# ALTERNATIVE B

## CONCEPT

This alternative would place a major emphasis on promoting wilderness values and restoring natural ecosystem processes. There would be greater opportunities than currently exist for visitors to experience untrammeled, challenging conditions. Specifically,

- Large areas of the park would be zoned as designated wilderness and backcountry (assessed as eligible for wilderness). In these areas, visitors would experience a wilderness situation.
- Visitors who did not access the backcountry zone areas or designated wilderness directly could gain an understanding of wilderness values indirectly through enhanced interpretive presentations in visitor facilities.
- Visitors would have greater day use opportunities with improved and more concentrated facilities, greater accessibility in developed areas, and enhanced exhibits.
- Visitor use levels would be actively managed in the designated wilderness and backcountry zones to reduce resource impacts and support natural ecosystem processes.
- Key cultural resources, including historic structures, would be stabilized and/or preserved or rehabilitated, sometimes limiting visitor access.

As shown in the Alternative B Management Zones map, this alternative would maximize the use of the wilderness threshold zone outside the designated wilderness and backcountry zones. The frontcountry zone would be limited to the use area between and adjacent to Pine Springs and Frijole Ranch, very small staging areas for the Salt Basin Dunes and Williams Ranch, and the old Signal Peak housing area. Developed zones would be bordered more frequently by wilderness threshold zones than frontcountry zones, providing little transition from developed to natural settings. New access points might be established, but would be primitive with few or no facilities. As described in the preferred alternative, the park's trail inventory could be expanded by mapping old ranch trails and road traces, but these would not be improved or maintained and would provide a primitive hiking experience.

