

Briefing Statement

Bureau: National Park Service
Issue: Cades Cove Management and Development Planning Process
Park Site: Great Smoky Mountains National Park
Date: September 19, 2007

Background: Cades Cove Historic District preserves a time capsule of historic resources and structures that represent the early settlement period of the 19th through early 20th Centuries. It attracts up to 2 million visitors annually. Travel around the 11-mile, one-way Cades Cove Loop Road frequently exceeds 2 to 3 hours. Visitor facilities such as the visitor center and restrooms were designed during the 1960s to serve far fewer visitors. One set of restrooms is located at the beginning of the Loop Road and the other set is located at the visitor center which is half way around the road – trip of up to two hours. This creates sanitation problems near numerous pull-offs along the road. The first opportunity for visitors to receive information is also at the visitor center which is located half-way around the Loop Road.

Heavy visitor use and lack of visitor educational opportunities lead to problems including erosion and vandalism at historic buildings and rampant wildlife feeding and harassment. Former croplands have been maintained as open meadows that afford very popular wildlife viewing, but no longer convey the historic agricultural community of the Cove's historic period.

In 2001 the Park began developing a new Development Concept and Transportation Management Plan to address these transportation, facility and visitor management issues. Most public concern has been focused on the transportation management alternatives that might be used to address congestion. The draft transportation alternatives range from no change from the current private vehicle access to a reservation system and mandatory or voluntary mass transit.

Current Status: Extensive public involvement during scoping phase produced four preliminary draft action alternatives that address a range of facility improvements as well as visitor access and use strategies. Visitor survey work was conducted in late July 2005 as part of a VERP process to inform the planning process. The survey results provide an understanding of visitor tolerance of differing levels of visitation and crowding. The preliminary draft alternatives are being refined and impacts on resources and the visitor experience evaluated. This phase of work is anticipated to conclude in early 2008 with reports that detail the refined alternatives, existing conditions, potential impacts and cost estimates for the refined alternatives. These reports will form the future National Environmental Policy Act framework.

Interested Parties/Interests: Most public sentiment has been focused on the transportation alternatives with commentors divided between those supporting a mass transit system and others supporting continued access via private vehicles.

Next Steps/Strategy: When completed, the refined alternatives and impact information will be presented at public meetings. Public input at those meetings may be used to develop an EIS and a General Management Plan amendment. These will guide Park management in designing and seeking funding for a series of management actions. The next round of public meetings has not yet been scheduled. Funding to complete the DCP and GMP amendment has not been made available, so the completion time is uncertain.

Congressional District: TN-2
Representative John Duncan, Jr.
Senators: Lamar Alexander, Bob Corker

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