



**National Park Service  
US Department of the Interior  
Freedom Riders National Monument  
Bus Burning Site  
Alabama**

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## **Finding of No Significant Impact**

### **Master Plan and Environmental Assessment, Freedom Riders National Monument Bus Burning Site**

PEPC ID 85257

#### **Recommended**

**ROLANDO HERTS**  Digitally signed by ROLANDO HERTS  
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Dr. Rolando Herts  
Superintendent, Freedom Riders National Monument

Date

#### **Approved**

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Darrell L. Echols  
Acting Regional Director  
Interior Region 2, South Atlantic – Gulf, National Park Service

Date

## CONTENTS

Introduction .....	2
Public Involvement .....	4
Selected Action and Rationale for the Decision .....	5
Rationale .....	6
Resource Protection Measures .....	7
Other Alternatives Considered .....	7
Significance Criteria Review .....	7
Potentially Affected Environment .....	7
Degree of Effects of the Action .....	9
Agency Consultation .....	12
Alabama Department of Transportation and Calhoun County Highway Department .....	12
Alabama State Historic Preservation Office .....	13
US Fish and Wildlife Service .....	13
Tribal Consultation .....	13
Conclusion: Finding of No Significant Impact .....	14
Attachment A: Response to Public Comments .....	15
Attachment B: Errata including Text Changes to the Environmental Assessment .....	18
Attachment C: Determination of Non-Impairment .....	19
References .....	22

## FIGURES

Figure 1. Project Area .....	3
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## INTRODUCTION

The National Park Service (NPS) prepared a master plan and environmental assessment for the Freedom Riders National Monument Bus Burning Site (Bus Burning Site). The Freedom Riders National Monument (monument) was established by presidential proclamation on January 12, 2017, to commemorate the stories, places, and people involved in the 1961 Freedom Rides. This series of political protests was a nonviolent campaign that brought national attention to the reality of segregation in the Southern United States and forced the federal government to act toward ending segregation in interstate travel. See figure 1 for a map of the project area. The master plan and environmental assessment was prepared in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) and the Department of the Interior implementing regulations 43 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 46.<sup>1,2</sup>

The purpose of this plan is to provide long-term guidance for public access to and commemorate the Bus Burning Site. The plan outlines an approach for providing opportunities to contemplate the stories and resources associated with the monument. It integrates the monument's natural and cultural resource protection goals and assesses impacts related to visitor experience.

The plan addresses a range of opportunities to bolster the Bus Burning Site, including:

- Identifying and prioritizing necessary infrastructure to support visitor access, use, and safety, as well as NPS operations at the Bus Burning Site.
- Enhancing public understanding of the history and significance of the Bus Burning Site and its connection to the broader civil rights movement.
- Providing a cohesive visitor experience throughout the park's subunits and projecting a clear NPS identity in all areas of the national monument.

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<sup>1</sup> Executive Order 14154, Unleashing American Energy (Jan. 20, 2025), and a Presidential Memorandum, Ending Illegal Discrimination and Restoring Merit-Based Opportunity (Jan. 21, 2025), require the Department to strictly adhere to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), 42 U.S.C. §§ 4321 et seq. Further, such Order and Memorandum repeal Executive Orders 12898 (Feb. 11, 1994) and 14096 (Apr. 21, 2023). Because Executive Orders 12898 and 14096 have been repealed, complying with such Orders is a legal impossibility. The National Park Service verifies that it has complied with the requirements of NEPA, including the Department's regulations and procedures implementing NEPA at 43 C.F.R. Part 46 and Part 516 of the Departmental Manual, consistent with the President's January 2025 Order and Memorandum.

<sup>2</sup> The Department of the Interior (DOI) published an interim final rule, NEPA Implementing Regulations, on July 3, 2025, "rescinding and making necessary targeted updates to its remaining regulations implementing" NEPA. 90 Fed. Reg. 29498 (July 3, 2025). The park published a Master Plan and Environmental Assessment on August 25, 2025, relying upon preexisting procedures that predate July 2, 2025. The Master Plan NEPA review was sufficiently advanced at the time DOI issued the rule, so NPS will rely upon the preexisting procedures to issue this FONSI, completing the NEPA review for the Master Plan. Nonetheless, the Master Plan / Environmental Assessment is consistent with DOI's July 3, 2025, NEPA Implementing Regulations.

