



Master Plan and Environmental Assessment

Freedom Riders National Monument Bus Burning Site



August 2025

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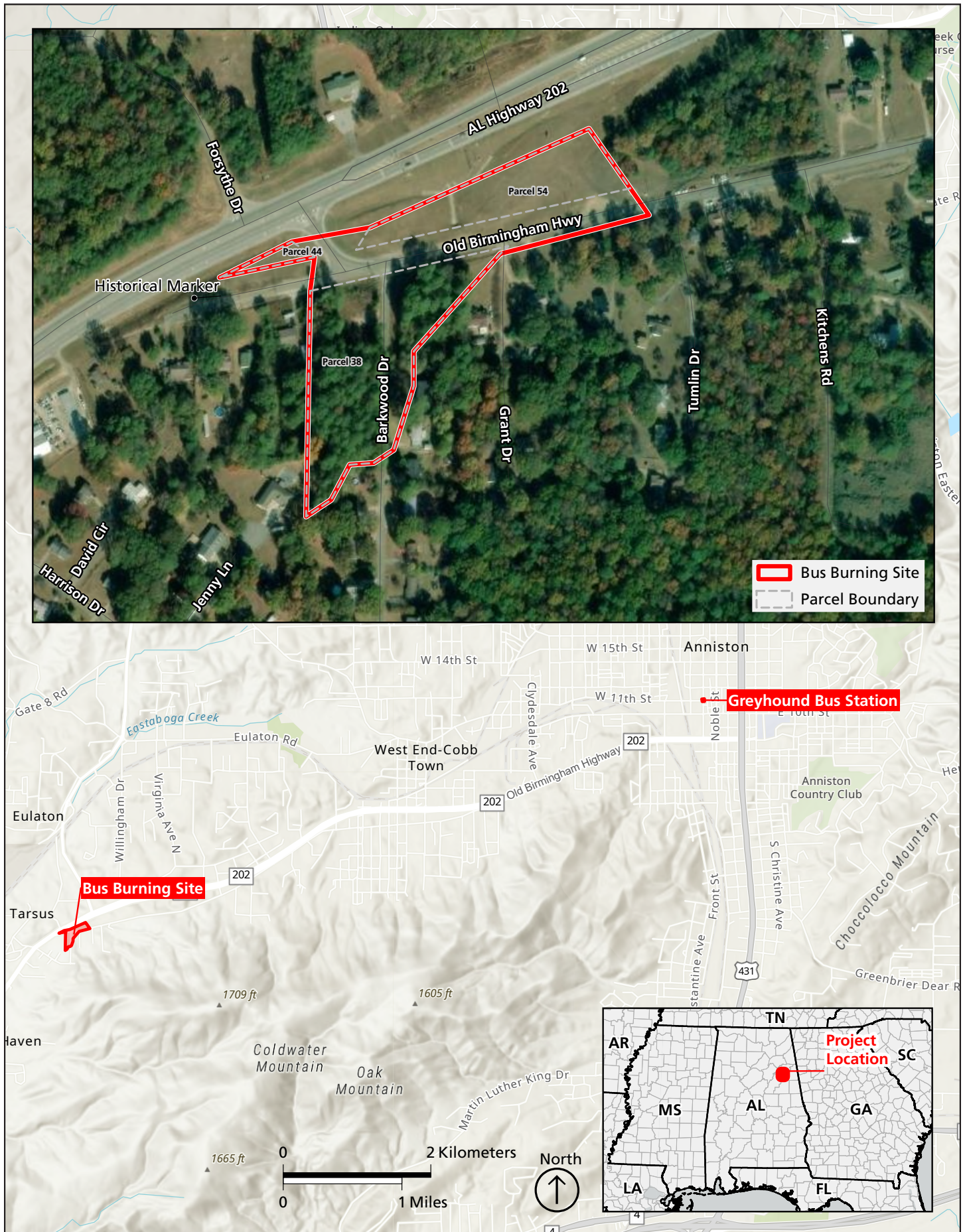


Executive Summary

The Freedom Riders National Monument Bus Burning Site (Bus Burning Site) is an integral component of the Freedom Riders National Monument (monument). The National Park Service (NPS) manages the historic Greyhound bus station (Bus Depot) in Anniston, Alabama, and the Bus Burning Site, which is 6 miles outside Anniston in Calhoun County. These two properties make up the discontinuous components of the Freedom Riders National Monument. The monument, established in 2017 by presidential proclamation, commemorates the stories, places, and people involved in the 1961 Freedom Rides, a nonviolent campaign that brought national attention to the reality of segregation in the Southern United States and forced the federal government to take action toward ending segregation in interstate travel. As a new unit of the NPS, the monument has few existing planning documents in its planning portfolio. Pursuant to the presidential proclamation, NPS is required to prepare a management plan, with full public involvement. This master plan and environmental assessment (MP/EA) serves as that management plan and will provide site-specific, long-term management guidance for public access to and commemoration of the Bus Burning Site at the national monument

The Bus Burning Site comprises three parcels totaling 5.86 acres (figure ES-1). Although the setting of the Bus Burning Site has been considerably altered by the construction of Highway 202, the site includes intact portions of the roadway and the shoulder where the bus was forced to pull over and subsequently set afire. The parcels are clustered around the intersection of Old Birmingham Highway with State Route 202, Anniston's western bypass. In 2008, much of the acreage of the lots that contained Forsyth & Son Grocery and adjacent residences to the east and west was taken for the construction of the bypass; only two greatly reduced portions of those lots remain. On the far west end of the Bus Burning Site is parcel 44 (i.e., county property parcel identification number), the 0.17-acre remnant of the lot on which the store and the adjacent owner's residence stood. Across Old Birmingham Highway to the east is parcel 54, comprising 1.77 acres that were part of neighboring properties. Across Old Birmingham Highway to the south is parcel 38, a 3.92-acre lot bisected by the right-of-way of Barkwood Drive.

Figure ES-1. Freedom Riders National Monument Bus Burning Site



PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose of this plan is to provide long-term guidance for public access to and commemoration of 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.

This plan addresses a range of issues and opportunities associated with 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.

ALTERNATIVES

ALTERNATIVE 1: NO ACTION/CURRENT MANAGEMENT

Alternative 1 describes the action of continuing present management operations and conditions (figure ES-2). While alternative 1 does not meet the purpose of and need for the project, it provides a basis for comparing the management direction and environmental consequences of the action alternatives. Under the no-action alternative, the MP/EA for the monument would not be implemented, and no facilities would be constructed. The NPS would maintain the existing conditions at the Bus Burning Site. Additionally, no boundary expansion would be recommended at the Bus Burning Site. Interim planned improvements would persist, including a gravel parking lot on parcel 38 across from the existing historical marker. Though a small number of visitors would most likely continue to visit the Bus Burning Site, the absence of visitor infrastructure, such as crosswalks, would continue to result in ongoing safety concerns (i.e., pedestrian and vehicle conflicts). Security concerns associated with the lack of park lighting, cameras, and fencing would continue. While the broader national monument would continue to operate at the Bus Depot, no formal management strategy would guide the long-term management of the Bus Burning Site.



Figure ES-2. Alternative 1: No Action

Freedom Riders National Monument Bus Burning Site

Alternative 1: No Action

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Action Alternatives

The action alternatives presented in this document are conceptual and may be altered in the final design to address site constraints or other planning considerations. Likewise, all names of places in the site plan, such as the “Freedom Wall,” “Freedom Plaza,” or “Freedom Grove,” are for descriptive purposes to better define the spaces discussed in the alternatives and to assist with future interpretive or descriptive designations after implementation. Additionally, elements suggested could be reorganized spatially, such as the placement of the photo wall, or elements added, as interpretive elements of the site are further finalized. Commemorative elements in this plan require approval from the NPS Director. This approval would be sought and gained before implementation.

ALTERNATIVE 2: EXISTING ROAD ALIGNMENT

Implementation of alternative 2 would develop three existing NPS parcels without any modification to the alignment of roadways (Barkwood Drive and the Highway 202 off-ramp) that currently bisect the site and current landscape (figure ES-3). Under alternative 2, the NPS would construct a visitor contact station and parking area, south of Old Birmingham Highway at the current intersection of Barkwood Drive, to serve as the visitor arrival and orientation space, with overflow and oversized vehicle parking on the eastern side of Barkwood Drive. A Freedom Plaza, to be constructed on parcel 54, would include elements to provide visitors with more information about the stories of the Freedom Riders and the civil rights legislation that followed, connect with the historical events that occurred there, and offer additional information about the overarching Freedom Rides campaign.

A Bus Burning Site Commemoration Space would be constructed at the site where the bus burning occurred and would include an installation of a metal frame depicting the Greyhound bus, including seats for the Freedom Riders and all others who were on the bus that day. A landscaped berm, or some other type of screening as recommended by the Cultural Landscape Report (CLR), would be installed on the northern property line to provide a buffer between the site and Highway 202. An interpretive photo wall along a concrete walkway would display images of the event.

Visitors to the monument would be encouraged to start their experience at the Greyhound Bus Station in Anniston where they would be oriented to the monument and its history and have the opportunity for a ranger interaction, proceed by private vehicle along Old Birmingham Highway following the route taken by the Freedom Riders, and end at the Bus Burning Site. Pedestrian circulation within the Bus Burning Site would continue to be segmented by the existing roads. Once at the Bus Burning Site, visitors would be encouraged to start their experience at the visitor arrival and orientation space, proceed to the Freedom Plaza, and end at the Bus Burning Site Commemoration Space. Visitors would be required to cross a minimum of four crosswalks including the portion of the Highway 202 off-ramp to complete their tour.

Through traffic along the Highway 202 off-ramp, Barkwood Drive, and Old Birmingham Highway would continue to occur and would serve visitors and area residents. NPS wayfinding, signage, concrete sidewalks, decorative paving, security and safety equipment (such as lighting and cameras), benches, and safety guardrails (along Highway 202) would be installed. Architectural Barriers Act (ABA)-compliant curb cuts, marked crosswalks, pedestrian islands, and signage would be installed to ensure visitor safety. Alternative 2 would include the installation of two speed table crosswalks across Old Birmingham Highway, a pedestrian island with crosswalks across the Highway 202 off-ramp, and two additional crosswalks across Barkwood Drive. Disturbed areas would be revegetated with native vegetation (i.e., grass, shrubs, and trees) to provide a contemplative park-like environment.

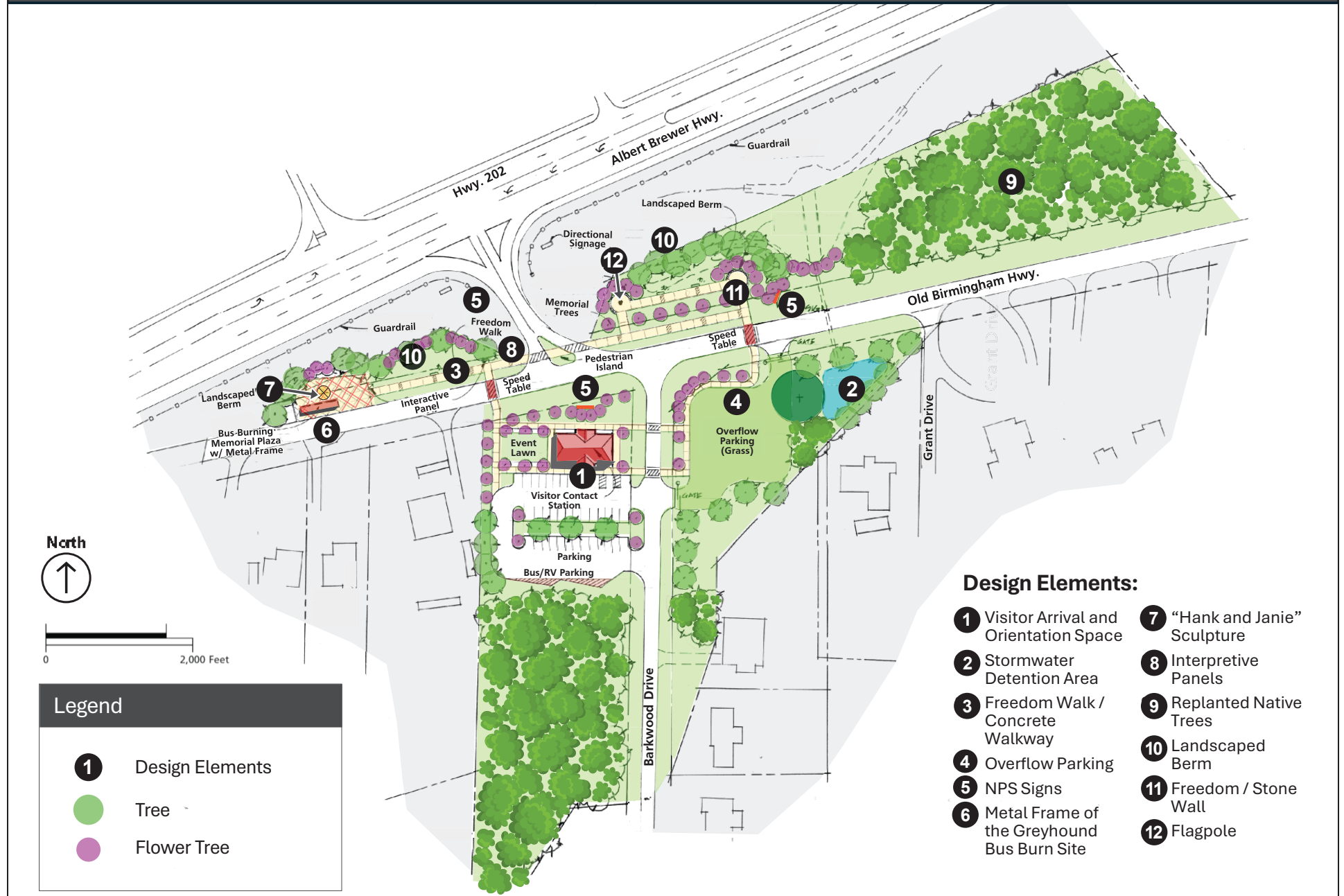


Figure ES-3. Alternative 2: Existing Road Alignment

Freedom Riders National Monument Bus Burning Site

Alternative 2: Existing Road Alignment

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ALTERNATIVE 3: NPS PROPOSED ACTION/PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

Alternative 3 would realign Barkwood Drive to the east and fully develop the segmented parcel south of Old Birmingham Highway (parcel 38), on either side of Barkwood Drive, and the parcel that includes the historical location of the Bus Burning Site (parcel 44) (figure ES-4). The northeast parcel (parcel 54) would not be developed, and the Highway 202 off-ramp would remain in its current location.

Alternative 3 would provide a visitor contact station and interpretation elements south of Old Birmingham Highway and would realign Barkwood Drive to allow for increased parking, including oversized parking spaces for tour buses, behind the visitor contact station. Alternative 3 would also provide additional interpretive information about the Freedom Rides campaign in the area around the visitor contact station.

A Bus Burning Site Commemoration Space would be constructed at the site where the bus burning occurred and would include an installation of a metal frame depicting the Greyhound bus, including seats for the Freedom Riders and all others who were on the bus that day. A bas-relief sound wall,¹ or other type of hardscape screening such as a mural, would be installed on the northern property line and would include an abstract of the Forsyth & Son Grocery story from the time of the burning. An interpretive photo wall along a concrete walkway would display images of the event.

Under alternative 3, a boundary adjustment would add adjacent residential parcels of land at the end of Old Birmingham Highway to the monument. The boundary adjustment would allow for expanded preservation of the cultural landscape and serve future interpretation, educational purposes, and operational needs. It would also eliminate vehicular traffic at the end of Old Birmingham Highway and increase safety for visitors. Implementation of alternative 3 would not consolidate all NPS parcels but would reduce the number of crossings required for visitors. NPS wayfinding, signage, concrete sidewalks, decorative paving, security and safety equipment (such as lighting and cameras), benches, and safety guardrails (along Highway 202) would be installed, along with traffic circulation and pedestrian safety measures such as crosswalks and speed tables. Disturbed areas would be revegetated with native vegetation (i.e., grass, shrubs, and trees) to provide a contemplative park-like environment.

¹A "bas-relief sound wall" refers to a noise barrier that incorporates bas-relief art or sculptural designs on its surface. These are structures built to reduce noise pollution, commonly seen along highways or in urban areas where noise is a concern.

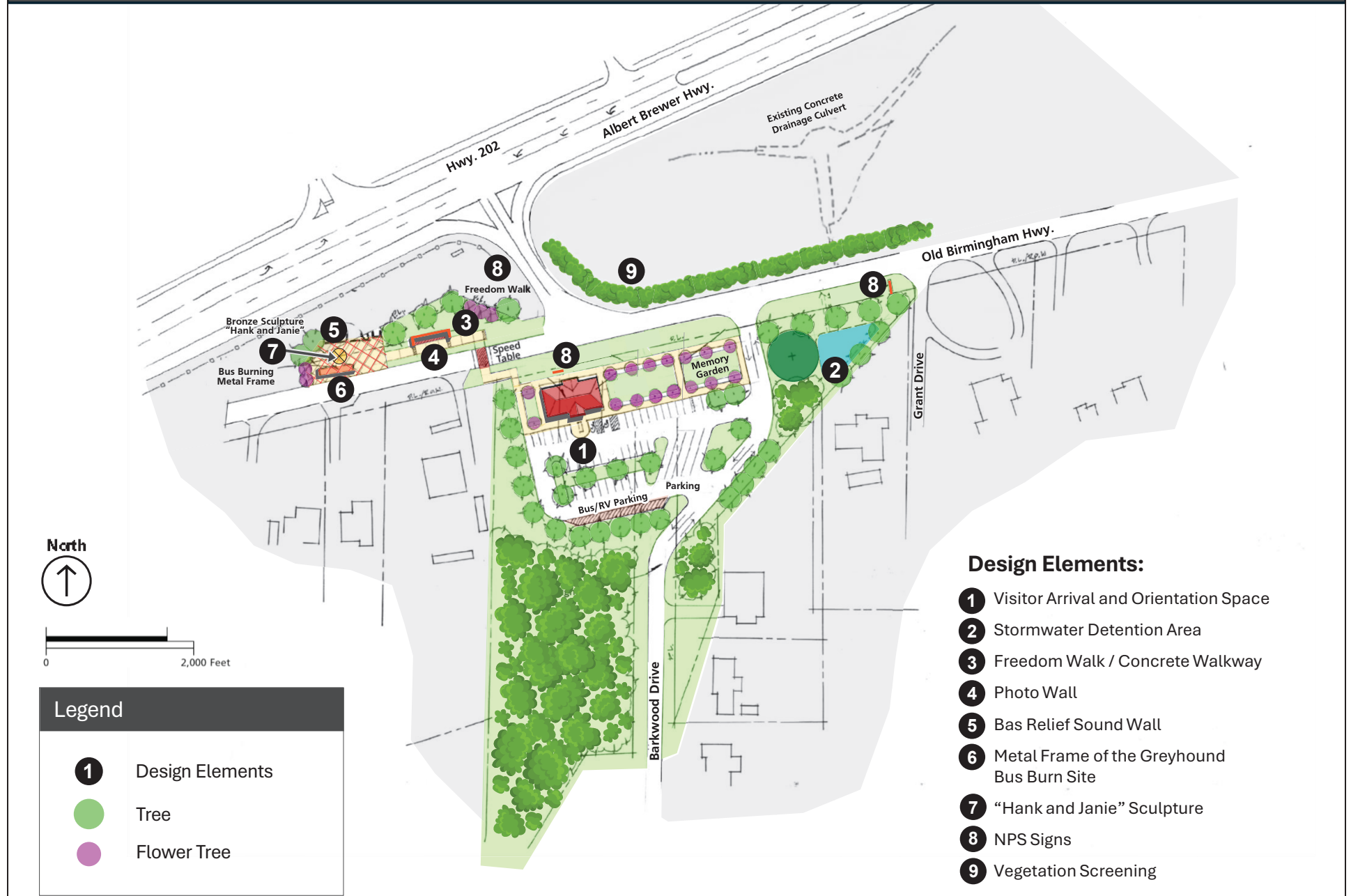


Figure ES-4. Alternative 3: NPS Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative

Freedom Riders National Monument Bus Burning Site

Alternative 3: NPS Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative

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ALTERNATIVE 4: SITE UNIFICATION WITH ADDITIONAL BUILDOUT AND RAMP RELOCATION

Implementation of alternative 4 would fully develop the three existing NPS parcels with substantial modifications to the roadways that currently bisect the site and current landscape (figure ES-5). Alternative 4 would unify the monument's three parcels by realigning Barkwood Drive to the east and fully develop the segmented parcel south of Old Birmingham Highway (parcel 38) on either side of Barkwood Drive and the parcel that includes the historical location of the Bus Burning Site (parcel 44). The Highway 202 off-ramp that bisects the two northern parcels (parcel 44 and 54) would be removed, and the northeast parcel (parcel 54) would be developed.

Alternative 4 would include a visitor contact station and interpretation elements south of Old Birmingham Highway and would realign Barkwood Drive to allow for increased parking, including oversized parking spaces for tour buses, behind the station for visitors.

Alternative 4 would propose the construction of a Freedom Plaza that would include elements to provide visitors with more information about the stories of the Freedom Riders and the civil rights legislation that followed, connect with the historical events that occurred there, and offer additional information about the overarching Freedom Rides campaign. Additionally, a "Freedom Wall" would be installed on the northern property line (parcel 54) to provide a visual and sound buffer between the site and Highway 202. The wall would provide signage on the side facing Highway 202 and interpretation on the side facing the Freedom Plaza. The site would also include a "Freedom Grove" of local flowering trees.

A Bus Burning Site Commemoration Space would be constructed at the site where the bus burning occurred and would include an installation of a metal frame depicting the Greyhound bus, including seats for the Freedom Riders and all others who were on the bus that day. A bas-relief sound wall, or other type of hardscape screening such as a mural, would be installed on the northern property line and would include an abstract of the Forsyth & Son Grocery story from the time of the burning. An interpretive photo wall along a concrete walkway would display images of the event.

Under alternative 4, a boundary adjustment would add adjacent residential parcels of land at the end of Old Birmingham Highway to the park. The boundary adjustment would allow for expanded preservation of the cultural landscape and serve future interpretation, educational purposes, and operational needs. Further administrative boundary adjustments may be needed to accommodate the relocation of the Highway 202 ramp, should that occur. The boundary adjustment and relocation or closure of the Highway 202 ramp would eliminate pedestrian and vehicle conflict points and provide a seamless vehicle-free visitor experience. NPS wayfinding, signage, concrete sidewalks, decorative paving, security and safety equipment (such as lighting and cameras), benches, and safety guardrails (along Highway 202) would be installed, along with traffic circulation and pedestrian safety measures such as a crosswalk and speed tables. Disturbed areas would be revegetated with native vegetation (i.e., grass, shrubs, and trees) to provide a contemplative park-like environment. Alternative 4 would also include additional stormwater water management design features such as box culvert extension to the existing stormwater infrastructure on parcel 54.

Chapter 2 provides descriptions of the desired future conditions management for the Bus Burning Site, with summaries and maps of the actions involved in the proposed action / preferred alternative. The proposed action / preferred alternative also provides management strategies and associated monitoring guidance, including a Visitor Use Management Framework for the Bus Burning Site (see appendix B).



Figure ES-5. Alternative 4: Site Unification with Additional Buildout and Ramp Relocation

Freedom Riders National Monument Bus Burning Site

Alternative 4: Site Unification with Additional Buildout and Ramp Relocation

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Purpose and Need for the Freedom Riders National Monument Bus Burning Site Master Plan and Environmental Assessment

1

BACKGROUND

The National Park Service (NPS) has prepared this master plan and environmental assessment (MP/EA) 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, a nonviolent campaign that brought national attention to the reality of segregation in the Southern United States and forced the federal government to take action toward ending segregation in interstate travel. The NPS manages the historic Greyhound Bus Station in Anniston, Alabama, and the Bus Burning Site, which is 6 miles outside of Anniston in Calhoun County. These two properties comprise the discontinuous units of the Freedom Riders National Monument (monument or national monument). As a new unit of the NPS, the monument has few existing planning documents in its planning portfolio. The MP/EA for the Bus Burning Site is intended to provide site-specific management guidance. Therefore, the scope of this MP/EA is focused on the Bus Burning Site because the current site is undeveloped and does not provide the desired experience to visitors or the larger community.

INTRODUCTION

This MP/EA will provide long-term guidance for public access to and commemoration of the Bus Burning Site at the national monument. This plan was prepared in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), Department of the Interior implementing regulations 43 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR Part) 46,² NPS Director's Order 12 (NPS 2011), and the NPS NEPA Handbook (NPS 2015a).

This chapter describes why the NPS is taking action at this time. This MP/EA evaluates alternatives and management actions proposed for the Bus Burning Site and analyzes impacts that could result from implementing these alternatives. Upon conclusion of this planning effort and the decision-making process, one of the alternatives or a combination of actions from the alternatives will become the long-term master plan.

²Executive Order 14154, “Unleashing American Energy” (January 20, 2025), and Presidential Memorandum, “Ending Illegal Discrimination and Restoring Merit-Based Opportunity” (January 21, 2025), require the department to strictly adhere to National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), 42 United States Code (USC) §§ 4321 et seq. Further, such order and memorandum repeal Executive Orders 12898 (February 11, 1994) and 14096 (April 21, 2023). Because Executive Orders 12898 and 14096 have been repealed, complying with such orders is a legal impossibility. The National Park Service (NPS) verifies that it has complied with the requirements of NEPA, including the department's regulations and procedures implementing NEPA at 43 CFR Part 46 and Part 516 of the Departmental Manual, consistent with the President's January 2025 order and memorandum. The NPS has also voluntarily considered the Council on Environmental Quality's rescinded regulations implementing NEPA, previously found at 40 CFR Parts 1500–1508, as guidance to the extent appropriate and consistent with the requirements of NEPA and Executive Order 14154.

