PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

CONCEPT

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:

- 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.
- 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 settings and experiences. As shown in the Preferred Alternative Management Zones map, 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 the 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 and designated wilderness.

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 Preferred Alternative Management Zones map.

- The areas of the existing visitor center, parking lots, trailhead, tent campground, picnic areas, and Butterfield Stage Station Ruins (the Pinery) would be designated as developed zone.
- The area south of U.S. Highway 62/180 that currently contains the maintenance area and staff housing also would be assigned to the developed zone. Few visitors would enter this area, where the focus would be on providing administrative and support services.
- The land north and east of Pine Springs, extending to Frijole Ranch, would be within the frontcountry zone.
- The wilderness threshold zone would be applied to the land south of the developed area and west of U.S. Highway 62/180 (the mouth of Pine Springs Can-

yon). This area would provide a transition between the area of heavy visitor activity and the designated wilderness to the southwest.

- The area west of the developed zone that generally is bounded by the Guadalupe Peak Trail on the south and the ridgeline of Guadalupe Peak on the west (the upper reaches of Pine Springs Canyon) has been found eligible for future consideration as wilderness. Therefore, this area was included in the backcountry zone.
- Once a site has been identified as a developed zone for the campground in the Pine Springs area, it will be added to the zoning for Pine Springs or Frijole Ranch.

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, for visitors who make a single, park-related stop as they travel through the region on U.S. Highway 62/180.

In the near term, the visitor center would be maintained in its current configuration. However, when funding became available, a new, consolidated park headquarters and office complex would be constructed south of U.S. Highway 62/180 close to the maintenance area. The park interpretive staff would remain in the visitor center, but other staff functions would be moved out of this building.

The removal of administrative offices from the Pine Springs visitor center would provide space for expanded visitor facilities and services. Some minor repairs or upgrades to the building might be made, but the structure generally is in good condition. The visitor center would be improved as follows:

