

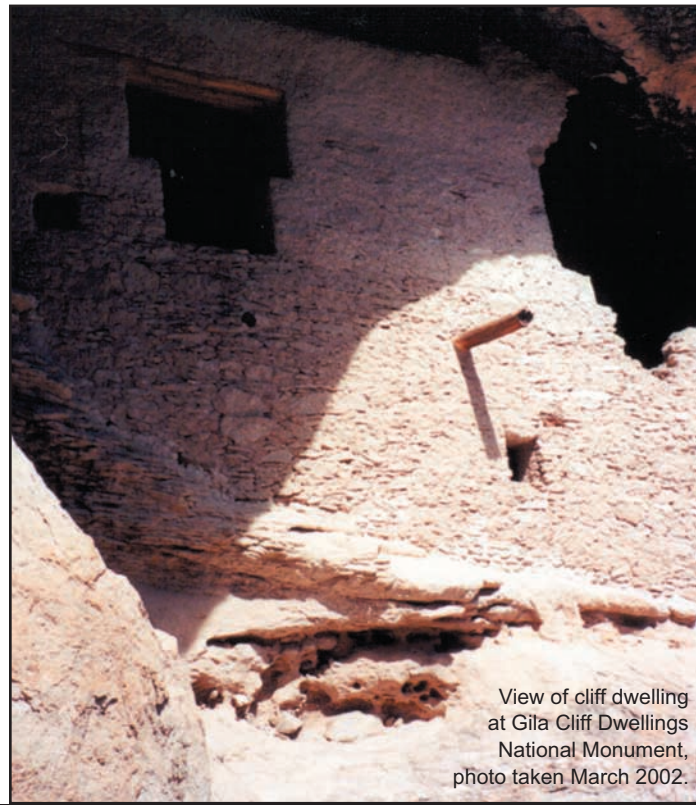


## Effects of Fire on Monument Resources

The planning process must address potential environmental effects related to fire management at the monument. This assessment of effects will be completed following distribution and response from the public on this newsletter. Resource areas that will be addressed in the Fire Management Plan/Environmental Assessment include:

- Geology and Soils
- Vegetation
- Water Resources
- Wildlife
- Air Quality
- Historic Properties
- Socioeconomics
- Public Health and Safety
- Visitor Use and Experience
- Wilderness

You are invited to provide comment on potential effects to these resources from fire and fire-related activities.



View of cliff dwelling at Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument, photo taken March 2002.



Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument  
HC 68 Box 100  
Silver City, NM 88061



## Fire Management Planning

Scoping Newsletter  
July 2002

### Dear Friends:

The National Park Service, in conjunction with the U.S. Forest Service, is preparing a Fire Management Plan/Environmental Assessment for Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument. The purpose of this plan is to establish future management direction for fire and fire-related activities at the monument. The plan will cover at least the National Park Service monument holdings, and will be prepared so as to coincide with the existing fire plan for the Gila National Forest. The goal of this effort is to provide Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument with a strategy for long-term management of fire and fire-related activities, while protecting the natural and cultural resources on these lands.

The Fire Management Plan/Environmental Assessment will be prepared in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and will provide the decision-making framework that analyzes a reasonable range of alternatives for fire management. Potential issues and impacts to the resources and values of these lands will be identified in the Fire Management Plan/Environmental Assessment. Measures to mitigate potential impacts will be outlined as well in the Fire Management Plan/Environmental Assessment.

The involvement of interested parties is essential in the preparation of a thorough Fire Management Plan/Environmental Assessment. This newsletter serves to provide you with information on the planning process, and to encourage your involvement with the project. I invite you to submit your written comments pertaining to this project, and I look forward to working with you on this important endeavor to protect and preserve the unique resources at Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument.

Sincerely,

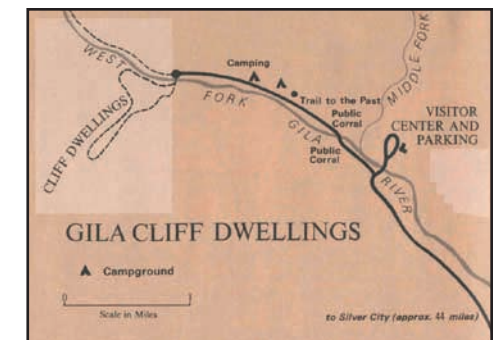
Annette Chavez  
Park Superintendent



### Introduction

Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument was established in 1907. It encompasses a total of 533 acres of land which is comprised of two separate parcels (see map). The western parcel of Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument is the bigger of the two parcels and contains a one-mile loop trail that leads to the cliff dwellings. The eastern parcel of Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument land is not developed for visitor use, and remains a natural area for preservation purposes.

Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument was established primarily to preserve the pre-historic cliff dwellings that were constructed there in the late 1200s. The term 'cliff dwellers' refers to Pueblo people who built their homes in natural caves. The Pueblo people also built homes in the open, and Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument contains examples of both types of settlements.



The cliff dwellings at Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument occur in five of seven caves in what is now known as Cliff Dwellers Canyon. These caves naturally occur about 180 feet above the canyon floor. The dwellings consist of about 40 rooms among these caves, and were constructed of stone from the formation exposed on the cliff. Timbers were used to support and construct the roof structures, some of which are still intact.

## Monument Administration

The National Park Service and the U.S. Forest Service recognize that they share a visitor and resource base in the vicinity of Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument. To that end, facilities have been developed to meet resource needs in that area and they are cooperatively managed by the agencies under formal agreements. Given that fire does not respect artificial administrative boundaries, that fire management needs of the agencies are similar, and that fires in the vicinity of the National Monument could affect National Forest or National Monument resources, regardless of point or source of ignition, the agencies also recognize a need to cooperate on the issue of fire management.

The National Park Service and the U.S. Forest Service are working together to prepare this Fire Management Plan/ Environmental Assessment. An Interdisciplinary Team (ID Team) composed of representatives of both agencies has been established to assist with the planning for this project. The ID Team met for the first time on March 7, 2002, to develop preliminary alternatives and to discuss potential effects of the project on the National Monument's resources. The ID Team will remain involved with this project until a decision has been made.

### Fire Terms

#### --Suppression

is a technique whereby fire is contained and extinguished.

#### --Fuels

is a term that refers to vegetation or other materials that carry fires and keep them burning. Fuels build-up occurs when vegetation or other materials increase in a certain area, which can pose a situation whereby fires are more easily/readily ignited. Fuels-reduction is a technique that minimizes fuels in a certain area to eliminate fuels build-up.

#### --Wildland Fire

is any nonstructural fire that occurs in the wildland.

#### --Prescribed Fire

is planned and management ignited to achieve site-specific objectives under prescribed weather conditions. These fires are utilized to achieve fire management goals such as reducing fuel buildup and improving wildlife habitat.

#### --Wildland Fire Use

is lightning caused fire that is managed for resource benefits as outlined in approved fire management plans. Sometimes the term 'prescribed natural fire' is used and means the same as wildland fire use.

## Purpose and Need

The purpose of taking action is to evaluate strategies for the management of fire and fuels within Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument, as determined cooperatively by the National Park Service and the U.S. Forest Service, in order to protect the resources and values of Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument and the adjacent Gila National Forest (Gila Wilderness).

The need for action is to develop a Fire Management Plan for a National Park Service unit that currently does not have such a plan, and to comply with National Park Service regulations, per Director's Order 18 (DO-18). DO-18 states, 'Each park with vegetation capable of burning will prepare a Fire Management Plan to guide a fire management program that is responsive to the Park's natural and cultural resource objectives and to safety considerations for Park visitors, employees, and developed facilities'. The completion of this Fire Management Plan will satisfy these requirements.



View of Gila River traversing Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument, photo taken March 2002.

## Objectives

The Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument currently does not have a Fire Management Plan, and no fire-related activities including prescribed fire are permitted within the monument boundary. Naturally-ignited fires within Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument boundary are suppressed. The U.S. Forest Service does have a Prescribed Natural Fire Implementation Plan which allows wildland fire use in the Gila National Forest. Objectives of the project are to:

- ▶ Provide for safety of firefighters, agency personnel, and the public during all phases of the fire management program.
- ▶ Protect identified values at risk from undesirable effects of fire.
- ▶ Implement the fire management program using cost-effective and environmentally sensitive techniques.
- ▶ As a cooperative effort of NPS and USFS, develop a plan that addresses the fire management needs of Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument.

## Proposed Alternatives

With the assistance of the ID Team, six alternatives were developed for implementing a fire management program at Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument. Two of these alternatives will be carried forward in the document for full analysis. These two alternatives are described in more detail below. The other four alternatives have been dismissed. A brief description of these alternatives is included below, and a reason for dismissing them.

