

A WILDERNESS PLAN FOR CRATERS OF THE MOON NATIONAL MONUMENT AND THE SURROUNDING REGION

Prepared by the National Parks Association:
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Photograph courtesy National Park Service

Outstanding in its own desolate and often grotesque way, Craters of the Moon National Monument in south-central Idaho protects a tract of semi-arid land which was overwhelmed in very recent geologic time by flows of basaltic lava. Volcanism here was largely non-violent, the lava issuing from various points along a zone of weakness in the earth's crust called the Great Rift to create vast fields of rough dark stone. Scene above was taken near monument's North Crater.

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THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE ACT and related statutes contemplate the protection of animals, plants, and scenery in the parks and monuments to the maximum feasible extent, subject to compatible visitation. This means that while national parks and monuments are for people, they were created by the people primarily to preserve the plants, animals, streams, rocks, mountains, and scenery for their esthetic, scientific, and cultural values.

Such protection cannot be accorded if park and monument planning is carried on within the narrow confines of the park or monument itself. Planning must be extended to very large regions around each unit. In this way visitation and participation in various kinds of recreation activities can be distributed throughout the region instead of being concentrated within the park or monument.

This broad distribution of visitation must be the fundamental principle of park and monument planning if the visitors are to enjoy the features for which the parks and monuments

were established and if the units are to be protected against overwhelming crowding and traffic.

The regional planning approach intended to distribute visitation over wide areas in accord with the capabilities and management objectives of different land areas, is the only solution to the problem of crowding in parks. Therefore the National Parks Association advances the following proposals for planning within Craters of the Moon National Monument and in a broad area surrounding the monument:

- 1) A Wilderness Plan for Craters of the Moon National Monument;
- 2) A Regional Plan for the area around the national monument.

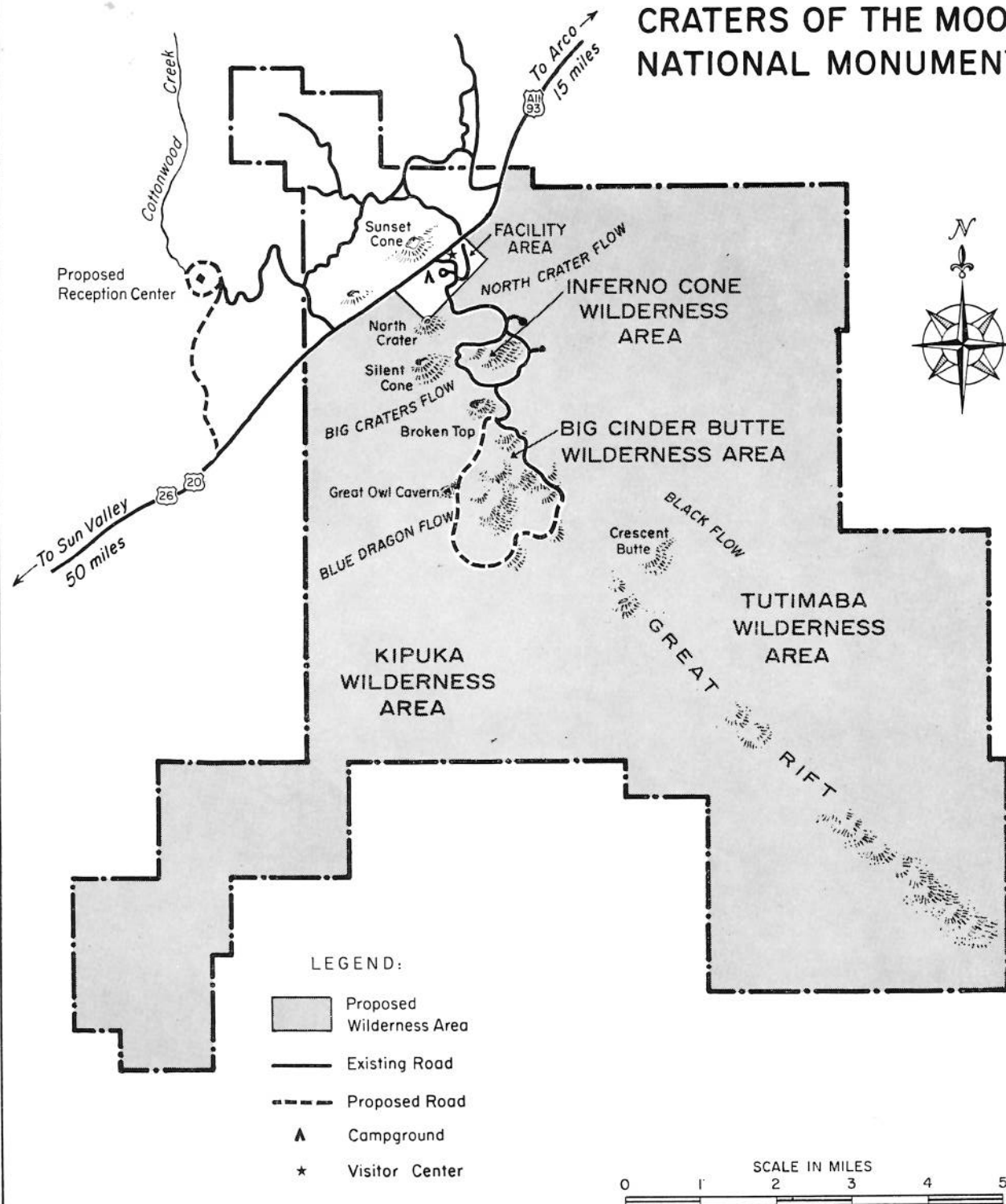
The relevance of the proceeding to consider wilderness proposals for Craters of the Moon National Monument extends beyond this single unit of the National Park System. The principles and concepts finally enunciated for this situation will perforce apply throughout the system. The natural phenomena contained in the monument are as important in their own right

