

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE



RECORD OF DECISION

**FINAL GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN
DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT PLAN
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

FOR KLONDIKE GOLD RUSH NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

SKAGWAY, ALASKA and SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

Alaska System Support Office
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INTRODUCTION

The National Park Service (NPS) prepared a final environmental impact statement, development concept plan, and General Management Plan (FEIS) for Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park in and near Skagway, Alaska, and in Seattle, Washington, pursuant to section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969. The FEIS describes four alternatives, including no-action, to guide future management, use, and interpretation of the park for the next 15 years. The plan provides ways to accomplish park development and operation in a manner that best serves the visitors while preserving the historic character and protecting cultural and natural resources. The alternatives were evaluated for their impact on park resources and values. The FEIS addresses comments made during the public review period.

This Record of Decision (ROD) documents the decision by NPS to select Alternative C. Alternatives evaluated in the FEIS and estimated environmental consequences are summarized. The ROD gives factors considered and supporting rationale for selecting the proposed action. The course of action for implementing the decision, including mitigating measures, is presented.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

Under the No-Action Alternative (Alternative A), there would be no general management plan to guide park management. Management would react to situations as needed. In Alaska, work toward a new crossing of Nelson Slough and beach area access would continue, and the existing park management and operations would continue. In Seattle, the basic operation would continue unchanged.

Under Alternative B (Minimal Alternative), the plan would allow some actions to take place in the park units. In Alaska, the park boundary in Dyea would be marked. Work would continue toward a new crossing of Nelson Slough and beach area access. The existing road along Nelson Slough would be graveled, but remain one lane. The campground, picnic area, and ranger station would be moved within the park boundary, and the historic segments of the Chilkoot Trail would be marked. In Skagway interpretive programs would be slightly increased, as would the visitor center operation. Site bulletins would be developed for each restored building. There would be an increased emphasis on maintaining the restored historic buildings as that program is completed. In Seattle about 2,800 square feet of additional lease space would be acquired, and improvements would be made to storage capabilities and the mezzanine area. Collections would be moved out of the basement and minor improvements made to existing exhibits. Pioneer Square and Washington Street Landing and other appropriate, waterfront-located interpretive exhibits would be developed and sited. A friends of the park group would be established.

Alternative C (Proposed Action) would provide a comprehensive plan for meeting the park's legislative mandate. The proposed action in Alaska includes development concept plans for Dyea and the Chilkoot Trail and would expand park management, development, resource (cultural and natural) protection, and maintenance components to meet most of the expected visitor-use increases and interests in the park. A Klondike History Research Center would be established in cooperation with the city of Skagway and state of Alaska, to process, study, conserve, and store historical, ethnographic, and natural history artifacts. Part of the center's function would be to provide interpretive and educational programs, as well as the opportunity for interagency training and academic research within Skagway. Specialized historic-building restoration skills would be made available to others on a cost-reimbursable basis. Access to the Dyea area would be improved with a rerouted, gravel road, and with enhancements to parking, picnic, interpretive, and trail opportunities. Selected Dyea townsite streets would be cleared and signed. Archaeological inventory, surveys, and mapping; marking the historical segments; minor trail rerouting; and increased interpretive programs would occur along the Chilkoot Trail. White Pass archaeological inventory, surveying, mapping, and marking the historic trail route would be completed; but no facilities are proposed in the unit. Trail access may be provided after archaeological inventory and compliance has been completed.

In Seattle, the proposed action would lead eventually to acquiring a permanent location for the park visitor center, park offices, and historic collections. In the interim, expanded lease space at the present location would allow park offices to move to accessible space on the third floor; and park collections would be moved to the mezzanine level of the building. The interpretive focus would shift with more emphasis toward the role of the Pacific Northwest in the gold rush. Additional interpretive information (exhibits and walking tours) would be developed within the Pioneer Square area. Interpretive exhibits, in cooperation with the city and port of Seattle, would be added at Washington Street Landing and at other appropriate waterfront locations. Contacts with the Skagway office would be expanded with staff cross training. A friends of the park group would be organized.

Under Alternative D (Substantial Change) for Alaska, park management, development, resource protection, and maintenance needs would expand to meet all of the expected visitor use increases and interests in the park well into the next century. To accommodate the additional visitor use, there would be an increase in operational activities, maintenance, interpretation, and resources management, while protecting park resources from degradation. Park facilities would be upgraded with improvements to the visitor and administrative facilities in Skagway and the development of new facilities in Dyea and along the Chilkoot Trail. This would provide visitors with additional activity options for a better understanding of park themes. Additional historic buildings would be acquired for restoration and leased for commercial activities, or retained for administrative purposes. Both an historical building restoration center and a Klondike History Research Center would be established in Skagway. The park would work with the state of Alaska and city of Skagway to provide better access for the Dyea and Chilkoot Trail areas. The park would also initiate and maintain additional cooperation with the city of Skagway, Parks Canada, and state and federal land management agencies to assure compatible uses in areas adjacent to the park. Maximum protection of cultural and natural resources would be provided. Connections with the Brackett Wagon Road and Canadian trails would be examined.

No alternative D (Substantial Change) was developed for the Seattle unit. Alternative C would be the proposed action.

