



Cave Trails Rehabilitation

An Environmental Assessment Scoping Letter

The Mammoth Cave National Park planning team is developing plans for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of cave tour trails within Mammoth Cave. Our plans are in the early stages of development. This newsletter is being distributed to our partners, neighbors, and stakeholders to solicit comments related to the development of an Environmental Assessment (EA) for this project.

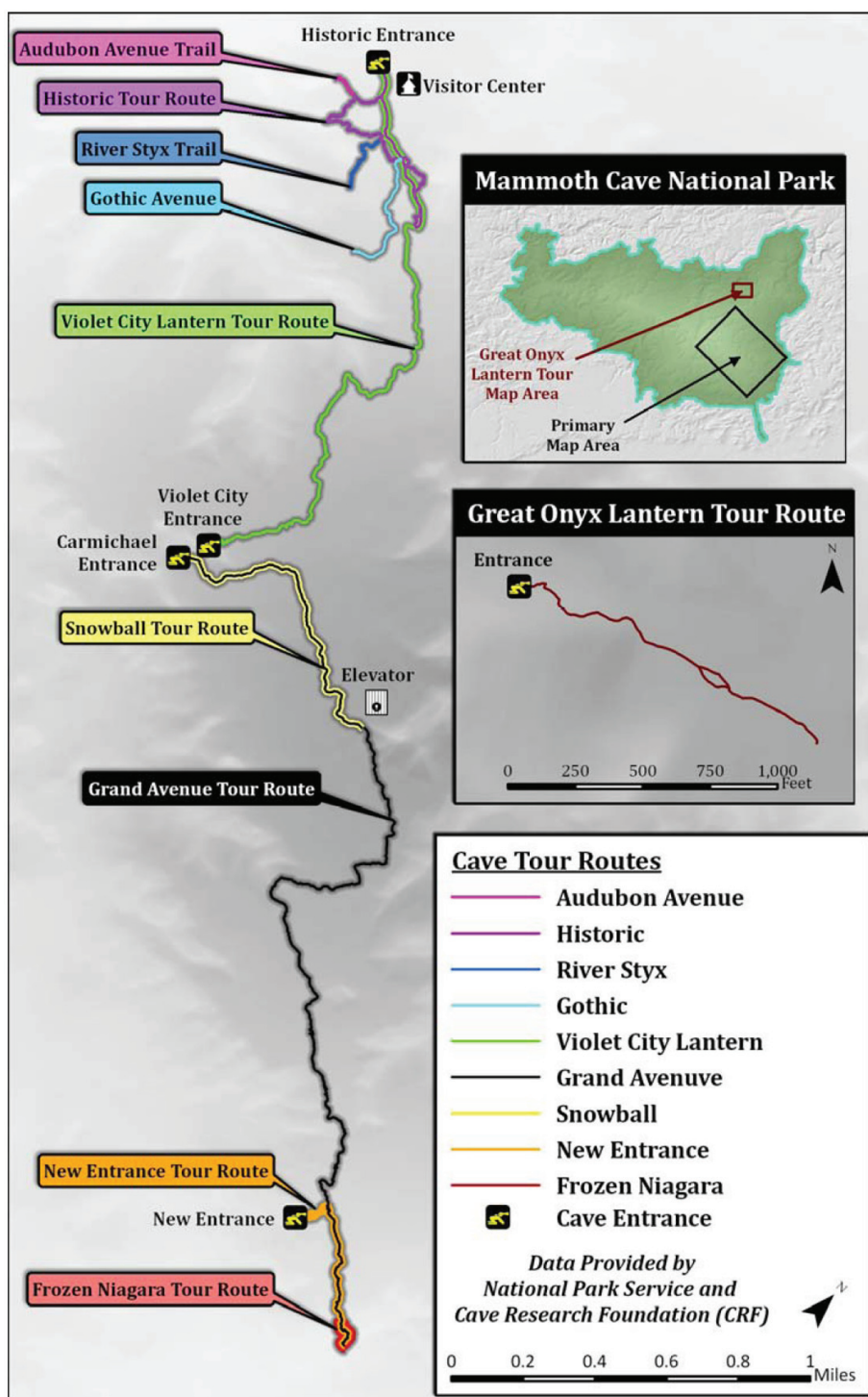
Please tell us what you think. If you would like to provide comments on this project, or request a copy of the draft EA that will be available later this year, you may do so either by commenting online through the National Park Service's Planning, Environmental, and Public Comment (PEPC) website at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/> or by writing to:

Mammoth Cave National Park
Attention: Superintendent
P.O. Box 7
Mammoth Cave, KY 42259

We would appreciate your comments by May 26, 2009 to be considered in this phase of the planning process. You will have additional opportunities to comment when the draft EA will be made available to the public for review in late summer or early fall of 2009. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Patrick H. Reed
Superintendent



NEPA Process

The NPS must follow the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 to assure consideration of important issues. The trail rehabilitation that is being considered at Mammoth Cave will be analyzed during the NEPA process.

As part of the NEPA process, the proposed improvements will be evaluated in an EA, which will analyze the potential environmental effects of the proposed trail rehabilitation. This analysis will consider impacts to topics such as cave biota, threatened and endangered species, water quality, cultural resources, visitor use, and public health and safety.

Project Details

Project Background

Approximately 12 miles of tourist trails in Mammoth Cave were constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s. The CCC crews widened tour paths and used cave sediments to level the rocky cave floor. Additional entrances to the cave were created allowing for 3-4 hour trips, versus 6-7 hour trips. Electric lights were installed along tour routes in stages between 1917 and 1965, and later updated in 2005-2006. In recent years, park staff have installed short stretches of boardwalks and paving stone-paths as prototype walking surfaces. In 2000, cave visitation was ten times greater than in 1934 when the CCC began work in the cave. Except for limited areas, there has been no rehabilitation or upgrade of Mammoth Cave tour trails since 1941.

Project Description

This project would reconstruct cave tour trails within Mammoth Cave. Cave passageways vary greatly in width, height, slope, features, and humidity. Treatment applied on the trails will be site specific. In some places only minor changes may be needed, while in others more comprehensive solutions will be applied.

The new cave tour trails will:

- Provide safer walking surfaces for park visitors;
- Significantly reduce or eliminate the impact of cave visitors (lint and dust) on delicate cave resources; and
- Protect cave resources by keeping visitors on defined trails and away from sensitive artifacts.

The project includes reconstruction of the trail surface, installation or replacement of steps, upgrade of safety rails, installation of lint guards along the edges of the trails, and where necessary installation of lights to provide a safe walking area. The trail surface would be reconstructed in many areas using a combination of concrete pavers, PolyPavement™, boardwalk, soilcrete, and other suitable and sustainable trail surface materials. The cave tour routes to be rehabilitated would include:

- Historic Tour route, plus Rafinesque Hall and Gothic Avenue, and the passage to River Styx;
- Violet City Lantern Tour route;
- Grand Avenue Tour route;
- New Entrance Tour route;
- Adjacent passageways previously used for public tours; and
- Great Onyx Cave trails.

Concrete pavers on the prototype trail installed in the Historic Section of Mammoth Cave.

