



CADES COVE PLANNING



Cades Cove Planning Moves into Second Phase

The second phase of the Cades Cove Development Concept and Transportation Management Plan has begun. It will build on five existing candidate alternatives (see page 3). These candidate alternatives are described in the Cades Cove Opportunities Plan produced in Phase I and are essentially at 70 percent development. During this second phase we will refine and further detail these alternatives and assess them based on their potential environmental impacts.

Phase II is scheduled to be conducted over a 22-month period. It will culminate in development of documents detailing the affected environment and impact analysis. It is hoped that the planning process will then move seamlessly into the next phase of the planning process (Phase III - see chart on page 2) leading to the development of a Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement, or EIS. (For an explanation of "Tier 1," see illustration and text on page 6.) It is possible that the final preferred alternative could combine elements drawn from the alternatives studied.

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Summary of Phase I Cades Cove Opportunities Plan

The first phase of planning for Cades Cove resulted in one "no action" alternative and four combinations of new approaches to resource management, visitor centers, transportation options, and other factors affecting the visitor's experience in "the Cove." These are known as "alternatives" and provide the foundation for the work of Phase II.

First, however, let's look at what will not change. Under all alternatives, visitors will still be able to use and enjoy areas such as the campground, picnic area, and horse concession. Traditional activities such as cemetery visitation, Old Timers Day, and Park-approved events such as weddings would continue. Private vehicle access during non-peak visitation periods would also continue. Maintenance of historic features according to federal standards would continue.

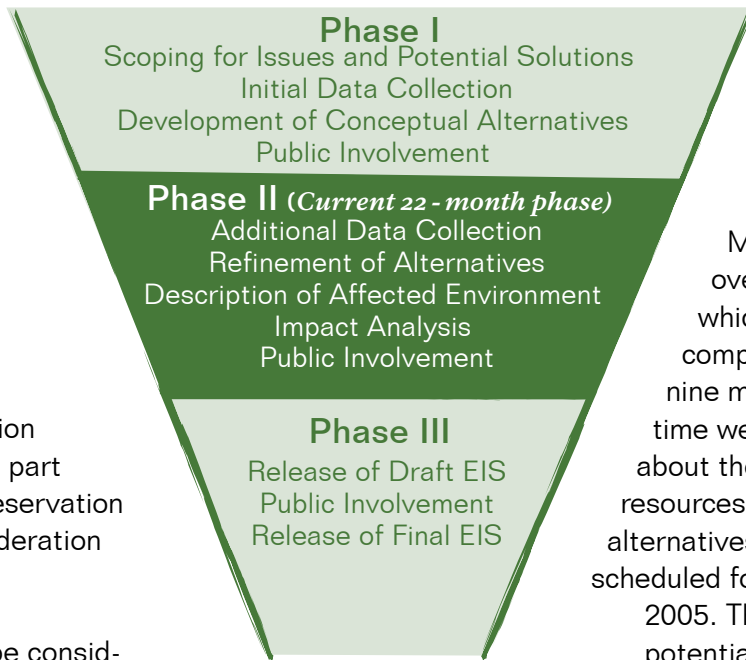
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Visit www.cadescoveplanning.com to read the Phase I report, *Cades Cove Opportunities Plan*. Also see the side bar on page 3 for other locations to view the Plan's detailed information.

Cades Cove Planning Moves Into Second Phase Continued from page 1

Cades Cove Planning Process




The Phase II study effort will be supported by an interactive public involvement program that includes newsletters, visitor surveys, a web site, a visual presentation, and one round of public meetings. Phase II will also include Section 106 consultation and agency coordination efforts. "Section 106" refers to the relevant part of the National Historic Preservation Act requiring careful consideration of cultural resources.

In addition to what might be considered more traditional environmental studies, the alternatives will also be examined based upon the Visitor Experience and Resource Protection (VERP) framework (see article on page 5). VERP will provide useful information on the quality of the visitor experience for each alternative and how natural and cultural resource conditions might be affected by visitor

use. Information gained through the VERP process will be used in evaluating alternatives and comparing potential impacts.

