

Capitol Reef National Park

Utah

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Capitol Reef Visitor Circulation Planning, Winter 2026 Newsletter

The National Park Service (NPS) wants to hear your ideas and questions on preliminary strategies that enhance recreational opportunities, alleviate parking and roadway congestion, and preserve the resources of Capitol Reef National Park.

Please submit comments online by visiting the NPS Planning, Environment and Public Comment website at <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/capitolreefplanning>. Once on the website, select “Open for Comment” to provide your thoughts on the preliminary strategies. Comments will also be accepted by mail at Capitol Reef National Park, Superintendent, HC 70, Box 15, Torrey, UT 84775.

From the Superintendent

We know this place is important to many people, and I am excited to get your input on what you value as we plan for the future of the park. This plan will provide a general framework, and with your help the park will prioritize actions and implement them in phases. Thank you for taking the time to comment and continue the conversation.

Stay Involved!



Project Website QR Code

The NPS Planning team will hold public meetings to share information about the ideas in this newsletter and to respond to your questions. To learn more about the plan and see a complete list of public meetings and instructions on how to connect to

virtual meetings, visit the project website (<https://parkplanning.nps.gov/capitolreefplanning>) and click on “Meeting Notices.” The storymap (<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/df9f550491c2443eb6f3062366ca8ddc>) also provides detailed information about the park and the planning process.

About the Park

Capitol Reef's unique geology and cultural landscape offer opportunities to experience diverse habitats and connect to the past. Key features and iconic resources like the Waterpocket Fold, Fremont River, and Sulphur Creek shape visitor experiences on routes and trails and in historic sites. Activities range from scenic drives and fruit picking in historic orchards to exploring vast, secluded landscapes.

Developing a Vision for the Future

In the past decade, visitation to Capitol Reef National Park has doubled. In 2024, the park welcomed a record 1.4 million visitors. Existing infrastructure such as trails and parking lots is no longer able to accommodate increasing use, which is affecting visitor experiences.

The National Park Service is working on a plan to improve circulation, upgrade infrastructure, and add new recreational features. This newsletter shares management goals and ideas to achieve them, and we look forward to your feedback and ideas.

Management Goals by Area

Management goals are broad, qualitative descriptions that describe what the National Park Service is trying to achieve. These goals can differ by area, as shown below. We value your input and would appreciate hearing your thoughts on these management goals.

Fruita

The area we know today as Fruita has long been a critical corridor for humans and wildlife navigating river canyons through sandstone landscapes.

