



# Welcome!

The National Park Service is interested in hearing your ideas and questions on preliminary strategies for holistically managing visitor access and travel to alleviate vehicular and pedestrian congestion in Glacier National Park.

Please submit comments online by visiting the NPS Planning, Environment and Public Comment website at <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/glaciervisitoruseplan>. Once on the website, select “Open for Comment” to provide your thoughts on the preliminary strategies. Comments will also be accepted by mail at Glacier National Park, Superintendent, PO Box 128, West Glacier, MT 59936.



## STAY INVOLVED!

The NPS planning team will hold public meetings to share information about the ideas in this newsletter and respond to questions.

To learn more about the plan and see a complete list of public meetings and instructions on how to connect to virtual meetings, visit the project website (<https://parkplanning.nps.gov/glaciervisitoruseplan>) and the StoryMap (<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/0f3e3fed838847d1ac97340124854b54>).

Dear Friends,

Glacier National Park staff need your input to help envision the future of how visitors access and travel in the park.

In August and September 2023, we invited you to join us in reflecting on the pilot vehicle reservation programs we operated at the park in 2021, 2022, and 2023. Your feedback helped shape the summer pilot program in 2024 and also got us thinking about what future years might look like. We've recently announced our program for 2025, which will build on the aspects that worked well in 2024—including access to Apgar Village, the east entrance of Going-to-the-Sun Road, and Two Medicine. The program will also refine the use of vehicle reservations to optimize visitor arrivals in the North Fork and the west entrance of Going-to-the-Sun Road. Now, we would like to shift our attention to a long-term effort to produce a durable and sustainable plan for visitor access and travel at Glacier. The strategies developed in this planning process will help park staff manage visitation in a consistent and predictable manner to protect natural and cultural resources and provide opportunities for meaningful visitor experiences for current and future generations.

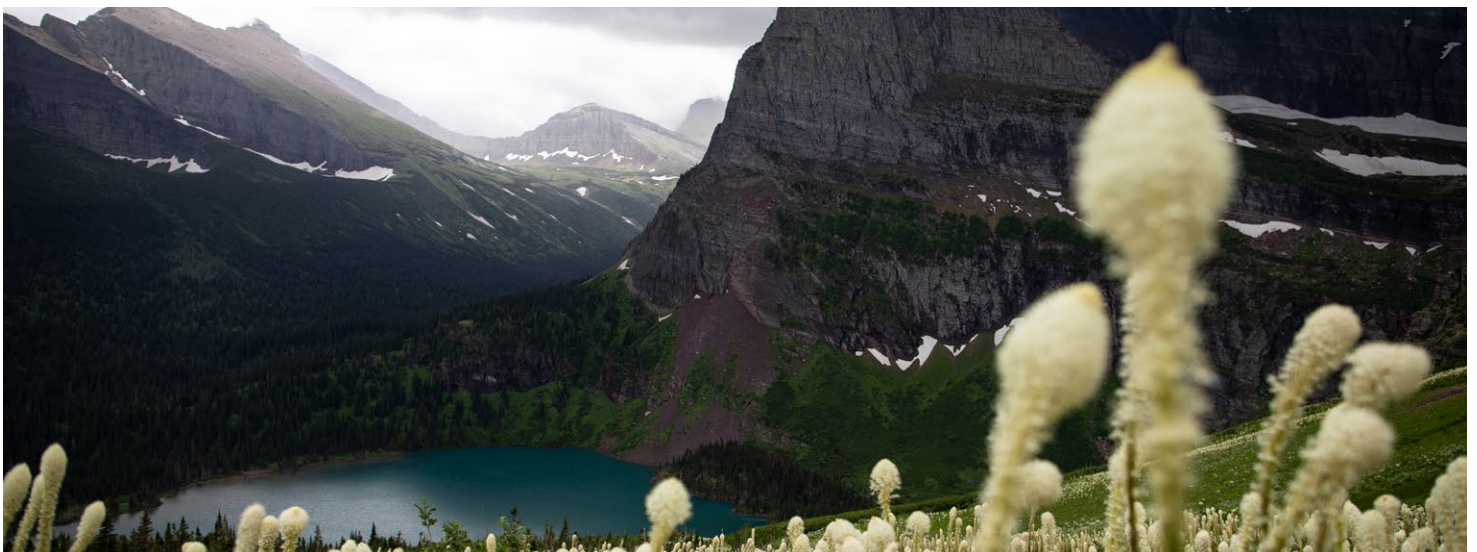
The National Park Service (NPS) mission calls for us to provide the best possible access to meaningful and enjoyable experiences while preserving the resources that make Glacier special. In recent years, achieving that mission has become more complex due to growth in visitation and changing use patterns, experienced not only in the park but in northwestern Montana generally. September 2024 featured record-setting high visitation to Glacier while pushing visitation to more than three million for the year (so far). While this increase means more people are exploring and connecting with the park, it also presents diverse challenges like crowding and congestion and difficulty providing timely emergency responses. The visitation increase also impacts the park's resources, such as iconic wildlife; Tribal connections; the scenic glaciated landscape; the park's historic infrastructure, such as Going-to-the-Sun Road; and facilities, such as water and waste disposal systems.

Drawing from the wealth of public comments from last year and the lessons learned from four years of piloting managed access strategies, we have created a framework of planning goals, issues, vision statements, and potential strategies for your feedback. We want to hear from you about what has worked best, what could be improved, and what you would like to see in the future.

To learn more and participate, start by reviewing this newsletter. Below, you'll find draft planning goals, issues, vision statements, potential strategies, and most importantly, instructions for providing your input. You can also visit the project website at <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/glaciervisitoruseplan>, which has additional background on the park, park visitation information, a description of how we currently manage popular destinations, and a history of visitor use management at Glacier. You'll also find information about a series of virtual and in-person public meetings we are hosting in November and December.

We look forward to hearing from you and continuing the conversation!

Sincerely,  
Dave Roemer, Superintendent







## PLANNING GOALS AND KEY ISSUES

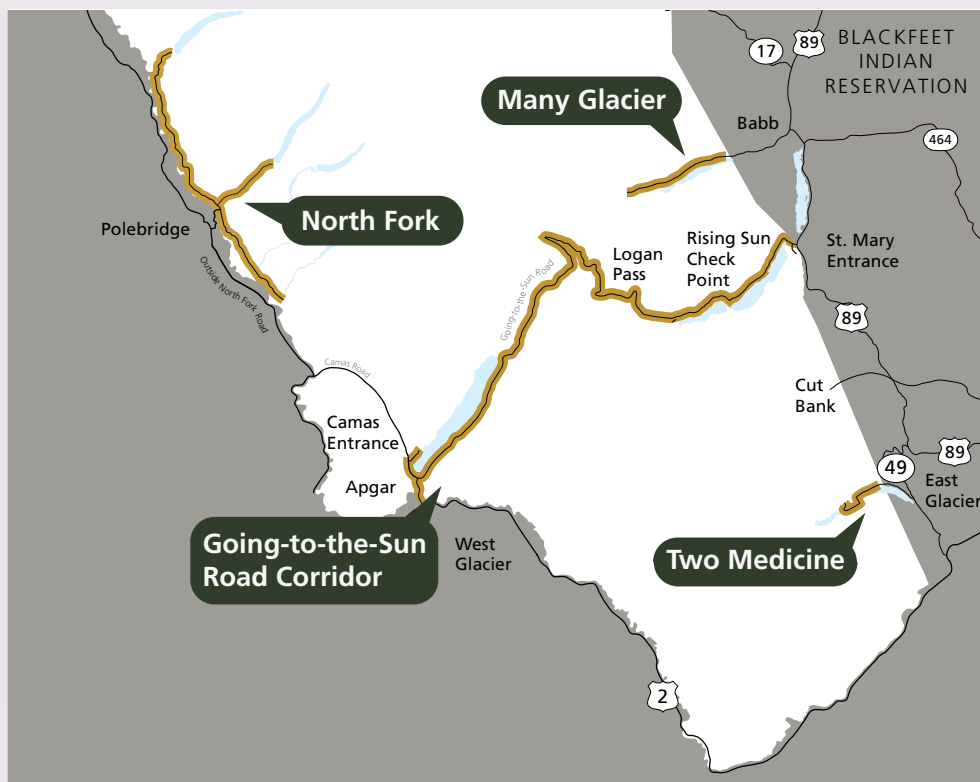
The goal of this process is to identify strategies that will holistically manage visitor access and travel to alleviate vehicular and pedestrian congestion. These strategies will preserve what makes the park special and maintain the unique character of different areas of the park.