Most Phase II tasks will overlap with the VERP effort, which is scheduled to be largely completed during the first six to nine months. During this same time we will be collecting information about the existing condition of resources and adding detail to the alternatives. This is tentatively scheduled for completion by late winter 2005. Then the assessment of potential impacts can start, a task estimated to take from four to six months and conclude around the

spring of 2006. Once impact assessment is largely completed an initial evaluation of alternatives can take place. The results of the environmental assessment and this initial evaluation of alternatives would be the subject of public meetings held in the spring or summer of 2006. 

Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement Record of Decision

Summary of Phase I Cades Cove Opportunities Plan Continued from page 1

The valley floor would be maintained as open with scenic vistas and opportunities to view wildlife. Educational programs such as ranger-led activities or interpretive displays would continue. There are also changes common to all action alternatives (2 - 5). These include a visitor center at the Loop Road entrance; improved roadways, pull-offs, and parking; and better communications for "real time" information on Cove conditions (e.g., driving times,

availability of camping, picnicking or parking, weather conditions, road closures). A long-range field management plan would guide yearly maintenance of the valley floor. Upgraded utilities (water, sewer, electricity, telecommunications) and sufficient Park staff (for law enforcement, education, maintenance, and administration) would support the chosen alternative.

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CADES COVE

Summary of Phase I Cades Cove Opportunities Plan Continued from page 2

Alternative 1 – No Action

The “no action” alternative assumes operations continue “as is,” including vehicle, bicycle, and pedestrian access to the Loop Road; existing visitor orientation centers and education programs; and field management, maintenance, and ranger activities. Resource conditions and visitor experience would change only in response to current operations. In addition to being required by law, the “no action” alternative provides baseline information for environmental analysis of other alternatives.

Alternative 2 – Roadway Improvements

Under Alternative 2, private vehicle access would continue unchanged. Changes would include minor improvements to the Loop Road, Sparks Lane, and Hyatt Lane; a “Master Circulation Plan” addressing pull-offs and parking; and enhanced visitor communications (directional signs, “real time” variable message signs, a telephone information service, a web site). In addition, a new, minor visitor center at the Cove’s entrance would provide primary visitor contact. Staffing would be increased slightly.

Alternative 3 – Managing Demand Through Peak Visitation Reservations


Alternative 3 would institute a reservation program for private vehicle access to the Loop Road during peak visitation periods. During off-peak periods, unrestricted private vehicle access to the Cove would continue. Roadway, parking, and communications elements from Alternative 2 would also be implemented. A small visitor contact center outside the Park would allow visitors to make reservations and collect basic information. A moderately sized visitor center at the beginning of the Loop Road would provide educational and interpretive resources.

Alternative 4 – Managing Demand Through Peak Visitation Reservations and Voluntary Transit

Alternative 4 would include communications and road/parking improvements as in Alternative 2 and the reservation program from Alternative 3, combined with a voluntary transit system during peak periods, based outside the Park. Visitors could choose to ride transit vehicles to a new visitor center located at the Loop Road entrance. There, visitors could board tram-style

vehicles to travel the Loop Road. These might feature interpretive programs or simply provide transportation or access to trailheads and historic sites. This alternative would require a moderate to high increase in staffing. Two moderately sized visitor centers, one located outside the Park and one at the entrance to the Loop Road, would provide access for the voluntary transit system, reservations, and information.

Alternative 5 – Visitor Management Through Peak Visitation Transit Access

Alternative 5 reflects the greatest change in visitation management. Access would be limited to transit vehicles during peak periods, operating in the same manner as in Alternative 4, including visitor centers in the Cove and outside the Park. During off-peak periods, unrestricted private vehicle access would continue. The transit service may be made available for voluntary use during non-peak periods. This alternative also includes the communications program described in Alternative 2 and would require a moderate to high increase in staffing. The visitor center at the entrance to the Loop Road would house visitor orientation kiosks, a museum, restrooms, and potentially a new amphitheater, bike concession area, and snack shop. The visitor center outside the Park would provide access to transit systems and visitor information. 





