



Circle Creek Parking Lot Project Environmental Assessment



City of Rocks National Reserve
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United States Department of the Interior • National Park Service • City of Rocks National Reserve

Executive Summary

This Environmental Assessment has been prepared to satisfy the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 (Public Law 91-190, 42 U.S. C. 4321-4347, as amended), including the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations found at 40 CFR 1500 -1508, Director's Order (DO) 12, and other applicable laws.

NEPA requires the documentation and evaluation of potential impacts resulting from federal actions. Federal actions may include projects financed, assisted, conducted, regulated or approved by a federal agency. An environmental assessment discloses the potential environmental consequences of implementing the proposed action and other reasonable and feasible alternatives. NEPA is intended to provide decision-makers with sound knowledge of the environmental consequences of the alternatives available to them. In this case, the Superintendent of City of Rocks National Reserve and the NPS Pacific West Regional Director are faced with a decision to relocate the Circle Creek Parking Lot. The current Circle Creek Overlook Parking Area is an undefined dirt surface on private land within the viewshed of the California National Historic Trail. This EA was prepared to assist the management to decide whether or not to relocate the parking lot and identify the environmental consequences of that decision.

The DO 12 handbook provides guidance to NPS personnel by explaining policy and procedure for NPS compliance with NEPA. DO 12 does not conflict with NEPA or CEQ regulations and facilitates compliance with NPS policies and requirements (http://www1.nrintra.nps.gov/eqd/do12site/01_intro/011_intro.htm).

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I. Introduction

In the Albion Mountains of the Northern Great Basin, City of Rocks National Reserve is a unique geologic area with granite pinnacles and monoliths. This area has long been an oddity and wonder, especially for passing emigrants of the California Trail (1843-1869). One emigrant artist, James F. Wilkins, named the area that contained these geologic features City of Rocks in 1849.

As early as the 1920s, City of Rocks has been recognized as an outstanding landscape worthy of the status as a national monument due to its unique cultural resources, scenic quality, and potential for high quality recreation. In 1964, it was designated a national historic landmark. In 1974 it received designation as a national natural landmark, and Section 36 was transferred to the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation (IDPR) from the Idaho Department of Lands.

City of Rocks National Reserve was created November 18, 1988, by Public Law 100-696, the Arizona-Idaho Conservation Act of 1988. This act drew a 22-mile boundary around lands owned or managed by the US Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), IDPR, and private individuals. After the approval of the 1996 City of Rocks National Reserve Comprehensive Management Plan, the National Park Service (NPS) officially transferred on-site management of the Reserve to IDPR on May 2, 1996.

These 14,407 acres preserve and protect a 6.2 mile segment of the congressionally designated California National Historic Trail and the surrounding cultural landscape. That landscape also includes a portion of the Salt Lake Alternate (of the California Trail), Mormon Battalion Trail, Kelton-Boise Stage Route, remnant trail ruts, and emigrant signatures written with axle grease. Other cultural resources include prehistoric artifacts, homesteads, irrigation and ranching improvements, and mica mines. The grazing of cattle on private lands and on seven authorized allotments in the Reserve continues today.

Elevation in the Reserve ranges from 5,720 feet (east entrance) to 8,867 feet (Graham Peak). Total relief is 3,147 feet. The geologic features have become world renown for rock climbing and academic study. In addition, the natural resources are diverse. Vegetation communities include sagebrush steppe, pinyon-juniper woodlands, mountain mahogany woodlands, and higher forest communities of aspen, sub-alpine fir, lodgepole pine, and limber pine. There are more than 498 species of plants, 142 birds, 5 amphibians, 14 reptiles, and 56 mammals documented or expected in the Reserve. Idaho's only known population of cliff chipmunks is in the Reserve and on adjacent lands. Other fauna of note include big-horn sheep, which have been reintroduced a few miles north, but on rare occasions, are observed within the Reserve.

Today the Reserve offers camping, climbing, hiking, backpacking, equestrian riding, mountain biking, sightseeing, and much more. About 100,000 visitors pass through the Reserve annually, primarily between April 1 and October 30. Many come from the metropolitan areas of the Wasatch Front in Utah or the populated areas of southern Idaho (Boise, Twin Falls, Pocatello, and Idaho Falls). Nearly every state is represented in visitor registers and on camping receipts — with Wyoming, California, Colorado, and Oregon most frequently listed. Foreign countries (about 15 to 20) are also represented annually. Although the Reserve is open year-round, the roads are often impassable in winter.

Scope of this Environmental Assessment

This Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared to satisfy the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 (Public Law 91-190, 42 U.S. C. 4321-4347, as amended), including the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations found at 40 CFR 1500 -1508, Director's Order (DO) 12, and other applicable laws, NPS Management Policies (2006) and management directives. This Environmental Assessment facilitates compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, Clean Water Act, and the Clean Air Act enacted for the protection of the environment.

The Superintendent of City of Rocks National Reserve and the NPS Pacific West Regional Director are faced with a decision to relocate the Circle Creek Parking Lot and will use this EA to make a decision about the project. The purpose of this Environmental Assessment is to identify, evaluate, and document the potential effects of the proposed Circle Creek Parking Lot Project (Figure 1). Existing conditions, described as the No-Action Alternative (Alternative 1), constitute the baseline for evaluating the effects of the proposed plan.

This project was outlined in the Comprehensive Management Plan (CMP) in 1994 and public comment was taken at that time. Although the exact design was not available in 1994, specifications about the number of cars and pavement type have not been altered since the CMP. The Reserve and the NPS are currently revising the General Management Plan (GMP) for the Reserve. This project is consistent with and will not be altered by the new GMP.

Park Purpose and Significance

In 2007, the National Park Service in cooperation with the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation developed a draft Foundation Statement to guide current and future planning and management of City of Rocks National Reserve. The Foundation Statement contains a description of the Reserve's purpose, significance, fundamental resources and values, primary interpretive themes, special mandates, and the legal/policy requirements for administration and resource protection.

The purpose is a statement of why Congress established the Reserve as a unit of the national park system. As documented in the Foundation Statement, the purpose of City of Rocks National Reserve is shown below.

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

Guided by legislation and the knowledge acquired through management, research, and civic engagement, statements of significance define what is most important about the Reserve's resources and values. The Foundation Statement identified six attributes of the Reserve's resources and values that are of such significance to be included in the national park system:

- 1. As part of the largest overland emigration route in American history, the 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.*
- 2. 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.*
- 3. The Reserve embraces the rural setting by preserving remnants of traditional occupation, transportation, and land use of prehistoric and historic peoples.*
- 4. 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.*
- 5. 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.*
- 6. The Reserve provides one of the highest quality granite face-climbing areas in the United States*

