

January 2003

Issue 1



## *National Park and Preserve General Management Plan Newsletter*

Dear Friends,

We would like to introduce you to two new planning initiatives at Great Sand Dunes National Monument and Preserve, a unit of the National Park System. Over the next few years, we will develop a new *General Management Plan* (GMP) and conduct a *wilderness review* for the expanded national monument and preserve. The Great Sand Dunes General Management Plan will provide management direction for resource stewardship, visitor understanding and appreciation, partnerships, facilities, and operations for the next 15 to 20 years. The wilderness review, which is required by law and National Park Service policy, will examine areas within the expanded Great Sand Dunes boundary to determine whether they are suitable for, and should be proposed as, wilderness.

We hope to have your help with these planning efforts. Because the general management plan and wilderness study will affect park resources, visitors, and neighbors, your opinions are important to us. By getting involved, you can make a difference in the future of Great Sand Dunes National Monument and Preserve.

We will keep you informed about planning progress via newsletters like this one, public meetings and open houses, and the World Wide Web. Information about the first public meetings is included in this newsletter. To share your ideas with us, please fill out the enclosed comment form, or you can write to us at the address below or visit our Web site (<http://planning.nps.gov/plans.cfm>). Thank you for your interest in the Great Sand Dunes.

*General Management Plan / Wilderness Review Team*  
*Great Sand Dunes National Monument and Preserve*  
11999 Highway 150  
Mosca, CO 81146

Sincerely,

Steve W. Chaney, Superintendent  
Great Sand Dunes  
National Monument and Preserve



### Public Open House Meetings

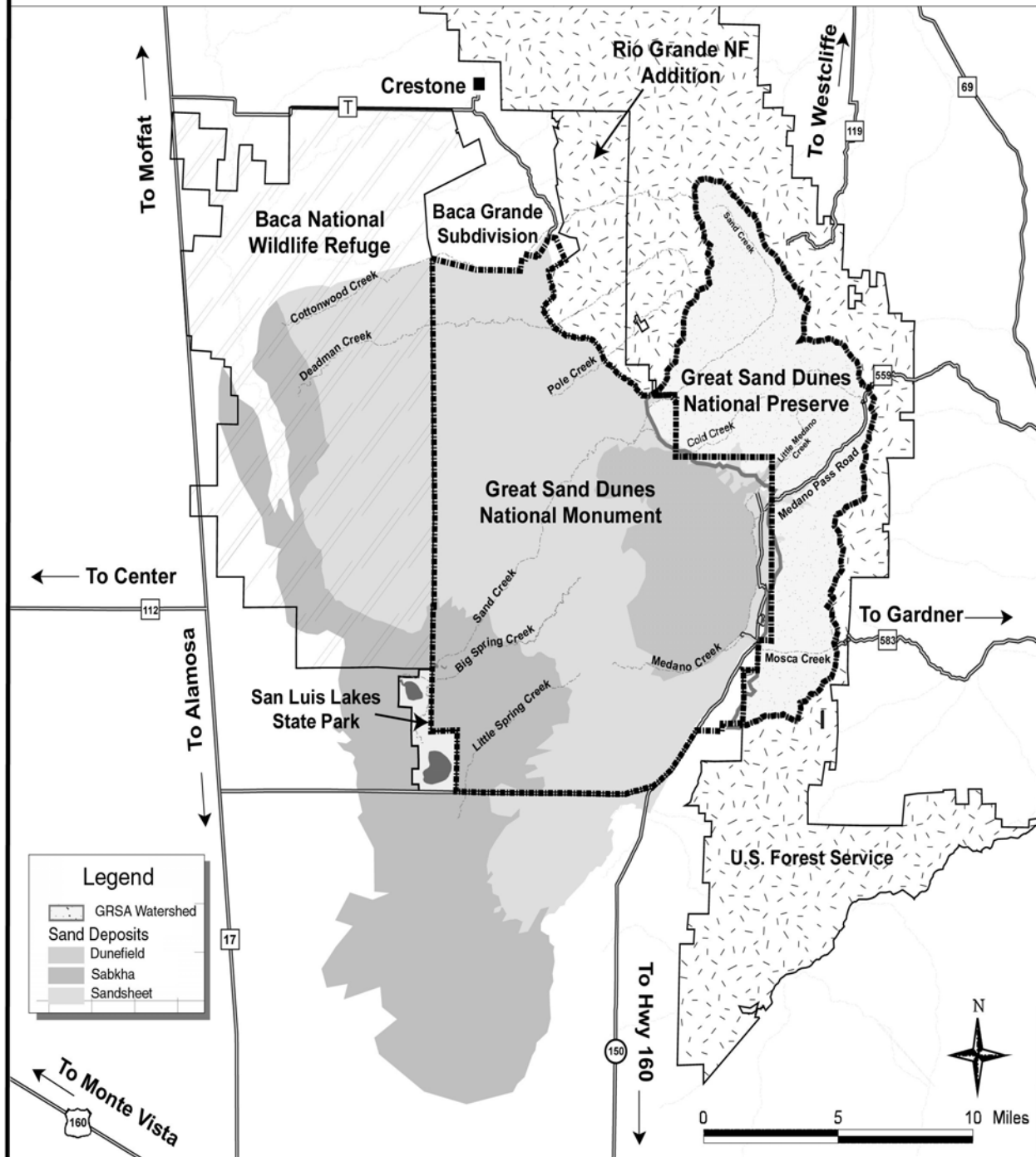
<b>Alamosa, Colorado</b> Trinidad State Jr. College, Room 124	February 13, 2003 4:00 pm to 7:00 pm
<b>Crestone, Colorado</b> 68575 County Road T Baca Grande Property Owner's Assoc. Hall	February 14, 2003 4:00 pm to 7:00 pm
<b>Front Range Area</b> Golden, Colorado 1470 - 10th Street Golden Community Ctr.	February 20, 2003 4:00 pm to 7:00 pm
<b>Westcliffe, Colorado</b> 209 Main Street Custer County Community Bldg.	February 21, 2003 4:00 pm to 7:00 pm

