

City of Rocks National Reserve

General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement
Newsletter #2 Results of Scoping, Winter 2009/2010



A Message from the Superintendent

Dear Citizen,

Over a foot of fresh snow has fallen, and regrettably not a visitor is in sight to enjoy the spectacular event. In winter, the Reserve's informal name Silent City of Rocks is best experienced. Heavy snows reduce the complexity of the park to its basic elements: rock and sky; yet, as it begins to melt, these 14,407 acres reveal many different things to the nearly 100,000 annual visitors. Many of you shared with us the fundamental importance of City of Rocks, how you would like to see the Reserve managed, or what you expect the National Park Service and Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation to provide. This second newsletter is partially an account of what you have told us.

For many, City of Rocks is a world-class climbing destination and a place that holds special memories of scaling pinnacles and camping long before the Reserve was designated. To some, the Reserve is one of the last best places to experience the historic westward migration of emigrants across an unsettled landscape. To a few, it is the land on which their grandparents carved out a living, raising cattle and sheep. More recently, it has become a place for building family memories, where the kids can scramble about the rocks or ride their bikes, while dad prepares supper, and mom relaxes around the campfire. It has become the photographer's canvas, the geologist's library, and the birder's paradise; and it is also the ancestral land of the Shoshone and the Bannock, who still gather pine nuts and reverence the land according to the traditions of the elders.

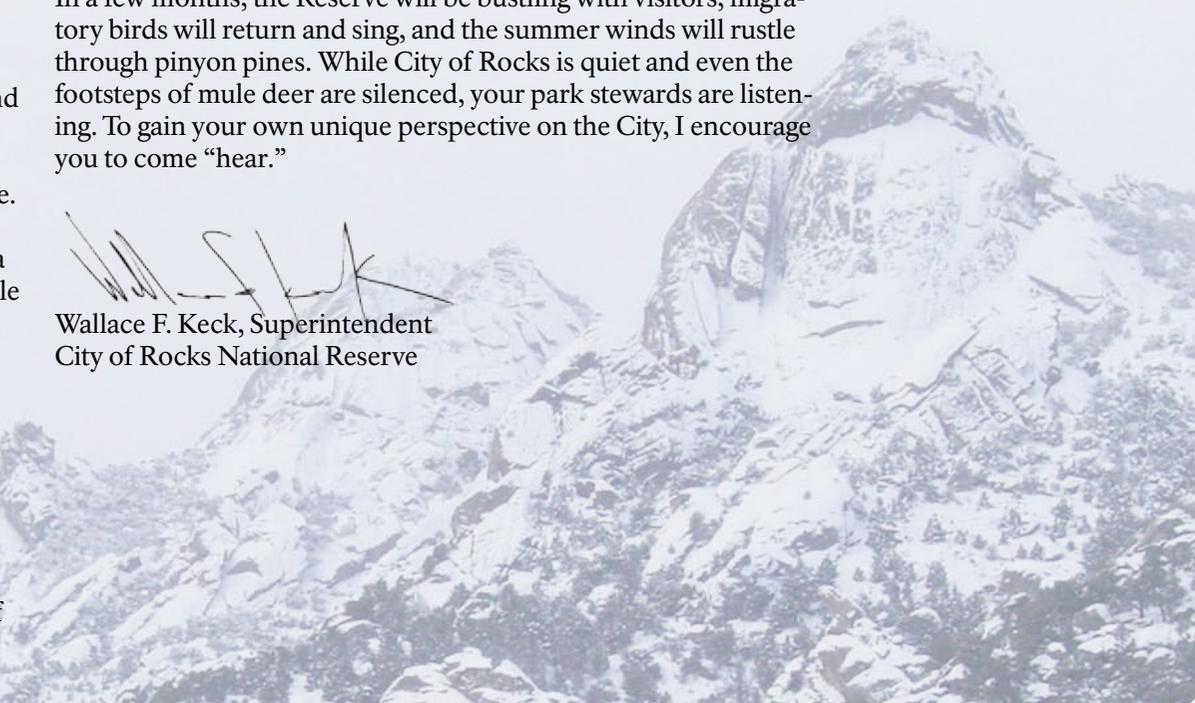
The greatest challenge to park managers is to maintain and enhance each of those experiences without diminishing the others. Greater still, is the challenge to provide for the needs of a large visiting public, and yet maintain the wildness and char-

acter for future generations. A general management plan attempts to guide us toward achieving these goals. The first step has been accomplished – we've heard you tell us what is important. Over the next several months, we will be developing management alternatives for your consideration; but this does not mean we've stopped listening. Please continue to tell us what you like about the Reserve, what facilities you believe are still needed, or where to draw the line in managing recreational uses; stay engaged and give careful consideration to the alternatives we will present.

