



Public Scoping

Newsletter 1, Summer 2015

Dear Friends:

The National Park Service (NPS) is conducting a boundary study to explore whether it would be appropriate and feasible to add lands in the Eagle Mountain area in Riverside County to Joshua Tree National Park. The NPS is in the public scoping phase of the study process. It is called “scoping” because with your input, we are determining the “scope” or overall approach to the study. The initial comment period for this study has started, and will extend through August 21, 2015.

This newsletter provides an overview of the study process and some preliminary findings and options under consideration by the NPS. I invite you to share your ideas and comments about the information presented in the newsletter.

Please join us for one of four public meetings to be held in July and August. At these meetings, the NPS study team will explain the study process, share some preliminary findings and options, answer your questions, and gather your ideas for the study.

Thank you for taking the time to learn about and comment on this study. You may share your thoughts by mail, e-mail, online at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/eaglemountain>, or at one of the upcoming public meetings. Future opportunities to comment during the study process are included in the newsletter.

We look forward to hearing from you! