DRAFT GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN /
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

National Park Service
United States Department of the Interior

GUADALUPE MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK
Texas

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Draft
General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement

Guadalupe Mountains National Park
Culberson and Hudspeth Counties, Texas

Guadalupe Mountains National Park was formally established, at a size of 76,293 acres, in 1972. In 1978, Congress designated 46,850 acres of the park as wilderness. In 1988, the park was expanded by 10,123 acres to include significant resources to the west.

The last parkwide management plan is from 1976. Much has changed since then, including visitor numbers, types, and use; the designation of wilderness; and park expansion. A new plan is needed to address how resources should be managed, how visitors access and use the park, what facilities are needed to support those uses, and how the National Park Service can best conduct its operations. This document examines four alternatives for managing Guadalupe Mountains National Park for the next 15 to 20 years. It also analyzes the impacts of implementing each alternative.

- Alternative A, the alternative of no action / continue current management, would extend existing conditions and trends of park management into the future. This alternative serves as a basis of comparison for evaluating the action alternatives.
- The preferred alternative would emphasize wilderness values and restoring natural ecosystem processes while expanding opportunities for visitors to enjoy a variety of settings in the park. Enhanced interpretation would include expansion of visitor facilities and services in the Pine Springs visitor center. New administration facilities and a campground would be constructed, and improved facilities and activities would be provided at other sites throughout the park.
- Park management under alternative B would emphasize promoting wilderness values and restoring natural ecosystem processes. Campsites and horse corrals would be closed and their sites revegetated. The limited amount of new construction would primarily support resource protection. Improvements in interpretation would be less extensive than in the preferred alternative.
- Alternative C would expand opportunities for visitors to enjoy a wider range of park settings. New park access and facility improvements would provide activities, interpretation, and visitor gateways to the interior of the park from the south, west, and north; recreation opportunities for more diverse visitor groups, and improved administrative facilities.

Only alternative B would have major, adverse impacts. These would result from the loss of visitor uses and experiences associated with frontcountry camping and horse use. None of the alternatives would result in impairment of any park resources. The lack of administrative space in alternative B may result in moderate to major, long-term, adverse impacts on park management.

This *Draft General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement* has been distributed to other agencies and interested organizations and individuals for review and comment. The public comment period will last for 60 days after the notice of availability has been published in the *Federal Register*. Readers are encouraged to send written comments on this draft plan, as described in "How to Comment on This Plan" on the next page. Please note that National Park Service (NPS) practice is to make comments, including names and addresses of respondents, available for public review.

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

HOW TO COMMENT ON THIS PLAN

Comments on this plan are welcome and will be accepted for 60 days after the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's notice of availability appears in the *Federal Register*. If you wish to respond to the material in this document, you may submit your comments by any one of several methods.

You may mail written comments to:

Superintendent
Guadalupe Mountains National Park — DGMP
400 Pine Springs Canyon Road
Salt Flat, Texas 79847-9400

You may comment electronically via the NPS' Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) project management database, which is available on the Internet at http://parkplanning.nps.gov/GUMO.

You may hand-deliver comments at one of several public meetings to be announced in the media following release of this document. Comments also may be hand-delivered to the Guadalupe Mountains National Park headquarters, Salt Flat, Texas 79847-9400

Before including your address, phone 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. Although 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.

Williams Ranch

WHY THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE PLANS

The National Park Service plans for one purpose — to ensure that the decisions it makes will carry out, as effectively and efficiently as possible, our mission:

> The National Park Service preserves unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the national park system for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations. The service cooperates with partners to extend the benefits of natural and cultural resource conservation and outdoor recreation throughout this country and the world.

In carrying out this mandate, NPS managers constantly make difficult decisions about ways to preserve significant natural and cultural resources for public enjoyment, resolve competing demands for limited resources, establish priorities for using funds and staff, and address differing local and nationwide interests and views of what is most important. Example planning decisions include:

- How can soils be protected at Guadalupe Mountains National Park while allowing continued use of popular trails?
- How should historic structures from the parks ranching era that are now within designated wilderness be managed?
- What is the best allocation of staff and budget to optimize both visitor experience and resource protection?

