

Final
General Management Plan /
Environmental Impact Statement
July 2010
**Cumberland Gap
National Historical Park**
Middlesboro, Kentucky



The Hensley Settlement

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**FINAL
GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN / ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT
CUMBERLAND GAP NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK
MIDDLESBORO, KENTUCKY**

General management plans are long-term documents that establish and articulate a management philosophy and framework for decision making and problem solving in the parks. Cumberland Gap National Historical Park's last comprehensive management planning effort was completed in 1979. Since that time many changes have taken place – patterns and types of visitor use have changed and the park's primary cultural landscape element has also changed as a result of construction projects involving the twin-bore Cumberland Gap Tunnel system, highway relocations, and the rehabilitation of the Cumberland Gap and Wilderness Road. In addition, acquisition of the Fern Lake watershed requires a defined management approach for resource use and protection. The park faces new resource and other management challenges as a result of these and other changes. This Final General Management Plan will provide management direction for the park for the next 15 to 20 years.

This *Final General Management Plan* examines three alternatives for managing the Cumberland Gap National Historical Park. The impacts of implementing each of the alternatives are also analyzed. One of the three alternatives is a “no-action alternative” that reflects park current conditions and management actions continued into the future. This alternative provides a baseline against which to compare the other alternatives. In Alternative B, the park provides some additional opportunities for access for visitors to enjoy a wide variety of cultural and natural resources in an outdoor setting. Alternative C, the preferred alternative, provides additional opportunities for access for visitors to enjoy the park's cultural and natural resources, while increasing and formalizing partnering efforts, and increasing opportunities for educational and interpretive activities.

This *Final General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement* has been distributed to other agencies and interested organizations and individuals for their review, after the Environmental Protection Agency's notice of availability has been published in the Federal Register. The no-action period for this document will last for 30 days.

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SUMMARY

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE PARK

Cumberland Gap National Historical Park (hereafter also referred to as the park) was authorized by Congress in 1940 to commemorate the story of the first doorway to the west. The park is authorized by Congress not to exceed 50,000 acres, and presently includes 24,531 acres. Included within the 24,531 acres are 14,091 acres of Recommended Wilderness as well as portions of the Fern Lake watershed.

PURPOSE OF THE GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN / ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

General management plans are required for all units of the national park system and are intended to establish future management direction. This General Management Plan provides comprehensive guidance for perpetuating natural systems, preserving cultural resources, and providing opportunities for quality visitor experiences at Cumberland Gap National Historical Park. This new general management plan updates the management framework for the park, addresses changing issues and conditions, incorporates new resource information, and provides management direction for new park lands.

Although a general management plan provides the analysis and justification for future funding, the plan in no way guarantees that money will be forthcoming. Requirements for additional data for legal compliance and competing national park priorities can delay implementation of actions. Full implementation of a plan could lie many years in the future.

MANAGEMENT ZONES

Management zones and prescriptions indicate how different areas of the park would be managed. The following four management zones were developed for the park: Cultural Resource Zone, Natural Zone, Recommended Wilderness Zone and Developed Zone. The focus of the Cultural Resource Zone is on education, outreach, and restoring and preserving cultural resource conditions. The Natural Zone focuses on preserving the natural environment to allow visitors more diverse outdoor experiences within the park. The Natural Zone incorporates increased visitor activities while preserving the natural experience. The Recommended Wilderness Zone is the same for all action alternatives. It focuses on preserving the natural environment to allow visitors to experience the area the way our ancestors did hundreds of years ago. This zone encompasses the majority of the park (14,091 acres) and provides the visitor with an opportunity to experience nature where human impact is largely unnoticeable and natural forces are the primary influence on the landscape. The Developed Zone focuses on providing visitor access, information, structured activities, and other visitor services. This zone provides opportunities for visitors to gather and learn about the varied cultural and natural resources in the park, engage in interpretive activities, and have access to park facilities.