Great Sand Dunes National Monument and Preserve  
Colorado

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



# Great Sand Dunes System



December 2002

## *The Great Sand Dunes System*

The sand at Great Sand Dunes originated in the surrounding San Juan and Sangre de Cristo Mountains. These mountains have shed billions of cobble, gravel, and sand grains into the San Luis Valley over the centuries. Creeks and rivers in the northern half of the San Luis Valley flow into a depression known as a closed basin. In a natural regime, they seasonally flood the closed basin with water and sediments. The resulting lakes and ponds are intermittent, and when dry, leave the sandy beach deposits exposed to winds sweeping across the area mostly from the southwest. The winds pick up and redeposit the sand, forming dunes that migrate toward the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. As the sand approaches the mountain front, wind patterns change. Passes in the mountain range allow winds from the northeast and other directions to enter the valley. As a result, there is a zone several miles wide along the mountain front having abundant winds from multiple directions. This phenomenon causes the dunes to become vertical rather than migratory. The Great Sand Dunes dunefield, sculpted by winds from several directions, is found in this zone; the vertical dunes have grown to over 750 feet above the surrounding valley.

Around the dunes lie two expansive formations—the sand sheet and the sabkha (see Great Sand Dunes System map). The sand sheet supports sparse vegetation, so its sand is more stable than the main dune mass. Nonetheless, the sand sheet serves as a supply source for the main dunes. The sabkha is a sand deposit hardened by minerals precipitated out of the region's abundant water. Even though the sabkha, under current conditions, has a hard mineral crust, it too is a potential source of sand for the dunes.

Medano and Sand Creeks, which flow around the dune mass, “recycle” the sand, carrying it back to the south and west sides of the dunes. The movement of sand in and out of the dunes is dependent on the natural processes within the sand deposits and the watershed, and disruptions could alter the dunefield as well as threaten rare plant and insect species. The Great Sand Dunes system includes the main dunes, the sand sheet and sabkha, and watersheds in the San Juan and Sangre de Cristo mountains, including the Medano and Sand Creek watersheds.

### *Related News from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service*

Upon federal acquisition of the Baca Ranch and establishment of the Baca National Wildlife Refuge (see Great Sand Dunes System map), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will undertake a planning effort, similar to the National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service, and assess alternatives for management of these new lands in the National Wildlife Refuge System. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is looking forward to the challenge and opportunity of participating in the coordinated efforts of these agencies, The Nature Conservancy, and the community, to develop a General Management Plan for the Great Sand Dunes in a way that complements future planning efforts on the Baca National Wildlife Refuge and the entire Great Sand Dunes ecosystem.