The plan will assess a variety of ways to improve park experiences and resource protection, including enhancing shuttle services, implementing reservation systems, and pursuing other strategies that would be applied in a fair and equitable way. A long-term plan would ensure that park operations and infrastructure remain sustainable for generations to come. This plan is needed to address the following issues:

- traffic congestion and visitor movement challenges
- road and valley closures as a result of traffic congestion
- staff capacity and visitor use impacts on park operations
- visitor use impacts on natural and cultural resources
- visitor use impacts on the quality of visitor experience at key destinations







**The Four Primary Geographic Areas of Glacier**

## Why Plan Now?

Park management has piloted different vehicle reservation programs over the last four summers, and clarity on a sustainable long-term approach is needed. Additionally, a lot has changed since the park's shuttle system was initiated in 2007, and park visitors and stakeholders have suggested that the National Park Service needs to take a fresh look at transit-related strategies.

Lessons learned from the 2021 *Going-to-the-Sun Road Corridor Management Plan and Environmental Assessment* and the pilot vehicle reservation programs have demonstrated the need for a holistic approach to planning for all major travel corridors in the park. Therefore, a plan would address the Going-to-the-Sun, Many Glacier, Two Medicine, and North Fork areas of the park while setting the stage for adaptive management in portions of the Goat Haunt/Belly River and Middle Fork areas.

## Management Goals by Area

Each area of Glacier National Park is exceptional in its own right. Based on previous planning efforts and public input, park staff developed draft management goals, also known as desired conditions, for each area of the park. The management goals describe what park managers are trying to achieve along travel corridors, the frontcountry, and developed portions of each geographic area. The goals describe the resources and values the areas highlight, the types of opportunities visitors may find, and how the unique areas are managed differently. The site-specific strategies in this newsletter all aim to meet these management goals.





## Going-to-the-Sun Road Corridor

The Going-to-the-Sun Road Corridor provides all visitors with an opportunity to experience the scenic majesty and historic character of the park. The corridor includes settings with a range of visitor densities and services. While crowding and vehicle and visitor congestion occur frequently in popular areas, they do not dominate the visitor's experience throughout the corridor. Traffic flow on roads is generally stable, though drivers' movements may be impacted by other vehicles, and visitors may spend most of their time following others. Visitors may find relative ease and convenience in some parts of the corridor, though other areas have fewer services and related infrastructure. The National Park Service manages the corridor to prevent conflicts over available parking spaces and among different user groups, maximize safety, and ensure seamless and efficient transportation connections. Once the visitor leaves the roadside and developed areas, their focus quickly shifts from the infrastructure marvel of Going-to-the-Sun Road to the marvel of the park's natural and cultural resources.

Visitors to the corridor have the opportunity to experience the unique aesthetic and engineering characteristics of the historically significant road and hotels. The roadway and associated visitation do not interfere with ecosystem integrity, wildlife habitats, and tremendous biological diversity as the road passes through all five park ecoregions. Visitors

can experience the park's iconic wildlife from safe distances in their natural habitats, and the wildlife remains relatively undisturbed.

## Many Glacier

The Many Glacier area is managed to protect its wild character and majestic views with quaint and approachable amenities. The area's sweeping vistas of iconic glaciers, valleys, and mountains inspire awe and a sense of being in the "American Alps." The traditional Swiss chalet "parkitecture" and strong sense of community provide welcoming hospitality and invite the visitor to stay awhile after a long journey to get there. The trail system provides opportunities for variety of hikes, from a rigorous overnight backpack to a leisurely stroll, while the grand Many Glacier Hotel and family lodge at Swiftcurrent Motor Inn make dining and relaxing readily enjoyable.



Visitors to Many Glacier have the opportunity to understand the strong Tribal connections to this living landscape to balance the clear European influence. Learning about the prominent geologic features, past geologic events, and iconic wildlife are also a focus. Visitor activity does not degrade wildlife habitat and their winter range, displace species, or create conflicts. While some of the area is managed to accommodate high levels of day use and some congestion can be expected at popular destinations, the rest provides greater solitude and fewer visitor encounters.





## North Fork

The North Fork area is intentionally managed as a rustic and primitive destination that visitors seek out for its remote character. Visitors do not find commercial facilities and services in this area and should be prepared to be self-sufficient. The North Fork area is highly natural, and the visitor is likely to find pristine landscapes, encounter wildlife, and observe natural processes on their own without interpretation.