ALTERNATIVES

The NPS developed all alternatives with substantial public, interagency, and NPS staff participation during the scoping process. Three alternatives have been developed for managing visitor use and resources at Cumberland Gap National Historical Park. Each alternative provides a different management approach. The alternatives were based on the park's purpose and significance, fundamental resources and values, legal mandates, public views, and information on visitor use and park resources. The alternatives are: Alternative A – the No Action Alternative, Alternative B, and Alternative C, the preferred alternative. The Recommended Wilderness Zone would be the same under Alternatives B and C. The 4,500 acre Fern Lake watershed and Fern Lake and surrounding area would be fully acquired and would be opened for visitor use under any of the alternatives. New

facilities that could be constructed at Fern Lake would include a composting comfort station and the acquisition, stabilization, and maintenance of a boat house and two residences.

Alternative A – No-Action

Alternative A consists of a continuation of current management practices, directions, and trends at Cumberland Gap National Historic Park. The types of park visitor activities and uses would remain the same as they are currently, except new activities at Fern Lake would include fishing, boating (no gasoline engines, electric trolling motors are appropriate), with nearby picnicking, hiking, and horseback riding. Four (full-time equivalent) NPS staff members would be added to the park primarily to assist with management requirements for the Fern Lake watershed, as well as the Hensley Settlement.

The park has a wide variety of interpretive or outreach/education programs that have been a key element in its success over the years. These programs include Heritage Fairs, Nature Fairs, and a large number of educational programs. In addition, partnering programs with local and regional organizations have been developed. Under Alternative A, the numbers and types of these programs would continue at their present levels as funding allows.

Under Alternative A, there would be no major changes in the condition or character of natural and cultural resources in the majority of the park. Efforts to preserve as many historic structures and landscapes as possible, with emphasis of the Historic Districts, would continue. Natural resource management programs would continue to emphasize protection of natural resources and processes. The park would also be responsible for maintaining the character and condition of the Fern Lake watershed as well as Recommended Wilderness. No new programs, activities, trails, or visitor uses would be expected.

Under the No Action Alternative, the existing management zones, as specified in the 1979 Master Plan, would continue to be implemented. There are currently three zones at the park with a variety of sub-zones. The existing zoning includes Development, Natural, and Historical Zones.

Alternative B

Under Alternative B opportunities for visitor access would be increased by providing additional park facilities as compared to Alternative A. This would expand visitor use of the park, while avoiding and minimizing potential adverse effects on natural and cultural resources. This would be achieved by strategically locating and limiting the numbers and types of new facilities, primarily within the newly established Developed Zones at Fern Lake, areas adjacent to the Hensley Settlement, the Visitor Center area, and the Wilderness Campground. Acquisition and management of Fern Lake under Alternative B would be the same as Alternative A, except under Alternative B a new Developed Zone would be established at Fern Lake that would make it possible to construct and operate new facilities to provide increased visitor access to this area.

By creation of several new and limited Developed Zones, connectivity between different areas of the park would be increased under Alternative B compared to Alternative A. Under Alternative B, seven new minor facilities have been identified for Developed Zones at Fern Lake, the Gap area, and areas adjacent to the Hensley Settlement that allow for additional facilities and provide visitors increased access to the park. Visitors would experience increased connectivity between the campground and the Gap and the Town of Cumberland Gap via enhanced biking and hiking trails. Expansion of the Developed Zone to include Kentucky State Highway 988 from Sugar Run to the Gap area would allow greater visitor access to this part of the park. Inclusion of Pinnacle Road in the Developed Zone would have a similar effect. Creation of a Developed Zone in areas near the Hensley Settlement would increase the potential use of this important resource for a wider variety of visitor and concessioner

activities such as wagon rides and guided tours as compared to Alternative A. These management actions would provide increased opportunities for concession and commercial services.

