

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**  
**CANYON RANGER STATION/EMERGENCY SERVICES BUILDING**  
**YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK**

Yellowstone National Park is a volcanic plateau of recent geologic origin. Its average elevation is 2,438 meters (8,000 feet), but higher mountains surround the plateau except to the southwest, where the plateau descends to the lower Snake River Plain of Idaho. The park encompasses mountains exceeding 3,353 meters (11,000 feet), and canyons and valleys cut by streams flowing from the Continental Divide. The park was established in 1872 as the nation's first national park, with a purpose to preserve for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations its geologic features, natural systems and processes, and history.

The current ranger offices are now housed in a temporary Visitor Center building. The offices were recently housed in the existing Visitor Center at Canyon. This function was displaced when the visitor center reconstruction began to improve its functionality and to meet the demands of current visitation levels. This Visitor Center-based ranger station was built in 1958 at a time when there was no need for a winter operation and no permanent year-round protection rangers were stationed at Canyon. The present staff of twelve employees, including four year-round employees, had shared a 14'x15' office (in the Visitor Center being reconstructed) that was conceived for a smaller and seasonal operation. There are no private areas to interview victims, witnesses, or suspects of crimes nor is there space to care for visitors requiring medical assistance. Confidential activities such as employment interviews, employee evaluations, and counseling sessions impact the rest of staff's access to the common office area.

**PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE**

The preferred alternative will construct facilities including a Ranger Station and Emergency Services Building (ESB) to serve Resource Management and Visitor Protection functions in the Canyon Village area. The ranger station building would be approximately 2,000 square feet in size, and provide offices, an employee locker room, a public contact area, storage facilities for the law enforcement and emergency services, and a training room. The ESB facility would contain approximately 2,400 to 3,400 square feet of garage and storage space to house structural fire engines, an ambulance, workshop, and storage facilities. Including an adequate 12-space paved parking area, the entire facility would be sited on less than one acre of land and constructed in two separate phases. The preferred site for this facility is located along an electrical line utility corridor east of the YPSS Service Station, west of Canyon Campground and north of the North Rim Drive across from the Canyon Village Historic District.

## **ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED**

Alternatives considered included a no-action alternative in which the Backcountry Permit Office would be accommodated within the reconstructed visitor center facility, but ranger offices, storage facilities, and other essential Resource Management and Visitor Protection functions would be displaced. Most ranger functions would have no dedicated space to work from.

A second alternative (Alternative B) would locate the same facilities proposed in the preferred alternative but in the location of a utility corridor on an abandoned road bed running east-west from the Tower-to-Canyon Road in the vicinity of the Canyon employee residential area. This corridor is on the northwest corner of Canyon Junction west of the Yellowstone Park Service Station (YPSS) and is approximately 300 feet long.

Other potential alternatives that were considered but rejected include: siting the facilities north of the Yellowstone Park Service Station adjacent to the Dunraven Road; locate a dedicated ranger station building behind the Canyon Visitor Center in the open area southeast of Canyon Junction while leaving the emergency vehicles in their present location in the maintenance compound; locating a ranger station and emergency services building in the area that a yurt camp operation is currently sited; locate the ranger station and ESB adjacent to the Blister Rust Camp; and providing space for all ranger station functions other than the ESB to occur at the reconstructed visitor center, with the ESB functions staying in their current location at the maintenance compound. These alternatives were rejected due to a lack of utilities close by, proximity to a residential area, wetland concerns, functional and operations concerns, existing site constraints, and cost concerns.

The preferred alternative would be located in good proximity to other visitor services, provide a geographic separation from the employee housing area, decrease emergency response times, and increase security.

## **ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE**

The environmentally preferred alternative is determined by applying the criteria suggested in the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), which is guided by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ). The CEQ provides direction that "[t]he environmentally preferable alternative is the alternative that will promote the national environmental policy as expressed NEPA's Section 101:

- Fulfill the responsibilities of each generation as trustee of the environment for succeeding generations;
- Assure for all generations safe, healthful, productive, and esthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings;

- Attain the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation, risk of health or safety, or other undesirable and unintended consequences;
- Preserve important historic, cultural and natural aspects of our national heritage and maintain, wherever possible, an environment that supports diversity and variety of individual choice;
- Achieve a balance between population and resource use that will permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life's amenities; and
- Enhance the quality of renewable resources and approach the maximum attainable recycling of depletable resources.

