DEATH VALLEY NATIONAL PARK
Saline Valley Warm Springs Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)
Summary of Preliminary Alternatives
January 2014

NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

The no action alternative would continue the current management of the area with no changes. Visitors would continue to be able to use the tubs and associated facilities, including car camping in the non-wilderness area and dispersed wilderness camping in wilderness areas. Camping areas would not be designated. The following regulatory provisions contained in the Superintendent's Compendium would continue: no birthing in tubs; children not "potty trained" or younger than 4 years old are required to wear waterproof swimming diapers; no pets permitted within 50 feet of the pools or springs; "source" pools are closed to bathing; introduction of human bodily waste into bathing pools is prohibited; and persons afflicted with an infectious disease, suffering from a cough, cold, or sores, or wearing bandages shall not use the tubs or springs. Maintenance of the tubs and associated facilities would continue to be carried out by the volunteer camp hosts and the user groups. The selection of this alternative could result in non-compliance with federal and state regulations.

Specific Elements

- There would be unrestricted dispersed camping, with impromptu fire rings.
- Off-road use by vehicles would be prohibited, but roads would not be designated.
- Full-time camp host at Lower Spring and seasonal camp hosts at Palm Spring would be assigned.
- Periodic response and patrols by rangers/resource staff would continue.
- Clothing would be optional throughout the planning area (campground and tubs).
- Water diversions from source pools to infrastructure and tubs would be maintained by camp hosts and user groups.
- Hazardous materials use and on-site storage would continue and would not be compliant with regulations.
- The camp host's auto repair support services, equipment, and supplies would remain.
- Vault toilets would be pumped once or twice per year by park maintenance.

- Minimal control of non-native plants (e.g., trimming and hand pulling of young palms by volunteer camp host and volunteers) would continue.
- Minimal control of non-native animals (e.g., feral burros excluded from pools and lawn at Lower Spring by fencing) would continue.
- Signs would be posted to educate users on proper food storage to reduce attraction to habituated wildlife (coyotes and ravens).
- NPS would continue the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Recreational Aviation Foundation (RAF) for maintenance of the airstrip; camping would be allowed at the airstrip.
- New and existing artwork would not be removed by the NPS.
- NPS would not consider or pursue historic or ethnographic cultural landscape listing of the springs in the National Register of Historic Places.
- Cooperative management of resources with the Timbisha Shoshone under the Timbisha Shoshone Homeland Act and accompanying Legislative EIS (LEIS) would be pursued; however, there would be no articulation of cooperative management beyond the framework established in the Act and LEIS.

MINIMUM MANAGEMENT ALTERNATIVE

The goal of this alternative would be to retain much of the current management of the area (as under the no action alternative), while ensuring compliance with applicable public health regulations, hazardous waste regulations, and the Superintendent's Compendium. NPS would ensure full compliance with applicable public health regulations regarding the quality of surface water, including routine testing of source pools, removal of dishwashing stations, and the maintenance of infrastructure for showers and soaking tubs. Further actions to protect public health would include the removal of the auto repair support services, fencing the settling pond, and fencing source pools to exclude wildlife and burros.

<u>Specific Elements</u>

- There would be dispersed camping, with authorized fire pans and hot coal disposal/ash removal stations.
- Off-road use by vehicles would be prohibited, but roads would not be designated.
- Full-time camp host and seasonal camp hosts would be assigned; housing would be provided for full-time camp host.
- NPS would be responsible for maintenance of the tubs and infrastructure, with support from volunteers.
- Dishwashing stations would be removed, with the requirement that visitors wash dishes away from communal areas, strain dishwater, and pack out food scraps.
- Signs would be posted to educate users on proper food storage to reduce attraction to habituated wildlife (coyotes and ravens).

- There would be full compliance with water quality and public health standards (monitored by camp hosts).
- There would be regular patrols by rangers/resource staff.
- Clothing would be optional throughout the planning area (campground and tubs).
- The camp host's auto repair support services, equipment, and supplies would be removed or, at a minimum, be brought up to regulatory code to protect public health and safety.
- Hazardous materials use and storage (e.g., gasoline and bleach) would meet regulations.
- Vault toilets would be pumped once or twice per year by park maintenance; the vault toilet at the full-time camp host area would be moved to Palm Spring.
- Palms at Upper Spring would be removed; tamarisk would be controlled by NPS; planting of native grasses only would be allowed.
- Fencing would be installed around springs to prevent access to source pools by feral burros.
- NPS would continue the MOU with RAF for maintenance of the airstrip; camping would be allowed at the airstrip; NPS would promulgate a special regulation to allow the airstrip to remain open in accordance with regulations contained in 36 CFR 2.17(a)(1).
- No new artwork would be allowed in developed areas or wilderness; non-historic artwork would be removed from wilderness; historic artwork would be retained.
- NPS would designate and retain the historic cultural landscape pending Determination of Eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places.
- Cooperative management of resources with the Timbisha Shoshone under the Timbisha Shoshone Homeland Act and the LEIS would be pursued; there would be a cooperative agreement with the Tribe for review of park management actions with a possible arrangement with the Tribe for shared resource protection and stewardship activities.
- NPS would consult with the Tribe on native plants and vegetation management at Upper Spring.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ALTERNATIVE