Creation of a Developed Zone on the west side of the Hensley Settlement would allow for improvement of Shillalah Creek Road (to remain gated) and creation of a new parking area at the base of Brush Mountain, providing visitors with an improved ability to park, and then hike, bike, or ride horses to the Hensley Settlement. Creation of a Developed Zone on the east side of the Hensley Settlement would provide visitors with an increased potential to access more facilities such as campsites, trails, and Martin's Fork Cabin as compared to Alternative A. In addition, visitors would be provided with increased access to the Shillalah Creek Wildlife Management area and the Kentucky Division of Water lands located adjacent to the park. Visitors would continue to use and experience the Civic Park Area near Sand Cave and White Rocks within the new Developed Zone.

Additional resource management (four additional, full-time equivalent staff) would be required to maintain the condition and character of natural and cultural resources and to manage and operate new facilities in the park. Resource management efforts needed to maintain resource conditions and character in all other areas of the park would otherwise be similar to Alternative A. Under Alternative B, the level of public outreach, education and partnering would be the same as Alternative A. No additional staffing would be proposed to support these activities.

Alternative C – Preferred Alternative

Alternative C is the plan the NPS proposes to implement over the next 15 to 20 years. Alternative C would provide a greater amount of visitor access and facilities in the park as compared to Alternative A. Alternative C would also feature increased levels of education, outreach, and formalized partnering. Otherwise, Alternative C would be similar to Alternative B in that it provides slightly expanded visitor access to the park while minimizing the potential for adverse effects on resources. New facilities would be sited and designed within their cultural and natural settings and context. Sustainable practices would be implemented, and new facilities would be designed to be unobtrusive.

Eleven new minor facilities are proposed for construction in Developed Zones near Fern Lake, the Gap area, and the areas adjacent to the Hensley Settlement under Alternative C. These facilities would provide increased visitor access to the park. Under Alternative C, the Developed Zone at Fern Lake and the Hensley Settlement would be larger than Alternative A, providing the opportunity for additional facilities in the future. Creation of a Developed Zone on the west side of the Hensley Settlement would allow for improvement of Shillalah Creek Road by creation of a new parking area at the base of Brush Mountain and paved or expanded parking immediately adjacent to the Hensley Settlement. Creation of a Developed Zone on the east side of the Hensley Settlement (adjacent to the existing Hensley Settlement Historic District) would provide visitors with an increased potential to access more facilities such as campsites, trails, and Martin's Fork Cabin as compared to Alternative A. In addition, visitors would be provided with increased access to the Shillalah Creek Wildlife Management area and the Kentucky Division of Water lands located adjacent to the park.

Camping opportunities would change by providing electrical hookups in select locations at the Wilderness Road campground, as well as providing access for horse trailers. Under Alternative C, connectivity from the visitor center to Fern Lake would be provided through a Developed Zone along the eastern end of the lake that would connect to the Developed Zone around the visitor center at the Gap. Additional park facilities, such as hiking trails, composting comfort station, or maintenance road, could be constructed within this larger Developed Zone. A Natural Zone would also be established to incorporate the rest of the Fern Lake watershed.

Opportunities for participating in interpretive and education programs (e.g., guided hikes, seasonal and school programs), and some special events would increase, compared to Alternative A. Measures

would be taken to formalize partnering efforts, and establish programs that support the park. Opportunities to enjoy recreational activities would increase, with increased opportunities for access in a variety of settings. These changes would also increase opportunities for establishing future concession and commercial services.

Addition of new facilities and activities would require additional staff to manage cultural and natural resources in order to maintain resource conditions and character while providing quality visitor experiences. A total of 7.2 full time equivalent staff would be hired under Alternative C to address these needs.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

For all three alternatives, the majority of impacts on natural resources and cultural resources would result from increasing access and visitor use over the life of the plan. Impacts on historic resources, natural resources, regional socioeconomics and NPS operations would not differ substantially among the action alternatives, however. The park would continue management efforts to maintain 14,091 acres as wilderness, as directed by Congress. Under all alternatives, this natural area provides outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive wilderness experiences.

