

**National Park Service**  
**U.S. Department of the Interior**

**CANYONLANDS NATIONAL PARK**  
2282 S. West Resource Blvd.  
Moab, Utah



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## **Finding of No Significant Impact**

### **Upgrading Potash Boat Launch**

### **Environmental Assessment**

In compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act, the National Park Service (NPS) prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) to analyze the effects of constructing improvements to the Potash Boat Launch area near Canyonlands National Park. The Potash Boat Launch Area is a major launch site for park visitors and commercial outfitters, who are accessing Canyonlands National Park via the Colorado River. Though the Potash Boat Launch is on private land, the NPS and its partners (the landowner, Utah Guides and Outfitters Association and individual outfitters) want to improve the visitor experience for people conducting river trips on the Colorado River through Canyonlands National Park. The improvements will provide important information about the area, the trip ahead and Canyonlands National Park. Improvements will also provide basic facilities at the launch ramp for those launching river trips and using the area for day use. An environmental assessment (EA) was developed to address the impacts the proposed projects may have on the visitor and other resources within the project area.

The NPS selected the preferred alternative to construct three shade structures to cover picnic tables, a private changing area, and three informational kiosks. An access trail from the picnic area to the boat launch will be established and access to the picnic area will be done via a new loop road behind the existing double vault toilets. The current parking area will be improved by re-grading and new gravel. The boundaries of the parking area will also become better defined and signs will inform visitors where to park when on overnight river trips.

The EA was prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 (42 United States Code 4321 et seq.), the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations (40 Code of Federal Regulations 1500 through 1508) for implementing NEPA, and the NPS NEPA compliance guidance handbook (Director's Order (DO)-12, *Conservation Planning, Environmental Impact Analysis, and Decision-making*).

#### **DESCRIPTION OF ALTERNATIVES**

Three alternatives were developed, a no action alternative and two action alternatives. Alternative 3 was proposed to upgrade the Potash Boat Launch

area with improvement and included expanding the existing boat ramp. Work to expand or improve the launch ramp at Potash will include areas that are outside the private land the National Park Service is authorized by the landowner to operate on so this alternative was dismissed from further consideration. The no action (Alternative 1) and the other action (Alternative 2) were carried forward for further evaluation in the EA.

Alternative 1 (No-Action) described the continued current management of the Potash Boat Launch area. Currently the parking area is not delineated very well and issues arise when groups who utilize the river for several days park their vehicles near the boat ramp. Other visitors using the boat ramp for the day have a difficult time getting their boats on and down the ramp with vehicles parked along the top of the boat ramp. Three vault toilets are provided within the Potash area. A basic vault toilet and kiosk is provided near the concrete boat ramp. This vault toilet is not sufficient enough facility to accommodate the use of thousands of river users and is frequently in need of cleaning and maintenance. The basic board kiosk between the pit toilet and the boat ramp contains simple information regarding exotic mussels but does not have enough room to provide additional information about Canyonlands National Park, the expectations of using the Colorado River and entering a national park. In the summer of 2009, the NPS did build a double vault toilet near the main parking area to better accommodate visitors. Also there are two entrances into the parking lot from the main dirt road. Under this alternative, this parking area will remain as is and no further improvements will be provided or constructed.

In Alternative 2 (Preferred), the NPS will provide improvements to the area by constructing three 14'x16' shade structures. These shade structures will have lattilla roofs that will provide shade only but will not stop the rain. The floor area will be compacted soil or road base. One 6'x6' changing station will be constructed near the shade structures for visitors to use to change in and out of their river gear. The changing room will have no roof, but it will have a concrete floor. A road will be constructed around the back of the double vault toilet as shown on the site plan to enable visitors with trailers with boats to access the picnic area. The road will be 36' wide and 320' long, and will have a compacted road base running surface. The total road area is 13,750 square feet. A 24" diameter culvert may be needed. Three informational kiosks will be constructed; one near the boat ramp, one near the double vault toilet and one at the entrance to the parking area. A trail will be developed from the shade structures to the boat ramp. This may require clearing an additional 1,000 square feet of tamarisk. The informal trails may be revegetated to keep foot traffic localized on the main trail and prevent additional social trails.

Boundaries of the parking area will be established by lining the limits of the parking area with dirt mounds and rocks from the area. One access road will be closed off to expand the area for more parking. The entire existing parking area will be graded and graveled. Rock material may be acquired from the Intrepid quarry and gravel material will be commercially purchased and brought to the parking area as a haul and dump operation. There will be no staging areas or borrow sources.