This alternative would seek to engage user groups in the management of the area to provide visitors with the types of experiences they currently value while working cooperatively to protect park resources and ensure compliance with applicable public health regulations and the Superintendent's Compendium. The user groups would be engaged in carrying out many of the actions needed to protect human health and park resources. Agreements would be developed between the park and user groups to identify responsibilities for water quality monitoring, maintenance of facilities, maintenance of the airstrip, and protection of park resources. Under this alternative, there would be full compliance with applicable public health regulations regarding the quality of surface water, including routine testing of source pools, removal of dishwashing stations, and the maintenance of infrastructure for showers and soaking

tubs. Further actions to protect public health would include the removal of the auto repair support services, fencing the settling pond, and fencing source pools to exclude wildlife and burros.

Specific Elements

- NPS would work with user groups to designate and define general camp areas, made clear by delineation of roadways and parking areas to prevent off-road use by vehicles; signage would be posted at wilderness boundaries; an area use map would be posted, both at the campground and shared online through user group websites.
- No camping would be allowed within 200 feet of source pool or tubs. There would be designated overflow "walk-in" camping areas with defined parking.
- Stay would be limited to 30 days per calendar year.
- Use of fire pans would be authorized, with hot coal deposit/ash removal stations.
- No permits would be required.
- To prevent incidental feeding of wildlife or burros, appropriate food storage would be accomplished through on-site and online outreach to users.
- Signs would be posted to educate users on proper food storage to reduce attraction to habituated wildlife (coyotes and ravens).
- Full-time camp host and seasonal camp hosts would be assigned; housing would be provided for full-time camp host.
- User groups would be responsible for maintenance of tubs and infrastructure under the supervision of NPS.
- Dishwashing stations would be removed, with the requirement that visitors wash dishes away from communal areas, strain dishwater, and pack out food scraps.
- There would be full compliance with water quality and public health standards with support from user groups (monitored by camp hosts).
- There would be regular patrols by rangers/resource staff, with prioritized presence during high use weekends.
- Clothing would be optional, with voluntary restrictions on nudity at certain times of year to respect Timbisha Shoshone tribal use.
- Hazardous materials use and storage would meet regulations.
- The camp host's auto repair support services, equipment, and supplies would be removed or, at a minimum, be brought up to regulatory code to protect public health and safety.
- Vault toilets would be pumped as needed by park maintenance, by contractor, or by cooperative agreement with user groups; the vault toilet at the full-time camp host area would be moved to Palm Spring; user groups may bring in portable vault toilets for heavy use weekends; NPS would explore the option of installing green composting toilets.
- Palms would be removed from Upper Spring and there would be a volunteer-based monitoring program to control palm seedlings at all three spring areas; NPS would

control tamarisk with assistance from volunteers; NPS would engage user groups to ensure planting of native grasses only.

- Fencing would be installed around springs to prevent access to source pools by feral burros.
- MOU with RAF for maintenance of the airstrip would continue; there would be addition of some infrastructure, e.g., tiedowns (but no additional restroom facility); camping would be allowed at the airstrip; NPS would promulgate a special regulation to allow the airstrip to remain open in accordance with regulations contained in 36 CFR 2.17(a)(1).
- Artwork would be retained in developed areas but no new artwork would be allowed in developed or wilderness areas; non-historic artwork would be removed from wilderness.
- NPS would designate and retain historic cultural landscape.
- Cooperative management of resources with the Timbisha Shoshone under the Legislative EIS would be pursued, with a possible arrangement with the Tribe for shared resource protection and stewardship activities.
- NPS would consult with the Tribe on native plants and vegetation management at Upper Spring.
- NPS would establish a monitoring and response program whereby actions would be taken by park management to restrict use of the springs if damage to natural and cultural resources is observed; there would be collaboration with the user groups to establish thresholds for use and overuse of the area.

RECREATION MANAGEMENT ALTERNATIVE

This alternative would allow for continued recreation at Saline Valley with some restrictions (including the Superintendent's Compendium), and more management responsibilities by NPS staff. Additional infrastructure would be added to designate campsites and manage resource impacts. Activities that are currently carried out by the camp hosts and user groups would be the sole responsibility of park staff under this alternative. The alternative would require an increase in park staff time for management of Saline Valley to monitor source water quality, maintain the infrastructure and manage exotic plants. Under this alternative, there would be full compliance with applicable public health regulations regarding the quality of surface water, including routine testing of source pools, removal of dishwashing stations, and the maintenance of infrastructure for showers and soaking tubs. Further actions to protect public health would include the removal of the auto repair support services, fencing the settling pond, and fencing source pools to exclude wildlife and burros.

