



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Death Valley National Park
PO Box 579
Death Valley, California 92328



IN REPLY REFER TO:

L7617

xL2423

July 20, 2010

Dear Interested Party:

The National Park Service is preparing an Environmental Assessment (EA) in accordance with National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) for renewed use of gravel borrow pits along Saline Valley Road in the northwest portion of Death Valley National Park, California. These borrow pits would be used by Inyo County to maintain Saline Valley Road as a graded-dirt road. Attached is a brief description of the project and location map for proposed borrow sites.

Alternatives under consideration include (1) taking no action and (2) permitting use and expansion of six existing borrow sites along Saline Valley Road.

Issues that will be considered in the EA include the project's effect on air, water quality, and cultural and recreational resources, as well as other social, economic and environmental effects.

As part of the process for determining the scope of issues to be addressed in the EA and for identifying the important issues related to the proposed action, we request your comments on the above issues and any other issues that you can identify as important. We intend to use your comments to:

- Identify the range of alternatives and impacts and the potentially significant issues to be addressed in the Environmental Assessment.
- Identify and eliminate from detailed study the issues which are not potentially significant or which have been covered by prior environmental review.
- Identify other environmental review and consultation requirements.

We request your comments by **August 21, 2010**. If you do not reply by that date, we will assume that you have no comments at this stage of project development.

Scoping comments can be sent to:

Park Superintendent
ATTN: Saline EA Comments
Death Valley National Park
P.O. Box 579
Death Valley, California 92328

Or, they can be submitted electronically on the following website:

<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/deva>

Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, be advised 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 from public review your personal identifying information, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

If you would like to receive a hard copy of the environmental document for this project when it is complete, please state so clearly 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 made available for review at the web address listed above.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Sarah Craighead".

Sarah Craighead
Superintendent

Enclosures (2):
Project Synopsis
Location Map

Environmental Assessment for Saline Valley Road Borrow Sites Project Synopsis

The National Park Service (NPS) is considering permitting the reactivation of sand-and-gravel-borrow pits (sites) for maintenance of Saline Valley Road in Death Valley National Park (DEVA). Saline Valley Road is a graded, dirt road connecting State Highway 190 at the southern terminus of Saline Valley Road to Loretta Mine-Death Valley Road at the northern terminus. Saline Valley Road forms much of the northwestern boundary of Death Valley National Park (Park). Prior to the passage of the California Desert Protection Act of 1994 (PL 103-433) that formed Death Valley National Park from expanded boundaries of Death Valley National Monument, the material sites were located west of the monument boundary on lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). During that period of time, Inyo County used several borrow sites under a permit issued by the BLM for maintenance and repairs to Saline Valley Road.

Portions of Saline Valley Road were washed out in late 1980s, particularly on the southern part of the roadway that goes through South Pass and Grapevine Canyon. Inyo County extracted sand and gravel from several sites for repair of the roadway including the six sites considered in this Environmental Assessment (EA). In 1994, with the passage of the California Desert Protection Act, these sites were located within the expanded boundaries of the new DEVA managed by NPS. According to Inyo County, only one of these sites (Waucoba) has been used since 1994.

Saline Valley Road is in need of repair and re-grading in sections. Inyo County is responsible for the maintenance of Saline Valley Road and has a right-of-way for the road and its maintenance. Material from the six borrow sites is needed to maintain this road in a cost-effective manner. No other suitable materials sites have been identified at a reasonable distance to the road within the Park boundaries, and obtaining materials from outside the Park is both expensive and runs the risk of introducing non-native plant species to the Park environment.

The proposed project is to reopen and potentially expand six of the existing sand-and-gravel-borrow sites along Saline Valley Road. The general location of the potential borrow sites along Saline Valley Road are shown on the enclosed figure. The Park is preparing an Environmental Assessment (EA) in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act to determine impact of use of these borrow sites for road maintenance. This EA will focus on the borrow sites and will not address road maintenance activities along the roadway of Saline Valley Road.

Preliminary site selection was made using the following criteria:

- Each borrow site was previously used for obtaining materials for use on Saline Valley Road and thus native vegetation was previously disturbed in the area of excavation;
- Each borrow site contains appropriate material (sand and gravel) for road maintenance;
- Each borrow site is in a non-wilderness area;
- Each borrow site is adjacent to, or a short distance away (less than 1/2 mile away) from the roadway and are spaced out along the roadway to reduce material haul distances and associated impacts;
- Each borrow site is located on NPS-administered land within DEVA; and
- Material from the borrow sites will only be used on Saline Valley Road within DEVA.

Two other previously used borrow sites have been dismissed from consideration due to resource concerns.