

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Glacier National Park
Montana



Record of Decision

Final Commercial Services Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement

August, 2004

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE**

RECORD OF DECISION

**COMMERCIAL SERVICES PLAN
GLACIER NATIONAL PARK**

**A UNIT OF WATERTON-GLACIER INTERNATIONAL PEACE PARK
FLATHEAD AND GLACIER COUNTIES, MONTANA**

The Department of the Interior, National Park Service (NPS) has prepared this Record of Decision on the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Final Commercial Services Plan for Glacier National Park, Montana. This Record of Decision is a statement of the decisions made as a result of environmental and socioeconomic analysis, and consideration of public and other agencies' input. It provides a description of the background of the project, a statement of the decision made, synopses of other alternatives considered, the basis for the decision, findings on impairment of park resources and values, a description of the environmentally preferable alternatives, a listing of measures to minimize environmental harm and an overview of public, agency and other nations involvement in the decision making process.

Project Background

The General Management Plan, completed in 1999, determined an overall guiding philosophy for Glacier National Park to manage most of the park for its wild character and for the integrity of Glacier's unique natural heritage. Traditional visitor services and facilities will be retained. Visitors will be able to enjoy the park from many vantage points. Visitor use will be managed to preserve resources, but a broad range of opportunities will be provided for people to experience, understand, study, and enjoy the park. Cooperation with park neighbors will be emphasized in managing use and resources.

Commercial services have been provided at Glacier since before the park's establishment in 1910. Beginning with travel by train and horseback and grand lodging accommodations during the early part of the century, through automobiles and motor inns in later decades, commercial services have provided the needed support to help the park fulfill its mission and allow visitors to experience, explore, and learn. But in the past 50 years, very little has changed in the types and levels of services that are provided at Glacier. It is very evident that the needs of the visiting public have evolved. Changing concessioner workforce dynamics and demographics require adaptations. Park facilities and the infrastructure that supports commercial services are aging and have deteriorated and cannot sustain continued use without improvements.

Commercial services are provided by private businesses that operate under contracts and authorization managed by the National Park Service. These businesses play a vital role in meeting the mission of the park, providing appropriate quality services that the National Park Service could not realistically furnish.

As we enter a new century, it is evident that a comprehensive commercial services plan is needed to reexamine the appropriate level and type of services that should be provided, develop a way to determine necessary and appropriate visitor services and guide the rehabilitation of historic hotel and motel properties around the park.

The Final Commercial Services Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement describe the vision for commercial services in Glacier National Park and determines the level and types of commercial visitor services that are necessary and appropriate for the foreseeable future. It also determines how to retain the well known traditional services such as grand historic hotel lodging, family accommodations, historic boat tours and horseback trips in the backcountry since the infrastructure that supports these services has deteriorated and requires major capital expenditures to be preserved and maintained. Improvements are necessary to add new approved services. For each developed area, the plan considers infrastructure and site improvements related to commercial services.

The goals of the Commercial Services Plan are to:

- Determine the appropriate overall mix of necessary and appropriate commercial services
- Establish a framework for future decisions.
- Establish the character and level of service by park areas based on need, expectation, economic feasibility and resource implications.
- Provide a clear vision and phased implementation strategy for rehabilitating the historic hotels.
- Continue a wide range of related visitor experiences.
- Provide the specific information necessary for the issuance of concession contracts.

Key Issues

In addition to the park needing an overall plan to guide management of commercial services in the park, there were a number of specific issues that were raised during internal and external scoping.

Employee Housing in the park currently available to the concessioners has a number of life, health and, safety issues such as the presence of asbestos. Housing capacity is inadequate. Most of the housing is dormitory style with shared bathrooms which limits the concessioner's ability to hire older, more experienced employees, married couples, or employees with families.

Health, life safety, and accessibility are concerns for many of the historic structures in the park that are operated by concessioners in addition to housing. These concerns place these structures, visitors and employees at risk. Most renovations occurred over 40 years ago. Issues include the presence of asbestos, and pests, wiring and plumbing that do not meet code, and outdated fire warning and sprinkler systems. Additionally, most of these structures do not meet current Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards.

Visitor/employee separation has become an issue over time. Most of the employee housing is located in the same areas where visitors recreate and relax or is near overnight visitor accommodations. This lack of separation has created a less than ideal experience for visitors and employees.

Vehicle and Pedestrian Access and circulation in the developed areas have become confusing. All of these areas were built when the park had fewer visitors and cars. There is limited parking and a lot of congestion during the peak season.

During scoping for this plan, public comments were received that asked the NPS to revisit the **future use of Granite Park Chalet**. They requested that we consider maintaining the option of a less expensive chalet experience at Granite Park (which would require a less complex utility system in contrast to Sperry Chalet). These two chalets are national historic landmarks that grace the backcountry of the park. Both chalets were closed to the public in 1992 due to substandard water and sewage systems, inadequate life safety, and deteriorating facilities. A decision was reached through an environmental assessment (EA) in 1993 that both chalets be rehabilitated to provide full service (lodging and prepared meals). Funding was obtained to complete the full rehabilitation of Sperry Chalet, which reopened to the public in 1999. Only partial funding remained and was committed to complete some of the structural stabilization work on Granite Park Chalet. Granite Park was reopened to the public in 1996. To meet the state's requirement of generating less than 100 gallons a day of gray water, the services offered at Granite Park Chalet were modified. During the rehabilitation of Sperry Chalet, it became evident that the time and funding needed and impacts to resources had been underestimated and not fully analyzed in the EA. It also became clear that the technology for a composting toilet system needed to be redesigned for Granite Park Chalet because of issues encountered at Sperry Chalet, some of which are still not resolved. The original estimate to complete both chalets was \$4.7 million. Sperry Chalet has cost approximately \$4.5 million to date. Costs have continued to rise, new information is available and assumptions made in the 1993 EA are no longer correct.