<u>Specific Elements</u>

- NPS would designate campsites with signposts and NPS-installed fire rings.
- Online camping permits would be required with a limit on the number of visitors per campsite, with a stay limit of 7 consecutive days.

- There would be no camping within 200 feet of source pools or tubs; designated overflow "walk-in" camp areas would be established.
- Off-road use by vehicles would be prohibited and made clear by delineation of roadways and parking areas; signage would be posted at wilderness boundaries.
- NPS would install food storage boxes to prevent incidental feeding of animals.
- Full-time camp host and seasonal camp hosts would be assigned; housing would be provided for full-time camp host.
- User groups would be responsible for maintenance of tubs and infrastructure under the supervision of NPS.
- Dishwashing stations would be removed, with the requirement that visitors would wash dishes away from communal areas, strain dishwater, and pack out food scraps.
- There would be full compliance with water quality and public health standards (monitored by camp hosts or other park staff).
- There would be regular patrols by rangers/resource staff, with prioritized presence during high use weekends.
- Clothing would be optional in tubs only; NPS would promulgate a special regulation to prohibit nudity outside of tubs.
- Hazardous materials use and storage would meet regulations.
- The camp host's auto repair support services, equipment, and supplies would be removed or, at a minimum, be brought up to regulatory code to protect public health and safety.
- Vault toilets would be pumped twice per year by park maintenance staff; a vault toilet would be added at Palm Spring for a total of five toilets; NPS would explore the option of installing green composting toilets.
- Palms would be removed from Upper Spring; tamarisk would be controlled by NPS; planting of native grasses only would be allowed.
- Fencing would be installed around springs to prevent access to source pools by feral burros.
- NPS would be responsible for maintenance of the airstrip; there would be addition of some infrastructure, e.g., tiedowns; no camping would be permitted at the airstrip; NPS would promulgate a special regulation to allow the airstrip to remain open in accordance with regulations contained in 36 CFR 2.17(a)(1).
- Non-historic artwork would be removed from developed areas and wilderness; no new artwork would be allowed.
- NPS would designate and retain the historic cultural landscape.
- Cooperative management of resources with the Timbisha Shoshone under the Timbisha Shoshone Homeland Act and LEIS would be pursued; there would be a possible arrangement with the Tribe for shared resource protection and stewardship activities.
- NPS would consult with the Tribe on native plants and vegetation management at Upper Spring.

- NPS would establish a monitoring and response program whereby actions would be taken by park management to restrict use of the springs if damage to natural and cultural resources is observed.

RESTORATION ALTERNATIVE

The goal of the restoration alternative would be to restore the springs as close as possible to their natural condition, with no or minimal development. The tubs and associated infrastructure would be removed, as would the airstrip. Camping would continue to be permitted but would be more restricted. Park staff would develop and implement a habitat restoration plan to remove exotic plants and restore native habitats. This plan would require extensive park staff support during implementation for education, enforcement, and restoration activities.

Specific Elements

- There would be dispersed camping within designated areas.
- No camp fires would be permitted (stoves permitted).
- Overnight stay would be limited to 3-7 consecutive days; a permit would be required with a limit on the number of visitors.
- No camping within 200 feet of source pools.
- Off-road use by vehicles would be prohibited and made clear by delineation of roads.
- No camp hosts would be assigned.
- Tubs and all infrastructure would be removed.
- There would be increased presence by rangers/resource staff to monitor restoration.
- Clothing conventions would be observed, consistent with other areas in Death Valley National Park.
- Signs would be posted to educate users on proper food storage to reduce attraction to habituated wildlife (coyotes and ravens).
- The camp host's auto repair support services, equipment, and supplies would be removed.
- Vault toilets would be removed; visitors would be required to carry out human waste.
- All non-native plant species would be removed, including the lawn at Lower Spring; there would be restoration with native species in natural distribution patterns.
- Burro exclusion fences would be installed at Palm Spring and Lower Spring until development and implementation of park-wide burro management plan.
- The airstrip would be removed.
- All artwork associated with development at the springs would be removed and there would be ongoing monitoring to prevent installations in wilderness and backcountry.

- All development would be removed, and the area would be restored to natural and ethnographic (Timbisha Shoshone) landscape.
- NPS would work with the Tribe to nominate the springs as a Traditional Cultural Property (TCP).
- Cooperative management of resources with the Timbisha Shoshone under the Timbisha Shoshone Homeland Act and Legislative EIS would be pursued; there would be a cooperative agreement with the Tribe for ongoing review and adaptation of park management actions; there would be a possible arrangement with the Tribe for shared resource protection and stewardship activities.
- NPS would consult with the Tribe on native plants and vegetation management at all three springs.