

**LAND AND RIVER TRAIL MANAGEMENT PLAN AT
MAMMOTH CAVE NATIONAL PARK
SUMMER 2023**

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT REPORT

SEPTEMBER 2023

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National Park Service (NPS) initiated civic engagement for the Land and River Trail Management Plan at Mammoth Cave National Park (the park). As part of this civic engagement, the National Park Service solicited input on the plan's purpose and proposed trail system changes.

The park issued a news release on July 25, 2023, with information on how to learn more about the plan and how to submit comments on the preliminary strategies. The park provided a graphic information system storymap with maps of draft trail alignments (<https://www.bit.ly/mammothtrailsmap>), a short informational video on YouTube discussing the plan details (), and a newsletter with details on the plan. The storymap had 1,073 interactions, and the YouTube video was viewed 175 times. The park hosted two public meetings, the first on Tuesday, August 1 at the Warren County Library, Bob Kirby Branch from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m., and the second on Thursday, August 3 at the Edmonson County Library from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. Park staff encouraged the public to submit comments through the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website at: <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/MammothTrails>. Comments were also accepted by US mail. The public comment period began on July 25, 2023, and ended on August 25, 2023.

The National Park Service considered all comments from members of the public. A total of 64 pieces of correspondence were received during the civic engagement period. This civic engagement report summarizes the comments expressed during this civic engagement period.

COMMENT ANALYSIS

Definition of Terms

- A **correspondence** is the entire document received from a commenter and includes letters, written comment forms, comments entered directly into the PEPC database, e-mails, and any other written comments provided either by postal mail or in person at the park.
- A **comment** is a portion of text within a correspondence that addresses a single subject such as "parking" or "visitor use and experience."

Comment Analysis Methodology

The National Park Service accepted written correspondence by US mail or entered directly into the PEPC system. Park staff did not receive any letters through the US mail; the public submitted all correspondence via the PEPC system. Once the public comment period concluded, each correspondence was read, and specific comments within each unique

correspondence were identified. When identifying comments, every attempt was made to capture the full breadth of comments submitted.

The public was asked the following questions:

1. What do you think of the plan's purpose, as described in the newsletter? Are there any trail-related issues we should address in the plan? Are there any opportunities we should be sure to take advantage of?
2. Think about a favorite trail in the park or consider your 'dream' Mammoth Cave trail. What do you value most about that trail, and why is it important? What about it should be preserved for current and future generations? What makes it unique from other trail-based experiences you can have in the region?
3. Consider the spectrum of opportunities described in the land-based and water-based trail categorization. Which categories would you be most interested in using, and why? Which categories would you like to see more of in the park?
4. Consider the proposed trail system changes. Which of the proposed new trails are of greatest interest to you? Are there any proposed changes to the system that concerns you?
5. Should we consider anything else while developing the Land and River Trail Management Plan and environmental assessment? Are there any potential social or environmental impacts we should evaluate?

Correspondence Received

The majority of correspondences were from residents of the state of Kentucky (83% of the total). Two or less correspondences were received from residents of Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, North Carolina, Ohio, Tennessee, and Utah.

COMMENT SUMMARIES

Correspondences are summarized below by the following themes: dream trails, feedback on preliminary trails, requested changes to preliminary trails, and implementation.

Dream Trails

The public described their "dream" trails at Mammoth Cave National Park as trails with interesting features and destinations such as cave views and/or entry, overlooks, diverse terrain with changes in elevation, views of water, historic sites, connecting to main park buildings, water for horses to drink, and waterfalls for visitors to enjoy. The public's dream trails at the park include diverse terrain with opportunities, ranging from easy and family friendly to challenging and "rugged." The public's dream trails also include nearby primitive camping. Lastly, some commenters expressed a desire for the Mammoth Cave National Park trails network to become more of a mountain bike tourism destination similar to Bentonville, Arkansas or the Pisgah/Brevard areas of North Carolina.

Some issues that detract from the public experiencing their dream trail environment include poor wayfinding on existing trails, braided-out muddy trenching on McCoy Hollow and Blair Hollow, and equestrians traveling on Big Hollow Trail (where horse use is not permitted).

