



# Cades Cove Opportunities Plan

## "Looking Back - Moving Forward"

### **Draft Long-Range Management Alternatives**

Cades Cove is one of the most visited areas of the Great Smoky Mountains. Over the years millions of people have visited and fallen in love with the Cove. Unfortunately as more people come to the Cove it becomes more difficult to maintain. The Cades Cove Opportunities Plan has been undertaken to identify long-range management alternatives that will ensure that the resources of the Cove continue to be enjoyed by this and future generations.

Throughout the process, the public has played an important role in identifying issues and concerns, determining goals and objectives, and developing ideas to resolve resource and visitation issues in Cades Cove. This newsletter provides descriptions and illustrations of the draft alternatives. The purpose is to provide a vision of how the Cove might be operated in the future and to obtain your comments on these ideas. A comment form that can be mailed to the Park has been included in this newsletter. Comments may also be submitted via email through the [www.cadescoveopp.com](http://www.cadescoveopp.com) website. Comments should be received by April 30, 2003.

### **Draft Alternative 1 – No Action**

This alternative reflects the continuation of existing National Park Service management policies and actions within Cades Cove. For example, there would be no changes in private vehicle or bicycle/ pedestrian access to the Loop Road. In addition, the existing visitor

orientation facilities would remain unchanged. Existing field maintenance, resource education operations and ranger activities would also remain at current levels.

### **Draft Alternative 2 – Roadway Improvements**

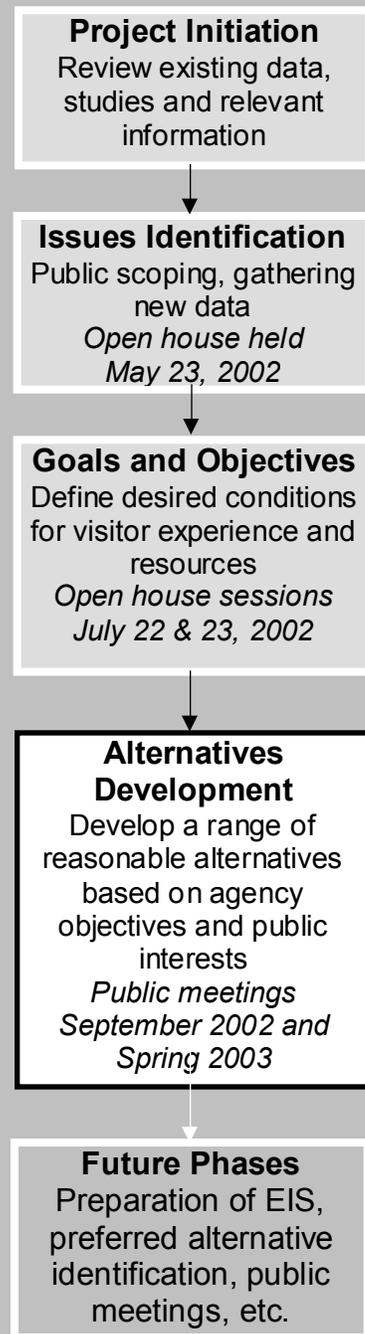
The second alternative proposes to undertake a series of minor improvements to the Loop Road, Sparks Lane, and Hyatt Lane. These improvements would be based on an adopted master circulation plan for the Cove. This plan would identify appropriate locations for formalized visitor pull-offs and roadside parking for scenic vistas and cultural attractions. Private vehicle access would continue as it is today. Also bicycle-only and pedestrian-only periods on Wednesdays and Saturdays would continue.

Alternative 2 would institute a communications program that would include Variable Message Signs, FM radio, phone-in and website information. Visitors would be able to get up-to-date traffic conditions and other information about Cades Cove.

Draft Alternative #2 would include a minor visitor center developed at the entrance to the Cove. The function of this visitor center would be the primary visitor contact point for visitors to the Cove. In addition, all other existing contact points would continue as they are today.