In a few months, the Reserve will be bustling with visitors, migratory birds will return and sing, and the summer winds will rustle through pinyon pines. While City of Rocks is quiet and even the footsteps of mule deer are silenced, your park stewards are listening. To gain your own unique perspective on the City, I encourage you to come "hear."

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Wallace F. Keck".

Wallace F. Keck, Superintendent
City of Rocks National Reserve



What is a General Management Plan?

A General Management Plan (GMP) is a long-range plan that identifies the overall direction for the future management of units of the National Park System. These plans provide a framework for managers to use in making decisions about how best to protect resources, what levels and types of uses are appropriate, what facilities should be developed, and how people access the Reserve. The GMP will describe the general path that the National Park Service (NPS) intends to follow in managing City of Rocks over the next 15-20 years. To comply with the National Environmental Policy Act and NPS policy, the GMP process will also analyze the environmental consequences of various alternatives suggested in the GMP that will be detailed in an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

How Can I Be Involved in Planning for City of Rocks' Future?

Your continued involvement in the planning process is critical for the successful completion of the GMP. There are two more times when you can provide formal comments to the planning team—at preliminary alternatives development and on the draft GMP/EIS. In addition, you can always write or call to voice your concerns or insights and to check in on the planning process.

Here are several ways for you to participate throughout this planning effort:

- Attend public meetings and workshops.
- Access information about the GMP at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/ciro>.
- Sign up on the mailing list to receive publications about the GMP. Choose whether you would like to receive paper newsletters sent to your mailing address or e-newsletters sent to your email address.
- Send a letter to the Superintendent.
- Email your comments to Reserve Superintendent@nps.gov.
- Phone the Reserve at (208) 824-5519 ext 101.

GMP Schedule

Estimated Time Frame	Planning Activity	Public Involvement Opportunities
Fall 2009	<p>Conduct Public Scoping— Identify goals and issues that need to be addressed. Host public meetings with the public, Reserve partners, agencies, and other stakeholders.</p> <p>* We are currently on this step.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the Public Scoping Newsletter and send us your ideas and concerns. • Attend public meetings and voice your ideas and concerns. Meet the planning team. • Read the Results of Scoping Newsletter.
2010	<p>Develop Preliminary Alternatives— Based on public scoping results, develop a draft outline of different possible futures for the Reserve. Provide opportunities for review and comment by the public, Reserve partners, government agencies, and other stakeholders.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the alternatives newsletter and send us your ideas and concerns.
2012	<p>Prepare and Distribute Draft GMP/EIS—Revise alternatives based on comment from the public, Reserve partners, government agencies, and other stakeholders. Provide additional details on each alternative, analyze impacts of the alternatives, and identify a preferred course of action.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend public meetings and voice your ideas and concerns. • Review the draft GMP/EIS or summary newsletter and provide written comments.
2013	<p>Revise Draft GMP/EIS and Prepare a Final GMP/EIS—Revise Draft GMP/EIS based on comment from the public, Reserve partners, government agencies, tribes, and other stakeholders.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the Final GMP/EIS.
2013	<p>Distribute and Implement the Approved GMP/EIS—Prepare and issue a Record of Decision and implement the plan as funding allows.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with the Reserve to implement the plan.

Next Steps

Many of your comments received during the public scoping period will provide the basis for developing possible scenarios (called alternatives) for the future of City of Rocks. In 2010, the planning team will send you a newsletter with some preliminary alternative concepts for your review and comment. Evaluating one set of alternatives over another helps the planning team to compare and contrast the advantages and disadvantages and provides a sound approach to decision making, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act.

For More Information

You can access more information about this long-range planning effort for City of Rocks National Reserve by visiting <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/ciro> or by contacting the Reserve Superintendent.

- Newsletter #1 Public Scoping (click on the "GMP" project link and download at the website)
- Complete transcripts from five public scoping workshops held in September and October 2009
- Commonly asked questions and answers about management of City of Rocks

Here's What We Heard from You...

Public Scoping

Last summer, City of Rocks National Reserve (Reserve) announced the beginning of the General Management Plan by posting flyers and posters around the Reserve and mentioning the GMP process at Reserve events. The planning team, comprised of National Park Service (NPS) and Reserve staff, officially began the public scoping process on August 25, 2009 when a Notice of Intent to prepare an environmental impact statement for the Reserve was published in the *Federal Register*.