Planning provides the National Park Service with methods and tools for resolving issues and promoting beneficial solutions. Planning products articulate how public enjoyment of a park can be part of a strategy for ensuring that resources are protected unimpaired for future generations.

The National Park Service is subject to legal requirements for planning that are intended to ensure that the best possible decisions are made. By law, the National Park Service must do the following:

- Conduct comprehensive general management planning.
- Base decisions on adequate information and analysis.
- Track progress made toward goals.

These processes make the National Park Service more effective, more collaborative, and more accountable.

Planning provides a balance between continuity and adaptability in a dynamic, decision-making process. The success of the National Park Service will increasingly depend on its ability to continuously process new information and use it creatively, often in partnership with others, to resolve complex, changing issues.

Planning provides a logical, trackable rationale for decision making by focusing first on why a park was established and what conditions should exist there. Meaningful decisions can be made only after these foundations are established. After the desired conditions that will be achieved and maintained have been defined, management teams can develop responses to changing situations while staying focused on what is most important about the park.

The planning process ensures that decision-makers have adequate information about benefits, costs, and impacts on natural and cultural resources, visitor use and experience, and socioeconomic conditions. Analyzing the park in relation to its surrounding ecosystem, historic setting, community, and a national system of protected areas helps park managers and staff members understand how the park can interrelate in systems that are ecologically, socially, and economically sustainable. Decisions made within this larger context are more likely to be successful over time.

Public involvement throughout the planning process provides focused opportunities for park managers and the planning team to interact with the public and to learn about public concerns, expectations, and values. Understanding people's values regarding park resources and visitor experiences contributes to success in developing decisions that can be implemented. Public involvement also provides opportunities to share information about park purposes and significance, and to present opportunities and constraints regarding the management of park lands and surrounding areas.

Finally, planning helps ensure and document that management decisions are promoting the efficient use of public funds, and that managers are accountable to the public for those decisions. The ultimate outcome of planning for national parks is an agreement among the National Park Service, its partners, and the public on why each area is managed as part of the national park system, what resource conditions and visitor experiences should exist there, and how those conditions can best be achieved and maintained over time.

McKittrick Canyon

SUMMARY

PARK HISTORY AND PLANNING

Guadalupe Mountains National Park in west Texas was authorized by an act of Congress (Public Law 89-667) on October 15, 1966. It was formally established, at a size of 76,293 acres, on September 30, 1972. In 1978, Congress passed legislation designating 46,850 acres of the park as wilderness.

On October 28, 1988, Congress passed legislation that enlarged the park by 10,123 acres. The new land included gypsum and quartzose dunes in an area west of and adjacent to the park boundary. Land acquisition was completed in conformance with the park's *Land Protection Plan* (NPS 1992). All of the land identified in the 1988 legislation was deeded to the National Park Service except 226 acres owned by The Nature Conservancy.

The last comprehensive planning effort for Guadalupe Mountains National Park was its 1976 master plan (NPS 1976). Much has changed since then. Examples include the

- evolution of patterns and types of visitor use
- Congressional designation of part of the park as wilderness
- 1988 addition of lands to the national park
- recommitment to managing the park in the spirit of protecting its wilderness resources while making the park more accessible to the public

Each of these changes has major implications for how visitors access and use Guadalupe Mountains National Park and the facilities needed to support those uses, how resources are managed, and how the National Park Service manages its operations. Therefore, a new plan is needed to

- clearly define resource conditions and visitor experiences to be achieved in Guadalupe Mountains National Park
- provide a framework for park managers to use when making decisions about what kinds of facilities, if any, to develop in the national park and how to best protect park resources, provide a diverse range of visitor experience opportunities, and manage visitor use
- ensure that the foundation for decision making has been developed in consultation with interested stakeholders and adopted by NPS leadership after an adequate analysis of the benefits, impacts, and economic costs of alternate courses of action

CONTENTS OF THIS GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN

This document includes five chapters and a references section.

Chapter 1: Purpose of and Need for the Plan sets the foundation for general management planning at Guadalupe Mountains National Park.