Feedback on Preliminary Trails

Support

The public expressed support for many of the proposed trails, such as expanding trails south of the Green River (away from the road), increasing gravel trails and connections to the Mammoth Cave Railroad Bike and Hike Trail, and keeping horses north of the river. The following specific trails received support: Sugar Sink, Flint Ridge, Cedar Spring Ridge, Silent Grove, Three Falls trail/campsite, and opening Houchin Ferry Road North to equestrians. The public expressed support for hiker-only trail loops, bike-only trail loops, shorter loop opportunities overall, and backcountry campsites along trail loops (i.e., separating trails by user groups).

Opposition

Some members of the public expressed opposition to the proposed decommissioning of trails. One commenter expressed a preference for none of the trails being decommissioned and requested that these trails stay open at least seasonally. The following specific trails received opposition for the decommission proposal: Mill Branch, McCoy Hollow, and Raymer Hollow. The rationale provided for keeping these trails open included maintaining diverse opportunities to riders, loop opportunities, and connecting to other equestrian trails.

Concerns

The public expressed some concern over the park's ability to maintain new trails financially and the park's ability to enforce wet weather closures. There was also concern regarding the safety of converting Houchin Ferry Road North to mixed use. Some commenters were concerned about bicycles, equestrians, and vehicles using the road and suggested reducing the speed limit to increase safety of all users. One commenter was concerned about the safety of the steep paved section of Houchin Ferry Road North near the river and being too slick when wet for equestrian use.

Requested Changes to Preliminary Trails

Requests

The public offered suggestions to improve the preliminary trail proposals, including more separation of use types on trails, more hiker only trails, 10–20 more miles of equestrian trails, and mountain bike routes that are greater than 10 miles in length and more technical. The public wants more trails that are challenging, take advantage of rock outcroppings/formations, explore scenic parts of the park, and lead to overlooks and other interesting features. Commenters requested more single-track cross-country mountain bike trails, more semiprimitive and primitive equestrian trails, and more wheelchair-accessible trails.

The public requested more of the following facilities to support trail use: tie spots for horses, trash cans at high-use areas, benches on accessible trails, picnic areas, maps, educational plaques, restrooms, and trail markings in different colors. The public also requested a paddle-in campground on the Green River.

The public requested having a method to report downed trees so social trails do not form; paving the Mammoth Cave Railroad Bike and Hike Trail since it is rough in some spots; and improving the information available on the website, including trail conditions, user mileage, planned/completed work, and tasks open to volunteers. Some commenters requested that Sal Creek be reopened for use by mountain bikers. One commenter requested kayak tours, and another commenter requested that the park work with other agencies to make the river passage on Old Lock 6 safer.

Lastly, some commenters requested that this plan address e-bikes. Some commenters want to see e-bikes prohibited on hiker/equestrian trails due to safety concerns, while others want e-bikes allowed on bike trails.

Suggested Trail Connections

The public suggested the park explore feasibility of trails in Bylew Hollow and Strawberry Valley and expressed interest in a trail across the Green River to connect the northern and southern parts of the park. The public suggested the following trail connections:

- more loop opportunities off Houchins Ferry Road North (such as connecting to First Creek Trail or McCoy Hollow Trail);
- gravel loops on gravel trails and existing roads (such as extending the gravel trail on Highway 70 to Joppa Ridge and connecting Union City to Park Ridge Road); and
- a new trail west of the Big Hollow north-south connector trail through more rocky technical terrain.

Implementation

The public requested that the park clearly communicate expectations on time lines for trail work and repairs. One commenter suggested working on one trail at a time.

Trail Hardening

The public provided requests on trail hardening that included placing gravel on top of hardened trails to increase comfort on horse hooves, placing rocks on wet areas to prevent them from getting too muddy, and only hardening specific stretches of trail as needed.

Wet Weather Closures

The public posed questions on how wet weather closures would occur. Commenters specifically asked what parameters would be used, which weather station information would be used, and who would make the decision. Some commenters proposed imposing a fee on users who use trails when a wet weather closure is in effect. Commenters also want to see signs on trails informing users of the wet weather closure.

Partnerships

The public suggested the park work with different organizations to help make the trails more sustainable and user-friendly for all visitors. Specific groups suggested for potential partnerships include the Mammoth Cave Backcountry Horsemen Association, the Ozark Trail Association, the Warren County Mountain Bike Team, Southwest Kentucky Mountain Bike Association, and Cave Country Trails.