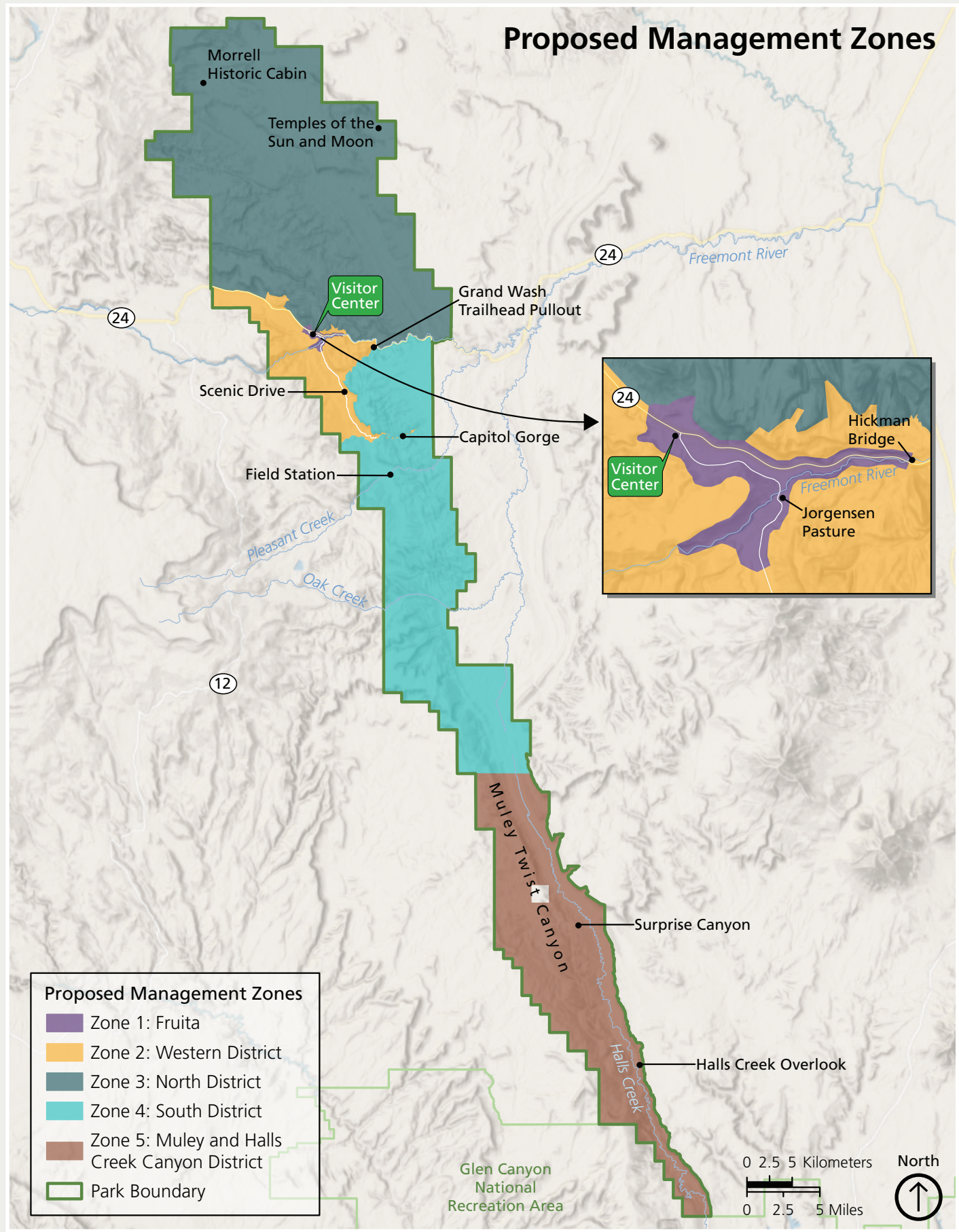
It includes resources such as historic orchards, the Fruita Schoolhouse, the petroglyph panel boardwalk, and Gifford House and barn. The park aims to preserve its historic character, support wildlife habitats, and maintain ecosystem diversity while accommodating relatively high visitor traffic. Collaboration with Tribes and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints enhances interpretation and education. The area supports low-difficulty trails, interpretive programs, fruit picking, picnicking, camping, and self-guided driving tours along State Route 24 (SR 24) and Scenic Drive.



Western District

The Western District includes rugged landscapes and historic sites such as the Hickman Bridge, Cassidy Arch, Panorama Point, Chimney Rock Loop, and Scenic Drive. It offers solitude and opportunities to learn wayfinding on rugged trails. Expansive vistas are abundant, offering connection with the park's natural beauty. Management objectives in this area focus on preserving the wilderness character, improving while protecting backcountry experiences, and protecting cultural resources. Visitors can experience wandering through unique geologic features on challenging trails and enjoy leisurely scenic driving in this district. Development remains concentrated at key pullouts and trailheads, minimizing intrusion into backcountry views, while facilities and signage enhance understanding without diminishing the sense of wildness.

