

City of Rocks National Reserve

General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement
Newsletter # 1 Public Scoping, Fall 2009



Join Us in Planning for the Future of City of Rocks

A Message from the Superintendent

Dear Citizen,

One hundred and sixty-six years ago, the first emigrant wagon train that headed to California passed through a strange and wonderful place called "City of Rocks." Others would follow between the years 1843 and 1882 - about a quarter million of them. No one, it would seem, passed this way without leaving a mark on the landscape. They scribed their names on the bizarre rocks with axel grease, their campfires consumed the trailside pinyon and sagebrush; their livestock grazed the Great Basin Wild Rye and licked the cool waters of Circle Creek; and their wagons, lightened by the long passage across the "Great American Desert," carved impressions into the gleaming granite. But this place also left its mark on them. Journals recorded their feelings, and sketches of the rocks told us they experienced more than a fleeting curiosity for this place. They described the landscape in terms of what they left behind, or hoped to build: Napoleon's Castle, Steeple Rock, City Hotel, Mansion House, Pyramid City...

At eve we encamped in Pyramid Circle, a delightful place indeed and one which requires the pen of the poet or the pencil of a painter to portray its beauties. It is a perfectly level plain, surrounded by mountains which are covered with pine and cedar trees and studded throughout with numerous tall white and green stones from sixty to one hundred and fifty feet and from ten to twenty feet in diameter at the base. As we view it this eve, the full moon shining upon it, our camp fires blazing near and striving, with their lurid light, to vie with the silvery moon in brightness. Our tents and wagons grouped together and a merry party tripping the light fantastic toe upon the green, whose cheerful, happy voices echo from the hills around us, presents a scene altogether picturesque and novel.

Harriet Sherrill Ward
August 19, 1853

At present, over 100,000 visitors pass through this "Pyramid Circle" each year. City of Rocks is still a delightful place, and one which requires "the pen of the poet or the pencil of the painter to portray its beauties" to those who have yet to come. This place has not changed much, but it does change us. Campfires still blaze "near and striving, with their lurid light, to vie with the silvery moon

in brightness." Tents and SUV's group together "and a merry party tripping the light fantastic toe upon the green whose cheerful, happy voices echo from the hills around us." This scene is still picturesque and it would take several novels to capture just how this place affects us today.

Thanks to Congress and thousands of citizens like you, this "City" will forever remain unsettled. On November 18, 1988, City of Rocks National Reserve was established to preserve and protect through cooperative efforts the scenic qualities and attributes of the California Trail landscape, historic rural setting, and granite features, while interpreting its values and managing recreation. In 1994, the National Park Service and the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation completed a long-range plan to carry out that mission.

Since then, much has been accomplished to restore a tired landscape, to provide the necessary facilities for visitors, and to study and interpret our heritage. But many new challenges remain on the horizon. Some of the old ideas no longer address the present realities, and a new general management plan is needed. This is where you have the opportunity to leave your mark on the landscape, and in the hearts and minds of a future generation. Please help us develop strategies today that will preserve what emigrant Margaret A. Frink called on July 15, 1850, "...a sublime, strange, and wonderful scene—one of nature's most interesting works." Learn more about how you can be involved in the process and stay informed "along the trail" by reading this newsletter. Together, let us scribe a new chapter in the history of this timeless place.

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

Wallace F. Keck
Park Superintendent
City of Rocks National Reserve

What is a General Management Plan?

A General Management Plan (GMP) is a long-range plan that answers “What kind of place do we want this park to be?” It will serve as a guidebook for the future to help managers make decisions about how to protect resources, what levels and types of uses are appropriate, what types of facilities should be developed and how people should access the park. Everything in the plan must be consistent with the park’s purpose and significance, and the legislation that established the National Park Service (NPS) in 1916, providing for the protection of the park’s natural and cultural resources while inviting appropriate visitor use and enjoyment of the park.

The plan will not include detailed facility designs, and it won’t be able to resolve all of the issues or guarantee funding. 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).

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. See times and dates of meetings on the back page of this newsletter.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review scoping newsletter and send us your ideas and concerns using the response form. Attend public meetings and voice your ideas and concerns. Meet the planning team.
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 alternatives newsletter and send us your ideas and concerns using the response form.
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 draft GMP/EIS or summary newsletter and provide written comments.
2013	<p>Revise Draft GMP/EIS and Prepare a Final GMP/EIS</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.