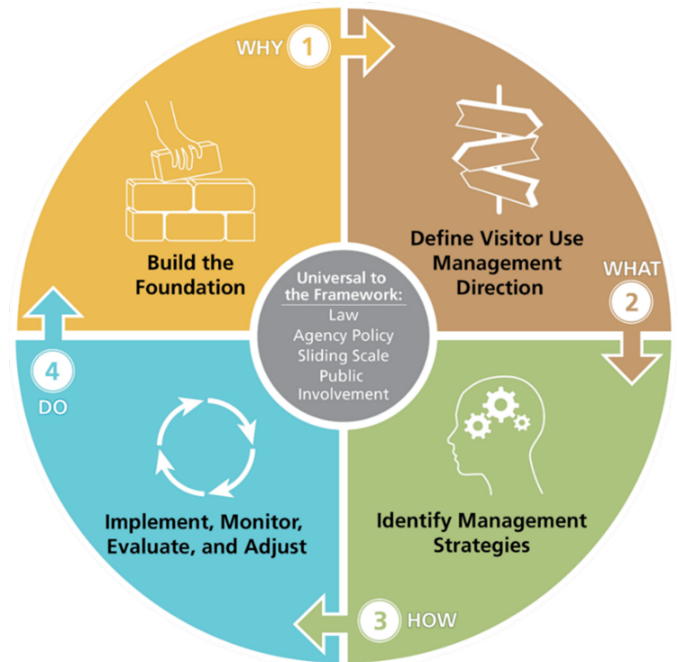
VISITOR USE MANAGEMENT OVERVIEW

Visitor use management is the proactive and adaptive process for managing characteristics of visitor use and the natural and managerial setting using a variety of strategies and tools to achieve and maintain desired resource conditions and visitor experiences. Simply put, it means managing use to provide sustainable recreation. The Visitor Use Management Framework (the framework; IVUMC 2016) provides the analytical elements necessary to address visitor use management opportunities and issues, consistent with applicable law and within existing agency management processes. Using this framework, the NPS can collaboratively develop long-term strategies for providing access, connecting visitors to key visitor experiences, protecting resources, and managing visitor use.

The framework (figure 1) provides cohesive guidance on four major elements for analyzing and managing visitor use: (1) build the foundation; (2) define visitor use management direction; (3) identify management strategies; and (4) implement, monitor, evaluate, and adjust. These elements represent the most basic and critical elements for successfully managing visitor use.

This plan is guided by the Visitor Use Management Framework to develop a long-term strategy for managing both visitor use and resources for the Bus Burning Site.

Figure 1. Overview of the Visitor Use Management Framework



PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PLAN

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

PARK PURPOSE, SIGNIFICANCE, AND SELECT FUNDAMENTAL RESOURCES AND VALUES

The monument's purpose, significance, and fundamental resources and values, as well as statutory mandates and NPS *Management Policies* (NPS 2006), are identified in the monument's foundation document (NPS 2018) and shape and guide this plan's proposals. The national monument commemorates the stories, places, and people involved in the 1961 Freedom Rides, a nonviolent campaign that brought national attention to the reality of segregation in the Southern United States and forced the federal government to take action toward ending segregation in interstate travel.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

RELATIONSHIP TO THE PARK PLANNING PORTFOLIO

Overview of NPS Planning

The National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978 and NPS *Management Policies 2006* require each unit of the national park system to have a management plan. All NPS units must address the four statutory requirements specified in 54 USC 100502 for general management planning. Director's Order 2: *Park Planning* specifies that a management plan refers to (1) a stand-alone management plan, or (2) the planning documents in a park's planning portfolio that collectively meet the statutory requirements for a management plan (NPS 2021). These statutory requirements, as described in the National Parks and Recreation Act, include the following:

- measures for resource preservation
- indications of the types and general intensities of development (i.e., visitor circulation and transportation patterns, systems, and modes), including general locations, timing of implementation, and anticipated costs
- identification of and implementation commitments for visitor carrying capacities
- assessment of potential boundary modifications to the external boundaries of the park

The NPS unit can conduct comprehensive planning either unit-wide or for specific geographical areas within a unit. At a specific geographical area scale, such as this plan, comprehensive planning can provide broad, programmatic guidance or act as a planning tool alongside an implementation plan to establish or update long-term management goals for specific types of uses or resources. The purpose of comprehensive planning is to ensure that a national park system unit has a clearly defined direction for resource preservation and visitor use. This helps the NPS achieve the mandate to preserve resources for the enjoyment of future generations. In addition, comprehensive planning makes the NPS more effective, collaborative, and accountable by:

- Providing a balance between continuity and adaptability in decision-making by defining the desired conditions to be achieved and maintained in a park unit. It also provides a touchstone that allows NPS managers and staff to adapt their actions to changing situations, while staying focused on what is most important about the park unit.
- Analyzing the park unit with the surrounding ecosystem, cultural setting, and community. This analysis helps NPS managers and staff understand how the park unit can interrelate with neighbors and others in ways that are ecologically, socially, and economically sound. Decisions made within such a large context are more likely to be successful over time.
- Affording everyone who has a stake in decisions affecting a park unit an opportunity to be involved in the planning process and to understand the decisions made. Park units are often the focus of intense public interest and public involvement throughout the planning process. Involving all interested stakeholders in developing a management plan provides opportunities for NPS managers and staff to interact with the public to learn about their concerns, expectations, and values. It also allows the NPS to share information about the park unit's purpose and significance and the opportunities and constraints for the management of park lands.

The ultimate outcome of comprehensive management planning for park units is an agreement among the NPS, its partners, and the public on why each area is managed as part of the national park system, what resource conditions and visitor experiences should exist, and how those conditions can best be achieved and maintained over time.

Management plans are intended to be long-term documents that establish and articulate a management philosophy and framework for decision-making and problem-solving in national park system units.

The monument was established in 2017 by presidential proclamation. As a recently established unit of the national park system, this document represents the first management plan for the Bus Burning Site and will meet general management planning requirements for the site.

Other Laws and Policies Related to NPS Management

This section discusses some of the most pertinent NPS-wide laws and policies related to planning and managing the monument. It is important to note that the monument must comply with these laws and policies regardless of this master planning effort.

The NPS must comply with laws and policies to protect environmental quality and resources, preserve cultural resources, and provide public services. Applicable laws and policies related to resource management include the Clean Water Act of 1972; the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA); the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended (NHPA); the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) of 1990; and policies related to public services and access including the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the Architectural Barriers Act Accessibility Act Standards (ABAAS), the Final Outdoor Developed Area Guidelines, and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Some laws and policies are applicable solely or primarily to units of the national park system. These include the 1916 Organic Act that created the NPS; the General Authorities Act of 1970, amended in 1978, relating to the management of the national park system; and the National Parks Omnibus Management Act of 1998. Other laws and policies have much broader application, such as the ESA, and the NHPA.

The NPS Organic Act (16 United States Code [USC] 1) provides the central management direction for all units of the national park system:

[P]romote and regulate the use of the Federal areas known as national parks, monuments, and reservations...by such means and measure as to conform to the fundamental purpose of said parks, monuments and reservations, which purpose is to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.

The national park system General Authorities Act (16 USC 1a-1 et seq.) affirms that while all national park system units remain “distinct in character,” they are “united through their inter-related purposes and resources into one national park system as cumulative expressions of a single national heritage.” The act makes it clear that the NPS Organic Act and other protective mandates apply equally to all units of the system. Further, amendments state that NPS management of park units should not “derogate...the purposes and values for which these various areas have been established.”

The NPS also has established policies for all units under its stewardship. These are identified and explained in a guidance manual entitled *NPS Management Policies 2006*. This MP/EA incorporates and complies with the provisions of these mandates and policies.

Compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act

This MP/EA is subject to the requirements of NEPA, which requires an assessment and public disclosure of the environmental impacts, both adverse and beneficial, of actions proposed by the federal government before those actions are implemented. When there are actions that could have a significant impact on the natural or human environment, the agency is required to prepare an environmental impact statement.

This MP/EA has been prepared in accordance with NEPA, as amended,³ Section 106 of the NHPA (16 USC 470 et seq.), and 36 CFR Part 800.

³Executive Order 14154, Unleashing American Energy (January 20, 2025), and a Presidential Memorandum, Ending Illegal Discrimination and Restoring Merit-Based Opportunity (January 21, 2025), require the Department to strictly adhere to NEPA, 42 USC §§ 4321 et seq. Further, such Order and Memorandum repeal Executive Orders 12898 (February 11, 1994) and 14096 (April 21, 2023). Because Executive Orders 12898 and 14096 have been repealed, complying with such Orders is a legal impossibility. The NPS verifies that it has complied with the requirements of NEPA, including the Department’s regulations and procedures implementing NEPA at 43 CFR Part 46 and Part 516 of the Departmental Manual, consistent with the President’s January 2025 Order and Memorandum. The NPS has also voluntarily considered the Council on Environmental Quality’s rescinded regulations implementing NEPA, previously found at 40 CFR Parts 1500–1508, as guidance to the extent appropriate and consistent with the requirements of NEPA and Executive Order 14154.

PROJECT AREA AND SCOPE OF THE MASTER PLAN

Because the monument is a new unit of the national park system with limited planning guidance, NPS management has determined that a comprehensive stand-alone MP/EA would be the best planning tool to meet the statutory planning requirements for the Bus Burning Site. This document fully addresses many of the statutory requirements, but for others, it provides a general framework. Specifics about the scope of the plan are articulated in the following sections.

SCOPE OF THE PLAN

The scope of the MP/EA includes a conceptual design for the Bus Burning Site. The plan provides a framework for resource protection, site development, access and safety concerns, stormwater management, and visitor capacities for the Bus Burning Site. The plan also presents a conceptual design for the space that would attract and inspire visitors to appreciate the contributions of the Freedom Riders to American civil rights history. Last, the plan includes recommendations for boundary adjustments at the Bus Burning Site to meet the site's NPS operational and resource protection needs.

With the help of partners and stakeholders, the NPS considered design concepts for the development of the Bus Burning Site. A preliminary list of physical and interpretive infrastructure assets was identified to support visitor experience at the site. These initial ideas were compiled into a site development program including restrooms, automobile parking, bus parking, walking trails, information on both the Freedom Riders and Freedom Rides, park space, commemorative space, and signage. Other site program items include utilities, stormwater detention and management, sound buffers, and universal accessibility.

PLANNING ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Many aspects of management for the national monument are defined in Presidential Proclamation 9566, the national monument's purpose and significance statements, and existing laws and policies. The resolution of questions or issues not addressed by the Presidential Proclamation or laws and policies is the basis for developing different alternatives or approaches to managing the monument. As with any decision-making process, there are key decisions that, once made, would dictate the direction of subsequent management strategies.

Specific issues and opportunities considered in this MP/EA were previously identified for the Bus Burning Site through an agency-led preliminary project planning process. Issues and opportunities were reviewed during this planning process to help define the scope of the plan and management alternatives. The planning issues considered in this MP/EA process are described below. Bulleted items following each issue reflect the goal to be addressed through proposed action in the MP/EA.



PROJECT BACKGROUND

History

In the spring of 1961, small, interracial bands of “Freedom Riders” set out to challenge discriminatory state laws and local customs that required the separation of races on buses and in bus station facilities such as waiting areas, lunch counters, and restrooms. Their journey was one of dozens of planned interstate bus trips designed to test if bus station facilities in the Southern United States were complying with US Supreme Court decisions. *Morgan v. Virginia* (1946) and *Boynton v. Virginia* (1960) had struck down Virginia laws compelling segregation in interstate travel and hardened the attitudes of segregationists in the Southern United States who continued to promote segregation policies. These successful cases won by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People laid the groundwork for direct action campaigns by civil rights organizations like the Congress of Racial Equality, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. These organizations organized more than 50 Freedom Rides that crisscrossed the Southern United States in 1961. These rides met resistance from southern segregationists who viciously attacked the Freedom Riders on several occasions (NPS 2018).

On May 4, 1961, in Washington, DC, a group of Freedom Riders boarded two buses, one a Greyhound and the other a Trailways, bound for New Orleans. The buses were to arrive in New Orleans on May 17. By the morning of Sunday, May 14, the Freedom Riders had traveled through Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina, and were ready to depart Atlanta, Georgia. The Greyhound bus was the first to depart Atlanta at 11:00 a.m. It reached Anniston in the early afternoon and was met by a crowd of angry segregationists, including members of the Ku Klux Klan, who attacked the bus. The mob threw rocks, broke windows, and slashed the bus's tires (NPS 2018). The police waited 15 minutes before arriving at the terminal, despite being warned earlier in the day of the potentially violent mob. After police chatted for a few minutes with members of the mob, they finally forced them back to allow the bus to leave (Arsenault 2006). The attackers followed the bus out of town in a convoy of around 30 to 40 cars. Two of the attackers' cars pulled in front of the bus, forcing it to slow down. About 6 miles west of Anniston, the two tires that had been slashed on the driver's side of the bus went flat. The bus was forced to pull over onto the highway shoulder in front of Forsyth & Son Grocery with the attackers in pursuit (Arsenault 2006). The segregationists continued their attack, and someone threw a bundle of flaming rags into the bus, causing the bus to explode seconds later. The Freedom Riders barely escaped with their lives (NPS 2018). Some neighbors invited a few of the Riders into their homes for water. Most notable was 12-year-old Janie Forsyth, one of the daughters of grocer Richard Forsyth, who brought cups and buckets of water to the Riders, including Hank Thomas, and tended to the injured. Meanwhile, the attackers' families, dressed in their best Sunday clothes, stood around to watch the scene, as did most other neighbors (Arsenault 2006; Nelson 2010; Sprayberry 2003).

A freelance photographer captured the scene; his photographs of the burning bus became iconic images of the civil rights movement. Through the media, the nation and the world witnessed the violence that took place in Alabama on Mother's Day in 1961. Images of the firebombed bus shocked the American public and created political pressure that would eventually lead to federal action to end segregation (NPS 2018).

The day of violence associated with the Freedom Rides in Anniston and Birmingham on May 14 gave national exposure to the segregation issue in the Southern United States, and many other rides maintained this issue's visibility with the American public. More than 400 Freedom Riders and many individual rides pressed the federal government to act. On May 29, 1961, Attorney General Kennedy petitioned the Interstate Commerce Commission to issue regulations banning segregation, and the commission subsequently decreed that by November 1, 1961, bus carriers and terminals serving interstate travel must be integrated (NPS 2018).

From 1961 until the 1970s, the Bus Burning Site mostly remained unchanged, until the State of Alabama purchased the eight lots to construct Anniston's western bypass. Acreage not used for the bypass was reassembled into the three parcels that comprise the Bus Burning Site and conveyed to Calhoun County in 2009 (NPS 2023). In 1967, Greyhound moved its bus depot to a new building on West Eighth Street, and in 2016, the city of Anniston purchased the historic Greyhound Bus Depot on Gurnee Avenue in Anniston, Alabama. Calhoun County and the city donated the Bus Burning Site and historic Greyhound Bus Depot to The Conservation Fund, which immediately conveyed them to the NPS (NPS 2023). These two properties make up the discontinuous units of the national monument, designated on January 12, 2017, by Presidential Proclamation 9566.

Geographic Description

The Bus Burning Site comprises three parcels totaling 5.86 acres (figure 2). Although the setting of the Bus Burning Site has been considerably altered by the construction of Highway 202, the site includes intact portions of the roadway and the shoulder where the bus was forced to pull over and subsequently set afire. The parcels are clustered around the intersection of Old Birmingham Highway with State Route 202, Anniston's western bypass. In 2008, much of the acreage of the lots that contained Forsyth & Son Grocery and adjacent residences to the east and west was taken for the construction of the bypass; only two greatly reduced portions of those lots remain. On the far west end of the Bus Burning Site is parcel 44, the 0.17-acre remnant of the lot on which the store and adjacent owner's residence stood. Across Old Birmingham Highway to the east is parcel 54, comprising 1.77 acres that were part of neighboring properties. Across Old Birmingham Highway to the south is parcel 38, a 3.92-acre lot bisected by the right-of-way of Barkwood Drive.

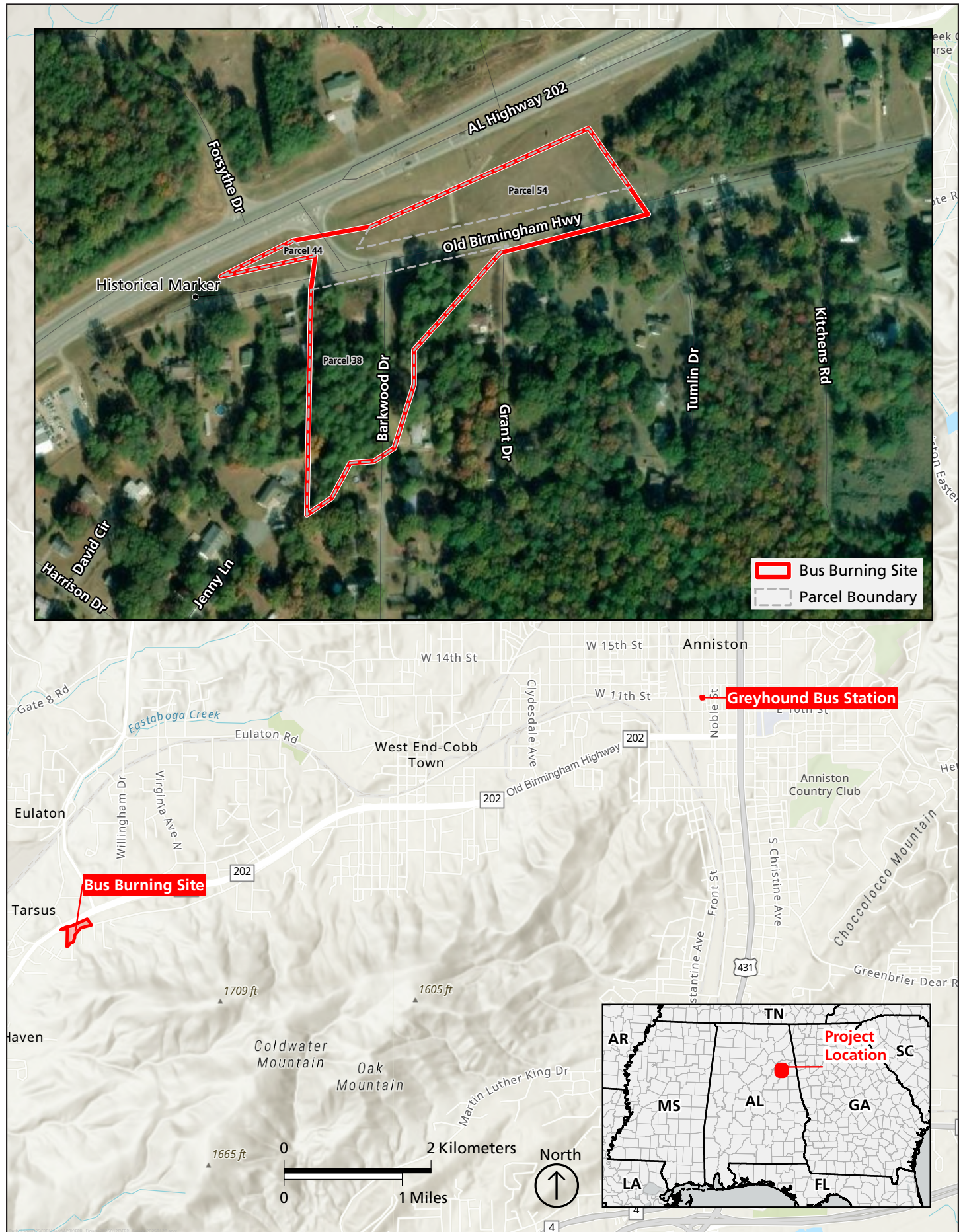
Special Mandates and Administrative Commitments

Many management decisions for a park unit are directed or influenced by special mandates and administrative commitments with other federal agencies, state and local governments, utility companies, partnering organizations, and other entities. Special mandates are requirements specific to a park unit that must be fulfilled. Mandates can be expressed in enabling legislation, in separate legislation following the establishment of a park unit, or through a judicial process. They may expand on a park's purpose or introduce elements unrelated to the purpose of the park unit. Administrative commitments are, in general, agreements that have been reached through formal, documented processes, often through memoranda of agreement. Examples include easements, rights-of-way, and arrangements for emergency service responses. In many instances, special mandates and administrative commitments can support a network of partnerships that help fulfill a park's objectives and facilitate working relationships with other organizations. They are an essential component of managing and planning for the national monument. The monument has no special mandates but has an administrative commitment as described below.

Framework Agreement between the National Park Service and the State of Alabama. The Memorandum of Understanding between the State of Alabama and the NPS identifies covenant protections for the Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT) associated with keeping adjacent public roadways accessible, protecting the existing drainage associated with the adjacent highway, and protecting the highway right-of-way at the Bus Burning Site in Calhoun County. It also establishes affirmative consultation requirements between the NPS and ALDOT concerning the development of the national monument, its management, and pedestrian access to the national monument at this location. The memorandum is dated January 3, 2017, and has no expiration date.



Figure 2. Freedom Riders National Monument Bus Burning Site



SCOPE OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Issues and Opportunities not Addressed

This MP/EA does not provide management guidance to address issues or opportunities at the Greyhound bus station or sites not currently within the monument boundary.

ISSUES AND IMPACT TOPICS RETAINED FOR ANALYSIS

“Issues” or “environmental issues” can be problems, concerns, conflicts, obstacles, or benefits that would result if the proposed action or alternatives, including the no-action alternative, were implemented. Such issues may be raised by the NPS, other agencies, Tribal governments, or the public. The primary issue associated with actions in the plan is understanding the changes to the natural and built environment that would be realized under any alternatives in the master plan.

Impact topics represent resources that could be affected, either beneficially or adversely, by implementing the proposed alternatives. The NPS used an interdisciplinary review process as well as existing studies and data and public comments to determine which resources would likely be affected by this project. Issues were retained for consideration and discussed in detail if they met one or more of the following criteria:

- the environmental impacts associated with the issue are central to the proposal or of critical importance
- a detailed analysis of environmental impacts related to the issues is necessary to make a reasoned choice between alternatives
- the environmental impacts associated with the issue are a big point of contention among the public or other agencies
- potentially significant impacts on resources are associated with the issue

The following topics are further analyzed in this MP/EA:

- visitor use and experience (including traffic and public safety)
- cultural landscape



ISSUES AND IMPACT TOPICS CONSIDERED BUT DISMISSED FROM ANALYSIS

Impact topics considered but not carried forward for detailed analysis are listed below along with a brief discussion and rationale for their dismissal.

Wetlands

The US Environmental Protection Agency and the US Army Corps of Engineers regulate wetlands and waters of the United States under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. Consideration of impacts on wetlands is also required under Executive Order 11990. In addition, NPS Director's Order 77-1: *Wetland Protection* calls for no net loss of wetlands and strives for a longer-term goal of a net gain of wetlands throughout NPS lands. There are no signs of surface waters in or near the project area. One subsurface stream flows underneath the adjacent roadways and project area.

Wetlands are dismissed as an impact topic because none of the proposed facilities and activities would occur in jurisdictional "waters of the United States" per Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. Furthermore, the proposed action would not adversely impact wetlands per NPS Director's Order 77-1. As a result, the NPS does not require a wetlands statement of findings for this project. Therefore, this topic was dismissed from detailed analysis.

Floodplains

Executive Order 11988, "Floodplain Management," requires the NPS and other federal agencies to evaluate the likely impacts of actions in floodplains. The objectives of the executive order are to: (1) avoid, to the extent possible, long-term and short-term, adverse impacts associated with occupancy, modification, or destruction of floodplains; and (2) avoid indirect support of development and new construction in such areas wherever there is a practicable alternative.

Construction activities proposed under the alternatives would not affect floodplains. Other activities, including removal of vegetation and road materials and installation of trails and parking areas, would not result in temporary or permanent effects on floodplains. Therefore, this topic was dismissed from further analysis.

Soils and Vegetation

The two north parcels of this site are heavily pre-disturbed and covered in mown turf. The portion of the south parcel that lies east of Barkwood Drive is vegetated with a mix of oak and pine trees. The front half of the south parcel west of Barkwood Drive is covered in broken pavement and gravel that is starting to revegetate into turf and weeds, while the south half of the parcel maintains a dense covering of oak and pine woodland. Tree species identified on the Bus Burning Site include water oak (*Quercus nigra*), pin oak (*Q. palustris*), black oak (*Q. velutina*), red oak (*Q. rubra*), arborvitae (*Thuja sp.*), pine (*Pinus sp.*), sweetgum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*), eastern red cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*), hickory (*Carya sp.*), pawpaw (*Asimina triloba*), black cherry (*Prunus serotina*), mimosa (*Albizia julibrissen*), winged elm (*Ulmus alata*), and wild plum (*Prunus americana*). Shrub and herbaceous species identified include mimosa (*Albizia julibrissen*), common privet (*Ligustrum sinense*), American beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*), pyracantha (*Pyracantha coccinea*), cherry laurel (likely *Prunus laurocerasus*), grape (*Vitis sp.*), Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*), vervain (*Verbena sp.*), and kudzu (*Pueraria montana*). Of these, mimosa, common privet, pyracantha, and kudzu have been identified as invasive plants in Alabama. The composition of the turf is unknown. Many other nonnative grasses and forbs are present that could not be identified. Site design would minimize the removal of mature trees. Any unavoidable trees removed would be species that are abundant in the surrounding area and would not have measurable impacts.

The Bus Burning Site and its rural neighborhood were developed at the base of Coldwater Mountain on gently sloping Anniston and Allen gravelly loams and Jefferson stony fine sandy loams that trend to the north. The site is in the Cold Spring Branch watershed. While ground disturbance would occur during construction, most areas have already been disturbed during past road construction and active maintenance activities. Disturbance to previously undisturbed areas would amount to fewer than 4 acres. Revegetation and recontouring of disturbed areas would occur as part of the construction activities and would be designed and expedited to minimize the potential establishment of invasive exotic species and erosion. Therefore, this impact topic has been dismissed from further analysis.

Noise and Soundscapes

In accordance with NPS *Management Policies 2006* (NPS 2006) and Director's Order 47: *Sound Preservation and Noise Management* (NPS 2000b), an important component of the NPS mission is the preservation of the natural soundscape. During restoration and rehabilitation construction, anthropogenic noise would likely increase because of the activities, equipment, vehicular traffic, and construction crews. Any sounds generated would be temporary, lasting only as long as the restoration and rehabilitation construction activity generates the sounds, and would have no long-term, measurable effect on visitors, employees, or natural soundscape conditions. Therefore, this topic was dismissed from further analysis.