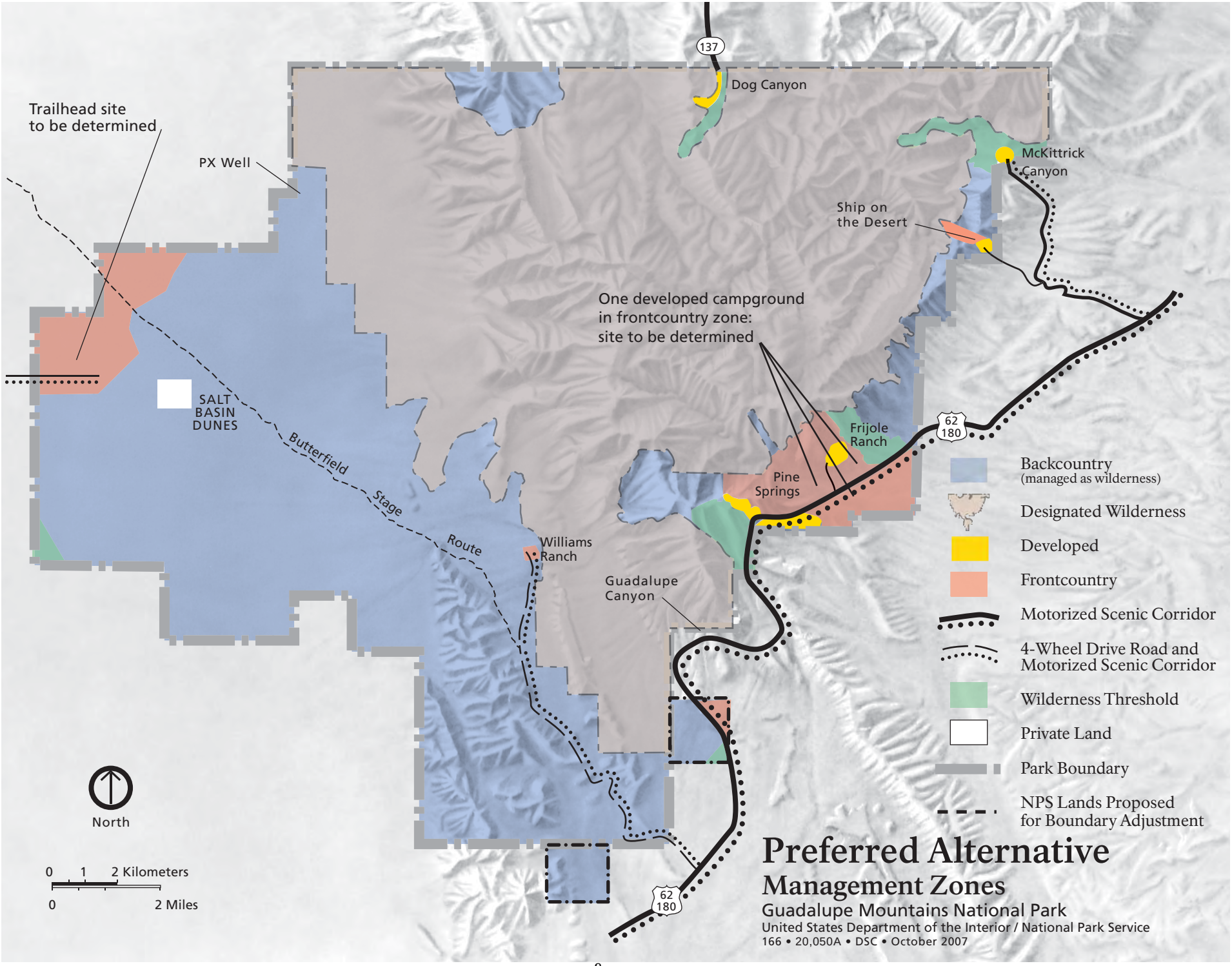
- Enhanced exhibits would provide an improved understanding of the park's geological and natural history
- Displays would include more emphasis on the ecological importance of wilderness, wilderness management in the park, and wilderness values and ethics.
- New cultural resource exhibits, which would include information and pieces from the cultural resource museum at Frijole Ranch, would be developed and installed to provide visitors with an appreciation of human history in the area.
- The natural and cultural / historical themes would be related in a more comprehensive presentation.
- The visitor center building would be redesigned to include program rooms and/or classrooms for seminars and other educational activities or group events.
- The bookstore may be expanded.
- New audiovisual technology would present park themes, information, and values. For example, video technology could be used to present trips in park's wilderness areas for those unable to access it directly.

An exhibits plan would be prepared to determine the content and most appropriate presentation methods for conveying the key themes of Guadalupe Mountains National Park to visitors.

The Pinery Area. At this area, a new exhibit building would be constructed to exhibit the stagecoach that is owned by the park and currently is on loan because there is no place on site to display it. Otherwise, facilities and management of the Butterfield Stage Station Ruins would not change from the no action alternative.

Pine Springs Trailhead Area. Existing tent camping near the canyon trailhead would continue. However, camping from vehicles, including recreational vehicle camping and group camping, would be moved to another location within the Pine Springs or Frijole Ranch frontcountry zone. Details are provided below.

Overnight camping would be prohibited in the trailhead area. The parking lot would be available only for day use, such as by picnickers and day hikers, and for overnight


Trailhead site
to be determined
PX Well
137
Dog Canyon
McKittrick
Canyon
Ship on
the Desert
One developed campground
in frontcountry zone:
site to be determined
SALT
BASIN
DUNES
Butterfield
Stage
Route
Williams
Ranch
Guadalupe
Canyon
Pine
Springs
Frijole
Ranch
62
180
North
0 1 2 Kilometers
0 2 Miles
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
Preferred Alternative
Management Zones
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parking of the empty vehicles belonging to hikers who were making multi-day hikes to the interior of the park. As a result of this management action, parking and picnic tables would be more available to day users, and picnicking may become a more common activity in the trailhead area. This action also would make more parking available for hikers and backpackers and would reduce their use of the visitor center parking lot during busy seasons.