Alternative 2 would require a low-level increase in the operations staff (rangers, etc.) and equipment for managing visitors and maintaining the Cove.

### **Steps in the Process**



## **Draft Alternative 3 – Managing Demand through Peak Visitation Reservations**

Draft Alternative 3 would institute a reservation system for private vehicle access to the Loop Road during peak visitation periods. Access to the picnic area, campground and horse concession would not be restricted. Access provisions would be made for “occasions” such as Old Timers Day, Decoration Day and pre-arranged events.

During off peak visitation periods, visitors continue to have unrestricted private vehicle access. This alternative would include the communications program described in Alternative 2. In addition, a separate pathway for bicycles and pedestrians would provide an alternate visitor experience.

Draft Alternative 3 includes a moderate visitor center at the entry to the Loop Road providing reservations, visitor contact and orientation, the bookstore (relocated from Cable Mill), and staff work space. A minor visitor center located outside the Park would also provide visitors an opportunity to make reservations (along with phone-in and web-based reservations), as well as providing the visitor with basic information about the Cove.

Draft Alternative 3 would have a low-to-moderate increase in the Cades Cove operations staff and equipment.

## **Draft Alternative 4 – Managing Demand through Peak Visitation Reservation and Voluntary Transit**

Draft Alternative 4 utilizes the reservation system developed in Alternative 3 and combines it with a voluntary transit system during peak visitation periods. Access to the picnic area, campground and horse concession would not be restricted. Alternative 4 would include the communications program described in Alternative 2. Access provisions for “occasions” and special events would be handled as described in Alternative 3.

The voluntary transit system would be based outside the Park. Visitors would

ride transit vehicles into the Cove and arrive at the Cove visitor center. This would be a moderate-size visitor center providing visitor contact and orientation materials as described in Alternative 3. Visitors then board tram-style transit vehicles that travel the Loop Road. The transit service may have different options available to visitors, including vehicles that provide interpretive programs and vehicles that simply provide Loop Road transportation or access to trailheads. The system is envisioned to be visitor friendly, including easy on/off at many stops along the Loop Road and frequent service allowing the visitor to tour the Cove at their own pace.

A moderate visitor center would also be developed outside the Park to function as the primary access point for the voluntary transit system. It would also provide reservations and other information about Cades Cove.

Alternative 4 will require a moderate-to-high increase in the level of the operations staff and equipment for the Cove.

## **Draft Alternative 5 – Visitor Management through Peak Visitation Transit Access**

Draft Alternative 5 reflects the greatest change in visitation to the Cove. During peak visitation, this alternative allows for only transit access to the Loop Road. Access provisions for “occasions” and special events would be handled in the same manner as described in Alternative 3. Access to the campground, picnic area and horse concession would not be restricted. During non-peak visitation periods there would be unrestricted private vehicle access in combination with the communications program described in Alternative 2.

The transit system for this alternative would operate in the same manner describe in Alternative 4.

The visitor center at the entrance to the Cove would be larger than with Alternative 4. It would serve as the transfer center for the transit system as well as provide visitor orientation, information, amphitheater, bike concession,

museum, restrooms, snack shop and bookstore. The visitor center outside the Park would be as described in Alternative 4.

Alternative 5 would require a moderate-to-high level of operations staff and equipment over current conditions.

## OTHER ALTERNATIVE ELEMENTS



### RESOURCES & EDUCATION

#### Alternatives 2 – 5:

- Maintain valley floor as open grassland with small woodlots, and fencerows allowing for good wildlife and scenery viewing opportunities along the Loop Road.
- Develop and implement a field management plan to guide yearly maintenance and long-term management of the valley floor in a manner consistent with the 1800 – 1920 cultural/historic era of the Cove including:
- Define interior fence locations from historic field plots
- Re-establish native grasses
- Re-establish wetlands and meandering streams
- Establish a schedule of field maintenance and appropriate management techniques such as mowing, burning, etc.