Threatened and Endangered Species

According to NPS *Management Policies 2006*, the NPS strives to maintain all components and processes of naturally evolving ecosystems, including the natural abundance, variety, and ecological integrity of native animal populations. Rare, threatened, and endangered species are protected under the ESA. Section 7 of the ESA requires federal agencies to coordinate with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) during project planning, if their proposed actions could affect listed species, to conserve listed species and their critical habitats. To identify federally listed species that could occur in the project area, the NPS obtained an official species list from the USFWS Alabama Ecological Services Field Office via the USFWS Information for Planning and Conservation (IPaC) system (<https://ecos.fws.gov/ipac/>) in February 2025. The project area does not contain designated critical habitat for any listed species. Thirteen federally listed, proposed, or candidate species were identified as potentially occurring near the project area:

- Gray bat (*Myotis grisescens*) – Endangered
- Indiana bat (*Myotis sodalis*) – Endangered
- Tricolored bat (*Perimyotis subflavus*) – Proposed Endangered
- Red-cockaded woodpecker (*Dryobates borealis*) – Threatened
- Alligator snapping turtle (*Macrochelys temminckii*) – Proposed Endangered
- Mohr's Barbara's buttons (*Marshallia mohrii*) – Threatened
- Tennessee yellow-eyed grass (*Xyris tennesseensis*) – Endangered
- White fringeless orchid (*Platanthera integrilabia*) – Threatened
- Monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*) – Proposed Threatened
- Blue shiner (*Cyprinella caerulea*) – Threatened
- Pygmy sculpin (*Cottus paulus*) – Threatened
- Finelined pocketbook (*Hamiota altilis*) – Threatened
- Southern clubshell (*Pleurobema decisum*) – Endangered

In accordance with Section 7 of the ESA, the NPS reviewed the proposed action, habitat requirements, and likelihood of occurrence of each species in the project area and determined that the project would have no effect on federally listed, proposed, or candidate species. The rationale for these findings is summarized below by species or group. Official species lists remain valid for 90 days. An updated species list obtained on June 30, 2025, confirmed that species statuses had not changed since February 2025.

Bats

The project would not have the potential to affect gray bat because the project area does not contain any caves or streams and, therefore, lacks suitable habitat for the species. The project would require limited tree removal, potentially including suitable roosting trees for the Indiana bat. The project area does not provide high-quality roosting habitat, as studies have shown that the Indiana bat tends to avoid habitats adjacent to transportation corridors because of noise disturbance (Gardner and Garner 1992; Zurcher et al. 2010; USFWS 2018). However, the NPS would avoid tree clearing during Indiana bat roosting season (March 15 to April 30) to minimize the risk of adverse effects on the species. The tricolored bat has been proposed for listing under the ESA but is not currently a federally listed species. If listed, the NPS would coordinate with USFWS, but would minimize impacts to the tricolored bat by conducting tree clearing outside of the pup season (May 15 to July 31).

Birds

The project area does not contain suitable nesting or foraging habitat for the red-cockaded woodpecker. This species requires open pine woodlands and savannas with large old pines with sufficient cavities for nesting and roosting (USFWS 2022b).

Reptiles, Fishes, and Freshwater Mussels

The project area does not contain any streams or other aquatic habitats. Therefore, there is no potential for alligator snapping turtle, blue shiner, pygmy sculpin, finelined pocketbook, or southern clubshell to occur in the project area. Best management practices to control runoff during project construction would avoid potential impacts on these species outside the project area.

Monarch Butterfly

The project area does not provide high-quality habitat for the monarch butterfly. The monarch butterfly's breeding and migratory habitat generally consists of meadows with a diversity of nectar-producing flowering vegetation and an adequate abundance of milkweed (USFWS 2024). Although milkweed and nectar flowers could occur in the project area, including along roadsides, the habitat is highly fragmented and frequently disturbed by ongoing maintenance, such as mowing. Therefore, the project would not affect the monarch butterfly.

Plants

The project would not have the potential to affect Mohr's Barbara's buttons, Tennessee yellow-eyed grass, or white fringeless orchid because these species do not occur in the project area. All three of these species occur in limited extant populations and the locations of those populations are known (USFWS 2016, 2021, 2022a, 2022c). Additionally, the disturbed nature of the habitat in the project area and ongoing maintenance, such as mowing, render habitat in the project area unsuitable for these species.

Most of the Bus Burning Site is pre-disturbed road right-of-way and median in a suburban setting, surrounded by residential lawns and landscaping, and adjacent to heavily used roads with associated vehicle noise. No threatened and endangered species or critical habitats are known to occur in the project area. Due to the area's suburban context, the level of human activity, and minimal habitat value, this topic was dismissed from further analysis.

Wildlife

According to the *NPS Management Policies 2006*, the NPS strives to maintain all components and processes of naturally evolving park unit ecosystems, including the natural abundance, diversity, and ecological integrity of animals (NPS 2006). The NPS determined that management strategies and actions outlined in this plan would have negligible effects on wildlife. Anticipated effects noted during an assessment of the action alternatives tied to wildlife were limited in scope and scale, and sensitive species are not likely to be affected by actions included in either of the alternatives.

Most of the Bus Burning Site is pre-disturbed road right-of-way and median in a suburban setting, surrounded by residential lawns and landscaping, and adjacent to heavily used roads with associated vehicle noise. As a result, wildlife in the project area is limited to adapted suburban species. Although construction-related activities may temporarily displace wildlife from the area, the proposed action would not result in measurable effects on wildlife or wildlife habitat. Due to the area's suburban context, the level of human activity, and minimal habitat value, this topic was dismissed from further analysis.

Migratory Birds

The protection of migratory birds is addressed under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (16 USC 703-712 2012). The term "migratory bird" is commonly interpreted as the regular, long-distance seasonal movement of birds along a flyway between wintering grounds and breeding grounds. However, there are degrees of bird migration, and they can be defined as movement between areas of increased and decreased resources (food, suitable habitat) for nesting, breeding, and overwintering, depending on their current biological needs, as follows:

- Long-distant migrants of the American continents typically move between breeding ranges in North America to wintering grounds in Central and South America.
- Medium-distance migrants will move over distances of a few hundred miles.
- Short-distance migrants, will, for example, move from higher to lower elevations—a phenomenon more easily observed where mountain ranges are situated.
- Permanent residents in a given area are not compelled to migrate due to a combination of species adaptations (e.g., can withstand cold weather) and the ability to find adequate food supplies year-round.

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act was enacted to implement the agreement between the United States and Canada for the protection of migratory birds. The statute makes it unlawful to pursue, hunt, take, capture, or kill migratory birds without prior authorization by the USFWS and protects feathers, eggs, and nests. Trees with potential nesting sites would not be removed during nesting season. The action alternatives are not expected to affect the habitat or migratory trends for bird species or change the overall trend in condition for these species. As a result, migratory birds were dismissed from further analysis.

Bald and Golden Eagles

The Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act (16 USC 668-668c) is a federal statute that protects bald eagles and golden eagles. This law prohibits anyone from "taking" eagles of either species without a permit issued by the Secretary of the Interior. "Take" includes birds, and their parts, including feathers, nests, or eggs. Destruction of bald or golden eagle nests requires a permit at all times, whether or not the nests are occupied and in use. The action alternatives are not expected to affect the habitat or migratory trends for these species or change the overall trend in condition for this species. As a result, these species were dismissed from further analysis.

Air Quality

Section 118 of the Clean Air Act requires the NPS to meet all federal, state, and local air pollution standards (42 USC 7401 et seq.). Areas where ambient air concentrations of a pollutant are below the ambient air quality standard limits are classified as “in attainment” for the pollutant. The national monument is in attainment for all criteria pollutants based on the current National Ambient Air Quality Standards set by the US Environmental Protection Agency for the project area. Construction activities would generate temporary emissions associated with construction equipment, hauling materials, fugitive dust, and the application of asphalt paving for additional parking areas. However, the emissions and fugitive dust would only occur during construction and would either dissipate quickly or be mitigated by the incorporation of construction best management practices. Implementation of the proposed action would result in local emissions associated with a potential increase in visitors at the Bus Burning Site; however, the amount would be inconsequential compared to existing traffic emissions on adjacent roadways. No long-term impacts on air quality are expected. Therefore, this topic was dismissed from further analysis.

Lightscaapes

In accordance with NPS *Management Policies 2006*, the NPS strives to preserve dark night skies and would “minimize light that emanates from monument facilities, and also seek the cooperation of monument visitors, neighbors, and local government agencies to prevent or minimize the intrusion of artificial light into the night scene of the ecosystems of parks” (NPS 2006). Restoration and rehabilitation construction activities would not occur at night; however, there may be occasions during special events when activities would occur after operating hours. The national monument is in a suburban setting, surrounded by streetscape lighting, residences, and other lighting sources (vehicle traffic). The ambient light levels are expected to increase beyond current levels as a result of the proposed action. Directed, shielded, sustainable lighting with carefully selected correlated color temperature (CCT) and lumen values would be used to minimize potential impacts. As designs are developed, the NPS Natural Sounds and Night Skies Division would be consulted regarding potential methods to reduce impacts to night skies; therefore, this topic was dismissed from further analysis.

Archeological Resources

The proposed action would not have any foreseeable impacts on archeological resources, thus archeological resources were dismissed from further analysis. The NPS conducted an Archeological Section 110 Survey at the Greyhound Bus Burning Site in 2024. The archeological investigation confirmed that there is little cultural material present. The investigation found that the area had been highly disturbed by the development of the highway and residential areas, so identifying historical context was difficult. No definitive cultural material related to the bus burning, or intact cultural deposits or features were observed (NPS 2024). Because the bus was set on fire on pavement and later moved, it is unlikely that any cultural material from the attack would survive where it occurred. In addition, the site has been highly disturbed by roadway construction, making it unlikely that any archeological deposits remain intact. While ground disturbance would occur during construction, most areas have already been disturbed during past road construction and active maintenance activities; disturbance to previously undisturbed areas would amount to fewer than 4 acres. In the event of the unexpected discovery of archeological artifacts during monitored construction, the NPS would continue Section 106 consultation with the state historic preservation office (SHPO) and other partnering sites through the standard review process.



Historic Structures

There are no historic buildings or structures in the project area; therefore, this topic was dismissed from further analysis. Buildings that were formerly on the site, such as the Forsyth Grocery, are discussed further under “Cultural Landscapes.”

Socioeconomics

Implementing the proposed action would not result in any identifiable adverse human health effects. No direct or indirect adverse effects on socioeconomics in the area would occur.

Although the site is located within a suburban area, the level of visitation is not expected to affect nearby residences. The monument is not anticipated to serve as a large employment source for the NPS, and thus demand for housing and services in the area is not expected to increase. The proposed action would not appreciably change local and regional land use or affect local businesses or other agencies. There could be minimal increases in employment opportunities and revenue generated in nearby small businesses from implementing the proposed action. Any increase in workforce and revenue due to construction would be temporary and would not change the socioeconomic characteristics of the area. Therefore, this topic was dismissed from further analysis.

Stormwater Management

Existing stormwater management at the Bus Burning Site includes a large concrete stormwater drainage culvert and detention area associated with the western bypass that extends into parcel 54 (figure 2). Around 2008, the drainage patterns of this site were altered to direct most stormwater runoff from Old Birmingham Highway and adjacent neighborhoods under the new Highway 202 and toward the Cold Spring Branch. Stormwater runoff from parcel 44 collects in a ditch on the south side of Highway 202 and is conveyed westward. Runoff from parcel 54 drains toward the center of the parcel, where it collects in the concrete stormwater structure and is conveyed northward under Highway 202. Stormwater runoff from parcel 38 drains to the ditch along the south side of Old Birmingham Highway as it did during the period of significance. From there, it is conveyed north by a concrete culvert, passing through parcel 54 via the concrete drainage structure. The proposed action would maintain or enhance the existing stormwater management standards at the site. Any alterations to stormwater management, including additional site drainage and detention design elements would be implemented per state and local standards to ensure no net loss in stormwater drainage flow and capacity. Any impacts on stormwater management during project staging or construction would be temporary, and no changes in the volume of stormwater being treated would occur. Therefore, this topic was dismissed from further analysis.





Management Direction and Alternatives

2

MANAGEMENT DIRECTION

This section outlines the management direction, including the desired conditions and management strategies, for the Bus Burning Site.

Desired conditions are statements of aspiration that describe resource conditions, visitor experiences and opportunities, and facilities and services that an agency strives to achieve and maintain in a particular area. They describe how a particular area should look, feel, sound, and function. An area may already be meeting these conditions, or conditions can be future-oriented (IVUMC 2016). Desired conditions statements are commitments that should reflect the financial and operational feasibility of the park. These statements highlight what management direction the park is working toward, and motivate development of management strategies and actions to achieve them.

An interdisciplinary team initially developed the desired conditions for this plan. These desired draft conditions were then refined with input from stakeholders, including Freedom Riders and their descendants, modern civil rights activists and leaders, civil rights historians, and members of the Freedom Riders Park Board who were instrumental in establishing the national monument. Input to inform desired conditions, actions, and strategies was collected via a robust civic engagement process that included the public and other stakeholders. This input was incorporated in the desired conditions descriptions noted below.

DESIRED CONDITIONS

Visitors to the Bus Burning Site would encounter a solemn and contemplative environment, designed to be as immersive as possible given existing highway infrastructure and associated noise impacts. From the highway, visitors would clearly see they are approaching a unit of the national park system, fostering a sense of importance and recognition. There would be a distinct sense of arrival as visitors enter the site. Adequate wayfinding and signage would enhance the visitor experience by guiding visitors to and through the site, allowing them to understand and connect with Freedom Rider history. Visitors would use shared means of transport or could independently access the Bus Burning Site. All aspects and components of the landscape at the Bus Burning Site would be safely accessible to visitors of varying abilities.

Once at the site, visitors would be shielded from the modern highway to the extent practical, promoting a reflective atmosphere while simultaneously allowing passersby to recognize the significance of the park unit. Visitors would have opportunities to reflect on the sacrifice and courage of the Freedom Riders and the relevance of the Freedom Rides to America's civil rights movement.

As they explore the grounds, visitors would learn about the stories of the Freedom Riders, the civil rights legislation that followed, and connect with the historical events that occurred there. Visitors would understand the historical significance and physical connection between the Bus Burning Site and the historic Anniston Greyhound Station, as well as how the 1961 events in Anniston evolved into the Freedom Rides and affected the civil rights movement. There would be a clear connection between the monument and cultural resources outside the monument's boundaries (e.g., the Anniston Civil Rights Trail) related to its significance.

Visitors would have opportunities to participate in occasional NPS-led or managed interpretive and educational experiences, including programs that cater to various audiences. These NPS-led or managed experiences would augment the interpretive exhibits at the national monument, including those anticipated at the Bus Depot in Anniston. Educational programs would highlight the history that took place at the Bus Depot and Bus Burning Site, especially during special events and field trips.

The site would also foster a sense of community and provide space for community members to gather. Although amenities are expected to be sparse, the Bus Burning Site may be used for community gatherings as well as other forms of group commemorative and contemplative experiences. The site would be used for special park-sponsored events focusing on community connection, shared learning, and celebration of culture to host a high volume of visitors on a limited number of days per year. Active forms of recreation would not be appropriate at the Bus Burning Site because they would be inconsistent with the solemnity of the site. Overall, the visitor experience would be characterized by low encounter rates, aside from events, allowing for a more personal journey through this pivotal chapter in American history.

MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Management strategies are specific actions that park management intends to implement to achieve the desired conditions over the life of the plan—in this case 15 to 20 years. Because the NPS is proposing some development on property adjacent to the monument that is not owned and administered by the NPS as of the date of this MP/EA, the delineation of roles is particularly important throughout the management strategies. It is important to note that while this MP/EA may identify some actions to be taken outside current federal property administered by the NPS within the monument, the NPS is only directly responsible for actions on federal property.

The NPS would support, where feasible, activities and actions that align with partner organizations, neighbors, agencies, and other stakeholders to meet the desired future conditions and help preserve the community's historic fabric within the monument's boundary. Management strategies would provide technical assistance to the community where resources and funding allow. The proposed management strategies, relative to each alternative, are discussed under "Elements Common to all Action Alternatives."

BOUNDARY ADJUSTMENT

NPS Management Policies 2006 states that "boundary adjustments may be recommended to:

- Protect significant resources and values, or to enhance opportunities for public enjoyment related to park purposes;
- Address operational and management issues, such as the need for access or the need for boundaries to correspond to logical boundary delineations such as topographic or other natural features or roads; or
- Otherwise protect park resources that are critical to fulfilling park purposes."

NPS Management Policies 2006 also states that "All recommendations for boundary changes must meet the following two criteria:

- The added lands will be feasible to administer considering their size, configuration, and ownership; costs; the views of and impacts on local communities and surrounding jurisdictions; and other factors such as the presence of hazardous substances or exotic species.
- Other alternatives for management and resource protection are not adequate."

The presidential proclamation for the monument directs the NPS to "use applicable authorities to seek to enter into agreements with others, including the city of Anniston, Calhoun County, ALDOT, and property owners, to address common interests and promote management efficiencies, including provision of visitor services, interpretation and education, establishment and care of museum collections and preservation of historic objects."

Recommendations for boundary adjustments associated with the proposed actions under each alternative are discussed below.

MANAGEMENT ALTERNATIVES

This section describes the MP/EA alternatives for the Bus Burning Site consistent with the purpose of and need for action. Table 1, provided at the end of this chapter, compares all alternatives analyzed. Alternatives and actions that were considered but are not technically or economically feasible, do not meet the purpose of and need for the project, create unnecessary or excessive adverse impacts on resources, or conflict with the overall management of the park or its resources were dismissed from detailed analysis (see “Alternatives Considered but Dismissed from Detailed Analysis”). This chapter also identifies the NPS preferred alternative and lists mitigation measures for each action alternative.

The NPS explored and objectively evaluated three action alternatives in this plan:

- Alternative 1: No Action/Current Management
- Alternative 2: Existing Road Alignment and Boundary
- Alternative 3: NPS Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative
- Alternative 4: Site Unification with Additional Buildout and Ramp Relocation

Each alternative is described in detail in the following sections. Commemorative elements in this plan require approval of the NPS Director. This approval would be sought and gained prior to implementation.

ALTERNATIVE 1: NO ACTION/CURRENT MANAGEMENT

Alternative 1 describes the action of continuing present management operations and conditions (figure 3). While alternative 1 does not meet the purpose of and need for the project, it provides a basis for comparing the management direction and environmental consequences of the action alternatives. Under the no-action alternative, the plan for the monument would not be implemented, and no facilities would be constructed. The NPS would maintain the existing conditions at the Bus Burning Site. Additionally, no monument boundary expansion would be recommended. Interim planned improvements would persist, including a gravel parking lot on parcel 38 across from the existing historical marker. Though a small number of visitors would most likely continue to visit the Bus Burning Site, the absence of visitor infrastructure, such as crosswalks, would continue to result in ongoing safety concerns (i.e., pedestrian and vehicle conflicts). Security concerns associated with the lack of park lighting, cameras, and fencing would continue. While the broader national monument would continue to operate at the Bus Depot, no formal management strategy would guide the long-term management of the Bus Burning Site.



Figure 3. Alternative 1: No Action

Freedom Riders National Monument Bus Burning Site

Alternative 1: No Action

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



ELEMENTS COMMON TO ALL ACTION ALTERNATIVES

The intent of each action alternative is to respect the significance and importance of the Bus Burning Site to the Freedom Rides campaign and the events that occurred on May 14, 1961, and to provide a solemn and contemplative environment for visitors to have interpretive opportunities to reflect on the sacrifice and courage of the Freedom Riders and their relevance to the nation's civil rights movement.

The action alternatives presented in this document are conceptual and may be altered in the final design to address site constraints or other planning and compliance considerations. Likewise, all names of places in the site plan, such as the "Freedom Wall," "Freedom Plaza," or "Freedom Grove," are for descriptive purposes to better define the spaces discussed in the alternatives and to assist with future interpretive or descriptive designations after implementation. Additionally, elements suggested could be reorganized spatially, such as the placement of the photo wall, and elements could be added as the interpretive elements of the site are further finalized.

Design Elements

Each action alternative is organized around programmatic elements to shape the future development and management of the Bus Burning Site: (1) visitor arrival and orientation space providing a visitor contact station and parking; (2) educational and interpretive spaces; and (3) a contemplative area at the "Bus Burning Site Commemoration Space." Many individual elements would be the same for all action alternatives. These elements are described below and are organized by functional area.

Visitor Arrival and Orientation Space

All action alternatives propose constructing a visitor contact station and parking area that would serve as the visitor arrival and orientation area. The proposed location (parcel 38) for the new facilities is across the street, south of Old Birmingham Highway, at the current intersection of Barkwood Drive. The visitor contact station would be designed with overhangs to provide shade for visitors and a place for rangers to start programs; it would include restrooms, family rooms with changing tables, and storage space. The building would allow for interpretive panels, the content of which would be determined at a future date. New utilities would be provided to the proposed facility, including electric, water, and septic sewer system. Approximately 2,000 linear feet of existing overhead powerlines would be removed and reinstalled underground. The septic fields would be placed strategically based on final site layout and requirements. A stormwater detention area would be sited east of the visitor contact station, separated from the main visitor areas by Barkwood Drive. Final design of the site would further evaluate stormwater retention needs, including defining the functional requirements and scope and scale of the area. The difference between each action alternative is related to the realignment of Barkwood Drive and potential removal of the Highway 202 off-ramp, both of which would change the size and orientation of this site and what could be interpreted there, as discussed below. Open green spaces adjacent to the visitor contact station would serve as gathering spaces for guided tours and special events. Visitors to the Bus Burning Site would start their experience at the visitor contact station where they would orient themselves to the various areas of the site using interpretive displays and NPS wayfinding signs on the structure's exterior.

Educational and Interpretive Space

All action alternatives include the construction of interpretive elements to provide visitors with more information about the stories of the Freedom Riders and the civil rights legislation that followed, connect with the historical events that occurred there, and offer additional information about the overarching Freedom Rides campaign.

An interpretive panel wall for educational messaging with informational panels about each Freedom Rider involved in the bus burning would be installed. Concrete sidewalks—the "Freedom Walk"—would provide embedded interpretive information such as the key dates for federal legislation important to the Freedom Riders civil rights movement. The location of these interpretive elements at the site would vary among the alternatives.

Each alternative would require an agreement with ALDOT and/or Calhoun County to allow the NPS to construct infrastructure and design elements adjacent to the right-of-way of Highway 202 next to parcel 44 and along Old Birmingham Highway. The specific type of agreement needed would be identified and negotiated in coordination with ALDOT and/or Calhoun County as part of the planning process. In addition, utility permits would be required to extend and alter the existing aboveground electrical lines to be installed underground.

Bus Burning Site Commemoration Space

The action alternatives would commemorate the site where the bus burning occurred and would include an installation of a metal frame depicting the Greyhound bus, including seats for the Freedom Riders and all others who were on the bus that day. The names of the Freedom Riders would be embedded on each seat. A bas-relief sound wall or landscaped berm (depending on the alternative) would be installed on the northern property line (parcel 44) to provide a buffer between the site and Highway 202 and to provide a place for interpretation of the role of the Forsyth & Son Grocery in the Freedom Riders story. An interpretive photo wall along a concrete walkway would display the images of the event captured by Joseph Postiglione⁴. Visitors would be encouraged to experience this area of the monument as their last stop.

Each alternative would require an agreement that would be negotiated with Calhoun County to allow the NPS to construct 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 this MP/EA, 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. All action alternatives would include a dedicated area for this sculpture near where the bus burning occurred. The NPS would seek permission to acquire and display the statue and would seek alternatives if permission were not granted.

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 (along Highway 202) would be installed as part of the action alternatives. Traffic circulation and pedestrian safety measures such as crosswalks and speed tables would also be installed as part of the action alternatives. Lighting installed under the action alternatives would be directed, shielded, sustainable lighting with carefully selected CCT and lumen values. Disturbed areas would 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 would be preserved, as it is likely a witness tree dating to the time of the bus burning. The tree would also provide shade to visitors in the summer months.

Design Principles

Each action alternative is organized around a unifying design theme. The following design principles would apply to all action alternatives and guide the development of the Bus Burning Site.

Cultural Resources

Section 106 of the NHPA (54 USC 306108), and its implementing regulations under 36 CFR Part 800, require all federal agencies to consider the effects of federal actions on historic properties, including historical structures eligible for or listed in the National Register of Historic Places (National Register). The NPS determined that the MP/EA and development of facilities could constitute an undertaking having a potential effect on National Register properties. The action alternatives could affect properties listed in or determined eligible for the National Register as a historic site or district, contributing features of a historic structure, or a cultural landscape.

The Freedom Riders National Monument Cultural Landscape Report (CLR) recommends rehabilitation⁵ as the most appropriate overarching treatment approach for the Bus Burning Site to meet the park’s current and projected future interpretive, functional, and management goals (NPS 2023). The design of the action alternatives would preserve the fabric and orientation of what remains of Old Birmingham Highway and would seek to maintain the remaining limited views from the 1961 landscape. Each action alternative would adhere to several specific recommendations in the CLR, including:

- Identifying the location of the Greyhound bus when it was burned in front of Forsyth & Son Grocery using interpretive elements.
- Revegetating the area with native plants.
- Adding a walkway from the parking area on parcel 38 and across Old Birmingham Highway to the site of the bus burning.
- Removing existing overhead powerlines and reinstalling them underground.
- Developing a visitor contact station and parking area on parcel 38.

Development of the site would follow some of the cultural landscape resource recommendations, as feasible, related to the form and type of development, as well as planting recommendations, in areas within the views of Old Birmingham Highway included in the monument boundary. During design, alternative approaches to screening the site from the highway, such as the use of vegetation, would be considered to minimize potential impacts. The action alternatives would include the construction of features within the cultural landscape, and those impacts are discussed in chapter 3.

⁴The NPS would seek permission to use and display Joseph Postiglione’s images and would seek alternatives if permission were not granted.

⁵The act or process of making possible a compatible use for a property through repair, alterations, and additions while preserving those portions or features that convey its historical, cultural, or architectural values (Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties).

Accessibility

The ABAAS is the implementing standard for the ABA. The ABA provides accessibility requirements for federal buildings and programs, similar to the Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines for the private sector. Compliance with the ABAAS is required for the construction or alteration of federally owned facilities commencing after May 8, 2006. These requirements would be met for the newly constructed facilities proposed and evaluated in this MP/EA. In addition to accommodations for visitors with disabilities, the parking area would have dedicated spaces to accommodate large vehicles, including buses and recreational vehicles.

