



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Death Valley National Park

PO Box 579

Death Valley, California 92328



IN REPLY REFER TO:

L7619

March 22, 2010

Dear Interested Party:

The National Park Service (NPS) is proposing to rehabilitate five miles of the Emigrant Canyon Road, commonly referred to as Lower Wildrose Road, from MP 20 to MP 24 in Death Valley National Park (Park). This section of Lower Wildrose Road has deteriorated over the years due to flash flooding and presents a hazard to vehicular travel in the Park.

Lower Wildrose Road serves as an access point for the western boundary of the Park and is the most direct route of travel for visitors coming from Ridgecrest, California. It provides access to the Wildrose area of the Park which is home to the historic Charcoal Kilns, Telescope Peak Trail, and several backcountry campgrounds. A flash flood in the late 1980s caused major damage to the road. Since then, the road has continued to experience flooding episodes and thus continues to degrade. The resulting road is partially paved and is a safety concern for those traveling by vehicle.

Purpose and Need for Action

The need for this project is evidenced by the fact that the existing road surface is in poor condition ranging from smooth pavement to rough dirt road—in many sections, the road surface is a combination of broken worn pavement and dirt roadbed. The poor conditions are due to the seasonal overflow of Wildrose Wash, which runs parallel to and sometimes runs within and crosses Lower Wildrose Road. In addition, a spring/seep that surfaces near the alignment of the roadway is causing water to flow over the road surface and is undermining the roadbed. In its current state, Lower Wildrose Road presents visitor safety and resource impact concerns.

In addition, the roadway needs to be improved to provide for visitor safety during the perennial blooming of the Panamint daisy (*Enceliopsis covillei*) which often draws large numbers of visitors to the area.

Alternatives Under Consideration

Three alternatives (other than a No Action Alternative) have been developed for consideration. The NPS has not yet selected a preferred alternative, pending further evaluation of these alternatives. The alternatives under consideration at this time are briefly described below. These alternatives are considered feasible from an engineering standpoint, and are consistent with the guidelines for maintaining current levels of resource protection, resource access, and visitor experience within the Park.

Alternative 1: No Action

This alternative would consist of maintaining the roadway in its current condition. The existing road was once paved but several flooding episodes have caused significant damage to the road. In addition, minimal repair or rehabilitation has occurred on the road so it continues to degrade. There are several sections of the road where there is limited or no pavement.

For this alternative, no repair or rehabilitation measures would be taken. No roadside drainage improvements would be contemplated or implemented to protect road surface. The roadway would continue to deteriorate over time, potentially forcing visitors in two-wheel-drive and/or low clearance vehicles coming from the Ridgecrest, California area to drive north to Highway 190 to access the Park.

Alternative 2: Repave Lower Wildrose Road and Widen Existing Road between Mile Marker 21 and 22

This alternative would consist of maintaining the current road alignment and repaving the entire length of the roadway between MP 20 and MP 24. Minor roadside drainage improvements would also be implemented, including but not limited to French drains.

The new road would be two lanes with each lane being 9-feet wide. A one-foot wide shoulder would be constructed on both sides of the road for a total road width of 20 feet. The one location where the road does not meet a 20-foot minimum width (standard for safety) is just northeast of the old convenience store site where a rock outcropping and a drainage channel limit the road width to 18 feet. At this location the rock outcropping would be chipped-back to allow for a 20-foot road width.

Alternative 3: Repave Lower Wildrose Road, Widen Existing Road between Mile Marker 21 and 22 and Provide Drainage Features and Road Reinforcement at Drainage Crossings

This alternative would consist of maintaining the current road alignment, but modifying the road in several locations to allow drainage to cross over the road. In these locations, road reinforcement will also be provided to support the road during rain events. These different types of drainage features (e.g. culverts, Arizona crossings) and road reinforcements (e.g. gabion baskets, buried k-rails, concrete sub base) will be evaluated to determine the impacts on the surrounding area. The entire length of the roadway between MP 20 and MP 24 would also be repaved. Minor roadside drainage improvements would also be implemented, including but not limited to French drains.

The new road would be two lanes with each lane being 9-feet wide. A one-foot wide shoulder would be constructed on both sides of the road for a total road width of 20 feet. The one location where the road does not meet the 20-foot minimum width is just northeast of the old convenience store site where a rock outcropping and a drainage channel limit the road width to 18 feet. At this location the rock would be chipped-back to allow for a 20-foot road width.

Alternative 4: Repave Lower Wildrose Road, Widen Existing Road between Mile Marker 21 and 22, Provide Drainage Features and Road Reinforcement at Drainage Crossings, and Provide Turn-Out Parking Area for Observing Panamint Daisy Blooming Area

This alternative would consist of maintaining the current road alignment, but modifying the road in several locations to allow drainage to cross over the road. In these locations, road reinforcement will also be provided to support the road during rain events. These different types of drainage features (e.g. culverts, Arizona crossings), and road reinforcement (e.g. gabion baskets, buried k-rails, concrete sub base) will be evaluated to determine the impacts on the surrounding area. The entire length of the roadway between MP 20 and MP 24 would also be repaved. Minor roadside drainage improvements would also be implemented, including but not limited to French drains.

The new road would be two lanes, with each lane being 9-feet wide. A one-foot wide shoulder would be constructed on both sides of the road for a total road width of 20 feet. The one location where the road does not meet the 20-foot minimum width is just northeast of the old convenience store site where a rock outcropping and a drainage channel limit the road width to 18 feet. At this location the rock would be chipped-back to allow for a 20-foot road width.

This alternative would also include construction of a vehicle turn-out area at the location of the Panamint Daisy population to facilitate safe public observation of this wildflower, which is known from a small area in Wildrose Canyon. The turn-out would provide safe visitor parking for viewing the Panamint Daisy during blooming season. The paved vehicle turn-out area would be up to 10 feet wide and long enough to allow parallel parking for up to 3 (three) passenger vehicles (approximately 60 feet long). Signage and other road features would be implemented in accordance with local and federal requirements.

How to Comment

The NPS, Death Valley National Park, is currently accepting comments on the purpose and need for the proposed project and any issues or concerns you have regarding the alternatives under consideration or the possibility for road closures during construction. Please send hardcopy comments to the address below or visit the web address below to submit comments electronically. **Comments will be accepted through April 14, 2010.**

<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/projectHome.cfm?parkId=297&projectId=19159>

Death Valley National Park
Attn: Lower Wildrose Comments
PO Box 579
Death Valley, CA 92328-0579

We appreciate your input and your interest in public lands. If you have any questions regarding the project, please contact Victoria Wilkins, Environmental Protection Specialist, at the address above; email her at Victoria_Wilkins@nps.gov or call her at (760) 786-3227.

NOTE: Please be aware that the names and addresses of respondents may be released if requested under the Freedom of Information Act. Our practice is to make comments, including names and home addresses, available for public review during regular business hours. Individual respondents may request that we withhold their home address from the record, which we will honor to the extent allowable by law. There may also be circumstances in which we would withhold from the record a respondent's identity, as allowable by law. If you wish us to withhold your name and/or address, you must state this prominently at the beginning of your comment. We will make all submissions from organizations or businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses, available for public inspection in their entirety. Anonymous comments may be included in the public record. However, the NPS is not required to consider or respond to anonymous comments.

If you would like to receive a hard copy of the environmental document for this project when it is complete, please clearly state so in your comment or submit your request to the contact listed above and one will be sent to you during the final comment period. If you do not submit a request, a hard copy of the environmental document will not be sent to you. However, this environmental document will be available for review at the web address listed above.

Sincerely yours,



Sarah Craighead
Park Superintendent