Proposed Management Zones



North District

The North District maintains its remote, rugged character with minimal development, preserving historic resources like ranching structures and cultural sites while integrating roadways and overlooks seamlessly into the natural landscape. Native vegetation and wildlife thrive, supported by restoration efforts and sustainable management of springs and rangelands. Visitors experience solitude, natural quiet, and sweeping views of striking geologic formations, with opportunities for primitive camping, hiking, canyoneering, and night sky viewing that foster self-reliance and connection to the wilderness. Facilities and signage are limited and unobtrusive, ensuring the integrity of the landscape and a sense of tranquility undisturbed by modern development.



South District

The South District preserves rich cultural heritage, including historic grazing infrastructure, pioneer corrals, rock imagery, and the legacy of Sleeping Rainbow Ranch, while fostering interpretation and educational opportunities through the Capitol Reef Field Station. Natural resources such as Pleasant and Oak Creeks, native vegetation, and critical wildlife habitats are protected to maintain ecological integrity, scenic views, and dark night skies while accommodating permitted cattle trailing. Visitors experience a sense of adventure and self-reliance in a remote, rugged landscape with minimal development and enjoy activities like hiking, backpacking, canyoneering, and world-class stargazing. Facilities remain limited and unobtrusive, supporting research, education, and orientation without compromising the area's wilderness character.



Muley and Halls Creek Canyon District

The Burr Trail within the park retains its rustic, unpaved character, preserving historic uses while offering visitors a sense of remoteness, adventure, and connection to the landscape. Native vegetation, biological soil crusts, and sensitive habitats in deep canyons are protected, ensuring intact ecosystems, pristine air quality, dark skies, and natural soundscapes. Visitors experience solitude and wilderness through scenic drives with dramatic switchbacks, slot canyons that are relatively easy to access, and multiday backpacking opportunities, complemented by minimal development and unobtrusive signage that maintain the area's cultural significance and wilderness integrity.



The strategies below are within the management areas described above and represent the proposed NPS approach for achieving the management goals for each area. We welcome your feedback and invite you to share your thoughts on these strategies.

Parkwide and General Management Strategies

This plan aims to improve and expand visitor services across the park. Strategies include enhancing parking and pedestrian circulation, aligning group sizes with resource and safety needs, and exploring new commercial services, particularly to meet transportation needs.

- Formalize group size numbers across activities by route or area.
- Formalize the park's permit system for backpacking and day-use climbing activities.
- Provide enhanced visitor experiences in key locations.
 - Create a new park orientation area with 24-hour visitor amenities, information, and interpretation.
 - » Option 1: Augment existing outdoor visitor amenities, combined with developing a visitor center plaza and shade structures adjacent to the existing visitor center.
 - » Option 2: Enhance wayside exhibits and shade structures at both the east and west SR 24.
 - Provide additional restroom facilities at the visitor center.
 - Enhance visitor experience at Sulphur Creek (across the street from the visitor center) by improving picnic options, parking, and access to the creek.



Management Strategies for the Fruita Rural Historic District

The strategies below aim to improve parking capacity and circulation for various vehicles, enhancing overall visitor experience, safety, and accessibility in the historic district. These improvements will enhance sensory experiences across the Fruita landscape and opportunities to connect to nearby wilderness on existing trails. Strategies will also improve the visual quality of the historic district and provide parking spaces for small and large vehicles.

- Relocate and redesign the Jorgensen parking area to restore scenic vistas from Cohab Canyon trail, create accessible orchard experiences, and improve connections to the park's trail system while blending into the cultural landscape.
- Provide dedicated oversized vehicle parking at the northern end of the Pendleton parking area, along with multimodal pathways connecting to the park's trail system. Changes to parking areas may also support potential commercial operations such as bike rentals and hiker/shuttle services.
- Delineate and maximize parking at existing lots within the Fruita Rural Historic District.
- Provide two primitive Fremont River access locations in the historic district.

Management Strategies for the Fruita and State Route 24 Trail System

With proposed circulation improvements and facilities upgrades in the Fruita Rural Historic District, the Fruita trail system would be expanded to include additional trails and connections to the district's key destinations, such as the visitor center, Gifford House, and orchards, and to Hickman Bridge Trailhead, just outside the historic district.