Circle Creek Overlook Parking Lot Relocation Project

City of Rocks National Reserve

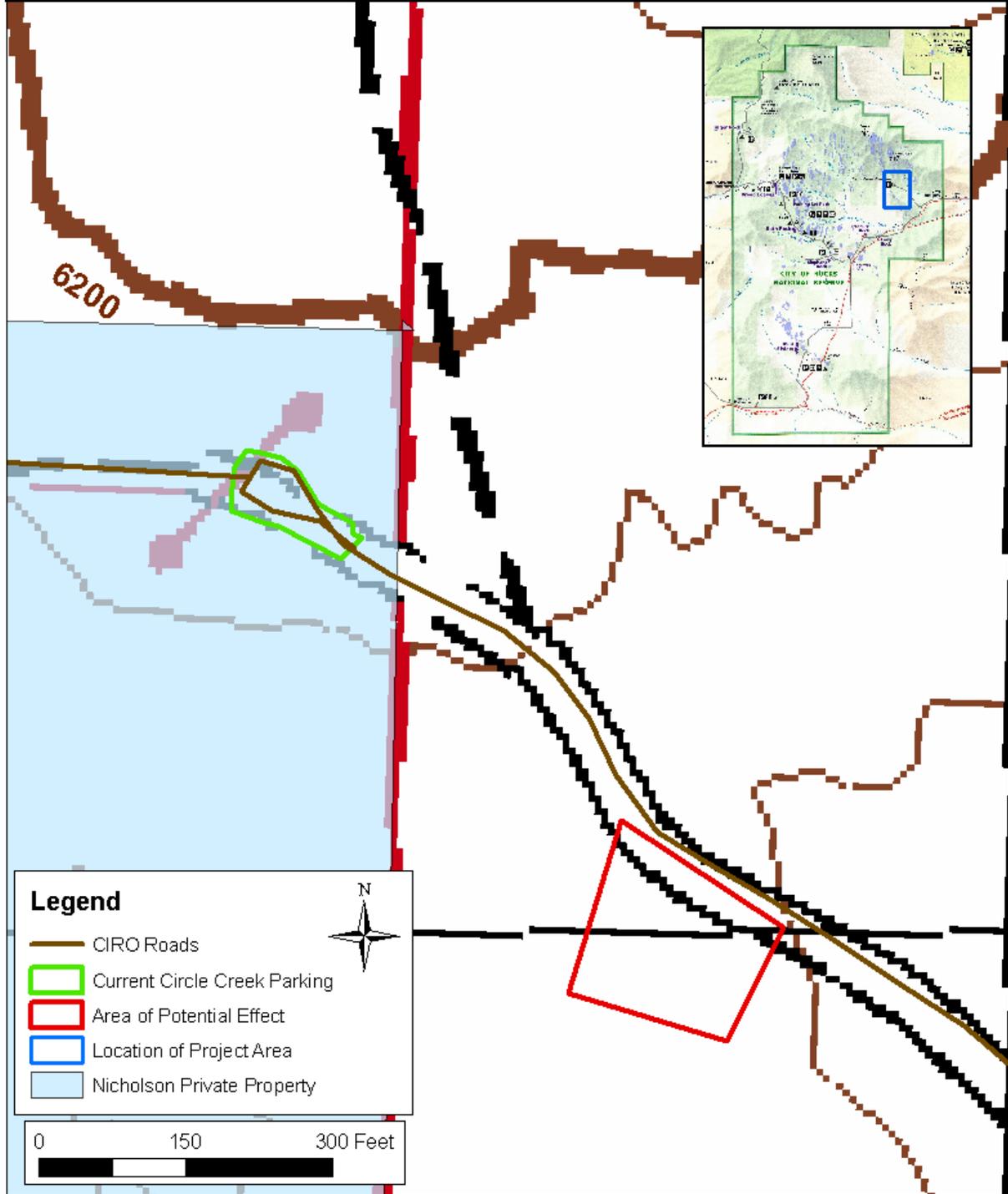


Figure 1. Project Location 7.5 Topographic Map

Circle Creek Overlook Parking Lot Relocation Project

City of Rocks National Reserve

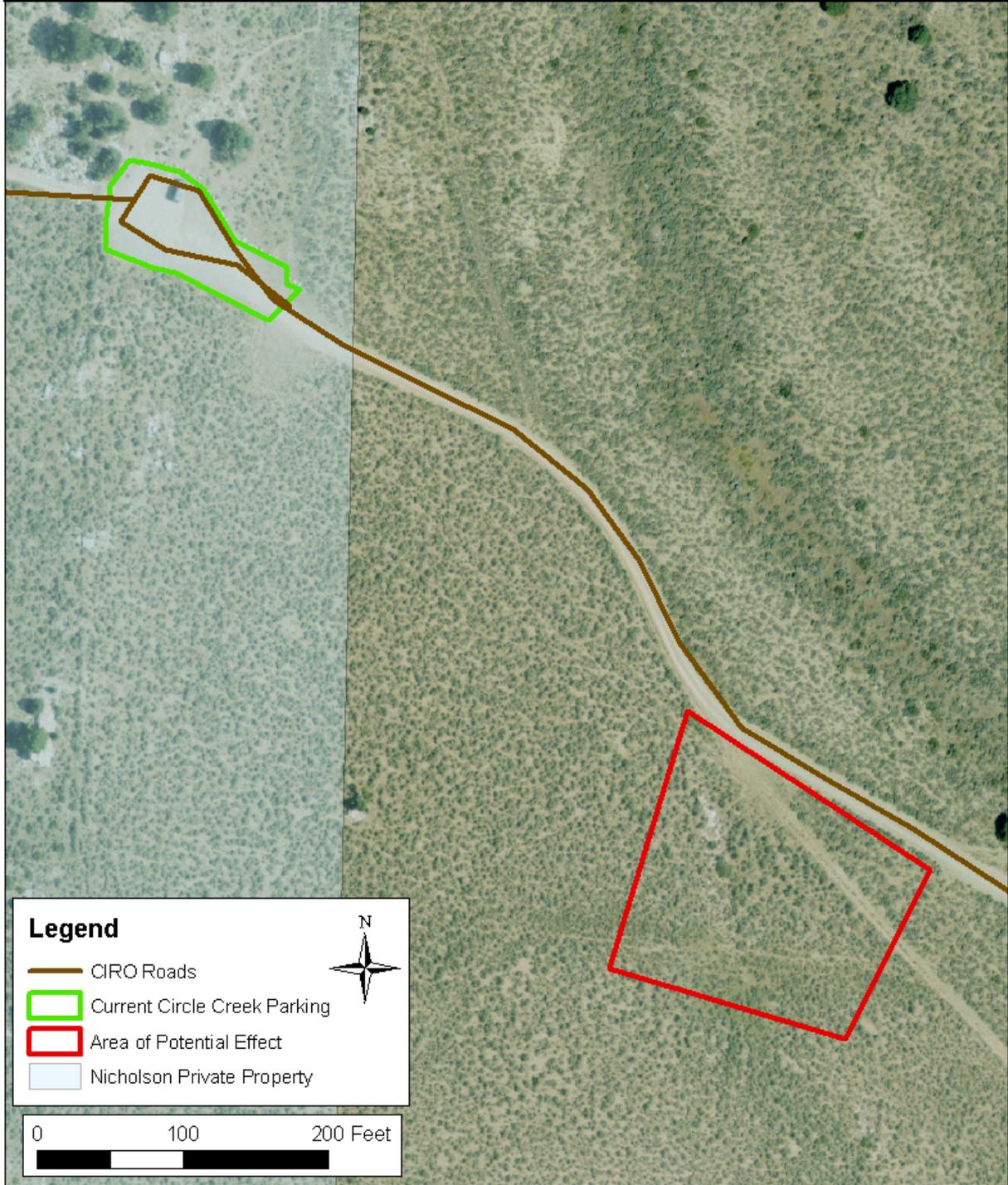


Figure 2. Project Location Aerial Photograph

II. Purpose and Need

Purpose and Need

Why does the parking lot at Circle Creek Overlook need to be relocated? Congress mandated in the Reserve's enabling legislation, for the Secretary of the Interior to "manage recreational use." The purpose of managing recreation is to ensure that the use of the Reserve does not degrade its nationally significant values. The purpose of the relocation of the parking lot at the Circle Creek Overlook is to remove the existing parking area from the view shed of the California National Historic Trail (CNHT). The current parking area is an undefined dirt surface and is located inappropriately on a private in-holding. The relocation of the parking lot is overdue as one of the Reserve's primary goals is to preserve the cultural landscape of the CNHT. In addition, the configuration of the current parking area impedes traffic flow and is expanding haphazardly to the detriment of the surrounding vegetation.

Goals and Objectives

GOAL

The goal of the project is to provide facilities to support recreational opportunities while minimizing: (1) impacts to the Reserve's nationally significant natural and cultural resource values, and (2) conflicts with other stakeholders.

OBJECTIVES

1. Protect and preserve historic properties and ensure that the Reserve's significance as a National Historic Landmark is not adversely affected by visitor use.
 - a. Protect the overall integrity of significant cultural resources, which include (but are not limited to) the experiential aspects of the historic setting, the association between the historic event and the historic property, and the feelings which these aspects evoke.
2. Manage visitor use so that impacts on natural resources (soils, vegetation, rock, wildlife, air, water quality, scenery, and natural sounds/silence) are minimized.
 - a. Ensure that natural resources are not impaired. The level of acceptable impact is defined, and measures to mitigate previous impacts are outlined.
 - b. Ensure that the protection of natural resources and values in the Reserve are articulated in interpretive, educational and orientation materials provided to visitors engaged in climbing.

Background

HISTORY OF THE RESERVE

The City of Rocks was formed by geologic forces of uplift of deep crustal granites and subsequent erosion which exposed the spires and peculiar formations seen by Native Americans, Emigrants, and early settlers in the past as well as visitors today. The Shoshone and Bannock were encountered by explorers, trappers, and emigrants in the area. The Shoshone and Bannock hunted game and collected pine nuts from the area as part of their seasonal occupation of southeastern Idaho. The City of Rocks was documented and sketched in journals by emigrants on the California Trail (1841-1869). Wagon ruts and signatures in axle grease, evidence of the emigrant's passage through the area, are visible today in the Reserve. Congress established the City of Rocks National Reserve in 1988 in order to protect the remnants of the California Trail and the spectacular geological formations as well as manage recreation in the area. The first documented climb in the Reserve took place in the early 1960's and climbing continues to be a popular activity. A detailed history of the Reserve is provided in the CMP. The plan can be viewed at the Reserve visitor center or on the internet at (<http://www.nps.gov/ciro/parkmgmt/planning.htm>).

RELATIONSHIP TO LAWS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE POLICY, AND PARK PLANNING DOCUMENTS

National Park Service Organic Act

The key provision of the legislation establishing the National Park Service, referred to as the 1916 Organic Act, is:

The National Park Service shall promote and regulate the use of the Federal areas known as national parks, monuments, and reservations hereinafter specified . . . by such means and measures as conform to the fundamental purpose of the said parks, monuments, and reservations, which purpose 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 (16 USC 1).

1970 National Park Service General Authorities Act (as amended in 1978 – Redwood amendment)

This act prohibits the NPS from allowing any activities that would cause derogation of the values and purposes for which the parks have been established (except as directly and specifically provided by Congress in the enabling legislation for the parks). Therefore, all units are to be managed as national parks, based on their enabling legislation and without regard for their individual titles. Parks also adhere to other applicable federal laws and regulations, such as the Endangered Species Act, the National Historic Preservation Act, the Wilderness Act, and the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. To articulate its responsibilities under these laws and regulations, the NPS has established management policies for all units under its stewardship.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (42USC 4341 et seq.)

NEPA requires the identification and documentation of the environmental consequences of federal actions. Regulations implementing NEPA are set for by the President's Council on Environmental Quality (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508). CEQ regulations establish the requirements and process for agencies to fulfill their obligations under NEPA.

Clean Water Act (CWA) (33 USC 1241 et seq.)