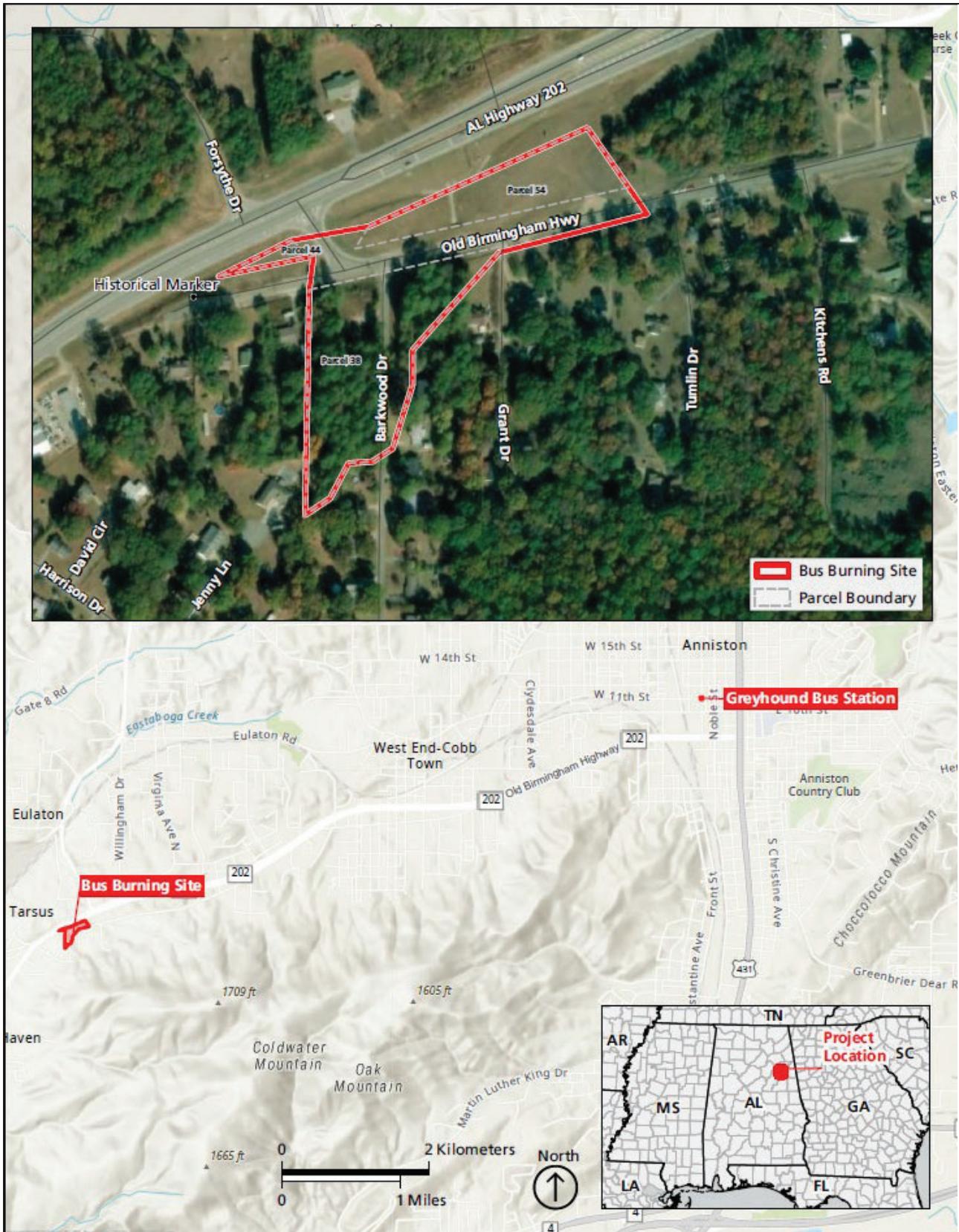


FIGURE 1. PROJECT AREA

As part of the planning process, the master plan and Environmental Assessment (EA) evaluated four alternatives, including a no-action alternative (alternative 1) and three action alternatives (alternatives 2, 3, and 4). The action alternatives present a reasonable and feasible approach that meets the purpose of and need for action. This Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) documents the decision of the National Park Service to implement the selected alternative, which is referred to as the proposed action (alternative 3) in the master plan and environmental assessment. The selected alternative respects the significance and importance of the Bus Burning Site to the Freedom Rides campaign and the events on May 14, 1961, provides a solemn and contemplative environment for visitors to reflect on the sacrifice and courage of the Freedom Riders, and offers opportunities to interpret the campaign's relevance to the nation's broader civil rights movement.

The selected alternative will realign a portion of Barkwood Drive to the east and fully develop the resulting recombined parcel south of Old Birmingham Highway (parcel 38) as well as the parcel that includes the historical location of the Bus Burning Site (parcel 44). The northeast parcel (parcel 54) will not be developed, and the Highway 202 off-ramp will remain in its current location (see figure 1 and the alternative description in the master plan and environmental assessment). Specific design elements, such as the Freedom Plaza, will not be constructed. A recommendation for the revision of the monument boundary will be made to include the acquisition of adjacent residential parcels of land at the end of Old Birmingham Highway to conserve historic resources in that area, provide opportunities for future interpretation, and improve park operations and visitor safety. However, regardless of a monument boundary revision, the design elements of alternative 3 will still be implemented as described. These design elements, which include a visitor arrival and orientation space and a Bus Burning Site Commemoration Space, will improve interpretation of the site.

## **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

Public engagement prior to the release of the master plan and environmental assessment for public comment is described in chapter 4 (page 78) of the master plan and environmental assessment. On August 25, 2025, the National Park Service issued a press release announcing the availability of the master plan and environmental assessment. The press release included a link to the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website, which initiated a 30-day public comment period. The National Park Service posted the master plan and environmental assessment and a supplemental newsletter to the PEPC website at the start of the public comment period. Comments were accepted from August 25, 2025, until September 24, 2025.

The supplemental newsletter included information about the background of the Bus Burning Site, a project overview, the purpose of and need for the project, an overview of the alternatives, current project status and schedule, and instructions for commenting on the master plan and environmental assessment. The park hosted an in-person public meeting on September 9, 2025, to provide information about the project and how to provide public comment and to answer participants' questions. The National Park Service received 19 correspondences during the public comment period. A Public Comment Response Report is provided in attachment A. The statements and conclusions reached in this FONSI are based on the documentation and analysis provided in the EA and associated decision file. To the extent necessary, relevant sections of the EA are incorporated by reference below. As required by NPS *Management Policies 2006*, a finding of non-impairment is included in attachment C. All page numbers and section/sentence locations referenced in this FONSI pertain to the master plan and environmental assessment published for public review in August 2025.

## SELECTED ACTION AND RATIONALE FOR THE DECISION

Based on the analysis presented in the master plan and environmental assessment, the NPS-selected alternative 3 (the proposed action and NPS-preferred alternative) after an evaluation of the feasibility of other considered alternatives. The selected action is summarized below and described in detail in the master plan and environmental assessment.

Under the selected action/alternative, the National Park Service will realign Barkwood Drive to the east and fully develop the currently segmented parcel south of Old Birmingham Highway (parcel 38) as well as the parcel that includes the historical location of the Bus Burning Site (parcel 44) to respect the significance and importance of the Bus Burning Site. The proposed improvements and resource protection measures outlined in chapter 2 of the master plan and environmental assessment will occur under the selected alternative.

Under the selected alternative, the northeast parcel (parcel 54) will not be developed, and the Highway 202 off-ramp will remain in its current location. Specific design elements described in alternatives 2 and 4, such as the Freedom Plaza, will not be constructed. The existing roadways and associated traffic disrupt the site and make it difficult to fully achieve the desired conditions for a safe and solemn environment. Implementation of the selected action will not consolidate all of the NPS parcels, but it will work towards consolidation. Most significantly, the realignment of Barkwood Drive will improve visitor safety by reducing the number of pedestrian road crossings.

Under the selected alternative, the proposed site plan will include several design elements to support improved interpretation of the Bus Burning Site. The key design elements associated with the selected alternative are described below.