Sustainability

Sustainable design concepts would be incorporated under the action alternatives. The NPS sustainable design guidelines attempt to balance human needs with the carrying capacity of the surrounding natural and cultural environments. These concepts are designed to minimize environmental impacts, goods and energy imports, and waste generation. New facilities would use environmentally preferable building materials and include features to conserve energy and water. Maintenance would also follow sustainable practices by using green products for cleaning and the principles of integrated pest management.

Management Strategies

Management strategies are specific actions that park management intends to implement to achieve the desired conditions over the life of the plan—in this case 15 to 20 years. The following management strategies would apply to the action alternatives and guide the development of the Bus Burning Site to address the planning issues and opportunities described in chapter 1.

Management strategies to improve visitor experience, specific to each section of the Bus Burning Site, are described below.

- **Connectivity between the Bus Depot and Bus Burning Site:** The NPS would facilitate connectivity between the Greyhound Bus Depot and the Bus Burning Site, the two discontinuous units that comprise the national monument. While people can visit the Bus Burning Site independently, the NPS would encourage visitors to begin their visit at the Bus Depot. The depot would offer interpretive elements and NPS staff to orient visitors to the monument before they visit the Bus Burning Site, which is intended to be a self-guided experience. Visitors would then travel to the Bus Burning Site along the route that the Freedom Riders took. The NPS would work with partners to establish consistent wayfinding along the recommended route. Interpretation would be aimed at telling the connected story of the two sites to create a cohesive visitor experience.
- **Visitor Arrival and Orientation Space:** The visitor contact station would become the initial visitor contact experience at the Bus Burning Site, providing visitors with a “sense of arrival” to the site. The NPS would proactively manage groups to improve visitor circulation and visitor use across the site. To the extent feasible given topography and resource constraints, the NPS would provide new visitor amenities that meet ABAAS specifications. The NPS would develop a paved area south of the new visitor contact station to provide visitor parking for passenger vehicles. The parking lot would be able to accommodate larger vehicles, including buses. The NPS would provide an outdoor green space to accommodate visitors during special events and guided tours to improve the visitor experience.
- **Interpretive Space:** Under alternatives 2 and 4, the “Freedom Plaza” would offer various interpretive spaces and exhibits. Under alternative 3, many of the elements included in the plaza would be more modest and incorporated into the visitor contact station and orientation area. Under alternatives 2 and 4, the NPS would coordinate with ALDOT to provide visitor safety features in the Freedom Plaza Interpretive Space and to maintain separation between visitors and traffic and stormwater features, including installing temporary or permanent barriers and stormwater drainage to accommodate for increased visitation and long-term sustainability. The NPS would also coordinate with ALDOT to determine the proper size and placement of the stormwater drainage system.
- **Bus Burning Site Commemoration Space:** The site where the bus burning occurred would become another visitor experience area. The NPS would proactively provide visitor information regarding busy times and seasons to manage visitor expectations and balance the level of visitation at one time. The NPS would also support efforts to determine the need and feasibility of increasing staff presence on-site to improve visitor capacity throughout the site.

Interpretive Planning – The NPS would develop an interpretive plan outside this MP/EA effort that would outline how the Bus Burning Site would integrate with the overall national monument story, and which part of the story is emphasized at each section of the Bus Burning Site itself, as well as at the bus station. Interpretive planning is a strategic process that, in its implementation, achieves management objectives for interpretation and education by facilitating meaningful connections between visitors and park resources. Interpretive planning comprehensively analyzes all interpretive needs and determines a wide array of interpretive services, facilities, and programs to efficiently and effectively communicate the park’s purpose, significance, and themes. Interpretive planning is a goal-driven process that determines appropriate means to achieve desired visitor experiences and provides opportunities for audiences to form intellectual and emotional connections with significance inherent in the resources while protecting and preserving those resources (NPS 2000a). The Bus Burning Site provides opportunity to interpret the importance of the Freedom Rides within the broader context of the national monument.

The plan would seek to coordinate with the Anniston Civil Rights Trail to add the Bus Burning Site to the Trail and would include wayfinding signage between the Bus Depot and Bus Burning Site.

Additional management strategies to improve interpretation and education, specific to each section of the Bus Burning Site, are described below.

- Visitor Arrival and Orientation Space: Visitors would receive information upon arrival with NPS wayfinding and educational information posted at the visitor contact station. Furthermore, visitors would be provided an opportunity for self-guided interpretation to experience the contemplative and educational landscape. On occasion, the NPS would support opportunities for NPS-led, or partner-led interpretation to increase educational resources for visitors.
- Freedom Plaza Interpretive Space: Under alternatives 2 and 4, the NPS would provide additional interpretive information about the Freedom Rides campaign. The NPS would provide cohesive branding to create a destination for visitors and to improve their historical and interpretive wayfinding at the plaza. Visitors would connect to the site using a sidewalk, which would include interpretive information important to the Freedom Rides movement. The NPS would also install an interpretive panel wall with educational messaging about the Freedom Riders to provide an immersive and informative visitor experience. Some of these elements would also be included in alternative 3, but located at the visitor contact station.
- Bus Burning Site Commemoration Space: The NPS would install a metal frame depicting the Greyhound bus including the seats for each passenger on the bus with the Freedom Riders' names embedded on each seat, to commemorate the site and improve educational interpretation. The NPS would also provide an interpretive photo wall along a walkway to display the images of the event captured by Joseph Postiglione.

Community and Partner Engagement – Partnerships are essential to the success of the Bus Burning Site. To ensure the continued growth and success of the Bus Burning Site, existing partnerships would continue, and new partnerships would emerge as the NPS continues to build relationships with other stakeholders to address the desired conditions and implement management strategies. The NPS would work with local partners to establish a volunteer program at the monument to engage the local community and other stakeholders in long-term stewardship. The NPS would also work with park partners to inform visitors about how they can best experience the monument, including using park publications, outdoor exhibits, maps, social media, and websites.

The NPS would encourage visitation to other sites with civil rights-related history, such as the Civil Rights Trail in Anniston, at the visitor contact station. The NPS would continue to work with park partners, including on implementing this plan. The NPS would coordinate with Calhoun County, and the utility companies, to provide the new electric, water, and septic sewer system infrastructure at the facility.

An agreement between the NPS and ALDOT would be developed to accommodate infrastructure and design elements within the right-of-way of Highway 202. The NPS would work with ALDOT to construct infrastructure, including a wall or berm, as well as a stormwater drainage system, to minimize visual and sound disturbances to the visitor experience. The NPS would follow ALDOT requirements to upgrade and extend the design features for the stormwater drainage system, including providing infill and grading in the area. Additionally, the NPS would work with ALDOT to provide design elements, including interpretive signage, native trees, and other amenities. The NPS would work with community partners to improve the collection of oral histories, photographs, and other personal effects and archives associated with the civil rights movement for inclusion at the site.

An agreement between the NPS and Calhoun County would be developed to provide additional infrastructure and design elements within the right-of-way of Old Birmingham Highway, adjacent to NPS-owned land parcel 44. The NPS would coordinate with Calhoun County on any realignment of Barkwood Drive. The NPS would coordinate with park partners to properly place the “Hank and Janie” bronze sculpture and provide interpretive signage for visitors. The NPS would coordinate a legal transfer or donation of the “Hank and Janie” bronze sculpture from the sculpture's owners. The NPS would continue to coordinate with other philanthropic partners to execute other opportunities and projects to help NPS fulfill the desired conditions for the Bus Burning Site.

Management Strategies Related to Monitoring – The following management strategies and mitigation measures may be implemented if and when monitoring reveals conditions are approaching or exceeding thresholds identified in the Monitoring Appendix (appendix A). These management strategies and mitigation measures are evaluated in this MP/EA.

- Increase proactive management of school groups to disperse use across the site.
- Increase NPS-led or managed interpretive opportunities.
- Provide information on anticipated use conditions to help manage visitor expectations, better inform trip planning, and disperse use between the Bus Burning Site and the Bus Depot.
- Use direct visitor contact, park publications, wayside exhibits, maps, social media, websites, and park partners to inform visitors on how they can best experience the monument. The goal would be to have visitors self-disperse throughout the site and visit during lower-use periods of the day to accommodate similar levels of visitor use but without concentrating that use during peak periods.
- Increase NPS staff presence on-site to help orient and disperse visitors throughout the site.
- Install temporary or permanent physical barriers to help mitigate overcrowding.

Management Strategies Related to Visitor Capacity – The following potential management strategies may be implemented to manage amounts and types of use identified in the Visitor Capacity Appendix (appendix B). These management strategies are evaluated in this MP/EA.

- Encourage visitation to other civil rights-related history sites such as the Civil Rights Trail in Anniston.
- Increase ranger presence to help circulate visitors throughout the area.
- Proactively provide visitor information regarding busy times and seasons to manage visitor expectations and balance visitation at one time.
- Engage with volunteers to support on-site education and interpretation.
- Install a gate at the parking lot to manage vehicular traffic.
- Consider requiring a ticket to enter the Bus Burning Site.

Elements specific to each alternative are discussed below.

ALTERNATIVE 2: EXISTING ROAD ALIGNMENT

Implementation of alternative 2 would develop the three existing NPS parcels without any modification to roadway alignments (Barkwood Drive and the Highway 202 off-ramp) that currently bisect the site and current landscape. All proposed development under alternative 2 would occur within previously disturbed areas.

Design Elements

Under alternative 2, the proposed site plan (figure 4) would include several design elements to support improved interpretation of the Bus Burning Site. The main programmatic elements would be the same as those described under “Elements Common to all Action Alternatives,” except for a few features described below.

Visitor Arrival and Orientation Space (figure 5): Under alternative 2, the visitor contact station would be located on the western portion of parcel 38 on the south side of Old Birmingham Highway, oriented toward the Highway 202 off-ramp. The eastern portion of parcel 38, east of Barkwood Drive, would be used for overflow and oversized vehicle parking and additional open green spaces that could serve as gathering spaces for guided tours and special events. Main visitor parking would be south of the new visitor contact station building.

Freedom Plaza Interpretive Space (figure 6): Alternative 2 would include the construction of a Freedom Plaza with elements to provide visitors with more information about the stories of the Freedom Riders and the civil rights legislation that followed, connect with the historical events that occurred there, and offer additional information about the overarching Freedom Rides campaign. Visitors would be encouraged to experience this area of the monument as their second location after the visitor contact station.

The plaza would include a circular area for a visitor gathering space and a flagpole. Additionally, a large landscaped berm would be installed on the northern property line (parcel 54) to provide a visual and sound buffer between the site and Highway 202. This area would also include an additional interpretive panel wall for educational messaging with informational panels about each Freedom Rider involved in the bus burning. Benches would be placed throughout the interpretive plaza for rest and reflection. This area would be connected to the Bus Burning Site Commemoration Space by a concrete sidewalk—the Freedom Walk—that would provide embedded interpretive information such as the key dates for federal legislation important to the Freedom Riders’ civil rights movement.

Alternative 2 would require an agreement with ALDOT for NPS to construct infrastructure and design elements adjacent to the right-of-way of Highway 202 next to parcel 54. Alternative 2 would not change or modify the existing stormwater culvert on parcel 54. During design, the NPS would ensure that any infill or other alterations to the site would not change the overall capacity to address stormwater runoff.

Bus Burning Site Commemoration Space (figure 7): Under alternative 2, the NPS would install a landscaped earth berm or some other screening as recommended in the CLR, such as vegetation, on the northern property line to provide a visual and sound buffer between Highway 202 and the site.

Visitor Access and Circulation

As previously stated, implementation of alternative 2 would not modify existing roadways. The off-ramp from Highway 202 and Barkwood Drive would remain in their current alignment within the monument boundary. All signage would direct traffic to the primary visitor entrance to the monument area from Old Birmingham Highway; visitors could also access the monument area via the Highway 202 off-ramp.

Visitors to the monument would be encouraged to start their experience at the Greyhound Bus Depot in Anniston where they would be oriented to the park and its history and have the opportunity for a ranger interaction, proceed in private vehicles along Old Birmingham Highway following the route taken by the Freedom Riders, and end at the Bus Burning Site. Pedestrian circulation within the Bus Burning Site would continue to be segmented by the existing roads. Once at the Bus Burning Site, visitors would be encouraged to start their experience at the visitor arrival and orientation space than to the Freedom Plaza, and on ending at the Bus Burning Site Commemoration Space. Visitors would be required to cross a minimum of four crosswalks including the portion of the Highway 202 off-ramp to complete their tour.

Traffic and Safety

Under alternative 2, the current through traffic along the Highway 202 off-ramp, Barkwood Drive, and Old Birmingham Highway would continue and would serve visitors and area residents. ABA-compliant curb cuts, marked crosswalks, pedestrian islands, and signage would be installed to provide visitor safety. Under alternative 2, the NPS would install two speed table crosswalks across Old Birmingham Highway, a pedestrian island with crosswalks across Highway 202 off-ramp, and two additional crosswalks across Barkwood Drive.

Boundary Adjustment

Under alternative 2, no boundary adjustment is recommended.



Figure 4. Alternative 2: Existing Road Alignment

Freedom Riders National Monument Bus Burning Site

Alternative 2: Existing Road Alignment

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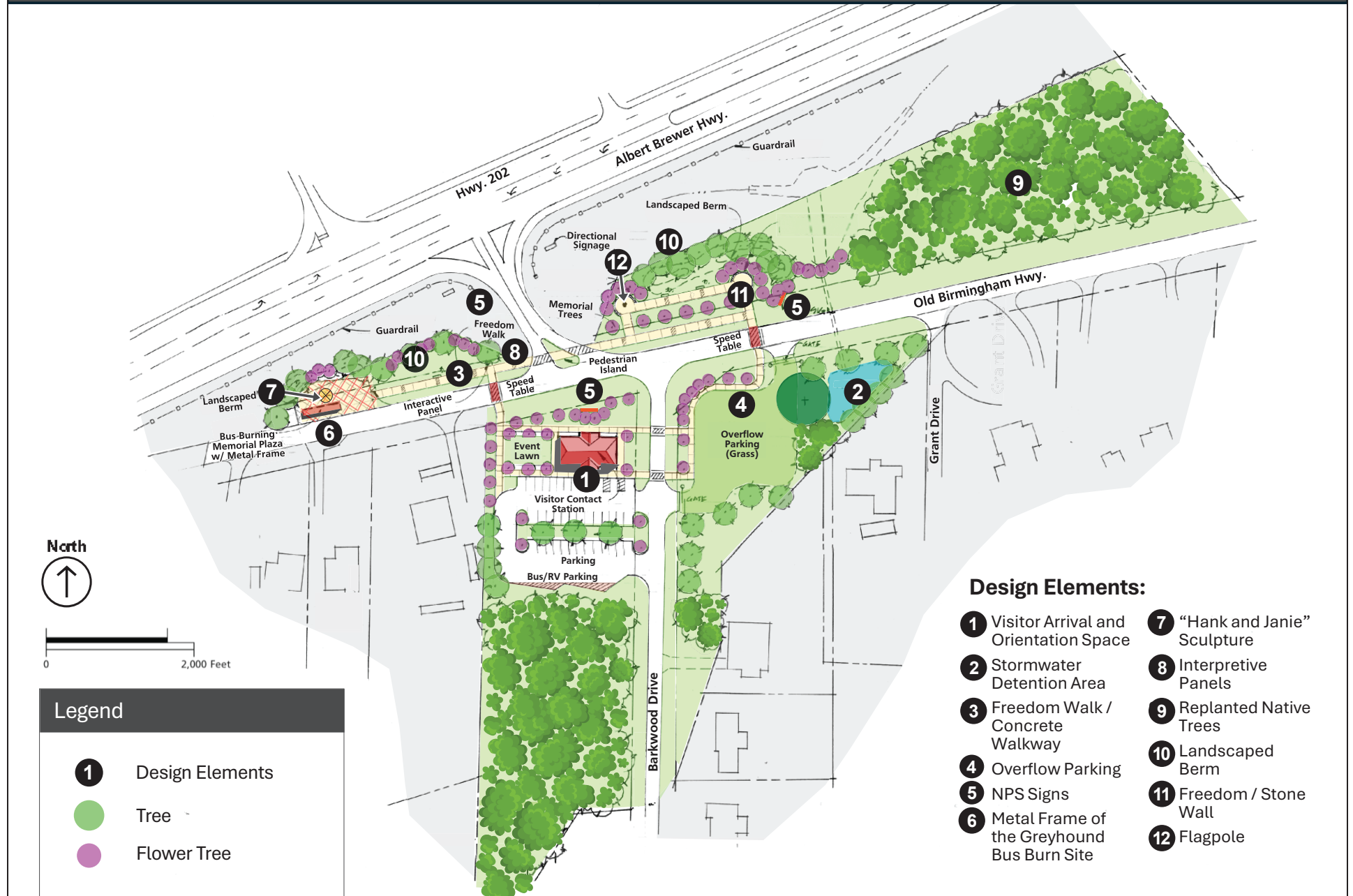


Figure 5. Alternative 2 Visitor Arrival and Orientation Space

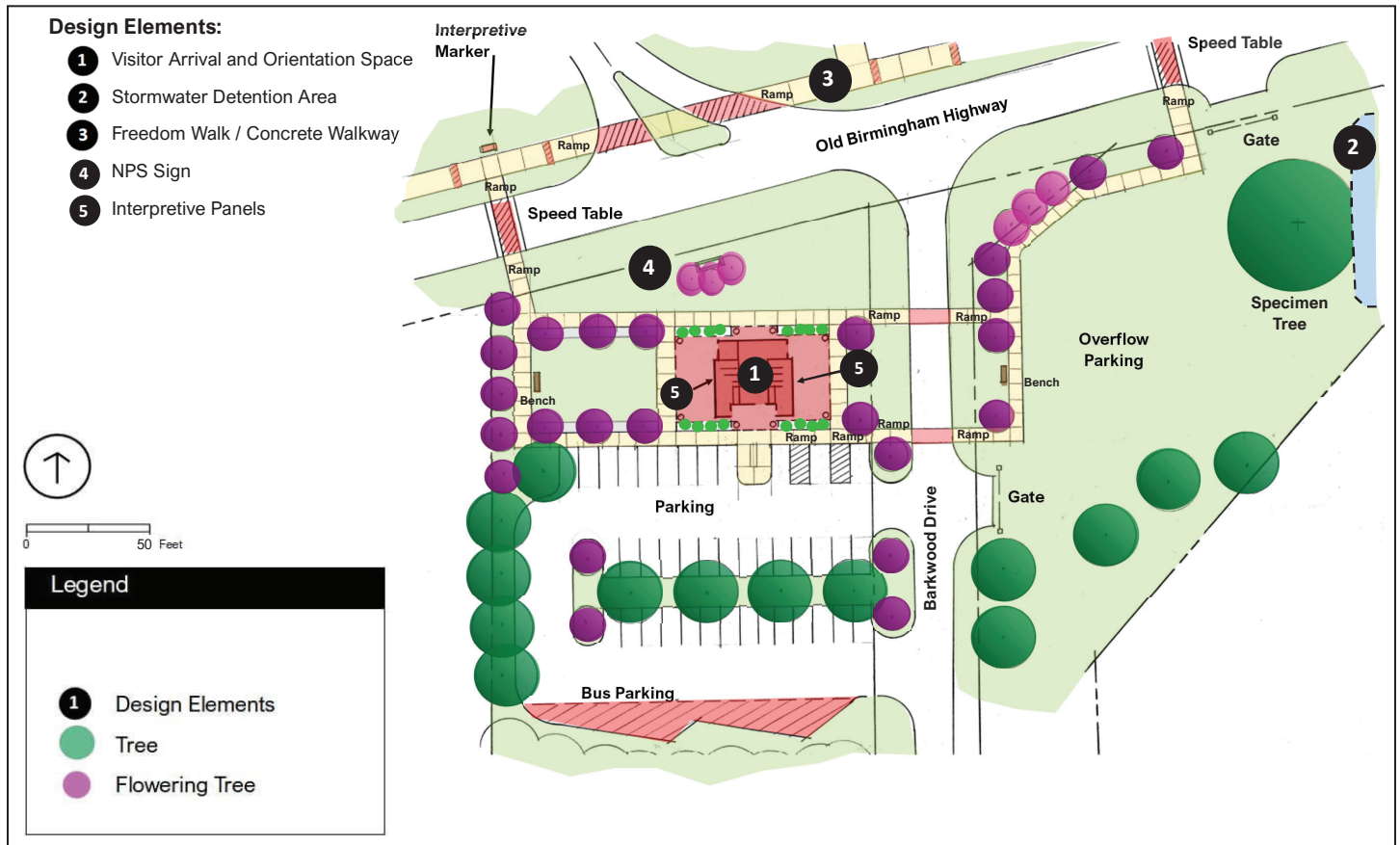
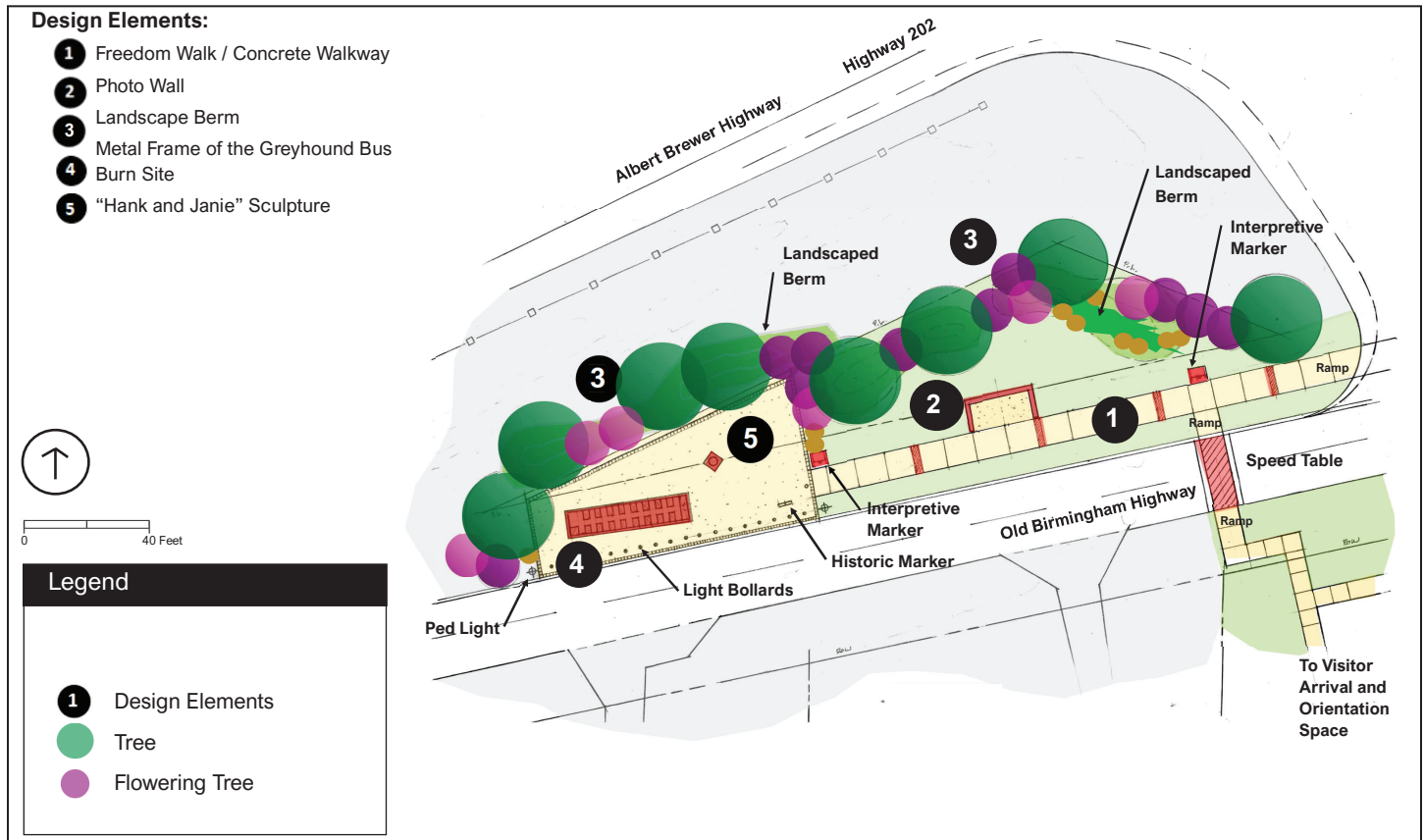


Figure 6. Alternative 2 Freedom Plaza Interpretive Space



Figure 7. Alternative 2 Bus Burning Commemorative Space



ALTERNATIVE 3: NPS PROPOSED ACTION/PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

The intent of alternative 3 is to respect the significance and importance of the Bus Burning Site to the Freedom Rides campaign and the events on May 14, 1961, and to provide a solemn and contemplative environment for visitors to have interpretive opportunities to reflect on the sacrifice and courage of the Freedom Riders and their relevance in the nation’s civil rights movement.

Alternative 3 would realign Barkwood Drive to the east and fully develop the segmented parcel south of Old Birmingham Highway (parcel 38) on either side of Barkwood Drive and the parcel that includes the historical location of the Bus Burning Site (parcel 44) (figure 8). The northeast parcel (parcel 54) would not be developed, and the Highway 202 off-ramp would remain in its current location. Specific design elements, such as the Freedom Plaza, would not be constructed.

The roadways and associated traffic disrupt the site and make it difficult to achieve the desired conditions for visitors to encounter a safe and solemn environment. Implementation of alternative 3 would not consolidate all of the NPS parcels but would reduce the number of crossings required for visitors, addressing some visitor safety concerns.

Design Elements

Under alternative 3, the proposed site plan would include several design elements to support improved interpretation of the Bus Burning Site. The main programmatic elements would be the same as described under “Elements Common to all Action Alternatives.” Other key design elements associated with alternative 3 not previously identified are described below.

Visitor Arrival and Orientation Space: Alternative 3 would include a visitor contact station and interpretation elements (figures 9 and 10), south of Old Birmingham Highway, similar to what is proposed under alternative 2. However, the realignment of Barkwood Drive would allow for increased parking, including oversized parking spaces for tour buses, behind the station for visitors. In addition, open green spaces would be directly adjacent to the visitor contact station, improving connectivity and serving as gathering spaces for guided tours and during special events. Alternative 3 would offer additional interpretive information about the Freedom Rides campaign in the area around the visitor contact station. The NPS would provide cohesive branding to create a destination for visitors and to improve their historical interpretation and wayfinding. Visitors would connect to the site via a sidewalk that would include interpretive information important to the Freedom Rides movement. The NPS would 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.

