

(FAVOR), and to establish new partnerships for environmental education and outreach programs.

Resource protection and visitor safety would be greatly enhanced through this alternative, with the addition of two law enforcement officers. This would allow for more patrol and enforcement of closures and sensitive areas protection, especially of wilderness areas or cultural resource sites. New areas of the backcountry would be closed to public access to protect wildlife resources. We would seek expanded management authority to regulate public and commercial activities in nearshore waters and submerged lands under the Management Agreement. A cultural resources field investigation and inventory would be conducted.

Implementation of Alternative C would also occur through the development of 11 step-down management plans. New staffing would be proposed through the addition of 6 permanent, full-time employees. The positions would be in addition to the 5 full-time positions proposed in Alternative B, for a total of 11 full-time positions in Alternative C. New maintenance and government housing facilities would be proposed along with new vehicles and boats to accommodate the staff increases. While Alternative C would promote our vision for these refuges, the resources available to implement it would not likely be forthcoming in the current economic environment as compared to when first proposed.

### Background

The National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 (16 U.S.C. 668dd–668ee) (Administration Act), as amended by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, requires us to develop a CCP for each national wildlife refuge. The purpose for developing a CCP is to provide refuge managers with a 15-year plan for achieving refuge purposes and contributing toward the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System, consistent with sound principles of fish and wildlife management, conservation, legal mandates, and our policies. In addition to outlining broad management direction on conserving wildlife and their habitats, CCPs identify wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities available to the public, including opportunities for hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, and environmental education and interpretation. We will review and update the CCP at least every 15 years in accordance with the Administration Act.

### Comments

Notices of availability of the Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment (Draft CCP/EA) were sent to 200 persons on the mailing list and copies were made available for a 30-day public review period as announced in the **Federal Register** on May 23, 2008 (73 FR 30139). At least 47 persons attended two public meetings held on the Draft CCP/EA during the open comment period. We received 25 comment letters by mail or e-mail from 16 persons and 11 non-governmental organizations. Comments were received from 4 government agencies and 1 Tribal government. The Draft CCP/EA was circulated through the Florida State Clearinghouse to 8 State, regional, and local governments.

### Selected Alternative

After considering the comments we received, and based on the professional judgment of the planning team, we selected Alternative B to implement the CCP. It promotes the enhancement of wildlife populations by maintaining and enhancing a diversity and abundance of habitats for native plants and animals, especially imperiled species that are only found in the Florida Keys. Many of the objectives and strategies are designed to maintain and restore native plant communities and ensure the biological integrity across the landscape. Strategies are designed to restore and maintain the fire-dependent pine rocklands and to enhance habitat features of selected salt marsh transition and freshwater wetland communities that benefit priority species in the National Key Deer Refuge. Research and monitoring will provide essential information for implementing an adaptive management approach to strategic landscape conservation, providing flexibility in management strategies in order to incorporate new information and changing environmental conditions. The CCP also provides for obtaining baseline data and monitoring indicator species to detect changes in ecosystem diversity and integrity related to climate change.

Since a primary purpose of the refuges is to provide sanctuary for nesting and migratory birds, protection from human disturbance will be enhanced, particularly at colonial nesting bird rookeries and at beach habitats in the backcountry islands of the Key West and Great White Heron NWRs. Ongoing research to identify causal reasons for the marked, long-term decline in the great white heron nesting population, as well as studies on the

impacts of sea level rise on wading birds, will be expanded.

A primary focus of the visitor services program is to enhance environmental education and outreach efforts through existing venues and expanded partnerships to reach a diversity of local residents, businesses, students, educators, and visitors. This plan focuses on increasing public awareness, understanding, and support for the refuges' conservation mission. It places priority on wildlife-dependent recreational uses, such as wildlife observation and photography. Non-wildlife dependent forms of recreation, such as beach picnicking and sunbathing, will be limited or restricted in sensitive areas. Awareness efforts will be expanded to inform visitors about protecting wilderness values.

The compatibility determinations for (1) Environmental education and interpretation; (2) hiking/daypacking, jogging, and walking (National Key Deer Refuge only); (3) bicycling (National Key Deer Refuge only); (4) wildlife observation and photography; (5) fishing; (6) beach use (National Key Deer Refuge only); (7) public use on wilderness and backcountry islands; (8) research and monitoring; (9) mosquito management (National Key Deer Refuge and Great White Heron NWR only); and (10) horseback riding (National Key Deer Refuge only) are available in Appendix F of the CCP.

### Authority

This notice is published under the authority of the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, Public Law 105–57.

Dated: August 24, 2009.

**Patrick Leonard,**

*Acting Regional Director.*

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## DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

### National Park Service

#### **Draft General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement, New River Gorge National River, WV**

**AGENCY:** National Park Service, Department of the Interior.

**ACTION:** Notice of availability of the Draft General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement for New River Gorge National River.