Floodplains are among the many natural resources in the park where the National Park Service usually avoids development; however floodplains were not a concern in the early part of the century when most of the developed areas were selected. Therefore most of these areas lie within 100-year floodplains.

Sensitive natural resources such as the federally listed threatened grizzly bear, gray wolf and Canada lynx and bald eagles, and state listed rare plants are located in or pass through many of the developed areas or other areas in the park where commercial services are provided.

The **construction season** is also of concern because closing visitor facilities for rehabilitation during part or all of the visitor season may affect the visitor experience and concessioner business opportunities, however allowing construction during the off-season can affect sensitive wildlife including the park's threatened species.

Modernization or expansion of developments was raised as an issue. Most comments urged that existing facilities should be rehabilitated, but that modernization should be kept to a minimum and developed areas should not be expanded. Public comments also stated that there should be a range of accommodations to provide for visitors from different income levels.

Other **support services for concessions operations** were raised. Hotel, motel, and food service operations require laundry facilities nearby. The current concessioner uses laundry

facilities at East Glacier which are not part of the commercial facilities owned by the park. There is a lack of shower and public laundry facilities.

Concerns were raised about the increasingly large groups taking **commercially guided day hiking** trips. The size of groups on **commercially guided bicycle tours** and frequency of these trips was also raised as a concern because in the past ten years the number of operators for this service has increased from five to 11 with an average of over 550 bicyclists coming to Glacier each summer. Large bicycle groups on the Sun Road have resulted in conflicts between bicyclists and motor vehicles.

Decision (Selected Action)

The description below is a summary of the preferred alternative as described in the Plan. Other actions described in the *Final Commercial Services Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement* under each preferred alternative will be implemented.

The vision for Commercial Services is:

Glacier National Park's commercial operators, or concessioners, assist the Park Service in providing for visitor use and enjoyment while at the same time preserving the park's unique resources for future generations. Through cooperation with each other and park neighbors, concessioners offer memorable, high quality experiences that provide opportunities to understand, appreciate, and enjoy the park in its classic western park setting. They ensure that visitors enjoy a reasonably safe experience, augmented by educational opportunities that expand appreciation of the park's natural and cultural resources and its role in our national heritage. Concessioners are part of the park's celebration of the ongoing peace, friendship, and goodwill among nations and recognition of the need for cooperation in a world of shared resources. Most of the commercial facilities are part of the rich cultural heritage and significance of the park; many are either national historic landmarks or are listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The park's unique character and associated experiences are maintained and necessary and appropriate services that complement the park and its individual developed areas are provided. All commercial services in the park will be resource oriented, provide quality service and experiences, and be located in well-maintained infrastructure.

The *Final Commercial Services Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement* identified the commercial services that are “necessary and appropriate” according to criteria developed in accordance with Title IV of the National Parks Omnibus Management Act of 1998. Standards and prescriptions were developed to further describe how each service will be provided. The Plan also refined the visitor services zone as conceptually described in the GMP-1999. Overall, the Plan maintains what currently exists within the park, however the operation dates for each of the developed areas have been increased slightly and the number of overnight rooms in the park has increased from 512 to 540. The decision for the necessary and appropriate services and those services that are related to the developed areas are as follows.

Granite Park Chalet (Alternative B) will continue to provide all the current services that exist now. The restrooms will be replaced and expanded, potable water will be provided, and formal or informal interpretive opportunities will be available.

Commercially guided day hiking (Alternative B) will provide cultural and natural history hikes as well as recreational hiking in all areas of the park except the North Fork management area. Client to guide ratios will not exceed one guide for 11 clients. Hikes associated with boat tours will continue with size limits on the following tours, 50 for Grinnell Lake, Grinnell Glacier, and Baring Falls Trails. No guided off-trail hiking, climbing, or fishing will be allowed. Group size limits apply in certain areas and on specific trails as stated in the *Final Commercial Services Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement*. One trip per day for each commercial operator on each trail in the backcountry will be allowed. An annual overall cap of 5,000 user days will be imposed park wide for commercial operators.

Guided underwater diving tours (Alternative B) will be allowed to occur in McDonald, Sherburne, Josephine, Swiftcurrent, Two Medicine, Pray, Lower Two Medicine, and St. Mary

lakes. **Firewood sales** (Alternative B) will be allowed in camp stores and at selected campgrounds. **Public showers** (Alternative B) will be added to or near campgrounds in the visitor services zone and existing public showers will be expanded.

Interpretive boat tours and boat taxi or boat transportation services (Alternative B) will continue to be provided. These facilities will be upgraded to comply with life safety, accessibility, and building codes as funding is available. New services will include tour boat pick-up at Apgar Village to replicate the original means of transportation to Lake McDonald Lodge. The present public boat dock will be extended. Vessels may also be added at Lake McDonald and Two Medicine Lake. Additional taxi services will be provided on St. Mary and Two Medicine Lakes by boat as appropriate.