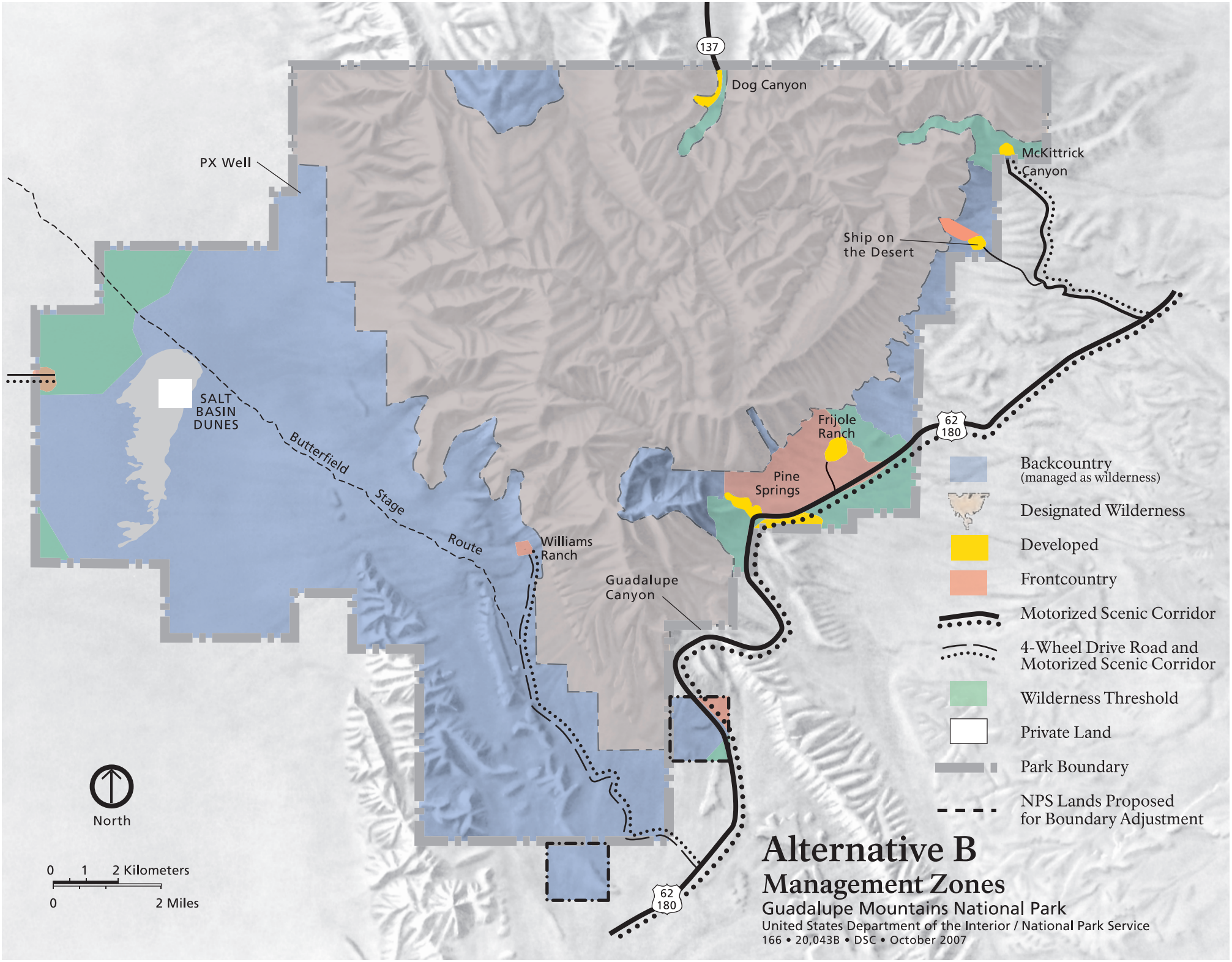
## FACILITIES AND ASSOCIATED VISITOR ACTIVITIES

### Pine Springs

**Management Zoning.** The management zones that would be applied to the Pine Springs area are shown in the Alternative B Management Zones map. Zoning would be the same as the preferred alternative, except that the area south of U.S. Highway 62/180 outside the developed zone would be in the wilderness threshold zone (rather than the frontcountry zone).

**Visitor Center Area.** The visitor center and associated parking lot and picnic area would continue to be a primary visitor destination point for day use and for visitors who make a single, park-related stop as they travel through the region on U.S. Highway 62/180. The visitor center building also would continue to be used for administrative offices. The displays in the visitor center would be improved to provide an increased emphasis on wilderness, including the ecological importance of wilderness and the ecosystem relationships within the park.

An understanding of wilderness values and leave-no-trace standards would be available to all visitors seeking a backcountry experi


137
Dog Canyon
PX Well
McKittrick Canyon
Ship on the Desert
SALT BASIN DUNES
Butterfield Stage Route
Frijole Ranch
62 180
Pine Springs
Williams Ranch
Guadalupe Canyon
Backcountry (managed as wilderness)
Designated Wilderness
Developed
Frontcountry
Motorized Scenic Corridor
4-Wheel Drive Road and Motorized Scenic Corridor
Wilderness Threshold
Private Land
Park Boundary
NPS Lands Proposed for Boundary Adjustment
North
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ence either through day hikes into the park's backcountry or through a backcountry permit allowing overnight use. An understanding of wilderness values and ethics would be emphasized in all interpretive activities.

**The Pinery Area.** Facilities and management of the Butterfield Stage Station Ruins would not change from the no action alternative.

**Pine Springs Trailhead Area.** All overnight camping would be removed from the trailhead area at Pine Springs. Recreational vehicle owners and tent campers would have to find camping at sites outside the park, such as at commercial operations on private land or on U.S. Forest Service or Bureau of Land Management lands to the north in New Mexico.

The closed tent camping area would be restored to a natural condition. The parking lot would be available only for day use, such as by picnickers and day hikers, and for overnight parking of the empty vehicles belonging to hikers who were making multiday hikes to the interior of the park.

The elimination of camping would make more trailhead parking available for wilderness users. The picnic tables would be more available to day users, and picnicking may become a more common activity in the trailhead area.

**Administrative Facilities.** No new offices or operational facilities would be built. Existing or additional operational needs would be addressed by adapting existing structures in the housing area south of U.S. Highway 62/180.

### Frijole Ranch

**Management Zoning.** Management zoning would be similar to the preferred alternative, except that the area south of U.S. Highway 62/180 would be zoned as wilderness threshold rather than frontcountry

**Facilities and Activities.** Frijole Ranch would continue to be a visitor destination for day use opportunities, consistent with the settings and experiences prescribed for the developed and frontcountry zones. The cultural landscape restoration that was described in alternative A would be implemented, and the exteriors of the buildings would be preserved for interpretation of this national register site. However, the emphasis would be on maintaining facilities, consistent with this alternative's focus on enhanced resource restoration.

The rehabilitated interior of the Frijole Ranch House would continue to house the cultural museum. The facilities at Frijole Ranch would continue to be staffed primarily by volunteers.

The parking area, picnic area, hard-surface path, trail signs, and vault toilet that currently are being constructed at Frijole Ranch would not change from alternative A. However, alternative B would remove the public corral and NPS pack animal operations would be relocated to a leased site outside the park. Both sites would be restored to a natural condition.