The selected alternative includes the following additional actions common to all alternatives in the FEIS:

- continuing international cooperation and pursuing recognition of the park as an international historical park.
- continued implementation of the park's land protection plan.
- pursuing an interagency national historical trail study of the Chilkoot and White Pass Trails and the possibilities of an international gold rush heritage corridor between Seattle and Dawson.
- pursuing an interagency wild and scenic river study of the White Pass Fork of the Skagway River and Taiya River.
- examining the possibilities of a fee interpretation demonstration area at the Moore House after restoration.

Carrying capacity considerations will be addressed as described in the plan, but may be modified by ongoing monitoring and resource assessments.

THE DECISION

The NPS will implement the proposed action (Alternative C) as described in the FEIS issued in November 1996.

DECISION CONSIDERATIONS

After carefully evaluating public comments throughout the planning process, including comments on the draft and FEIS, the NPS has decided that the proposed action (Alternative C) best accomplishes the park

unit's legislated purpose to preserve historic structures and trails associated with the Klondike Gold Rush of 1898. The proposed action balances the statutory mission of the NPS to provide long-term protection of park resources and significance while allowing for appropriate levels of visitor use and appropriate means of visitor enjoyment. The selected action also best accomplishes identified management goals and desired future conditions, with the fewest environmental impacts.

Alternative C best responded to the public request that development be kept to a minimum with change reflecting only safety and carrying capacity improvements. Secondary road and bridge access in Dyea is necessary to access Dyea Flats. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game has determined that Nelson Slough is a significant salmon rearing stream and that vehicles can no longer cross the ford site to access the flats.

Developments in Skagway will be limited to structures already owned by the federal government and assigned to the park for restoration and management. No new acquisitions will be pursued except on a willing seller - willing buyer basis. There was a perception that the federal government already owns a sufficient number of structures to carry-out the purposes of the park.

Development in the White Pass unit has been and will continue to be kept at minimum levels. Improvements may include a trail to access locations in the White Pass unit after the necessary archaeological compliance has been completed. There was strong sentiment that some access be provided into areas in the White Pass City area. Alternative C includes trail access in conjunction with U.S. Forest Service management of adjacent land to the south of the unit.

Two major developments are included in the Proposed Action. They include an Historic Resources Center and an Historic Restoration Center in Skagway. These facilities would make use of the park historic restoration shop and other park owned facilities to house centers for the advancement of knowledge about the Klondike Gold Rush and the principles of historic restoration technology. These centers would bring additional skilled jobs into the community and would attract professional researchers and craftsmen to the park and the community with a resulting economic stimulus.

In Seattle, implementation of the Proposed Action will result in the acquisition of a permanent facility in an appropriate location within the Pioneer Square National Historic District. The permanent facility will provide necessary additional space for administrative work, educational outreach, collections management, and enhanced interpretive programs. A small center will be established for Klondike Gold Rush research that will enhance the park's ability to preserve its historic collections. The Proposed Action will also permit leasing of additional space for administration and curatorial storage in the interim until a permanent facility is acquired.

The Proposed Action will result in expanded interpretative activities and provide for additional exhibits in Seattle. Walking tours that include more of the overall historic district will be added, a regular schedule of school programs and teacher workshops will be expanded, and the park will coordinate with the city and port of Seattle and other partners to interpret the role of the Seattle waterfront in the Gold Rush and the connection between the waterfront story and the Pioneer Square story.

A friends of the park group will be established to assist the park in volunteer recruitment, fund-raising, and involvement of the Seattle business community and historic interests.

ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERABLE ALTERNATIVE

Alternative D was identified as the environmentally preferable alternative for Alaska and Alternative C as the environmentally preferable alternative for Seattle. Alternative D for Alaska would provide the maximum degree of protection for natural and cultural resources while providing improvement to visitor access, use, and understanding about the park.

Alternative C would offer the greatest potential for resource protection and interpretive opportunities for Seattle. The other alternatives do not provide the level of environmental protection that these two environmentally preferred alternatives do.

In accordance with the consultation requirements of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, and its implementing regulations (36 CFR 800), copies of this plan were provided to the Alaska and Washington State Historic Preservation Offices and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. Comments received were reproduced in the final GMP/DCP/EIS (September 1996). Under the preferred Alternative (Alt. C for Seattle and Alt. D for Alaska), no adverse effects were identified or anticipated, provided the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Archeology and Historic Preservation were followed for all applicable projects.

IMPLEMENTATION AND MITIGATION

All practicable measures to avoid or minimize environmental impacts have been incorporated into the selected action. These include, but are not limited to:

- keeping visitors to designated roads and trails in most areas
- revegetation of disturbed sites with native plants
- restoration or maintenance of natural processes to the extent practicable
- baseline studies of plants and animals
- consultation and compliance regarding cultural resources
- monitoring programs for resource and visitor impacts and carrying capacities
- emphasis on resource protection in interpretation and educational programs

Because the scope of the general management plan is mostly conceptual, site-specific surveys, consultation, and compliance with all applicable laws, regulations, and policies, including mitigation if necessary, will be carried out before any development begins.

CONCLUSION

The above factors and considerations warrant selecting Alternative C, the proposed action, as the general management plan for Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park. The selected action will be implemented as described in Chapter 2 of the FEIS.

RECOMMENDED:

/s/ Clay Alderson Date: 1/31/97
Clay Alderson Superintendent
Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park
Skagway, Alaska

/s/Willie Russell Date: 1/31/97
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CONCURRED:

/s/ William C. Walters Date: 2/6/97
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APPROVED:

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