Visitors to the North Fork have the opportunity to enjoy spectacular scenic beauty without the intrusion of modern development, technology, or large numbers of people. Visitors do not feel crowded or constrained, even at the most popular

destinations, and there should be no sense of competition for parking or congestion on roadways. Visitors can find solitude to the extent desired to appreciate the historic character and wildness of the area. Management of the North Fork reflects the importance of interagency and international cooperation in protecting transboundary watersheds, wildlife, and native fisheries. Visitation has minimal impact on the outstanding condition of these resources. The traditional rustic character of the North Fork can easily be seen in the built environment of the North Fork, including the ranger station, campgrounds, unpaved roads, and trails.

## Two Medicine

The Two Medicine area is managed to preserve its wild character, Tribal significance, and a slower pace in an understated setting. Limited services and amenities contribute to a rustic, uncongested, and intimate park experience tucked away in a magical alpine valley. The area provides world-class hiking with opportunities for solitude for visitors prepared to work for it. Shorter-distance hikers can still immerse themselves in the scenic landscape along the shoreline.

Visitors to Two Medicine have the opportunity to understand the rich cultural significance and tradition of the area. Past, current, and future relationships between the ecosystem and Native peoples are underscored by the area's name itself—a reference to the historic need for two medicine lodges to support the people gathered there. As an area of transition between the plains and the mountains, unique and diverse wildlife and views of geologic features like the Lewis Overthrust would be protected.



## POTENTIAL PARKWIDE STRATEGIES

The strategies listed below could apply in a variety of ways and to different locations throughout the park. All the strategies proposed or considered must help meet the purpose and need of the project and help achieve the management goals above. The project team has been developing options for management based on public and interested party input, as well as feedback from all levels of the National Park Service. These ideas would be designed to help protect the park's fundamental resources and values and improve visitor access and opportunities.

For each of these strategies, we are currently evaluating the following:

- **Viability** – How this strategy would help us resolve key issues in each area of the park and how this strategy would help us meet the project and management goals
- **Feasibility** – How much this strategy would cost and the potential source of funding, including whether user fees would be required and which resources would be needed to implement this strategy
- **Desirability** – When and where this strategy would be most useful, how much this strategy would improve visitors' experience and/or resource conditions, and whether there would be any trade-offs

No single solution will meet all project goals and resolve all issues. The National Park Service is seeking your feedback on the management options described below as a part of our evaluation.

### Reservation Systems

**Issue/Opportunity** – Popular parking lots, entrance stations, and roadways throughout the park are frequently congested, preventing visitors from reaching their intended destinations with ease and timeliness. Congestion affects visitor safety, emergency response, and the quality of the experience. In response to traffic congestion, full parking lots, vegetation damage from undesignated parking, the potential for gridlock, and concerns about emergency access, park staff have had to resort to adaptively closing areas of the park when the number of vehicles in an area creates conditions that approach gridlock. This reactive approach of using unplanned closures to manage park congestion has negative impacts on visitor access and experience and park operations.



#### Potential Solutions/Strategies:

- Common to all reservation strategies:
  - » Reservations could be used during seasons and times of high and concentrated visitation.
  - » Reservations could be released in multiple blocks (i.e., several months out and the evening before) for the main season.
  - » In areas with multiple entry points, reservations could be applied to one or more entries.
- Timed-entry reservations – Visitors to the park would have a reservation to enter during a specific window of time (e.g., between 8:00 a.m. and 10:00 a.m.). Once in the park, visitors could stay as long as they would like.
- Daily reservations – Daily reservations would allow entry to the park at any time during identified seasons and times of high and concentrated visitation. Reservations would be released in two blocks (i.e., several months out and the evening before) for the main season.
- Parking reservations – Visitors would obtain a reservation for a specific area or parking lot during identified seasons and times of high and concentrated visitation.
- Shuttle-only access for key locations – Areas with high levels of visitation and lower levels of available parking would be considered for shuttle-only access.
- Activity permits – To increase parking turnover and reduce congestion on trails, permits would be required to hike high-use trails during times of concentrated visitation.

#### Your ideas?

##### Think About

- Where might reservation systems be applied to achieve the management goals for reservations systems?
- Which type of reservation system would be most effective in which locations?



## Shuttle Systems

**Issue/Opportunity** – Glacier has one of the oldest shuttle systems in the national park system. Shuttle systems have been and would continue to be a critical component of the park experience for many visitors and could support the park in achieving management goals and meeting the purpose and need for this plan. Shuttle systems could also play a role in reducing vehicle congestion, providing access to crowded parking areas, and creating connections between locations and experiences without having to move and park vehicles.