Motor vehicle tours (Alternative B) will continue to be provided throughout the park with the exception of the North Fork management area. Tours will be allowed on the Camas Road. Taxi service operations will continue to be provided to destinations in the park until contractual agreements expire. After that locations for taxi service will expand. Taxi services will not be allowed on the inside North Fork Road. Commercial shuttling of private vehicles could be provided to trailheads and designated locations in the Two Medicine, Many Glacier, and Going-to-the-Sun Road corridor management areas. This service will not be provided in the North Fork management area. No administrative facilities to support these services will be provided in the park. A Public Transportation Service will continue to be provided. A separate park wide transit plan will be prepared.

The stables at Apgar, Lake McDonald, and Many Glacier will continue to provide **horseback riding and packing services** to the public. Guided trail rides will also be offered in the Two Medicine area (Alternative C). Limited guided trips will be permitted on the Dry Fork Trail to Oldman Lake from the Two Medicine Entrance Station and over the Mt. Henry Trail from Two Medicine to East Glacier. There will be no stop at Scenic Point. Other day trips may include riding up the Mt. Henry Trail from East Glacier to Fortymile Creek and up the Autumn Creek-East Glacier Trail to the ridge on Dancing Lady Mountain. Only one trip per day, per trail will be allowed from July through September with a maximum party size of 10 riders. Weed-seed free hay must be fed to the horses being used and access will be dependent upon the trails being sufficiently dry. No facilities will be constructed or installed inside the park for this operation. All stock will be maintained outside the park and delivered to and from the park each day for scheduled rides. Rides will continue to be permitted on the existing trails.

Commercially guided bicycle tours (Alternative B) will continue to be provided on paved roads in the visitor service zone in all management areas in the park. Limitations will be placed on the number of riders in each group and the number of commercially guided groups that can cross the Going-to-the-Sun Road per day. These services will continue to be provided in the rustic zone at the Apgar Lookout, the 1913 Ranger Station, and the Cut Bank area. Off-road bicycle use is prohibited. **Commercial step-on guide services** (Alternative B) will be permitted on all park roads open to the public except for the North Fork management area.

The rustic village atmosphere will be maintained in the **Apgar Village** developed area. A full range of visitor services will be provided by a combination of the National Park Service, concessioners, and or private businesses. The objectives described in the *Final Commercial Services Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement* will be met. Improvements will be

made to the Village Inn. Pedestrian and vehicle circulation will be improved and separated. Parking will be consolidated and expanded off the main roadway. Pedestrian access will be provided to the future West Side Discovery Center and Transit Center. The Lake McDonald shoreline will be stabilized. (Alternative B).

The historic character of the **Lake McDonald** developed area that includes the historic district and Lake McDonald Lodge will be preserved. A full range of visitor services will be provided by concessioners. The objectives described in the *Final Commercial Services Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement* will be met and actions described in the preferred will be implemented. All existing services will continue to be provided. Facilities will be adapted to expand the types of overnight accommodations to include hostels (budget), motel (standard), rustic lodge, and multiunit cabins (high and deluxe). The number of guest accommodations will be slightly increased, a central parking area will be built, and pedestrian circulation will be emphasized. Employee housing will be removed from the floodplain and replaced. The Coffee Shop will be replaced with a new restaurant and the Stewart Motel and Annex will be replaced with a new motel. (Alternative C).

The historic values will be preserved at the **Rising Sun** developed area and a full range of visitor services will continue to be provided. The objectives described in the *Final Commercial Services Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement* will be met and actions described in the preferred will be implemented. New guest and employee overnight accommodations will be constructed outside the floodplain near the Motel. Additional cabin style accommodations will be constructed to enhance the auto camp character. The boat concessioner housing will be relocated to near the Lower Motel. (Alternative C).

The culturally significant resources will be preserved at the **Two Medicine** developed area and traditional recreational and visitor services will be provided. The objectives described in the *Final Commercial Services Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement* will be met and actions described in the preferred will be implemented. The traditional rustic visitor experience will continue to be provided. The existing comfort station will be replaced with a structure that is more compatible with the other historic structures. Parking will be removed from the Two Medicine Lake viewshed. The historic character of the General Store's exterior and the historic landscape will be restored. An accessible trail will be constructed between the General Store area and the campground. (Alternative B).

Many Glacier developed area will be maintained as a separate development from Swiftcurrent and provide traditional visitor and support services for the National Park Service and concession operations. The significant historic resources such as the grand hotel will be preserved and continue to be used for visitor services. The objectives described in the *Final Commercial Services Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement* will be met and actions described in the preferred will be implemented. Historic features such as the stairwell in the lobby will be restored and retail services will be relocated. Employee housing will be moved out of the Hotel and the space reclaimed for guests accommodations. The approach to the hotel and the service drive along the lakeside will be landscaped to reinforce the hotel's cultural character and improve the visitor's arrival experience. Employee recreational facilities will be moved from the Hotel and the Lower Dormitory will be converted to guest accommodations, slightly increasing the number of guest rooms in this area. New employee housing, parking, and recreational facilities will be constructed near the Upper Dormitory with

some additional housing needs accommodated at Swiftcurrent developed area or outside the park. Remote long-term employee parking will be located in the area. (Alternative C).