At the end of August, the planning team produced and mailed *Newsletter #1 Public Scoping* to approximately 250 people on the Reserve's mailing list. This included invitations to public workshops to over 90 stakeholders from agencies, organizations, government representatives, and tribal governments. Additional newsletters were available at the visitor center.

The GMP project was posted on the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/ciro> and on the Reserve's homepage at <http://www.nps.gov/ciro/parkmgmt/planning.htm>. Both websites provide information regarding the Reserve's GMP and a method for taking public comments. The Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation also noted the GMP planning process on their website at <http://parksandrecreation.idaho.gov/parks/cityofrocks>.

The planning team encouraged the public to comment and share their thoughts, ideas, and concerns through newsletters, email newsletters, correspondence, press releases, public workshops, informal meetings, and websites. Comments were received from the public until the scoping period closed on November 15, 2009.

Public Scoping Workshops and Written Comments

The NPS held five public workshops in southern Idaho in September and October 2009 to provide the public with an opportunity to meet the planning team, to learn about the GMP planning process, and to provide comments. The workshops included a presentation on the Reserve and GMP planning process followed by facilitated group discussions. Public workshops were held in Almo, Burley, Pocatello, Boise, and Ketchum, Idaho. In total, 72 people signed in at the workshops. Comments from these workshops are posted to the PEPC website.

During the public comment period, the planning team received a total of 27 written responses in the form of letters, emails, newsletter response forms, and web comments.

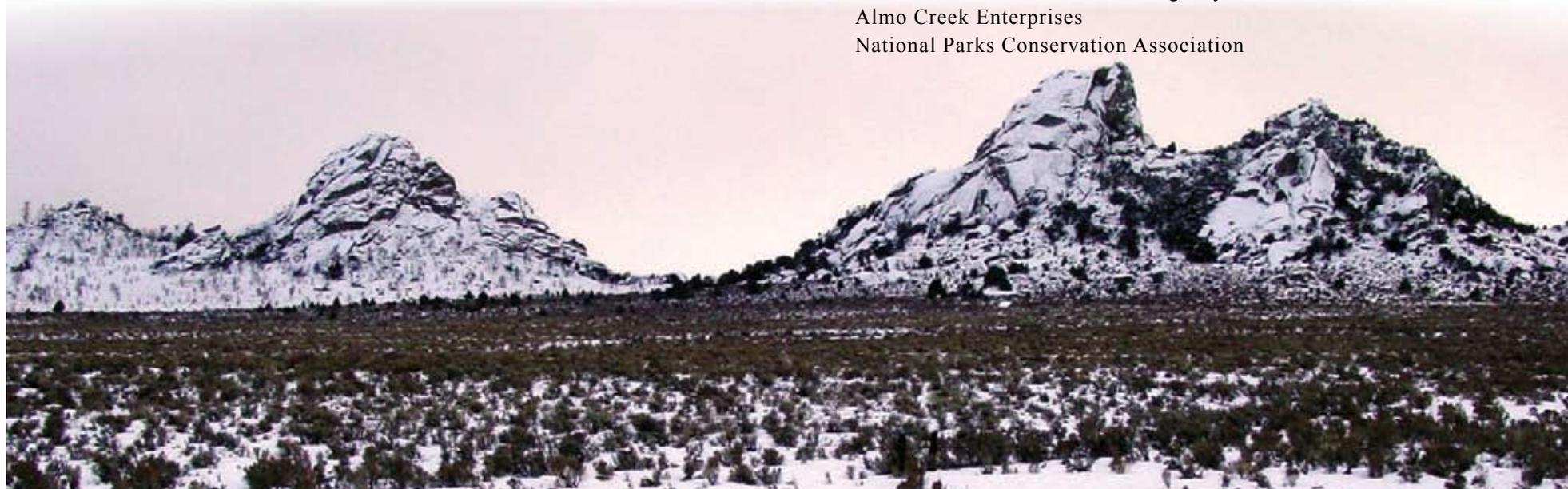
In addition, two stakeholder meetings were held. On September 23, 2009 the GMP planning team met with representatives of the Sawtooth National Forest, Minidoka Ranger District and the Bureau of Land Management, Burley Field Office in Burley, Idaho. On October 22, the planning team met with the NPS Upper Columbia Basin Network in Ketchum.



NPS and Reserve staff explain the planning process at a public scoping meeting.