- It describes why the plan is being prepared and what needs it must address.
- It gives guidance for the alternatives that can be considered within the framework of the park's legislated mission, its purpose, the significance of its resources, special mandates and administrative commitments, and servicewide mandates and policies.
- The chapter details the planning opportunities and issues that were raised during public scoping and initial planning team efforts. The alternatives in the next chapter address these issues and concerns to varying degrees.

- This chapter identifies the scope of the environmental impact analysis, including identification of the impact topics that were and were not analyzed in detail.

Chapter 2: Alternatives, including the Preferred Alternative, begins by describing the management zones that will be used to manage Guadalupe Mountains National Park in the future. It then describes four alternatives that were considered, including mitigation measures proposed to minimize or eliminate the impacts of some proposed actions. The environmentally preferred alternative is identified, and summary tables highlight differences among the alternatives and their environmental consequences.

Chapter 3: Affected Environment describes the areas and resources that would be affected by implementing actions in the various alternatives. It is organized to include natural resources, cultural resources, visitor use and experience, the socioeconomic environment, and NPS operations and facilities.

Chapter 4: Environmental Consequences describes the methods used for assessing impacts. It then analyzes the effects of implementing the alternatives on the impact topics described in the "Affected Environment" chapter.

Chapter 5: Consultation and Coordination describes the history of public and agency coordination and compliance during the planning effort. It also describes the qualifications of the preparers and identifies the agencies, organizations, and others who will be receiving copies of this document.

Chapter 6: References presents supporting information. This includes the bibliography, an index, and appendixes.

ALTERNATIVES AND THEIR IMPACTS

This *Draft General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement* presents four alternatives for future management of Guadalupe Mountains National Park. Alternative A, no action / continue current management, would not change how the park currently is managed. The three action alternatives are referred to as the preferred alternative, alternative B, and alternative C. The action alternatives, which are based on the park's mandates, mission, purpose, and significance, present different ways to manage resources and visitor use and to improve facilities and infrastructure in the park. Each alternative was evaluated to determine its effects on relevant impact topics, including

- soils
- plant communities and vegetation
- wildlife
- geologic resources
- paleontological resources
- archeological resources
- historic structures
- cultural landscapes
- ethnographic resources
- museum collections
- access, activities and destinations, and scenic views
- interpretation, education, and orientation
- socioeconomic environment
- park operations

Alternative A, No Action / Continue Current Management

This alternative would maintain the conditions, visitor services, and management practices as they currently exist and would extend them into the future.

- All park lands that are undeveloped for visitor or operational uses would continue to be managed as wilderness.

- Current visitor facilities and park infrastructure would stay in existing locations.
- The park would continue to provide small areas that visitors could easily access and experience by vehicle and much larger areas that visitors could access and experience only with considerable effort and challenge.
- Cultural resources would continue to be protected and maintained in a stable condition.

Other than the Congressionally designated wilderness area, no management zoning is identified in the no action / continue current management alternative. However, backcountry lands would continue to be managed as wilderness, regardless of whether they were formally designated as such.

Alternative A would result in mostly minor, long-term, adverse impacts on natural resources, visitor use and experience, and socioeconomics. Moderate, long-term, adverse impacts on the sensitivities of American Indians would result from continued park visitation in the area of the gypsum sand dunes. Moderate, long-term, adverse impacts on park administration would result from inadequate office space and the NPS' inability to meet housing needs for critical staff.

Alternative A would not result in unacceptable impacts or impairment of park resources or values.

Preferred Alternative

The preferred alternative would emphasize wilderness values and restoring natural ecosystem processes, while expanding some opportunities for visitors to enjoy easier access to park settings than currently exist. Specifically:

- The large areas of the park that have been assessed as suitable for wilderness would be zoned as designated wilderness and backcountry. In these areas, visitors would experience a wilderness situation.
- There would be a wider range of overnight and multi-day destination opportunities.
- Visitors who did not enter the backcountry or designated wilderness zones could gain an understanding of wilderness values indirectly through enhanced interpretive presentations within the more developed and more easily accessible zones.
- Visitors would have greater developed day use and overnight opportunities with improved facilities, greater accessibility, and enhanced exhibits.
- Cultural resources, including historic structures, would be stabilized and/or preserved or rehabilitated and protected from impacts. This would be achieved in part by actively managing visitor access in some areas.