#### Options that could be included in any alternative:

- Demonstrate 1800 – 1920 era agricultural tools and plants on a small demonstration area



### CAMPGROUND

#### All Alternatives:

- Future rehabilitation would comply with current ADA standards for the campsites, parking, and comfort stations

#### Options that could be included in any alternative:

- Additional parking for campsites
- Electric hook-ups for campsites
- Expanded water and sewer capacity for campground
- Concession-operated showers in campground



### CAMPSTORE

#### Options included in any alternative:

- Undertake a small expansion of the Campstore
- Increase parking for Campstore

#### Alternative 5

- Relocate Campstore to major visitor center

## OTHER ALTERNATIVE ELEMENTS



### PICNIC AREA

#### Alternative 5:

- Add a group picnic area in the vicinity of the Campstore/ Amphitheater



### HORSE OPERATIONS

#### Options that could be included in any alternative:

- Relocate horse concession facilities within the developed area of the Cove
- Define and sign an area to serve as day-use horse trailer parking
- Improve the Anthony Creek Horse Camp area including potable water, improved toilets, and meet ADA standards
- Relocate Anthony Creek Horse Camp access away from the picnic area
- Collocate day-use and horse camp (overnight) facilities at Turkeypen Gap include potable water, toilets, and mounting block



### UTILITIES/VISITOR COMFORT

#### Options that could be included in any alternative:

##### Developed area of the Cove

- Extend utilities to the visitor center
- Expand water and sewer to provide showers in the campground

##### Cable Mill

- Extend electric and telephone
- Add call boxes
- Add beverage vending machines
- Improve water and sewer service
- Increase restroom facilities
- Increase trash receptacles

##### Loop Road

- Add primitive (composting) toilets at up-to four locations along the Loop Road

##### Communications

- Ensure that existing electric and telecommunications lines along Park Roads are capable of handling the proposed communications program

## Draft ALTERNATIVE # 1

### DESCRIPTION

- No Action
- Existing Conditions
- On-going maintenance

### MOTORIZED VISITATION

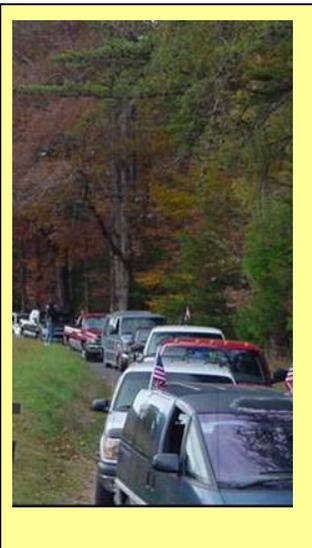
- Maintain existing roads
- Access by private vehicles remains as is currently
- Cove open from sunrise to sunset, except for bike/pedestrian closures
- Existing parking and pull-off spaces continue
- Continue existing traffic management

### NON-MOTORIZED VISITATION

- Bicycles and pedestrians share the road with private vehicles
- Issues with bicycle/pedestrian conflicts with private vehicles continue
- Continue closures for bicycle/pedestrian use only

### VISITOR ORIENTATION

- Maintain existing visitor contact station at Cades Cove entrance
- Maintain visitor facilities, contact and orientation at Cable Mill
- Maintain existing level of ranger-led programs



## Draft ALTERNATIVE # 2

### DESCRIPTION

- Communication Program
- Improved roadway features – pull-out and parking areas

### MOTORIZED VISITATION

- Motorized visitation elements from Alternative 1 are continued
- Develop and implement a plan for minor roadway improvements, including pull-outs and parking areas, based on carrying capacity studies

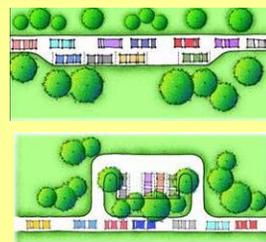
### NON MOTORIZED VISITATION

- Extend bicycle- and pedestrian-only hours
- Add bicycle racks at more locations along the Loop Road

