

Briefing Statement

Bureau: National Park Service
Issue: Facility Planning at Great Smoky Mountain Institute at Tremont
Park Site: Great Smoky Mountains National Park
Date: September 19, 2007

Background: The Great Smoky Mountain Institute at Tremont (Institute) serves as the Park primary residential environmental education center and is managed by a partner organization with the same name. The facilities at Tremont are owned by the National Park Service and include: an administration/maintenance building, dormitories, dining hall and staff housing. These facilities were constructed in the 1960's and housed a Job Corp Center until the mid 1970's. The facilities were never constructed to serve as a residential Environmental Education Center and were built to have a seven year life span. They do not function well in meeting current programmatic needs for the 5,000 annual adult and children participants. The Institute strives to reconnect Americans with the natural world in ways that are relevant to them so that they will be inspired to care for their natural and cultural heritage. A revitalized facility at Tremont will meet the NPS goals set forth in the Interpretation and Education Renaissance and respond to an ever changing society.

In 2003 the Tremont Board completed a visioning and master planning exercise to help frame the facility needs required, from their vantage point, to develop a world class residential Environmental Education program. The total costs of implementing the plan were estimated at \$20 million at that time. New major components proposed included: dormitories, main lodge with dining hall, flexible indoor program and office space, staff housing and site improvements.

In fiscal year 2005, the Park received \$500,000 of congressional funding to complete a Development Concept Plan (DCP) and an Environmental Assessment (EA) process for Tremont. The Park has prepared a range of alternatives which includes the Board's 2003 Master Plan as one alternative. Other alternatives call for improvements that range from minimal to moderate in order to create a reasonable mix of solutions that could be implemented based on funding opportunities.

Current Status: The range of alternatives was presented to the public on November 13 -14, 2006. An impact and cost analysis of each alternative has been completed and will be used as a basis for selecting an Agency Preferred Alternative to be included in a Draft Environmental Assessment and DCP which is scheduled for release late in 2007.

Next Steps/Strategy: Utilize a Choosing By Advantages process to select an Agency Preferred Alternative. A CBA workshop is scheduled for October 2 and 3, 2007. The Tremont Board is working diligently to assess the feasibility and capability of individual and corporate donors, but the Board was not yet ready to commit a fixed amount during development of the FY 2008 Centennial Challenge project development. Financial feasibility for construction and operations will be a consideration during the decision making process. An NPS capital investment (Centennial Challenge) may significantly influence potential donors, additional partnerships and achieve the Tremont vision.

Congressional District: TN-2

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