Periodic dredging of Manzanita Spring would cease under this alternative, and the pool that has been artificially maintained since early pioneer days would be allowed to silt in. This would result in its return to a more natural wetland community at this site.

### McKittrick Canyon

**Management Zoning.** Zoning in the McKittrick Canyon area would be the same as that described for the preferred alternative.

**Facilities and Activities.** McKittrick Canyon would continue to be a destination for day use activities. With the following excep-

tions, facilities and activities in this area would be the same as in the preferred alternative.

- The upgraded exhibits at the visitor contact station would provide orientation to self-discovery opportunities and would place added emphasis on wilderness and leave-no-trace use of the land.
- Restrooms would not be provided in the Pratt Cabin area.

### Dog Canyon

**Management Zoning.** Zoning in the Dog Canyon area would be the same as that described for the preferred alternative.

**Facilities and Activities.** Many features at Dog Canyon would remain the same as in alternative A. Changes implemented with alternative B would include the following.

The visitor contact station would be improved and its exhibits would be renewed to better interpret the natural and cultural history of the area. The focus also would include wilderness and leave-no-trace use of the land.

Recreational vehicle camping would be removed. The existing tent camping and hiking facilities would be maintained.

The water storage system at Dog Canyon would be enlarged to meet visitor and operational needs. Changes would be the same as those described for the preferred alternative.

The public horse corral would be removed. The NPS' pack horse operation at Dog Canyon would be relocated to a leased facility outside the park. These sites and the former recreational vehicle camping area would be restored to a natural condition.

### Salt Basin Dunes

**Management Zoning.** A small area just inside the park boundary would be zoned frontcountry. Beyond this zone to a distance of about a mile from the boundary, the wilderness threshold zone would be applied. The remainder of the area, including the dunes, were found eligible for future consideration as wilderness and would be zoned backcountry.

**Facilities and Activities.** Staging and access for the Salt Basin Dunes area would be similar to that described for the preferred alternative. However, the parking lot and trailhead would be just inside the park boundary, and visitors would hike a 2-mile-long primitive trail to access the dunes. The former small parking lot about a mile from the boundary would be removed and the site would be restored to a natural condition.

### Williams Ranch

**Management Zoning.** Management zoning would be the same as described for the preferred alternative.

**Facilities and Activities.** The condition and management of the road and parking lot associated with Williams Ranch would be the same as alternative A. In this alternative, the cultural landscape would be stabilized. Otherwise, facilities and activities would be the same as the preferred alternative.

### Other Visitor Facilities

**Ship-on-the-Desert** would be assigned to the developed zone and the road into the site would be in the motorized scenic corridor zone. The building and cultural landscape would be preserved, but the site would not be adaptively used for any purposes.

**PX Well** is within an area that has been found eligible for future consideration as wilderness, and would be zoned backcountry. It would be maintained as a discovery site.

At **Dell City**, the visitor contact station would be upgraded as described in the preferred alternative.

At the **Guadalupe Pass trailhead area**, the National Park Service would formalize an access agreement with landowners as described in the preferred alternative, and would provide minimal improvements for signage and parking.

## NATURAL RESOURCES

Natural resource management would emphasize restoration and preservation of impacted landscapes. Management of threatened or endangered species and other species of concern, and management of air quality would be the same as described for alternative A.

### Wilderness

Alternative B would have less extensive development of trailheads that provide access to backcountry and designated wilderness zones. Otherwise, its management of wilderness would be identical to the preferred alternative.

### Geological and Paleontological Resources

Geological and paleontological resources would be managed in a manner similar to that described in alternative A. A permit system would be used to provide access to specific stratotype and fossil locations and would increase the protection of these resources.

### Plants and Wildlife

The goal of all management actions for plants and wildlife would be identical to that described for alternative A.

**Management of Human-Disturbed Ecosystems.** These areas would be managed as described in the preferred alternative. In addition, vegetation would be restored at sites where facilities were removed. These would include, but may not be limited to, the tent campground at Pine Springs, the public corrals and NPS pack animal operations, and the parking lot near the Salt Basin Dunes.

**Management of Exotic Species.** The management of exotic plant and animal species, including aoudads, that threatened park resources or public health would the same as alternative A. Changes from alternative A would include the following.

- This alternative would have the broader goal of eradicating all species of exotic plants throughout the park.
- It would use more strict control measures to protect plant and animal species and communities from impacts from exotic species.
- Horse use would be prohibited within the designated wilderness and backcountry zones to prevent the spread of exotic species.
- Conditions for native plant revegetation would be enhanced by creating an active planting program using locally collected seed.