Under this act, it is a national policy to restore and maintain the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the nation's waters, to enhance the quality of water resources, and to prevent, and control, and abate water pollution. Section 401 of the *Clean Water Act* as well as NPS policy requires analysis of impacts on water quality. *NPS Management Policies* provide direction for the preservation, use, and quality of water in national parks.

Clean Air Act (as amended) (42 USC 7401 et seq.)

The Clean Air Act states that park managers have an affirmative responsibility to protect park air quality related values (including visibility, plants, animals, soils, water quality, cultural resources and visitor health) from adverse air pollution impacts.

Endangered Species Act (16 USC 1531 et seq.)

The Endangered Species Act (ESA) requires federal agencies, in consultation with the Secretary of the Interior, to use their authorities in the furtherance of the purposes of the act and to carry out programs for the conservation of listed endangered and threatened species (16 USC 1535 Section 7(a)(1)). The ESA also directs federal agencies, in consultation with the Secretary of the Interior, to ensure that any action authorized, funded, or carried out by an agency is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any endangered or threatened species or result in the destruction or adverse modification of designated critical habitat (16 USC 1535 Section 7(a)(2)). Consultation with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) is required if there is likely to be an effect.

National Historic Preservation Act (1966 as amended) (16 USC 470)

Section 106 of the NHPA directs federal agencies to take into account the effect of any undertaking [a federally funded or assisted project] on historic properties. An "Historic property" is any district, building, structure, site, or object that is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places because the property is significant

at the national, state, or local level in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, or culture. This section also provides the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) an opportunity to comment on the undertaking. The 1992 amendments to the act have further defined the roles of American Indian Tribes and the affected public in the Section 106 process.

National Park Service Management Policies (2006)

Management Policies govern the way park managers make decisions on a wide range of issues that come before them. Management Policies consolidates agency policy on a wide variety of laws, technology, resource management, and other issues pertinent to management of the National Park System. Sections applicable to the proposed project are quoted below.

NPS Policy 1.4.3 The NPS Obligation to Conserve and Provide for Enjoyment of Park Resources and Values

The “fundamental purpose” of the national park system, established by the Organic Act and reaffirmed by the General Authorities Act, as amended, begins with a mandate to conserve park resources and values. This mandate is independent of the separate prohibition on impairment, and so applies all the time, with respect to all park resources and values, even when there is no risk that any park resources or values may be impaired. NPS managers must always seek ways to avoid, or to minimize to the greatest degree practicable, adverse impacts on park resources and values. However, the laws do give the NPS the management discretion to allow impacts to park resources and values when necessary and appropriate to fulfill the purposes of a park, so long as the impact does not constitute impairment of the affected resources and values.

The fundamental purposes of all parks also include providing for the enjoyment of park resources and values by the people of the United States. The “enjoyment” that is contemplated by the statute is broad; it is the enjoyment of all the people of the United States, not just those who visit parks, and so includes enjoyment both by people who directly experience parks and by those who appreciate them from afar. It also includes deriving benefit (including scientific knowledge) and inspiration from parks, as well as other forms of enjoyment. Congress, recognizing that the enjoyment by future generations of the national parks can be ensured only if the superb quality of park resources and values is left unimpaired, has provided that when there is a conflict between conserving resources and values and providing for enjoyment of them, conservation is to be predominant. This is how courts have consistently interpreted the Organic Act, in decisions that variously describe it as making “resource protection the primary goal” or “resource protection the overarching concern,” or as establishing a “primary mission of resource conservation,” a “conservation mandate,” “an overriding preservation mandate,” “an overarching goal of resource protection,” or “but a single purpose, namely, conservation.”

NPS Policy 8.2 Visitor Use

Enjoyment of park resources and values by the people of the United States is part of the fundamental purpose of all parks. The NPS is committed to providing appropriate, high quality opportunities for visitors to enjoy the parks, and will maintain within the parks an atmosphere that is open, inviting, and accessible to every segment of American society. ...The NPS will therefore provide opportunities for forms of enjoyment that are uniquely suited and appropriate to the superlative natural and cultural resources found in the parks. ...To provide for enjoyment of the parks, the National Park Service will encourage visitor activities that: (1) are appropriate to the purpose for which the park was established; and (2) are inspirational, educational, or healthful, and otherwise appropriate to the park environment; and (3) will foster an understanding of, and appreciation for, park resources and values, or will promote enjoyment through a direct association with, interaction with, or relation to park resources; and (4) can be sustained without causing unacceptable impacts to park resources or values.

NPS Policy 8.2.2.1 Management of Recreational Use

Superintendents will develop and implement visitor use management plans and take management actions, as appropriate, to ensure that recreational uses and activities within the park are consistent with its authorizing legislation or proclamation and do not cause unacceptable impacts to park resources or values. ...visitor use management plans will (1) contain specific, measurable management objectives related to the activity or activities being addressed; (2) be periodically reviewed and updated; and (3) be consistent with the carrying capacity decisions made in the general management plan.

City of Rocks National Reserve Comprehensive Management Plan (p. 348)

The CMP indicates development of the Circle Creek Basin Overlook will be consistent with the purpose of the Reserve. The plan calls for the construction of a 20 car gravel parking lot for day use, a ¼ mile accessible hardened trail to the overlook, a vault toilet, one interpretive sign and garbage and recycling receptacles. In addition approximately 10 miles of trail to connect Indian Grove and Pinnacle Pass to the overlook will be constructed.

(Note: The Comprehensive Management Plan was developed through a lengthy and open, public process beginning November 1989, leading to the final approval and activation on February 1, 1996. All other implementation plans concerning City of Rocks National Reserve are subject to the goals and objectives of the Comprehensive Management Plan. The plan can be viewed at the Reserve visitor center or on the internet at <http://www.nps.gov/ciro/parkmgmt/planning.htm>).

Cooperative Agreement between the NPS and the State of Idaho, IDPR; Article II.2

The State of Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation will (a) upon transfer of the Reserve to IDPR management and administration, assume, accept and embrace all on-site program management responsibilities associated with a unit of the National Park and Idaho State Park System, (b) adopt and implement the Comprehensive Management Plan for the Reserve and subsequent and supplementary program or action plans developed in collaboration with, and approved by, the NPS for City of Rocks, (c) adopt and implement the amended Operational Plan and Guidelines for Management of City of Rocks National Reserve.

Idaho Statute 67-4218 (Creation of IDPR)

There is hereby created a department of parks and recreation which shall be, for the purposes of section 20, article IV, of the constitution of the state of Idaho, an executive department of state government.

Idaho Statute 67-4212 (Designated State Parks)

The following described areas in the state of Idaho, so far as these areas are owned or controlled by the State of Idaho, and used for public, outdoor recreational purposes, are hereby declared to be Idaho State Parks or Idaho Recreational Trailways, and they are hereby placed under the jurisdiction and control of the Park and Recreation Board of the Department of Parks and Recreation of the State of Idaho:...(18) City of Rocks, (one section of land within the National Reserve) located west of the Village of Almo in Cassia County...(30) Castle Rocks State Park, including any department lands in Cassia County situated outside the National Reserve boundary.

Idaho Statute 67-4219 (Intent of Legislature)

It is the intent of the legislature that the department of parks and recreation shall formulate and put into execution a long range, comprehensive plan and program for the acquisition or leasing, planning, protection, operation, maintenance, development and wise use of areas of scenic beauty, recreational utility, historic, archaeological or scientific interest, to the end that the health, happiness, recreational opportunities and wholesome enjoyment of life of the people may be further encouraged. The department may fulfill this mission by operating a statewide system of parks and recreation programs or by entering into agreements with...the federal government that further expand the public park and recreation opportunities available to the public...

Idaho Administrative Code (IDAPA) 26 Title 01 Chapter 20 (Legal Authority)

The Idaho Park and Recreation Board is authorized under Section 67-4223, Idaho Code, to adopt, amend or rescind rules as may be necessary for proper administration of Chapter 42, Title 67, Idaho Code, and the use and protection of lands and facilities subject to its jurisdiction.

The Director may, pursuant to Section 67-4239, Idaho Code, authorize any employee of the Department to exercise any power granted to, or perform any duty imposed upon the Director.

The park manager or designee may establish and enforce all rules, including interim rules. Interim rules shall apply to the public safety, use, and enjoyment or protection of natural, cultural, or other resources within lands administered by the Department. Those rules shall be posted for public view and shall be consistent with established state laws and these rules. Interim rules shall expire in one hundred twenty (120) days from the established effective date unless approved by the Board.

Public Participation

Public involvement is a key part of the NEPA process. In this part of the process, the general public, federal, state, local agencies and organizations are provided an opportunity to identify concerns and issues regarding the potential effects of proposed federal actions.

The public participation in this process took place as part of the public process for the CMP. The CMP was developed through a lengthy and open, public process beginning November 1989, leading to the final approval and activation on February 1, 1996. All other implementation plans concerning City of Rocks National Reserve are subject to the goals and objectives of the CMP. The plan can be viewed at the Reserve visitor center or on the internet at <http://www.nps.gov/ciro/parkmgmt/planning.htm>. No additional public comment was sought for the preparation of this EA because it is a design phase of a concept plan that was included in the public process for the CMP.

Currently the NPS and Reserve are preparing a new GMP. To date, two newsletters have been sent to stakeholders and the general public for comment. The newsletters are available at the visitor's center and on the internet at (<http://www.nps.gov/ciro/parkmgmt/gmp.htm>).