Developing a Foundation for the Plan

The General Management Plan will be based on a foundation for planning and management, called a foundation statement. The foundation statement includes the following:

- The park purpose—why Congress established City of Rocks National Reserve
- Park significance statements—why the Reserve is important within a global, national, regional, and system-wide context. Significance statements are directly related to the Reserve’s purpose
- Primary interpretive themes—the key stories that describe the resources of the Reserve for the public.

Park Purpose

City of Rocks National Reserve (Reserve) was created to preserve and protect through cooperative efforts the scenic qualities and attributes of the California Trail landscape, historic rural setting, and granite features, while interpreting its values and managing recreation.

Park Significance

- As part of the largest overland emigration in American history, City of Rocks National Reserve preserves the most intact and authentic setting of the California Trail. City of Rocks served as a landmark and critical refuge that inspired numerous written accounts of the landscape.
- The Reserve has a timeless natural quality and protects and preserves outstanding scenery set among sculpted granite monoliths framed by the Albion and surrounding mountains.
- City of Rocks National Reserve embraces the western rural setting by preserving remnants of traditional occupation, transportation, and land use of prehistoric and historic peoples.
- The Reserve is a dramatic geologic landscape with naturally sculptured

spires and domes that evoked emotional responses as recorded in emigrant diaries and from visitors of today.

- The Reserve preserves an uplifted and eroded landscape that reveals geologic structures, igneous intrusions, and a rare exposure of some of the oldest and deepest crustal metamorphic rocks in the western United States.
- City of Rocks National Reserve provides one of the highest quality granite face-climbing areas in the United States.

Interpretive Themes

- City of Rocks was a major landmark for emigrants traveling along the California Trail. City of Rocks provided rest and inspiration for the many weary travelers who were heading for Granite Pass and ultimately for California or Oregon.
- The timeless scenery of City of Rocks National Reserve is broad and expansive yet accessible and personal. People develop a personal relationship with this landscape as evidenced by pioneer journals and comments from modern-day visitors.
- The rural historic setting of City of Rocks National Reserve still provides authenticity to the traditional western rural lifestyles of the past 150 years, as well as much of the prehistoric culture.
- Erosion of a cross-jointed granite pluton has resulted in the formation of a maze of spires and domes that are noted for their impressive scenery, stark silence, and inspirational qualities.
- The uplifted and eroded rocks at City of Rocks National Reserve are like an open window into the earth where visitors and scientists can view tectonic (ancient geologic) events that raised the mountainous interior of the western United States and surficial processes that are shaping the current landscape.
- People come from around the world to experience the challenge of climbing the rocks in a quiet and scenic western setting.

Common Questions and Answers

When was City of Rocks National Reserve established?

The Reserve was established in 1988 by the Arizona-Idaho Conservation Act of 1988 (Public Law 100-696). This act created a boundary around lands owned or managed by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation (IDPR), and private landowners. Located in the Albion Mountains of southern Idaho, the Reserve encompasses 14,407 acres.

Why was the Reserve established?

For generations of Cassia County residents, City of Rocks' scenic, natural, and cultural resources have provided inspiration, educational opportunities, and recreation. Concern over increasing use of the area by visitors from outside the region prompted local residents to support efforts to designate City of Rocks as a national reserve.

In recognition of its historical significance to the nation, the City of Rocks was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1964 as one of the most intact settings and significant landmarks on the California Trail. In 1974, it was designated a National Natural Landmark for its unique and nationally significant geologic features.

What is a national reserve?

City of Rocks National Reserve is a unit of the National Park System, and as such, has access to support and services provided by the National Park Service. The Reserve differs from most traditional National Park System units in its unusual management arrangement, and also in terms of certain traditional ranching uses that are allowed to continue provided they are consistent with the obligation to protect the area. There are only two national reserves in the National Park System—the other is Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve in Washington State established in 1978. There are also two national reserves that are not in the National Park System.

Who manages the City of Rocks National Reserve?

The Reserve is managed by Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation to preserve and protect the Reserve's nationally significant historical, cultural, and scenic resources, to manage recreational use, and to interpret the area's resources for the public. State management of the Reserve fulfills a mandate of the enabling legislation calling for the "state or appropriate units of local government" to manage the Reserve.

