analyzes the impacts of their implementation.

The preferred alternative (alternative A) addresses resource protection and preservation, education and interpretation, visitor use and facilities, land protection and boundaries, and long-term operations and management and responds to issues identified during the preliminary planning process. The preferred alternative establishes management zones, guides use and management activities, and adjusts the park’s organizational structure to reflect the scientific, resource protection, and operational needs of the park.

The no-action alternative (alternative B) identifies no major changes in management direction. Current conditions would continue without creating management zones. No further direction would be given regarding resource conditions, types and intensities of visitor use and development, desired visitor experiences, and park partnerships.

Management Vision

In the preferred alternative, Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument managers aspire to work closely with stakeholders and cultivate partnerships to meet the scientific, resource protection, interpretation, and operational needs of the park. Park managers envision the park as a living laboratory that supports scientific research with both local and global significance. Park staff collaborate with partners to explore new practices and methods for the conservation of sensitive natural and cultural resources. Science is integrated into the park experience, making research accessible to visitors to spark curiosity, understanding, and stewardship. Interpretive programs and media are designed to complement surrounding public land visitor experiences. Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument is a place where visitors feel connected to park stories and resources and understand how they are intertwined.



Management Strategies

This general management plan proposes high-level management strategies that may be applied to achieve desired conditions and the management vision laid out in the document. The management strategies and actions focus on:

- Cultural resources management
- Natural resources management
- Visitor experience and services
- Partnerships

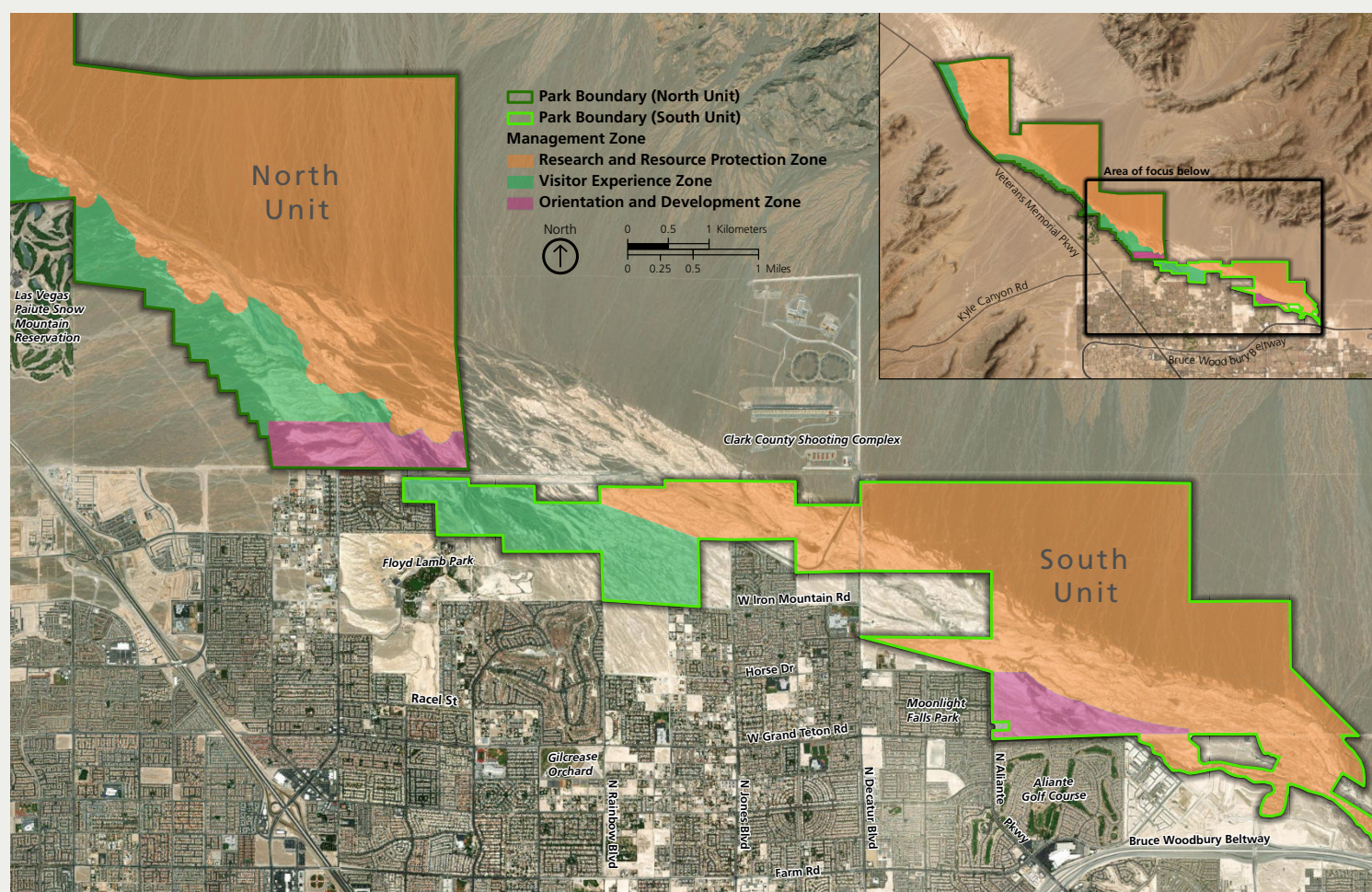
Generally, the development of specific sites and facilities is not outlined in general management plans. Some information is included on how the management of different areas of the park could include the establishment of facilities.