**Visitor Arrival and Orientation Space**—Under the selected action, the park will encourage visitors to begin their visit to Freedom Riders National Monument at the Greyhound Bus Station. Here, visitors will have access to rangers and focused and orienting interpretive opportunities. They will be encouraged to travel to the Bus Burning site along the same route that the Freedom Riders took in 1961. At the burn site, there will be an “arrival and orientation space” that includes a contact station with interpretive elements. The visitor contact station will be designed with overhangs to provide shade for visitors and a place for rangers to start programs; it will include restrooms, family rooms with changing tables, and storage space. The building will allow space for the installation of interpretive panels, the content of which will be determined at a future date. New utilities will be provided for the facility, including electricity, water, and septic sewer system. Approximately 2,000 linear feet of existing overhead powerlines will be removed and reinstalled underground. The septic fields will be placed strategically based on final site layout and requirements. A stormwater detention area will be sited east of the visitor contact station, separated from the main visitor areas by Barkwood Drive. Final design of the site will further evaluate stormwater retention needs by identifying the functional requirements, scope, and scale of the area.

The realignment of Barkwood Drive will allow for increased parking, including oversized parking spaces for tour buses. In addition, open green spaces will be directly adjacent to the visitor contact station, improving connectivity and serving as gathering spaces for guided tours and during special events. The selected alternative will offer additional interpretive information about the Freedom Rides campaign in the area around the visitor contact station. The National Park Service will provide cohesive branding to create a destination for visitors and to improve their historical interpretation and wayfinding. Visitors will connect to the site via a sidewalk that will include interpretative information important to the Freedom Rides movement. The National Park Service will also install interpretive panels on the outside walls of the visitor contact station with educational messaging about the Freedom Riders to provide an immersive and informative visitor experience.

*Parcel 54*—No interpretive elements will be developed in this area under the selected action. Some elements of the “Freedom Plaza” described in alternatives 2 and 4 will be modestly incorporated into the arrival and orientation space, but substantial development on this parcel will not occur and the existing stormwater drainage infrastructure will not be modified. Shrubs and native trees will be planted along the southern edge of parcel 54 to provide a visual barrier from the heavy traffic along Highway 202. Further natural revegetation of parcel 54 may also be encouraged, consistent with the recommendations in the Freedom Riders National Monument Cultural Landscape Report (2023).

*Bus Burning Site Commemoration Space*—The selected action will commemorate the site where the bus burning occurred. An installation of a metal frame will depict the Greyhound bus that includes seats marked with the names of the Freedom Riders and all the others who were on the bus that day. The names of the Freedom Riders will be inscribed on each seat. A bas-relief sound wall, or other type of hardscape screening such as a mural, will be installed on the northern property line (parcel 44) to provide a buffer between the site and Highway 202 and provide a place for interpretation of the role of the Forsyth Grocery in the Freedom Riders story. An interpretive photo wall along a concrete walkway will display the images of the event captured by Joseph Postiglione<sup>3</sup>. The selected alternative will require an agreement with Calhoun County to allow establishment of infrastructure and design elements within the right-of-way of Old Birmingham Highway adjacent to parcel 44. As part of a project outside the development of the master plan and environmental assessment, park partners are developing a bronze sculpture of “Hank and Janie.” This statue portrays young Janie Forsyth giving injured Freedom Rider Hank Thomas a glass of water on the side of the road. The selected action will include a dedicated area for this sculpture near the site of the bus burning.

*General Design Elements*—Additional NPS wayfinding, signage, concrete sidewalks, Architectural Barriers Act (ABA)-compliant curb cuts, decorative paving, security and safety equipment (such as lighting and cameras), benches, and safety guardrails and bollards (as needed) will be installed as part of the selected action. Traffic circulation and pedestrian safety measures, such as crosswalks and speed tables, will also be installed as part of the selected action. Disturbed areas will be revegetated with native vegetation (i.e. grass, shrubs, and trees) to provide a contemplative park-like environment. The large oak tree located on parcel 38 will be preserved, as it is likely a witness tree dating to the time of the bus burning. The tree will also provide shade to visitors in the summer months.

## Rationale

The National Park Service has chosen alternative 3 (preferred alternative) as the selected action because it:

- Satisfies the purpose and need by guiding management of the facilities, parking, roadways, and future development in and around the Bus Burning Site.
- Stays consistent with the national monument’s mission to enhance public understanding of the history and significance of the Bus Burning Site and its connection to the broader civil rights movement.
- Implements resource protection measures and best management practices that will avoid, minimize, and mitigate adverse environmental impacts.

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<sup>3</sup> The National Park Service will seek permission to use and display Joseph Postiglione’s images and will seek alternatives if permission were not granted.

## **RESOURCE PROTECTION MEASURES**

Resource protection measures are discussed in chapter 2 of the master plan and environmental assessment as incorporated elements of the alternatives. These protection measures are considered part of the selected action and will be implemented to avoid, minimize, and/or mitigate impacts on the site's resources. Additional mitigation measures were not needed to reduce environmental impacts below the significance threshold. The measures presented in chapter 2 of the master plan and environmental assessment are subject to the final design and approval of plans by relevant agencies.

## **OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED**

In addition to the NPS-selected action described above (alternative 3), the National Park Service analyzed a no-action alternative and two other action alternatives (alternatives 2 and 4) (see chapter 2 of the master plan and environmental assessment). The no-action alternative was not selected because it does not meet the purpose of and need for the project, nor does it address the following: land management concerns, cultural landscape needs, or visitor use and interpretation needs at the Bus Burning Site. Alternative 2, which would maintain the existing road alignment, was not selected because it would result in an overly segmented visitor experience, with safety concerns that could be challenging to mitigate; it would not provide a fully unified or immersive visitor experience. Alternative 4, which was the most ambitious development scheme, would have provided full pedestrian-accessible unification of all the federally managed parcels at the site and would have provided space for additional interpretation and commemorative elements in a plaza that would occupy parcel 54. Alternative 4 was not selected because it would require complex and expensive construction, regulatory hurdles associated with relocation of the Highway 202 entrance ramp, and alterations to local traffic patterns.

An additional alternative considered but dismissed is also summarized in chapter 2 of the master plan and environmental assessment.