The **Swiftcurrent** developed area will be maintained as a separate developed area from Many Glacier and continue to provide traditional visitor and support services for the National Park Service and concession operations. Significant resources such as the Swiftcurrent Motor Inn will be preserved and continue to be used for visitor services. The objectives described in the *Final Commercial Services Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement* will be met and actions described in the preferred will be implemented. The historic auto camp experience will be enhanced. All overnight guest accommodations will be provided in cabins (budget/hostel and standard type accommodations), some with private bathrooms. Additional cabins will be added to fill in existing cabin circles and new circles will be created where the employee bath house and motel currently exist. One cabin ring may be converted to hostel accommodations. Employee housing and other employee functions will be better separated from the guest activities by concentrating those functions in the existing motel area. Parking improvements will be made and public shower facilities will be expanded. Vehicular and pedestrian circulation will be improved. (Alternative B).

New operation dates will be implemented in the six developed areas. These dates are the outside dates that the concession facilities can operate. Facility condition, funding, wildlife activity, staffing and weather may require shorter operating seasons which will be determined on a year-to-year basis within these time frames. None of these dates apply to services that are independent of facilities, such as road-based tours and day hiking. Rising Sun could operate from the 3rd week in May through the end of September. Many Glacier could operate from the beginning of June through the 3rd week in September. Swiftcurrent could operate from the beginning of June through the end of September, Two Medicine could operate from the 3rd week in May through the end of September, Apgar could operate from the beginning of May through the end of October and Lake McDonald could operate from mid May through the 3rd week in October. The operating dates for Granite Park and Sperry Chalets will remain between July 1 and mid September, depending on weather and other factors.

A number of other actions will be implemented. These include improved interpretation and orientation at each developed area, upgraded facilities to comply with life safety, accessibility, and building codes and boat rentals will continue to be provided by the boat tour concessioner at existing locations. Fishing equipment rental could occur at boat rental locations. Guided backpacking services will continue to be provided park-wide. No guided off-trail hiking or climbing will be allowed. Equipment rental, childcare, and commercial entertainment could be accommodated within existing facilities. Sperry Chalet will continue to provide overnight guest accommodations with full services. Commercially guided rafting will continue to be provided on the Middle and North Forks of the Flathead River under conditions of a permit issued by the U.S. Forest Service. Emergency Road Services will continue to be provided in the visitor service and rustic zones of the park. Guided cross-country skiing/snowshoeing will continue to be provided in all zones park-wide, except for the North Fork management area where these services can be provided only in the visitor service zone. Guided photography and art seminars will continue to be provided park-wide except for the North Fork management areas where it will be limited to the area south of the Camas Road. Catered meal services will continue to be provided in designated picnic areas for special events, groups, or meetings

under a special use permit or in concession operated facilities by the concessioner or their agents.

A number of mitigation measures will be adhered to during construction and or operation of the commercial services as appropriate. These measures are in addition to any other federal state or local permits and requirements and specific protection guidelines to preserve park resources. They are listed in detail in the *Final Commercial Services Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement*.

Other Alternatives Considered

A number of alternatives were considered that are described in detail in the *Final Commercial Services Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement*. Below is a summary of these.

Granite Park Chalet: Two other alternatives were considered; a no action/status quo alternative which would continue operation of the chalet as a hiker shelter and an alternative that considered making it full service similar to what is offered at Sperry Chalet.

Commercially Guided Day Hiking: a no action/status quo alternative was considered that would continue the guided operation as it is managed currently with no limits on group size or on which trails could be used. **Guided Underwater Diving:** a no action/status quo alternative was considered that did not allow any commercially guided underwater diving in the park.

Firewood Sales: a no action/status quo alternative was considered. Commercial operators would continue to offer firewood for sale in camp stores in the six developed areas. **Public Showers:** a no action/status quo alternative was considered that would continue to provide showers only in the Rising Sun and Swiftcurrent developed areas.

Boat Tours and Transportation: a no action/status quo alternative was considered that maintained the existing operation, schedule, housing, and facilities for the concessioner.

Guided Interpretive Vehicle Tours, Taxi, Private Vehicle Shuttle, and Public Transportation Service: no action/status quo alternatives were considered that maintained existing conditions for all of these. Private Vehicle shuttles are not currently provided in the park. **Horseback Riding and Horse Packing Services:** a no action/status quo alternative was considered that maintained the current operation at Apgar, Lake McDonald, and Many Glacier. Another alternative considered providing the above services except at Apgar stables which would only be used as a base for horse packing operations. Another alternative considered operating stables at Many Glacier and Apgar, but removing the stable operation at Lake McDonald. Commercial rides to Sperry Chalet would continue, but horses would be trucked to the trailhead for each ride.

Commercially Guided Bicycle Tours: a no action/status quo alternative was considered that would continue to provide this service on paved roads in the visitor service zone of all management areas in the park, in addition to some rustic zone areas. No limits would be placed on group size, number of groups per day, or number of operators. **Commercial Step-on Guide Services:** A no action/status quo alternative was considered. This service is not currently offered in the park. **Commercially Guided Motorcycle Tours** were initially considered in the *Draft Commercial Services Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement*. In the Final Plan it was determined that they no longer meet the necessary and appropriate criteria for a commercial service and therefore are not allowed in Glacier National Park.