## *Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve Act of 2000*

Great Sand Dunes National Monument was established in 1932 to preserve lands containing spectacular and unique sand dunes and additional features of scenic, scientific, and educational interest for the benefit and enjoyment of future generations. The Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve Act of 2000 enlarged Great Sand Dunes National Monument from 39,000 acres to over 100,000 acres, and also established Great Sand Dunes National Preserve, which exceeds 40,000 acres (see National Park Service Legislative Boundaries map). The purpose of the 2000 legislation was to protect the Great Sand Dunes natural system. Most of the expansion area was U.S. Forest Service land or is rangeland—the northwestern portion is the Baca Ranch, and the southwestern portion, the Medano-Zapata Ranch (owned by The Nature Conservancy).

The many designations within the National Park System are sometimes confusing to the public. *National monuments* are usually established by presidential proclamation (under the authority of the Antiquities Act of 1906) to protect landmarks, structures, and other objects of

historic or scientific interest situated on lands owned or managed by the federal government. *National parks* are generally large natural places having a wide variety of attributes, often including significant historic assets. Hunting, mining, and other consumptive activities are generally not permitted. *National preserves* are usually areas having characteristics associated with national parks, but in which Congress has permitted some combinations of public hunting, trapping, oil/gas exploration and/or extraction.

The expanded Great Sand Dunes unit, which includes some private and state inholdings, is now called “Great Sand Dunes National Monument and Preserve.” This name will change to “Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve” once the Secretary of the Interior determines that land having a sufficient diversity of resources has been acquired to warrant designation of the land as a national park. The *national preserve* was created from former Rio Grande National Forest lands west of the Sangre de Cristo divide and east of the monument. Like

the current national monument (soon to be national park), Great Sand Dunes National Preserve is managed by the National Park Service (NPS).

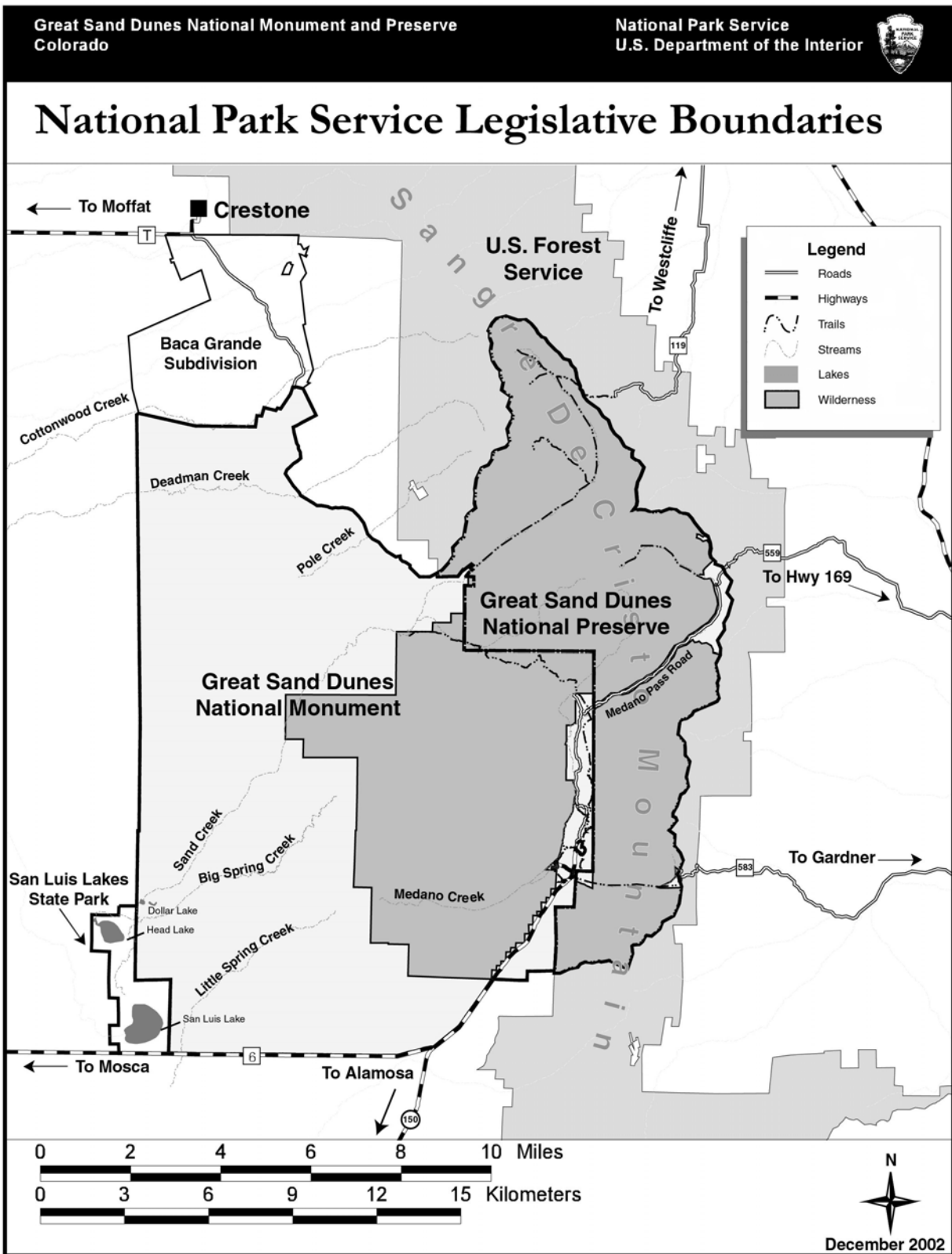
The Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve Act of 2000 had other provisions in addition to expanding the national monument and creating the national preserve. It provided for the establishment of the Baca National Wildlife Refuge (see Great Sand Dunes System map). The refuge will be established when the Secretary of the Interior determines that sufficient land has been acquired to constitute an area that can be efficiently managed as a national wildlife refuge. It will be located west of the expanded national monument, and will consist primarily of former Baca and Medano/Zapata Ranch lands, and will be managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The 2000 act also provided for another part of the Baca Ranch—the north-eastern “arm”—to be added to and managed by Rio Grande National Forest (see Great Sand Dunes System map).