(For more information about specific agency and staff consultation, see the section in this document entitled *List of Persons and Agencies Consulted / Preparers*)

III. Alternatives

The Alternatives were developed from collaborative interdisciplinary analysis based on the expertise of interdisciplinary planning team members, as well as on internal and external scoping with Native American Tribes, federal, state and local agencies, interested organizations and individuals during the public comment period for the CMP in 1989-1996.

Alternative 1: No Action (Do Not Relocate Parking Area)

Under the Alternative 1, the Circle Creek Overlook parking area would remain in its current location on a private in holding and in the view shed of the California National Historic Trail (CNHT).

GENERAL MANAGEMENT

Leaving the parking area in its current location means the parking area will continue to be within the view shed of the CNHT and on a private in-holding within the Reserve boundaries. In addition, the current parking area is an undefined dirt surface which tends to expand during peak use. Currently there are no sanitary facilities and no accessible hardened trail to the interpretive wayside at the overlook.

Historic and Natural Preservation Zone

California Trail Subzone:

The current parking area is consistent with the management zone of the California Trail subzone in that the parking area is directly associated with access, enjoyment, and interpretation of the CNHT.

Alternative 2: Proposed Action (Relocation of Circle Creek Parking Lot)

Under Alternative 2, the Reserve would relocate the Circle Creek Parking Lot out of the view shed of the CNHT and off the private in holding. The NPS will design and engineer the parking lot using best practices for construction, erosion control, drainage system, and expected service life within the 0.66 acre Area of Potential Effect (APE).

Under this alternative, a defined gravel parking lot to accommodate 20 cars would be constructed. The defined parking lot would be out of the view shed of the CNHT and off the private in-holding. In addition, unauthorized and unwanted expansion would be much easier to prevent and parking regulations easier to enforce.

Currently there are no sanitary facilities or accessible infrastructure for visitors to the Circle Creek Overlook. The installation of a vault toilet and the construction of an accessible hardened trail, surfaced with natural materials, to the overlook would provide necessary facilities and accessible infrastructure for this popular site.

MONITORING

The parking lot and the associated vault toilet and information sign would be inventoried and their conditions formally monitored. These periodic assessments provide data for the Facility Maintenance Software System (FMSS), used to allocate funding for facility maintenance throughout the NPS.

Alternatives Considered But Rejected

Under the NEPA alternatives may be eliminated from detailed study based on the following reasons [40 CFR 1504.14 (a)]:

- Technical or economic infeasibility;
- Inability to meet project objectives or resolve need for the project;
- Duplicates other less environmentally damaging alternatives;
- Conflict with an up-to-date valid plan, statement of purpose and significance, or other policy; and therefore, would require a major change in that plan or policy to implement; or
- Environmental impacts are too great.

The following alternatives or variations were considered during the design phase of the project, but based on the above criteria, they were rejected.

ALTERNATIVE TO REMOVE THE CIRCLE CREEK PARKING AREA

The Circle Creek Overlook and associated parking area are very popular for visitors who have come to get a sense of the CNHT and those who have come to climb the nearby rock formations as well as a starting point for hikes. Removing the parking area would restore the view shed of the CNHT and allow the natural vegetation to return, restoring the private in holding; however, it would not be consistent with the Reserve's goal of managing recreation for the enjoyment of the visitors as it would remove a key piece of infrastructure visitors use to enjoy the Reserve. Because the removal of the parking area would not be consistent with the goal of managing recreation specified in the Reserve's enabling legislation this alternative has been rejected.

Environmentally Preferred Alternative

In accordance with Director's Order-12, *Conservation Planning, Environmental Impact Analysis, and Decision-making* and CEQ (Council on Environmental Quality) requirements, the NPS is required to identify the "environmentally preferred alternative" in all environmental documents, including Environmental Assessments. The environmentally preferred alternative is determined by applying the criteria suggested in NEPA, which is guided by the CEQ. The CEQ (46 FR 18026 - 46 FR 18038) provides direction that the "environmentally preferable alternative is the alternative that would promote the national environmental policy as expressed in NEPA's Section 101," including:

1. Fulfill the responsibilities of each generation as trustee of the environment for succeeding generations;
2. Assure for all Americans safe, healthful, productive, and aesthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings;
3. Attain the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation, risk of health or safety, or other undesirable and unintended consequences;
4. Preserve important historic, cultural and natural aspects of our national heritage and maintain, wherever possible, an environment that supports diversity and variety of individual choice;
5. Achieve a balance between population and resource use which will permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life's amenities; and
6. Enhance the quality of renewable resources and approach the maximum attainable recycling of depletable resources (NEPA Section 101(b)).

Generally, these criteria mean the environmentally preferable alternative is the alternative that causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment and that best protects, preserves, and enhances historic, cultural, and natural resources (46 FR 18026 – 46 FR 18038).

Alternative 2, the relocation of the parking lot, has been determined as the environmentally preferred alternative. The construction of the new parking lot will cause an impact to vegetation; however, this impact will be mitigated by restoring the current parking area's vegetation. In addition, it will remove the existing

undefined and expanding parking area from the view shed of the CNHT, provide sanitary facilities at a heavily used point of interest, and create a well defined and easily enforceable gravel parking lot. Clearly defining the area available for parking will prevent visitors from damaging vegetation surrounding the parking lot. This prevents the expanding and cumulative damage to vegetation surrounding the parking lot. In addition, providing sanitary facilities will prevent visitors from using and contaminating the surrounding landscape.

Alternative 1 is not the environmentally preferred alternative because continued use of the undefined dirt parking area will continue the adverse cumulative effects to the vegetation surrounding the parking area, erosion of the soil from the parking area surface, and contamination of the area with human waste. In addition, the current parking area is within the viewshed of the CNHT and causes an adverse effect to the cultural resource.

IV. Impact Topics and Methodology

Impact Topics Analyzed

Impacts of the alternatives on the following topics are presented in this environmental assessment: soils, water resources, vegetation, wildlife, special status species, prehistoric and historic archeological resources, ethnography, cultural landscapes, visitor experience, and park operations.

PHYSICAL RESOURCES

Soils: Management policies require the NPS to understand and preserve and to prevent, to the extent possible the unnatural erosion, physical removal, or contamination of the soil. The alternatives involve activities with the potential for erosion or sedimentation impacts to occur. Therefore, soils are addressed as an impact topic.

Water Resources: The 1972 Federal Water Pollution Control Act, as amended by the Clean Water Act of 1977, is a national policy to restore and maintain the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the nation's waters, to enhance the quality of water resources, and to prevent, and control, and abate water pollution. NPS management policies provide direction for the preservation, use, and quality of water in national parks.

Surface Water: Section 401 of the Clean Water Act as well as NPS policy require analysis of impacts on water quality.

BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

Vegetation: NEPA calls for examination of the impacts on the components of affected ecosystems. NPS policy is to protect the natural abundance and diversity of park native species and communities, including avoiding, minimizing or mitigating potential impacts from proposed projects.

Wildlife: Many wildlife species reside in or near the areas where climbing takes place in the Reserve. NEPA also calls for examination of the impacts on these components of the ecosystem. NPS policy is to protect the natural abundance and diversity of park native species and communities, including avoiding, minimizing or mitigating potential impacts from proposed projects.

Special Status Species: The Endangered Species Act (ESA) requires an examination of impacts to all federally listed threatened or endangered species. NPS policy also requires an analysis of impacts to state-listed threatened or endangered species and federal candidate species. Under the ESA, the NPS is mandated to promote the conservation of all federal threatened and endangered species and their critical habitats within the park boundary. NPS management policies include the additional stipulation to conserve and manage species proposed for listing.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Prehistoric and Historic Archeological Resources: Conformance with the Archeological Resources Protection Act in protecting known or undiscovered archeological resources is necessary.

Historic Structures/Cultural Landscapes: Consideration of the impacts to cultural resources is required under provisions of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, and the 2008 Programmatic Agreement among the National Park Service, the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. It is also required under NPS Management Policies (2006). Federal land managing agencies are required to consider the effects proposed actions have on properties listed in, or eligible for inclusion in, the National Register of Historic Places (i.e., Historic Properties), and allow the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation a reasonable opportunity to comment. Agencies are required to consult with federal, state, local, and tribal governments/organizations, identify historic properties, assess adverse effects to historic properties, and negate, minimize, or mitigate adverse effects to historic properties while engaged in any federal or federally assisted undertaking (36 CFR Part 800).

Impact Topics Dismissed From Further Consideration

The topics listed below either would not be affected or would be affected only negligibly by the alternatives evaluated in this Environmental Assessment. Therefore, these topics have been dismissed from further analysis. Negligible effects are effects that are localized and that would not be detectable over existing conditions.

Geology: NPS *Management Policies* (2006) call for analysis of geology and geological hazards should they be relevant. This plan will not impact the geology or rock formations so this topic has not been further analyzed in this document.

Land Use: Lands within the APE are federally-owned (NPS) land within the Reserve. This project is subject to and consistent with the management zones established by the *City of Rocks National Reserve Comprehensive Plan* (National Park Service, 1995). Thus, the proposed action will not result in any changes to existing land use, and this topic has not been further analyzed in this document.