Freedom Plaza Interpretive Space: No interpretive elements would be developed in this area (parcel 54) under alternative 3. Some of the elements of the Freedom Plaza included in other alternatives would be more modest and located in the visitor contact station area. Shrubs and/or native trees would be planted along the southern edge of parcel 54 to provide a visual barrier from the heavy road traffic along Highway 202 (figure 8). Alternatively, parcel 54 could be revegetated similar to alternative 2, which would be consistent with the recommendations in the CLR.

Bus Burning Site Commemoration Space: Alternative 3 would include the elements discussed under “Elements Common to All Action Alternatives.” In addition, the NPS would construct a bas-relief sound wall, or other type of hardscape screening such as a mural, that would be installed on the northern property line and would include an abstract of Forsyth & Son Grocery story from the time of the burning (figures 11 and 12).

Boundary Adjustment

Under alternative 3, the monument boundary would be revised to include acquisition of adjacent residential parcels of land at the end of Old Birmingham Highway to preserve the sites for future interpretation, educational purposes, and operational needs. The boundary adjustment would allow for expanded preservation of the cultural landscape, eliminate vehicular traffic at the end of Old Birmingham Highway, and increase safety for visitors. By incorporating select parcels into the monument's boundary, the NPS would be able to protect the interpretation of the Bus Burning Site; support resource protections to components of the historic landscape; and improve visitor access, experience, and safety. However, if the monument boundary is not revised, alternative 3 would still be implemented as described.



Figure 8. Alternative 3: NPS Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative

Freedom Riders National Monument Bus Burning Site

Alternative 3: NPS Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative

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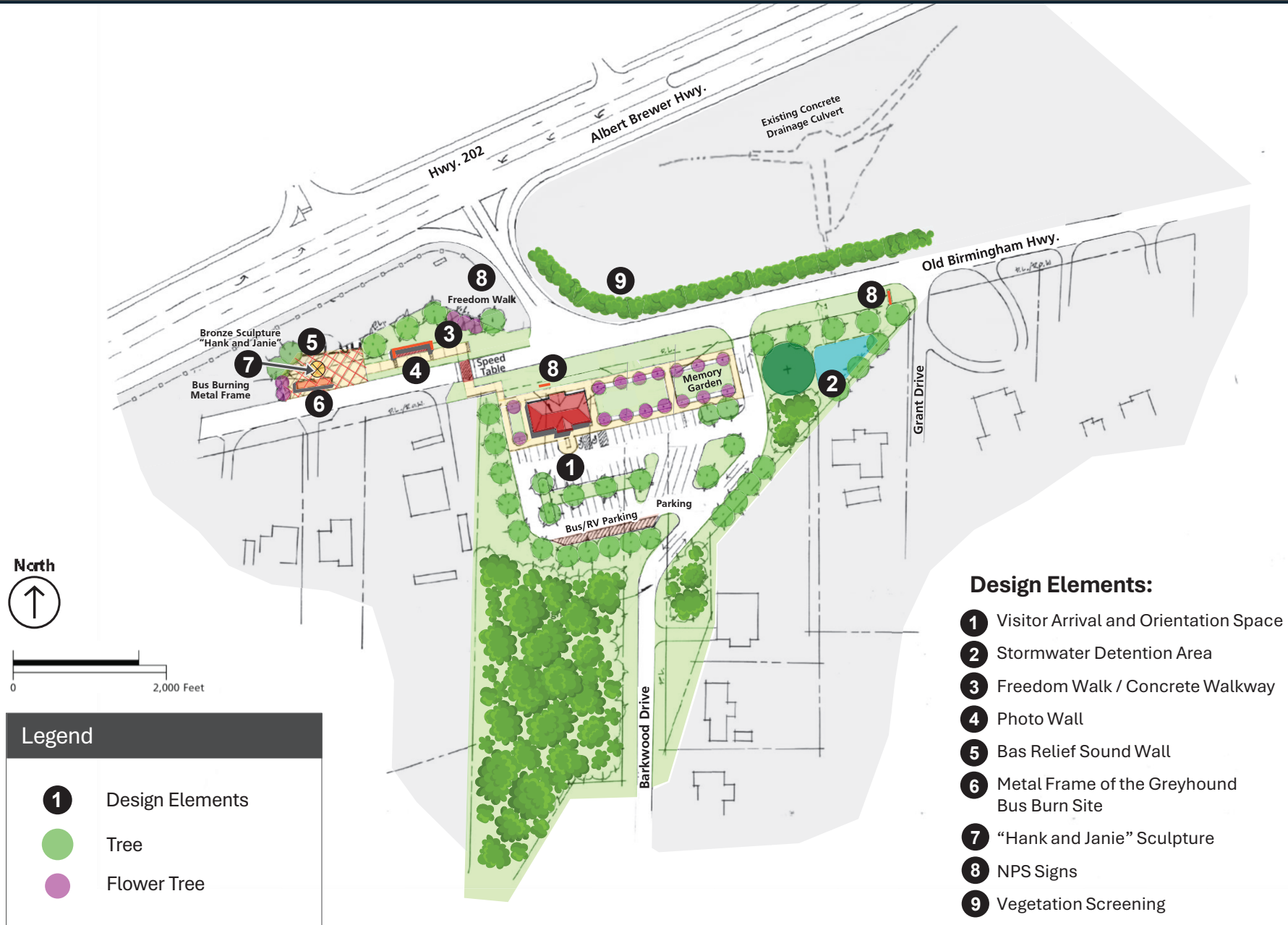
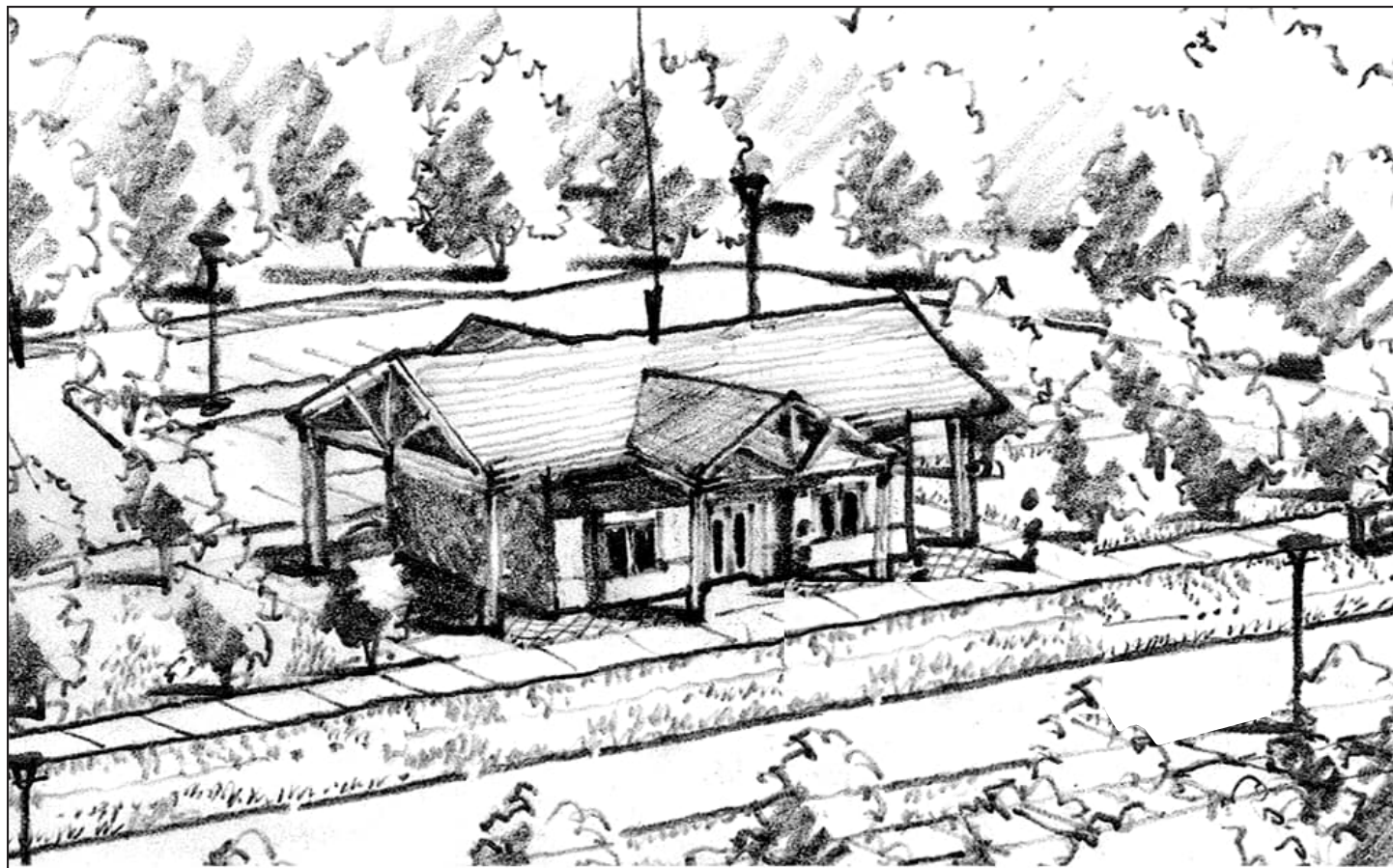


Figure 9. Visitor Arrival and Orientation Space



Figure 10. Rendering of Visitor Contact Station⁶



⁶Detailed drawings of proposed project elements are stylized. Final design standards are not yet created.

Design Elements:

- 1 Freedom Walk / Concrete Walkway
- 2 Photo Wall
- 3 Bas Relief Sound Wall
- 4 Metal Frame of the Greyhound Bus
- 5 Burn Site

Legend

- 1 Design Elements
- Tree
- Flowering Tree

Site Plan Labels:

- Albert Brewer Highway
- Highway 202
- Landscaped Berm
- Interpretive Marker
- Ramp
- Speed Table
- Old Birmingham Highway
- Interpretive Marker
- Historic Marker
- Light Bollards
- Ped Light
- To Visitor Arrival and Orientation Space

Bas Relief Sound Wall

CELEBRITY STONE PLAZA

PHOTO WALL - LARGER BITCHES OF FORTH PHOTOGRAPHIC PHOTOS

SEE POSTER WALL

PHANTOM

PLANTER

SCULPTURE "HALL OF JAILING"

METAL FRAME OF BENCHES W/ ALABAMA MARSHALL SEATS FREEDOM FIGHTERS NAMES IN BLACK LETTERS ON SEATS

OLD BIRMINGHAM HWY

LEFT CURVE

HISTORIC MARKER

LIGHT BOLLARDS

J.H. 2A

ALTERNATIVE 4: SITE UNIFICATION WITH ADDITIONAL BUILDOUT AND RAMP RELOCATION

Implementation of alternative 4 would fully develop the three existing NPS parcels, substantially modifying the roadways that currently bisect the site and current landscape (figure 13). Alternative 4 would unify the monument's three parcels by realigning Barkwood Drive to the east and fully develop the segmented parcel south of Old Birmingham Highway (parcel 38) on either side of Barkwood Drive and the parcel that includes the historical location of the Bus Burning Site (parcel 44). The Highway 202 off-ramp that bisects the two northern parcels (parcel 44 and 54) would be removed, and the northeast parcel (parcel 54) would be developed.

The current alignment of the roadways and associated traffic disrupt the site and make it difficult to achieve the desired conditions for visitors to encounter a safe and solemn environment. Implementation of alternative 4 would consolidate the three parcels and improve visitor flow around the Bus Burning Site; provide a more seamless visitor experience across the monument's proposed interpretive landscape; offer more interpretive and educational space to accommodate more visitation; remove vehicular traffic from the contemplative landscape; and reduce the number of pedestrian road crossings and conflict points.

Design Elements

Under alternative 4, the proposed site plan (figures 13 and 14) would include several design elements to support improved interpretation of the Bus Burning Site. The main programmatic elements would be the same as described under alternative 3 and under "Elements Common to all Action Alternatives," except for a few features as described below.

Visitor Arrival and Orientation Space: Alternative 4 would include a visitor contact station south of Old Birmingham Highway on parcel 38 as proposed under alternative 3 (figure 15). The visitor contact station would be sited to allow for green space on either side for interpretation and gathering for special events. Some interpretive elements presented under alternative 3 at the visitor arrival and orientation space would be more developed and located within the Freedom Plaza as described below.

Freedom Plaza Interpretive Space: Under alternative 4, the NPS would construct a Freedom Plaza that would include elements to provide visitors with more information about the stories of the Freedom Riders and the civil rights legislation that followed, connect with the historical events that occurred there, and offer additional information about the overarching Freedom Rides campaign (figure 16). Visitors would be encouraged to experience this area of the monument as their second location after the visitor orientation space.

The plaza would include a circular area for a visitor gathering space and a flagpole, which could also be used for interpretation (see example described under alternative 2). Additionally, a large "Freedom Wall" would be installed on the northern property line (parcel 54) to provide a visual and sound buffer between the site and Highway 202. The wall would offer signage on the side facing Highway 202 and interpretation on the side facing the Freedom Plaza. The plaza area would also include an additional interpretive wall for educational messaging with informational panels about each Freedom Rider involved in the bus burning. Benches would be placed throughout the interpretive plaza for rest and reflection. The site would also include a "Freedom Grove" of local flowering trees that could serve as another element in telling the Freedom Rider story. This area would be connected to the Bus Burning Site (discussed below) by an inscribed concrete sidewalk that would provide interpretive information such as the key dates for federal legislation important to the Freedom Riders civil rights movement.



Figure 13. Alternative 4: Site Unification with Additional Buildout and Ramp Relocation

Freedom Riders National Monument Bus Burning Site

Alternative 4: Site Unification with Additional Buildout and Ramp Relocation

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



This alternative would require an agreement with ALDOT for the NPS to construct infrastructure and design elements adjacent to the right-of-way of Highway 202 next to parcel 54. Due to the low elevation associated with the existing stormwater drainage system, the area would require approximately 15,000 cubic yards of fill dirt and grading. The stormwater drainage system would be upgraded and extended, following ALDOT requirements, to support the design features. During design, the NPS would ensure that any infill or other alterations to the site would not change the overall capacity to address stormwater runoff.

Bus Burning Site Commemorative Space: Alternative 4 would include the design elements at the Bus Burning Site on parcel 44 as proposed under alternative 3 (figure 17). A bas-relief sound wall, or other type of hardscape screening such as a mural, would be installed on the northern property line and would include an abstract of Forsyth & Son Grocery story from the time of the burning.

Highway 202 Ramp: Under alternative 4, the Highway 202 off-ramp that bisects the two northern parcels (parcel 44 and 54) would be closed or relocated to reduce pedestrian and vehicle conflict points and provide a seamless vehicle-free visitor experience. If the ramp were relocated, future land acquisition could be required as discussed in the “Boundary Adjustment” section.

Additional Features: Alternative 4 would also include additional stormwater water management design features such as box culvert extension to the existing stormwater infrastructure on parcel 54. The remainder of the property would be planted with native vegetation to foster a park-like setting.



Figure 14. Rendering of Bus Burning Site Monument Looking Southwest

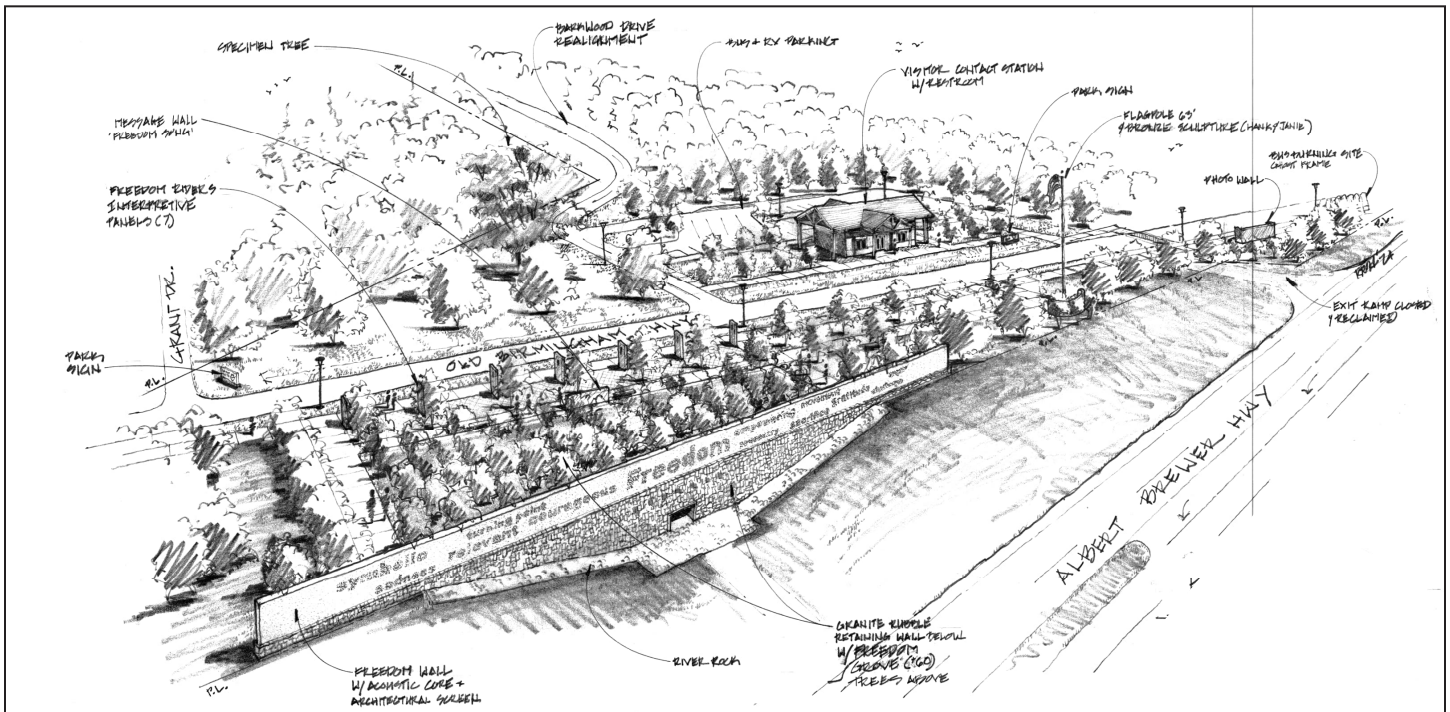


Figure 15. Alternative 4 Visitor Arrival and Orientation Space

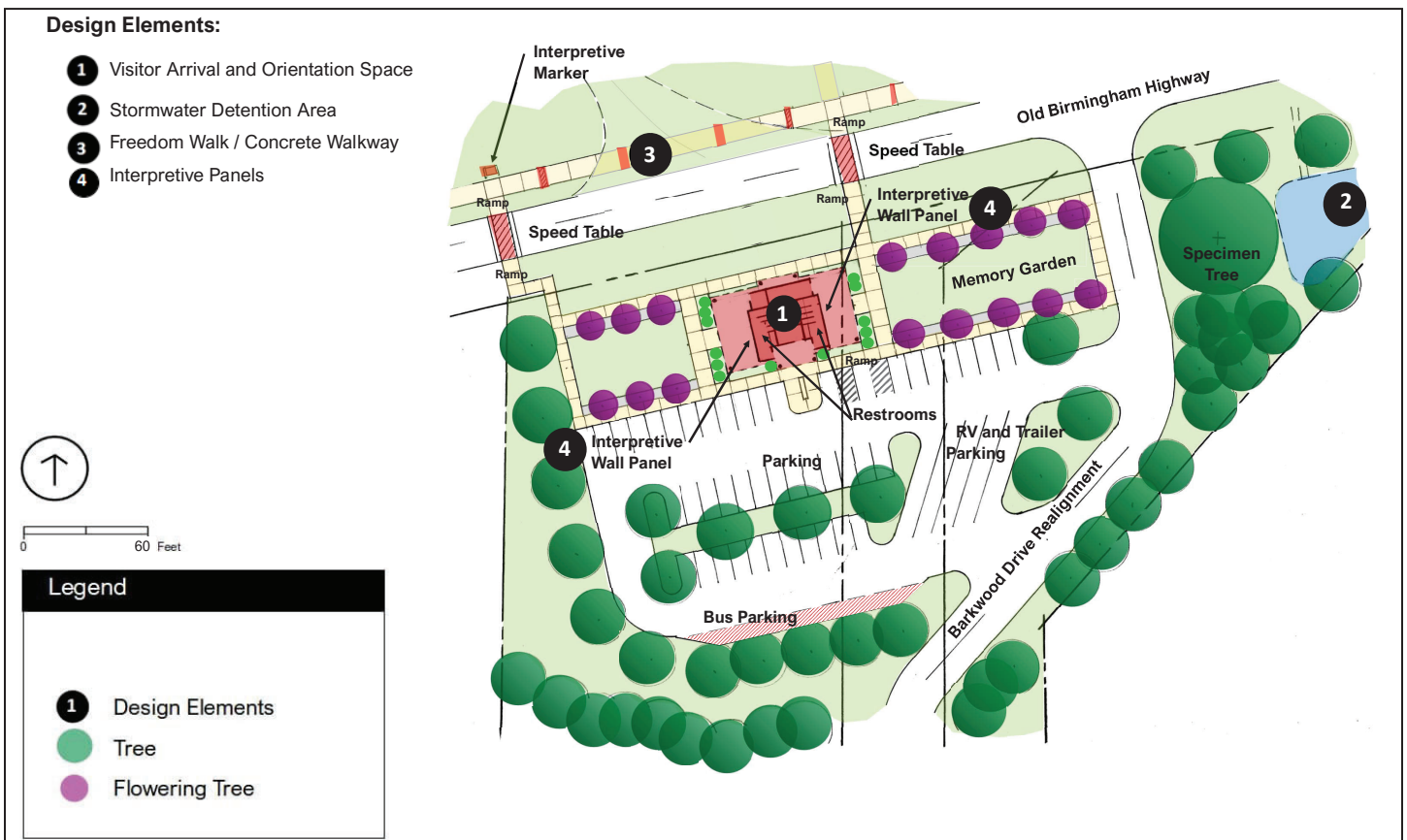


Figure 16. Alternative 4 Freedom Plaza

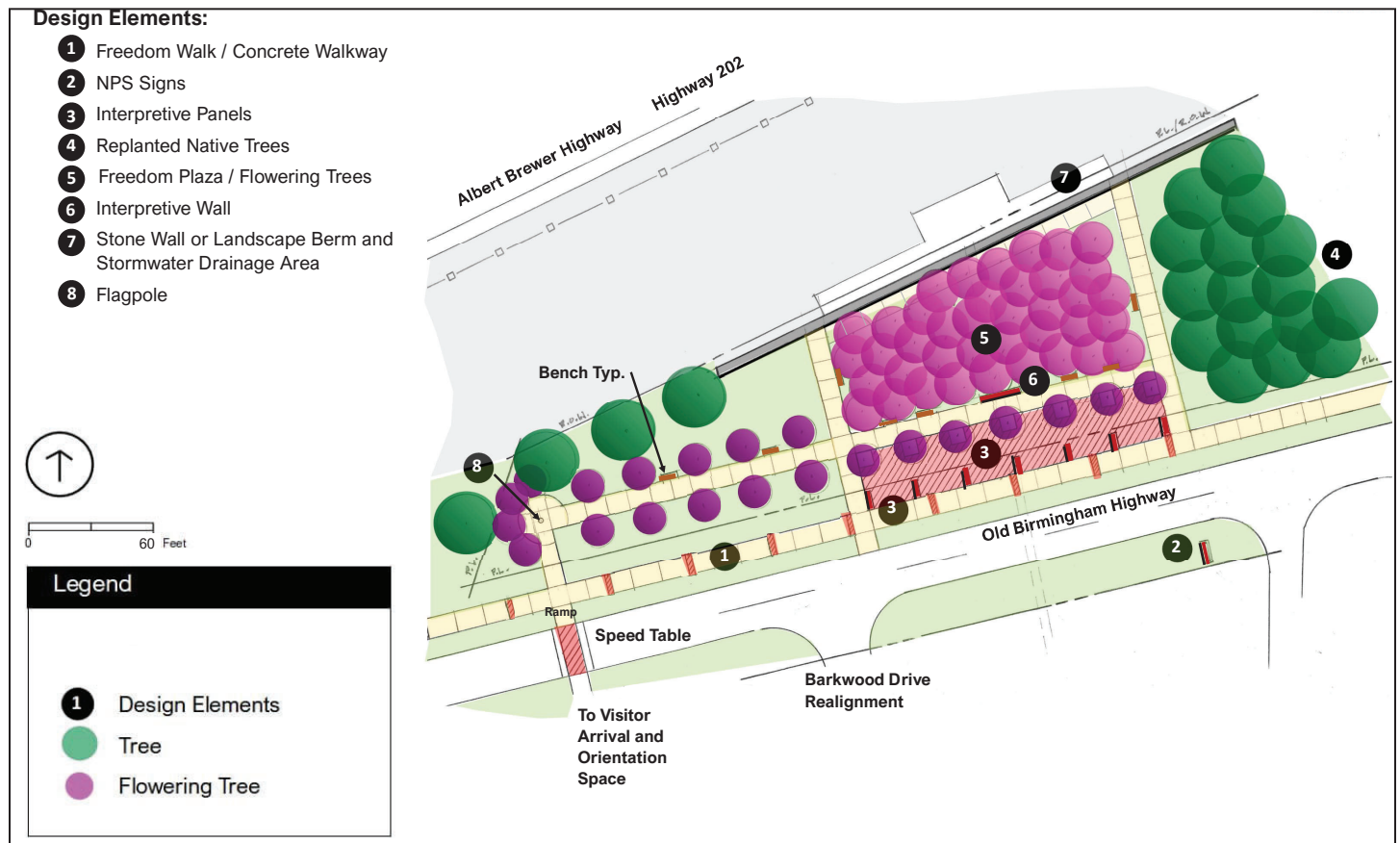
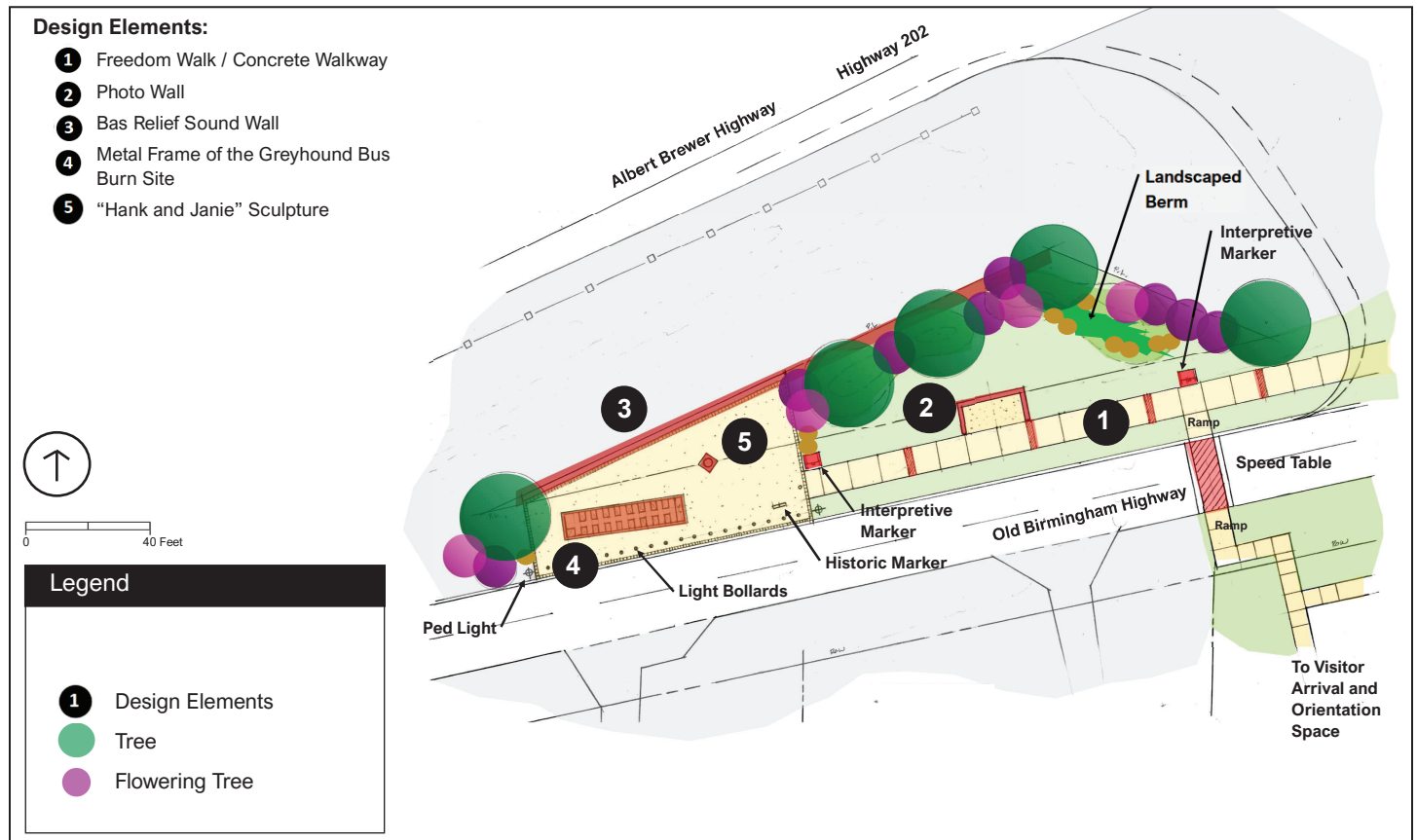