Great Sand Dunes





## *What's a General Management Plan?*

General management plans are foundation plans that help park managers guide programs and set priorities for resource stewardship, visitor understanding and appreciation, partnerships, facilities, and operations for the next 15 to 20 years. The plan will not provide specific, detailed answers to every resource or facility question facing the park. Rather, it will provide a framework and rationale for decision making, which will allow park managers to effectively address future problems and opportunities.

## *Why Prepare a General Management Plan?*

- **To create a vision and clear direction for the park's future**
- **To focus precious resources (like staff and money) to achieve park goals**
- **To exchange ideas with the public**
- **To forge and strengthen partnerships**
- **To comply with public law and National Park Service policies**

### *Related News from the U.S. Forest Service*

Similar to the Great Sand Dunes, the Rio Grande National Forest anticipates acquisition of additional lands (see Great Sand Dunes System map) as planned expansion takes place. Acquired lands will also require planning and determination of an appropriate Management Area Prescription. It is desirable for the Rio Grande National Forest to join with the Great Sand Dunes to conduct a joint area analysis because of possible interconnecting transportation routes and adjacent lands. Impacts on one jurisdiction may well impact the other. Separate decision processes will be necessary, but it will be advantageous to coordinate Planning Steps 1 through 5, as identified in this newsletter.

## *Much More Than Sand Dunes*



*Big Spring Creek*



*Preserve*



*Mt. Herard*



*Medano Lake*



## *What is the Wilderness Review?*

The Wilderness Act of 1964, Department of the Interior regulations, Secretarial Orders, and *NPS Management Policies* (2001) require review of roadless and undeveloped areas within the National Park System to determine whether they are suitable for and should be proposed for wilderness. Wilderness review is a continuing obligation for the National Park Service because the National Park System changes with every new area or expanded boundary.

The first step in the wilderness review process is to conduct a *wilderness suitability assessment*, which is a factual determination of whether the park unit contains an area that is undeveloped or roadless and 5,000 acres or more in size (or of sufficient size to make management of wilderness practicable). If it is determined that the park unit does not contain such an area, the wilderness review process ends for that park.

