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**Jesse Juen,**

*Acting State Director.*

**Authority:** 40 CFR 1506.6; 40 CFR 1506.10; 43 CFR 1610.2; 43 CFR 1610.5-2.

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## DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

### National Park Service

[NPS-PWR-PWRO-0928-8539; 9082-H921-409]

#### Draft Environmental Impact Statement for General Management Plan/Wilderness Study, Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, Hawaii

**AGENCY:** National Park Service, Interior.

**ACTION:** Notice of intent.

**SUMMARY:** The National Park Service is expanding the scope of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that is being prepared for updating the General Management Plan (GMP) for Hawaii Volcanoes National Park. As part of this conservation planning and environmental impact analysis effort, the Draft EIS will include a wilderness study to determine if any additional portions of the park should be recommended for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System (currently the park contains 130,790 acres of Congressionally designated Wilderness).

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** This Notice supplements and updates the original Notice of Intent (published in **Federal Register** on April 13, 2009) which formally announced initiation of the GMP update effort. The scope of the EIS is expanded to include an evaluation of foreseeable effects associated with possible designation of additional wilderness within Hawaii Volcanoes National Park. The new GMP will establish the overall direction for the park, setting broad management goals for managing the area over the next 15 to 20 years. The GMP will prescribe desired resource conditions and visitor experiences that are to be achieved and maintained throughout

the park. Based on the desired conditions, the GMP will outline what resource management and visitor activities, and what limited development, would be appropriate in the park. Among the topics that have been addressed thus far are preservation and protection of native ecosystems and the park's natural and cultural resources; significance of park resources to Native Hawaiian culture; visitor experiences including use of facilities and participation in activities and programs; access to lava for visitors and researchers; current wilderness management issues; transportation, roads and parking; commercial services and special park uses; park operations, partnerships, and collaboration; and the future of the Kahuku Unit. A reasonable range of alternatives for managing the park, including "no-action" and "agency preferred" alternatives will be developed through the planning process and analyzed in the EIS. The EIS will evaluate the potential environmental impacts of all alternatives, address appropriate mitigation strategies, and identify an "environmentally preferred" alternative.

*Comments:* To facilitate sound planning and analysis of foreseeable environmental effects, Hawaii Volcanoes National Park is gathering additional information relevant to preparing the Draft EIS. The park is also soliciting suggestions from the public on issues that should be addressed in the wilderness study, and comments on the range of preliminary GMP alternatives under consideration. In concert with local, state, Tribal, and other federal agencies, consideration will also be made for cooperative management of resources outside park boundaries that affect the integrity of the park. Thoughtful comments and participation in this scoping process are desired. You are encouraged to submit your comments directly online through the NPS Planning, Environment and Public Comment Web site at: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/havo> (select the GMP/Wilderness Study from the list of projects). Or if you prefer to do so, you may send written responses to: Cindy Orlando, Superintendent, Attn: General Management Planning Team, Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, P.O. Box 52, Hawaii National Park, HI 96718-0052.

All written comments on the GMP/Wilderness Study must be postmarked, hand delivered, or electronically transmitted not later than January 3, 2012. Immediately upon confirmation of this date an update will be posted on the project Web site. Before including your address, phone number, email address, or other personal identifying

information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment—including your personal identifying information—may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

In April 2009, seven public scoping sessions were held on the island of Hawaii (including Volcano, Hilo, Naalehu, Kailua-Kona), on Oahu (Honolulu), and on Maui (Kahului). Additional meetings were held in August 2011 to provide a planning update that presented preliminary alternatives and addressed what would be considered in the wilderness study component. All persons who previously submitted comments during the initial GMP scoping process need not resubmit their comments. However, persons who have not previously submitted comments related to wilderness, or who wish to submit any new information or comments related to the range of preliminary alternatives are encouraged to do so.

The GMP project Web site <http://www.nps.gov/havo/parkmgmt/plan.htm> will provide regularly up-dated information regarding the project, including planning process milestones, meeting notices, reports and documents, and useful links associated with the EIS process.

The conservation planning and environmental impact analysis supporting preparation of the GMP/Wilderness Study will be conducted as described above, in accord with Council on Environmental Quality requirements and other appropriate Federal regulations, and NPS Director's Order 12, 2006 Management Policies pertaining to wilderness, and other NPS procedures and policies. For further information, please contact: Cindy Orlando, Superintendent, Hawaii Volcanoes National Park (contact information as noted above). General information about Hawaii Volcanoes National Park is available at <http://www.nps.gov/havo>.

*Decision Process:* Following the completion of the scoping phase and consideration of all public concerns and other agency comments, a Draft EIS, wilderness study, and proposed GMP will be prepared and released for public review. Thereafter, the availability of the Final EIS/GMP would be similarly announced in the **Federal Register** and via local and regional news media. As a delegated EIS, the official responsible for the final decision on the GMP is the Regional Director, Pacific West Region,

National Park Service. Following approval of the GMP the official responsible for implementation would be the Superintendent, Hawaii Volcanoes National Park.

Dated: November 3, 2011.