Figure 17. Alternative 4 Bus Burning Site



Visitor Access and Circulation

As previously stated, full site unification under alternative 4 would realign Barkwood Drive along the eastern side of the property boundary to create a direct connection to Old Birmingham Highway. The Highway 202 off-ramp would be closed and removed, or closed and relocated to the east on property (to be acquired) to improve circulation, visitor safety, and access. The orientation of the visitor contact station would run parallel with Old Birmingham Highway with the entrance located along the east side of the property. Relocating the exit ramp and realigning Barkwood Drive would provide a cohesive visitor experience throughout the monument and a safer pedestrian connection between the visitor arrival space, the Bus Burning Site, and the Freedom Plaza components; it would also reduce the number of pedestrian crosswalks. These actions would improve circulation and interpretation throughout the monument area. The primary visitor entrance would be along Old Birmingham Highway; however, access would still be available via Barkwood Drive. Visitors would exit their vehicles at the new parking lot and have access to the visitor contact station and its associated amenities.

Relocating the exit ramp and realigning Barkwood Drive would essentially make most of the monument area a vehicle-free zone west of Barkwood Drive. The only vehicle traffic beyond the visitor contact station would be associated with residences at the end of Old Birmingham Highway.

Boundary Adjustment

Under alternative 4, the monument boundary would be revised, as discussed under alternative 3, to include adjacent parcels at the end of Old Birmingham Highway to preserve the sites for future interpretation, educational purposes, and operational needs. The boundary adjustment would allow for expanded preservation of the cultural landscape, eliminate vehicular traffic at the end of Old Birmingham Highway, and increase safety for visitors. Additional land acquisition may be needed under alternative 4 to accommodate the relocation of the Highway 202 off-ramp should that be necessary. Incorporating a parcel to the east into the monument's boundary, would allow relocation of the Highway 202 off-ramp by approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ mile to align with Bynum Leatherwood Road, perpendicular to Highway 202. The full implementation would remove all vehicle traffic west of the parking lot entrance, making the monument area a pedestrian safe area. Localized traffic patterns within the adjacent residential areas could be altered. Eastbound traffic would gain access to Highway 202 via Old Birmingham Highway and Plunkett Road. Westbound traffic could access Highway 202 via Barkwood Drive to Harrison Drive. This boundary revision would protect the interpretation of the Bus Burning Site; support resource protections to components of the historic landscape; and improve the visitor access, experience, and safety.

Management Strategies

Access

Pedestrian movement would be separated from vehicular traffic to the maximum extent practicable, to ensure visitor safety and limit potential conflicts between vehicle and pedestrian movement.



TABLE 1. COMPARISON OF ALTERNATIVES

PLANNING ELEMENT	ALTERNATIVE 1: NO ACTION	ALTERNATIVE 2: EXISTING ROAD ALIGNMENT	ALTERNATIVE 3: PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE	ALTERNATIVE 4: SITE UNIFICATION WITH ADDITIONAL BUILDOUT AND RAMP RELOCATION
VISITOR USE AND EXPERIENCE	<u>Access:</u> There would be no primary visitor contact station or access point established for the monument at the Bus Burning Site. Site visitation would be limited and similar to the current rate. The site would continue to offer limited access to visitors with mobility issues.	<u>Access:</u> The visitor entrance to the monument would be scattered; visitors could access the site through either the Highway 202 off-ramp, Old Birmingham Highway, or Barkwood Drive. Site visitation would be improved with added infrastructure and features to aid visitors with mobility issues.	<u>Access:</u> Same as described under alternative 2.	<u>Access:</u> The primary visitor entrance to the monument would be established off Old Birmingham Highway. The Highway 202 off-ramp would be removed, and Barkwood Drive would be realigned. Site visitation would be improved with added infrastructure and features to aid visitors with mobility issues.
	<u>Circulation:</u> Site visitation would not be encouraged, and pedestrian and vehicle circulation would continue at its current level. No changes or improvements would be made to the surrounding transportation infrastructure.	<u>Circulation:</u> Pedestrian circulation would be improved with dedicated areas for visitors to experience the monument. Visitors would start their experience at the visitor arrival and orientation space, proceed to the Freedom Plaza, and end at the Bus Burning Site. Vehicle circulation would be similar to existing conditions—visitors and through traffic would continue along the Highway 202 off-ramp, Old Birmingham Highway, and Barkwood Drive.	<u>Circulation:</u> Vehicle circulation would be similar to existing conditions as visitors and through traffic would continue along the Highway 202 off-ramp, Old Birmingham Highway, and Barkwood Drive. Visitors would start their experience at the visitor arrival and orientation space and end at the Bus Burning Site.	<u>Circulation:</u> Removing the Highway 202 off-ramp and realigning Barkwood Drive would improve the circulation around the Bus Burning Site by enhancing visitor experience and improving pedestrian safety by reducing or eliminating the potential vehicle conflict points, or both. Pedestrian circulation within the monument site would be same as described under alternative 2.
	<u>Wayfinding:</u> Site visitation would not be encouraged, and additional wayfinding would not be available.	<u>Wayfinding:</u> Additional NPS markers and branding would be at the Bus Buring Site. The primary national monument marker would be located along Highway 202, with secondary markers along Old Birmingham Highway and at the visitor contact station. The NPS would coordinate with partners to install wayfinding signage between the two monument sites (Bus Depot and Bus Burning Site) and would encourage the addition of the Bus Burning Site to the Anniston Civil Rights Trail.	<u>Wayfinding:</u> Same as described under alternative 2; however, additional NPS wayfinding would not be installed at parcel 54 because the property would remain undeveloped. The existing NPS sign on parcel 54 would be removed.	<u>Wayfinding:</u> Same as described under alternative 2. However, the primary national monument marker would be located along Old Birmingham Highway on parcel 54. The existing NPS sign on parcel 54 would be removed.

TABLE 1. COMPARISON OF ALTERNATIVES

PLANNING ELEMENT	ALTERNATIVE 1: NO ACTION	ALTERNATIVE 2: EXISTING ROAD ALIGNMENT	ALTERNATIVE 3: PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE	ALTERNATIVE 4: SITE UNIFICATION WITH ADDITIONAL BUILDOUT AND RAMP RELOCATION
VISITOR USE AND EXPERIENCE (CONT.)	<u>Security</u> : Current security concerns would continue.	<u>Security</u> : The NPS would install security measures, such as lighting and cameras, and would work with Calhoun County to address safety concerns with new facilities and resources.	<u>Security</u> : Same as described under alternative 2.	<u>Security</u> : Same as described under alternative 2.
VISITOR CENTER AND PARKING	Visitors would continue to visit the site and park in the interim parking lot on parcel 38. No visitor contact station would be constructed.	A visitor contact station and parking lot would be constructed on previously disturbed areas on the western portion of parcel 38. Additional visitor overflow parking (grass) would be added to the eastern portion of parcel 38.	Same as described under alternative 2, except the primary parking area would be larger and the overflow parking area would not be developed. The realignment of Barkwood Drive would allow for the majority of parcel 38 to be used for the new visitor contact station and increase parking to accommodate both small vehicles and large tour buses and recreational vehicles.	Same as described under alternative 3.
VISITOR SAFETY AND TRAFFIC	Improvements to visitors' safety would not occur, and current traffic patterns would continue.	Traffic patterns would be similar to existing conditions as visitor and through traffic would continue along the Highway 202 off-ramp, Old Birmingham Highway, and Barkwood Drive. Safety concerns related to vehicle and pedestrian conflict points would increase because the number of visitors crossing the active roadways would also increase.	Traffic patterns would be altered with the realignment of Barkwood Drive. Changes would improve visitor safety by allowing the NPS to improve vehicle access along Old Birmingham Highway; reducing or eliminating the number of vehicles traveling on the western side of the Highway 202 off-ramp; and reducing the number of pedestrian crosswalks and potential conflict points. Traffic patterns associated with the Highway 202 off-ramp would remain the same as described under alternative 1.	Traffic patterns would be altered with the removal of the Highway 202 off-ramp and realignment of Barkwood Drive. Changes would improve visitor safety by allowing NPS to establish a vehicle-free zone west of Barkwood Drive and to direct vehicle access along Old Birmingham Highway; eliminate vehicular traffic west of Barkwood Drive; and reduce or eliminate the number of pedestrian crosswalks and potential conflict points.

TABLE 1. COMPARISON OF ALTERNATIVES

PLANNING ELEMENT	ALTERNATIVE 1: NO ACTION	ALTERNATIVE 2: EXISTING ROAD ALIGNMENT	ALTERNATIVE 3: PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE	ALTERNATIVE 4: SITE UNIFICATION WITH ADDITIONAL BUILDOUT AND RAMP RELOCATION
CULTURAL LANDSCAPE REHABILITATION	No improvements or changes would be made to the cultural landscape at the Bus Burning Site.	The cultural landscape would be rehabilitated, with features constructed within it to establish a commemorative experience that supports visitor orientation to historical views and promotes interpretation and understanding of the events of 1961.	Same as described under alternative 2.	Same as described under alternative 2.
BOUNDARY ADJUSTMENT	No boundary adjustment would occur to the monument at the Bus Burning Site.	Same as described under alternative 1.	The NPS would seek to expand the boundary of the national monument to include adjacent residential parcels. The boundary revision would protect the interpretation of the Bus Burning Site and support resource protections for components of the historic landscape as well as allow NPS to establish a vehicle-free zone along Old Birmingham Highway west of the Highway 202 off-ramp.	Same as described under alternative 3, as well as an additional property east of parcel 54 if needed to relocate the Highway 202 off-ramp.
MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES	The NPS would provide the current site management level, consisting primarily of ground and lawn maintenance. The NPS would not develop any additional management strategies for the Bus Burning Site.	The NPS would develop and implement specific management strategies for the monument to achieve the desired conditions for the Bus Burning Site, including: • Visitor Use Management • Interpretive Planning • Community and Partner Engagement	Same as described under alternative 2; however, visitor use management would focus on separating pedestrian movement from vehicle traffic to ensure visitor safety, improve access, and limit potential conflicts between vehicle and pedestrian movements by limiting the parcels that are developed, which would reduce the number of crossings needed for visitors.	Same as described under alternatives 2 and 3.

Key: Bus Burning Site = Freedom Riders National Monument Bus Burning Site; NPS = National Park Service

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT DISMISSED

Throughout the planning process, the interdisciplinary team and stakeholder groups considered various ways to maximize opportunities to preserve, interpret, and rehabilitate the Bus Burning Site. Internal scoping discussions and comments gathered during the civic engagement process generated a variety of ideas and options to meet the goals of the site. Alternative options or elements that did not meet the purpose and need were dismissed. The following alternatives were considered in the preliminary planning process but dismissed from further analysis in the MP/EA because they were not considered reasonable alternatives (e.g., they were determined not to be technically or economically feasible).

BARKWOOD REALIGNMENT TO THE WEST

The NPS considered realigning Barkwood Drive to the west to directly align with the existing Highway 202 off-ramp and Old Birmingham Highway intersection. This concept included installing a pedestrian refuge island in the center of the off-ramp for pedestrian crossing and speed controls. However, due to safety concerns as well as the continued disruption and presence of the roadways bisecting the NPS property, this alternative was dismissed.

RESOURCE PROTECTION MEASURES

The NPS places strong emphasis on avoiding, minimizing, and mitigating potentially adverse environmental impacts. Exact measures to be implemented would depend on the final design and approval of plans by relevant agencies and would be determined during future design and construction phases.

Under its Organic Act, the NPS has the authority to develop and direct mitigation for impacts to resources under its jurisdiction. This is in addition to the requirements that may be created by the need to comply with laws and regulations managing resource impacts that are overseen by other agencies. To meet these obligations, the NPS has developed management policies and director's orders that identify the authorities (laws, regulations, and executive orders) directing how impacts and mitigation to resources will be managed, as well as the policies and procedures by which the NPS will comply with these authorities. A full listing of the NPS policies is available from the NPS Office of Policy website at: <https://npspolicy.nps.gov/index.cfm>.



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Potential Impacts and Environmental Issues

3

INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes both the affected environment (the existing conditions of resources, including trends and ongoing and planned actions) and environmental consequences (impacts) of the action alternatives on each resource. The affected environment and environmental consequences if no action is taken are described in each “Current and Expected Future Condition of the [Resource] if No Action is Taken” section.

As a result of information gathered in internal scoping and civic engagement, the NPS determined the following issues should be carried forward for detailed analysis in the EA.

- Visitor Use and Experience
- Cultural Landscape

Analysis of environmental consequences from the no-action alternative and the action alternatives focus on these same issues. This analysis is based on expected changes that each alternative would have on current conditions of the resources and resource trends. It includes beneficial and adverse impacts likely to result from implementing the alternatives considered in this MP/EA. The analysis also assumes NPS guidelines have been applied to protect resources and visitor experiences. Finally, the analysis assumes that prior to the construction of facilities, site-specific permitting and consultation would occur (as appropriate) as further site design and engineering studies are completed.

Additional issues and topics were considered during the development of this plan. See chapter 1 for brief descriptions of the impact topics discussed during the development process but ultimately dismissed from detailed analysis and the accompanying rationale.

ANALYSIS METHODS FOR ESTABLISHING IMPACTS

The analysis of impacts follows Director’s Order 12 procedures (NPS 2011), the NPS *NEPA Handbook* (NPS 2015a), and the NPS *NEPA Handbook Supplemental Guidance: Preparing Focused and Concise Environmental Assessments* (NPS 2015b). The intensity of impacts is assessed in the context of the park’s purpose and significance and any resource-specific context that may be applicable. The methods used to assess impacts vary depending on the resource being considered and are generally based on a review of existing literature, studies, and research performed by park staff; information provided by experts within the NPS, and other agencies and institutions; professional judgment; park staff expertise and insights; and public input, where appropriate.

Area of analysis refers to the geographic setting within which an impact may occur, such as the affected area within the project area. For the purposes of this project, most impacts are local to the immediate project area unless otherwise noted.

TYPE OF IMPACT

The potential impacts of the alternatives are described using the following terminology:

- **Short term:** Impacts that would occur as a result of the construction activities of the action alternatives. Depending on impact topic, impacts may be intermittent (days or weeks) or continuous during construction.
- **Long term:** Impacts that would continue to occur after construction is complete and may continue for years or decades.
- **Beneficial:** A favorable change in the condition or appearance of the resource, or a change that moves the resource toward a desired condition.
- **Adverse:** A change that declines, degrades, and/or moves the resource away from a desired condition or detracts from its appearance or condition.

VISITOR USE AND EXPERIENCE

CURRENT AND EXPECTED FUTURE CONDITIONS OF VISITOR USE AND EXPERIENCE IF NO ACTION IS TAKEN

This section describes the current and expected future conditions of visitor use and experience at the Bus Burning Site under the no-action alternative. Because no foreseeable management actions would be implemented under this alternative, the affected environment and expected impacts are the same and are discussed together. These conditions are presented through the lens of the visitor experience, including opportunities to access and understand the site, engage with its historical significance, and experience a setting that supports reflection and learning. Trends that would impact the site include the development of other civil rights sites in the region, including the Bus Depot, which would provide a larger visitor experience and potentially bring more visitors to the area to see the series of sites.

Figure 18. Freedom Riders Historical Marker at the Bus Burning Site



Visitor Use and Access

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, with an estimated 300 to 600 visitors in 2024 and approximately 1,300 total visitors over the past three years (appendix B). Visitor access is limited to personal vehicles; there are no public transportation connections between the Bus Depot in downtown Anniston and the Bus Burning Site. 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 (figure 18), creating barriers to access, comfort, and safety. Old Birmingham Highway, a narrow dead-end road, offers no turnaround option other than private driveways, which may discourage visitation or lead to confusion. 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.

Not all people navigating the site area are seeking a park experience. Old Birmingham Highway dead ends approximately 600 feet west of the interim parking lot for the Bus Burning Site. Along those 600 feet, the highway provides access to several residences (figure 19). 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 looking to visit the Bus Burning Site. Other than the homes immediately served by Old Birmingham Highway west of the park, alternate routes exist to provide through-traffic options.

Under current conditions, 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 the historical marker, installed by the Alabama Historical Association in 2007, offers limited interpretive information, it is located approximately 100 feet east of the location where the bus burning occurred and 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 (figure 18), 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 Bus Depot 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.

In summary, if no action is taken, visitor use and experience at the Bus Burning Site would likely remain limited in volume, constrained by access and circulation barriers, and lacking in meaningful opportunities for interpretation and reflection. These conditions would continue to fall short of the monument's desired conditions for inspiring public understanding, honoring the sacrifices of the Freedom Riders, and fostering opportunities for commemoration and education.



Figure 19. Roadways and Circulation Adjacent to Bus Burning Site



EFFECTS COMMON TO ALL ACTION ALTERNATIVES: MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Monitoring

Management strategies associated with monitoring would help the NPS 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 would reduce crowding, promote safe circulation, and support a reflective atmosphere. These actions would have long-term, beneficial impacts by preserving opportunities for quiet contemplation and minimizing visitor conflicts or bottlenecks during high-use periods. Some strategies, such as the use of temporary barriers, may result in short-term visual intrusions or changes to site aesthetics, but these impacts would be minor and reversible.

Implementing Visitor Capacity

Management strategies associated with implementing visitor capacity would 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), would help balance visitation across time and space. By encouraging trip planning and promoting use of nearby civil rights sites in Anniston, these strategies could also broaden public understanding while relieving pressure on the Bus Burning Site. These approaches would 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 could introduce modest barriers to spontaneous visitation, such tools would only be used if needed to preserve experiential quality, and their use would be evaluated as part of the park's ongoing monitoring and adaptive management efforts.

EFFECTS OF ALTERNATIVE 2: EXISTING ROAD ALIGNMENT

Under alternative 2, the NPS would develop the three existing NPS parcels without any modification to the alignment of existing roadways. Alternative 2, along with the other action alternatives, would seek to respect the significance and importance of the Bus Burning Site to the Freedom Rides campaign and the events that occurred on May 14, 1961, and to provide a solemn and contemplative environment for visitors to have interpretive opportunities to reflect on the sacrifice and courage of the Freedom Riders and their relevance to the nation's civil rights movement.

Visitor Use and Access

Alternative 2 would create a formalized arrival point at the Bus Burning Site by constructing a visitor contact station and parking area on parcel 38. This development would provide essential amenities, such as restrooms, shaded gathering areas, and interpretive wayfinding signage that support a more welcoming and organized arrival experience. Parking would accommodate both private vehicles and tour buses, helping to expand access for a broader range of visitors. The addition of concrete sidewalks, crosswalks, and pedestrian islands would improve circulation across the site.

However, visitors would still need to cross a minimum of four marked roadways, including the Highway 202 off-ramp, to fully experience the interpretive elements across all three parcels. While speed tables, signage, and pedestrian islands would enhance safety, the segmented nature of the site and the need to cross active roadways would remain a notable barrier to seamless circulation. These crossings could be confusing or uninviting, especially for visitors with mobility concerns or those seeking a more immersive, continuous site experience. Overall, access would improve substantially in terms of infrastructure, but circulation would remain somewhat constrained due to the unaltered road alignment.

Because alternative 2 would not change the road alignments through the park, impacts on people using the roads for access to the Highway 202 bypass or to residences south of Old Birmingham Highway would be minimal. However, some of the safety features, including traffic islands and crosswalks would present minor disruptions to current traffic flow, as would the presence of pedestrians, who are rare on the site currently. During periods of construction, traffic could be temporarily slowed or redirected.

Visitor Experience and Site Conditions

The proposed improvements under alternative 2 would significantly enhance the overall quality of the visitor experience. A new visitor contact station would establish a clear sense of arrival and provide opportunities for orientation, gathering, and reflection. The visual and sensory quality of the site would be improved through removal of overhead utilities, revegetation with native plants, and installation of security lighting and cameras, all of which would help create a more welcoming and well-maintained environment.

Despite these improvements, the proximity of active roadways would continue to disrupt the contemplative atmosphere. The segmented site layout and the presence of traffic noise and movement, particularly near the Highway 202 off-ramp, would detract from the site's solemnity and may hinder deep emotional engagement for some visitors. The required road crossings could also create a feeling of disjointedness that interferes with the narrative and experiential flow of the visit. While these conditions would be mitigated by thoughtful design elements such as berms, decorative paving, and quiet gathering areas, they would not be fully resolved under this alternative.

Interpretation, Education, and Understanding of Significance

Alternative 2 would result in major beneficial impacts on interpretive and educational opportunities at the Bus Burning Site. A Freedom Plaza would be constructed to house new interpretive elements that tell the story of the Freedom Riders, provide context about the broader civil rights movement, and link the site to the Greyhound Bus Depot in Anniston. Visitors would encounter educational panels, embedded sidewalk interpretation, and QR codes connected to digital content that deepens their understanding of the events of May 14, 1961.

A commemorative installation representing the Greyhound bus, along with an interpretive photo wall and the "Hank and Janie" sculpture, would offer immersive and emotionally resonant storytelling. These features would allow visitors to engage intellectually and emotionally with the site's significance, creating new opportunities for reflection, connection, and learning. Although the need to cross roadways may interrupt the sequence of storytelling, the interpretive infrastructure itself would represent a substantial and lasting improvement over current conditions.

Conclusion: Effects of Alternative 2 on Visitor Use and Experience

In summary, alternative 2 would improve access, introduce vital visitor infrastructure, and significantly expand interpretive and commemorative opportunities at the Bus Burning Site. However, the continued fragmentation of the site and the need for multiple road crossings would limit experiential continuity and detract from the contemplative atmosphere. While the alternative would represent a substantial improvement over current conditions, it would still fall short of fully realizing the monument's desired conditions for a unified, immersive visitor experience that supports safe movement, quiet reflection, and meaningful engagement with the Freedom Riders' legacy.



EFFECTS OF ALTERNATIVE 3: NPS PROPOSED ACTION/PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

Under alternative 3, the NPS would realign Barkwood Drive to the east and fully develop the segmented parcel south of Old Birmingham Highway (parcel 38) on either side of Barkwood Drive and the parcel that includes the historical location of the Bus Burning Site (parcel 44). The northeast parcel (parcel 54) would not be developed but would be planted with native vegetation, and the Highway 202 off-ramp would remain in its current location. Alternative 3, along with the other action alternatives, would seek to respect the significance and importance of the Bus Burning Site to the Freedom Rides campaign and the events that occurred on May 14, 1961, and to provide a solemn and contemplative environment for visitors to have interpretive opportunities to reflect on the sacrifice and courage of the Freedom Riders and their relevance to the nation's civil rights movement.

Visitor Use and Access

Alternative 3 would substantially improve visitor access and circulation across the Bus Burning Site. By realigning Barkwood Drive to the east and concentrating development within two primary parcels (38 and 44), this alternative would reduce the number of required pedestrian crossings and eliminate some of the most hazardous circulation points, including those associated with the Highway 202 off-ramp. The result would be a more intuitive and less fragmented layout that simplifies visitor movement across the site.

