



# United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
GRAND CANYON NATIONAL PARK  
P.O. BOX 129  
GRAND CANYON, ARIZONA 86023-0129



IN REPLY REFER TO:

D18 (GRCA 8217)

MAR 16 2010

Subject: Mule Operations and Stock Use in Grand Canyon National Park

Reference: Review of Environmental Assessment

Dear Interested Party:

The Environmental Assessment (EA) for Mule Operations and Stock Use in Grand Canyon National Park is now available for public comment. The purpose of this EA is to examine environmental impacts associated with commercial, private and administrative stock use. It is guided by the following objectives:

- Provide opportunities for mule and stock use within Grand Canyon National Park to as large a cross section of visitors as practicable.
- Establish appropriate levels and types of stock use (i.e. number of stock per day, group size) on park trails that will allow for improved maintenance and reduced resource impacts and costs associated with trail maintenance.
- Through improved maintenance and operations, reduce conflicts between stock users and hikers on park trails.
- Identify optimal stock facility locations, including associated infrastructure size and locations for improving health, safety and overall visitor experience.

The EA evaluates five alternatives, including a No-Action Alternative. The No-Action Alternative would continue current mule operations and stock use within Grand Canyon. The four Action Alternatives, including the Preferred Alternative (Alternative B), propose the following common elements: continued limited commercial stock use at Tuweep, no commercial stock use on Whitmore Trail, trail monitoring, use of an adaptive management strategy, continued trail maintenance and funding, temporary trail closures, removal of mule waste from trails, education of trail users, implementation of annual limits on commercial mule rides, general retention of stock facilities and continued administrative stock use.



The Preferred Alternative, Alternative B, also includes the following, pending the ability to maintain park trails:

***South Rim Commercial Stock Use***

- No more than 10,000 commercial mule rides, including inner canyon and above rim rides would be offered each year. (current annual average use – 8,315 rides)
- On Bright Angel Trail, up to 10 rides per day would be allowed to Phantom Ranch. Plateau Point day rides from the South Rim would not be offered under this alternative.
- On South Kaibab Trail, up to 10 rides per day plus up to 12 pack stock would be allowed to Phantom Ranch (round trip).
- An above the rim ride from Yaki Point area east toward Shoshone Point would be allowed at a level of 40 rides per day (the concessioner would be responsible for maintenance of the rim trail through their operating plan).
- The current mule barn in Grand Canyon Village would house a small number of concessioner stock; the majority of concessioner stock operations would be moved to the South Kaibab Trailhead.

***North Rim Commercial Use***

- No more than 8,000 commercial mule rides, including inner canyon and above rim rides, would be offered each year. (current annual average use – 7,072 rides)
- On the North Kaibab Trail, up to 40 rides per day would be allowed to the Supai Tunnel; with no more than 20 rides on the trail at one time. The North Kaibab Trail would be open for commercial stock to the Supai Tunnel, but not to Roaring Springs.
- Up to 40 one-hour rides on the Ken Patrick Trail to the Uncle Jim Junction would be allowed per day, with no more than 20 mules on this section of trail at any one time.
- Up to 20 half-day rides to Uncle Jim Point would be allowed daily.
- The hitching rail at Uncle Jim Point would remain in place and a one-stall composting toilet would be installed to replace the existing temporary toilet.

***Private Stock Use***

- Overnight below the rim groups would be allowed, with up to six stock and six people per group. Day use (allowed both above and below the rim) would be allowed up to 12 stock and 12 people per group.

As stated above, under all Action Alternatives, a monitoring and adaptive management strategy would be used to assess trail and resource conditions.

Through the proposed adaptive management strategy, the park would monitor the cost of trail maintenance, trail conditions, total deferred maintenance costs, stock and hiker use levels, and resource conditions. This information would be used by park managers to implement additional actions if necessary (i.e. park managers could choose to further limit stock use or close trails to stock use permanently or seasonally or limit human use (seasonally, number per day, etc.)).

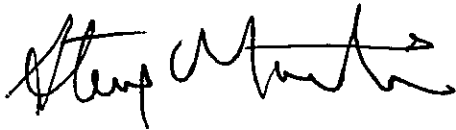
This planning effort was initiated and communicated through a letter soliciting issues and input on mule operations and stock use in May 2009. Comments received during scoping were incorporated where appropriate in the EA. The National Park Service encourages your review of and comment on the EA, which is available online at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/grca> by clicking on the project name and then scrolling to "Open for Public Comments." Comments may also be mailed to the address below. The comment period will be open for 45 days, ending April 30th, 2010.

Superintendent  
Grand Canyon National Park  
Attention: Mule Operations and Stock Use  
P.O. Box 129 (1 Village Loop for express mail)  
Grand Canyon, Arizona 86023

Before including your address, telephone number, e-mail address or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment, including your personal identifying information, may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

We appreciate your input on this planning effort. To obtain a CD or hardcopy of the EA, please contact Edward A. Bennett with the Office of Planning and Compliance, at 928-638-7695, or by email at [Edward\\_Bennett@nps.gov](mailto:Edward_Bennett@nps.gov). In the future, we will be sending 'Dear Interested Party' letters for environmental assessments via email. Please submit your email address in order to receive correspondence electronically to the email address above.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steve Martin", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Steve Martin  
Superintendent