The "No Action Alternative" would result in no direct impact to the natural and cultural resources environment because it does not require additional development. However, it is not the environmentally preferred alternative. The operational inefficiencies caused by the lack of a facility to house the Resource Management and Visitor Protection function would have a long-term adverse impact on enforcement rangers' abilities to act as guardians of the environment and effectively preserve the park's resources for succeeding generations. Employees would be denied safe, protective surroundings in their workspace. The "No Action" alternative does not allow for adequate employee workspace. Employee quality of life would be adversely affected by the lack of work facilities as many work activities would be relocated to private residences.

Alternative A allows for adequate workspace for employees, increasing employee effectiveness in protecting and preserving park resources. The public is also provided with convenient access to protection rangers, increasing safety and enjoyment of the park. The location also avoids impacting the employee residential area use, increasing the quality of life for employees of all divisions.

Alternative B also allows for adequate workspace for employees, increasing employee effectiveness in protecting and preserving park resources. The visitor experience is somewhat affected by the less-convenient and less-than-obvious location of Alternative B in comparison with Alternative A. Employee quality of life would also be affected by Alternative B's close proximity to employee housing. Alternative B was also identified as having a greater potential impact on amphibian habitat.

Because of the reduced impact on employee quality of life, the improved quality of visitor experience provide by its proximity to the Canyon developed area, its lesser potential impact on amphibian habitat, and the above criteria, Alternative A was determined to suitably fit the balance that is required to be met as the environmentally preferred alternative. Alternative A best preserves and enhances cultural and natural resource over the long-term. Construction of Alternative A best meets the national environmental policy expressed in NEPA (Sec. 101 (b)) to fulfill the responsibilities of each generation as trustee of the environment for succeeding generations.

## WHY THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE WILL NOT HAVE A SIGNIFICANT EFFECT ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

As defined in 40 CFR §1508.27, significance is determined by examining the following criteria:

### *Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse*

Construction of the preferred alternative would impact approximately one acre of land from the resulting construction of the ranger station, ESB, and associated parking areas. Negligible impacts to park geology and topography, minor short-term impacts to the soils, and no effect to geothermal resources would occur. Disturbance to vegetation would be mitigated by topsoil conservation, revegetation and noxious weed monitoring and control efforts would occur. The project would have a moderate long-term affect on the forest canopy and understory in the area of the proposed ranger station and ESB. Rare plants would not be affected. Short-term impacts to air quality would be minor, localized, and limited to the duration of construction. A minor long-term impact to visual resources would occur from the new buildings being constructed.

### *Degree of effect on public health or safety*

As described in the EA, Alternative A would co-locate the Ranger Station and ESB on the northeast side of the Canyon intersection, directly across from the Canyon Village developed area. This alternative would require that personnel responding after hours drive through the residential area and through the Canyon intersection to access the ambulance or structural fire engine. The emergency vehicles would then be in the vicinity of the high call-volume area, and would not be driven through the residential area or the Canyon intersection for the majority of incidents. With this alternative, and the completion of a Canyon Emergency Services Building, staff working at the Canyon Ranger Station would have a greatly reduced response time for emergency incidents that mostly occur in the Canyon Village.

### *Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas*

The proposed project location would be outside, but near, the historic district boundary. With the design measures implemented, long-term, direct, and cumulative effects of the proposed alternative would be minor to historic resources. No historic properties affected by implementation of this project.

### *Degree to which effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial*

Implementation of the project would cause a moderate beneficial improvement in visitor service and convenience from existing conditions. It is anticipated that a slightly more accessible and convenient public interaction would occur. There has been no reason from the planning process or public comment period to indicate the project is controversial. There were four comments received concerning the effect the project would have on the experience of the winter

yurt camp guests and employees. The proposed ranger station/ESB would be located approximately 0.2 mile from the Yurt camp. This is slightly more than the distance from the existing Canyon service station.

*Degree to which the possible effects on the quality of the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks*

There were no highly uncertain or unique or unknown risks identified.

*Degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration*

The action for this project will not set any NPS precedent. The preferred alternative is consistent with siting and construction of buildings permitted elsewhere.

*Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts*

This project is related to another project currently under construction. The Canyon Visitor Center is currently under construction due to considerable renovation and redesign. A separate environmental assessment was prepared for that project. All visitor center operations, including the visitor services and resource protection functions are currently operating out of temporary facilities located in the Canyon developed area parking lot. Completion of the visitor center project and the proposed ranger station/ESB project will result in greatly improved visitor services and experience. There are no cumulative effects considered to have significant impacts.

*Degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed on National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.*

A portion of the Canyon developed area is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Compliance with §106 of the National Historic Preservation Act was completed with a concurrence with the NPS determination of no effect by the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Officer on July 30, 2004.

*Degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its critical habitat*

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, on January 8, 2004, concurred with the determination of may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect the bald eagle; no effect on Canada lynx; may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect, the grizzly bear; and may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect, the gray wolf.

*Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, state, or local environmental protection law*

This action violates no federal, state, or local environmental protection laws.

In addition to reviewing the list of significance criteria, the National Park Service has determined that implementation of the proposal will not constitute an impairment to Yellowstone National Park's resources and values. This conclusion is based on a thorough analysis of the environmental impacts described in the *Canyon Ranger Station/Emergency Services Building Environmental Assessment*, the public comments received, relevant scientific studies, and the professional judgment of the decision-maker guided by the direction in NPS *Management Policies* (December 27, 2000). Although the plan/project has some negative impacts, in all cases these adverse impacts are the result of actions taken to preserve and restore other park resources and values. Overall, the plan results in benefits to park resources and values, opportunities for their enjoyment, and it does not result in their impairment.

## **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

The environmental assessment was made available for public review and comment during a 30-day period ending November 7, 2003. A total of 9 responses were received. The comments received were from individuals, an organization, a business permit holder and his employee, and state, county, federal and tribal agencies. One response endorsed Alternative A; the other responses did not state a preference, although 4 letters voiced concerns and suggested mitigations specific to Alternative A.

Substantive comments to the EA centered on 3 topics: way-finding, visibility and appearance of the building, and visitor experience. These concerns resulted in no changes to the text of the environmental assessment but are addressed in errata sheets attached to this FONSI. The FONSI and errata sheets will be sent to all commentors.

## **CONCLUSION**

The preferred alternative does not constitute an action that normally requires preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS). The preferred alternative will not have a significant effect on the human environment. Negative environmental impacts that could occur are minor or moderate in intensity. There are no significant impacts on public health, public safety, threatened or endangered species, sites or districts listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, or other unique characteristics of the region. No highly uncertain or controversial impacts, unique or unknown risks, significant cumulative effects, or elements of precedence were identified. Implementation of the action will not violate any federal, state, or local environmental protection law.

Based on the foregoing, it has been determined that an EIS is not required for this project and thus will not be prepared.

Recommended:

*Sumner Lewis*  
Superintendent

9/14/04  
Date

Approved:

*Steve Martin*  
Intermountain Regional Director

9/21/04  
Date

SUMMARY OF COMMENTS  
Canyon Ranger Station/Emergency Services Building  
Environmental Assessment

A total of 9 responses on the Canyon Ranger Station/ESB Environmental Assessment were received during or within 5 days after the 30-day public review period from October 7, 2003 to November 7, 2003. The comments received were from individuals, an organization, a business permit holder and his employee, and state, county, federal and tribal agencies. One response endorsed Alternative A; the other responses did not state a preference, although 4 letters voiced concerns and suggested mitigations specific to Alternative A.

**Comment: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service** – The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, on January 8, 2004, concurred with the determination of may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect the bald eagle; no effect on Canada lynx; may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect, the grizzly bear; and may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect, the gray wolf.

**Comment: Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office (attachment to cover letter from the Wyoming Office of the Governor)** – Management of cultural resources on projects is conducted in accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and Advisory Council regulations 36 CFR Part 800. These regulations call for survey, evaluation and protection of significant historic and archeological sites prior to any disturbance, which your Environmental Assessment has demonstrated you have done, in part. Specific comments on the project's effect on cultural resource sites will be provided to Yellowstone National Park when we review the cultural resource documentation called for in 36 CFR Part 800, which includes the proposed building design.

**Reply:** *Documents to comply with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act for this project were submitted to the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office. One site, 48YE520G1 was identified and recommended as a non-contributing for the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A and D. This was a part of an abandoned portion of the Grand Loop Road and it was determined that this segment no longer functions for it's original purpose and its construction was considered ordinary. Additionally, the road as a cultural property has lost integrity because it was rehabilitated. No prehistoric archeological materials were discovered. Elevation drawings of the proposed Ranger Station were also submitted to WY SHPO and determined to be compatible with the Canyon Village Historic District near the proposed site.*

**Comment: Beartooth Alliance** – The Beartooth Alliance endorses Alternative A as the best selection for improvement of services to the public and preservation of Park area.