### VISITOR ORIENTATION

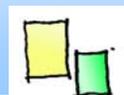
- Communicate information on traffic and other Cove activities/events
- Variable Message Signs, FM radio, phone-in service, and web service
- Develop a minor visitor center at the entry to the Loop Road
- Maintain visitor facilities, contact and orientation at Cable Mill and other contact points

**Parallel Pull-off:**  
**Dimensions of 5 spaces:**  
 140' x 10'  
**Area:** 1,270 sq. ft.  
**Use:** Ideal where depth of intrusion into resource areas is limited and requires a widening of the road to accommodate vehicle width



### **MINOR VISITOR CENTER** **(AT THE ENTRY TO THE LOOP ROAD)**

- VISITOR CONTACT SPACE
- MINIMAL INTERPRETIVE MATERIALS AVAILABLE
- RESTROOMS



## Draft ALTERNATIVE # 3

### DESCRIPTION

- During peak visitation periods, private vehicle access to the Loop Road will be by reservation only
- Access to picnic area, horse concession, campground and visitor center is not restricted
- Communications program and improved roadway features as in Alternative 2

### MOTORIZED VISITATION

- Peak visitation periods will require visitors to have a reservation for private vehicle access to the Loop Road
- Access provisions would be made for occasions such as Old Timers Day, Decoration Day and pre-arranged events

- Unrestricted private vehicle access during non-peak visitation periods

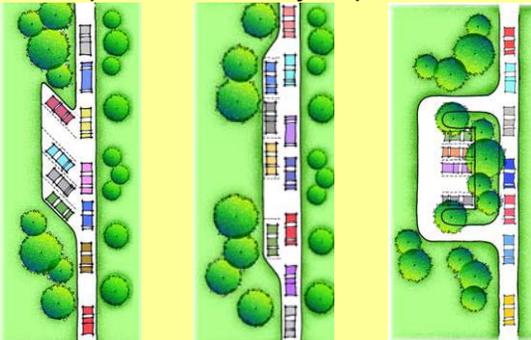
### NON-MOTORIZED VISITATION

- Add a separate bicycle/pedestrian path in the Cove
- Optional concession-operated shuttle service from the gateway communities for pedestrian and bicycle access
- Add bicycle racks at more locations along the Loop Road

### VISITOR ORIENTATION

- Develop a moderate visitor center at the entry to the Loop Road
- Develop a minor visitor center outside the Park
- Maintain existing visitor facilities, contact and orientation at Cable Mill (bookstore relocated) and other contact points

#### Examples of roadway improvements



Example of a variable message sign

#### **DRAFT ALT 3** **MODERATE VISITOR CENTER** **(AT THE ENTRY TO THE LOOP ROAD)**

##### Functions include:

- Reservations
- Visitor contact & orientation
- Bookstore
- Restrooms
- Staff work/prep. Room
- Parking

#### **DRAFT ALT 3** **MINOR VISITOR CENTER** **(OUTSIDE THE PARK)**

##### Functions include:

- Reservations
- Visitor contact space
- Restrooms
- Parking

# Draft ALTERNATIVE # 4

## DESCRIPTION

- During peak visitation periods, private vehicle access to the Loop Road will be by reservation only
- Voluntary transit system developed as an alternative visitor experience
- Communications program and improved roadway features per as in Alternative 2

## MOTORIZED VISITATION

### Private vehicle access:

- Same as Alternative 3 (peak period reservation system)
- Access provisions would be made for occasions such as Old Timers Day, Decoration Day, and pre-arranged events
- Continue to allow use by private vehicles during non-peak visitation

### Transit service:

- During peak visitation period, voluntary transit service (from visitor center outside the Park to the Cove visitor center with transfer to a tram service for Loop Road)