The NPS officially transferred on-site management of the Reserve to IDPR on May 2, 1996, after approval of the first comprehensive management plan, and after local government enacted regulations to protect the historic and natural features of the area. The Reserve presently has 9,520 acres in federal ownership, 640 acres in state ownership, and 4,887 acres are in private ownership. The same staff who manage City of Rocks also manage the nearby Castle Rocks State Park.

Who has jurisdiction over private land within the Reserve?

Private land within the Reserve is regulated by Cassia County zoning and subdivision ordinances. At the time the Reserve was established, legislation required that local government have in place ordinances or other regulations which would preserve the historic and natural features of the area. Cassia County responded with the creation of a Historic Preservation Zone. This zone limits existing landowners to one residence per ownership of record at the time the Reserve was established, and land uses consistent with that of 1988 and earlier. Currently this zone covers most, but not all, of the Reserve.

What are the missions of the NPS and the IDPR?

The mission of the NPS is "to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations" (NPS Organic Act). The mission of IDPR is to improve the quality of life in Idaho through outdoor recreation and resource stewardship. A cooperative agreement and an operation plan and guidelines for management were developed between the NPS and IDPR to assure efficient and high quality management of the Reserve meeting the missions of each agency.



What Opportunities and Challenges Face City of Rocks National Reserve?

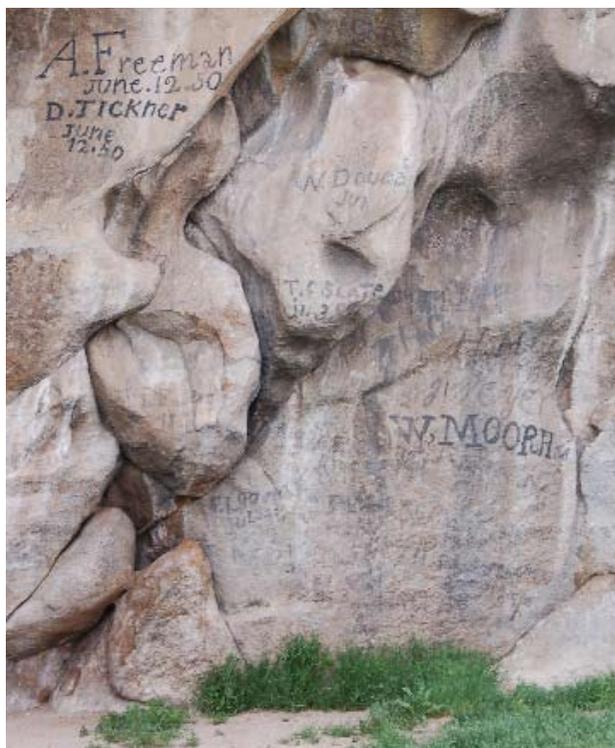
City of Rocks National Reserve is a unique unit of the National Park System in its management and operations. It faces significant challenges in the near and long-term future. The planning team has identified some initial issues listed below that will be addressed in the GMP. Because the GMP is a long-range vision for the Reserve, the issues are broad and conceptual. Please let us know your thoughts on these issues and if you have additional issues, suggestions or recommendations.

Cultural Resource Protection and Preservation

What are the opportunities for protecting and managing the cultural resources at City of Rocks?

The Reserve was established “to preserve and protect the significant historical and cultural resources” related to the California Trail which passed through the City of Rocks between 1843-1882. These resources include the emigrant inscriptions, trail ruts, and landscape characteristics that contributed to City of Rocks’ prominence along the trail. The Reserve also manages other cultural resources related to Native American use before the California Trail era, and homesteading and ranching which post-date the California Trail. These resources include archeological sites, remnants of homesteads, as well as archival and museum objects. The GMP will explore various preservation treatment options, management strategies, and design guidelines for the protection of a wide variety of cultural resources.

Some of the cultural sites, such as the Boise-Kelton Stage Station, are located on private land within the Reserve and contain important historic remnants of the California Trail (designated a National Historic Trail in 1992) or the homesteading period. Managing cultural resources on both private and public land presents challenges, such as protection from vandalism, weathering, and impacts from visitor use and livestock grazing.



Travelers on the California Trail marked their journey by signing their names on rock spires.

Natural Resource Protection

How can City of Rocks explore stewardship and research opportunities throughout the Reserve?

The Reserve is home to a diversity of plant and animal life, as well as the dramatic granite rock formations. Invasive species, visitor activities, and grazing can impact these resources. The GMP will explore management actions for natural resource protection.