as the wonders of Yellowstone or any of the other great parks.

The primary objective of management for Craters of the Moon National Monument ought to be to reserve as large an area as possible in wilderness status. There is more than adequate room in the extensive region surrounding the monument as well as abundant outdoor recreation facilities provided by the federal, state, and local levels of government, and by private individuals and organizations, to accommodate persons coming to the region seeking varied, active, interesting outdoor recreation release from their work-a-day life. In fact, the region offers a remarkably diverse array of high quality recreation resources.

The volcanic origins of the Snake River Plain have resulted in a weirdly convoluted landscape that is startling to behold. The monument presents a marvelous opportunity for people to come face to face with the awesome forces of volcanism. In addition, the volcanic activity has caused many unusual ecological relationships worthy of scientific investigation. Both func-

WILDERNESS PLAN FOR CRATERS OF THE MOON NATIONAL MONUMENT



Federal Graphics

PLATE I

tions are enhanced by wilderness conditions.

The raw surface of lava and cinders, coupled with semi-arid climatic conditions, present special wilderness problems. The nature of lava and the prevailing semi-arid climate preclude lush vegetative cover. Structures which rise above the surface, roadways, and even parked vehicles have tremendous visual impact over long distances in any area devoid of vegetative growth which rises high enough to offer visual relief. Under such conditions, the concept of providing strips of land between the edge of the highway and the beginning of wilderness is unreasonable. We believe that wilderness should begin at the roadside.

NPA Recommendations

It is proposed that four wilderness areas be established. They are shown in general terms on Plate 1, page 6. The proposed wilderness units are: Kipuka, Tutimaba, Inferno Cone and Big Cinder Butte. The area of the monument north of Highways 20, 26, 93-A is not recommended for inclusion because it is more representative of the foothills of the Pioneer Mountains than the volcanic phenomena of the Plain, is crisscrossed by roads, and has evidence of former mining activity.

Each of the four wilderness areas proposed meets the principle of commencing at the edge of the road. A major separation between the proposed Kipuka and Tutimaba Wilderness Areas is along the spine of the Great Rift—the major fissure through which the bulk of the lava, cinder, and ash issued—a discernible physiographic feature. The separation of the two proposed wilderness areas was made necessary by the existing roadway extending south from Inferno Cone to the north edge of Big Cinder Butte. The exterior boundaries for these major wilderness units are artificial. Both could be extended as such into the comparable surrounding landscape which is administered as part of the public domain by the Bureau of Land Management under existing statutory provisions.

