

## Briefing Statement

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**Bureau:** National Park Service  
**Issue:** Future Management of Elkmont Historic District  
**Park Site:** Great Smoky Mountains National Park  
**Date:** September 19, 2007

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**Background:** A total of 74 cottages, outbuildings and the Wonderland Hotel are located in the Elkmont section of Great Smoky Mountains National Park, which were purchased in the 1920's and 30's when lands were acquired to create the Park. They were occupied until December 1992 through a series of leases. The current Park's General Management Plan (GMP), approved in 1982, documents a decision that upon expiration of the leases in 1992, the buildings should be removed and the land restored to a natural state. In early 1994, the Elkmont District was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. Of the 74 buildings, 49 were identified as contributing to the Historic District.

After the lessees vacated in 1992, the Park announced its intentions to remove the structures as stated in the GMP, but the Tennessee State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) rejected the plan. A subsequent NPS proposal in 1999 was rejected by the SHPO and the National Advisory Council for Historic Preservation. In 2001 the Park began a public Environmental Impact Statement/General Management Plan Amendment process to determine the future management of the vacant buildings in the Elkmont Historic District. Seven alternatives for preservation and use of the buildings were studied with costs estimated at between \$1.3 million and over \$30 million. Alternatives range from full removal of buildings to preservation of all contributing and non-contributing buildings for operation as a restaurant and lodging by a concessioner. The analysis shows that the concession operations are not financially viable.

An Agency Preferred Alternative was announced for comments in February 2006 as part of a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). The Preferred Alternative will result in a newly described Elkmont historic district, and calls for restoration and preservation of 19 structures, including the Appalachian Clubhouse, to be available for public visitation (but not for overnight occupancy), restoration of the Appalachian Clubhouse as an educational venue and for public use as a gathering space, and development of a variety of interpretive media to tell the story of the district's history. The estimated cost of this alternative is approximately \$5 million. The expectation is that the project will be a public/private endeavor.

The remaining buildings will be removed. In December 2006 a selection of historic materials were salvaged for conservation in the Park's collection from the structurally-failed Wonderland Hotel and the remainder of the structure was removed.

This alternative emphasizes the preservation of both natural and cultural aspects of our natural heritage while maintaining an environment that supports a variety of individual choice and visitor use options.

**Current Status:** Discussions are underway between the NPS, the Tennessee State Historic Preservation Officer, and the National Advisory Council for Historic Preservation which will result in a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA). It will define the measures that the NPS will take to mitigate impacts to the historic district and buildings within the legal guidance provided by the National Historic Preservation Act. The MOA will become a part of the Final EIS which is expected late in 2007

**Interested Parties/Interests:** Public comments expressed at meetings following the release of the DEIS were split at two ends of the management spectrum. One group, lead by environmental groups including National Parks Conservation Association, favors preservation of the minimum number of buildings and restricting their use to a combination of public day-uses. The other group, comprised mainly of former lessees, favors preservation of the maximum number of buildings through use as concession food/lodging.

**Next Steps/Strategy:** Finalize the MOA with the Tennessee SHPO and the NACHP and issue the Final EIS. The resulting GMP Amendment will provide the basis to seek a combination of public and private funding to implement the Record of Decision. Development of a Stabilization Plan, a Preservation Plan and an Interpretive Media Plan has been submitted as a Centennial Challenge Project

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**Congressional District: TN-2**

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Senator: Bob Corker

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