New Campground. The preferred alternative would include the construction and operation of a new, developed campground in the frontcountry zone in the vicinity of Pine Springs or Frijole Ranch. A detailed development concept plan would be prepared for this facility, but as currently envisioned, the campground would include the following:

- About half the campsites would be designed for cars with tents.
- About half would be pull-through recreational vehicle sites with electrical hook-ups.
- There would be two to four group campsites with adjacent vehicle parking.
- Support facilities would include modern restrooms and showers, and a sanitary dump station.

The campground may be located in an area that has not been extensively disturbed by past development. However, careful siting would be done to avoid sensitive resources, such as archeological sites and populations of special-status (such as endangered or threatened) species. Avoidance of areas prone to flash flooding also would be an important site selection criterion. In siting the campground, planners would take maximum advantage of the substantial volume of resource survey work that already has been done in the vicinity of Pine Springs and Frijole Ranch.

This campground could be run by the National Park Service, or by a concessioner. An evaluation of the optimal approach for operating this facility would be included in a commercial services plan that would be prepared by the National Park Service as part of the preferred alternative. Regardless of the operator, the campground would not include any other facilities, such as a gasoline station or a store.

Administration Facilities. New administration facilities would be constructed within the park boundary close to the existing maintenance facility on the south side of U.S. Highway 62/180. As currently envisioned, the facilities would include

- headquarters offices and administrative space
- new, secure curatorial storage
- a parking lot

The expanded administration facilities would allow staff to vacate the two three-bedroom houses that currently are used for office space. The houses would then be converted back to residential space for staff providing critical park functions. This would increase park housing in the Pine Springs area by 15 percent.

Site selection would include the conduct of surveys to ensure that important archeological resources or special-status species habitats were avoided. All buildings would be constructed to the standards prescribed in the then-current version of *Management Policies 2006*. In particular, the new facilities would not be in or near any flash-flood zone.

The utility infrastructure at Pine Springs would be upgraded to accommodate the expanded administrative facilities. This would include water, wastewater, telecommunications and electric power.

Frijole Ranch

Management Zoning. Frijole Ranch would be in the developed zone. The area to the northeast would be zoned wilderness threshold. All other areas surrounding the

developed zone would be assigned to the frontcountry zone. This unit may also have a developed zone for a campground relocated from the Pine Springs area.

Facilities and Activities. Frijole Ranch would continue to be a visitor destination for day use opportunities, consistent with the settings and experiences prescribed in the developed and frontcountry zones. However, improvements at the site would enhance the cultural experience while providing a broader range of visitor experiences.

The cultural resource museum would be removed from the Frijole Ranch house to the visitor center and incorporated in the new cultural exhibits at the Pine Springs visitor center, where they would be available to larger numbers of visitors throughout regular hours, seven days a week. Expanded exhibits with a primary emphasis on ranching in west Texas would be placed in the Frijole ranch house. An exhibit plan would be prepared to determine the best way to present this interpretive theme.

The historic structures, consisting of the Frijole Ranch house, barn, and other outbuildings, and the surrounding garden and orchard would be rehabilitated as an integrated cultural landscape that interpreted ranching history. Updated outdoor exhibits would be provided so that even when volunteers were not present, visitors would have opportunities to understand the workings and values of an early 1900s west Texas ranch. Some targeted interpretive programs could be provided at this site.

At Manzanita Spring, the National Park Service would continue its practice of dredging the spring periodically to remove accumulated sediment and maintain an open pond. This action would maintain the spring as part of the cultural landscape.

The upgrades that currently are underway at Frijole Ranch for parking, picnicking, and restrooms were described in alternative A. These upgrades represent the existing condition for the preferred alternative. The public corral area would remain at its current location south of Frijole Ranch.