**Management of Wetland and Aquatic Environments.** All wetland and aquatic environments would be protected as natural ecosystems. The protection of fragile wetland soils and vegetation of Smith Spring would be improved by limiting access. After Section 106 consultation, Manzanita Spring would be allowed to naturally fill with sediment and return to a more natural wetland.

**Management of Research Natural Areas.** Management would continue as described for alternative A. However, new lands could be identified and designated as research natural areas where no human-caused impacts would occur. Specifically, this alternative would designate research natural areas

in representative ecosystems, including the Chihuahuan Desert and the Salt Basin Dunes.

### Water Quality and Quantity

The management of water resources for this alternative would be the same as those described for the preferred alternative.

## CULTURAL RESOURCES

Cultural resource management would be directed toward preserving and stabilizing nationally significant resources only. Management of ethnographic resources would be the same as described for alternative A.

### Archeological Resources

Management of archeological resources would be the same as alternative A except that archeological sites would be protected and preserved.

### Historic Structures and Landscapes

Historic structures and landscapes listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places would be preserved while providing minimum access required for visitor understanding. Remnants of historic ranching activities in the backcountry zone would be removed after they were determined to be ineligible for listing in the national register.

The management of historic structures and landscapes associated with visitor facilities throughout the park was described previously under the heading "Facilities and Associated Visitor Activities." A summary of the key changes that would occur under alternative B includes the following.

- The Frijole Ranch house and cultural landscape would be rehabilitated and interpreted as a period ranch consistent with the developed zone.
- Williams Ranch structure would be rehabilitated and the cultural landscape would be stabilized with no interior visitor access consistent with the frontcountry zone.
- Pratt Cabin and cultural landscape would be preserved.
- Ship-on-the-Desert and its cultural landscape would be preserved with no adaptive use.

Management of the Hunter Line Cabin, Butterfield Stage route, Cox Cabin, and Bowl Cabin would be the same as in the preferred alternative. The preferred approach for remnants of historic ranching activities in the backcountry zone would be removal after they were determined to not be eligible for listing in the national register. Natural conditions would be restored at removal sites.

### Collections

Museum collections would be stored in conditions consistent with NPS preservation and security standards within the park. This would be accomplished by consolidating specimens in existing facilities in the park that have been adapted for museum collections storage use, and through use of regional storage facilities.

## VISITOR USE AND UNDERSTANDING

Many elements of visitor use and understanding already have been described in other elements of alternative B, particularly including "Facilities and Associated Visitor Activities." To avoid repetition, this section focuses on the broad nature of visitor use and understanding that would be associated with this alternative, plus features that contribute to visitor use and understanding that were not covered previously.

Visitor understanding would be focused on promoting wilderness values and restoring natural ecosystem processes. Improvements in interpretation would be less extensive than in the preferred alternative.

### Visitor Experience

The Pine Springs visitor center would provide an improved understanding of the park's geological and natural history, wilderness, and leave-no-trace use of the land.

Frijole Ranch would continue to house the cultural museum.

Because the campground at Pine Springs would be removed, visitors would not have the opportunity to camp along the eastern alluvial uplands and would not have the easily accessible opportunity to understand the values and threats to the night sky resource.

An understanding of wilderness values and leave-no-trace standards would be available to all visitors seeking a backcountry experience either through day hikes into the park's backcountry or through a backcountry permit allowing overnight use. An understanding of wilderness values and ethics would be emphasized in all interpretive activities.

The trail and backcountry camping system would not change from alternative A. Through direct experience, visitors would be able to gain a first-hand understanding of wilderness values.

### Visitor Education, Interpretation, and Orientation

Education, interpretation, and orientation opportunities would be concentrated in accessible, enhanced visitor facilities. Facilities and exhibits would be improved at the visitor center, Frijole Ranch, Pratt Cabin, and contact stations in McKittrick Canyon, Dog Canyon, and Dell City. Consistent with this alternative's theme of enhanced resource restoration, most visitor exhibits would highlight the park's natural and geologic resources, the fragile canyon ecosystem, the ecological importance of wilderness, and self-discovery opportunities. The exception would be at Frijole Ranch, which would focus on cultural and historical themes.

New visitor orientation and interpretive exhibits would be provided at the Dell City visitor contact station, with a focus on interpreting the ecology, geology, and cultural history of the Salt Basin Dunes. In other locations, the focus would be on self-discovery with visitors seeking a wilderness experience.