**Comment: The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Nation** – The Park Service has conducted sufficient surveys to protect any sites that might be



within project boundaries. The CS&KT will concur with any of the local tribes that may have responded to the EA.

**Reply:** *No responses were received from other tribes.*

**Comment: Teton County [Wyoming] Historic Preservation Board** – Declined to comment as the proposed project is not located within Teton County.

**Comment:** Four responses were concerned about the number of trees that would need to be cut and the effect that the removal of this vegetation would have on the visibility of the ranger station/ESB from YPSS and the yurt-camp. Two comments were concerned that a highly-visible ranger station would create confusion for visitors looking for the new Canyon Visitor Center.

**Reply:** *Appropriate screening of the new building was discussed at length during the planning process. The design objective is to use existing vegetation to screen the view of the ranger station from the North Rim Road, the YPSS facility and the yurt-camp operation. Some replanting may be necessary to supplement existing vegetation, and vegetation removed for construction purposes may need to be replaced with replanted trees to maintain the screening. The Wildland-Urban Interface project, which protects structures from wildfire damage by thinning vegetation in the vicinity of buildings may affect the density of the vegetation near this project, but creative thinning patterns, use of fire-resistant building materials and replanting of younger, more fire-resistant trees will mitigate the impacts on the screening effect of the vegetation. Younger trees with shorter crown heights may offer superior eye-level screening.*

**Comment:** Two responses were concerned with size of the building and the specific area that this acreage would cover. “The proposed square-footage of this building results in a building size approximately 40 feet wide by one half the length of a football field...The estimated disturbed area of one acre ...will likely require the clear cutting of the entire area from the YPSS gas station and dorm to the amphitheater.”

**Reply:** *The maximum square footage is based on the inclusion of second-story loft storage areas in the ESB. Tentatively, the ranger station is expected to be approximately 40 feet by 50 feet. The ESB will be approximately 40 feet by 70 feet and is tentatively designed to be attached to the north wall of the ranger station. This produces a building that is 40 feet wide by 120 feet long, with the long axis oriented north-south. This orientation minimizes the width of the disturbance between YPSS and the amphitheater.*

**Comment:** Use environmentally-responsible design and building materials, as well as fire-resistant shingles and clapboard. Two comments requested that the building(s) incorporate a “rustic” appearance “like the picture of the old Canyon [Ranger Station] on the cover.”

**Reply:** *The National Park Service is committed to environmentally-responsible building design, including the use of fire-resistant materials to reduce the necessity to remove flammable vegetation in the vicinity of the building. The appearance of the building will be designed in consultation with the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office to ensure the building is consistent with existing structures and the architectural style of the area and the park setting.*

**Comment:** Four comments were received concerning the effect the project would have on the experience of the winter yurt-camp guests and employees. The comments emphasized the importance of striving to preserve the “pristine appearance” and “wilderness experience” of the camp. Related comments pertained to siting of the project in relation to the yurt-camp and suggested that 1) the project be sited no farther north than the power line 2) the driveway connecting the North Rim Drive with the Ranger Station be minimized in length 3) a site near the Camper Services Building be considered instead.

**Reply:** *The area of the powerline will be incorporated into the project in order to minimize the use of previously undisturbed ground. The site will be located and designed to be as close as possible to the North Rim Drive while still taking advantage of the disturbed area and natural vegetative screening. Disturbance for the construction of the project will be located approximately 50-100 feet from the North Rim Drive.*

**Comment:** Line a pedestrian walkway across the North Rim drive for pedestrian access to the Ranger Station (but don't remove more trees to enhance visibility).

**Reply:** *The park Branch of Landscape Architecture is working on several possible site designs for the buildings and the access area. Pedestrian safety and vegetative screening will be given due consideration in choosing the final design.*

**Comment:** Consider the amount of snow that will slide off the roof and need to be removed from in front of the windows, and the maneuverability of the groomer in accessing the ranger station (don't widen the driveway and remove more trees).

**Reply:** *Representatives of the Maintenance Division participated in the planning process to address these kinds of issues, and the design will be reviewed by the Maintenance Division to ensure that the buildings can be safely and efficiently maintained. Because it will only be necessary to pack the area and remove piled snow, the work can be done with the grooming vehicle without the grooming attachment, which limits the maneuverability of the grooming vehicle.*