The visitor contact station, located on the southern side of Old Birmingham Highway, would feature restrooms, interpretive panels, and shaded gathering areas, supported by an expanded parking area that would accommodate oversized vehicles. Clearly marked crosswalks, speed tables, and accessible walkways would connect the visitor contact station to the commemorative space across the road. Together, these elements would produce long-term, beneficial impacts on visitor access, comfort, and safety, while reinforcing a more cohesive and manageable flow of movement.

Alternative 3 would minimally affect local traffic navigating the Bus Burning Site to reach the Highway 202 bypass or residences south of Old Birmingham Highway. The highway ramp would remain. Barkwood Drive would be reoriented but would continue to serve the neighborhood to the south. There would be temporary disruptions and detours on Barkwood Drive during construction to reroute its connection to Old Birmingham Highway. Ultimately, realization of the recommended boundary adjustment and acquisition of lots at the western terminus of Old Birmingham Highway would eliminate the need for traffic to travel beyond the entrance to the site on Old Birmingham Highway.

Visitor Experience and Site Conditions

The overall visitor experience would be greatly enhanced under alternative 3. A realigned roadway and simplified circulation pattern would allow visitors to engage with the site in a more immersive and continuous manner. The visitor contact station would 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.

The design would promote a contemplative, park-like setting through the use of native landscaping, pedestrian-friendly surfaces, and visual buffers such as a bas-relief sound wall along Highway 202. These features would help mitigate the disruptive influence of nearby traffic and support the solemn and reflective atmosphere intended for the site. Although some noise and visual intrusion from Highway 202 would persist, the design features would effectively soften these impacts. Overall, visitor experience under alternative 3 would benefit from improved spatial coherence, reduced circulation stress, and a more thoughtfully developed physical setting.

Interpretation, Education, and Understanding of Significance

Alternative 3 would offer robust opportunities for interpretation and education, though more modest than those in alternatives 2 and 4. Interpretive elements would be integrated primarily 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 would encounter educational panels and QR codes connected to digital interpretive content. The commemorative space would include the symbolic metal bus frame with embedded names of the Riders, a photo wall, and the "Hank and Janie" sculpture—key features that ground the site in its historical significance.

Although this alternative would not develop the Freedom Plaza on parcel 54, interpretive opportunities would remain strong due to the focused investment in fewer, better-connected spaces. By reducing the need to navigate multiple road crossings, alternative 3 would allow visitors to follow a more coherent narrative arc from arrival to commemoration. The result would be a powerful, focused interpretive experience that deepens understanding of the site's importance while minimizing distractions or logistical barriers.

Conclusion: Effects of Alternative 3 on Visitor Use and Experience

In summary, alternative 3 would provide a more unified, accessible, and safer experience than alternative 2 by reducing internal road crossings and concentrating interpretation and circulation within two well-connected parcels. The visitor experience would be substantially enhanced through site improvements, safety features, and emotionally resonant commemorative elements. Although interpretive infrastructure would be somewhat more modest compared to other action alternatives, this alternative would achieve a strong balance between operational feasibility and experiential quality, advancing the monument's desired conditions for accessibility, reflection, and public understanding of the Freedom Riders' story.

EFFECTS OF ALTERNATIVE 4: SITE UNIFICATION WITH ADDITIONAL BUILDOUT AND RAMP RELOCATION

Under alternative 4, the NPS would fully develop the three existing NPS parcels with substantial modification to the roadways that currently bisect the site and current landscape. Alternative 4 would unify the monument's three parcels by realigning Barkwood Drive to the east and would fully develop the segmented parcel south of Old Birmingham Highway (parcel 38) on either side of Barkwood Drive and the parcel that includes the historical location of the Bus Burning Site (parcel 44). The Highway 202 off-ramp that bisects the two northern parcels (parcel 44 and 54) would be removed, and the northeast parcel (parcel 54) would be developed.

Alternative 4, like the other action alternatives, would respect the significance and importance of the Bus Burning Site to the Freedom Rides campaign and the events that occurred on May 14, 1961, and provide a solemn and contemplative environment for visitors to have interpretive opportunities to reflect on the sacrifice and courage of the Freedom Riders and their relevance to the nation's civil rights movement.

Visitor Use and Access

Alternative 4 would provide the most cohesive and intuitive visitor circulation experience by fully unifying the monument's three NPS parcels. Through the realignment of Barkwood Drive and the relocation of the Highway 202 off-ramp, this alternative would eliminate all internal road crossings within the visitor experience area. Visitors would move seamlessly between the arrival area, interpretive plaza, and commemorative site without encountering vehicular traffic, resulting in long-term, beneficial impacts on access, safety, and experiential continuity.

The expanded visitor contact station and parking area would accommodate a wider range of visitors, including those arriving by tour bus, and would be supported by accessible sidewalks, native landscaping, and formal gathering spaces. Wayfinding and orientation features would help visitors navigate the site independently, and the elimination of circulation barriers would allow for greater flexibility in how visitors explore the site, enhancing accessibility for all ages and abilities.

Alternative 4 presents the most expansive adjustments to the surface roads that crisscross the site. Like alternative 3, Barkwood Drive would be reoriented, and traffic detours would occur temporarily during construction. Under this alternative, the Highway 202 access ramp would be either relocated to the east or eliminated, forcing traffic on Old Birmingham Road to access the highway up to a mile east via Plunkett Road. It is possible, with an expanded boundary adjustment and land acquisition that this impact to local traffic patterns could be reduced by relocating the ramp via an extension of Highway 109 to the south to meet Old Birmingham Highway. In either case, traffic moving in either direction on Old Birmingham Road would still be able to access Highway 202, either via a relocated ramp or via Plunkett Road (eastbound traffic) or via Barkwood Drive to Harrison Drive (westbound traffic). Ultimately, like in alternative 3 but to a greater extent, realization of the recommended boundary adjustments and acquisition of lots at the western terminus of Old Birmingham Highway and closure of the Highway 202 off-ramp would eliminate the need for traffic to travel beyond the entrance to the Bus Burning Site.

Visitor Experience and Site Conditions

Under alternative 4, the visitor experience would be the most immersive and contemplative of all the alternatives. The removal of the Highway 202 off-ramp and realignment of Barkwood Drive would allow for a larger, unified commemorative landscape, shielded from traffic noise and visual distractions. The site would more closely resemble a cohesive memorial park, with an atmosphere designed to support reflection, learning, and emotional connection.

Visitors would begin their experience at the expanded visitor contact station and move through the Freedom Plaza and commemorative space without interruption. The addition of visual and sound buffers, such as the Freedom Wall and new native vegetation, would further support a quiet, respectful setting. Open green spaces and thoughtful site design would provide room for both individual reflection and group events. While temporary construction-related disruptions would occur during implementation, the long-term outcome would be a significantly enhanced setting for experiencing the monument's themes of courage and sacrifice.

Interpretation, Education, and Understanding of Significance

Alternative 4 would result in the most comprehensive interpretive and educational experience for visitors. The development of the Freedom Plaza would allow for a rich layering of interpretive content, including stories of the Freedom Riders, the broader civil rights movement, and the aftermath of the 1961 bus burning. Interpretive features, such as the Freedom Wall, interpretive panels, embedded timeline elements, and QR codes, would enable self-guided exploration supported by immersive storytelling.

At the commemorative site, the symbolic bus frame, interpretive photo wall, and "Hank and Janie" sculpture would serve as emotional anchors, helping visitors connect personally with the events of May 14, 1961. The seamless integration of interpretive features across a unified site would ensure a clear and powerful narrative arc from arrival to reflection. This experience would be accessible, intellectually engaging, and emotionally resonant, making alternative 4 the most effective at achieving the monument's interpretive goals.

Conclusion: Effects of Alternative 4 on Visitor Use and Experience

In summary, alternative 4 would offer the most immersive, cohesive, and contemplative visitor experience by fully unifying the site and eliminating internal vehicular circulation. The alternative would achieve the monument's desired conditions to the greatest extent, fostering deep reflection, emotional engagement, and educational understanding through a fully integrated commemorative landscape. While this alternative would require the most extensive construction and coordination, the long-term outcome would be a nationally significant site that honors the Freedom Riders through a safe, accessible, and powerful visitor experience.

REASONABLY FORESEEABLE FUTURE IMPACTS

Alternative 1: No Action/Current Management

The impacts of reasonably foreseeable actions under alternative 1 are described above in the "Current and Expected Future Condition of Visitor Use and Experience if No Action is Taken" section. As more visitation to the area occurs from the development of other civil rights sites, including the Bus Depot in Anniston, there would be long-term, beneficial impacts to the overall region, which the Bus Burning Site would not contribute as minimal visitor experience would be available at that site.

Alternative 2: Existing Road Alignment

The development of other civil rights sites in the area, including the development of the Bus Depot in Anniston, would result in long-term, beneficial impacts to visitor use and experience, as visitors to the region would have the opportunity to experience multiple aspects of the civil rights story. Alternative 2 would affect visitor use and experience by providing design and interpretive elements that would create a solemn, contemplative, and educational experience and by including improvements to safety, parking, and traffic circulation. Reasonably foreseeable impacts to visitor use and experience under alternative 2 would primarily be beneficial because actions would create visitor experiences where there are none and add to the overall regional visitor experience.

Alternative 3: NPS Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative

The impact of other actions in the project area would be the same as described under alternative 2. Reasonably foreseeable impacts to visitor use and experience under alternative 3 would primarily be beneficial since actions would create visitor experiences where there are none and add to the overall regional visitor experience.

Alternative 4: Site Unification with Additional Buildout and Ramp Relocation

The impact of other actions in the project area would be the same as described under alternative 2. Alternative 4 would impact visitor use and experience by providing design and interpretive elements that would create a solemn, contemplative, and educational experience; consolidating the three parcels and improving visitor flow around the Bus Burning Site; providing a more seamless experience across the monument's proposed interpretive landscape; removing vehicular traffic from the contemplative landscape; and reducing the number of pedestrian road crossings and conflict points. Reasonably foreseeable impacts to visitor use and experience under alternative 4 would primarily be beneficial because actions would create visitor experiences where there are none, but some people wishing to access the Highway 202 bypass via the current ramp configuration could be inconvenienced. Similar to alternatives 2 and 3, the actions under alternative 4 would create visitor experiences where there are none and add to the overall regional visitor experience.



CONCLUSION

Under the no-action alternative (alternative 1), visitor use and experience at the Bus Burning Site would remain limited in volume and constrained by access, safety, and interpretive challenges. The absence of visitor infrastructure, formal arrival points, and meaningful interpretation would continue to fall short of the monument's goals for fostering public understanding, reflection, and commemoration.

Each of the three action alternatives would result in long-term, beneficial impacts on visitor use and experience by introducing new interpretive features, improving access, and enhancing opportunities for education and contemplation. While all would provide key infrastructure and storytelling elements, the quality and coherence of the visitor experience would vary based on site layout, circulation, and design.

Alternative 2 would introduce critical improvements, including a visitor contact station and commemorative spaces across all three parcels. However, it would retain the existing roadway configuration, requiring multiple pedestrian crossings, including one across the Highway 202 off-ramp, which would present ongoing safety concerns and detract from experiential continuity. This alternative would improve conditions and present the fewest disruptions to existing traffic patterns, but could fall short of providing a fully unified or immersive visitor experience.

Alternative 3, the NPS preferred alternative, would reduce the number of road crossings by limiting development to parcels 38 and 44 and realigning Barkwood Drive. Any impacts on local traffic patterns would be minor and temporary under this alternative. Alternative 3 would improve circulation and safety while concentrating interpretive and commemorative features into a more cohesive and accessible layout. Although slightly more modest in interpretive scope than alternatives 2 or 4, this alternative would strike an effective balance between feasibility and visitor experience, offering a well-connected and emotionally resonant engagement with the site.

Alternative 4 would provide the most seamless and contemplative visitor experience by unifying all three parcels through the realignment of Barkwood Drive and relocation of the Highway 202 off-ramp. It would eliminate internal vehicular traffic and pedestrian road crossings within the visitor use area, allowing for a fully immersive and accessible commemorative landscape. While this alternative would require the most complex construction and alter local traffic patterns, it would achieve the monument's desired conditions to the greatest degree.

All three action alternatives would result in temporary, short-term, adverse impacts during construction, including noise, visual disturbance, and restricted access. These impacts would be limited in duration and outweighed by the long-term, beneficial outcomes across all action alternatives.

Implementation of monitoring and visitor capacity strategies would result in long-term, beneficial impacts on visitor use and experience by supporting the park's ability to manage use proactively, respond to changing conditions, and sustain the contemplative and commemorative qualities central to the monument's purpose.



CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

Section 106 of the NHPA of 1966, as amended (54 USC 306108 et seq.), and its implementing regulations under 36 CFR Part 800 require all federal agencies to consider effects of federal actions on historic properties, which are properties eligible for or listed in the National Register. The NPS determined that the MP/EA and development of facilities could constitute an undertaking having a potential effect on historic properties.

Cultural resources include a variety of property types such as historic buildings, structures, objects, archeological sites, and ethnographic resources that can also be grouped in broader districts or landscapes that have significant associations with prehistory or history. The significance of cultural resources is assessed by their eligibility for inclusion in the National Register. To be eligible for the National Register, properties must possess integrity and meet at least one of four criteria. The property:

- A. Is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
- B. Is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or
- C. Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
- D. Has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Integrity is the ability of a property to convey its significance by retaining several or most of the seven aspects of integrity: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. The NPS categorizes cultural resources as archeological resources, cultural landscapes, ethnographic resources, historic and prehistoric structures, and museum collections. Archeological resources, ethnographic resources, and museum collections have been dismissed from consideration in this analysis; the remaining resources are described below.

The Bus Burning Site is considered a historic cultural landscape, a status confirmed by Alabama SHPO with consensus determination (January 2024) on the findings of the FRRI Cultural Landscape Inventory. The primary contributing factor of this designation is the site's strong association with the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, namely the Freedom Rides of the 1960s and subsequent bus burning at this location in 1961.

CURRENT AND FUTURE EXPECTED CONDITION OF THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE IF NO ACTION IS TAKEN

This section describes current and expected future conditions related to cultural resources at the Bus Burning Site. If no action is taken, cultural resources would remain unchanged. The descriptions below describe cultural resources under current management. Because no foreseeable actions are expected to affect these conditions, the affected environment and impacts of the no-action alternative are the same and are discussed only once.



CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

The NPS defines a cultural landscape as “a geographic area, including both cultural and natural resources and the wildlife or domestic animals therein, associated with a historic event, activity, or person or exhibiting other cultural and aesthetic values” (NPS 2025). The Bus Burning Site retains integrity, although it is impacted by the construction of highway 202 and related demolition of the Forsyth & Son Grocery and Residence (NPS 2023).

As described in Chapter 1, the Bus Burning Site is one of two sites that make up Freedom Riders National Monument. The site is about 6 miles west of the Bus Depot and outside the city limits. It comprises three parcels totaling 5.86 acres that cluster around the intersection of Old Birmingham Highway with Highway 202, Anniston’s western bypass. The site where the Greyhound bus was burned was being used as a commercial grocery store and related residence in 1961. The large lot immediately across (south of) Old Birmingham Highway from the burning site was used to service well pump engines; most of the other lots were in residential use in 1961. At the Bus Burning Site, only a sliver of the grocery store property and portions of the neighboring lots remain.

Work to create Anniston’s western bypass in the 1970s and 2000s meant the demolition or alteration of most of the character-defining features on the three parcels that make up the Bus Burning Site today. Highway construction and associated demolition has left the Bus Burning Site lacking integrity of design, materials, and workmanship; however, the site has integrity of location because it contains the site of the bus burning, and integrity of setting because Old Birmingham Highway in front of the site and most of the houses and commercial buildings present in 1961 south of the highway are extant. Because of these surviving elements, which were documented in photographs during the bus burning event, the site has integrity of feeling. Further, the section of Old Birmingham Highway and the extant historical residences to the south convey the association of the site with the bus burning to an observer through comparison of historical photographs to existing conditions. Therefore, the Bus Burning Site has integrity of association. When Freedom Riders National Monument was designated a unit of the NPS in 2017, Freedom Riders National Monument was administratively listed in the National Register of Historic Places, including both the Bus Burning Site and the Bus Depot. The FRRI listing does not yet possess a National Register number or a completed nomination form, but the Cultural Landscape Inventory contains documentation that could be used as a source to create that nomination. The CLI regards the Bus Burning Site as significant and retaining integrity for the reasons stated above. Alabama SHPO reviewed and provided consensus determination on CLI on January 4, 2024.

Barkwood Drive, the road that currently bisects parcel 38, was not present at the time of the bus burning in 1961. Most of the area that makes up today’s parcel 38 was occupied by Williams Electric Motor Winding Shop, which opened in February 1960 to service water well engines. In 1971, the Williams Electric Motor Winding Shop lot was subdivided to create the Mountain Terrace Subdivision. In 1973, the State of Alabama purchased most of today’s parcel 38 for the western bypass project. Between 1973 and 1981, Barkwood Drive and its associated residential driveways were constructed. The Williams Electric Motor Winding Shop lot on the south side of Old Birmingham Highway has been cleared and abandoned and is now the western portion of parcel 38. The other lots directly across Old Birmingham Highway from the Bus Burning Site are in private ownership and remain in residential use. The State of Alabama ultimately did not use the portion of parcel 38 that it owned for the western bypass and transferred ownership to Calhoun County in 2009.

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 integrity in terms of setting, feeling, and association, and likely more. 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.

As outlined in the CLR, the preferred Secretary of the Interior treatment recommended for the Freedom Riders National Monument is rehabilitation, which is defined as the process of making possible a compatible use for a property through repair, alterations, and additions while preserving those portions or features which convey its historical, cultural, or architectural values (NPS 2023). The treatment recommendations were reviewed and signed by the park, the Southeast Regional Office, and Alabama SHPO. The CLR recommendations are considered optional. The CLR recommends prioritizing the preservation of remaining elements of the 1961 landscape and enhancing the visitor experience and understanding of the bus burning event. Specific recommendations include:

- encouraging conservation easements for the lots and buildings on the south side of Old Birmingham Highway;
- relocating the historical marker 100 feet east to the actual burning site;
- increasing interpretive signage;
- planting an intermittent vegetative buffer by Highway 202;
- adding a walkway from the site parking to the bus burning location;
- Preparing a vegetation management plan;
- designing visitor parking, restrooms, and a welcome center;
- preserving the large oak in the middle of the eastern portion of parcel 38 (it may be old enough to be a witness tree to the events of 1961).

EFFECTS COMMON TO ALL ACTION ALTERNATIVES

Under all action alternatives, adverse impacts on the cultural landscape are anticipated because modifications would occur to the area that would not be consistent with the historic 1961 landscape. The addition of a visitor arrival and orientation space; parking lot; and educational, interpretive, and contemplative installations would be addition to the landscape that have an adverse impact. However, the site of these facilities is not immediately adjacent to the Bus Burning Site, minimizing potential impacts. As outlined in appendix A, 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, these adverse impacts would still allow for the contributing features of the cultural landscape to be preserved. Also, additions and alternations to the landscape under each alternative would align with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and generally conform to the CLR recommendation for rehabilitation which would result in long-term, beneficial impacts on the site. Specific treatment recommendations from the CLR were selected and pursued based on their compatibility with all elements of the proposed project and its alternatives.

Under all action alternatives, the cultural landscape would benefit from the enhanced opportunity to preserve and maintain what does remain of the 1961 landscape and Old Birmingham Highway. Historic views would be improved through shielding modern intrusions and orienting viewers toward the more intact views to the south. The revegetation of disturbed areas, such as the east half of parcel 54, would be consistent with the recommendations of the CLR and also help to restore the historic landscape. Revegetating certain areas of the site would more closely resemble the landscape as it was in 1961, and would be consistent with treatment recommendations as outlined in the CLR. Providing some level of screening between the Bus Burning Site and Highway 202, the exact nature of which varies between alternatives, would be consistent with the CLR and would provide beneficial long-term impacts. The extent to which these beneficial impacts can be achieved varies under each action alternative.



EFFECTS OF ALTERNATIVE 2: EXISTING ROAD ALIGNMENT

Introducing facilities to the landscape such as a parking lot, modern buildings, and interpretive installations that are not representative of the 1961 landscape would have an adverse impact on the cultural landscape. Constructing these facilities would further alter the landscape from how it appeared during the Freedom Rides; however, this adverse impact would occur along with long-term, beneficial impacts of implementing the rehabilitation recommendations of the CLR. 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. However, alternative 2 would benefit the cultural landscape by preserving what does remain of the 1961 landscape and Old Birmingham Highway, consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and the CLR recommendation for rehabilitation. Long-term, beneficial impacts would occur from the reforestation that would occur on parcel 54, which is consistent with the recommendations of the CLR to reforest the eastern half of parcel 54.

Alternative 2 would also enhance historic views by directing the line of sight away from noncontributing features using a berm against Highway 202 as a visual and sound buffer. This would also orient viewers toward what does remain of the historic site setting, Old Birmingham Highway and the residences located adjacent to the NPS property, both of which are contributing features to the landscape. Construction of a berm on the Bus Burning Site itself would alter the topography and may encroach on the historic location of the grocery store. During design, alternative approaches to screening the site from the highway, such as the use of vegetation, would be considered to minimize potential impacts.

EFFECTS OF ALTERNATIVE 3: NPS PROPOSED ACTION/PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

Impacts on the cultural landscape under alternative 3 would be similar to those described for alternative 2. Alternative 3 would alter the existing landscape by adding modern facilities, but it would 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 CLR recommendation for rehabilitation. The use of a bas-relief wall, or other screening element such as a mural, would be consistent with the concept of screening recommended in the CLR, resulting in long-term benefits to the site. Additionally, shifting Barkwood Drive to the east would move the noncontributing roadway farther outside of the oriented view of the Bus Burning Site, which would result in a more intact cultural landscape.

EFFECTS OF ALTERNATIVE 4: SITE UNIFICATION WITH ADDITIONAL BUILDOUT AND RAMP RELOCATION

Impacts to the cultural landscape under alternative 4 would be similar to those under alternative 2 and alternative 3. Alternative 4 would alter the existing landscape by adding modern facilities, but it would 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 CLR recommendation for rehabilitation. Under alternative 4, the Highway 202 off-ramp would be removed, which would more closely resemble the 1961 landscape because the Highway 202 off-ramp was constructed after the bus burning. Additionally, shifting Barkwood Drive to the east would move the noncontributing roadway farther outside of the oriented view of the Bus Burning Site, which would result in a more intact cultural landscape.



REASONABLY FORESEEABLE FUTURE IMPACTS

Under all action and the no-action/current management alternatives, the NPS would maintain the existing contributing features of the site as identified in the CLR, including extant natural and built features, topography, and views along and across Old Birmingham Highway.

Alternative 1: No Action/Current Management

The impacts of reasonably foreseeable future actions under the no-action alternative are described above in the “Current and Expected Future Condition of the Cultural Landscape if No Action Is Taken” section.

Alternative 2: Existing Road Alignment

Development in the area around the Bus Burning Site that detracts from the cultural landscape would have long-term adverse impacts. Alternative 2 would likely have a beneficial impact on the cultural landscape by preserving what remains of the 1961 landscape and potentially creating opportunities for further rehabilitation in the future. Over time, this would likely have a beneficial foreseeable impact on the character-defining features of the cultural landscape.

Alternative 3: NPS Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative

The impact of other actions in the project area would be the same as described under alternative 2. Alternative 3 would likely have a beneficial impact on the cultural landscape by preserving what remains of the 1961 landscape and potentially creating opportunities for further rehabilitation in the future. The monument boundary would be revised to include adjacent residential parcels of land that contain buildings constructed prior to 1961 to preserve the parcels for future preservation and use. Upon further Section 110 documentation, these residences may be considered contributing features. Over time, this would likely have a beneficial foreseeable impact on the character-defining features of the cultural landscape and provide additional opportunity for rehabilitation of the site.

Alternative 4: Site Unification with Additional Buildout and Ramp Relocation

The impact of other actions in the project area would be the same as described under alternative 2. Alternative 4 would likely have a beneficial impact on the cultural landscape by preserving what remains of the 1961 landscape and potentially creating opportunities for further rehabilitation in the future. The monument boundary would be revised to include adjacent residential parcels of land to preserve the parcels for future preservation and use. Upon further Section 110 documentation, these residences may be considered contributing features. Over time, this would likely have a beneficial, foreseeable impact on the character-defining features of the cultural landscape and provide additional opportunity for rehabilitation of the site.

CONCLUSION

Under the no-action alternative, the NPS would maintain the existing contributing features of the site as identified in the CLR, including extant natural and built features, topography, and views along and across Old Birmingham Highway. Each of the three action alternatives would result in adverse and beneficial impacts to the cultural landscape by altering the existing landscape by adding modern facilities and, in some cases, acquiring property and realigning roadways. During finalization of designs, variations in where specific items (such as the photo wall) are placed, or how a desired outcome is achieved (such as screening with a mural versus a bas-relief wall) would occur to minimize potential impacts to the cultural landscape. Overall, the alternatives would 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 CLR recommendation for rehabilitation.

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Consultation and Coordination

4

AGENCY AND TRIBAL CONSULTATION

The EA describes consultation and coordination with other federal agencies, offices, and federally recognized Tribes.

Preliminary coordination with ALDOT and the Calhoun County Highway Department was initiated in June 2024. The NPS will continue to consult with ALDOT and the Calhoun County Highway Department over the next several years to ensure proper engagement at both the state and local level are maintained throughout the life of the project.

The NPS Interior Region 2: South Atlantic–Gulf prepared a Cultural Landscape Report (CLR) for Freedom Riders National Monument. The NPS published and submitted the final CLR to the Alabama SHPO in May 2023. The CLR describes the historical development of the Bus Burning Site landscape, documents existing site conditions, analyzes potential National Register of Historic Places significance and integrity, and provides treatment recommendations and guidelines. The NPS will continue to pursue the rehabilitation recommendation and monitoring described in the CLR under all alternatives.