Air Quality: City of Rocks is located within an area that has been designated a Class II airshed under the Clean Air Act (1977). Class II areas are those that need reasonably or moderately good air quality protection. Due to the low population density and lack of large emission sources near the Reserve, air quality is generally very good. However, air quality data for the Reserve has not been systematically collected. High particulate matter concentrations occasionally occur in the area when strong winds increase dust emissions from exposed soils in agricultural fields or on dirt roads. Air quality within the Reserve is important primarily for visibility and visitor enjoyment of scenic vistas. However, neither of the alternatives examined in this document contain provisions that would affect air quality directly. Any indirect changes to air quality would not be detectable over existing conditions. Therefore, impacts to air quality have not been further analyzed.

Wetlands: Executive Order 11990 requires that impacts to wetlands be addressed. There are no wetlands within the project area so this topic has been dismissed from further analysis.

Floodplains: Executive Order 11988 (Floodplain Management) requires an examination of impacts to floodplains and potential risk involved in placing facilities within floodplains. NPS *Management Policies*, DO-2 (Planning Guidelines), and DO-12 (Conservation Planning, Environmental Impact Analysis, and Decision Making) provide guidelines for proposals in floodplains. Executive Order 11988 requires that impacts to floodplains be addressed. There are no floodplains within the project area so this topic has been dismissed from further analysis.

Water Quantity: Implementation of the plans analyzed in this document would have no measurable effect on the quantity of available water within the Reserve.

Ethnography: The NPS defines ethnographic resources as any “site, structure, object, landscape, or natural resource feature assigned traditional legendary, religious, subsistence, or other significance in the cultural system of a group traditionally associated with it” (DO-28, *Cultural Resource Management Guideline*, p. 181). The one known ethnographic resource within City of Rocks National Reserve is subsistence gathering of pine nuts from pinyon pine trees by the Shoshone-Bannock Tribe. Neither of the alternatives analyzed in this document would have any discernable effect on the pinyon pine forests within the Reserve or the ability of tribal members to gather the pine nuts. Thus, impacts to ethnography are dismissed from further consideration.

Museum Collections: Management Policies and other cultural resources laws identify the need to evaluate effects on NPS collections if applicable. The City of Rocks museum collections are stored off-site at Hagerman Fossil Beds National Monument in Hagerman, Idaho. These collections would not be affected by the proposed plan. Thus, impacts to museum collections are dismissed from further consideration.

Wilderness: There is no wilderness or wilderness study areas within City of Rocks National Reserve. This impact topic has been dismissed from further consideration.

Socioeconomics: Socioeconomic impact analysis is required, as appropriate, under NEPA and NPS Management Policies pertaining to gateway communities. Although tourism does play an important role in the local and regional economies, ranching and farming are dominant. There would be no measurable effects to regional or gateway community economies, or changes in visitor attendance or visitor spending patterns as a result of the implementation of the actions described herein.

Prime and Unique Farmlands: No prime or unique agricultural soils are known to exist in the Reserve.

Energy Consumption: Implementation of the plans analyzed in this document would have no measureable effect on the overall consumption of energy associated with visitation or for park operations and maintenance. The facility is day-use only and there will be no lighting.

Environmental Justice: Executive Order 12898 requires all federal agencies to incorporate environmental justice into their missions by identifying and addressing disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of their programs and policies on minorities and low-income populations and communities. The plans evaluated in this environmental assessment would not adversely affect socially or economically disadvantaged populations.

Park Operations: Impacts to park operations and visitor services are often considered in Environmental Assessments to disclose the degree to which proposed actions would change park management strategies and methods. The alternatives evaluated in this document would result in no changes to park staffing or operations.

Methodology

This section contains the methods / criteria used to assess impacts for specific resource topics. The definitions of impacts adhere to both those generally used under NEPA to describe impacts as well as those used by Section 106 of the NHPA and those used under Section 7 of the ESA.

The fundamental purpose of the national park system, established by the Organic Act and reaffirmed by the General Authorities Act, as amended, begins with a mandate to conserve park resources and values. NPS managers must always seek ways to avoid or minimize to the greatest degree practicable adverse impacts on park resources and values. However, the laws do give the NPS management discretion to allow impacts to park resources and values when necessary and appropriate to fulfill the purposes of a park, as long as the impact does not constitute impairment of the affected resources and values. Although Congress has given the NPS management discretion to allow certain impacts within parks, that discretion is limited by the statutory requirement that the NPS must leave park resources and values unimpaired, unless a particular law directly and specifically provides otherwise. Impairment is an impact that, in the professional judgment of the responsible NPS manager, would harm the integrity of park resources or values, including opportunities that would otherwise be present for the enjoyment of those resources or values. An impact to any park resource or value may be impairment. However, an impact would more likely constitute impairment to the extent that it affects a resource or value whose conservation is:

- Necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation or proclamation of the park;
- Key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or to opportunities for enjoyment of the park; or
- Identified as a goal in the park's General Management Plan or other relevant NPS planning documents.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ANALYSIS

The environmental consequences for each impact topic were defined based on the following information regarding context, type of impact, duration of impact, area of impact and the cumulative context. Unless otherwise stated at the beginning of the resource section in Environmental Consequences, analysis is based on a qualitative assessment of impacts.

CONTEXT: Setting within which impacts are analyzed – such as the project area or region, or for cultural resources – the APE.

TYPE OF IMPACT: A measure of whether the impact will improve or harm the resource and whether that impact occurs immediately or at some later point in time.

Beneficial: Reduces or improves impact being discussed

Adverse: Increases or results in impact being discussed

Direct: Caused by and occurring at the same time and place as the action, including such impacts as animal and plant mortality, damage to cultural resources, etc.

Indirect: Caused by the action, but occurring later in time, at another place, or to another resource, including, for example, changes in species composition, vegetation structure, range of wildlife, or offsite erosion

DURATION OF IMPACT: Duration is a measure of the time period over which the effects of an impact persist. The duration of impacts evaluated in this Environmental Assessment may be one of the following:

Short-term: Often quickly reversible and associated with a specific event, one to five years

Long-term: Reversible over a much longer period, or may occur continuously based on normal activity, or for more than five years

AREA OF IMPACT

Localized: Detectable only in the vicinity of the activity

Widespread: Detectable on a landscape scale (beyond the affected site)

CUMULATIVE: Cumulative impacts are the effects on the environment that would result from the incremental impacts of the action when added to other past, present and reasonably foreseeable future actions. Impacts are considered cumulative regardless of what agency or group (federal or non-federal) undertakes the action.

The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) describes a cumulative impact as follows (Regulation 1508.7):

A “Cumulative impact” is the impact on the environment which results from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions regardless of what agency (federal or non-federal) or person undertakes such other actions. Cumulative impacts can result from individually minor but collectively significant actions taking place over a period of time.

The cumulative projects addressed in this analysis include past and present actions, as well as any planning or development activity currently being implemented or planned for implementation in the reasonably foreseeable future. Cumulative actions are evaluated in conjunction with the impacts of an alternative to determine if they have any additive effects on a particular resource. Because most of the cumulative projects which could contribute are only in the early planning stages, the evaluation of cumulative impacts is based on a general description of the project. The cumulative impacts factors include:

*Continued vegetation damage and destruction around the current parking area

*Contamination of the soil by human waste in the landscape near the current parking area

*Erosion of the soils of the current parking area

IMPACT MITIGATION

Minimize the type, duration or intensity of the impact to an affected resource

Mitigate the impact by

Repairing localized damage to the affected resource immediately after an adverse impact

Rehabilitating an affected resource with a combination of additional management activities

All Impacts Except Special Status Species and Cultural Resources

Note: Special Status Species and Cultural Resources impact determinations are formally determined under the Endangered Species Act (Section 7) and the National Historic Preservation Act (Section 106), respectively.

Minor: Measurable or anticipated degree of change would have a slight effect, causing a slightly noticeable change of approximately less than 20 percent compared to existing conditions, often localized.

Moderate: Measurable or anticipated degree of change is readily apparent and appreciable and would be noticed by most people, with a change likely to be between 21 and 50 percent compared to existing conditions. Can be localized or widespread.

Note: Cultural resources impacts are also initially characterized as noted above, however the conclusion follows the format below, and makes a formal determination of effect under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. In accordance with National Park Service Management Policies (2006), the analysis in this Environmental Assessment fulfills the responsibilities of the National Park Service under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

Cultural Resources Impacts

No Effect: There are no historic properties in the APE; or there are historic properties in the APE, but the undertaking will have no impact on them. Also, the action, based on conditions of approval, would not likely result in impacts to presently unidentified cultural resources.

No Adverse Effect: There will be an effect on the historic property by the undertaking, but the effect does not meet the criteria in 36 CFR Part 800.5(a)(1) and will not alter characteristics that make it eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). The undertaking is modified or conditions are imposed to avoid or minimize adverse effects. This category of effects is encumbered with effects that may be considered beneficial under NEPA, such as restoration, stabilization, rehabilitation, and preservation projects. Under the terms of the 2008 PA, data recovery can mitigate affect to archaeological properties that are eligible for listing on the NRHP under criterion D. However, some archaeological sites are eligible as traditional cultural places under criterion A, and such mitigation may not be sufficient or appropriate.

Adverse Effect: The undertaking will alter, directly or indirectly, the characteristics of the property making it eligible for listing on the NRHP. An adverse effect may be resolved in accordance with the Stipulation VIII of 2008 Programmatic Agreement, or by developing a memorandum or program agreement in consultation with the SHPO, ACHP, American Indian tribes, other consulting parties, and the public to avoid, minimize, or mitigate the adverse effects (36 CFR Part 800.6(a)).