### Interpretive and Educational Outreach Programs and Media

Programs and media would be enhanced at the visitor center and contact stations using new audiovisual technology to present park themes, information, and values.

- Visitor contact stations at McKittrick Canyon and Dell City would have updated exhibits, information technology, and audiovisual systems to maximize the visitor educational experience and minimize staffing requirements.
- Computer based audiovisual media would provide enhanced opportunities for those who do not actually explore the park.
- Video technology would simulate trips in park's wilderness areas for those unable to access it directly.
- Interactive media, the park's Internet site, and other technology would be enhanced to more effectively interpret park resources and values.

### Visitor Access, Circulation, and Parking

**Visitor Access.** Alternative B would decrease overnight access to the park through the removal of existing camping facilities.

- All overnight camping would be removed from the trailhead area at Pine Springs, which would become a day use only area. Recreational vehicle owners and tent campers would have to find camping at sites outside the park
- Recreational vehicle camping would be removed at Dog Canyon, which would become a tent camping only area.

**Circulation.** Alternative B would remove the 1-mile-long road from the park's west boundary to the Salt Basin Dunes parking area.

**Parking.** A new parking lot for the new Salt Basin Dunes trailhead would be constructed just inside the park boundary. This parking lot would have a gravel surface and space for 10 vehicles. At the Pine Springs trailhead, additional parking for day use and overnight backcountry hikers would be available because all camping would be removed from this site.

### Hiking Trails, Trailheads, and Horse Use

**Hiking Trails.** Existing trails would be managed as described in alternative A. As described in the preferred alternative, the National Park Service may add to the park's trail inventory by mapping hiking trails along abandoned trails and road traces on the park's west side that date from the area's ranching period. These all would be managed as primitive trails in a wilderness setting, and improvements would be limited to cairns to mark trail routes in difficult-to-follow areas and, possibly, signs at junctions with other trails.

**Trailheads.** Alternative B would include a new trailhead just inside the park boundary about 2 miles west of the Salt Basin Dunes. This alternative also would provide signage and an enlarged parking lot at the Guadalupe Pass trailhead.

**Horse Use.** Alternative B would eliminate all visitor horse use in the park. The public corrals at Frijole Ranch and Dog Canyon would be removed.

## PARK OPERATIONS

Many elements of park operations would remain the same as in alternative A. Most of the changes that would occur already have been described in other elements of alternative B, particularly including "Facilities and Associated Visitor Activities." They include the following:

- Existing facilities in developed and frontcountry zones would be used to meet administrative needs.
- Sanitation facilities in wilderness threshold and backcountry zones could be provided in cases of demonstrated need that could not be mitigated by improved education of visitors.
- All NPS pack horse operations would be moved to leased sites outside the park.
- The water storage system at Dog Canyon would be enlarged.

In addition to features described earlier for this alternative, the Pine Top patrol cabin would be removed and area would be restored consistent with the backcountry zone.

## BOUNDARY ADJUSTMENT

Alternative B would include a boundary adjustment like that described in alternative A.

## COSTS

The estimated costs to fully implement alternative B were shown in table 4. The costs in the table provide a relative sense of the resources necessary to implement this alternative. The cost estimate is in 2006 dollars and has been rounded to the nearest thou-

sand dollars. These estimates should not be used for budgetary purposes.

The total one-time cost to implement alternative B would be $4,334,000. The one-time construction costs primarily would address improvements to historic structures, trailheads, and some contract stations to support visitor opportunities to experience wilderness while providing an improved orientation to the park. The estimated one-time construction costs would be $2,164,000.

Alternative B would include extensive work on park resources, including restoration of the areas currently occupied by campgrounds and horse corrals, and the removal of exotic species. The total estimated one-time non-facility costs would be $2,170,000, which would include $2,070,000 for resource management and $100,000 for improvements to visitor orientation.

Annual operating costs for the park would be covered with the estimated 2008 base budget of $2,933,000.

The total number of full time employees would be 34, which is the target number identified in the core operations strategy. With the increased operational flexibility, the National Park Service anticipates being able to hire temporary and seasonal staff to complete some resource management actions included in this alternative, such as the Section 106 study on Manzanita Spring and landscape rehabilitation work.

The total amount of deferred maintenance in the park would be unlikely to change because of this alternative. The housing units would continue to be used for administrative office space, and the deferred maintenance on these structures could remain. The increased operational flexibility in this alternative could enable the National Park Service to address some deferred maintenance actions in a more timely manner, and implement some priority actions that could be funded from the park budget.