The smaller Inferno Cone and Big Cinder Butte Wilderness Areas are enclosed by parts of the present or proposed loop road system.

An enclave of 320 acres is set aside as a facility area to accommodate

the present visitor center and the present campground. Facilities in such an area should focus largely on the equipment required to interpret the natural features of the wilderness area for visitors. Provision should be made for water supply, educational displays and exhibits, and sanitary facilities.

The facility area raises the issue of Bureau of Outdoor Recreation classifications. The issue of placing different areas in one class or another as a statement of management objectives must consider first the category of the park or monument according to the Secretary of the Interior's memorandum of July 10, 1964. We believe Craters of the Moon would be categorized as a "natural" area; that is, the inclusion of the area in the national park system is based upon the public judgment that the natural phenomena are unique and must be given primary consideration. BOR classifications can be applied to such units of the national park system only if the areas to be selected for management different than "primitive" (Class V) are extremely small or if the natural state of the area is such that Class V designation is not physically possible.

The facility area in Craters of the Moon ought to be devoted exclusively to educational purposes. The area should be developed to educate a flow of visitors to the natural values of the monument but not to serve accumulations of visitors in private automobiles bent on a wide array of recreation activities. Campgrounds are not necessary for the purposes of a facility area, and the present 45-family campsites should be phased out of the monument area. Twenty acres, adequate for the visitor center in the facility area, might be Class I (high density recreation); the remainder of the facility area, that part of the monument north of U.S. 20, 26, 93-A, and the corridors separating the wilderness areas could be Class III (natural environment areas). The remainder of the monument—approximately 49,740 acres—will be Class V. An additional 69,000 acres of adjoining BLM lands have little or no topographic differentiation from the landscape within the monument and contain several large kipukas, or "islands" of pre-eruption terrain surrounded by recent lava. The area should be carefully examined with a

view to establishing comparable Class V management on these lands under terms of the Classification and Multiple Use Act of 1964.

The Regional Plan

Before considering Craters of the Moon National Monument as part of a recreation region, we should observe that there are several discernible characteristics demonstrated by visitors to any region which serve as useful groupings in planning for recreation development.

One group resides in or immediately adjacent to the recreation region. The visitation generated by this group ordinarily does not involve overnight stays within the recreation region. Persons tend to set out to participate in one recreation activity per day's trip: for example, family boating, fishing, or gem collecting. Another major group originates within four or five hours' driving time from the recreation region. People in this group usually have a set destination where one or two nights will be spent. They may participate in several recreation activities in the region, but usually close to their overnight stopping place. A third major group resides some distance away from the recreation region and may spend one or two nights at different locations in the recreation region, or parties may spend many nights at a single location within the recreation region. A distinction between those people arriving in a recreation region during different seasons of the year should also be noted. This is particularly relevant to consideration of Craters of the Moon National Monument because of the topography and climatic conditions. During the summer season, when the bulk of inter-regional recreation visitation takes place, temperatures on the treeless Snake River Plain—especially where aggravated by black lava—are high, and broad, flat plains are not overly attractive for recreation purposes. Visitors to the region during the summer are likely to make their stay at Craters of the Moon National Monument relatively short in comparison to the length of stay in the nearby mountainous areas. Likewise, winter temperatures are cold, and lingering snow on the ground is not uncommon. However, a rising number of people in the total population who are able to