A small, low-country, hike-in campground below the eastern escarpment would be developed to provide a less challenging backcountry experience with some wildland characteristics. The location for this small campground has not been determined, but candidates include sites along El Capitan Trail, between Frijole Ranch and Pine Springs, and off the Smith Springs Trail to the east or northeast. The concept would be to provide an opportunity for people who want to backpack but cannot climb to the top of the mountain, such as visitors with physical challenges and families with small children. However, the trail would not be wheelchair accessible.

Like the park's high country campgrounds, this campground's three to five sites would have tent pads constructed with landscape timbers. An associated area would be available for activities such as cooking and eating, but there would not be any picnic tables or other amenities. Campers would have to pack in their food and water and pack out their trash. It would be operated like all of the other backcountry campgrounds, which currently require a no-fee permit.

McKittrick Canyon

Management Zoning. The McKittrick Canyon trailhead and contact station would be in the developed zone. The canyon from the trailhead to Pratt Cabin would be zoned as wilderness threshold. Areas uphill from Pratt Cabin and above the canyon sidewalls would be within the designated wilderness zone.

Facilities and Activities. McKittrick Canyon would continue to be a destination for day use activities at the visitor contact station, trailhead area, and Pratt Cabin. Other

areas would have few facilities, consistent with the settings and experiences prescribed in the wilderness threshold zone. The electric power line would be removed.

The visitor contact station would be upgraded to bring exhibits up to date, better interpret the natural history of the canyon, and provide a stronger visitor understanding of geologic resources, wilderness and leave-no-trace ethics, the fragile canyon ecosystem, and associated human impacts. This could include the use of information technology and audiovisual systems to maximize the visitor educational experience. Some targeted interpretive programs may be provided.

The McKittrick Nature Trail next to the visitor contact station would have limited improvements. This primarily would consist of additional and updated wayside exhibits. Management of the McKittrick Canyon Trail from the trailhead to Pratt Cabin would be much the same as in alternative A, with continued orientation and interpretation that emphasized staying on the trail, resource protection, and employing leave no trace ethics, with stress on the absence of restroom facilities beyond the trailhead. Beyond the Pratt Cabin, the McKittrick Canyon Trail would be managed as a wilderness trail.

Pratt Cabin would continue to be preserved and used as an interpretive center, and water would not be available at this site. The goal would also be to not provide any sanitary facilities. The National Park Service would accomplish this by developing an aggressive education program to address sanitation. However, if sanitation issues could not be mitigated through education and other efforts, a new, small, sanitary facility could be planned and built in the future.

The Pratt Cabin cultural landscape would be rehabilitated to the Pratt family era. This would include removing the solar system.

Dog Canyon

Management Zoning. The campground, trailhead, and contact station area at Dog Canyon would be in the developed zone. Upper Dog Canyon south of the developed zone to the switchbacks on the Tejas Trail would be managed as wilderness threshold. All other areas would be within the designated wilderness zone.

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

The visitor contact station would be improved and expanded. The exhibits would be revised to better interpret natural and cultural history of the area and to enhance accessibility and effectiveness of orientation to park visitors.

One group campsite currently is available at Dog Canyon, and the area is popular with groups, particularly from the west Texas and southern New Mexico area. To ensure that adequate facilities are available to meet demand, another group campsite would be added. The campsite would be sited above the canyon's flash-flood levels.

The water storage system at Dog Canyon would be enlarged to a capacity of 30,000 gallons to meet visitor and operational needs. This would involve upgrades in both the piping and storage components of the system.

A fire building would be constructed in the developed zone at Dog Canyon. This facility likely would be one-story, and would house a small wildland fire truck (probably type 6) and provide storage space for gear. Candidate sites include co-location with the barn facility (perhaps even as an addition to the barn), or the housing area. In either location, it would be outside the flash flood zone and

would be designed to match the existing administrative structures.

Salt Basin Dunes

Management Zoning. The area north of the existing road from the boundary to about a mile inside the park would be zoned frontcountry. The motorized scenic corridor zone would be applied along the road. The southeast corner where existing power line roads occur would be wilderness threshold. 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 improved over time to provide enhanced use as a visitor destination for day use. In the short-term, the current Salt Basin Dunes parking area on the western park boundary would be retained and slightly improved. This would include the addition of informational signs.