In addition, the GMP will re-evaluate management of the City of Rocks Research Natural Area (RNA). This 312-acre area within the Reserve was designated for its outstanding natural features, natural processes, natural diversity, and ecological values. It contains unique geologic formations and the northern limit of the pinyon-juniper forest type in North America. The designation and boundary was inherited from the Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service when the Reserve was established. As part of the GMP process, agency information on the RNA and the current status of its resources will be reviewed. A determination will be made which recreational uses, if any, might be appropriate within the RNA, whether the RNA designation should remain, and whether other areas of the Reserve with biological diversity could also be considered for designation as RNAs.



The Reserve is home to a diversity of plant and animal species.

Soundscape / Natural Quiet

How can City of Rocks maintain its dominance of natural sounds, such as birds’ songs and the wind, that contribute to its timeless quality?

Natural sounds are a fundamental resource of the Reserve, once referred to as the “Silent City of Rocks.” Military and commercial overflights, especially at night, have an impact on both visitor experience and wildlife. Reserve operations and visitor activities can also contribute to the deterioration of the natural soundscape. Baseline acoustical monitoring has recently been conducted to measure and record the sounds of the Reserve. The GMP will present recommendations to maintain natural sounds and natural quiet in the Reserve.

Air Quality and Night Skies

How can the Reserve maintain clear atmospheric conditions that provide for unobstructed views, pristine airsheds, and clear night skies?

Air quality in and around southern Idaho is some of the most pristine in the nation, but it has shown steady deterioration over the last ten years. Pristine airsheds are a fundamental resource of the Reserve and visitor surveys indicate that air quality and sce-

nic vistas are among the most highly valued characteristics of the Reserve. The GMP will evaluate ways to protect the airsheds and associated views, particularly those associated with the California National Historic Trail that bisects the Reserve. Southern Idaho is also one of the best places in the U.S. for viewing night skies. The GMP will recommend ways to protect and restore the scenic and ecological qualities of a naturally dark environment in and around the Reserve.

Climate Change

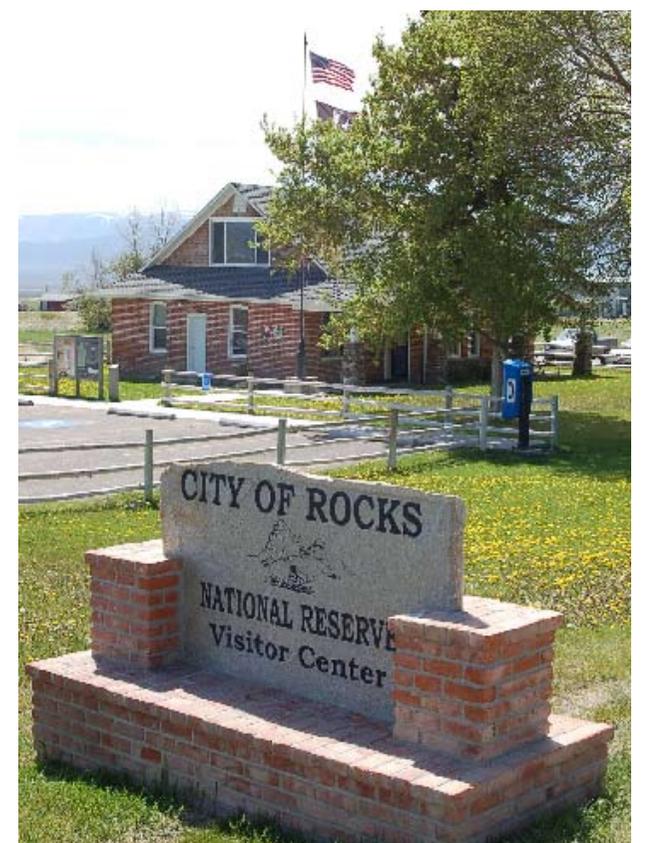
How should the Reserve minimize its carbon footprint and respond to the effects of global climate change?

The effects of global climate change may include changes in temperature, precipitation, evaporation and snowpack rate, local weather patterns, wild-fire frequency, and plant communities. Planning and management actions will allow the Reserve to minimize its greenhouse gas emissions, adapt to climate change, and interpret changing conditions. The GMP will provide guidance on how the Reserve will assess, respond to, and interpret the impacts of global climate change on resources.

Operations/Facilities

What types of facilities are needed to provide for sustainable operations at City of Rocks?