Management Zones

The National Park Service uses management zoning to identify and describe the variety of resource conditions and visitor experiences to be achieved and maintained in different areas of a park. In most cases, zoning is the spatial application of statements of desired conditions and describes the conditions, outcomes, and opportunities for specific areas of a park.

Under the preferred alternative, the plan would rely on three management zones to define specific desired conditions and visitor experiences to achieve and maintain in each area.

Each management zone would be associated with a general level of management guidance or direction, including the types of activities and facilities that are appropriate in that management area. The management zones would be consistent with and help achieve the specific purpose, significance, and special mandates for Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument.



Research and Resource Protection Zone

- The Research and Resource Protection Zone has unmodified features and a natural-appearing environment. Critical resource protection and strategic research opportunities are the guiding concepts for managing this zone and take precedent over visitor use and development.
- This zone protects areas with highly sensitive fundamental paleontological, geological, cultural, and natural resources. These resources are the most highly managed within the park boundary to ensure their protection and study. Resource management seeks to retain the inherent and natural value of soundscapes, views, and plant communities and all other resources and features. This zone has the highest potential for rich scientific field research and inventory and monitoring programs compared to other zones.
- Visitor use in this zone is supplementary to resource protection and research and is prioritized in other zones. Any trails and limited modifications in this zone maintain a natural appearance to the greatest extent practicable, while avoiding sensitive natural and cultural features.

Although there may be limited self-guided experiences in this zone, most visitor interaction with sensitive resources is managed in this area with guided interpretive experiences that focus on conservation and the scientific process, which provide experiences for varied skill levels. Navigation may be challenging due to limited signage and rugged terrain. Overall, visitor use is low compared to the two other zones. This zone may accommodate commercial use that is compliant with park values, management priorities, resource protection, and visitor safety.

- This zone is the least developed in the park and contains limited visitor amenities. Any development that occurs in this zone is related to visitor safety and scientific research and is temporary, when possible. The zone retains a relatively undeveloped character that prioritizes the natural environment and its resources.

Visitor Experience Zone

- The Visitor Experience Zone has key features and resources, a mostly natural-appearing environment, and some development that supports the visitor experience. The balance between visitor use and resource protection is the guiding concept for overall management in this zone, which may result in varied visitor opportunities and some development.
 - Resources in this zone are highly protected and managed but are more accessible for visitors to connect with compared to the Resource Protection and Research Zone. Although resources are more easily accessible in this setting, resource protection takes precedent over visitor use and is prioritized and/or mitigated when creating new visitor opportunities.
 - Visitors are able to experience visual and physical connectivity to fundamental resources. This safely connects visitors with resources from the past and present, while still providing a wide range of visitor experiences.
- Although some outdoor skills and familiarity may be required in some areas, accessible opportunities for visitors of all abilities are provided as both guided and unguided experience. There are low-to-moderate levels of day use that may range from a few hours to all day, and visitors expect to encounter each other on a regular basis in this zone. Finally, this zone may have opportunities for commercial use authorizations that are compatible with resource protection.
- Development in this zone is most typically implemented to support the visitor experience and protect park resources, where necessary. Although development is limited to mostly simple and unobtrusive directional signs and visitor amenities that interface well with the undeveloped nature of this setting, there may be instances of human-made structures in some areas that create the least impact on resources as possible. There are low-to-moderate levels of day use, and the potential for commercial use authorizations is accommodated.

Orientation and Development Zone

- The Orientation and Development Zone has contemporary structures and amenities, some natural features, a modified landscape, and the presence of both visitors and staff. The harmonious conceptual and physical interface between the undeveloped setting of the park and proximate urban environment is the guiding feature and concept for the management of this zone. The Orientation and Development Zone supports visitor use and park operations, serving as primary locations for recreation, visitor interpretation, research, park administration, and maintenance functions.
 - Resources are managed in a way that balance resource protection with all other Tribal, visitor, and staff functions. Although resources in this zone may be disturbed, their protection is considered a high priority in relation to all other activities. Resources found in a more natural setting may be less common compared to other zones but are showcased in a protected and developed environment.
- Visitor use levels are likely to be highest in this zone, and visitor use focuses on orientation and education. Although opportunities for visitor experiences in a natural setting may be limited, this zone provides a wealth of trip planning and scientific information about the park and its resources. This area may have some trails, including accessible trails, but experiences are more likely to prioritize self-guided wayfinding and exhibits that focus on learning about fundamental resources and history. Visitors should expect to frequently encounter other visitors here, and visitors do not need a high degree of outdoor skills in this area. Some commercial use may be present in this area, as authorized by park management, that includes orientation areas, equipment storage, and other visitor experiences.
 - Facilities and amenities are managed to provide safe, secure, and appropriate functions required for park management and visitor experiences. This area is the most developed of the three zones, but this development is completed so that it does not significantly impact fundamental resources or mitigate these impacts. Only necessary facilities, structures, and amenities are established to support park operations and visitor experiences and the park's overall mission, goals, and enabling legislation.