In the interim, the single-lane access road to this area would be maintained to provide access to low-clearance vehicles, but some visitors may still consider it challenging. It would probably include a scenic overlook with a wayside exhibit. The Salt Basin Dunes parking area may be relocated to provide better protection of resources and an enhanced visitor experience.

A detailed development concept plan with an environmental assessment would be prepared for the Salt Basin Dunes area, but as currently envisioned, the trailhead parking lot would have a gravel surface and provide space for 10 vehicles. The new trailhead at this site would include about three picnic tables with shade structures and a restroom. Visitors would access the dunes via a primitive trail that would be about a mile long, depending on the selected location of the new trailhead relative to the dunes. Criteria to be used in siting all of these facilities include avoidance of archeological resources and special concern species, and accommodating any concerns expressed by American Indians or others.

Wayside exhibits could be provided along the access road and at the new trailhead. Additional interpretive materials could be developed for use along the trail, but no interpretive signs or waysides would be installed in the dune area, which would be managed as wilderness.

In addition to visitor orientation, key points of the exhibits would include

- the ecology and geology of the red and white dunes
- the archeology and cultural history of the Salt Basin Dunes area
- wilderness values and the need to protect the area's wilderness resources

Surveys for natural and cultural resources would be conducted prior to the installation of any facilities to protect them by avoidance. Visitor use would be managed at the Salt Basin Dunes to ensure that wilderness values were maintained and damage to natural and cultural resources did not occur.

Williams Ranch

Management Zoning. The area in the immediate vicinity of Williams Ranch would be zoned frontcountry. The motorized scenic corridor zone would be applied along the road from the park boundary to this historic site. The area to the west of Williams Ranch was found eligible for future consideration as wilderness and would be zoned backcountry. The area to the east of the ranch is within the designated wilderness zone.

Facilities and Activities. Access to Williams Ranch would be better maintained so that the ranch would be a visitor destination for day use. The road would still be single lane and would be restricted to high-clearance vehicles, but would be designed to better

resist water damage and better accommodate travel in both directions. Use of the road would continue to be by permit only.

The exterior of the Williams Ranch house would be rehabilitated, but there would not be any visitor access to the interior. The cultural landscape around the ranch house also would be rehabilitated. The parking lot would be expanded to accommodate 10 vehicles on a gravel-surface.

Other Visitor Facilities

Ship-on-the-Desert would be assigned to the developed zone. The road from the park boundary to this site would be within the motorized scenic corridor zone.

The building and its cultural landscape would be rehabilitated to support research, education, and operation activities.

An administrative campground with a vault-type, "sweet-smelling toilet" and three recreational vehicle pads with hook-ups would be provided outside the cultural landscape area. This campground would support NPS operations and house volunteers.

Access to **PX Well** would be increased by providing signs for a dirt road that extends from the Salt Basin Dunes parking vicinity to this facility. To allow access for visitors, the road, which dates from the property's ranch era, also would be added to the park map and the informal access across private land would be formalized. With an improvement in the base course, the road probably would be suitable for use by most visitor vehicles. The trailhead site would be assigned to the frontcountry zone, and the road would be within the motorized scenic corridor zone. Surrounding lands were found eligible for future consideration as wilderness and would be zoned backcountry.

A new trailhead would be established at PX Well. Currently envisioned facilities would include a small parking lot and a trail sign for the two trails that lead from this location. Although some cairns might be placed to mark the trails' locations, both trails would be primitive, would not be maintained by the park, and would provide a true wilderness experience.

- Because the trail up to PX Flat is steep and is not suitable for horses, this trail probably would be designated for hikers only.
- The other trail is an old road that connected PX Well with Williams Ranch. The abandoned roadway can accommodate horse use, and the trail probably would be used by hikers and riders.