### Options that could be included:

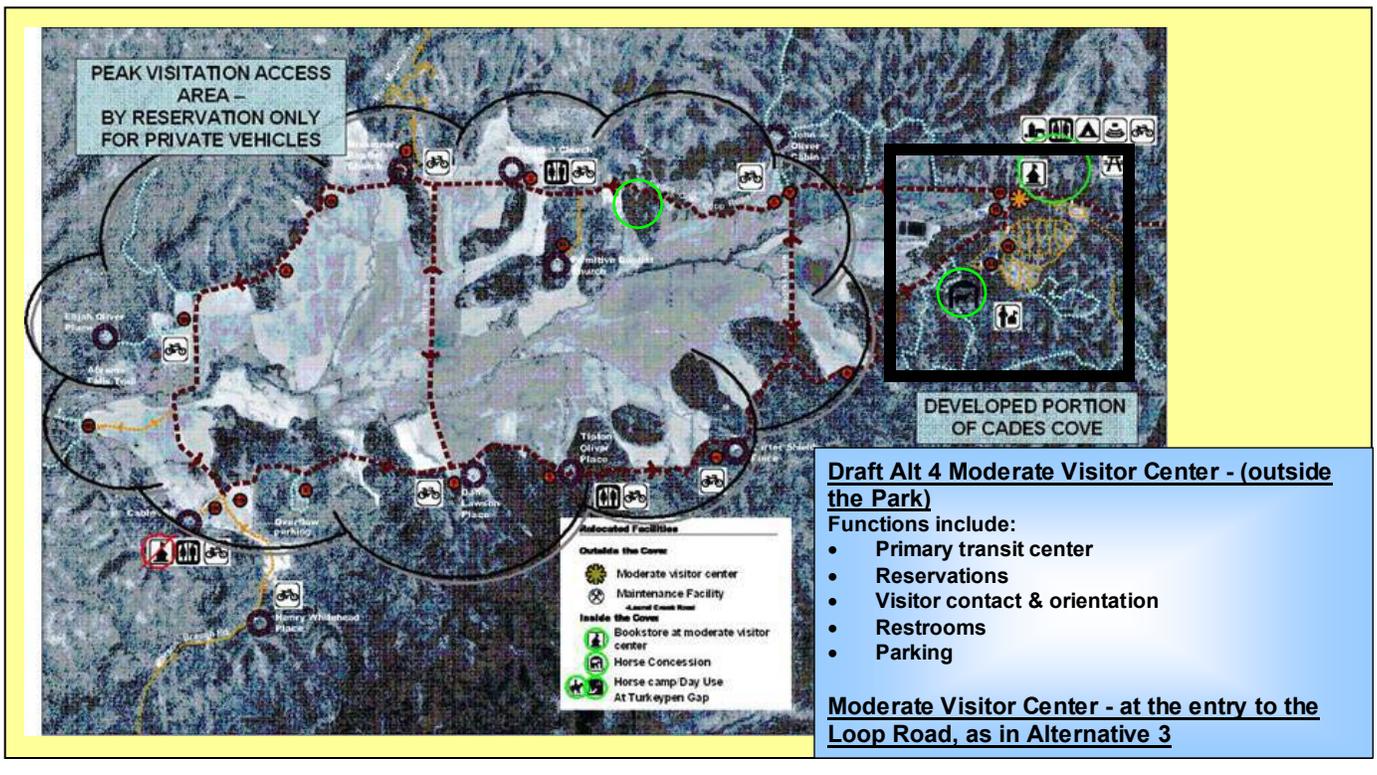
- Operate voluntary transit system year-round
- Encourage transit system use by limiting private vehicle access to an alternative loop via Sparks or Hyatt Lane during peak visitation periods

## NON-MOTORIZED VISITATION

- Same elements as in Alternative 3

## VISITOR ORIENTATION

- Develop a moderate visitor center at the entry to the Cove
  - Functions include functions listed in Alternative 3 and transit transfer point
- Develop a moderate visitor center outside the Park
  - Functions include providing the primary transit operations center along with the functions listed in Alternative 3
- Maintain visitor facilities, contact and orientation at Cable Mill (relocated bookstore) and other contact points