The National Park Service is beginning a wilderness suitability assessment as part of this planning process. The public is invited to provide written or electronic comments, particularly concerning factual data that the National Park Service needs to know about to determine whether the new lands within the boundary contain wilderness-suitable areas. Comments can be sent to the Superintendent via the comment form in this newsletter, to the Web site, or directly to the monument. If the wilderness suitability assessment determines that a park contains lands that meet the minimum

requirements of undeveloped character and sufficient size, the National Park Service takes a second step—a *wilderness study*.

A wilderness study is a formal, detailed evaluation of the lands identified in the wilderness suitability assessment. A wilderness study results in either a wilderness proposal for some or all of the areas, or a proposal that none of the areas be recommended as wilderness. During a wilderness study, the National Park Service invites full public participation, conducts public hearings, performs an impact analysis, and publishes notices in the *Federal Register*, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, and the Wilderness Act of 1964.

A wilderness study may be a separate document accompanied by an environmental impact statement, or it may be part of a general management plan / environmental impact statement. At Great Sand Dunes, the intent is to prepare the GMP and wilderness study together, but if the notice and hearing requirements of the wilderness study lag, it will be completed separately at a later time. Either way, the wilderness study / environmental impact statement must contain a range of wilderness alternatives. If the preferred alternative for the wilderness study proposes that wilderness be recommended, the National Park Service submits the recommendation to the Secretary of Interior, who can submit it to the President, who can, in turn, submit it to Congress. Only Congress can designate wilderness, and Congress is under no obligation to act on a wilderness recommendation.





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## *The Great Sand Dunes Advisory Council*

The legislation that expanded Great Sand Dunes National Monument also provided for the establishment of the “Great Sand Dunes National Park Advisory Council.” The advisory council’s role is to advise the Secretary of the Interior (generally via the Great Sand Dunes Superintendent) regarding the development of the general management plan for the national park and preserve.

The council consists of ten members, to be appointed by the Secretary, and to include (1) one member of, or nominated by, the Alamosa County Commission, (2) one member of, or nominated by, the Saguache County Commission, (3) one member of, or nominated by, the “Friends of the Dunes” organization, (4) four members residing in or near the San Luis Valley, and (5) three members of the general public. All council members must have recognized backgrounds that reflect the purposes for which the national park and preserve were established, and the interests of the persons that will be affected by the planning and management of the park and preserve.

Formation of the advisory council is underway. The council will function in accordance with the Federal Advisory Committee Act (5 USC App.) and other applicable laws. After completion of the general management plan the council will be dissolved.

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## *Preliminary Issues for the General Management Plan*

One of the first steps in developing a general management plan is the “discovery” phase, in which we gather initial ideas about what the plan should address. We’d like to hear your thoughts about the topics below, and other issues and opportunities you think should be addressed by the general management plan for the Great Sand Dunes.

- purpose, significance, mission, and mission goals for the expanded park and preserve
- protecting the Great Sand Dunes ecosystem
- public use and education
- special designations or use conditions
- activities on adjacent lands
- routes of access
- desired visitor experiences
- congestion and crowding
- facilities and recreation opportunities
- information, education, and interpretive programs and services
- acquisition of inholdings
- commercial services
- park staff and funding
- wilderness management

## *The “Community-Based Ecosystem Stewardship” Workshop*

A workshop, “Community-Based Ecosystem Stewardship: Ensuring a Healthy Environment,” was held November 19–21, 2002, in Alamosa, Colorado. The National Park Service hosted the workshop with the goal of developing a strategy for development of an advisory council and a management planning process for Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve.