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**BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES**

The following best management practices were developed to minimize the degree and/or severity of adverse effects and are common to the action alternative.

- All construction equipment will remain within the existing project area. No equipment will be allowed in the floodplain area.
- To minimize the amount of ground disturbance, staging and stockpiling areas will be in previously disturbed areas, away from visitor use areas and the river channel to the extent possible. All staging and stockpiling areas will be returned to pre-construction conditions or improved by restoring to more natural conditions following construction.
- Because disturbed soils are susceptible to erosion until revegetation takes place, standard erosion control measures such as silt fences and/or sand bags will be used to minimize any potential soil erosion.
- Revegetation efforts will strive to reconstruct the natural spacing, abundance, and diversity of native plant species using native species. All disturbed areas will be restored as nearly as possible to pre-construction conditions shortly after construction activities are completed.
- Fugitive dust generated by construction will be controlled by spraying water on the construction site. Water will be hauled in and will not be pumped from the Colorado River.
- To reduce noise and emissions, construction equipment will not be permitted to idle for long periods of time.
- To minimize possible petrochemical leaks from construction equipment, regularly monitor and check construction equipment to identify and repair any leaks. Equipment will be refueled in disturbed areas, away from the river channel and floodplain.
- Maintenance workers and supervisors will be informed about special status species. If a species were discovered in the project area, provisions will require the cessation of construction activities until resource management staff re-evaluates the project.
- Prior to construction activities, the project area will be resurveyed. If listed species are found in the vicinity of the project area activities will be limited to ones that are unobtrusive or to times of the year when the listed species are not present or less affected by disturbance.
- Any groundbreaking construction activities should be performed before migratory birds return to the site (approximately March 15) or after all young have fledged (approximately July 31) to avoid incidental take.
- If construction is scheduled to start during the period in which migratory bird species are present, steps should be taken to prevent migratory birds from establishing nests in the potential impact area. These steps could include covering equipment and structures and use of various excluders (e.g., noise). Birds can be harassed to *prevent* them from nesting on the site. Once a nest is

established, they cannot be harassed until all young have fledged and are capable of leaving the nest site.

- If construction is scheduled to start during the period when migratory birds are present, a site specific survey for nesting migratory birds should be performed starting at least 2 weeks prior to site clearing.
- If nesting birds are found during the survey, buffer areas should be established around nests.
- Construction should be deferred in buffer areas until birds have left the nest. Confirmation that all young have fledged should be made by a qualified biologist.
- Construction activities will maintain a seasonal buffer from March 1 through August 31, if occupied Mexican spotted owl nesting sites area found within 1 mile of Potash, to protect breeding and nesting owls.
- Construction activities will maintain a seasonal buffer from early May through mid September to protect nesting and fledgling Southwestern willow flycatchers, if occupied nests found within one quarter mile of Potash.
- Construction activities will maintain seasonal buffers if occupied raptor nesting sites are found in the vicinity of Potash.
- Parking area will be identified and may be fenced with construction tape or some similar material prior to construction activity. The fencing will define the construction zone and confine activity to the minimum area required for construction.
- In the unlikely event cultural resources materials are inadvertently discovered during the project, all construction activities will be halted until the materials can be analyzed and recovered by NPS archeologists. The state historic preservation officer and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, will be consulted as necessary, according to §36 CFR 800.13, *Post Review Discoveries*. If needed, formal §106 compliance will be conducted prior to resuming construction. In the unlikely event that human remains are discovered during construction, provisions outlined in the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (1990) will be followed.

### **SELECTION OF THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE**

Alternative 2 is the National Park Service preferred alternative because it best meets the purpose and need of the project as well as the project objectives to 1) to provide basic facilities to accommodate the high level of use from park visitors, the general public and commercial outfitters, 2) to provide access to park information that will educate the public on the rules and regulations of the area, the river and a national park, and 3) to provide a parking area that is functional for all user groups.

### **ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE**

Alternative 2 is the environmentally preferred alternative. The environmentally preferred alternative is determined by applying the criteria suggested in the

National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), which is guided by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ). The CEQ provides direction that, "The environmentally preferable alternative is the alternative that will promote the national environmental policy as expressed in NEPA's § 101:

1. Fulfill the responsibilities of each generation as trustee of the environment for succeeding generations;
2. Assure for all Americans safe, healthful, productive, and aesthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings;
3. Attain the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation, risk of health or safety, or other undesirable and unintended consequences;
4. Preserve important historic, cultural, and natural aspects to our national heritage and maintain, wherever possible, an environment that supports diversity and a variety of individual choice;
5. Achieve a balance between population and resource use that will permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life's amenities; and
6. Enhance the quality of renewable resources and approach the maximum attainable recycling of renewable resources."