You are welcome to view the Phase I report at any of the following locations or visit www.cadescopeplanning.com

Mary E. Tippitt Memorial Library
120 Tiger Drive
Townsend, TN 37882

Blount County Public Library
508 N. Cusick Street
Maryville, TN 37804

Anna Porter Public Library
207 Cherokee Orchard Road
Gatlinburg, TN 37738

Pigeon Forge Public Library
2449 Library Drive
Pigeon Forge, TN 37863

Lawson-McGee Library
500 West Church Avenue
Knoxville, TN 37915

NPS Sugarlands Park Visitor Center
Newfound Gap Road
Gatlinburg, TN 37738

Pack Memorial Library
67 Haywood Street
Asheville, NC 28801

NPS Oconaluftee Visitor Center
150 Highway 441 North
Cherokee, NC 28719



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How Can I Contribute to Phase II?

The questions and answers below describe the public involvement process for Phase II and relate it to public involvement in Phase I. Please stay involved! Your continued participation will help to shape the character of the final alternatives and the choices to be made among them during Phase III. For more questions and answers about the planning process to date and the draft alternatives, visit www.cadescopeplanning.com.

Q. How can I become involved in this study (Phase II of the Cades Cove Plan)?

A. Stay informed through the Cades Cove planning project's web site (set your "favorites" bookmark to www.cadescopeplanning.com, a new address for our site) and send comments on what you see there over the next two years. Three newsletters, including this one, will let you know about major stages in this part of the planning process – the start, the completion of technical studies, and the completion of Phase II. Over the summer of 2005, this planning process will involve the conduct of the "Visitor Experience and Resource Protection" ("VERP" – see page 5 in this newsletter). The VERP analysis will include opportunities on the web site for you to ask questions and then later to comment on its findings. In March 2006, a local access cable television presentation is planned. You will also be able to attend meetings in the spring or summer of 2006 at one of four locations to learn about the results of the technical analyses and their implications for the next step of the study process – Phase III (for more on what is expected to result from Phase II, see page 2 in this newsletter).

Q. Why are you holding only one round of public meetings in this phase of the study (Phase II)?

A. In Phase I, there were many meetings because we wanted to introduce the public to the planning process, and we needed public input to identify ideas and concerns (a stage known as "scoping") and to shape the alternatives. From May of 2002 to June of 2003, there were five rounds of public meetings in 14 different locations, involving more than 760 participants. Now, the draft alternatives are in hand (see pages 1- 3). Phase II primarily involves technical analyses that will refine the alternatives and examine their potential impacts and benefits. These studies will provide additional information for citizens to consider and comment on. When these analyses are complete and the information is available for a 30-day official comment period, four meetings will be held, three on the Tennessee side of the Park and one on the North Carolina side. These meetings are anticipated for spring or summer of 2006.

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VERP and CADES COVE

Growing levels of visitation at national parks across the nation are increasing the challenges to the National Park Service (NPS) in fulfilling its dual missions to “provide for the enjoyment of park visitors” and to “preserve park resources for future generations.” The 1978 National Parks and Recreation Act requires the NPS to address the complex issues of visitor use management and “park carrying capacity” — the types and levels of visitor use in each park that can be accommodated while sustaining acceptable resource and social conditions. To accomplish this, NPS has developed a planning tool called “Visitor Experience and Resource Protection” (VERP).

VERP consists of a nine-element process that provides a general framework for analysis and action rather than a rigid procedure. The goals of the VERP process for Phase II of Cades Cove planning, to be met through the involvement of a wide variety of experts, NPS staff, and the public, are to:

- Describe desired future conditions.
- Identify indicators of quality for visitor experience and resources.
- Establish standards specific to Cades Cove that define minimum acceptable conditions for visitor experience and resources.