The following representatives submitted comments at either the public workshops or through written correspondence:

U.S. Congressman Mike Simpson staff
Idaho State Senator Denton Darrington
Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation
Idaho Department of Fish and Wildlife
ACE Fire Protection District
Cassia County Commission
Bruesch Ranch
Cassia County Road and Bridge Department
City of Rocks Quick Response Unit
National Park Service Trails Office
Idaho Back Country Horsemen
Fairfield Inn and Suites
Cassia County Gateway West Task Force
The Access Fund
Southern Idaho Tourism
Oregon-California Trails Association
Idaho Alpine Club
Sierra Club
NPS Upper Columbia Basin Network
Sawtooth Mountain Guides
University of Idaho
Sawtooth National Forest, Minidoka Ranger Station
Bureau of Land Management, Burley Field Office
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Almo Creek Enterprises
National Parks Conservation Association



Summary of Public Comments

Through the course of the scoping period, the GMP planning team received many thoughtful comments. The following summary incorporates both public workshop comments and written comments through November 15, 2009. All comments received have been reviewed and will be considered during the development of the GMP alternatives.

In response to the questions posed in the newsletter and suggestions recorded during the public workshops and correspondence, a series of common trends and themes emerged in the responses. The following section of the newsletter contains a summary of all comments heard, organized by topic.

In addition, the planning team received a number of suggestions for improvements or revisions to the Reserve's purpose, significance statements, and primary interpretive themes. The team is now in the process of reviewing each of these suggestions. Revisions will include adding a new significance statement involving natural resources along with some minor language changes to some of the significance statements and an interpretive theme.

Overview

Many people responded to what they valued most about the Reserve. The most frequent comment from the public was an appreciation for the rustic, undeveloped character of the Reserve and a desire to maintain that character. Most comments conveyed a desire to keep the Reserve essentially the same as it is today, including maintaining roads unpaved. Many commenters expressed their love of the Reserve's landscape and scenic vistas. There was support for additional climbing opportunities, including climbing in the Research Natural Area (RNA), and on Twin Sisters. Many commenters expressed a desire for additional or improved camping opportunities, and concerns about potential future overcrowding. Many were also concerned about visual and resource impacts of development outside the Reserve boundary. There was also a good deal of support for enhanced interpretation of the Reserve's history and cultural resources, particularly in the form of interpretive waysides.

Amazing to me that the current management practices have apparently worked so well. The feel of the reserve, at least in "off season" and mid-week, is so close to what we experienced when first visiting 50 years ago.



Visitor facilities at Bath Rock.



Twin Sisters in winter.

Visitor Experience and Facilities

Most people valued the existing rural character and expressed a strong desire to "keep it the same" and not overdevelop the Reserve. Several expressed concerns about increased visitor use and potential impacts to natural resources or visitor experiences. The primary carrying capacity concerns were overcrowding, parking congestion, noise, and traffic.

I would hope that in 20 years it will look pretty much the same as it does now.

While appreciating the minimally developed character of the Reserve, a few commenters supported construction of a new visitor center for interpretation and visitor orientation with one comment opposed to its construction. Some were in favor of improved or expanded parking facilities, including equestrian parking and staging facilities, as well as parking close to trails and climbing sites.

I hope you will keep facilities simple but with a range of accommodation from the simple one person tent of the rock climber, etc., to RV space for us old-n-achey.

To improve access to Reserve resources, as well as linking to surrounding lands, some expressed support for an expanded trails network. A few commenters suggested having trails that allow mountain bike use. Some comments supported additional directional signage on trails, as well as signs to indicate public/private land boundaries.

There were many comments on the topic of camping. Many suggested that the Reserve provide additional or improved camping opportunities. The

primary concern was overcrowding at existing campgrounds. Commenters were generally pleased with facilities already available at the nearby Smoky Mountain campground, but some were interested in developing new camping opportunities within the Reserve boundary. Most were supportive of keeping campsites within the Reserve "primitive," without hookups or major infrastructure.



Snowshoeing is a great way to experience the Reserve in winter.

Some commenters expressed a desire for expanded climbing opportunities. A few of these conveyed an interest in exploring climbing options in the Reserve's RNA, but most focused on opening Twin Sisters to climbing. A few comments suggested allowing climbing on Twin Sisters with constraints such as weekday-only climbing.

I love the climbing and camping at CRNR. Few places offer the peaceful setting and climbing opportunities.