Alternative 2 is the environmentally preferred alternative because it best addresses these six evaluation factors. This alternative will provide improvements to the area for visitors, while minimizing environmental impacts to the extent possible. The proposed facilities and improved parking area will be used by future generations.

#### **WHY THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE WILL NOT HAVE A SIGNIFICANT EFFECT ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT**

As defined in 40 CFR §1508.27, significance is determined by examining the following criteria:

***Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal Agency believes the balance of the effect will be beneficial.***

Implementation of the preferred alternative will result in some adverse impacts; however, the overall benefits of constructing the improvements, particularly to the benefit of park visitors and concessioners outweigh these negative effects.

Adverse effects are expected to all impact topics: soils, vegetation, threatened and endangered species, and visual visitor use and experience. The construction of several improvements to the area and the parking lot at Potash will result in minor adverse and beneficial impacts to soils, vegetation and threatened and endangered species. Visitor use and experience will benefit the greatest from proposed improvements and impacts will be moderate. The establishment of shade structures and kiosks and improving the existing parking area will have short to long term adverse impacts to the soils and vegetation within the 1.6 acres of the project area. Some impacts to soils and vegetation will occur from the new trail building and digging for concrete foundations of shade structures

and changing structure. Some vegetation will be removed within the shade structure sites and changing room site as well as within the loop road. Constructing a trail from the boat ramp to the picnic area and double vault toilets will reduce the use of the many social trails in the area and will further improve local vegetation and soil conditions by keeping foot traffic localized on one trail. Any ground-disturbing activity using backhoes, graders and other heavy construction equipment may have a detectable effect on threatened and endangered species and species of special concern. Construction practices such as not conducting activities during sensitive times (i.e. nesting) will limit these effects to being short-term and be of little consequence to the species population. Building shade structures over picnic tables will allow visitors to enjoy the area even during the hottest months. A changing area will benefit river users to change in and out of their river attire. At first, visitors may be adversely impacted during the constructing of these improvements but this will be short term and minor. It is important to note that the new improvements may also bring more river users to use this boat launch to access the river. This increase may decrease the solitude that visitors are seeking when running the Colorado River and will be a moderate adverse impact.

***Degree of effect on public health or safety:***

The preferred alternative will have an overall beneficial effect on public health and safety, particularly for the park's concessioners that regularly use the Potash Boat Launch area. By improving the parking lot, there will be better delineated areas for concessioners and visitors to park and prevent overnight river users from blocking the boat ramp for other users. The new trail will also keep some visitors from walking through the parking area to the boat ramp.

***Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas:***

The preferred alternative will not impact unique characteristics of the area including park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas because these areas do not exist within the project area.

***Degree to which effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial:***

There were no highly controversial effects identified during either preparation of the environmental assessment or the public review period.

***Degree to which the possible effects on the quality of the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks:***

There were no highly uncertain, unique, or unknown risks identified during either preparation of the environmental assessment or the public review period.

***Degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration:***

The preferred alternative is not expected to set a precedent for future actions with significant effects, nor does it represent a decision in principle about a future consideration.

***Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts:***

Cumulative effects were determined by combining the effects of the alternative with other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions at each park unit. A number of past, ongoing, or reasonably foreseeable future actions within the park and in the surrounding region of the park unit was identified and analyzed in the environmental assessment. Cumulative impacts vary by resource; however, cumulative impacts are not expected to be greater than minor in intensity. The relative adverse contributions of the preferred alternative to the overall cumulative impacts are predicted to be minor.

***Degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed on National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical places:***

The Potash Boat Ramp area has had hundreds of years of human disturbance as well as periodic flooding of the Colorado River. A memo was sent to the Utah State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) on February 23, 2010 for their concurrence on using the Southeast Utah Group Programmatic Agreement for categorically excluding this project under section A and B: "human and natural impacts such that, if sites were once present, no integrity remains". As no historic properties are present in the project area, a "No Historic Properties Affected" determination was made by the NPS. The Utah SHPO concurred with the NPS determination on March 17, 2010.

***Degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its critical habitat:***

The biological assessment of federally threatened, endangered and candidate species was developed within the EA and describes seven species that occur or potentially occur within the Potash Boat Launch area. In accordance with the Endangered Species Act, §7, consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) concerning impacts to threatened and endangered species was initiated during the initial drafting of this EA. In February of 2010, public scoping letters describing the proposed action were sent to the Utah Ecological Service Office of the USFWS. Response to the public scoping letter, including threatened, endangered, and candidate species lists, was received from Utah USFWS in March 2010 and a site visit with an USFWS fishery biologist was conducted. A biological assessment was then included within the EA that included determination of effect for each of the seven species to be "may effect but not likely to adversely affect". Additional best management practices for the six species can be found in the EA.

Concurrence with the above determinations was received from the Utah USFWS office on June 17, 2010.

***Whether the action threatens a violation of federal, state, or local environmental protection law:***

These actions will not violate any federal, state, or local environmental laws.

**APPROPRIATE USE, UNACCEPTABLE, IMPAIRMENTS**

Sections 1.5 and 8.12 of NPS *Management Policies* underscore the fact that not all uses are allowable or appropriate in units of the National Park System. The proposed use was screened to determine consistency with applicable laws, executive orders, regulations and policies; consistency with existing plans for public use and resource management; actual and potential effects to park resources; total costs to the Park Service; and whether that public interest will be served. This plan is an appropriate use according to Canyonlands General Management Plan and with the goals objectives of the *2006 National Park Service Management Policies* (NPS 2006). Providing basic facilities and information kiosks are a common and vital structure in most park units. The proposed improvements are consistent with the park's general management plan and other related park plans. With this in mind, the NPS finds that creation and use of these parking area improvements are an acceptable use for Canyonlands National Park.

The impact threshold at which impairment occurs is not always readily apparent. Therefore, the National Park Service applies a standard that offers greater assurance that impairment will not occur by avoiding unacceptable impacts. These are impacts that fall short of impairment, but are still not acceptable within a particular park's environment. Park managers must not allow uses that will cause unacceptable impacts; they must evaluate existing or proposed uses and determine whether the associated impacts on park resources and values are acceptable. Proper location, sizing, as well as construction materials for these facilities and establishing best management practices will ensure that unacceptable impacts to natural resources and values will not occur.

In analyzing impairments in the NEPA analysis for this project the NPS takes into an account the fact that if an impairment were likely to occur, such impacts will be considered to be major or significant under CEQ regulations. This is because the context and intensity of the impact will be sufficient to render what will normally be a minor and major or significant. Taking this into consideration, NPS guidance documents note that "Not all major or significant impact under a NEPA analysis are impairments. However, all impairments to NPS resources and values will constitute a major or significant impact under NEPA. Although this project is federally funded and is using federal resources, this project occurs on private land. Therefore, there will be no impairment to park resources and a determination on impairment does not need to be made in the EA.

**PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

The EA was made available for public review and comment during a 30-day period ending July 4, 2010. To notify the public of this review period, a press release was mailed to stakeholders, affiliated Native American Tribes, interested parties and newspapers. Copies of the document were sent to the US Fish and Wildlife Service. The EA was also made available at the Grand County Library, and at the Canyonlands National Park Headquarters office in Moab, UT. The EA

plan was posted on NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment website (PEPC) at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/cany>. No comments were received during the public review period.

### CONCLUSION

In consideration of the comments received throughout the planning process, careful review of potential resource and visitor impacts, and developing appropriate mitigation to protect resources, the preferred alternative best strikes a balance between the widest range of use and enjoyment of Canyonlands National Park degradation of the environment or risk of health or safety.

The preferred alternative does not constitute an action that normally requires preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The preferred alternative will not have a significant effect on the human environment. Adverse environmental impacts that will occur are negligible to moderate. There are no unmitigated adverse impacts on public health, public safety, threatened or endangered species, sites or districts listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, or other unique characteristics of the region. No highly uncertain or controversial impacts, unique or unknown risks, significant cumulative effects, or elements of precedence were identified. Implementation of the action will not violate any Federal, State, or local environmental protection law. Based on the foregoing, it has been determined that an EIS is not required for this proposed project on private land, and thus, will not be prepared. Implementation may take place immediately after the date of this decision.

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_

Mary Gibson Scott

Acting Regional Director, NPS Intermountain Region

7/12/10  
Date