During the next six months, the study team will define the Cades Cove visitor experience and resource protection factors. Generally speaking, this is done for each area within the Cove. Some areas, such as restrooms, can be readily evaluated using industry standards and prior research to determine when the level of crowding and wait times exceed desired levels.

Other areas, such as historic buildings and wildlife viewing areas, will be more of a challenge. To establish effective evaluation factors for these areas requires considerable research, much of it on-the-ground. A key approach will be to survey visitors to assess how they view conditions in Cades Cove related to traffic, crowding, other

visitors’ behavior, facility availability and adequacy, and whether or not the public thinks these conditions should be maintained or improved.

Once we understand the desired future condition, both in terms of quality of visitor experience and resources, indicators of quality can be selected. These need to be sensitive to change as well as something that can be monitored. For each indicator, a standard will then be developed to define the minimum condition to be maintained. In the Phase II effort these standards will be expressed as a range and used to refine the draft action alternatives so that each alternative can achieve the desired future condition. This assures a set of workable draft alternatives that will enable the Park to fulfill its mission in Cades Cove. The establishment of indicator monitoring and management actions to ensure that established standards are maintained will be addressed in future study phases. 🦌



How Can I Contribute?

Continued from page 4

Q. Why are you still considering alternatives? I thought you finished that task in the previous study (Phase I)!

A. Phase I produced ideas that were combined into draft conceptual alternatives. We think these represent the complete range of feasible ideas and their combinations. But further detail and analysis is needed to be certain that the final alternatives considered truly represent the feasible range of alternatives. The technical analyses in Phase II are intended to give us that information. We will then be able to refine the conceptual alternatives and then evaluate each of the final alternatives for their feasibility, cost, and environmental impacts. Once we are satisfied that we have the right alternatives and enough information to evaluate them, the process of making choices during Phase III can begin. The process of gathering information and refining alternatives can be a back and forth process, with information leading to refinements that raise new questions that require even more information! So be prepared to hear about “the alternatives” for a long time to come.

Q. So what do you mean when you talk about a Tier 1 EIS?

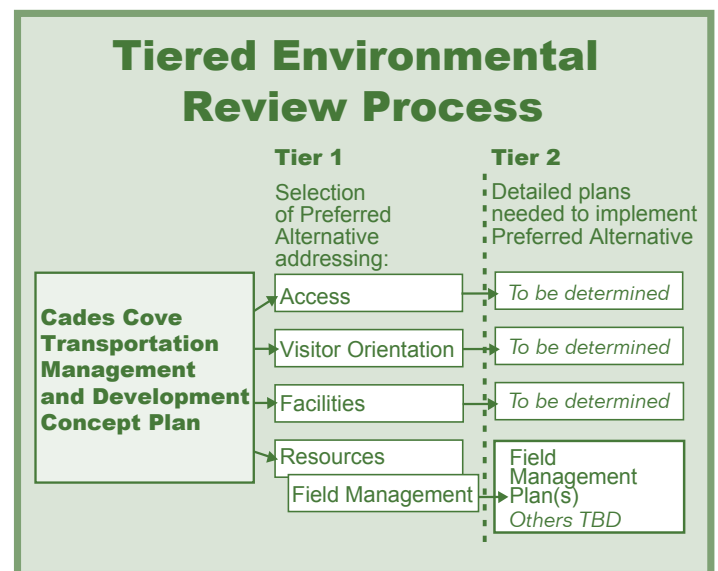
A. The decisions to be made in the planning process for Cades Cove range from very complex to simple or straightforward. One way to deal with this complexity is to tackle the decisions in layers, or “tiers.” The Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for Cades Cove will be general, or programmatic, setting the course for Cades Cove for years to come and providing the detailed information required for an EIS on the scale of the entire Cove. There will be an alternative selected at the end of this planning process that incorporates many individual elements. The NPS may be able to proceed with implementation of some of the more straightforward elements of the selected alternative with the completion of this Tier 1 EIS and Record of Decision (ROD), such as minor improvements to individual parking areas. However, more complex elements of the selected alternative would require additional analysis before implementation. Decisions relating to these elements would build from this Tier 1 (or programmatic) EIS. For example, the selected alternative of the Tier 1 EIS may direct that a new visitor center be built in Cades Cove. There may be an indication of general