The preferred alternative would combine preserving wilderness areas and natural settings with providing a wider spectrum of accessible areas and experiences. Wilderness threshold zoning would provide for transitions between frontcountry and designated wilderness or backcountry zones. The areas zoned as frontcountry would include most of the areas adjacent to or surrounding developed areas and would include lands near Pine Springs and Frijole Ranch; the area adjacent to and surrounding the new Salt Basin Dunes staging area; the old Signal Peak housing area, which is in one of the two NPS-owned land parcels that would be included in a proposed boundary change; an expanded staging area at Williams Ranch; and improved access at Guadalupe Pass and a new access point at PX Well. These areas would provide some transition from developed to natural settings while also providing larger numbers of improved access points for areas zoned as backcountry or designated wilderness.

The preferred alternative would have mostly minor, long-term, adverse impacts on most natural resource impact topics, primarily because about 200 acres of currently undeveloped land would be permanently converted to developed park facilities. Beneficial impacts would occur because of the better natural resource protection or restoration that this alternative would provide.

Most actions associated with the preferred alternative would have no adverse effects on cultural resources. However, adverse effects could result from the construction of new facilities and site restoration. Adverse effects would result from the removal of national register-eligible structures that were remnants of historic ranching activities. Increased park-related use of the sand dunes area would result in moderate, adverse, long-term impacts on the sensitivities of American Indians.

Beneficial effects on visitor uses and experiences would occur at numerous sites within and associated with the park, including Pine Springs, Frijole Ranch, McKittrick Canyon, Dog Canyon, Salt Basin Dunes, Williams Ranch, Ship-on-the-Desert, PX Well, Guadalupe Pass, and Dell City. There could be minor, long-term, adverse impacts on visitors who desire more solitude.

Increased visitation that would result from park improvements would have beneficial impacts on regional economies and community infrastructure.

Long-term, beneficial impacts would result from the new, consolidated headquarters complex near Pine Springs, the ability to reclaim two Pine Springs housing units for their original purpose, improved fire management resources at Dog Canyon, and reduced maintenance of rehabilitated or realigned trail segments. Increased maintenance associated with the new facilities would have a long-term, moderate, adverse impact on park operations.

The preferred alternative would not result in unacceptable impacts or impairment of park resources or values.

Alternative B

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,

- The large areas of the park that have been assessed as suitable for wilderness would be zoned as designated wilderness and backcountry. 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 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.
- Except at designated backcountry sites, camping in the park would be eliminated. Horse use by visitors also would end. Camping and corral sites would be restored to natural conditions.
- Actively managed visitor use levels in the designated wilderness and backcountry zones would result in reduced resource impacts and enhanced natural ecosystem processes.
- Key cultural resources, including historic structures, would be stabilized and/or preserved or rehabilitated, sometimes limiting visitor access.

This alternative would maximize the use of the wilderness threshold zone outside the designated wilderness and backcountry zones. The frontcountry zone would be lim-

ited 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.

Alternative B would have mostly beneficial impacts on most natural resource impact topics, primarily because the land currently used for camping and corrals would be restored. Beneficial impacts also would occur because of the better natural resource protection or restoration that this alternative would provide.

Most actions associated with alternative B would have no adverse effects on cultural resources. However, adverse effects could result from the construction of new facilities and site restoration. Adverse effects would result from removal of national register-eligible structures that were remnants of historic ranching activities and from allowing the human-made pond of Manzanita Spring in the Frijole Ranch cultural landscape to fill in naturally with silt and return to a wetland.

A major, long-term, adverse impact on visitor use and experience would result from eliminating camping except in the backcountry. Eliminating horse use usually would be perceived as a major, long-term, adverse impact by riders and a negligible or beneficial impact by hikers. Improved and expanded exhibits, enhancements in the attractiveness of the Williams Ranch area as a destination, and increased opportunities for solitude would be long-term, beneficial impacts.

Minor or moderate, long-term, adverse impacts on access would result from closing the road to the Salt Basin Dunes parking area, eliminating camping except in the backcountry, and eliminating horse use. Beneficial, long-term impacts on access would be associated with providing additional parking at Williams Ranch and the Salt Basin Dunes trailhead.

