

Great Smoky Mountains National Park Cades Cove Planning Process Summary

The Cades Cove area of Great Smoky Mountains National Park has long been one of the most visited locations within the Park. The area attracts over 1.5 million visitors per year who come to see the sweeping mountain scenery, the abundant wildlife, and the preserved historic churches and farmsteads. The level of visitation has remained relatively consistent, in part because the road system is at capacity during peak demand periods. This concentrated visitation has created some level of impacts to resources as well as posing management challenges to respond to provide for the visitors' needs and expectations. The Park recognizes the need to protect Park resources, while still providing for and enhancing the visitor's experience. In order to accomplish this goal, Great Smoky Mountains National Park is undertaking an analysis and planning process for the Cades Cove area of the Park.

About Cades Cove:

Cades Cove is a valley surrounded by mountains and one of the most popular destinations in the park. Deer are often seen in the fields and sightings of other wildlife, including bear, are common. A wide array of historic buildings dating back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries are scattered through out the cove. An 11-mile one-way, single lane loop road provides the only access around the cove.

In the over thirty years since the Park last took a holistic look at the management of Cades Cove, visitation to the Cove increased as much as 300%. While visitation has declined from a peak of about 2 million in 1999, signs of the stress associated with visitation on natural and cultural resources and visitor facilities continue to be apparent (i.e., soil erosion, lines at restrooms and peak season traffic congestion).

About the Project:

The Cades Cove Planning Project is a phased process. Phase I of the process included five rounds of public meetings and resulted in the development of conceptual alternatives. The Cades Cove Opportunities Plan is the summary document for Phase I and identifies issues, goals and objectives, and the five conceptual alternatives.

During Phase II the Park is refining the conceptual alternatives developed in Phase I in light of a Choosing by Advantages (CBA) process. CBA includes a value analysis process component which is required by the National Park Service. CBA is a tool that assesses the relative strengths of each key element of the project to ensure that essential functional requirements are met, all viable alternatives are considered, solutions are cost effective, and benefit-to-cost relationships are considered. CBA analysis has been incorporated within the project objectives of Phase II of the process. Phase II is scheduled to be complete in the winter of 2008/2009 and includes additional data collection, refinement of the concept alternatives using CBA, and an analysis of the impacts of each alternative on Park resources, the visitor experience, and park operations as well as the projected implementation and operational costs.

Phase III of the process will include additional public meeting opportunities where the analysis

performed during Phase II will be presented for comments. The comments received will then be taken into consideration along with resource and visitor experience impacts and costs to develop the decision document. The start of Phase III and the next public input opportunity have not yet been scheduled.