The Reserve has an on-going need for staffing, funding, and facilities. The visitor center, as proposed in the 1994 CMP, has yet to be constructed on leased BLM land near the Almo entrance into the Reserve. An opportunity exists to develop an interagency visitor center that would meet the needs of the adjacent Castle Rocks State Park and potentially other surrounding land managing agencies. In addition, there are insufficient options for seasonal and permanent housing on either Reserve administered land or in the local community. The GMP will provide guidance to these facilities planning efforts.



The current visitor center is located in the town of Almo. The 1994 CMP proposed a new visitor center on leased BLM land.

Visitor Experience

What types of experiences, activities, and facilities should be available in the Reserve to meet visitor needs while also protecting Reserve resources?

Visitors come to the Reserve to enjoy the scenery, and to climb, hike, and recreate in other ways. Visitation to the Reserve is increasing, and the demographics of visitors are trending to younger adult visitors (25-35 years) and smaller group sizes. As the visiting population shifts, their interests and preferred activities may also change. The GMP will use current visitor survey data to comprehensively address visitor facilities, activities, and programs. Day use and camping will be evaluated taking into consideration camping opportunities on adjacent public and private lands. A comprehensive look at the trail system with associated parking, picnicking, and trailheads will be completed as part of the GMP. The GMP will also provide guidance on other recreational uses, such as hunting and equestrian use, including locating staging areas and any related facilities.



Overnight camping is one of the most popular activities at City of Rocks.

Evaluation of Boundaries

Does the current boundary adequately protect resources and values fundamental to the purpose of the Reserve?

The National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978, as amended, requires that GMPs consider the adequacy of existing boundaries. When the Reserve was established, it was assumed that the private lands and associated ranching within the boundary would remain part of the Reserve. Since then, many of the landowners have opted to sell their land to the National Park Service. Planning for these acquired lands will be addressed in the GMP. The GMP will also determine if any changes to the boundary are appropriate based on resource protection, visitor use, and land management needs.

The National Historic Landmark and National Natural Landmark boundaries that overlay the Reserve are configured differently from each other and neither covers the entire Reserve. The Cassia County Historic Preservation Zone does not cover the entire Reserve, and therefore may not fully protect the cultural and natural resources. This presents some management challenges. The GMP will consider recommendations for these boundaries so that they might be consistent with the extent of the Reserve boundary.

Transportation/Circulation

What transportation methods and options could meet visitor needs, protect resources, and allow for changing conditions due to climate change?