## **SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA REVIEW**

In considering whether the effects of the proposed action are significant, the National Park Service analyzed the potentially affected environment and degree of the effects of the action. In considering the degree of the effects, the National Park Service considered short- and long-term effects as well as beneficial and adverse effects.

### **Potentially Affected Environment**

As described in the master plan and environmental assessment, the selected alternative has the potential for adverse and beneficial impacts on the Bus Burning Site. These impacts affect visitor use and experience as well as cultural landscapes.

### **Visitor Use and Experience**

The Bus Burning Site is composed of three parcels located near the intersection of Old Birmingham Highway and Highway 202 in Anniston, Alabama. The site is open to the public year-round, but visitation remains low. An interim parking area is available at the corner of Barkwood Drive and Old Birmingham Highway, but no designated pedestrian infrastructure supports safe or intuitive movement between the parking area and key features of the site. The lack of defined pathways or crosswalks requires visitors to navigate through grass or along road shoulders to view the historical

marker. Old Birmingham Highway, a narrow dead-end road, offers no turnaround option other than private driveways, which may lead to confusion and discourage visitation. These access limitations may contribute to the relatively low use of the site and diminish the ease with which visitors can engage with its resources.

The southern half of the Bus Burning Site is bisected by Barkwood Drive, which provides access to a residential neighborhood. The northern half of the site is split by a highway ramp that provides local access to the Highway 202 bypass. Far more visitors to the site are passing through on these surface roads than they are coming to visit the Bus Burning Site. Other than to the homes immediately served by Old Birmingham Highway west of the park, alternate routes exist to provide through-traffic options.

The Bus Burning Site lacks a formal point of arrival or any elements that signal to visitors they have entered a nationally significant location. There is no visitor contact station, site entrance experience, or welcoming infrastructure to support orientation or wayfinding. A single park identification sign is illuminated by ground-level lighting, but there is no consistent signage or site design to guide visitor movement or set expectations for the experience.

The physical setting is dominated by the adjacent four-lane Highway 202, which introduces a steady stream of traffic noise and movement that detracts from opportunities for quiet reflection or contemplation. The absence of developed pedestrian circulation routes or gathering spaces further limits the potential for meaningful engagement. While a historical marker installed by the Alabama Historical Association in 2007 offers some interpretive information, the content is limited, the marker is located approximately 100 feet west of the location where the bus burning occurred, and the information is not supported by any additional context or storytelling features. A previously installed interpretive kiosk has been removed, and no seating, shade, or visitor amenities are available. The result is an austere environment that may feel incomplete or disorienting to visitors seeking a deeper understanding of the events that took place there.

The Bus Burning Site currently lacks any NPS-developed interpretive or educational materials. The only available interpretive element is the historical marker, which provides brief information about the events of May 14, 1961, but does not convey the full significance of the Freedom Riders' journey or the broader civil rights movement. There is no integration between the Greyhound Bus Depot in Anniston and the Bus Burning Site in terms of interpretation, theming, or visitor flow. This disconnect limits the public's ability to understand how the two locations are linked, both geographically and historically, and impairs the monument's ability to meet its interpretive goals.

The current site conditions do not support school programs, group gatherings, commemorative events, or other forms of educational engagement. Visitors are largely left to self-navigate and interpret the significance of the location without guidance or context, which may lead to missed opportunities for deeper learning and emotional connection.

## **Cultural Landscapes**

Currently, the setting of the Bus Burning Site south of Old Birmingham Highway is still a rural area with a residential neighborhood. The setting of the Bus Burning Site has been considerably altered by the construction of Highway 202 and Barkwood Drive and the severing of Old Birmingham Highway, making it more difficult to orient a visitor to intact historical views. Even still, a few features remain to make those connections: the remaining segment of Old Birmingham Highway; the vista eastwards down the highway; much of the existing topography; and woodland enclosure by parcel 38. The homes west of parcel 38, and directly south of the bus burning location, date to the bus burning and contribute to the historical setting, feeling, and association. Thus, while few physical features remain today to orient the visitor, the property does retain sufficient integrity to convey its

historic significance. What does remain of the 1961 landscape—Old Birmingham Highway, the eastern view that includes Old Birmingham Highway and remaining residences, as well as the topography, stormwater conveyance, and woodland enclosure by parcel 38—are considered contributing features to the integrity of the Bus Burning Site.

There are several small-scale features in the Bus Burning Site, though none contribute to the cultural landscape. These include a historical marker, a park identification sign, several utility poles, a utility box, several light poles, and a few traffic signs. As noted above, a historical marker, installed by the Alabama Historical Association in 2007, stands on the north edge of parcel 44. The historical marker is located about 100 feet west of the location of the bus burning. The marker describes both May 14, 1961, and incidents involving the Greyhound bus, and is in good condition. Facing Highway 202 is an NPS park identification sign that reads “Freedom Riders National Monument Greyhound Bus Burning Site.” Lighting installed on the ground illuminates the sign.

## **Degree of Effects of the Action**

The National Park Service considered the following actual or potential project effects in evaluating the degree of effects for the selected alternative.

### **Beneficial and Adverse, and Short-term and Long-term Effects of the Selected Alternative**

The National Park Service did not identify any significant impacts on resources that would require analysis in an environmental impact statement. The impacts of the selected action, including direct, indirect, short-term, and long-term effects do not reach the level of a significant effect.

Implementation of the preferred alternative will result in both beneficial and adverse impacts, as summarized from chapter 3, “Potential Impacts and Environmental Issues,” of the master plan and environmental assessment (pages 46–59) below.

### **Effects on the Quality of Life of the American People**

Implementation of the selected alternative will not meaningfully affect the public’s access to natural resources or recreational opportunities on federal lands. The Bus Burning Site is not used for extractive purposes, and the proposed development will not interfere with public access to the surrounding landscape. The selected alternative includes measures to improve visitor safety and accessibility, such as realigning roadways and installing pedestrian infrastructure, which will enhance the quality of recreational experiences. Emergency services, public utilities, transportation, education, and social services will not be adversely affected. The NPS consulted with affiliated Tribes, and no concerns were raised regarding the implementation of the master plan. The selected alternative will support passive use of the site’s cultural and natural resources by improving interpretive infrastructure and preserving the contemplative character of the landscape. Public education and interpretation will be enhanced through new signage, commemorative elements, and visitor contact facilities, contributing positively to the public’s understanding of civil rights history.