### Potential Solutions/Strategies:

- Assess existing routes for areas of improvement and greater efficiency.
- Work with partners to provide shuttles from gateway communities to the park.
- Provide express shuttles for hikers or other recreational uses.
- Implement mandatory hiker shuttles in the alpine area of the park while maintaining scenic auto-touring options.
- Implement an optional reservation system for existing shuttle services, which would essentially guarantee a seat but would not be required.
- Provide access within a specific geographic area of the park via area circulator services.
- Evaluate transfer points for shuttles and their role and value in achieving management goals.



### Your ideas?

#### Think About

- Which type of shuttle system might you use and why?
- Which areas of the park might be best served by a shuttle system or specific shuttle services?

## Communication and Trip Planning

**Issue/Opportunity** – All management strategies considered as part of this planning process would require robust and innovative communication tools. Providing accurate, timely, and easily accessible trip planning and park information would help visitors plan their experiences to best meet their individual needs. These strategies would also help visitors fully understand and plan for current and expected conditions in the park.

### Potential Solutions/Strategies:

- Provide enhanced trip planning information.
- Improve messaging on a range of digital media platforms.
- Collaborate with gateway communities, lodging, and other partners to provide improved information to visitors.
- Establish and clearly communicate bike regulations and times for access on the Going-to-the-Sun Road.

### Your ideas?



#### Think About

- What types of communications would reach you or people you know?



## Parking and Infrastructure

**Issue/Opportunity** – Crowding at destinations such as trails, overlooks, visitor service areas, and other highly visited places in the park is making it increasingly challenging for visitors to have the experience they hoped for at the park. Considering innovative ways to manage parking and infrastructure would help address some of these challenges.

### Potential Solutions/Strategies:

- Provide metered access, including strategies such as one vehicle out/one vehicle in or other variations.
- Implement designated parking for overnight use.
- Implement time-limited parking, such as short-term-only parking in existing lots.



- Change infrastructure to improve entrance areas such as turnarounds and bypass lanes.

**Your ideas?**

### Think About

- If you were bringing a vehicle to Glacier, where would you like to park? How long would you like to park at that destination?
- Where has the absence of available parking presented a barrier to your desired type of visit?

## SITE-SPECIFIC POTENTIAL STRATEGIES

The following potential strategies are in addition to the ones mentioned above.

### Going-to-the-Sun Road

#### Potential Strategies:

- Designate some parking areas, including scenic roadside pullouts, as time-limited parking (e.g., 30-minute or 1-hour parking).
- Define vehicle-free opportunities for accessing Logan Pass on the Going-to-the-Sun Road (e.g., five or seven days after plowing is complete).
- Define times of day for bike use.
- Require hikers to access the alpine via a shuttle.

**Your ideas?**

### Two Medicine

#### Potential Strategies:

- Implement a “circulator shuttle” from East Glacier to Two Medicine.
- Implement parking reservations for the Two Medicine Boat Dock.

**Your ideas?**

### Many Glacier

#### Potential Strategies:

- Implement a “circulator shuttle” that would provide access for lodging guests and visitors to move between lodging and other amenities and trailheads.

**Your ideas?**

### North Fork

#### Potential Strategies:

- Use parking permits or reservations for Bowman Lake and Kintla Lake.
- Inside North Fork Road:
  - » Maintain this road as a hiker-biker-horseback pathway.
  - » Reopen the road to two-way vehicle traffic.
  - » Reopen the road to one-way vehicle traffic from Polebridge to Fish Creek/Camas.

**Your ideas?**





## HOW TO COMMENT

Public engagement is an essential component of helping us refine this plan, and we greatly value your perspective. Visit the project StoryMap to learn more about how you can be involved in the future of visitor experience and access planning at Glacier National Park at <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/glaciervisitoruseplan>.

You are invited to join the conversation by attending a public meeting and submitting online feedback. Please visit <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/glaciervisitoruseplan> or scan the QR code with a smartphone to leave a comment online. Please submit comments by January 6, 2025.



During the comment period, we are most interested in hearing from you about the following:

1. Do the management goals for the different areas of the park reflect your desired experiences in those areas?
2. How might we manage the growth in visitation to Glacier National Park in a way that protects what makes Glacier a special place?
3. We've developed strategies for your consideration. Are there other strategies or changes to listed strategies that should be considered and analyzed that are not already presented?

For more information about public meetings and how to comment, visit <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/glaciervisitoruseplan>.