No alternative has yet been identified as the National Park Service/U.S. Forest Service Preferred Alternative or as the Environmentally Preferred Alternative. Following public scoping, the final list of alternatives for full analysis in the Fire Management Plan/Environmental Assessment will be determined. Your input on these alternatives will facilitate completion of a thorough planning process.

## Alternatives Carried Forward

**Alternative A - No-Action Alternative** - Under this alternative, current fire management activities would continue per the existing National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service policies. Because Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument does not have a Fire Management Plan, the current management strategy is to treat all starts within the park as wildland fires and manage them under the appropriate suppression strategy. Reduction of fuels, prescribed fires, wildland fire use, or other fire-related activities would not occur within the Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument boundary. Further, no fire management activities would be permitted across the National Park Service and the U.S. Forest Service boundary.

**Alternative B – Natural Landscape Prescribed Fire Alternative** - Under this alternative, fire management would be based on "natural landscape" conditions and not agency land boundaries. Fire would be allowed to cross the Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument/U.S. Forest Service boundary and there would be various prescribed fire and fuels management activities in appropriate areas within the monument. This alternative includes:

- 1) management of prescribed fires,
- 2) wildland fire use, based on the outcome of a decision-making fire prescription flowchart contained in the current U.S. Forest Service Prescribed Natural Fire Implementation Plan, items to be considered include local fire situation, resources and funding, public safety, and smoke conditions,
- 3) fuels reduction methods,
- 4) fire management prescriptions that cross the Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument boundary to/from the Gila Wilderness, and
- 5) interagency coordination between National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service.

This alternative was developed to allow for flexibility in the types of fire-related activities used at Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument, in addition to meeting the objective to develop an interagency plan that addresses fire management in both U.S. Forest Service and National Park Service lands.

## Dismissed Alternatives

The following four alternatives were dismissed from further consideration because they did not meet the Purpose and Need for the project; were not feasible; resulted in substantial environmental or human health and safety impacts; and/or did not meet the objectives for the project, particularly the objective of interagency coordination between the National Park Service and the U.S. Forest Service.

**Alternative C – Monument Boundary Prescribed Fire Alternative** - This alternative is the same as Alternative B, except that no fires or fire-management activities would be permitted across the Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument boundary, either into or out of the monument.

**Alternative D – No Management Alternative** - This alternative would not permit any fire management activities within the Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument boundary, including fuels reduction, wildland fire use, prescribed fires, or any other fire-management techniques. Wildland fires would not be suppressed, but allowed to burn until they extinguish naturally or approach the Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument boundary, where they would be suppressed before extending onto adjacent U.S. Forest Service lands.

**Alternative E – Monument Boundary Mechanical Treatment Alternative** - This alternative is the same as Alternative C, except that the only type of fire-management activity allowed would be manual or mechanical treatment to reduce fuels. No prescribed fires would be permitted under this alternative, and all wildland fires would be suppressed. All activities would only be permitted within the Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument, and not allowed to cross the Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument boundary into or out of U.S. Forest Service lands.

**Alternative F – Use of Herbicidal Treatment for Fuels Reduction Alternatives** - This alternative is the same as Alternative E except that it would involve the spraying of herbicides to reduce growth of vegetation that would eventually build up as fuel.



## Public Participation

Your input is important in achieving a viable plan that will protect the resources at Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument and the adjacent Gila National Forest. A comment form is enclosed in this newsletter on which you can provide your comments on the project, and return via mail. Written comments may also be submitted via electronic mail at [Roxanne\\_Runkel@nps.gov](mailto:Roxanne_Runkel@nps.gov).

Please provide comments by  
September 13, 2002.

## General Schedule

### Winter 2002

- Begin Planning Process
- Organize ID Team
- Establish Purpose and Need for Project

### Spring 2002

- Meet with ID Team
- Develop Preliminary Alternatives
- Distribute Newsletter to the Public
- Finalize Project Alternatives following Public Response

### Summer 2002

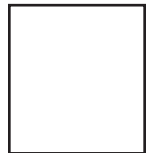
- Gather Background Information
- Assess Potential Effects of the Project
- Prepare Proposed Fire Management Plan/  
Environmental Assessment

### Fall 2002

- Distribute Proposed Fire Management Plan/  
Environmental Assessment to Interested Agencies and Public
- Receive Comments on the Proposed Fire Management Plan/  
Environmental Assessment

### Winter 2003

- Prepare the Decision and Notify the Public



Please return written comments to:

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Denver, CO 80225-0287