At **Dell City**, the visitor contact station would be improved or a new facility would be constructed to provide visitor access even when the contact station was not staffed. The improved access and interpretive resources would provide opportunities for greater visitor understanding of the resources in the western part of the park. Exhibits could employ computer technology and audiovisual systems to maximize the visitor educational experience.

At the **Guadalupe Pass trailhead area**, the National Park Service would formalize an agreement with landowners to ensure continued permanent access across private land to enter the park and use the Salt Basin Overlook Trail, Guadalupe Canyon, and other facilities. The trailhead would then be minimally improved with signage and an enlarged parking area.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Natural resource management would emphasize preservation and restoration of ecosystem function, particularly in areas negatively impacted by visitor use and access. 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

As shown in the Preferred Alternative Management Zones map, the area that has been formally designated as wilderness by Congress would be assigned to the designated wilderness management zone. The areas that were found eligible for future consideration as wilderness in the wilderness eligibility assessment that is presented in appendix D would be assigned to the backcountry zone.

New lands acquired on the west side have been assessed for wilderness eligibility. Those areas formerly excluded from wilderness designation but with wilderness attributes, including the northeastern slopes of Guadalupe Peak (including trail), Bear Canyon, the Patterson Hills, and western bajadas, would be managed consistent with the backcountry zone and have been recommended for inclusion in the wilderness study for formal wilderness designation.

Wilderness management would be expanded to a maximum extent consistent with the settings and experiences prescribed in the backcountry zone.

The expanded exhibits at the Pine Springs visitor center would provide increased education on the ecological and social importance of wilderness. Upgraded exhibits at this site, at trailheads, in park publications, and on the Internet would emphasize wilderness ethics and "leave no trace" standards for all wilderness activities.

The tent pads would be maintained at the 10 designated backcountry campsites. Additionally, primitive sanitary facilities could be provided if needed to protect resources.

Geological and Paleontological Resources

Geological and paleontological resources would be managed as described in alternative A.

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 much as described in alternative A. However, some active manipulation would be implemented to reduce impacts and hasten restoration. In particular, the recovery of previously grazed areas would be augmented by aggressive control of exotic plants.

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. Also like alternative A, horse use that was limited to day use on designated trails would continue to be allowed within the same area. Changes from alternative A would include the following.

- This alternative would have the broader goal of eradicating target species of exotic plants throughout the park.
- It would use more strict control measures to protect native plant and animal species and communities from impacts from exotic species.
- Within the designated wilderness and backcountry zones, and particularly along trails, aggressive management action would be used to prevent or minimize the spread of exotics.
- 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 envi-

ronments would be protected as natural ecosystems. Fragile wetland soils and vegetation of natural springs would be protected by not providing any new access and development to wetlands. Management of wetlands and aquatic environments that are cultural landscape components would be assessed for significance and appropriate management.

Management of Research Natural Areas. Management would continue as described for alternative A. However, additional research natural areas could be added to the system if appropriate and consistent with this program.

Water Quality and Quantity

Management of water resources would be similar to that described in alternative A, but the National Park Service would be more aggressive in protecting water quality and quantity. In particular, this would include designing and implementing a groundwater monitoring program on the west side of the park.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Cultural resource management would emphasize preservation and rehabilitation of significant resources. 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 stabilized.

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 appropriate visitor access. Remnants of historic ranching activities in the backcountry zone would remain as discovery sites.

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 the preferred alternative includes the following.

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

The management of sites that were not addressed as part of visitor facilities would be as follows.

- The Hunter Line Cabin would be stabilized and preserved as a historic resource within designated wilderness.
- The Butterfield Stage route would be delineated for visitor interpretation.
- The Cox Cabin, and Bowl Cabin would be studied for national register eligibility and, pending findings to the contrary, would be documented and then removed and the areas would be restored. In the interim, they would remain discovery sites and would be allowed to deteriorate with any safety hazards mitigated.
- Other discovery sites that became a safety concern would be assessed and documented for the national register (if appropriate) and removed or the hazard would be mitigated.