### *Cultural Landscapes*

The selected alternative will have long-term beneficial impacts and short-term adverse impacts on the cultural landscape.

The selected alternative will constitute an adverse effect on the cultural landscape because modifications will occur to the area that will not be consistent with the historic 1961 landscape. Note that these impacts anticipated under the selected alternative have been determined adverse under NEPA analysis, they will not constitute an adverse effect under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, as the historic significance of the site is tied to the May 1, 1961, event under

Criteria A—and the interpretation, understanding, and protection of the characteristics that contribute to the site would be enhanced by implementation of the selected alternative.

The development of a visitor arrival and orientation space; parking lot; and educational, interpretive, and contemplative installations will result in an adverse impact to the land's historical integrity. However, these facilities will not be immediately adjacent to the Bus Burning Site, minimizing potential impacts and allowing for the contributing features of the cultural landscape to be preserved and better appreciated. Constructing these facilities will alter the landscape from how it appeared during the Freedom Rides, but there is currently little left of the 1961 landscape, as the property has been greatly altered since the period of the bus burning. The Forsyth & Son Grocery Store, the Greyhound bus, and other contributing features have previously been removed. The selected alternative will preserve what does remain of the 1961 landscape and rehabilitate the site consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and the recommendation of the *Freedom Riders National Monument Cultural Landscape Report* (2023) (CLR). The use of a bas-relief wall, or other screening element such as a mural, is consistent with the concept of screening recommended in the cultural landscape report, resulting in long-term benefits to the site.

Additionally, shifting Barkwood Drive to the east will move the noncontributing roadway farther outside of the oriented view of the Bus Burning Site, resulting in a more intact cultural landscape.

As outlined in appendix A of the master plan and environmental assessment, management strategies related to monitoring may be implemented that could further alter the cultural landscape, such as temporary or permanent barriers, fencing, or entrance gates. However, if implemented, these adverse impacts will still allow contributing features of the cultural landscape to be preserved. To mitigate any adverse effects, additions and alterations to the landscape will align with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and generally conform to the CLR recommendation for rehabilitation which will result in long-term, beneficial impacts on the site.

Under the selected alternative, the cultural landscape will benefit from the enhanced opportunity to preserve, maintain, and highlight what remains of the 1961 landscape and Old Birmingham Highway. Historic views will be improved by shielding modern intrusions and orienting viewers toward the more intact views to the south and east. The revegetation of disturbed areas, such as the east half of parcel 54, is consistent with the recommendations of the CLR and will also help to restore the historic landscape. Revegetating certain areas will make the site more closely resemble the landscape as it was in 1961 and will be consistent with treatment recommendations as outlined in the cultural landscape report. Providing screening between the Bus Burning Site and Highway 202 is consistent with recommendations in the cultural landscape report and will provide beneficial long-term impacts.

#### *Visitor Use and Experience*

##### Visitor Use and Access

The selected alternative will have long-term, beneficial impacts and short-term, adverse impacts on visitor use and access.

Visitor access and circulation improvements will result in long-term, beneficial impacts by realigning Barkwood Drive to the east and concentrating development within two primary parcels (38 and 44), reducing the number of required pedestrian crossings and eliminating some of the most hazardous circulation points, including those associated with the Highway 202 off-ramp. These improvements will result in long-term, beneficial impacts by providing a more intuitive and less fragmented layout that simplifies visitor movement across the site.

The development of the visitor contact station will have long-term, beneficial impacts on visitor experience by providing more visitor amenities, such as restrooms, interpretive panels, shaded gathering areas, and an expanded parking area that will accommodate oversized vehicles. The addition of clearly marked crosswalks, speed tables, and accessible walkways will also connect the visitor contact station to the commemorative space across the road. These design elements will result in long-term, beneficial impacts on visitor access, comfort, and safety, while reinforcing a more cohesive and manageable flow of movement.

Local traffic navigating the Bus Burning Site to reach Highway 202 or residences south of Old Birmingham Highway will experience short-term, adverse impacts from the temporary disruption in traffic patterns and detours on Barkwood Drive during construction. The highway ramp will remain, but Barkwood Drive will be reoriented, and it will continue to serve the neighborhood to the south. These shifts in local traffic patterns will result in short-term, adverse impacts on visitor use and access. However, should the selected alternative's recommendation for a boundary adjustment be accomplished, acquisition of lots at the western terminus of Old Birmingham Highway will eliminate the need for traffic to travel beyond the entrance to the site on Old Birmingham Highway.

### Visitor Experience and Site Conditions

The selected alternative will have long-term, beneficial impacts and short-term, adverse impacts on visitor experience and site conditions.

A realigned roadway and simplified circulation pattern will have long-term, beneficial impacts on visitor experience by allowing visitors to engage with the site in a more immersive and continuous manner. The creation of the visitor contact station will serve as a defined arrival point that sets the tone for the experience and provides an opportunity for orientation before exploring the rest of the site. Additionally, the design will result in long-term, beneficial impacts on visitor experience by providing a contemplative, park-like setting by virtue of native landscaping, pedestrian-friendly surfaces, and visual and audible buffers, such as a bas-relief sound wall along Highway 202. Although some noise and visual intrusion from Highway 202 will persist, the design features will effectively soften these impacts. Overall, visitor experience will benefit from improved spatial coherence, reduced circulation stress, and a more thoughtfully developed physical setting.

Short-term, adverse impacts on visitor use and experience will occur during construction from roadway detours that result in increased travel times and potentially limit access to certain areas of the site during construction.

### Interpretation, Education, and Understanding of Significance

The selected alternative will have long-term, beneficial impacts on visitor interpretation, education, and understanding.

Long-term, beneficial impacts on visitor interpretation, education, and understanding will occur with the addition of interpretive elements around the visitor contact station and the Bus Burning Site, with a focus on telling the story of the Freedom Riders and commemorating the events of May 14, 1961. Visitors will encounter educational panels and QR codes connected to digital interpretive content. The commemorative space will also include the symbolic metal bus frame with embedded names of the Riders, a photo wall, and the "Hank and Janie" sculpture, which are key features that ground the site in its historical significance.