Some expressed concerns about visitor conflicts, including group crowding at parking lots and campsites, pedestrian safety, day users in camping areas, and conflicts between equestrian and non-eques-

trian users. A few commenters suggested increasing day use options in the Reserve to disperse and alleviate some user conflicts. A few comments supported continued hunting within the Reserve, providing suggestions such as posting hunting season dates on the Reserve website to alert visitors and minimize potential hunter/recreationist conflicts.

There was some support for changes or upgrades to the reservation system. Issues that were brought up included reservation fees, ease of use, difficulty making last-minute reservations, and potential for using the reservation system to better manage times of high visitation and address carrying capacity issues.

While a few supported expanded opportunities for all terrain vehicle (ATV) use and access, several commenters expressed general opposition to ATV use in the Reserve.

Resource Protection

Many commenters highly valued the scenery and vistas within the Reserve, and a few noted the clear air quality that allows for these views. In addition to the scenic views and landscape, a few others expressed their appreciation of the pristine night sky setting at the Reserve. Many comments also noted a concern about the visual and other resource impacts of development projects adjacent to the Reserve.

In twenty years, I probably won't even be here, but it would be nice to know that my granddaughter and her friends find it still simple and clean with a great view of a starry sky.

Several commenters expressed appreciation for the natural quiet in the Reserve, and some comments conveyed concern about noise from overflights and vehicles. A few were concerned that sounds of “civilization” may intrude into the visitor experience in the future, as visitation increases. A few were concerned about existing and future noise impacts from ATV or other recreational vehicle use.

Traditional use is strong within City of Rocks. Many comments supported the continuation of traditional ranching and grazing uses within the Reserve. A few were in favor of limiting or removing grazing in order to reduce impacts to natural and cultural resources.



City of Rocks Road is not maintained during winter months.



Visitors value the scenery, quiet, and communities of native species in the Reserve.

Commenters expressed concerns about resource impacts from overcrowding, trampling, and increased visitor use. Some comments suggested adding signage and possibly fencing to safeguard and interpret cultural resources. Commenters also encouraged inventory and monitoring of wildlife species in the Reserve.

Native plants and management of invasive species were also a concern, and commenters noted the value of native species to the cultural landscape and the potential for invasives to be spread through recreational activities. Some comments emphasized maintaining the stability and integrity of the California National Historic Trail by not seeking to remove vegetation along the trail, and maximizing the use of fire or other natural occurrences to deal with invasive species along the trail corridor.

Access and Transportation

Most of the commenters valued the unpaved roads as a way to minimize traffic and vehicle speeds and maintain the rural undeveloped character of the Reserve. Some expressed concerns about dust and erosion along the roadway. A few suggested reducing speed limits to minimize noise and dust, as well as to enhance safety. One commenter supported paving or treating the roads in order to reduce dust. Some were concerned about the road being turned into a paved highway and expressed their opposition to that idea.

Please don't ever pave the road in City Of Rocks.