size, function, and location but another level, or tier, of review would be needed before it could be built. The second tier would not re-examine whether the visitor center should be built but would look more specifically at size, function, and location. (The building’s and site’s design would be yet another, final level of decision making.) As in all planning undertaken by the NPS, public involvement would continue to be a key part of these future implementation efforts.

Q. Why should I bother to participate? Did my participation make any difference in the previous phase of study?

A. The public’s involvement shaped many aspects of the alternatives and the supporting technical studies in Phase I. Well over 1,800 individual comments were received during Phase I. Almost two-thirds of these comments related to traffic congestion, overcrowding, or air quality. Other concerns included the need to educate visitors about the Cove in advance of their visit and the need to better manage resources, in part through stronger law enforcement. Many people also voiced the concern that the traditional visitor experience would be lost if the NPS were to change anything in the Cove, and bicyclists, hikers, picnickers, equestrians, photographers, artists, and many others who have special interests in the Cove experience offered suggestions.

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How Can I Contribute? Continued from page 6

In response to people's suggestions about enforcement, rangers began patrolling on bicycles in the summer of 2002 to increase their ability to move around the Cove during congested times. In Alternatives 4 and 5, where shuttles are specified for Loop Road visitors during peak periods, public comment encouraged incorporation of the idea of "open air" style trams or trolleys and frequent stops (the resulting draft recommendations are 17 to 18 stops, with people able to get off and catch another tram any time). Concerns about Cades Cove descendants' access has led to a technical study during Phase II to look specifically at traditional practices in Cades Cove.

Some public comments could not be considered for use in the draft alternatives without assuming a major change to federal laws, such as the suggestion to charge entrance fees to the Cove. Other ideas did not meet project goals, such as the suggestion to add a second lane to the Loop Road. Adding 15 to 19 feet of pavement for the length of the road would change the visitor's experience by altering the road's scenic quality and historic character, and would harm wildlife, vegetation, and possible archaeological sites. For these reasons, this concept was determined not to meet the project goal of providing exceptional visitor experiences that respect the natural and cultural resources of Cades Cove.

All public comments were recorded during Phase I and will be continually addressed as details are added to the alternatives and the planning process moves forward. 🦌





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Please contact us for additional information or if you would like to be added to our mailing list.
The National Park Service cares for the special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

Message from the Park Superintendent Welcome to the First Issue of *Cades Cove Planning*

Three years ago the National Park Service and the Knoxville Regional Transportation Planning Organization initiated the Cades Cove Development Concept and Transportation Management Plan to evaluate transportation and other needs of Cades Cove. The first phase of the planning process was completed in the fall of 2004, and we are now ready to begin the second phase.

In Phase II we will be completing affected environment and impact analysis work that will lead to development of a Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Wilbur Smith Associates is conducting the second phase of the plan, with the Knoxville Regional Transportation Planning Organization serving as project manager.

This is the first of three newsletters we plan to distribute during Phase II. We hope you will find it of interest.

Articles here focus on such topics as:

- An outline of the findings from Phase I including the five alternatives developed.

- How can I contribute to Phase II?
- The Visitor Experience and Resource Protection (VERP) framework, which will be used to evaluate the alternatives.

Your input continues to be important as we begin the environmental analysis of Cades Cove. We plan to keep you informed of our work through issues of this newsletter and via our web site. You can visit our web site at www.cadescopeplanning.com for updated information on the project and to send us comments. In the spring or summer of next year, we will conduct a round of public meetings at four different locations to present the final definition of alternatives and the results of the VERP analysis.

Please share with us your questions or concerns at any time during this process.

Dale A. Ditmanson
Superintendent