By reducing the need to navigate multiple road crossings, the selected alternative will allow visitors to follow a more coherent narrative arc from arrival to commemoration. These investments will provide long-term, beneficial impacts on visitors by offering a powerful, yet focused interpretive

experience that deepens understanding of the site's importance while minimizing distractions or logistical barriers.

*Monitoring*—Management strategies associated with monitoring will help the National Park Service respond adaptively if thresholds are approached or exceeded. Strategies such as dispersing school groups, increasing ranger presence, installing barriers, and using communication tools to guide visitor behavior will reduce crowding, promote safe circulation, and support a reflective atmosphere. These actions will have long-term, beneficial impacts by preserving opportunities for quiet contemplation and minimizing visitor conflicts or bottlenecks during high-use periods. However, some strategies, such as the use of temporary barriers, will result in visual intrusions or changes to site aesthetics, but these impacts will be minor and reversible.

*Implementing Visitor Capacity*—Management strategies associated with implementing visitor capacity will further support the site's ability to accommodate desired levels of use while sustaining high-quality experiences. These actions, including information sharing, timed-entry systems, volunteer support, and infrastructure-based traffic controls (e.g., parking gates), will help balance visitation across time and space. By encouraging trip planning and promoting use of nearby civil rights sites in Anniston, these strategies can also broaden public understanding while relieving pressure on the Bus Burning Site. These approaches will be especially beneficial during commemorative events or seasonal peaks, ensuring that crowding does not degrade the site's solemnity or interfere with interpretation. While timed entry or ticketing can introduce modest barriers to spontaneous visitation, such tools will only be used if needed to preserve experiential quality, and their use will be evaluated as part of the park's ongoing monitoring and adaptive management efforts, which currently do not indicate their need.

### **Other Considerations for Effects of the Action**

In evaluating the effects of the selected action, the National Park Service considered several other factors that might contribute to the intensity of impacts. The selected action will not affect public health or safety, is not expected to be highly controversial, and does not establish new precedents for future actions with significant effects. The selected action does not violate any federal, state, or local law imposed for the protection of the environment.

## **AGENCY CONSULTATION**

The National Park Service initiated consultation with relevant agencies, including Alabama Department of Transportation and the Calhoun County Highway Department, the Alabama State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), and Tribal Nations, during the preparation of the master plan and environmental assessment and provided a copy of the master plan and environmental assessment for review. This consultation is discussed in detail in chapter 4 of the master plan and environmental assessment titled “Consultation and Coordination.”

### **Alabama Department of Transportation and Calhoun County Highway Department**

In June 2024, the National Park Service initiated coordination with including Alabama Department of Transportation and the Calhoun County Highway Department. The National Park Service will continue to consult with both parties over the next several years to ensure proper engagement at both the state and local level are maintained throughout the life of the project.

## **Alabama State Historic Preservation Office**

Compliance with section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act was conducted separately but concurrently with the planning process for the master plan and environmental assessment. As required by section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, the National Park Service consulted with the Alabama Historical Commission's State Historic Preservation Officer over the life of this planning effort. Prior to initiating work on the master plan and environmental assessment, the National Park Service had documented and developed treatment recommendations for a parkwide cultural landscape that includes the Bus Buring Site and those documentation efforts and recommendations were shared with the SHPO in the form of a Cultural Landscape Report (NPS 2023). During this planning effort, the National Park Service conducted a Section 110 archeological survey of the entirety of the federally managed lands of the burn site. The survey included ground penetrating radar and systematic subsurface (shovel) testing. No archeological resources of significance were found, and these results were shared with the State Historic Preservation Officer.

On September 16, 2025, the National Park Service sent a copy of the master plan and environmental assessment to the Alabama State Historic Preservation Officer. In the accompanying letter, the National Park Service stated that the proposed actions are consistent with the general treatment guidance in the recent cultural landscape report, which recommended a rehabilitation treatment approach for the burn site. Rehabilitation allows compatible additions to, and alterations of, the landscapes to provide facilities for visitor access and use. The National Park Service provided examples of activity types from the plan and communicated a finding of no adverse effect for the implementation of the master plan, regardless of the alternative selected. On November 19, 2025, the State Historic Preservation Officer indicated concurrence with the agency finding No adverse effect.

## **US Fish and Wildlife Service**

Under the Endangered Species Act, the National Park Service determined that the selected action will not affect threatened, endangered, and proposed listed species; designated critical habitats; candidate species; or migratory birds. No further coordination is required.

## **TRIBAL CONSULTATION**

The National Park Service completed the section 106 consultation process for the master plan and environmental assessment, including consultation with traditionally associated Native American Tribes that are culturally or historically affiliated with the National Monument. In April 2024, the National Park Service initiated consultation with the following Tribal Nations: Absentee Shawnee Tribe, Alabama-Quassarte Tribal Town, Cherokee Nation, Coushatta Tribe of Louisiana, Eastern Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma, Jena Band of Choctaw Indians, Kialegee Tribal Town, Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, Muscogee (Creek) Nation, Poarch Band of Creek Indians, Seminole Nation of Oklahoma, Seminole Tribe of Florida, Shawnee Tribe, and Thlophlocco Tribal Town. The Coushatta Tribe of Louisiana responded on May 1, 2024, and stated that they had no comments to provide at the time. The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians responded on April 29, 2024, and stated that they would defer to Tribes with an interest in the area, as Calhoun County is outside their area of interest. The Muscogee Nation responded on April 29, 2024, stating that they would like to continue consultation. The Poarch Band of Creek Indians responded on April 29, 2024, and requested to consult on the potential effects on historic properties. No other Tribal nations responded to the invitation to consult.

On September 16, 2025, the National Park Service distributed a copy of the master plan and environmental assessment to each of the Tribes listed above as well as the archeological survey report for the burn site. They communicated a finding of no adverse effect for the implementation of

the master plan and environmental assessment regardless of the alternative selected. On September 23, 2025, the Muscogee (Creek) Nation responded with a request for more information associated with the archeological survey, which was provided by the National Park Service on September 30, 2025. No other Tribal nations responded. The park will continue to communicate with Tribal nations during the implementation of the master plan and environmental assessment.