**SUMMARY:** Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, 42 U.S.C. 4332(2)(C), the National Park Service announces the availability of the

Draft General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (Draft GMP/EIS) for New River Gorge National River, West Virginia. Consistent with National Park Service laws, regulations, and policies, and the purpose of the National River, the Draft GMP/EIS describes and analyzes five alternatives, including the no action alternative, to guide the management of the National River over the next 15 to 20 years. The alternatives incorporate various management prescriptions to ensure protection, access and enjoyment of the park's resources.

Alternative 1 is the no action alternative, which would continue current management and trends, with no major changes in direction.

Alternative 2 emphasizes the substantial differences among subareas of the gorge, improving them to reflect their differing character, resources, and visitor experiences. Management actions would build upon the cultural resource, interpretive, and recreational opportunities of the north and south ends of the park, while retaining a primitive and remote feeling in the middle of the park.

Alternative 3 would unify the park by providing a north-south through park hike and bike trail, enhancing existing scenic roads, and building new access and facilities in the middle of the park to balance opportunities for visitors throughout the park.

Alternative 4 recognizes river gateways and the rim to river experiences that take visitors to them as the primary access points and orientation venues in the park. River gateways would be enhanced to tell gorge stories while providing improved river, trail, and recreational access. The NPS and gateway communities would work cooperatively to enhance rim to river experiences.

Alternative 5 is the National Park Service's preferred alternative. Alternative 5 would preserve areas for primitive recreational experiences from end to end of the park. Interspersed with these primitive areas would be cultural and interpretive resource focal areas where visitors could explore communities and other places that once populated the gorge, experience the river, and enjoy a variety of recreational experiences. A north-south through park connector composed of improved scenic roads and trails would enable visitors to travel the length of the park, visit these areas, and access the backcountry. Partnerships with gateway communities and improved rim to river experiences would foster links to the park as a whole and to specific cultural and interpretive resource areas within the park.

The Draft GMP/EIS evaluates potential environmental consequences of implementing the five alternatives. It describes the affected natural, cultural, scenic, and socioeconomic environments within and near the park and analyzes potential impacts on park resources and values. Seventeen resource topics are addressed, including physiography, geology, and soils; floodplains; water quality; vegetation; aquatic wildlife; terrestrial wildlife; rare, threatened, and endangered species; scenic resources; archeological resources; cultural landscapes; historic structures; ethnographic resources; regional and local economy; communities; visitor use and visitor experience; park access; and park operations.

**DATES:** The National Park Service will accept comments on the Draft GMP/EIS from the public for 60 days from the date the Environmental Protection Agency publishes their Notice of Availability in the **Federal Register**. Public meetings will be held in Hinton, Beckley, and Fayetteville, West Virginia to solicit comments on the Draft GMP/EIS during the public review period. The dates, times, and locations will be announced on the park's Web site at <http://www.nps.gov/neri>; on the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) Web site at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/neri>; in local papers; and can also be obtained by contacting the park at (304) 465-0508.

**ADDRESSES:** The Draft GMP/EIS will be available for public review and comment online at the NPS PEPC Web site (<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/neri>), and at the park's Web site (<http://www.nps.gov/neri>). Printed copies (in limited quantity) and CDs can be requested by calling (304) 465-0508. Printed hardcopies can be viewed at the following locations:

New River Gorge National River—Headquarters, 104 Main Street, Glen Jean, WV 25846.

New River Gorge National River—Canyon Rim Visitor Center, 162 Visitor Center Road (off US 19, north of the New River Gorge Bridge), Lansing, WV 25862.

New River Gorge National River—Sandstone Visitor Center, Meadow Creek Road, Sandstone, WV 25958.

Raleigh County Public Library, 221 N. Kanawha Street, Beckley, WV 25801.

Summers County Public Library, 201 Temple Street, Hinton, WV 25951.

Oak Hill Public Library, 611 Main Street, Oak Hill, WV 25901.

The preferred method to comment is to submit comments electronically through the NPS PEPC Web site at

<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/neri>. You may also send written comments to Superintendent Don Striker, New River Gorge National River, 104 Main St., Glen Jean, WV 25846. Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment—including your personal identifying information—may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Don Striker, Superintendent, New River Gorge National River, 104 Main Street, Glen Jean, WV 25846, (304) 465-0508.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** Through the Draft GMP/EIS planning process, the NPS was able to develop a unified approach to managing the major changes in and adjacent to the park since the 1982 General Management Plan was prepared, to focus on protecting park natural, cultural, and scenic resources, and to identify opportunities to facilitate appropriate forms of visitor education, interpretation and use. Twelve related legislative mandates have been added since the enabling legislation was signed into law in 1978, including several boundary changes. The most recent legislation mandates the continuation of hunting within the park. The Draft GMP/EIS includes a recommendation for additional boundary changes as well as a wilderness eligibility assessment for all National Park Service lands and waters within the current park boundary.

**Mary Pearson-Cooper,**

*Acting Regional Director, Northeast Region, National Park Service.*

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## DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

### Bureau of Land Management

#### Notice of Intent To Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for the Restoration Design Energy Project and Possible Land Use Plan Amendment

**AGENCY:** Bureau of Land Management, Interior.

**ACTION:** Notice of Intent.

**SUMMARY:** In compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended, and the