**John H. Williams,**

*Acting Regional Director, Pacific West Region.*

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## DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

### National Park Service

[NPS-PWR-PWRO-1002-8566; 8826-1016-600]

#### Environmental Impact Statement for Restoration of the Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias, Yosemite National Park, Madera, Mariposa, Mono, and Tuolumne Counties, CA

**AGENCY:** National Park Service.

**ACTION:** Notice of intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement.

**SUMMARY:** The National Park Service (NPS) is preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Restoration of the Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias in Yosemite National Park. This EIS addresses implementation of actions called for in the 1980 General Management Plan (GMP), presenting comprehensive design alternatives for restoring natural conditions in the Mariposa Grove, as well as improving visitor experience and access within the Grove and at the nearby South Entrance to the park. The NPS is initiating public scoping and consultation with interested members of the public, agencies, and federally recognized American Indian Tribes traditionally associated with the area to help identify topics, issues, and concerns for consideration in the EIS.

**DATES:** Comments must be received by January 3, 2012.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** In 1864, Congress passed landmark legislation preserving both the Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias and the Yosemite Valley. This was the first time Congress set aside public lands for the express purpose of preserving scenic and natural values, stating that these areas "shall be held for public use, resort, and recreation \* \* \* inalienable for all time" (Act of June 30, 1864, 13 Stat. 325). Giant sequoia groves occur sporadically on the western slope of the Sierra Nevada as remnants of more extensive forests that existed thousands of years ago. These impressive trees are known for their massive size and

longevity. The Mariposa Grove comprises about 500 mature giant sequoia trees in an upper and lower grove. It is the largest of three giant sequoia groves within the park. Distribution of the trees is limited by several factors including surface water, typically supplied by melting snow; soil and air moisture; temperature; and ground water. Giant sequoias have expansive but shallow root systems that can reach up to one hundred feet from the base of the tree. Fire plays an important role in giant sequoia ecology, creating canopy openings and releasing soil nutrients needed for seedling establishment. Fire scars on the trees indicate that fires occurred at intervals of approximately 3-15 years within the Mariposa Grove until the late 19th century.

The Mariposa Grove is home to several special-status species, including the Pacific fisher (*Martes pennanti*, a candidate for federal listing as a threatened or endangered species), California spotted owls (*Strix occidentalis occidentalis*), Bolander's woodreed (*Cinna bolanderi*), mountain lady's slipper (*Cypripedium montanum*), and Coleman's piperia (*Piperia colemanii*). Cultural resources in the area include archaeological resources and several historic properties either in, or eligible for listing in, the National Register of Historic Places. Historic resources include (1) the Mariposa Grove, a historic district that includes the loop road, several trails, the Civilian Conservation Corps-era comfort station, and the Grove Museum (individually listed), and (2) the South Entrance Station, a historic district that includes the comfort station, ranger residence/garage and the entrance checking station. The Mariposa Grove Road will be assessed for its eligibility for listing in the National Register as part of the project. Non-historic structures and sites within the Grove include the parking areas, gift shop, ticket booth, tram staging area, fueling station, vault toilets, shuttle stops and bus parking areas, several trails, and communications equipment.

**Site Management History:** Paved roads, parking areas, a campground, and other infrastructure were constructed within the Mariposa Grove from the 1930s to the 1970s. Since then, management practices have evolved along with our understanding of ecology and giant sequoias. After nearly a century of fire suppression, prescribed fire was reintroduced to the Mariposa Grove in 1971, as resource managers recognized that heavy fuel build-up could threaten its survival. Growing concerns about visitation impacts also

led to the decision to prohibit private vehicles in the Upper Grove. In the 1980 General Management Plan (GMP), Yosemite National Park outlined goals and actions to protect and restore the Mariposa Grove and improve the nearby south entrance to the park. Some projects have been implemented, such as removal of the campground and lodge. However, several major actions have yet to be fully designed or implemented, such as relocating parking from the Lower Grove, improving facilities, upgrading utilities, and redesigning the South Entrance Station.

**Purpose and Need:** Comprehensive actions are needed to ensure that the Mariposa Grove continues to thrive and provide inspiration and enjoyment for future generations. Primary goals of this project are to restore degraded habitat and natural processes critical to the long-term health of the Mariposa Grove, and to improve the overall experience for visitors. Existing conditions affecting the health of the Mariposa Grove include (1) roads and other infrastructure are disrupting natural water flows, (2) facilities in the Lower Grove—a parking lot for over 100 vehicles, a tram staging area, fueling station, fuel storage tanks, generators, and a gift shop—are encroaching on sequoias and their habitat, and (3) foot and vehicle traffic have compacted soils and exposed shallow sequoia roots. Stressed trees are less resilient and more susceptible to external threats such as disease, wildfire from surrounding areas, and effects from climate change.

Existing conditions affecting the visitor experience include (1) inadequate information exists to properly orient visitors upon arrival to the park or the Mariposa Grove, (2) road configuration at the South Entrance and entrance to the Mariposa Grove is confusing, (3) the parking lot fills to capacity early in the day, forcing temporary closures of the lot and road, (4) long lines form at the kiosks and intersection as visitors attempt to get information, find parking, or turn around due to lot and road closure, (5) shuttles from Wawona to the Mariposa Grove are often already full when they arrive at the South Entrance Station shuttle stop, and (6) trails and facilities need improvements for accessibility.

Conditions affecting visitor and employee safety include (1) pedestrian crossings to and from the facilities and parking are undefined and hazardous amid the traffic congestion, (2) small entrance station kiosks have insufficient space for employee safety, accessibility, or comfort while working long shifts, (3) multiple left turn lanes crossing one another at the South Entrance Station