Beneficial impacts on the regional economy would occur because the loss of most camping opportunities in the park would increase demand for commercial camping and other overnight lodging.

Operationally, insufficient space for management and administrative activities in alternative B would have a moderate to major, long-term, adverse impacts on management and administration. Moderate, long-term, adverse impacts resulting from insufficient space also would affect the maintenance aspect of operations.

Alternative B would not result in unacceptable impacts or impairment of park resources or values.

Alternative C

Alternative C would expand opportunities for visitors to enjoy easier access to a wider range of park settings than currently exist. New park access and facility improvements would provide visitor gateways to the interior of the park from the south, west, and north. Opportunities would be provided for a less-challenging wilderness experience that would accommodate more diverse visitor populations. Promoting wilderness values also would be emphasized.

Easier access to multiple settings would provide visitors with a wider range of overnight and multi-day destination activities. Wilderness experiences would still be available in the park's interior, but most areas around the existing developed sites would be zoned as frontcountry rather than the more primitive wilderness threshold. The frontcountry zone would include

- most of the area near the developed zones at Pine Springs, Frijole Ranch, Dog Canyon, and McKittrick Canyon to Pratt Cabin
- the area around the Salt Basin Dunes trailhead facilities
- the old Signal Peak housing area
- the Williams Ranch, Guadalupe Canyon, and PX Well staging areas

These frontcountry zones would provide some transition from developed to natural settings while improving access to the backcountry and designated wilderness zones. Additional trails and developed staging areas would enhance access. The new trails would be designed to accommodate larger numbers of visitors, sometimes including those with impaired mobility.

Increases in dispersed visitor use outside development centers would require more aggressive resource impact mitigation to maintain natural ecosystem processes. Cultural resources, including historic structures, would be stabilized and/or preserved or rehabilitated, with the goal of protecting them from impacts while accommodating visitor use.

Alternative C would have mostly minor, long-term, adverse impacts on most natural resource impact topics, primarily because about 500 acres of currently undeveloped land would be permanently converted to developed park facilities. Beneficial impacts would occur because of the better natural resource protection or restoration that this alternative would provide.

Most actions associated with alternative C would have no adverse effects on cultural resources. However, adverse effects could result from the construction of new facilities and site restoration. Adverse effects would result from the removal of national register-eligible structures that were remnants of historic ranching activities. Increased park-related use of the sand dunes area would result in moderate, adverse, long-term impacts on the sensitivities of American Indians.

Beneficial effects on visitor uses and experiences would occur at numerous sites within and associated with the park, including Pine Springs, Frijole Ranch, McKittrick Canyon, Dog Canyon, Salt Basin Dunes, Williams Ranch, Ship-on-the-Desert, PX Well, and Guadalupe Pass. There could be minor, long-term, adverse impacts on visitors who desire more solitude.

Increased visitation that would result from park improvements would have beneficial impacts on regional economies and community infrastructure.

Long-term, beneficial impacts would result from the new, consolidated headquarters complex near Pine Springs, the ability to reclaim two Pine Springs housing units for their original purpose, improved fire management resources at Dog Canyon, and reduced maintenance of rehabilitated or realigned trail segments. Increased maintenance associated with the new facilities would have a long-term, moderate, adverse impact on park operations.

Alternative C would not result in unacceptable impacts or impairment of park resources or values.

THE NEXT STEPS

After the distribution of the *Draft General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement,* there will be a 60-day review and comment period. After the comment period closes, the NPS planning team will evaluate substantive comments from other federal agencies, tribes, organizations, businesses, and individuals and will incorporate appropriate changes into a *Final General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement*. The final plan will include letters from government agencies, any substantive com-

ments on the draft document, and NPS responses to substantive comments.

Following distribution of the *Final General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement* and a 30-day no-action period, a record of decision approving a final plan will be signed by the NPS regional director. The record of decision documents the National Park Service selection of an alternative for implementation. The plan can then be implemented, depending on funding and staffing. However, it should be understood that a record of decision does not guarantee that funds and staff will be available for implementing the approved plan.

Wildflowers along Williams Ranch Road

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