Special Status Species

No Effect: The project (or action) is located outside suitable habitat and there would be no disturbance or other direct or indirect impacts on the species. The action will not affect the listed species or its designated critical habitat (USFWS 1998).

MITIGATION MEASURES INCORPORATED INTO THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

Mitigation measures will include; erosion control measures during construction, the design of the drainage system, and restoration of the vegetation in the existing parking area. The design of the drainage system and the erosion control measures in place during construction will follow best management practices. The restoration of the vegetation of the existing parking area would be completed using best management practices and in consultation with the private landowner.

V. Affected Environment

Information in this section is derived from a comprehensive review of existing information pertaining to City of Rocks National Reserve. It includes information from the Reserve's Comprehensive Management Plan, various natural and cultural resources management plans and other park planning documents. Specific sections from these documents are cited appropriately in the text and the bibliographic information placed in the *References* section of this document.

Soils

The Natural Resource Conservation Service has published soil survey information on its Web Soil Survey page (NRCS, 2009). Soils data for City of Rocks National Reserve was generated from two soil surveys, Cassia County, Idaho, Eastern Part (ID708) and City of Rocks National Reserve, Idaho (ID721). A review of this data indicates that. The soil in the APE consists of Riceton Loamy Coarse Sand 4 to 12 % slopes. The soil is well drained with slow to medium run off. Although described with moderate wind and water erosion, the soil survey indicates that major management factors are wind and water erosion. Depth to bedrock can be more than 60 inches. This soil is not rated as a wetland (hydric) soil.

On a broader scale, granular disintegration and erosion of the pluton have created a hollowed landscape within the mountain range, which emigrants traveling west on the California trail appropriately named "Circle Creek Basin." Exfoliation of the exposed rock has shaped a maze of granite and gneiss spires encircling the basin, the bases of which are buried in coarse sand. Soil development is poor. Steep-sloped granitic terrains in arid and semi-arid climates are known for their inability to withstand land-use practices. At City of Rocks, cattle trails, social trails, dirt roads and un-designed campsites, all existing prior to establishment of the Reserve, have disturbed the coarse-grained soils and altered the associated vegetation. Erosion, due to past and current land-uses, is a serious and difficult-to-reverse process affecting both cultural and natural resources. Where erosion has been severe, streams have become locally entrenched and downstream locations have become sediment-choked.

Water Resources

SURFACE WATER

Surface water within the APE is limited to one small drainage which flows south toward Circle Creek. Circle Creek flows east toward the Raft River which flows north and eventually empties into the Snake River. Stream gradients in the southern Albion Range are steep, averaging 360 feet per mile on Circle Creek.

Under Idaho water quality standards, surface water that flows to the Raft River from the Reserve is protected for use as agricultural water supply, cold water habitat, salmonid spawning, and primary and secondary contact recreation. This surface water is used primarily for agricultural purposes, both by private landowners within the Reserve and downstream users outside the Reserve. Water quantity and quality of the Reserve streams and springs has not been extensively studied.

As detailed above (see Soils), the soils in the APE are moderately erodible, and these eroded areas could contribute sediment to streams during high flows corresponding to storm events and spring snowmelt. High stream sediment and associated turbidity can negatively affect stream organisms both in and outside the Reserve far downstream from the source of particulate matter.

Flooding, sometimes severe, typically occurs during brief but heavy thundershowers from June through August. Sediment from roads, trails and camping areas are inevitably washed into Circle Creek, resulting in potentially heavy sediment loading and decreased water quality. Due to the erodible soils, some erosion is natural, but past development has caused accelerated erosion in many locations. Riparian areas have been impacted by gullification on steeper gradients and sediment loading on low gradients, resulting in altered vegetation communities.

Vegetation

A total relief of 3,147 feet and a variety of exposures and rock and soil types produce many different vegetation communities in City of Rocks. Today most of the plant cover, except the vegetation on steep and rocky exposures, is considerably changed from its natural condition. The changes over time were caused by a combination of man-induced factors, including intense grazing, dry-land farming, fire suppression, brush control, seeding, development of roads and trails, and camping.

The dominant plant communities in the APE include; big sagebrush and grasslands and mixed scrub.

BIG SAGEBRUSH/GRASSLANDS

The arid open valley floors of the Circle Creek basin and upper Emigrant Canyon were originally covered with a mosaic of vegetation dominated by open stands of big sagebrush with an under-story of native perennial grasses such as Idaho fescue. Today, most of the City of Rocks basin is covered by monotypic stands of big sagebrush interspersed with plants with little or no forage value, such as tansy mustard, rabbit brush, and exotic Russian thistle, peppergrass, cheatgrass, and halogeton. Crested wheatgrass (another exotic) dominates the understory where private landowners and the BLM have improved range for livestock. Areas with sagebrush steppe vegetation in a natural condition are scarce in southern Idaho.

MIXED SCRUB

The higher slopes are covered with mountain big sagebrush, mountain snowberry, serviceberry, and bitterbrush, with other shrubs, grasses, and herbs growing in the openings between the shrubs.

Wildlife

MAMMALS

Results from a 2003 City of Rocks National Reserve mammal inventory included species lists and additional information on mammals in the area. The University of Idaho Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources conducted the inventory under a cooperative agreement with the NPS. The primary goal of the inventory was to confirm 90 percent of the species expected to occur within the Reserve. Expected species lists used for the inventory were developed from published literature, historic reports, and expert opinion.

The 2003 mammal inventory was productive and brought species confirmation totals to 75 percent. Thirty-five species of mammals were confirmed in the Reserve. The cliff chipmunk (*Tamias dorsalis*), a “peripheral species” in Idaho, was found to be common in the area and the Reserve appears to support a relatively large population of this species. The spotted bat (*Euderma maculatum*) was confirmed in the Reserve in 2003. This species is listed as a species of special concern by the state of Idaho and is poorly known in the state. The hoary bat (*Lasiurus cinereus*), silver-haired bat (*Lasionycteris noctivagans*), and pallid bat (*Antrozous pallidus*) were also confirmed in the Reserve for the first time during the 2003 inventory. The deer mouse (*Peromyscus maniculatus*) and the great basin pocket mouse (*Perognathus parvus*) were the two most abundant mammals represented in trapping results. The pinyon mouse (*Peromyscus truei*) was reconfirmed in the Reserve for the first time since an unvouchered report was made in 1967. City of Rocks is at the northern limit of the range for this unique species and the voucher specimen for this species collected in 2003 may represent a significant range extension for Idaho. In March of 2003, a ringtail (*Bassariscus astutus*) was found dead in nearby Castle Rocks State Park by the current Climbing Ranger and documented by Idaho Department of Fish and Game personnel. This was the first record of the species in Idaho and also represents a significant northward range extension. The status of this unique and secretive species in the Reserve should be further evaluated.

BIRDS

Approximately 142 species of birds are known or expected to occur within or adjacent to the Reserve boundary. Common, year-round residents include: American kestrel, northern flicker, black-billed magpie, common raven, mountain chickadee, dark-eyed junco, and Cassin's finch. More uncommon occurrences include: golden eagle, prairie falcon, common poorwill, gray flycatcher, pinyon jay, Say's phoebe, and Virginia's warbler.

Breeding birds indicative of various habitats within the Reserve are listed below:

Sagebrush: sage thrasher, green-tailed Towhee, Brewer's sparrow, and vesper sparrow.

Pinyon-juniper woodland and mountain mahogany: chipping sparrow, western scrub jay, robin, and Cassin's finch.

Aspen-chokecherry: red-naped sapsucker, mountain bluebird, and mountain chickadee.

Coniferous forest: Clark's nutcracker, redbreasted nuthatch, and yellow-rumped warbler.

Riparian: house wren, yellow warbler, Lazuli bunting, and red-winged blackbird.

Rock cliffs and ledges: white-throated swift, violetgreen and cliff swallows, and red-tailed hawk

AMPHIBIANS AND REPTILES

A herpetological inventory of the Reserve was conducted by Idaho State University in 2001. The primary objective of this study was to complete field surveys throughout the City of Rocks National Reserve, Idaho with the goal of documenting 90 percent of all amphibian and reptile species that potentially occur within the Reserve.

This study documented seven species within the area: Only one amphibian species, the boreal chorus frog (*Pseudacris maculata*) was detected. Two species of lizards were observed, including the common sagebrush lizard (*Sceloporus graciosus*) and the western skink (*Eumeces skiltonianus*). Four species of snakes were observed including the rubber boa (*Charina bottae*), the striped whipsnake (*Masticophis taeniatus*), the gophersnake (*Pituophis catenifer*), and the terrestrial gartersnake (*Thamnophis elegans*).

Prehistoric and Historic Archeology

The APE is located on the north side of the Circle Creek Basin. Archaeological evidence indicates that Native Americans have used the City of Rocks area for the last few thousand years. Fur trappers and explores made their way along the Raft River but the documentation seems to show they did not spend much time in the vicinity of the Reserve as there are virtually no descriptions of the rock formations in their journals. The emigrants passed through the area on their way west and left evidence of signatures in axle grease on rock formations. They sketched rock formations and described their reactions to the sites. Some are basic factual writings and some verge on the poetic. Early Settlers to the area used Circle Creek as a source of water for their stock and fields.