Visitor Use Management

The plan includes guidance for managing visitor use that will aid the park in facilitating access, providing welcoming and meaningful experiences, and protecting resources and values. Unmanaged visitor use can inadvertently damage the very natural and cultural resources and qualities that attract people to these areas in the first place. As noted, the general management plan includes desired resource and visitor experience conditions for the park as a whole and for the management zones. This element of the plan is vital to supporting a diversity of visitor opportunities and managing the dynamic nature of visitor use over time. In addition to the desired conditions, the plan includes the identification of indicators that would be used to track trends in conditions related to visitor use, along with thresholds that define when conditions are becoming unacceptable for the selected indicators. Monitoring indicators is an essential part of managing visitor use, as it provides feedback to evaluate the effectiveness of management actions in achieving and maintaining desired conditions. These elements of the plan would guide the management of the types and levels of visitor use, along with informing the identification of visitor capacities in future implementation plans.

Boundary Adjustments

The National Park Service, in accordance with the National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978 (Pub. L. 95-625), also requires that general management plans determine whether park boundaries are adequate for protecting resources or whether they need to be adjusted to carry out park purposes. Activities adjacent to the park's boundaries have the potential to impact park resources. Resources don't stop at the park's boundary. The general management plan will address how to best protect the park's resources and evaluate whether any boundary changes should be recommended. Under the preferred alternative, the National Park Service would pursue the acquisition of the "Rainbow" parcel. This privately owned parcel is 44 acres and is located along the northern boundary of the south unit of the park and south of the Clark County Shooting Complex.

A Combined General Management Plan and Environmental Assessment

When a federal agency proposes to take an action, such as spending federal funds or deciding how to manage federal property, the responsible agency must follow the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. The development of this general management plan is consistent with the National Environmental Policy Act, the National Historic Preservation Act, and other applicable laws and policies. This environmental assessment describes the existing environment of the national monument prior to taking any action, proposes one or more action alternatives, and analyzes the potential environmental impacts of implementing each alternative.



The general management plan and environmental assessment will be open for a 30-day comment period, closing on March 16, 2024. While all comments are welcome and appreciated, addressing the following questions will best contribute to helping shape the future of the park:

- What are your overall thoughts on the general management plan for Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument?
- What are your thoughts on the proposed desired conditions and management strategies?
- What are your thoughts on the proposed management zones?
- Do you have suggestions for changes to the proposed plan?
- Do you have other ideas you'd like to share with the project team?

Please be as specific as possible in your responses and include any questions about the process that remain unanswered for you.

ON THE WEB (PREFERRED METHOD):

Visit the park planning website at <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/TUSKgmp>

BY MAIL:

Superintendent, Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument
601 Nevada Way, Boulder City, NV 89005

BY EMAIL:

tusk_information@nps.gov

VIRTUAL MEETING

The National Park Service will also hold a virtual meeting via Microsoft Teams and an in-person meeting to provide the public with a range of opportunities to learn more, provide comments, and ask questions about the project.

Date: February 28, 2024

Time: 6–8:00 p.m.

Location: Visit the park planning website at <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/TUSKgmp> and click the “Meeting Notices” tab.

IN-PERSON MEETING

Date: February 29, 2024

Time: 6–8:00 p.m.

Location: Sun City Aliante, 7390 North Aliante Parkway, North Las Vegas, NV 89084

Time Line

During the planning process, the National Park Service has and continues to engage with the Tule Springs Advisory Council; affiliated Tribes through consultation; and other agencies, stakeholders, and the public to develop the general management plan. Important steps in the planning process are outlined below, along with anticipated time lines for completion.

Step	Planning Process
Step 1: Winter 2021/2022 (Project Begins)	Identify planning issues and opportunities.
Step 2: Summer 2022	Public engagement – Seek comments, concerns, and ideas related to the general management plan.
Step 3: Fall/Winter 2022	Refine strategies and develop a plan.
Step 4: Spring/Fall 2023	Prepare the plan and associated compliance.
Step 5: Fall 2023	Begin compliance via the National Environmental Policy Act and the environmental assessment.
Step 6: Winter 2024	Conduct public review of the general management plan and environmental assessment.
Step 7: Spring 2024	Address public comments and revise the plan as needed.
Step 8: Spring 2024 (Project Ends)	Finalize the plan, associated compliance, and issue a decision.

**We are
here**