- Create new multimodal opportunities that connect key park features.
 - Develop a multimodal path and pedestrian bridge along SR 24 to provide access between notable features such as the Fruita Schoolhouse, the petroglyph panel, Hickman Bridge Trailhead, and Navajo Dome pullout.
 - Develop a multimodal path along Scenic Drive to Pendleton Pasture and parking area.
 - Develop one or two connector trails circulating between Fruita Campground and Hickman Bridge Trail, or, for shorter adventures, between the picnic area, Fruita Schoolhouse, and the petroglyph panel.
 - Provide safe road crossing(s) to connect key features on SR 24 and Scenic Drive (e.g., underpasses or marked crossings).

Management Strategies for the State Route 24 Area

These strategies would help manage overflow parking at key destinations and improve visitor safety within this popular corridor, particularly through adjustments to and potential expansion of parking areas.

- Enhance safety and increase nonroadside parking capacity at Hickman Bridge through various means. Options include creating new parking and making safe trails to underutilized parking areas such as the Navajo Dome viewpoint pullout. Reduce or eliminate roadside parking.



- Provide new connectivity between sites and trailheads.
- Improve parking at other key locations along SR 24 by delineating parking and improving visitor safety at Grand Wash Trailhead and the parking area for Goosenecks and Sunset Point. Implement time-limited parking where appropriate and feasible.

Management Strategies for the Scenic Drive Area Beyond the Fruita Rural Historic District

The Scenic Drive is a popular paved road that guides visitors to the Fruita Rural Historic District and farther to spur road connections at Grand Wash and Capitol Gorge, which enter canyons and access trailheads.

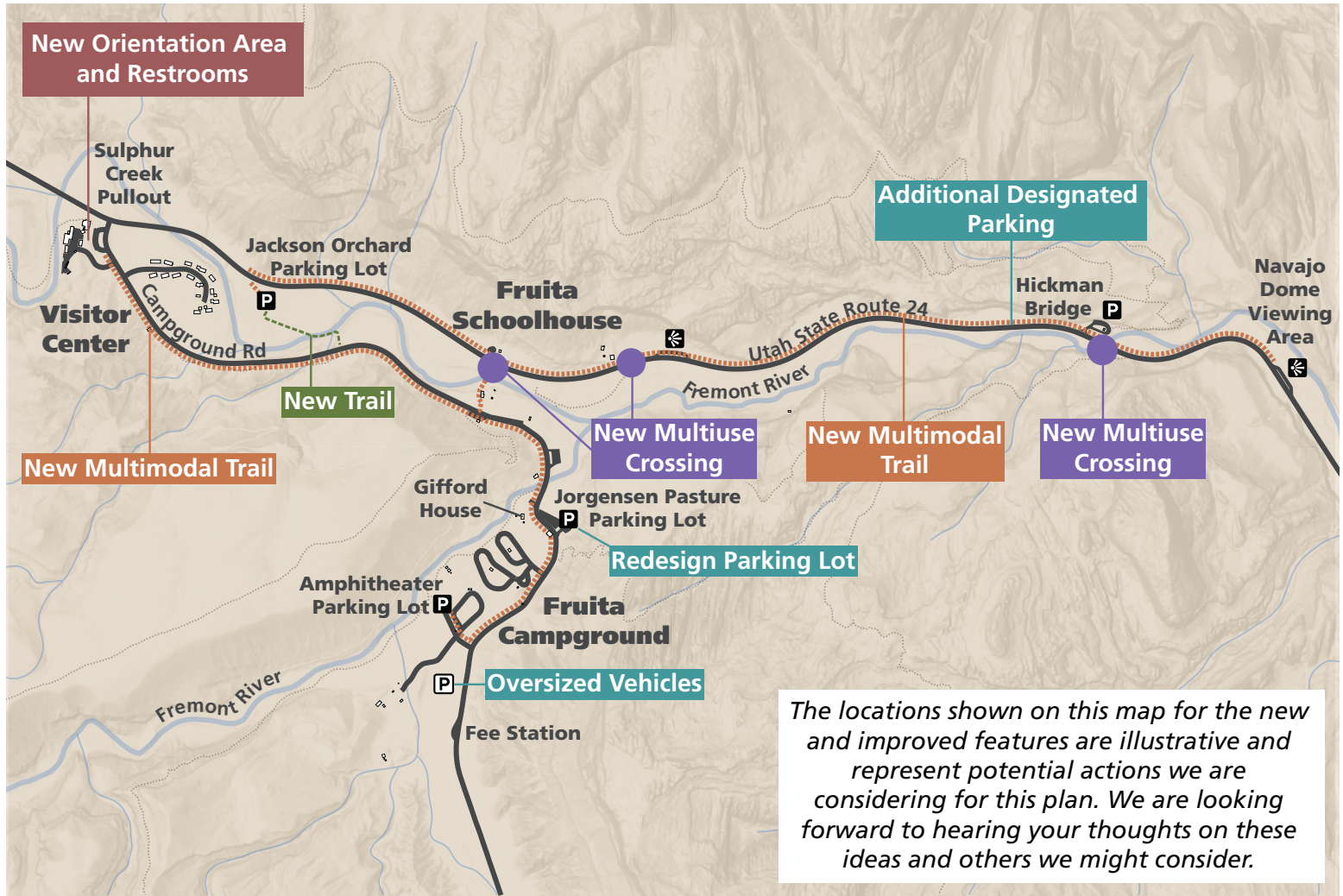
- Improve visitor safety and visitor experiences at Grand Wash by either developing a new parking lot along Grand Wash or adjusting use types during the flood season by creating hiker/biker opportunities and expanding parking outside the flood zone near Scenic Drive.
- Reconfigure and delineate parking spaces at Grand Wash to maximize visitor day use opportunities and improve safety.