Historic Structures / Cultural Landscapes

The Circle Creek Basin was used by the emigrants and the early settlers and later ranchers in the City of Rocks area. The APE is within the viewshed of the California National Historic Trail. There are currently no historic structures within the APE. The cultural landscape surrounding the CNHT as well as the rural ranching landscape are still very much in evidence within the APE.

VI. Environmental Consequences

Impacts to Soils

Alternative 1

The current location and condition of the parking area is detrimental to the soils because the parking area is bare soil of the Riceton Loamy Coarse Sand (Soil Survey). This type of soil has a moderate erosional hazard for wind and water (Soil Survey).

Known impacts that would continue to occur under this alternative include:

- Erosion of soils from the bare dirt surface of the parking area
- Contamination of the soil from human waste

The causes of these impacts include:

- Water flowing across the bare soil
- Wind blowing across the bare soil
- Humans in need of restroom facilities

The sole mitigation measure has been citing drivers for parking their vehicles outside of the parking area; however, this is problematic because the current parking area lacks clearly defined boundaries. No sanitary facilities are present so preventing vegetation impact from visitors in search of a spot to use is not possible.

Continued use under Alternative 1 would have a direct, long term, moderate, localized, and adverse effect on soils.

Alternative 2

The APE for Alternative 2 contains the same types of soils as Alternative 1 and would be susceptible to the same water and wind erosional forces if left bare; however, in Alternative 2 erosion would be minimized by covering the parking surface with gravel and defining and limiting the parking spaces. The soils would be exposed during construction and control measures would be put in place.

Known impacts that would continue to occur under this alternative include:

- Erosion of soils from the project area in the construction phase

The causes of these impacts include:

- Water flowing across the bare soil
- Wind blowing across the bare soil

Mitigation measures would include best practices in the design of the drainage system and to minimize erosion from the project area during construction.

Thus, impacts to soils under Alternative 2 in the short term are expected to be adverse, direct, localized, and mitigated during the construction phase. The long terms impacts to soils are expected to be minimal in terms of erosion and beneficial in terms of contamination.

Impacts to Water Resources

IMPACTS TO SURFACE WATER

Alternative 1

Surface water quality can be impacted by the erosion of soils into stream channels. The sediment load in the stream channel can affect water quality.

Known impacts that would continue to occur under this alternative include:

- Erosion of soils from the project area into the nearby drainage
- Contamination by human waste

The causes of these impacts include:

- Water flowing across the bare soil
- Wind blowing across the bare soil
- Humans in need of restroom facilities

No mitigation measures are currently in place and this would continue under Alternative 1.

Thus, impacts to soils under Alternative 1 are direct, long term, moderate, adverse, and widespread.

Alternative 2

As in Alternative 1 the impact on surface water from Alternative 2 is primarily from erosion. The erosion would primarily be during the construction phase and would be minimal, short term, direct, and localized. The installation of a vault toilet would eliminate the possibility of contamination of the water by human waste.

Mitigation measures for soil erosion would be in place during the construction phase and the project designed to avoid soil erosion through the lifetime of the project.

The impacts to surface water under Alternative 2 are expected to be direct, short term, localized, and minimal in terms of erosion and direct, long term, widespread, and beneficial in terms of contamination.

Impacts to Vegetation

Alternative 1

Under Alternative 1, the parking area would continue to be undefined bare ground.

Known impacts that would continue to occur under this alternative include:

- De-vegetation of ground covers particularly at the edges of the parking area as visitors create spaces for their cars when the lot is full and as they find areas to use as bathroom facilities.

The causes of these impacts include:

- Vehicles crushing vegetation
- Human feet trampling and crushing vegetation and disturbing soils
- Pet dogs digging nearby beneath brush in search of cool soil

The sole mitigation measure has been citing drivers for parking their vehicles outside of the parking area; however, this is problematic because the current parking area lacks clearly defined boundaries. No sanitary facilities are present so preventing vegetation impact from visitors in search of a spot to use is not possible.

The impacts to vegetation under Alternative 1 are direct, long term, moderate, localized, and adverse.

Alternative 2

Alternative 2 would clearly define the boundaries of the parking lot with a raised graveled area and parking bumpers. There would also be signs that indicate where parking is not allowed. In addition, a vault toilet would be installed to prevent vegetation trampling and contamination.

The primary goals of mitigation would be to protect vegetation by limiting the size of the parking lot by clearly defining its boundaries and covering its surface to make it durable to withstand use. Under this alternative, mitigation strategies to limit impacts to vegetation in and around the parking lot would include the following:

- Clearly define the boundaries of the parking lot, walkways, and trails
- Install a vault toilet to provide sanitary facilities for visitors

- Apply a durable, natural surface such as crushed native rock or sand
- Install signs instructing dog owners to keep their pets within the parking lot and on trails
- Plant native cactus in areas where people or pets are likely to trample vegetation

With the implementation of the mitigation measures listed above, adverse impacts to the area surrounding the parking lot would be direct but localized, short term, and minor. The beneficial affects to the vegetation would be direct, long term, and widespread.

Impacts to Wildlife

Alternative 1

There would be no impacts to wildlife as a result of Alternative 1.

Alternative 2

Wildlife can be impacted by noise which can disrupt breeding and nesting as well as cause wildlife to avoid an area during noise events.

The noise of construction cannot be mitigated but the timing can be altered to avoid impacting sensitive species if necessary.

Impacts to wildlife as a result of Alternative 2 would be short term, and primarily due to noise during the construction phase. This noise would be confined to daytime (work) hours during the construction phase of the project.

Impacts to Prehistoric and Historic Archeology

Alternative 1

Impacts to prehistoric or historic archeological sites can be caused by disturbance of the ground surface. There would be **no adverse effect** on prehistoric or historic archeological sites under Alternative 1.

Alternative 2

As in Alternative 1 ground disturbance would have a direct impact on archeological sites. A Phase I archeological survey was conducted within the APE to determine if any unknown archeological sites exist within the APE. The survey of the proposed APE was conducted on October 12, 2007 by Coral Moser and Matthew Smith under the supervision of Skip Lohse, Professor and Anthropology Department Head at Idaho State University in Pocatello, Idaho. Two obsidian flakes were noted and photographed but not collected. NPS archeologist Kirstie Haertel requested the flakes be collected but despite being recorded with a GPS unit the flakes could not be located. The archeologists in the field noted erosion in the APE and indicted the flakes may have been moved during the spring snow melt. No archaeological sites eligible for the National Register of Historic Places were documented. For the purposes of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, there would be **No Effect** on historic properties (Moser 2008; SHPO concurrence letter dated April 7, 2010).

Recommendations for monitoring during ground disturbance were made in the report (Moser 2008). The suggested monitoring will be conducted by a staff member who meets the Secretary of Interior Standards for an archeologist. Monitoring will consist of a qualified archaeologist site observing the use of earth moving machinery to ensure the reporting of any cultural resources found during ground disturbing activities.

Impacts to Historic Structures / Cultural Landscapes

Alternative 1

There are no historic structures in or within view of the existing parking area so there will be **no effect** to historic structures. Alternative 1 impacts the view shed of the CNHT. The parking area is visible from key viewpoints on the south side of the Circle Creek Basin as visitors look north across Circle Creek Basin, a known nooning and camping location for emigrants on the California Trail. Therefore, Alternative 1 has an **adverse effect** on the CNHT (Figure 3).

Alternative 2

As in Alternative 1 there are no historic structures in or within the viewshed of the APE so there will be **no effect** to historic structures. Alternative 2 will have no impact of the cultural landscape or view shed of the CNHT. The parking lot and associated infrastructure would be hidden behind a hill out of view of the CNHT and screened by trees to minimize the view from the City of Rocks Road to the east. Alternative 2 will have **no effect** on the cultural landscape of the CNHT (Figure 4).

Impairment

The project will not impair any of the natural or cultural resources within the project's APE. The short term effect on soils will be adverse but long term will be minimal to beneficial. The short term effect to water, vegetation, and wildlife will be minimal and the long term effect will be beneficial. There will be no effect on prehistoric or historic archaeological sites, historic structures or the cultural landscape.