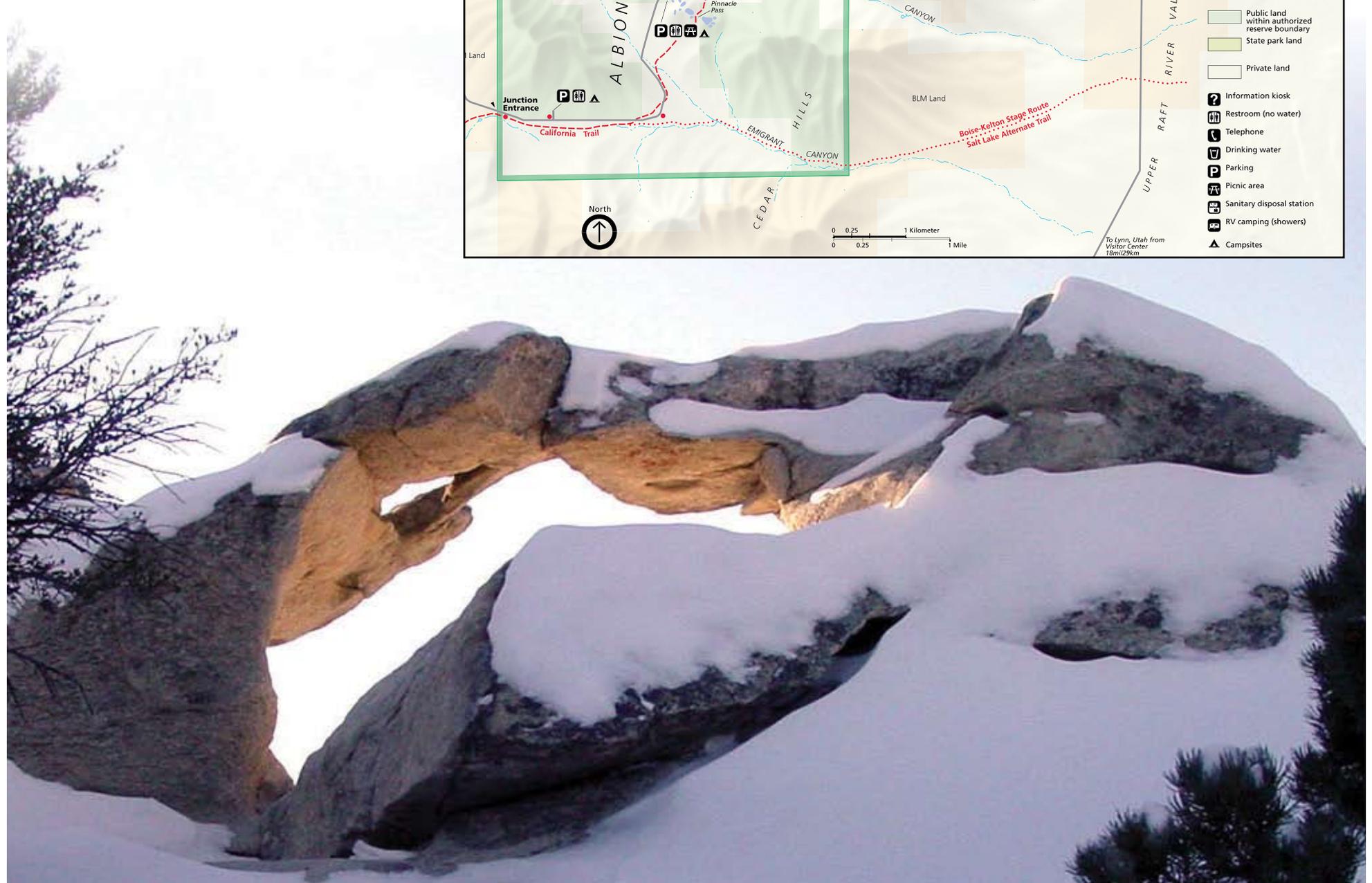
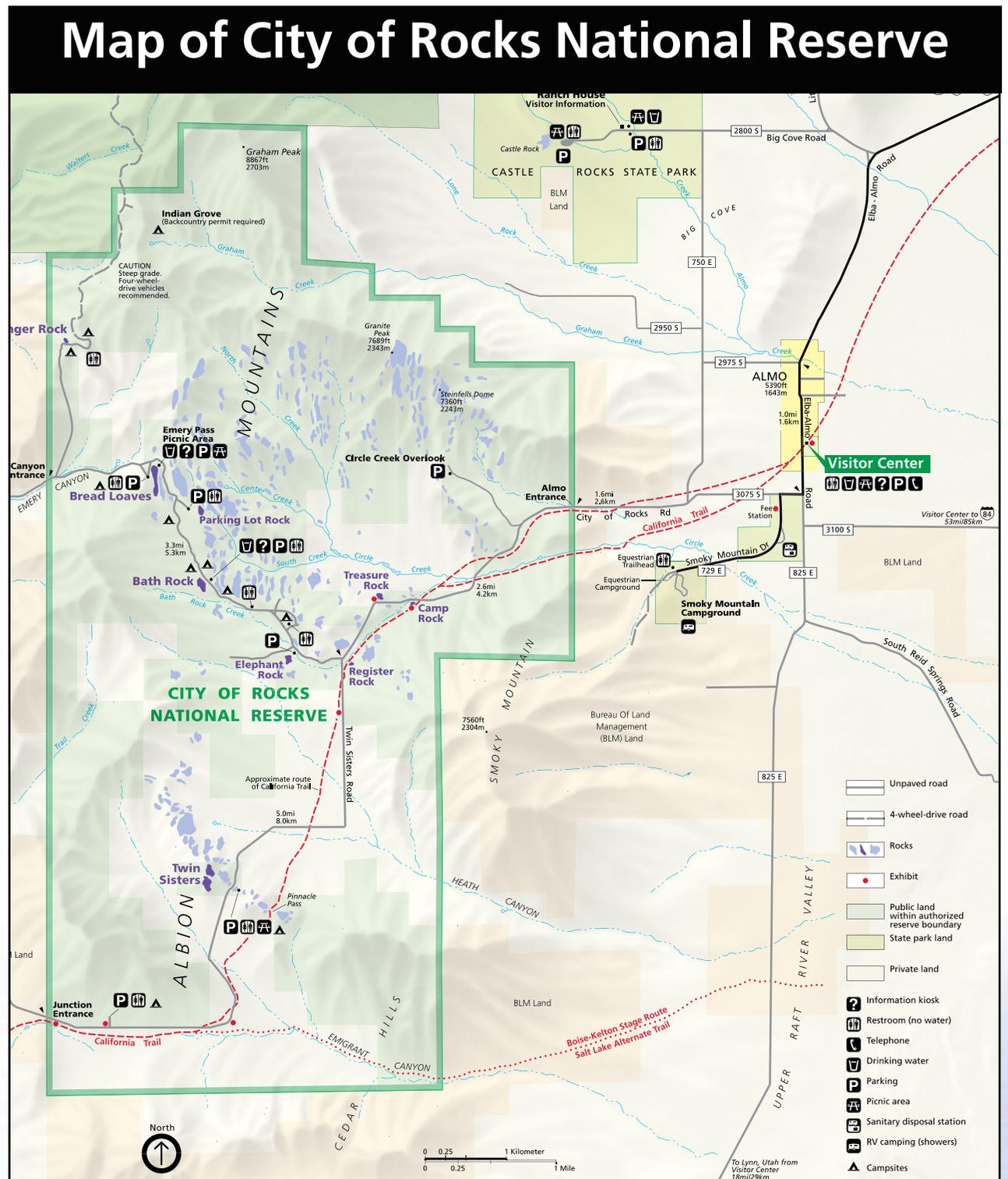
Education and Interpretation