## **CONCLUSION: FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

As described above, the selected alternative does not constitute an action meeting the criteria that normally requires preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The selected alternative will not have a significant effect on the human environment in accordance with section 102(2)(c) of NEPA.

This finding is based on consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality and National Park Service guidance, in place at the time the NPS initiated NEPA review, on the criteria for significance, regarding the potentially affected environment and degrees of effects of the impacts described in the master plan and environmental assessment (which is hereby incorporated by reference) and as summarized above.

The NPS has considered all relevant information in the NEPA process and the NEPA process has concluded.

Documents appended to the FONSI include the following:

- Attachment A: Response to Public Comments
- Attachment B: Errata Indicating Text Changes to the Environmental Assessment
- Attachment C: Determination of Non-Impairment

## ATTACHMENT A: RESPONSE TO PUBLIC COMMENTS

The master plan and environmental assessment was available for public review and comment between August 25, 2025, until September 24, 2025, through standard mail or the project's PEPC website. The National Park Service received 19 pieces of correspondence during the public review period. All comments were read and analyzed to identify substantive comments, defined as a comment that does one or more of the following:

- Question, with reasonable basis, the accuracy of information in the NEPA document
- Question, with reasonable basis, the adequacy of the environmental analysis
- Present reasonable alternatives other than those presented in the NEPA document
- Cause changes or revisions in the proposal

In other words, substantive comments raise, debate, or question a point of fact or analysis. Comments that merely support or oppose a proposal or that merely agree or disagree with NPS policy are not considered substantive and do not require a formal response.

The following text summarizes the substantive comments received during the comment period and is organized into concern statements and responses. All page numbers contained herein refer to the version of the plan/EA that was released for public review.

### Visitor Amenities and Comfort

*Concern Statement*—Several comments requested visitor amenities such as shaded rest areas, drinking fountains, picnic areas, and family gathering spaces to enhance comfort, especially in Alabama's heat. Evergreen vegetative screening and large shade trees were recommended to provide both aesthetic and functional benefits without detracting from commemorative features.

*Agency Response*—All action alternatives described in the EA include shaded gathering areas, restrooms, and green space adjacent to the visitor contact station (p. 36). The visitor contact station is designed with overhangs for shade and includes family rooms with changing tables (p. 36). While picnic areas are not explicitly called out, such facilities are not precluded by the design in the selected alternative and the National Park Service may choose to incorporate them in open green spaces intended for informal gatherings and events (p. 33) or the wooded area south of the parking lot.

### Accessibility

*Concern Statement*—Accessibility was a recurring concern. Commenters urged that parking zones be Architectural Barriers Act (ABA)-compliant and that accessible routes extend throughout the site. There was also support for digital interpretation tools (e.g., QR codes) to broaden access for younger and multilingual audiences.

*Agency Response*—All action alternatives include ABA-compliant curb cuts, sidewalks, and accessible parking (p. 38). The visitor contact station and interpretive elements are designed to be fully accessible. Digital interpretation tools, including QR codes, are mentioned as part of the interpretive strategy (p. 65) that would be developed in a future long range interpretive plan.

## Traffic, Safety, and Infrastructure

*Concern Statement*—Safety concerns were raised regarding the proposed relocation of the highway ramp and the design of alternative 2. Supporters of alternatives 3 and 4 cited improved safety, better traffic flow, and enhanced visitor experience. One commentor expressed opposition to the removal of the 202 ramp because of concerns for increased traffic on Old Birmingham Highway. Concerns were also expressed about the condition of drainage infrastructure and the importance of safe, functional screening for the privacy of neighbors.

*Agency Response*—The environmental assessment thoroughly analyzed traffic and safety concerns. The selected alternative (3) realigns Barkwood Drive to reduce pedestrian crossings (p. 66) and avoids development that would encourage crossings of the ramp of 202. Stormwater management improvements are included in all action alternatives, including the selected alternative. Though not explicitly mentioned, vegetation screening presented in the selected alternative serves both to promote a contemplative environment for visitors and provide privacy for neighbors.

## Environmental and Transportation Impacts

*Concern Statement*—The American Bus Association and others highlighted the environmental benefits of motorcoach access, noting that sites that lack dedicated parking increase emissions and congestion and supported the plans for bus parking in alternatives 3 and 4. These commenters supported alternatives 3 and 4 for their inclusion of motorcoach parking and tourism potential, and requested that these benefits be more fully analyzed in the environmental assessment.

*Agency Response*—The environmental assessment acknowledges the importance of motorcoach access and includes oversized parking in the selected alternative (p. 45). While the environmental benefits of mass transit are not deeply quantified in the impact analysis, the environmental assessment notes that improved access for buses supports tourism and reduces vehicle congestion (p. 66). These benefits will be further considered during implementation and design.

## Community Engagement and Equity

*Concern Statement*—Commenters requested that neighbors be invited to connect to the septic system and that screening be designed to protect neighborhood privacy. There was also concern about the time the planning process has taken and a desire for more inclusive engagement.

*Agency Response*—The selected alternative includes vegetative screening and sound barriers to protect both visitors and neighbors (pp. 36–37). While extending septic access to neighbors is outside the scope of this EA, could be technically challenging and would come at expense to participating residences, the National Park Service will continue to coordinate with local partners and utilities as the site is developed (p. 39). Continued community engagement is a key part of the implementation strategy (p. 78) and is a core value of the Freedom Riders National Monument that staff actively pursue in all the park’s programs.

## Alternative Preferences and Design Concerns

*Concern Statement*—There was strong support for Alternative 3, with some also supporting Alternative 4 for its safety benefit, enhanced beautification, and space benefits. However, concerns were also raised that Alternative 4 may be overbuilt and could distract from the burn site experience and commemorative purpose. One commentor opposed any new development at the site, suggesting

that limited NPS resources be focused on improving the experience and condition of the park's Bus Station Unit in Anniston only.

*Agency Response*—The National Park Service has selected alternative 3 because it balances safety, feasibility, and interpretive and access goals (p. 66). It reduces pedestrian crossings and improves circulation without requiring the highway ramp relocation. Alternative 4 offers the most immersive experience but requires more complex construction and funding (p. 67) that could delay implementation. Concerns about overbuilding and cost are acknowledged in the comparative analysis (pp. 55–57).