# Draft ALTERNATIVE # 5

## DESCRIPTION

- During peak visitation periods, visitor access to the Loop Road would be by transit system only
- Non-peak visitation periods would continue to have unrestricted private vehicle access
- Communications program and improved roadway features as in Alternative 2

## MOTORIZED VISITATION

### Private vehicle access

- During peak visitation periods, private vehicles not allowed on the Loop Road
- Public access to the picnic area, campground, horse concession and visitor center will not be restricted
- Access provisions would be made for occasions such as Old Timers Day, Decoration Day and pre-arranged events

### Transit service

- Visitors park at visitor center outside the Park

- Transit service from outside the Park to the Cove visitor center
- Visitors transfer to Cove tram system for Loop Road

### Option that could be included:

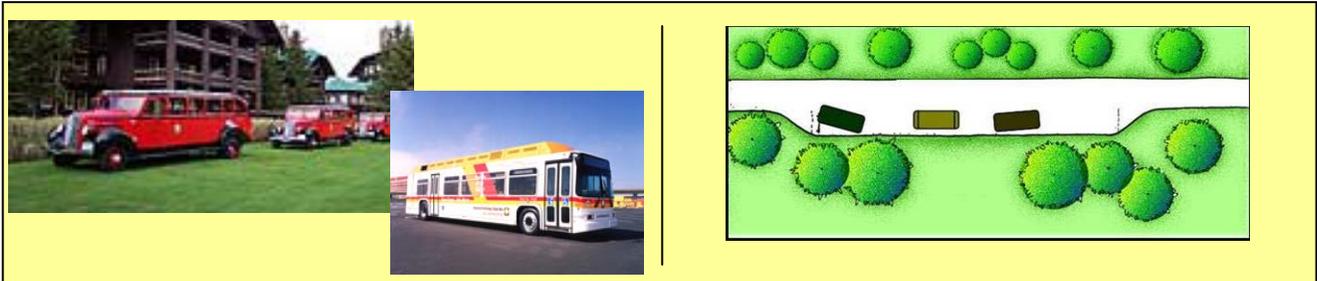
- During non-peak visitation periods, voluntary transit service

## NON-MOTORIZED VISITATION

- Same elements as in Alternative 4

## VISITOR ORIENTATION

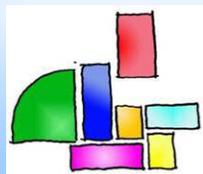
- Develop a major visitor center at the entry to the Loop Road
- Develop a moderate visitor center outside the Park
- Maintain visitor facilities, contact and orientation at Cable Mill (bookstore has been relocated) and other contact points



### Draft Alt 5 Major Visitor Center (At the entry to the Cove)

#### Functions include:

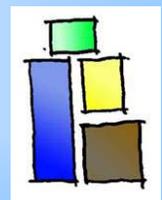
- Transit system transfer point
- Museum
- Display and interpretation
- Amphitheater
- Bookstore
- Campstore/gift/snackshop
- Bike concession
- Resource education
- Restrooms
- Offices/workspace
- Parking



### DRAFT ALT 5 MODERATE VISITOR CENTER (OUTSIDE THE PARK)

#### Functions include:

- Primary transit operations center
- Visitor information and orientation
- Restrooms
- Parking



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## INPUT VIA THE WEB

As always, we seek your input. This includes comments through the web site: [www.cadescoveopp.com](http://www.cadescoveopp.com). The web site provides access to the public input material described in this report as well as comment forms.

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National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



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If you are interested in additional information or would like to be added to our mailing list, please contact us at:

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Website  
[www.cadescoveopp.com](http://www.cadescoveopp.com)  
Boards from the first public meeting are available on the website

The National Park Service cares for the special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

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