- Areas subject to any remnant removal would be restored to natural conditions, when possible.

Collections

The availability of new museum collections storage space in the expanded headquarters and administrative space constructed south of U.S. Highway 62/180 would enable the National Park Service to keep most specimens within the park and store them in a manner that was consistent with NPS preservation and security standards. Consistent with past practices, the National Park Service may still find it appropriate to house some specimens in universities and museums or in a future, shared, regional NPS facility.

VISITOR USE AND UNDERSTANDING

Many elements of visitor use and understanding already have been described in other elements of the preferred alternative, 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 previously addressed.

Under the preferred alternative, park visitors would learn about and experience the park's human history through exhibits, audio-visual media, and exposure to the park's cultural resources. Geological and fossil formations, as well as the park's native plants and animals, would lend to an increased understanding of the parks significance.

Visitors to Guadalupe Mountains would be given opportunities to have a true wilderness experience at a self-sufficiency level. Isolated and challenging wilderness opportunities will include the solitude, tranquility, and beauty of the rugged wilderness.

Visitor Experience

The Pine Springs visitor center would provide an improved understanding of the park's geological and natural history. Its enhanced exhibits also would include both natural and cultural / historical themes for a more comprehensive presentation of resources in the park.

Ranching exhibits at Frijole Ranch and rehabilitated components of the cultural landscape would provide visitors with opportunities to understand the workings and values of a west Texas ranch in the early 1900s. Visitors also would come into contact with abandoned farm and ranch ruins throughout the park. Through these experiences they would have the opportunity to better understand the nature of ranching in a severe environment.

A wider diversity of visitors would be accommodated in new camping opportunities in the park. In concert with increased interpretation, this would enable a broader segment of the population to gain and increased understanding of the value of clear night skies.

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 provided in accessible, enhanced visitor facilities and targeted interpretive programs and activities. 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. Space for seminars and educational programs would be available at the visitor center. Ship-on-the-Desert would support research, educational, and operational activities.

Additional and improved wayside interpretive exhibits would be more widely dispersed park-wide. Contact stations, trailheads, and scenic corridor stops would emphasize the ecological importance of wilderness and the significance of the park. Visitor orientation and wayside exhibits would be provided at the Salt Basin Dunes to interpret the ecology, geology, and cultural history of the dunes.

Interpretive and Educational Outreach Programs and Media

In addition to the expanded programs and media at visitor facilities, an expanded educational outreach program would target a wider range of audiences. These would include people who have not traditionally used the park. New audiovisual technology would present park themes, information, and values.

- The Pine Springs visitor center and contact stations at McKittrick Canyon and Dell City would have updated exhibits, information technology, and audiovisual systems to maximize the visitor educational experience.
- 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.
- Outreach and educational programs would be planned and presented onsite and offsite with emphasis on curriculum-based materials.
- Outreach to local communities and educational groups would be expanded, including El Paso and Juarez.

Visitor Access, Circulation, and Parking

Visitor Access. The preferred alternative would expand overnight access to the park through the addition of new or expanded camping facilities.

- Expanded opportunities for overnight stays for all levels of camping would be available in the new, larger campground that would be located in the vicinity of Pine Springs or Frijole Ranch.
- A small, low-country, hike-in campground below the eastern escarpment about 2 miles from the Frijole Ranch parking lot would provide a backcountry experience without the need for a strenuous, uphill hike.
- One group campsite would be added at Dog Canyon to encourage groups, particularly from the west Texas and southern New Mexico area, to use the site.
- At Ship-on-the-Desert, an administrative campground would be constructed to support NPS operations

Circulation. Internal circulation would be improved by as follows:

- The single-lane road from the park's west boundary to an area about a mile west of the Salt Basin Dunes would be improved to provide access by low-clearance vehicles.