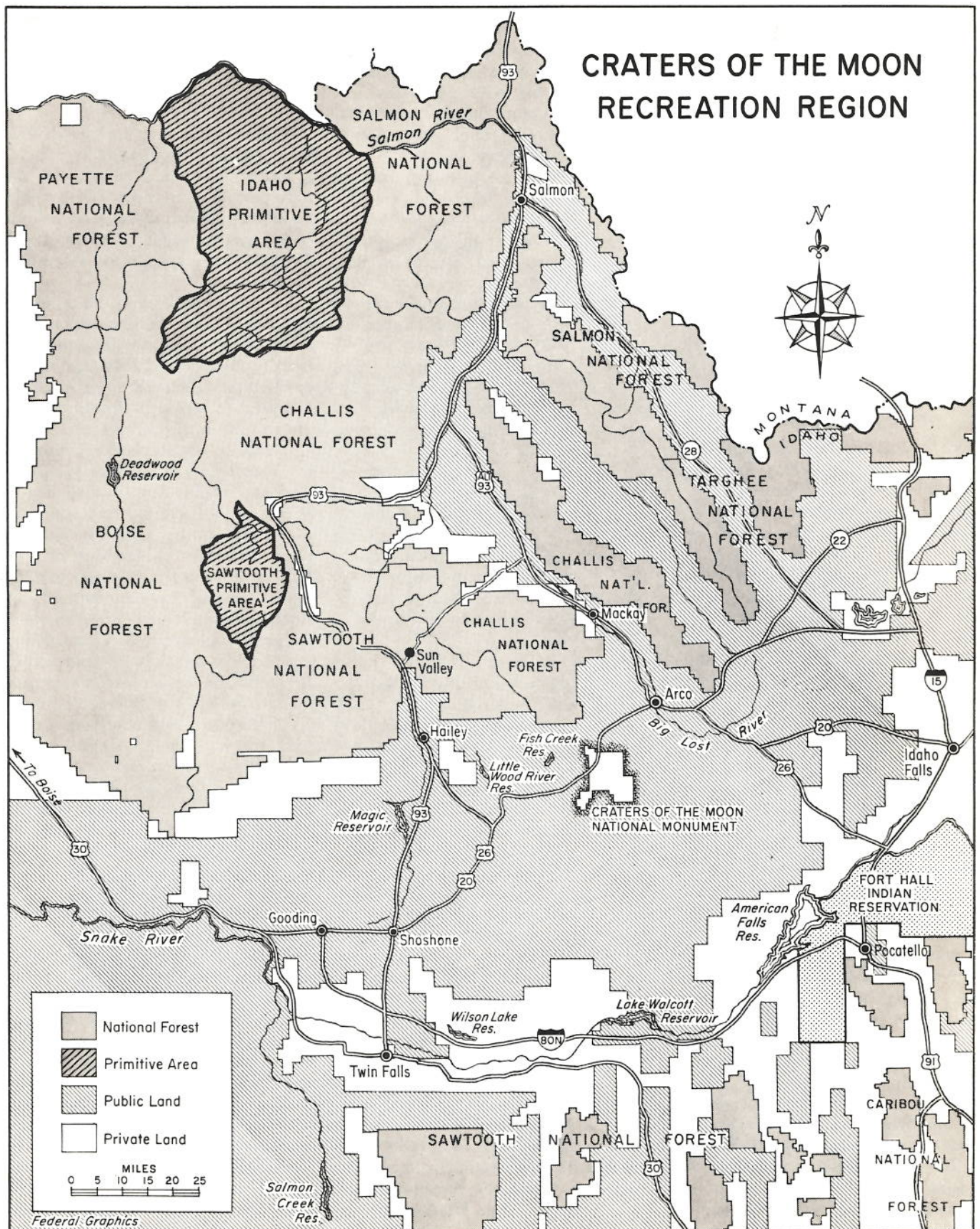


PLATE 2

travel during the spring-fall periods of the year are attracted to semi-arid areas. Many of these visitors move more slowly than peak season visitors and are much interested in the natural history of any area through which they pass. The location and quantity of visitor facilities may vary widely according to the proportions of visitors found in each group, and should be the subject of much study.

Visitation Analyzed

There were approximately 147,000 visitors to Craters of the Moon National Monument in 1965 and the total may rise to 157,000 by 1973. These figures may be far more a result of facility availability than an indication of total demand on the part of people wishing a national monument wilderness experience. The real issue is the nature of the facilities constructed to accommodate visitors, and the effect of the facilities—both in terms of their own impact and in terms of likely increases in visitation—on the wilderness areas. It is at this point that deliberate management must take a hand and direct streams of visitation by the provision of alternative facility supplies designed to achieve the socially chosen goals in designated wilderness areas.

