

Briefing Statement

Bureau: National Park Service
Issue: Future Management of Elkmont Historic District
Park Site: Great Smoky Mountains National Park
Date: January 27, 2010

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

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

An Agency Preferred Alternative was announced for comments in February 2006 as part of a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). The Preferred Alternative will result in a newly described Elkmont historic district, and calls for restoration and preservation of 19 structures, including the Appalachian Clubhouse, to be available for public visitation (but not for overnight occupancy), restoration of the Appalachian Clubhouse as an educational venue and for public use as a gathering space, and development of a variety of interpretive media to tell the story of the district's history. The remaining buildings would be removed. This alternative emphasizes the preservation of both natural and cultural aspects of our natural heritage while maintaining an environment that supports a variety of individual choice and visitor use options. The estimated cost of this alternative is approximately \$6 million. The expectation is that the project will be a public/private endeavor.

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

In 2008, 2009 and 2010 funding from Friends of the Smokies and or Great Smoky Mountains National Park was made available to begin stabilization the buildings proposed for preservation. Part of the funding was used to prepare Historic Structures Reports to guide the restoration of the Appalachian Clubhouse and several of the cabins.

Current Status: On June 30, 2009 Southeast Regional Director David Vela signed a Record of Decision (ROD) to implement the Agency Preferred Alternative. The ROD may be found at:

<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/>. A Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the NPS, the Tennessee State Historic Preservation Officer, and the National Advisory Council for Historic Preservation was executed in December 2008. The MOA defines the measures that the NPS will take to mitigate impacts to the historic district and buildings within the legal guidance provided by the National Historic Preservation Act.

Next Steps/Strategy: The new GMP Amendment provides the basis to seek a combination of public and private funding to implement the Record of Decision. Now that a ROD has been issued the Park can move forward with restoration of the structures, beginning with the Appalachian Clubhouse using \$550,000 of NPS funding that is now available. Funding is also available from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to construct new, paved parking areas to serve hikers using Jakes Creek and Little River Trails as well as visitors to the Elkmont Historic District. That construction and the re-paving of the roads within the District are scheduled for July – August 2010.

Congressional District: TN-1

Representative: Phil Roe

Senator: Lamar Alexander

Senator: Bob Corker

Contact: Superintendent Dale Ditmanson, (865) 436-1201