For each of the developed areas a range of alternatives were considered that included no action/status quo which essentially addressed life, safety, accessibility and building code issues, but did not correct any of the deficiencies with the type and amount of employee housing, services for visitors, vehicle circulation, and proximity of employee and guest accommodations and support services required by a concession operation. Other alternatives were considered in addition to the preferred for all areas except Two Medicine. They ranged from proposed removal of the Village Inn at Apgar, modification of the Coffee Shop at Lake McDonald and conversion of the Stewart Motel to employee housing. At Rising Sun limited separation of employee and guest accommodations was considered. At Many Glacier an alternative was considered that moved most of the employees into housing at Swiftcurrent. At Swiftcurrent an alternative was considered that retained the current mix of motels and cabin accommodations, built a few new cabins and constructed a new motel unit. This alternative also moved employee housing and recreation facilities to the east side of the Swiftcurrent complex.

Basis for the Decision

Granite Park Chalet. Alternative B was selected because it will provide a diverse range of opportunities to park visitors and retain traditional accommodations in the backcountry. Guests will be provided with options to customize their stay with a mix of self-or full-service opportunities, and with a range of associated rates. A smaller gray water treatment system will be required than under Alternative C and will result in less land disturbance and fewer helicopter flights or pack trips for construction and operational support. This alternative strongly conforms to the criteria expressed in NEPA Section 101 for the environmentally preferred alternative in that it “preserves important historic, cultural, and natural aspects of our national heritage and maintains, wherever possible, an environment that supports diversity and variety of individual choice.

Commercially Guided Day Hiking. Alternative B was selected because placing limits on the size of groups hiking on trails begins to implement the General Management Plan and achieve the desired visitor experiences and resource protection. Hikers in the backcountry zone will have fewer encounters with other hikers than in the day use zone.

Guided Underwater Diving Tours. Alternative B was selected because it will offer a new experience and provide the visitor with increased understanding and appreciation of the park’s submerged resources, park’s purpose and significance. It will be managed under an operating plan that will assure resource protection.

Firewood Sales. Alternative B was selected because firewood sales in campgrounds will provide a service that has long been requested by the public and will be managed under an operating plan that assures that it will meet all appropriate criteria to protect resources. It will discourage visitors from collecting or cutting firewood from within the park.

Public Showers. Alternative B was selected because it will expand the current level of services that are inadequate and better meet the needs of the visiting public with minimal impacts to park resources.

Boat Tours and Transportation (Boat Taxi). Alternative B was selected because it provides more choices and opportunities to visitors with minimal impacts to park resources.

Guided Interpretive Vehicle Tours, Taxi, Private Vehicle Shuttle and Public Transportation Service. Alternative B was selected because it will better meet the public's tour and transportation needs in and around Glacier National Park and provide more flexibility for visitors who choose long distance hikes with minimal impacts on resources.

Horseback Riding and Horse Packing Services. Alternative C was selected because it will continue the historic, guided horseback trips from the Apgar, Lake McDonald, and Many Glacier areas. It will also permit limited guided trips in the Two Medicine area on selected trails. Only weed-seed free hay will be fed to the horses being used. No major streams will be impacted. The trails were chosen for their present suitability under dry conditions. This decision will increase visitor choices and return some historic guided horse opportunities to the East Glacier and Two Medicine areas that were discontinued in 1970. It will also provide opportunities for expanded cultural and natural interpretation and could provide a business opportunity on the east side of the park. Although there will be additional impacts associated with increased horse use including encounters with hikers, increased waste from horses on trails, erosion, trampling of vegetation, and weed spread, these effects will be mitigated in part by small, infrequent parties, use of weed- seed free hay, careful monitoring of trail conditions and readiness, and intensified trail maintenance.

Commercially Guided Bicycle Tours. Alternative B was selected because it will improve safety by reducing the potential conflicts between commercially guided riders and motorized vehicles. Because commercially guided bicycle tours can range from groups of five to 100 cyclists, the limits on group size will ensure a quality visitor experience and avoid conflicts between motorists and bicycle tour groups. An allocation system will be developed to distribute opportunities among different commercial bicycle tour groups.

Commercial Step-On Guide Services. Alternative B was selected because it offers the public a necessary and appropriate visitor experience that is not currently provided and will have minimal effects on resources.

Apgar Village Developed Area. Alternative B was selected because removal of the Village Inn (in Alternative C) would not guarantee improved views across the lake and the costs of rebuilding the lodging at a new site compared to the benefits do not justify the expense. Although for many years the National Park Service has considered moving the Village Inn away from the lake and restoring the lakeshore, analysis indicated that this action might have adverse effects that were not apparent years ago.

Lake McDonald Developed Area. Alternative C was selected because it will best accomplish the goals for the area by 1)consolidating employee housing and functions in one area and removing them from flood-prone areas; 2)replacing the historically incompatible Coffee Shop with a building more suited to the scene, and allowing more flexible use of the site to improve parking and relocate employee housing; 3)improving the range of visitor accommodations; and 4)replacing the Stewart Motel with an upgraded facility that makes better use of the site, is compatible with the historic district and is more economical than a costly remodel of the existing strip motel buildings. While both alternative B and C improved the sense of arrival to the lodge, alternative C offers more flexibility to address parking and circulation needs.