As required by Section 106 of the NHPA, the NPS is consulting with the Alabama SHPO. On April 24, 2024, the NPS sent a letter to the Alabama Historical Commission's State Historic Preservation Officer initiating consultation in accordance with Section 106 of the NHPA. The NPS shared that the planning effort would include a phase I archeological survey of the NPS property at the Bus Burning Site. The Alabama SHPO confirmed that the project was logged in their database on April 29, 2024. On May 5, 2024, the Alabama Historical Commission's Assistant State Archaeologist replied to the NPS's letter initiating Section 106 consultation and commented on the upcoming phase I archeological survey stating that typical shovel test surveys are not always effective in the investigation of heavily disturbed/urban environments and, if used, should be part of a multiple lines of evidence approach. Subsequently, the NPS Southeast Archeological Center completed the phase I archeological survey of the site. On July 10, 2024, the NPS sent a letter to the Alabama SHPO to communicate a Finding of No Adverse Effect for the construction of the interim parking lot, to request SHPO review and concurrence with the finding, and to share that NPS archeologists had recently completed a phase I archeological survey of the entirety of the NPS property at the Bus Burning Site. Section 106 consultation will continue throughout the planning process and will be completed prior to project implementation.

As required by Section 106 of the NHPA, the NPS is consulting with federally recognized Tribes. On April 24, 2024, the NPS sent letters requesting consultation on a government-to-government basis to the following 14 federally recognized 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 Nation
- Poarch Band of Creek Indians
- Seminole Nation of Oklahoma
- Seminole Tribe of Florida
- Shawnee Tribe
- Thlopthlocco Tribal Town

The letter also stated that the planning effort would include a phase I archeological survey of the NPS property at the Bus Burning Site. 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. The NPS has distributed a copy of this MP/EA to each of the Tribes listed above and will continue to consult with them during the finalization and implementation of the MP/EA.

The USFWS IPaC tool was used to identify species protected under Section 7 of the ESA, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, and the Bald and Golden Eagle Act of 1940 that may be impacted by a project proposal. The NPS used the IPaC tool to request an official species list for use in evaluating potential impacts on resources with the project area. USFWS generated an official species list and a response letter on February 11, 2025, to confirm the no effect determination. Conservation measures recommended by the USFWS would be incorporated into construction specifications and implemented during construction to protect migratory birds; therefore, consultation is not required for the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 and the Bald and Golden Eagle Act of 1940.



PUBLIC AND STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION AND SCOPING

This MP/EA represents the thoughts and input of the NPS, its partners, other agencies, and the public. Consultation and coordination among partner organizations and the public are vitally important to the planning process. The NPS began the process of developing the MP/EA for the Bus Burning Site in 2023 and completed a series of stakeholder meetings with its partner organizations and other key stakeholders. In March 2024, the NPS engaged a variety of stakeholders, including Freedom Riders and their descendants, Freedom Riders Park Board members, civil rights historians and activists, local government organizations, and others. During these in-person and virtual meetings, the NPS asked these stakeholders which elements and features they would like to see at the Bus Burning Site, and the group brainstormed ideas regarding the monument's future. The stakeholders' ideas were recorded; these ideas informed the alternatives and management strategies included in the MP.

Additional meetings were held in June 2024 with the following partner organizations and stakeholders:

- City of Anniston
- Calhoun County
- ALDOT

On September 5, 2024, the NPS issued a press release to local, regional, and national media outlets requesting feedback from the public on ideas for developing and managing the Bus Burning Site. The public was notified of this planning effort via a newsletter in September 2024 announcing a public comment opportunity, including two open house events for the MP/EA. The newsletter provided background information on the national monument, discussed the need for the MP/EA, and invited the public to provide feedback on preliminary design concepts. The NPS solicited feedback on a series of questions included in the newsletter to assist with planning for the monument's future and to identify preferred visitor experiences at the site. The initial public comment period on the MP/EA ran from September 9, 2024, to October 9, 2024, and included opportunities for involvement in the planning process for the new monument and to submit written comments. The NPS held two open house events on September 24, 2024, from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. (Central Time), and on September 24, 2024, from 4:00 to 7:00 p.m. (Central Time) to provide the public the opportunity to learn more about the planning process and ask questions about the MP/EA.

During the comment period, 16 correspondences were submitted, with some members of the public submitting multiple comments. Once all correspondence was received, each was read, and specific comments within each correspondence were identified and sorted into the following categories: interpretation suggestions; new suggestions; design suggestions; Freedom Wall suggestions; Bus Burning Site sculpture suggestions; feedback on concepts; sustainability-related suggestions; public engagement feedback and suggestions; and safety, parking and traffic concerns and suggestions. A secondary stakeholder workshop was held on December 18, 2024. Using input received from partner organizations, stakeholders, and members of the public (during both the public comment period and the workshop), the NPS team modified the preliminary concepts to guide development of the alternatives.

NEXT STEPS

The release of this MP/EA will initiate a 30-day public review and comment period, after which the NPS planning team will evaluate comments from other federal agencies, organizations, businesses, and individuals regarding the MP/EA and make revisions as appropriate. After this public review, the plan may be approved with a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) on the EA, assuming there are no significant impacts identified during public review. If significant impacts are identified, a notice of intent to initiate an environmental impact statement may be prepared. A FONSI would document the NPS selection of one, or a combination of, the alternatives evaluated in the EA for implementation. Once the FONSI is signed, the planning process is complete, and the selected alternative will become the basis of the site's master plan.

Following the completion of this planning process, the park will transition to the implementation phase. This is a multistep process that will include moving the conceptual designs into more formalized designs; additional compliance; formalizing partnerships, agreements, and strategies for construction on and off of federal lands; selecting a contractor; and beginning construction. While the NPS intends to move to the implementation phase after the NEPA process and other consultation processes are completed, the approval of this MP/EA does not guarantee that the funding and staffing needed to implement the MP will be forthcoming. Implementation of the approved MP would depend on future NPS funding levels; service-wide priorities; and partnership funds, time, and effort. It could be affected by factors such as changes in NPS staffing, visitor use patterns, and unanticipated environmental changes. The NPS may conclude, after analysis of the best information available, that certain elements of the MP requiring significant financial investment need to be modified or not pursued. Regardless, full implementation of the MP could be many years in the future. Major construction projects in the NPS can take more than 10 years to fund, but this process could be expedited through using funds from philanthropic or other sources outside the NPS. Philanthropic support or partner-funded development can shorten the time from planning to implementation. Once the MP has been approved, formalization of partnership agreements (including for philanthropic support), more detailed design planning, and additional consultation would be completed before certain activities to implement the MP would begin. Consultation with the Alabama SHPO, associated Tribes, and other concerned parties would continue, in accordance with Section 106 of the NHPA regarding undertakings affecting historic properties.

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Appendix A — Monitoring

INTRODUCTION

This appendix provides additional information about the monitoring strategy as it relates to the Bus Burning Site Master Plan at Freedom Riders National Monument (monument).

Monitoring is the process of routinely and systematically gathering information or making observations to assess the status of specific resource conditions and visitor experiences. Monitoring is an integral component of visitor use management, as it allows managers to objectively and effectively evaluate whether desired conditions are being achieved and maintained. Without monitoring, managers cannot determine whether their management strategies and actions are effective. Monitoring helps inform visitor use decisions. Ensuring that visitor use decisions are based on sufficient information results in a higher degree of accountability, defensibility, and transparency.

Data collected systematically through monitoring help demonstrate the effectiveness of current management strategies, as well as the potential need for changes in management strategies over time. Monitoring shows how conditions change over time, including the rate and magnitude of change. In this way, monitoring provides a much richer and more complete picture to determine whether new management actions are needed to achieve and maintain desired conditions. If a visitor capacity is identified, monitoring is essential to ensure that desired conditions are achieved and maintained (IVUMC 2019b).

INDICATORS AND THRESHOLDS

Monitoring is accomplished by selecting indicators that are used to track trends in resource and experiential conditions. Established thresholds clearly define when conditions are becoming unacceptable for the selected indicators, thus alerting managers that a change in management action(s) is required. Together, indicators and thresholds help managers monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of management actions in achieving and maintaining desired conditions.

Indicators are specific resource or experiential attributes that can be measured to track changes in conditions so that progress toward achieving and maintaining desired conditions can be assessed. Indicators translate the broad description of desired conditions into measurable attributes that can be tracked over time to evaluate changes in conditions. Therefore, indicators correlate directly with desired conditions. In addition, indicators must be capable of being assessed objectively over time, so that managers can determine whether conditions have changed and, if so, how.

The interdisciplinary planning team considered the central issues driving the need for the plan and developed related indicators that would help identify when the level of impact becomes cause for concern and management action may be needed. The indicators described below were considered the most critical, given the importance and vulnerability of the resource or visitor experience affected. The planning team also reviewed the experiences of other park units with similar issues to help identify meaningful indicators.

Thresholds. A threshold is the minimally acceptable condition associated with an indicator. Visitor activities inevitably cause changes in natural or cultural resource conditions or visitor experiences. Proactive management involves determining the acceptable level of change for selected indicators. Thresholds serve this role by establishing the point at which the effects of visitor use on desired conditions are anticipated to become enough of a concern that a management action is needed to achieve and maintain desired conditions. In this role, thresholds serve as a stop sign or a “line in the sand.” The concept of thresholds is well established within the field of natural resource monitoring (Guntenspergen 2014). The term “threshold” in the visitor use or recreation disciplines is synonymous with “standards” or “quality standards.”

The interdisciplinary team used public input, field observations, professional judgment, best available science, and literature reviews to establish thresholds for each selected indicator based on desired conditions.

TABLE A-1. NUMBER OF VEHICLES AT ONE TIME IN PARKING LOTS –INDICATORS AND THRESHOLDS

INDICATOR

People Per Viewscape (PPV) at key destinations.

THRESHOLD

No more than the PPV stated for each monitoring location below, 90% of the sampled time.

Monitoring locations

Bus Burning Site: 30 PPV

Plaza: 100 PPV

Contact Station/ Lawn Space: 50 PPV

RATIONALE

Crowded conditions have been documented to adversely affect the quality of visitor experience in national parks (Capacity Work Group 2010). People per viewscape (PPV) metrics aid managers in understanding visitor use density at key destinations, allowing the NPS to quantify the number of people per viewscape in a location and compare those numbers to desired conditions. People per viewscape is not a measure of the total number of people who visit a site; rather it is a measure of use levels across time that can be applied to understanding social conditions related to the visitor's experience (Manning 2007). This indicator, or some variation thereof, is in use at many other parks and areas to monitor visitor experience. These visitor-based standards can be used to guide the development of social indicators and thresholds for crowding.

Desired conditions for the visitor experience state that visitors will encounter a solemn and contemplative environment, and learn about the stories of the Freedom Riders, the civil rights legislation that followed, and connect with the historical events that occurred there. Crowded conditions would hinder the ability to achieve a solemn and contemplative experience. This indicator is important to ensure park staff are able to achieve desired conditions without unintended consequences of crowding and congestion that may occur as the site is fully built out. Via monitoring and protecting visitor experience at key destinations, the effectiveness of management strategies that influence specific destinations can be assessed and adjusted as needed.

MONITORING

The park will identify a specific period, such as one hour, to quantify the people visible at one time from specific vantage points associated with key destinations. Monitoring would take place at as many different times of the day and year as practical, ensuring that busiest days and high-use locations are captured. In the future, the park may change the monitoring strategy and/or data collection as new technology becomes available.

MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Increase proactive management of school groups to disperse use across the site.

Increase NPS-led or managed interpretive opportunities.

Provide information on anticipated use conditions to help manage visitor's expectations, better inform trip planning, and disperse use between the burn site area and the depot.

Use direct visitor contact, park publications, wayside exhibits, maps, social media, websites, and park partners to inform visitors on how they can best experience the monument. The goal would be to have visitors self-disperse throughout the site and visit during lower-use periods of the day to accommodate similar levels of visitor use but without concentrating that use during peak periods.

POTENTIAL FUTURE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Increase NPS staff presence on-site to help orient visitors and disperse throughout the site.

Install temporary or permanent physical barriers to help mitigate overcrowding.

OTHER RELATED MONITORING

In addition to thresholds, managers may establish specific, positive targets or objectives for resource conditions or visitor experiences. Unlike a threshold, an objective or other related monitoring is defined as a specific result that an agency aims to achieve in a specified timeframe. If thresholds are markers to prevent negative consequences and unacceptable conditions, objectives are markers to help ensure positive progress toward achieving and maintaining desired conditions. Another distinction between objectives and thresholds is that objectives typically reflect conditions that are affected directly by agency action, such as staffing levels, whereas thresholds reflect conditions that result from visitor use effects under a particular management strategy. In practice, objectives are typically stated as managerial performance goals whereas thresholds are typically based on physical, biological, or social conditions (IVUMC 2019a). In areas where thresholds are already being exceeded, management actions would be implemented immediately.

Vehicles at One Time

Monitoring objective: The National Park Service (NPS) will monitor the number of vehicles at one time (VAOT) in identified parking lots and roadways throughout the Bus Burning Site. VAOT may be monitored by cameras, staff, or volunteers. Monitoring would take place at as many different times of the day and year as practical, ensuring that the busiest days and high-use locations are captured. In the future, the park may change the monitoring strategy and/or data collection as new technology becomes available.

Rationale: This monitoring objective is a measure of visitors' ability to find parking at the Bus Burning Site. Monitoring and managing visitor use according to this monitoring objective helps ensure that visitors have safe and stress-free access to the site by reducing vehicle congestion and conflicts. VAOT is a measure commonly used by park managers and researchers to quantify vehicle congestion in parking lots (Lawson and Kiser 2013; Manning et al. 2014). It provides an important measure of parking lot conditions in relation to visitor access to destinations as well as potential park resource impacts as a result of parked vehicles in unauthorized areas when lots are full. This monitoring objective also relates to visitor experience and safety. By noting instances of full parking lots, managers will better understand the demand for space and mitigate safety concerns and conflicts by addressing parking issues. Unendorsed parking creates conflicts and hazards such as reduced road lane width, an increased number of pedestrians in the roadway, use of private land, and at times, pavement damage at the road's edge. Unauthorized parking can also hinder the visitor experience by detracting from historic/cultural views along the roadway, creating difficult visitor mobility and circulation, and surpassing other thresholds such as PPV. Additionally, unauthorized parking on roadways can negatively impact residents who live along the roadway or who use the roadways. By monitoring VAOT, the NPS will be able to make informed decisions related to parking infrastructure and the timing and level of visitor use in an area.

Management strategies and mitigation measures include:

- Encourage visitors via the unit's website to select less popular areas or times to avoid crowding.

Damage to the Built and Natural Environment

Monitoring objective: The NPS will monitor the number of instances of graffiti or vandalism to the built and natural environment, including but not limited to interpretive signs, displays, and landscape.

Rationale: By identifying and proactively mitigating instances of intentional damage to the built and natural environment (e.g., vandalism and graffiti), the park can better provide a visitor experience that adequately commemorates the Freedom Rides and Riders, and their influence on modern society.

Monitoring the Bus Burning Site and using an incident reporting system, such as Incident Management, Analysis and Reporting System (IMARS) and/or a spreadsheet, to report incidents of damage to the built and natural environment provides information to address key resource issues and enables the park to achieve desired conditions for both resources and visitor experience.

Management strategies and mitigation measures include:

- When appropriate and necessary, issue a press release describing the incident of damage.
- The NPS would immediately remediate damage by replacing or addressing damaged infrastructure.
- Increase ranger presence or patrols.
- Implement strategic surveillance in areas with known instances of damage.

Potential future management strategies:

- Consider physical barriers (e.g., fencing).
- Consider managing for day use only.
- Contact the Resource Protection Branch to seek recoveries under the applicable statute, likely The System Unit Resource Protection Act (SURPA, formerly known as "19jj") and/or the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).
- Collaborate with local law enforcement to implement strategic patrols and issue citations, as necessary.

Appendix B — Visitor Capacity Identification

INTRODUCTION

This section provides additional information about visitor capacity identification as it relates to the Bus Burning Site Plan for Freedom Riders National Monument (monument). Visitor capacity is a component of visitor use management and is the maximum amounts and types of visitor use that an area can accommodate while achieving and maintaining desired resource conditions and visitor experiences that are consistent with the purposes for which the area was established.

The primary goals of visitor use management are to maintain opportunities for meaningful and enjoyable visitor experiences and protect resources. Visitor capacity is a tool that can aid managers in achieving and maintaining desired conditions. To fulfill the requirements of the 1978 National Parks and Recreation Act (54 United States Code [USC] 100502), visitor capacity identifications are legally required for all destinations and areas that this planning effort addresses (IVUMC 2016). Future monitoring of use levels and indicators would inform the National Park Service (NPS) if use levels were at or near visitor capacities. If so, future potential management strategies, as outlined in the “Indicators and Thresholds” section, would be taken. For each location, an overview of the analysis is included below.

Visitor capacities were identified using best practices and examples from other plans across the NPS using the Interagency Visitor Use Management Council (IVUMC) guidelines outlined in the Visitor Capacity Guidebook: (1) determine the analysis area, (2) review existing direction and knowledge, (3) identify the limiting attribute, and (4) identify visitor capacity and strategies to manage the capacity.

Guideline 1. Determine the Analysis Area(s)

This guideline has a far-reaching effect on identifying visitor capacity because it involves identifying (1) where geographically the visitor capacity will be implemented, (2) displacement or other unintended effects of managing visitor use levels, and (3) the effect of managing allocation(s) of visitor use within the analysis area(s). To determine the appropriate analysis area(s), the interdisciplinary planning team sought to understand the relationship between existing and potential visitor use patterns and desired conditions, and identified the following as analysis area for visitor capacity identification:

- Greyhound Bus Burning Site

This analysis fulfills the requirements of the 1978 National Parks and Recreation Act (54 USC 100502) to identify visitor capacity for all areas that this planning effort addresses. This analysis area comprises all visitor use areas within the plan scope. Strategies to achieve desired visitor capacities have also been identified as part of this process.

Guideline 2. Review Existing Direction and Knowledge

During this step, the planning team reviewed existing direction and knowledge, including:

- applicable law and policy
- prior applicable planning and guidance
- existing conditions in the analysis area

The 2020 General Management Plan Preliminary Planning Report and the 2018 Foundation Document (NPS 2020, 2018) provide important overarching guidance and direction for the Bus Burning Site, including providing short descriptions of desired visitor experiences, resource conditions, appropriate support facilities, and definitions of key issues and constraints associated with the planning needs of the park. An overview of visitor use issues and current use levels specific to the Bus Burning Site are provided for the analysis area.

This plan updates the previous guidance by developing more specific visitor use management direction, consistent with IVUMC guidance, including indicators, thresholds, visitor capacity, and related management strategies as well as possible future management strategies for the monument. Possible future management strategies would not be implemented immediately, rather only as visitor capacities are approached.

Although the monument does not have current visitor use statistics, key partners in the area have data describing the characteristics of visitation to civil rights sites in Alabama. The Alabama Tourism Department used anonymized mobile data collected by the consultancy Tourism Economics and interpreted using the data platform Symphony Intelligence to create reports on key civil rights attractions throughout the state. The reports provide information about the points-of-origin of visitors; cross-visited points of interest; and demographics, including household income, age, and race (Symphony Tourism Economics 2024).

Anniston is advantageously situated just off the interstate, connecting two key source markets for visitation: the Birmingham metropolitan area (also known as Greater Birmingham), the largest, and growing, population region in the state; and Metro Atlanta, the rapidly growing, sixth-most populous metropolitan area in the country, home to almost 6.5 million residents. In 2023, Birmingham attracted almost 4 million visitors to the region, while, according to the Atlanta Convention & Visitors Bureau, Atlanta welcomed 50 million visitors the same year. Both cities are experiencing growth in tourist arrivals, representing additional potential visitor segments (Atlanta Convention & Visitors Bureau 2023).

Using the data provided by the Alabama Tourism Department, including the locations of the Freedom Riders National Monument and seven other sites similar in nature, including Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, Kelley Ingram Park, Edmund Pettus Bridge, Selma Interpretive Center, Civil Rights Memorial Center, Montgomery, Freedom Rides Museum, and Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site, several key takeaways for the direction of the local heritage tourism market become apparent and are described below. It is important to note that four of the reports contain sample sizes of less than 300 (Freedom Riders National Monument, both years; Selma Interpretive Center 2022; and Freedom Rides Museum 2022), while the rest are greater than 300 (Symphony Tourism Economics 2024)

As awareness grows and the visitor experience available at Freedom Riders National Monument improves, there will likely be moderately strong demand for visitation. For example, in 2024, 26% of visitors to Birmingham Civil Rights Institute were non-Alabamians, while only 19% of visitors to Freedom Riders National Monument were, according to the Alabama Tourism Department data. This suggests an untapped segment of non-Alabamians visiting the Institute who could be inspired to visit the monument. In addition, 61% of visitors to the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute also visited Birmingham Civil Rights National Monument. This segment would be highly likely to consider visiting Freedom Riders National Monument and can be easily reached with promotional information. Analysis of data from all eight sites about “cross-visited points of interest” reveals that many visitors to civil rights in Alabama sites take time to visit multiple, geographically dispersed sites, from Birmingham to Montgomery to Selma. This suggests a primed existing market for Freedom Riders National Monument, particularly given its convenient location, though it will also face competition from other sites (Symphony Tourism Economics 2024).

In addition to the presence of identifiable source markets for visitation to Freedom Riders National Monument, an important factor influencing the direction of visitation is the marketing and promotion efforts of the Alabama Tourism Department, Calhoun County, and the United States Civil Rights Trail initiative. These stakeholders are expected to continue promoting civil rights tourism well into the future, raising awareness of Freedom Riders National Monument among key segments of potential visitors. National park system units with active local and regional tourism partners promoting the site to viable target market segments often experience robust visitation as a result.

Guideline 3. Identify the Limiting Attribute

This guideline involves identifying the attribute(s) that most constrains the analysis area’s ability to accommodate visitor use. The interdisciplinary team considered all potential attributes that would constrain the analysis area’s ability to accommodate visitor use and identified the specific limiting attribute(s) most meaningful in guiding the analysis for the analysis area. Further, the interdisciplinary team identified the most relevant indicators related to the limiting attribute(s) to ensure desired conditions are achieved or maintained.

Guideline 4. Identify Visitor Capacity and Implementation Strategies

To identify the appropriate amounts and types of use at key areas, outputs from previous steps were reviewed to understand current conditions compared to desired conditions for the area. This analysis informed the identification of visitor capacities for the analysis area. Management strategies and actions have been identified to achieve desired visitor capacity. Park staff identified that people at one time (PAOT) is the most meaningful metric to manage to the capacity.

GREYHOUND BUS BURNING SITE

Review of Existing Direction and Knowledge

This analysis area includes the entire NPS-owned Greyhound Bus Burning Site, located approximately 6 miles outside Anniston, Alabama, along the shoulder of the Old Birmingham Highway in Calhoun County. The Old Birmingham Highway runs east–west through the center of the analysis area, intersecting with Barkwood Drive, which runs north–south. From this intersection, the NPS owns three parcels that together compose the entire site. Desired conditions for the area state that visitors encounter a solemn and contemplative environment, and that the visitor experience is characterized by low encounter rates, aside from events, allowing for a more personal and impactful journey.

The current visitor experience is limited to viewing a historical marker at the burn site that describes the events that took place in 1961, during which a violent mob set fire to a bus with the Freedom Riders. Beyond the presence of the roadside marker, the site includes intact portions of the roadway and the shoulder where the bus was forced to pull over and subsequently set afire. The 1961 setting of the Bus Burning Site has been considerably altered by the construction of Highway 202, but along with the highway corridor itself, few houses that were present during the event are still extant.

Visitors currently access the site either from Highway 202, Old Birmingham Highway, or Barkwood Drive. Current parking is limited, and often visitors park on the side of the Old Birmingham Highway. In the past, the park staff and groups such as the Freedom Riders Committee have held public events at the site. Exact visitation numbers to the site are unknown but estimated to be between 300 and 600 people in 2024, and around 1,300 total for 2022, 2023, and 2024 combined. Visitation is thought to be low partially due to the lack of interpretive materials and infrastructure at the site.

The action alternative would increase visitor experience, opportunities, and circulation. The circulation around the Bus Burning Site would be improved by the closure of the Highway 202 off-ramp, both enhancing visitor experience and improving pedestrian safety by eliminating the potential vehicle conflict points. Additional wayfinding and interpretive elements would enhance visitor experience and create further opportunities to engage with the history of the site. Further, the park would use new visitor facilities and services to host commemorative events and community events, such as Anniston's Rails to Trails event.

The limiting attribute and visitor capacity identification below is based on the implementation of the action alternative.

Limiting Attributes and Relevant Indicators

The attribute that most constrains this analysis area's ability to accommodate visitor use is the quality of visitor experience as it relates to crowding, congestion, and opportunities for solemnity and contemplation. Desired conditions for the site include opportunities for a solemn and contemplative environment. Further, the site itself is a fundamental resource and value for the park unit. Crowding and/or high levels of visitation at one time would compromise the area's ability to achieve desired conditions for visitor experience throughout this analysis area. As use increases, opportunities for solemnity and contemplation decrease. Therefore, the quality of visitor experience constrains this area's ability to accommodate visitor use.

The most relevant indicator for the Freedom Riders National Monument to monitor is People Per Viewscape (PPV) at key destinations. The park would also monitor vehicles at one time (VAOT) and damage to the built and natural environment.

Visitor Capacity and Implementation Strategies

Given existing conditions and limiting attributes, park staff identified that visitor capacity can be increased from current use levels to achieve and maintain desired conditions. Current use levels in this area are achieving and maintaining desired resource conditions and visitor experiences. Opportunities for a solemn and contemplative environment and low encounter rates inform the amount of use this area can accommodate. Actions implemented in the preferred alternative would provide visitor facilities, services, and infrastructure and provide additional opportunities for interpretation. Therefore, the identified visitor capacity for this analysis area is 180 PAOT. In the preferred alternative, up to 800 PAOT could be accommodated with additional park staff and partner support to manage use and mitigate impacts to the experience.

Additional management strategies to implement visitor capacity include:

- Encourage visitation to other civil rights-related history such as the Civil Rights Trail in Anniston.
- Increase ranger presence to help circulate visitors throughout the area.
- Proactively provide visitor information regarding busy times and seasons to manage visitor expectations and balance visitation at one time.
- Engage with volunteers to support on-site education and interpretation.

Potential future management strategies:

- Install a gate at the parking lot to manage vehicular traffic.
- Consider requiring a ticket to enter the Bus Burning Site.

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