Management Strategies for the North and South Districts

The park's remote North and South Districts offer more challenging opportunities than the developed Fruita area. Visitors can experience solitary sandstone monoliths in the North District and view cliff faces, amphitheaters, and narrow canyons west of Notom Road in the South District.

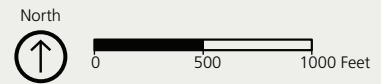
- Increase opportunities for sustainable recreation through trail delineation and expansion of visitor services such as a vault toilet.
- Improve campsite delineation and enhance the existing trail from Cathedral Valley Campground to the overlook.
- Add five day-use parking spaces in the North District for accessing the key destinations of Morrell Cabin and the Cathedrals Trail.
- Provide additional day use parking spaces near the Cedar Mesa Campground in the South District.

Potential Management Strategies Map



Legend

- | | | |
|---------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| Existing Roads | Existing Parking | New Multimodal Trail |
| Existing Structures | New Parking | New Multiuse Crossing |
| Rivers & Creeks | Existing Scenic Viewpoint | |
| Existing Trails | New Trail | |





Your Impact and How to Get Involved

Without thoughtful planning and public participation, issues like congestion, safety, and resource damage could diminish the park's unique qualities. This plan proposes many opportunities to create more connected and immersive experiences for visitors, and there are likely many more options to consider.

Join us in shaping the future of Capitol Reef! Share what you value most and what strategies and actions you think will support meaningful visits.

To comment or to join a public meeting, visit <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/CapitolReefPlanning> or scan the QR code with a smartphone.



Project Website QR Code



During the comment period, we are most interested in hearing from you about the following questions.

1. Do the management goals by area (p. 2-4) reflect your desired experiences in those areas?
2. We've developed management strategies for your consideration (p. 5-7). What other strategies or changes to these strategies should be considered?
3. Are there any other challenges or opportunities you think the park should be addressing?