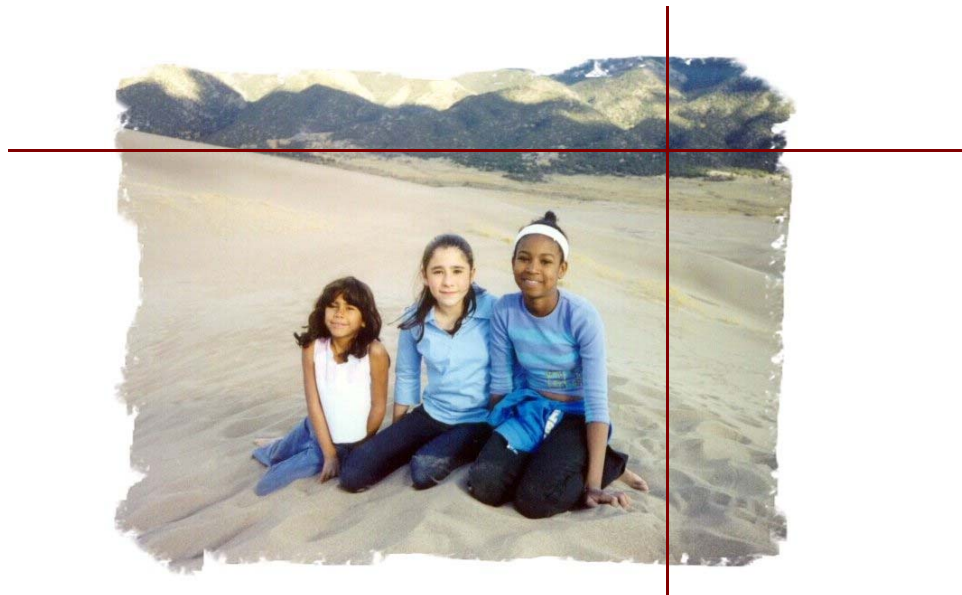
About 40 participants from San Luis Valley and elsewhere in Colorado attended. These individuals included representatives from land management agencies, tribes, counties, and private organizations, as well as community activists, ranchers, and others. Early in the workshop, it became clear that the San Luis Valley has a strong and diverse community that is concerned about Valley resources. This community has a solid foundation based on trust, mutual respect, and cooperation.

The workshop leaders encouraged a collaborative process among community, government, and science to support healthy natural systems and processes; diverse and productive economies; and social well-being. A key point was that social, economic, and

ecological health are interrelated—one can’t be addressed without addressing them all.

Workshop participants considered several “planning case studies” from other geographic areas that demonstrated how such collaborative relationships can work. The general consensus was that the San Luis Valley Community has worked collaboratively in the past (as in supporting the 2000 park expansion legislation), and has the will and means to do so in the future.

Participants discussed trends affecting the Valley and the nationally-significant Great Sand Dunes. They also discussed the idea of “stewardship,” which they characterized using the following phrases: taking responsibility; finding balance between environmental, social, and economic concerns; thinking seven generations ahead; having emotional ownership; and “giving back.” The workshop group generated useful ideas about how the National Park Service and Great Sand Dunes Advisory Council can reach out to, and gather input from, the San Luis Valley Community and others during development of the GMP for Great Sand Dunes.



## Planning Steps

### Great Sand Dunes General Management Plan and Wilderness Review

#### Step 1: Project Start-up      Fall 2002 - Winter 2002

- Assemble the interdisciplinary planning team and advisory council
- Conduct a wilderness suitability assessment
- Conduct internal scoping and preliminary consultation

#### Step 2: "Discovery" (initial idea gathering)      Winter 2002 - Spring 2003

- Consult with the public, agencies, and tribes
- Develop preliminary issue statements

#### Step 3: Visioning      Winter 2002 - Summer 2003

- Reaffirm park purpose, significance, and mission
- Reaffirm park interpretive themes
- Develop mission goals
- Develop management prescriptions (desired future conditions)

#### Step 4: Analysis and Alternatives      2003 - 2004

- Develop a range of GMP and wilderness study\* alternatives
- Identify and analyze impacts
- Consult with the public, agencies, and tribes
- Select a preferred alternative

#### Step 5: Documentation      2004 - 2005

- Prepare a Draft GMP/Wilderness Study\*/Environmental Impact Statement
- Consult with the public, agencies, and tribes
- Prepare a Final GMP/Wilderness Study\*/Environmental Impact Statement
- Consult with the public

#### Step 6: Decision      2005

- Prepare the Record of Decision and implement the plan

*The wilderness study process has its own requirements for Federal Register notices and public hearings. If this process lags too far behind the General Management Plan process, the wilderness study will be completed separately at a later time.*

*[Note: Dates shown are approximate.]*





*The National Park Service cares for special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.*

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## ***Participate in the Planning Effort!***

**Please attend an Open House with brief presentations at:  
4:00 p.m., 5:00 p.m., and 6:00 p.m.**

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