Rising Sun Developed Area. Alternative C was selected because it will provide the best separation of employee and guest functions and create the most flexibility for accommodating a variety of employee housing and recreational needs at the site. It will improve safety by removing both guest and employee overnight accommodations from the floodplain. It also provides additional cabin-style accommodations that will enhance the auto camp character.

Two Medicine Developed Area. Alternative B was selected because it will result in an improved historic scene and sense of arrival for visitors entering the area. In addition, a new pedestrian trail and bridge to the campground will improve visitor safety and provide a more scenic approach to the lake.

Many Glacier Developed Area. Alternative C was selected because it provides the best separation of guest and employee functions and creates a greater range of types of guest accommodations. It will also improve the sense of arrival to the hotel and enhance the visitor experience by removing employee recreational facilities from the hotel and restoring the lobby to its historic appearance.

Swiftcurrent Developed Area. Alternative B was selected because it provides good separation of guest and employee function and expands the guest experience by offering more cabin-style accommodations, some with private bathrooms, and some as a hostel. These new units will replace the “mid-range” or standard accommodations currently provided in the motel. This decision could accommodate some employees currently housed in the Many Glacier area and provide a variety of housing to accommodate different needs of employees.

Finding on Impairment of Park Resources and Values

Short term negligible to moderate adverse impacts on water quality, soils, vegetation, wildlife, natural sound, air quality, historic resources, visual resources, energy consumption, and landowners in the park will occur. An increase in sedimentation from erosion of disturbed soils associated with construction and/or repair will cause minor to negligible short-term adverse impacts on water quality. Soil erosion and compactions from equipment will cause unavoidable, negligible short-term adverse impacts on soils. Temporary disturbance and vegetation trampling during all construction work will have negligible to minor, short-term adverse impacts on vegetation. There will be a temporary increase in noise in the park during construction activities having minor adverse impacts on natural sound. Increased dispersed dust and exhaust emissions will cause negligible to minor short-term adverse impacts on air quality during construction, rehabilitation, and maintenance. Minor to moderate short-term adverse impacts on historic resources will include temporary changes to the historic setting of an historic district or historic building due to either the presence of construction equipment and materials or actual temporary changes to buildings during rehabilitation work. Similarly the presence of construction equipment will result in minor short-term adverse impacts on visual resources. Construction of new guest and employee facilities as well as new parking lots will cause permanent minor adverse impacts on soils, minor impacts on vegetation and minor to moderate impacts on wildlife. Impacts to wildlife could be major if construction is done during sensitive seasons.

At Lake McDonald developed area there will be a major, long term beneficial impact from implementing the decision on visitor experience. There will be a major beneficial impact on visual resources from removal of the Coffee Shop.

At Many Glacier, there will be major long term beneficial impacts on visitor experience from implementing the decision. Early plowing of the Many Glacier Road could have major, long term adverse impacts on the federal candidate species, slender moonwort (*Botrychium lineare*).

In all the developed areas there will be moderate to major long term beneficial impacts on historic structures from rehabilitating the deteriorating historic buildings.

In addition to determining the environmental consequences of alternatives, National Park Service policy (Management Policies 2001) requires analysis of potential effects to determine whether actions would impair Park resources. Because implementation of the selected actions will not result in any major adverse impacts to a resource or value whose conservation is: (1) necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation of Glacier National Park; (2) key to the natural or cultural integrity of the Park or to opportunities for enjoyment of the Park; or (3) identified as a goal in the Park's general management plan or other relevant National Park Service planning documents, there will be no impairment of Glacier National Park's resources or values. The selected action will prevent impairment from occurring.

Environmentally Preferred Alternative

The environmentally preferable alternative is defined as the "alternative that will promote the national environmental policy as expressed in the National Environmental Policy Act's Section 101. Typically, this means the alternative that causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment. It also means the alternative that best protects, preserves and enhances historic, cultural and natural resources" (*Forty Most Asked Questions Concerning Council of Environmental Quality's National Environmental Policy Act Regulations, 1981*). As expressed in the National Environmental Policy Act's Section 101, it is the continuing responsibility of the Federal Government to:

1. Fulfill the responsibilities of each generation as trustee of the environment for succeeding generations;
2. Assure for all generations safe, healthful, productive, and esthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings;
3. Attain the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation, risk of health or safety, or other undesirable and unintended consequences;
4. 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;
5. Achieve a balance between population and resource use that will permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life's amenities; and
6. Enhance the quality of renewable resources and approach the maximum attainable recycling of depletable resources.

The environmental consequences for all of the alternatives were analyzed and assessed against the six criteria above. While the results of the *Final Commercial Services Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement* indicate that all of the No Action/Status Quo alternatives involve the least amount of change to the environmental and historical resources, they neither

satisfy the purpose and need underlying the preferred alternatives, nor fulfill these six criteria, with the exception of Firewood Sales, discussed below.

The environmentally preferred alternative for Granite Park Chalet is the preferred alternative and decision described in this Record of Decision because it achieves all six of the criteria.

The environmentally preferred alternative for Commercially Guided Day Hiking is the preferred alternative and decision described in this Record of Decision because it achieves all six of the criteria.

The environmentally preferred alternative for commercially guided underwater diving is the preferred and the decision as described in this Record of Decision because it achieves criteria 1-5, but does not achieve the 6th, because this criterion cannot be applied to this service.