A few people mentioned their appreciation for the educational opportunities offered by the Reserve. Others favored marking the California National Historic Trail, while some suggested interpreting the trail from nearby viewpoints and maintaining the trail undeveloped as part of a cultural landscape. Comments also stated support for additional presence of interpretive staff within the Reserve. To educate the public about geological and historical information, several comments expressed a desire for more interpretive wayside exhibits in the Reserve. Some suggested interpretive trails. A number of comments suggested that many visitors do not connect with the historic and cultural significance of the Reserve, and many supported increased visibility of historical interpretation. Others suggested continuing and enhancing interpretation of the local area, including other historic trails, historic land uses, and family histories.

Land and Boundary

Opinions on further private land acquisition were somewhat mixed. Some commenters were opposed to the NPS acquiring additional private lands while others supported continued acquisition of private lands within the Reserve boundary under the willing seller policy. With the goal of protecting resources, a few people encouraged re-evaluation of the current Reserve boundary. Some supported aligning the boundary to be harmonious with the multiple zoning designations (such as the National Historic Landmark boundary and Cassia County's Historic Preservation Zone) that overlay the Reserve. There were a few comments that opposed any boundary expansion.

My family has owned land in Almo Idaho in direct relation to the emigrants. What about my heritage for my generations to come?



City of Rocks National Reserve 2010 Calendar of Events

Valentine Excursion – February 13

Take your sweetheart on a romantic get-away to the winter wonderland of Castle Rocks State Park. A ranger-guided snowshoe hike will take you to some of the most spectacular views in the park. Snowshoeing will begin at 10 a.m. at the Castle Rocks Ranch House, and the event will conclude at 1 p.m. Snowshoes are available at the park for \$10 per adult and \$5 for ages 17 and under. Group rates are also available. Space is limited and reservations are required.

Winter Day Camp - February 15

Kids, Learn about Castle Rocks while traversing the park on snowshoes. The camp for children 5-9 years old will be held on February 15th from 10:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Activities include backcountry safety, animal track identification and nature in winter. Snowshoes will be provided. Space is limited and reservations are required. Fee: \$5.00 (includes lunch)

Wildflower Walks – May 15

Join the park superintendent and other naturalists for a day of wildflower walks, photography, and plant identification in the pristine sage-brush steppe, aspen forests, and high mountain meadows of City of Rocks and Castle Rocks. All activities are Free.

Idaho Archeology Month Event at Castle Rocks – May 16

Hike at Castle Rocks State Park – Shock and awe, Buried Beach Site, pictographs and more! Bring your own lunch, water and binoculars. All activities are Free.