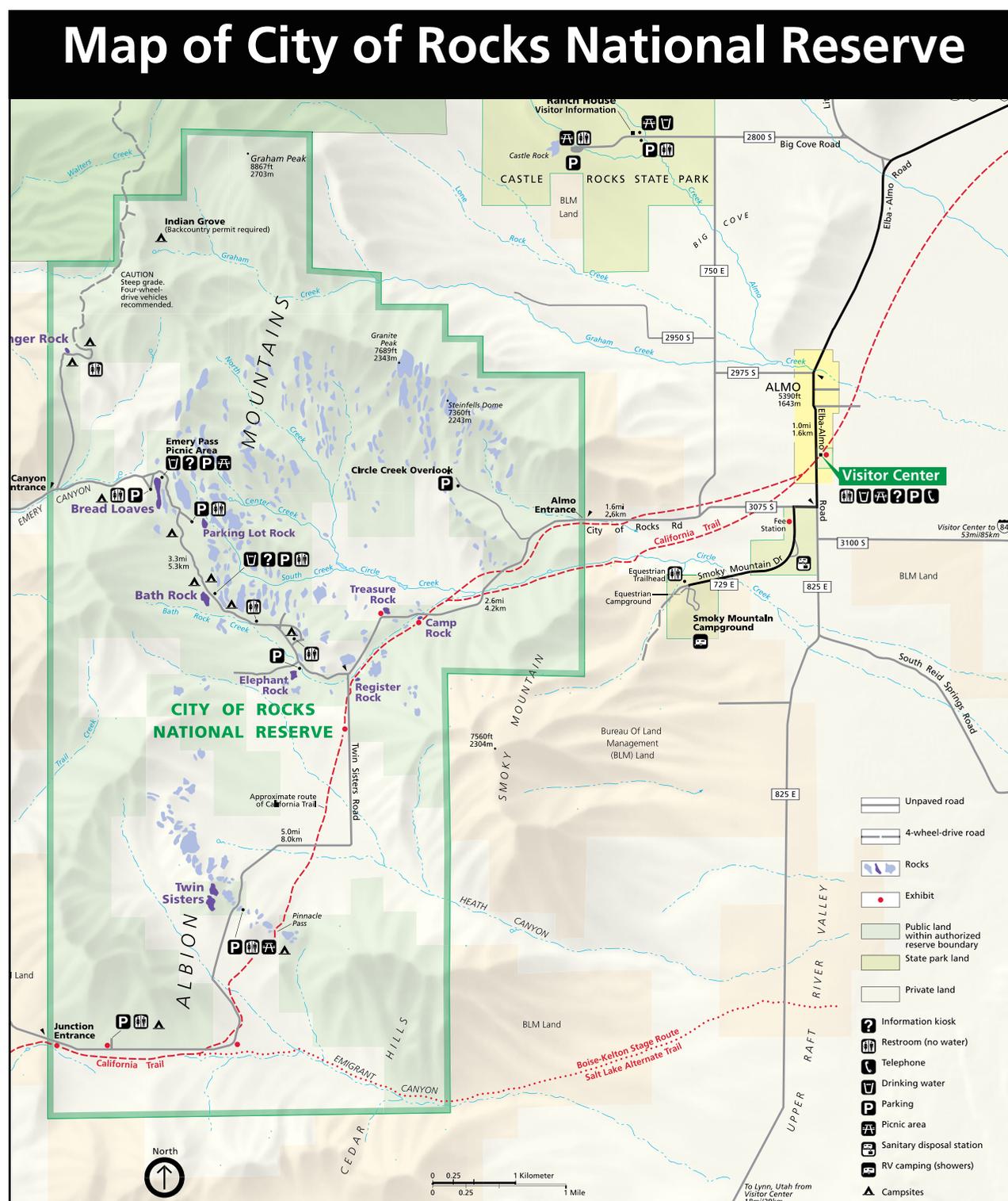
Access and transportation within and through the Reserve includes use by motorized vehicles, horses, bicycles, and people on foot. Parking is available in both day use and overnight camping areas, but overflow parking often takes place along the side of roads, creating safety concerns and erosion issues. Staging areas for equestrian use also present similar issues. Some visitors merely pass through the Reserve on scenic drives along the City of Rocks road. The GMP will consider all forms of motorized and non-motorized transportation and evaluate circulation patterns, parking, and other transportation options.

City of Rocks Backcountry Byway is an unpaved road that runs through the Reserve. The Byway is experiencing erosion, due to climatic conditions and its alignment on disintegrating granite soils.

The road is currently managed by Cassia County, which poses some challenges for Reserve staff when maintenance is needed. The GMP will recommend appropriate road maintenance standards, including identifying appropriate practices for drainage and erosion control along the Byway. The GMP will also examine an array of potential management options for the City of Rocks Backcountry Byway and make recommendations as appropriate.



Transportation on City of Rock Backcountry Byway includes sightseers as well as Reserve visitors.





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

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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>

You're Invited to a Workshop!

Come and meet the planning team, learn more about the general management plan and planning process, and discuss your ideas and concerns for the future of City of Rocks National Reserve. Please try to attend one or more of these workshops. We look forward to seeing and hearing from you!

Monday, September 21 - Almo
7 p.m. - 9 p.m.
CIRO Shop Conference Room
(200 yards south of Visitor Center)
3035 Elba-Almo Rd
Almo, Idaho

Tuesday, September 22 - Pocatello
7 p.m. - 9 p.m.
Idaho State University, Museum of
Natural History (Building #12)
Education Room
5th Ave and Dillon St.
Pocatello, Idaho

Thursday, October 22 - Ketchum
7 p.m. - 9 p.m.
Ketchum City Hall
480 East Avenue N.
Ketchum, Idaho

Tuesday, September 22 - Burley
10 a.m. - 12 p.m.
Burley City Hall - Council Chambers
1401 Overland Ave
Burley, Idaho

Wednesday, September 23 - Boise
7 p.m. - 9 p.m.
IDPR Headquarters
5657 Warm Springs Ave
Boise, Idaho

Written comments can also be submitted online or using the attached comment form. *Please submit all comments by November 15, 2009.*

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

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OFFICIAL BUSINESS PENALTY
FOR PRIVATE USE - \$300



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