The environmentally preferred alternative for Firewood Sales is the No Action alternative. This was not selected as the decision. Neither the No Action/Status Quo alternative or the preferred alternative met criteria 6¹ because burning of firewood does not enhance the quality of a renewable resource, nor does it recycle this resource. The preferred alternative also did not achieve criteria 3 because burning of firewood does not attain the widest range of beneficial use and it causes some degradation, risk of health or safety to visitors, and other undesirable consequences. Alternative B was selected as the decision because the smoke from campfires is not normally at high enough levels that it poses a significant health hazard for visitors or the natural resources.

The environmentally preferred alternative for Public Showers is the preferred alternative and decision as described in this Record of Decision because it achieves criteria 1-5 above. Criteria 6 cannot be applied to this service.

The environmentally preferred alternative for Boat Tours and Transportation is the preferred alternative and decision in this Record of Decision, because it achieves criteria 1-5. Criteria 6 cannot be applied to this service.

The environmentally preferred alternative for Interpretive Vehicle Tours and Public Transportation is the preferred alternative and decision in this Record of Decision, because it achieves all six of the criteria.

The environmentally preferred alternative for Horseback Riding and Packing Services is the preferred alternative and decision in this Record of Decision. None of the alternatives achieve all six of the criteria. The preferred alternative achieves criterion 1, 3, 4 and 5. It does not achieve criteria 2 because horses have controversial impacts on trails and natural resources. It does not achieve criteria 6 because it does not enhance the quality of renewable resources or approach the maximum recycling of depletable resources.

The environmentally preferred alternative for Commercially Guided Bicycle Tours is the preferred alternative and decision in this Record of Decision because it achieved all the criteria except for #4. This criterion cannot be applied to this service.

The environmentally preferred alternative for Commercial Step-On Guide Services is the preferred alternative and decision in this Record of Decision. It achieves all of the criteria except 2 and 6. Neither of these criteria can be applied to this service.

The environmentally preferred alternatives for each of the developed areas discussed in the plan are the preferred and the decision in this Record of Decision because they achieved all six of the criteria.

Public and Interagency Involvement

The notice of intent (NOI) to prepare a Commercial Services Plan and Environmental Impact Statement was published in the *Federal Register* September 12, 2000. Opportunities for early public participation were provided through a series of public open houses, a newsletter released in November 2000 and a comment form available on the National Park Service's Commercial Services Plan Web site. Open houses were held in Kalispell, Great Falls, Missoula, and Browning Montana and in Lethbridge Alberta, Canada in December, 2000. Early meetings were held with state and local agencies and tribal governments. Scoping comments were accepted until December 30, 2000. All comments received from the public during the General Management Plan regarding commercial services were also reviewed. Over 200 comments were received during scoping. These comments were in the form of letters, Web site, and comments made and received at public meetings. All comments received during scoping were considered in the EIS. Chapter 1 of the FEIS describes the issues and concerns raised.

The *Draft Commercial Services Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement* (DEIS) was released to the public in May, 2003 for a 60 day review period, and a press release was issued. A *Federal Register* notice was published on May 7, 2003. Comments were initially due July 30th, but due to the extreme fire season in and around the park, the comment period was extended until August 15th. Public open houses and hearings were held during the month of June in Kalispell, Missoula, Browning, and Great Falls, Montana and in Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada. Approximately 70 people attended these meetings and 430 written comments were received including transcripts from the testimony at the public hearings and comments received by email and telephone.

Most of the comments received were supportive of the Draft Plan and preferred alternatives, with some notable exceptions. The services that drew the heaviest comments were the future of Granite Park Chalet, guided motorcycle tours, guided bicycle tours, guided underwater diving, guided horseback rides, the numbers proposed for the group size on guided hikes, and some of the proposals at the developed areas. Except for Granite Park Chalet, most of the commenters supported the preferred alternatives, but offered suggestions and a few had concerns about how some of the services would affect resources. Some commenters wanted to see stricter limits on the size of the guided group hikes. Some of the comments suggested that the Blackfoot Tribe should have first priority to provide these services.

Comments regarding the future of Granite Park Chalet were almost evenly divided over whether it should be returned to full service or remain as it is. A few more comments supported full service. Commenters in favor of full service stated that increased ease of access for the young, elderly, and families would be an important part of their experience. Many commenters fondly recalled their experiences at the Chalet in the past such as hot meals eaten with a group of strangers, camaraderie, education provided by the staff, and emergency services provided by a full time staff available all summer. Commenters in favor of retaining the Chalet as a "hiker shelter" cited environmental concerns. Most who commented in favor of the hiker shelter said they would value having a lower cost alternative to Sperry Chalet.

Compelling arguments were presented on both sides of this issue. The National Park Service reexamined the preferred alternative and made a few changes that are reflected in this decision and in the *Final Commercial Services Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement*.

Most of the comments received on the Draft EIS on guided motorcycle tours, opposed the addition of these tours in the park as a new service. The tours were considered inappropriate and unnecessary in the park and concerns were raised about the noise associated with this type of service. Several comments suggested requiring quiet mufflers and a few comments supported the addition of this service. After considerable deliberation, the National Park Service determined that there is a real potential for guided motorcycle tour groups to adversely impact the visitor experience through heightened noise levels. Because of these concerns, the National Park Service determined that guided motorcycle tours do not meet all the criteria for “necessary and appropriate.”