## **Cultural Landscape and Civil Rights Trail Integration**

*Concern Statement*—Commenters supported boundary adjustments presented in alternatives 3 and 4 to preserve the cultural landscape and recommended adding the site to the Anniston Civil Rights Trail to enhance its historical and educational value locally.

*Agency Response*—The selected alternative includes a recommendation for a boundary adjustment to preserve adjacent residential parcels and protect the cultural landscape (p. 45, 54) as well as to provide the potential for a pedestrian experience on Old Birmingham Highway with no vehicle conflicts. The environmental assessment also supports coordination with the Anniston Civil Rights Trail and other heritage tourism initiatives (p. 39).

## **ATTACHMENT B: ERRATA INCLUDING TEXT CHANGES TO THE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

No corrections or revisions were required to the Freedom Riders National Monument Bus Burning Site Master Plan and Environmental Assessment following its public release in August 2025.

## ATTACHMENT C: DETERMINATION OF NON-IMPAIRMENT

### The Prohibition on Impairment of Park Resources and Values

The NPS *Management Policies 2006*, section 1.4.4, explains the prohibition on impairment of park resources and values: “While Congress has given the Service management discretion to allow impacts within parks, that discretion is limited by the statutory requirement (generally enforceable by the federal courts) that the Park Service must leave park resources and values unimpaired unless a particular law directly and specifically provides otherwise. This, the cornerstone of the 1916 Organic Act, establishes the primary responsibility of the National Park Service. It ensures that park resources and values will continue to exist in a condition that will allow the American people to have present and future opportunities for enjoyment of them. The impairment of park resources and values may not be allowed by the Service unless directly and specifically provided for by legislation or by the proclamation establishing the park. The relevant legislation or proclamation must provide explicitly (not by implication or inference) for the activity, in terms that keep the Service from having the authority to manage the activity so as to avoid the impairment.”

#### What is Impairment?

Sections 1.4.5 and 1.4.6 of *Management Policies 2006* provide an explanation of impairment.

Section 1.4.5 defines impairment as

*an impact that, in the professional judgment of the responsible NPS manager, would harm the integrity of park resources or values, including the opportunities that otherwise would be present for the enjoyment of those resources or values.*

Section 1.4.5 goes on to state that

*[a]n impact to any park resource or value may, but does not necessarily, constitute an impairment. An impact would be more likely to 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, or*
- *key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or to opportunities for enjoyment of the park, or*
- *identified in the park's general management plan or other relevant NPS planning documents as being of significance.*

An impact would be less likely to constitute an impairment if it is an unavoidable result of an action necessary to preserve or restore the integrity of park resources or values and it cannot be further mitigated.

Section 1.4.6 of *Management Policies 2006* identifies the park resources and values that are subject to the no-impairment standard:

*The "park resources and values" that are subject to the no-impairment standard include:*

- *the park's scenery, natural and historic objects, and wildlife, and the processes and conditions that sustain them, including, to the extent present in the park: the ecological, biological, and physical processes that created the park and continue to act upon it; scenic features; natural visibility, both in daytime and at night; natural landscapes; natural soundscapes and smells; water and air resources; soils; geological resources; paleontological resources; archeological resources; cultural landscapes; ethnographic resources; historic and prehistoric sites, structures, and objects; museum collections; and native plants and animals;*
- *appropriate opportunities to experience enjoyment of the above resources, to the extent that can be done without impairing them;*
- *the park's role in contributing to the national dignity, the high public value and integrity, and the superlative environmental quality of the national park system, and the benefit and inspiration provided to the American people by the national park system; and*
- *any additional attributes encompassed by the specific values and purposes for which the park was established.*

## **Non-Impairment Determination for the Selected Action**

This determination of non-impairment has been prepared for the NPS-selected action described in the Finding of No Significant Impact for the Master Plan and Environmental Assessment for the Freedom Riders National Monument Bus Burning Site. For the selected action, a determination of non-impairment is typically made for each of the impact topics carried forward for detailed analysis in the environmental assessment. However, the impairment determination does not include a discussion of impacts on visitor experience because it is not considered a park resource or value subject to the non-impairment standard. Therefore, an impairment determination was only made for impacts on the park's cultural landscape at the Bus Burning Site.

Other impact topics considered but dismissed from analysis in the Environmental Assessment included wetlands, floodplains, soils and vegetation, noise and soundscapes, wildlife, threatened and endangered species, Bald and Golden Eagles, air quality, lightscapes, historic structures, socioeconomics, and stormwater management. These topics were all considered but eliminated from detailed analysis because they are not present in the project area, or because no potential for significant adverse impacts was identified and the selected action would not contribute to aggregate effects on these resources.

Impacts on the site will be reduced to the extent possible through resource protection measures. Unacceptable impacts were also considered but will not occur.

### **Cultural Landscape**

The “The Greyhound Bus Burning Site” is identified as a “Fundamental Resource” in the park’s foundation document (NPS 2018) and the National Park Service has an obligation to ensure protection unimpaired. Implementation of the selected alternative will involve minor adverse effects on the cultural landscape because modifications will occur to the area that will not be consistent with the historic 1961 landscape. However, in areas where the proposed modifications will alter the cultural landscape, they will not compromise the resource’s eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places and remain in alignment with the recommendations of the park’s cultural landscape

report. The cultural landscape will benefit from strategies in the selected alternative that preserve and maintain what does remain of the 1961 landscape and Old Birmingham Highway. The selected alternative will also better orient visitors to these important existing historic aspects of the site. All additions and alterations to the landscape will align with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and generally conform to the cultural landscape report's recommendations, which will result in long-term, beneficial impacts on the site. Therefore, implementation of the selected alternative will not result in impairment of cultural resources on NPS lands.

## **Summary**

The adverse effects and environmental impacts anticipated from implementing the selected action will not harm the resources or values identified in the proclamation of the park as necessary to conserve. The resources and values key to the cultural integrity of the park, the enjoyment of the park, and the historical significance of the park will not be affected to a level that constitutes impairment of Freedom Riders National Monument.

## REFERENCES

National Park Service (NPS)

- 2006 NPS Management Policies 2006. Washington, DC: US Department of the Interior, National Park Service.
- 2011 Director's Order 12: Conservation Planning, Environmental Impact Analysis, and Decision-Making.
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