Birders Weekend – June 5-6

All things birds! Come for the early morning identification walks, birding by ear, and feeder watch. Castle Rocks State Park comes alive with the influx of migratory birds from Central and South America. Don't miss the experience of hearing Snipe on the wing, or viewing the brilliant colors of Lazuli Bunting and Western Tanager. You could see over 50 species in a single hike with the help of our guides! Times and locations of walks and presentations will be posted in advance. All activities are Free.

Summer Day Camp – June 22, 24, and 26

Kids, discover park secrets through education and fun. Day camp for children 7 to 11 years old will be held 8:30 a.m. to noon on June 22nd and June 24th and 8:30 am to 2:00 p.m. on June 26th. Lunch will be provided on the third day. Activities will focus on cultural and natural history. Space is limited and reservations are required. Fee: \$5.00

Summer Trail Ride – June 28

Experience the splendor and solitude of Castle Rocks from horseback. This ranger-guided trail ride will take participants around the geologic area to dramatic vistas. The group will meet back at the Ranch House for an "Old West" catered Dutch oven lunch. Participants may bring their own horse or make prior arrangements to rent one from Indian Grove Outfitters in Almo. Space is limited and reservation is required. Fee is \$20.00 per person.

Flag Retirement Ceremony – July 2

Castle Rocks and Boy Scouts of America Troop 20 join together in proper disposal and flag retirement ceremony for the American flag. The scout group will demonstrate in a dignified manner how to destroy the flag when it is no longer a fitting emblem for display. The event starts at 8 p.m. at Smoky Mountain Campground.

Natural History Hike – July 10

Further your knowledge while exploring City of Rocks on a guided dayhike. Join park superintendent on a natural history adventure to observe summer blooms and wildlife activity while traversing the 5-mile North Fork Trail. Bring lunch, water and binoculars. This event is free.

Star Party – July 16

Castle Rocks State Park, Magic Valley Astronomical Society, and College of Southern Idaho's Centennial Observatory will host Solar viewing (safe views of the Sun with specially filtered telescopes) 2-6 p.m. at Smoky Mountain Campground and Star Party (telescope viewing) 9 p.m. to midnight at Ranch House site. Several telescopes will be set up for solar and night sky viewing. Bring warm clothing and binoculars if you would like. This event is free. \$5.00 Day Use Fee to the park applies.

Climbing Workshop – September 11

Have you always wanted to climb? Here's your chance. Join Climbing Ranger Brad Shilling for a thrilling adventure up one of the many routes that City of Rocks offers. This one-day event includes climbing instruction, safety awareness, and an opportunity to climb. Beginners ages 12 and up are welcome. Children under 18 must have a parent or guardian present. Fee is \$20.00 per person

Fall Trail Ride – September 25

Looking for a few hours of scenic beauty from horseback? This rangerguided trail ride will take participants along the Box Top Trail to dramatic park vistas. The group will rest at Bread Loaves for an "Old West" catered Dutch oven lunch. Participants may bring their own horse or make prior arrangements to rent one from Indian Grove Outfitters in Almo. Space is limited and reservation is required. Fee is \$20.00 per person.

For additional information please contact Juanita Jones (208) 824-5519 x. 106, or email juanita_jones@partner.nps.gov



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation

Contacts

Wallace Keck, Superintendent
City of Rocks National Reserve
(208) 824-5519 ext 101

Venna Ward, Assistant Manager
City of Rocks National Reserve
(208) 824-5519 ext 102

Mail

City of Rocks National Reserve
PO Box 169
Almo, ID 83312

GMP Project Website

For project information or to provide comments directly online:
<http://www.parkplanning.nps.gov/ciro>

Reserve Website

For more information about the Reserve:
<http://www.nps.gov/ciro>

The National Park Service cares for special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.



Carl TerHarr, Volunteer Videographer

City of Rocks has a new visitor orientation video

During the fall of 2009, City of Rocks National Reserve staff and volunteer videographer Carl TerHarr produced a new visitor orientation DVD. The 8 ½ - minute video highlights the nationally significant values of the Reserve, while featuring dramatic scenery, narration, and music. Former park service employee Geoffrey Cook provided the narration. The new video replaces the visitor orientation film *A Short Walk through Time*, produced by Clyde Simmons' Broken Spoke Production that was featured at the City of Rocks visitor center from 2001 through 2009.

Printed on post-consumer recycled paper with soy-based inks. 

City of Rocks
National Reserve
PO Box 169
Almo, ID 83312

OFFICIAL BUSINESS PENALTY
FOR PRIVATE USE - \$300



City of Rocks National Reserve
General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement
Newsletter #2 Results of Scoping, Winter 2009/2010