Some of the letters and comments received contained ideas that were outside the scope of this plan. The National Park Service values this input and where applicable it will be taken into account in future plans or administrative decisions.

A notice was published in the *Federal Register* on June 21, 2004 announcing the availability of the *Final Commercial Services Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement*. A press release was issued. Seven comments were received, mostly stating their agreement with the Plan and congratulating the park on developing such a well written plan. One commenter had specific questions about the guided diving service, another came in to the office to discuss how the National Park Service reached the decision on Granite Park Chalet. One objected to firewood sales, another stated their support of showers at Two Medicine. Substantive comments were addressed in the Final EIS in Chapter 5 on pages 5-11-5-102.

Agency and American Indian Consultation and Coordination

Agency coordination was accomplished through correspondence, telephone communication and review of project related materials. Letters were sent to the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the Montana State Historic Preservation Officer, the Montana Department of Environmental Quality, the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation and the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks. Additional meetings review and discussion occurred with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the State Historic Preservation Office. During the public comment period on the *Draft Commercial Services Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement*, agency comments were received from the US Environmental Protection Agency, the Montana Department of Environmental Quality, and a letter was received from the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council. A meeting was held with the Council on May 1, 2003.

The Environmental Protection Agency wrote accepting the NPS response to their comments that were published in the *Final Commercial Services Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement*.

A Biological Assessment was submitted to the US Fish and Wildlife Service on March 23, 2004, and they concurred with the determination of not likely to adversely affect bald eagle, bull trout, Canada lynx, gray wolf, and grizzly bear on April 15, 2004. Formal consultation is not required. Informal consultation will continue with this agency as projects to implement this plan are funded.

The Montana State Historic Preservation Office wrote that after reviewing the Draft CSP and Draft EIS they saw nothing that caused “great concern, but looked forward to reviewing these projects in greater detail as they are developed.” There is not sufficient documentation to

complete section 106 compliance, therefore when the documentation as defined by 36 CFR 800.11 becomes available, Glacier National park staff will conduct Section 106 compliance.

A letter was received from the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council. The plan was discussed with the Cultural Liaison on April 8, 2003, and a meeting was held with the Tribal Council on May 1, 2003. The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes Historic Preservation Department was updated on the plan throughout its development including during regular consultation meetings on December 5, 2001, March 18, 2002, and October 28, 2002. Further consultation will occur with the tribes in accordance with Section 106 as the documentation required in 36 CFR 800.11 becomes available. Minor errors were found on three pages in the *Final Commercial Services Plan and Final Environment Impact Statement*. An errata sheet attached to this Record of Decision corrects these errors.

Conclusion

As described in the decision and the mitigation section in the *Final Commercial Services Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement* on pages 2-73-2-78, all practical means to avoid or minimize environmental harm from the selected alternative have been adopted. Because there will be no major adverse impacts to resources whose conservation is (1) necessary to fulfill specific purposes in the establishing legislation for Glacier National Park; (2) key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or to opportunities for enjoyment of the park; or (3) identified as a goal in relevant National Park Service planning documents, there will be no impairment of the park's resources or values. After a review of these effects, the alternatives selected for implementation will not impair park resources or values and will not violate the NPS Organic Act. Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act will be completed when the documentation standards required by 36 CFR 800.11 are met. If any of the proposed actions are determined to meet the criteria of adverse effect as design and construction drawings are developed and were not discussed in the Final EIS as a potential adverse effect, NEPA will be re-initiated. Section 7 compliance was completed based on information known at this time. As each project proceeds it will be reevaluated against the Biological Assessment and the determination of effect will be confirmed. If the effect determination changes, informal consultation will be reopened and a new Biological Assessment will be prepared. NEPA compliance may be re-initiated if the impacts were not analyzed in the Environmental Impact Statement. A Statement of Findings is also attached to this Record of Decision.

Recommended:

/s/ Michael O. Holm
Michael O. Holm, Superintendent
Glacier National Park
National Park Service

8/19/04
Date

Approved:

/s/ Stephen Martin
Stephen P. Martin, Director
Intermountain Regional Office
National Park Service

8/20/04
Date

Attachment:
Errata Sheet
Statement of Findings

Errata Sheet

This errata sheet corrects errors on 3 pages in the Final EIS.

Page 2-95, Table 2-21

Visitor Use and Experience	No effect	Major long-term, positive impacts Minor, positive, long-term impacts	Major long-term, positive impacts Minor, positive, long-term impacts
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Page 2-102, Table 2-32

Threatened and Endangered Species	Minor to moderate adverse impacts	Continued cumulative adverse impacts; minor to moderate, positive, long-term impacts at Apgar	Continued cumulative, minor to moderate, adverse impacts at Two Medicine and St. Mary	Continued cumulative, minor to moderate, positive long-term impacts at Lake McDonald; negligible, positive long-term impact for the gray wolf
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For all the threatened and endangered species listed below, the same impacts described for Alternative A would continue under Alternative C at all sites except for Two Medicine where impacts would be increased due to the expansion of guided horseback riding services in these areas. This alternative could have minor to moderate ~~to major~~, long-term negative impacts on these species, ~~except for gray wolf~~ except for Bull Trout at Two Medicine.