Within a radius of a two-hour drive of Craters of the Moon National Monument there are: the Boise-Sawtooth National Forest, the Challis National Forest, and a portion of the Targhee National Forest; four major Bureau of Reclamation reservoirs, with associated intensive facility development, within the administrative responsibility of these national forests; all or portions of two primitive areas totaling 1,450,000 acres; one state park and four state recreation areas; one national wildlife refuge (administered by the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife on a Bureau of Reclamation reservoir); several smaller reservoirs developed by private landowners in cooperation with federal agencies; and the extensive privately developed recreation facilities and visitor capacities at Sun Valley and in the several communities adjacent to the great lava plains. At least two other major reservoirs surrounded by land suitable for the development of recreation facilities supplement the water-based supply.

The bulk of the land immediately adjacent to the monument is administered by the Bureau of Land Management. While no facilities have been constructed by this agency within the region, there are areas of significant recreation potential which could be developed to serve the needs of visitors to the Craters of the Moon National Monument region.

Available within the recreation region are 1800 family campsites, five public boat-launching facilities, 26 rental cabin developments, at least 50 private campsites, and there is expansion planned for more than 1100 additional family campsites by 1973. There are more than 100 motel units available for rent in towns like Arco, MacKay, Shoshone, Hailey and Gooding, within one hour's driving distance of the national monument, plus the capacity of the Sun Valley complex, which has 520 rental units available.

Each of these areas can provide visitor accommodations for those people coming to the Craters of the Moon recreation region to enjoy the strange, lava wilderness of the Snake River Plain. Each of these visitors would be able to drive—or the private establishment where they were housed would provide transportation—to a reception center immediately adjacent to the national monument on the west (near the outflow of Cottonwood Creek). Parking areas, restaurant, sanitary facilities, book and curio sales, and administration of the monument would be located here.

The low foothills which dominate this area support a scattered stand of ponderosa pine, a setting ideal for campground establishment. If demand for such capacity, especially in view of an extended spring-fall season, rose high enough, a privately operated campground could well be encouraged as part of the reception area. In this way direct governmental provision of overnight facilities would not operate to the detriment of existing private operators.

Monument Transportation

From the reception center, visitors would be loaded in specially designed, multi-passenger vehicles for the trip to the visitor center in the national monument. The visitor center would be devoted to the advance of scientific

knowledge in the monument and the display and explanation of that knowledge to the visiting public. Other specially designed vehicles would leave the visitor center at regular, short intervals for the convenience of visitors wishing to move through the corridors separating the wilderness areas. These vehicles would make frequent stops at the heads of foot-trails leading into the wilderness areas and at points of special attraction.

There is no physical reason why resort complexes cannot be established at other locations within the recreation region—especially near established communities. In such locations the attraction of shopping centers, golf courses, swimming pools, air conditioning, and other modern conveniences would tend to draw many vacationers who might be expected to make Craters of the Moon National Monument one of their stops, thus satisfying visitor wants without danger of serious overcrowding or impairment of the wilderness environment. Such complexes would be likely in the recreation region only as the economic feasibility proved they could become viable operations. The present shortage of spring-fall visitor facilities could also be alleviated in the context of existing private areas near the national monument.

The facilities at a reception area need not be extensive or expensive. This is simply because there will not be large numbers of diverse visitors requiring overnight accommodations in close proximity to the national monument. Neither will the transporting vehicles have to be of gigantic proportion. Only minimal design problems are expected in dealing with the nature of the facilities and the working of the transportation system.

This proposal illustrates an alternative approach to the planning of a national park or monument unit. It first of all focuses on a primary management objective for the park or monument. It then relates that management objective to the characteristics of the land and resource patterns in the surrounding region and the nature and magnitude of the present and anticipated visitation to the region as well as the economic development objectives of the residents of the region itself. ■