Visitors have expressed overall satisfaction with most existing opportunities in the park. Impacts associated with implementing Alternative A would therefore be associated with continuation of existing visitor experiences and use. Maintaining the current use, access, and range of visitor experiences would have long-term, minor and beneficial effects on visitor use and experience for those that are satisfied with existing conditions. Many visitors voiced preferences for more access and interpretive programs and the lack of these would result in a long-term, moderate, and adverse effect on visitor experience. Impacts of Alternative A on natural resources and soundscape would continue to be primarily long-term, negligible, and both beneficial and adverse. Impacts to cultural resources based on National Environmental Policy Act requirements would be mainly long-term, minor to moderate, and both adverse and beneficial. Impacts to cultural resources based on Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act would be considered to be potentially adverse, since specific project designs are not yet available (the only option according to Section 106 requirements is “no effect”, which cannot be stated at the present time). In either case, compliance assessments will be required to meet both National Environmental Policy Act and Section 106 requirements for future projects. These assessments will be tiered to the general management plan/environmental impact statements in the future. Impacts to transportation and park operations would be long-term, minor and adverse. Socioeconomics and concessions and commercial services would not experience major changes, and the impacts would be long-term and short-term, moderate and beneficial for socioeconomics and long-term, moderate and adverse for concessions and commercial services. Impacts to scenic resources and visual quality would continue to be long-term, minor and beneficial.

Impacts associated with implementing Alternative B are primarily related to increasing visitor access and activity in the Developed Zones associated with the Hensley Settlement, the Gap, and Fern Lake. The park would be protected by continuation of effective management of natural and cultural resources, while at the same time increasing services and access, primarily in the Developed Zones. Increasing visitor access and range of visitor experiences in this manner would have long-term, moderate to major and beneficial effects on visitor use and experience, while minimizing potentially adverse effects of any new facilities. Visitors who voiced satisfaction with current conditions may perceive a long-term moderate, adverse affect related to visitor use and experience. Effects of natural and cultural resources would be primarily related to construction and operation of new facilities. The NPS would implement sustainable practices and design facilities to blend with their natural and cultural environments/context. In addition, environmental assessments would be completed to assure potentially adverse effects are avoided or greatly minimized through proper siting and design. This would mitigate many potentially adverse impacts. Adverse impacts on natural resources would

therefore be primarily long- and short-term, minor to moderate. Adverse impacts on cultural resources based on National Environmental Policy Act requirements would be primarily negligible to minor, with minor, adverse effects due to facility construction, operation and use, and moderate, beneficial effects on ethnographic resources and values, and overall minor to moderate benefits from continuing management, education and outreach efforts. Impacts to cultural resources based on Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act would be the same as Alternative A. Impacts of Alternative B range from long- and short-term, minor, and adverse for soundscape, scenic resources, and visual quality, and park operations. Beneficial impacts on socioeconomics, transportation, and concessions and commercial services would be long- and short-term minor to moderate.

Alternative C would have many impacts that are similar to Alternative B, particularly for natural and cultural resources. Construction and operation of new facilities would cause long-term, minor adverse effects to archeological resources. In general, the effects of increased education, outreach, and partnering efforts on most natural and cultural resources would be long-term, moderate to major and beneficial. Increased access and visitor services would provide many of the same results, both beneficial and adverse. Impacts to cultural resources based on Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act would be the same as Alternative A. There would be long-term moderate, beneficial effects to park operations, transportation, concessions and commercial services. Impacts of Alternative C on socioeconomics would be similar to Alternative B, long- and short-term, negligible to moderate and beneficial. Long- and short-term, minor and adverse impacts would occur as a result of implementation of Alternative C on soundscape and scenic resources and visual quality.

THE NEXT STEPS

The Cumberland Gap National Historical Park *Final General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement* includes letters from governmental agencies, any substantive comments on the draft document, and NPS responses to those comments. Following distribution of the *Final General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement* and a 30-day no-action period, a record of decision approving a final plan will be signed by the NPS regional director. The record of decision will document the NPS selection of an alternative for implementation. With the signed record of decision, the plan can then be implemented, depending on funding and staffing. (A record of decision does not guarantee funds and staff for implementing the approved plan.) The park must compete with other units of the National Park system for limited implementation funding.

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