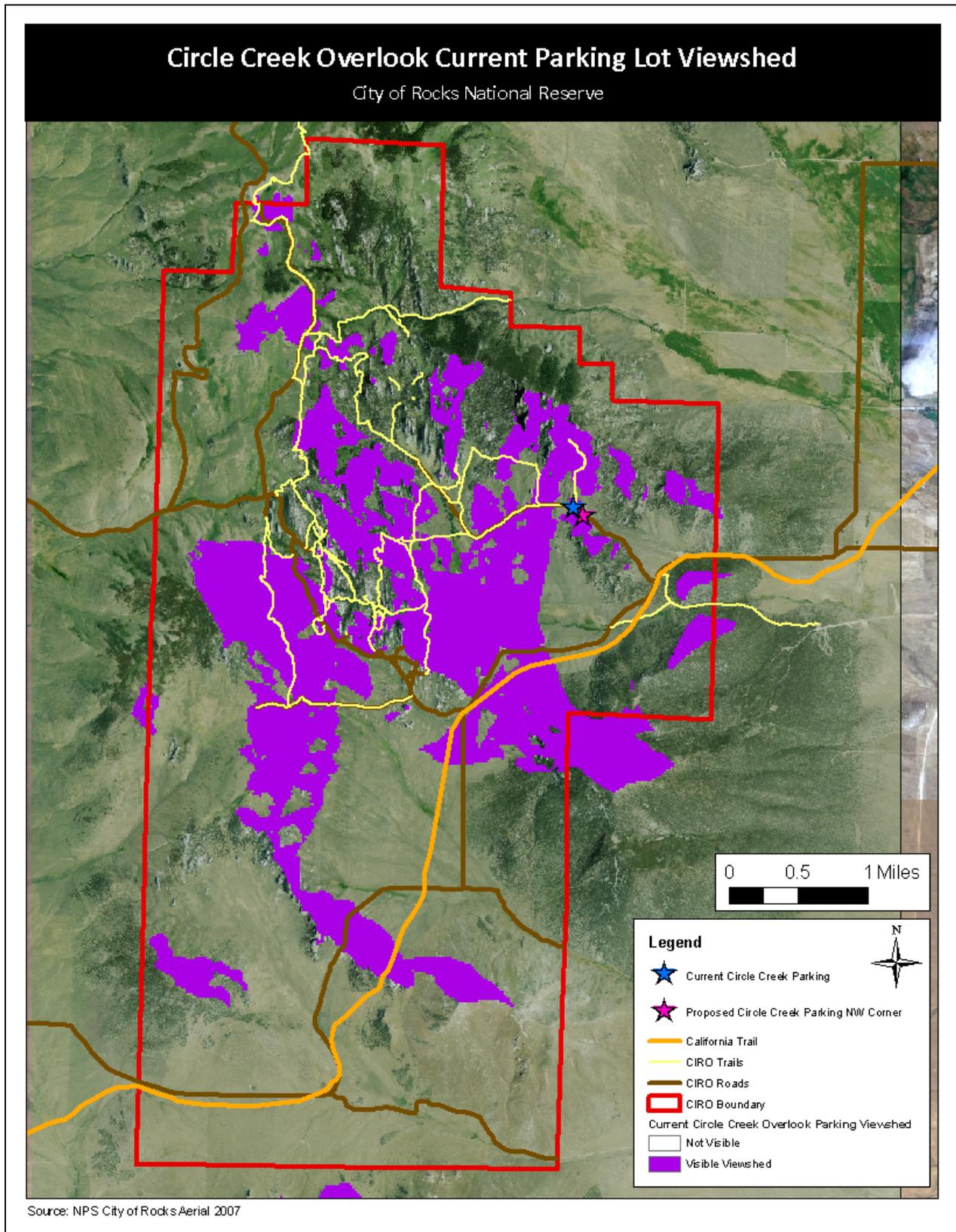


Figure 3. Viewshed analysis for Alternative 1

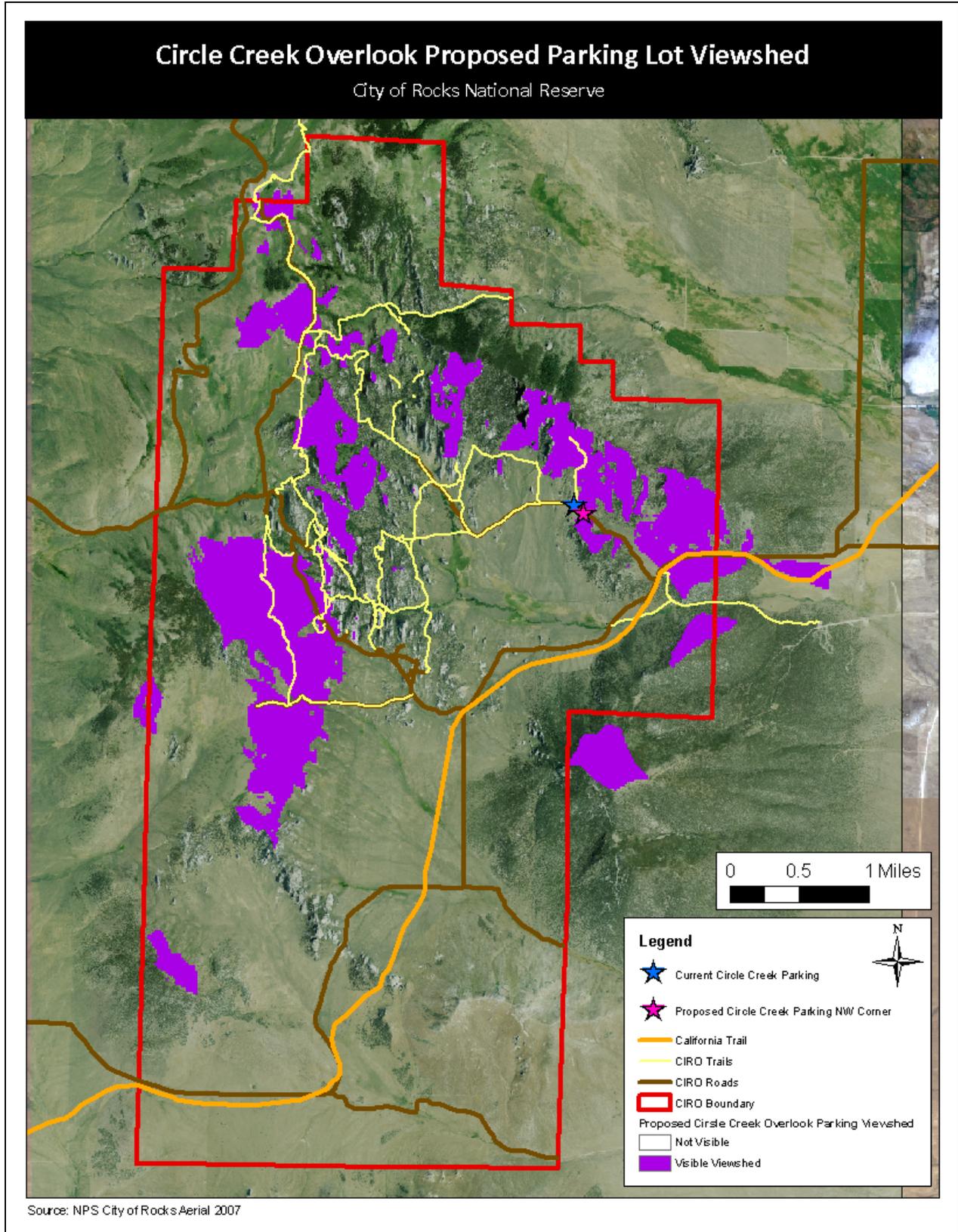


Figure 4. Viewshed analysis for Alternative 2

VII. Consultation and Coordination

Public Engagement

The public participation in this process took place as part of the public process for the CMP. The CMP was developed through a lengthy and open, public process beginning November 1989, leading to the final approval and activation on February 1, 1996. All other implementation plans concerning City of Rocks National Reserve are subject to the goals and objectives of the Comprehensive Management Plan. The plan can be viewed at the Reserve visitor center or on the internet at <http://www.nps.gov/ciro/parkmgmt/planning.htm>).

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL SCOPING

The public scoping period for this project was included in the public scoping for the GMP as described above.

The public outreach called for in Section 106 of NHPA was integrated into the NEPA process in accordance with NPS Management Policies (2006).

This environmental assessment is being made available to the public, federal, state and local agencies and organizations through press releases distributed to a wide variety of news media, direct mailing, placement on the Reserve's website as well as in local public libraries (Albion, Oakley, and Burley, Idaho).

Responses to comments on this environmental assessment will be addressed in the proposed Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) or will be used to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (if appropriate).

MEDIA

A press release will be issued notifying the public and media.

AGENCY CONSULTATION

Agency consultation regarding this project was included in the consultation for the CMP.

NATIVE AMERICAN CONSULTATION

Native American consultation regarding this project was included in the consultation for the CMP.

PUBLIC REVIEW

A press release will be distributed to people, businesses, and agencies who have expressed an interest in projects at City of Rocks National Reserve. The environmental assessment will also be available at the public libraries in Albion, Oakley, and Burley. The Environmental Assessment will also be available on the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment system and the Reserve's website, located at <http://www.nps.gov/ciro>. Copies will be sent to those who request one during the review period. In addition, the following organizations and individuals will receive a copy of the Environmental Assessment; The Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, Michael Nicholson, Ted Tracy, and other private landowners within the Reserve.

Comments on this Environmental Assessment should be directed to:

Wallace Keck
Superintendent
City of Rocks National Reserve
P.O. Box 169
Almo, Idaho 83312

If reviewers do not identify substantial environmental impacts, this Environmental Assessment will be used to prepare a FONSI, which will be sent to the NPS Pacific West Regional Director for signature.

During the public review period, additional consultation will occur to affirm determinations of effect (if needed) with the Idaho SHPO. Notice of the concurrence with the determinations of effect for historical resources will be identified in the FONSI for this Environmental Assessment.

For more information concerning this Environmental Assessment, please contact Wallace Keck, Superintendent. For a copy of this document, please call City of Rocks National Reserve at (208) 824-5519.

List of Persons and Agencies Consulted / Preparers

The following people and agencies were consulted during the preparation of this Environmental Assessment:

National Park Service, Pacific West Region (Seattle)

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National Park Service, City of Rocks National Reserve

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Kristen Bastis, Chief of Cultural Resources and Integrated Resource Manager, City of Rocks National Reserve and Castle Rocks State Park (preparer)

VIII. References

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