- The ranch road trace from the Salt Basin Dunes parking area several miles north and east to PX Well would be improved with a new base course for visitor use.
- Access to Williams Ranch would be improved by upgrading the single lane road through engineered measures to reduce water damage and better accommodate travel in both directions. This road would continue to be limited to high-clearance vehicles.

Parking. Additional parking would be available at several sites throughout the park.

- Additional parking would be available in the trailhead parking lot at Pine Springs because recreational vehicle campers would be moved to the new campground.
- Additional parking would be available in the Pine Springs visitor center parking lot because hikers and backpackers would be able to use the trailhead parking lot. Additionally, most use by NPS staff would move to the new administrative facility south of U.S. Highway 62/180.
- The Salt Basin Dunes trailhead parking lot about a mile east of the park boundary would be improved with a gravel surface.
- A small, gravel-surfaced parking lot would be constructed in association with the new PX Well trailhead.
- The Williams Ranch parking lot would be expanded to accommodate 10 vehicles on a gravel-surface.

Hiking Trails, Trailheads, and Horse Use

Hiking Trails. Two primitive trails that start at PX Well would increase hiking opportunities in the northwest part of the park. In addition, 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. New trailheads would be constructed about a mile west of the Salt Basin Dunes and at PX Well. The existing trailhead would be improved at Frijole Ranch. At Guadalupe Pass, the trailhead would be minimally improved with signage and an enlarged parking area.

Horse use. The public corrals would remain at Frijole Ranch and Dog Canyon. Within the designated wilderness and backcountry zones, horse use would continue to be limited to day use only, with no stock allowed in these zones overnight.

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 the preferred alternative, particularly including "Facilities and Associated Visitor Activities." They include the following:

- A new administrative facility would be constructed south of U.S. Highway 62/180. Most administrative offices would be moved from the visitor center building to this new facility.
- Sanitation facilities in wilderness threshold, backcountry, and designated wilderness zones would be provided or improved only in cases of demonstrated need that could not be mitigated by improved education of visitors.
- Ship-on-the-Desert would be rehabilitated to support research, educational, and operational activities, and a new administrative campground would be constructed outside the cultural landscape.

- Operations improvements at Dog Canyon would include an enlarged water storage system and a fire building.

Pine Top patrol cabin could be removed in the future.

A commercial services plan would be prepared to evaluate the potential for providing park services that are necessary and appropriate through concessioners. Opportunities could include, but would not be limited to, operation of the new campground in the vicinity of Pine Springs or Frijole Ranch, and commercial horse operations at Frijole Ranch and/or Dog Canyon. However, they would not include facilities such as a gasoline station or a store.

BOUNDARY ADJUSTMENT

The preferred alternative would include a boundary adjustment like that described in alternative A.

COSTS

The estimated costs to fully implement the preferred alternative 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 thousand dollars. These estimates should not be used for budgetary purposes.

The total one-time cost to implement the preferred alternative would be $9,716,000. In addition to the costs described in alternative A, the National Park Service would develop a new administrative facility, provide a new campground in the vicinity of Pine Springs or Frijole Ranch, and improve access to the Salt Basin Dunes. The estimated cost for one-time construction would be $7,436,000.

This alternative would include resource management actions, including revegetation of disturbed areas and areas where exotic species were removed. Interpretive and orientation information improvements would improve the visitor experience in the park. The one-time, non-facility costs would be $2,280,000, which would include $2,030,000 for resource management and $250,000 for visitor experience and orientation.

Annual operating costs for the park would be covered within 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 could nominally decrease as a result of this alternative. The housing units currently being used for administrative office space would be converted back into housing once the headquarters building was completed. Rehabilitating these structures so that they could again be used as housing would address any deferred maintenance on these structures. The contribution of the housing structures to the total deferred maintenance is small, and because the long-term estimates for deferred maintenance are imprecise, no change is shown in table 4 in the deferred maintenance needs at the park. However, because implementation of the core operations strategy should provide the National Park Service with greater operational flexibility, some deferred maintenance actions could be addressed in a more timely manner, and the National Park Service could better implement priority actions that could be funded from the park budget.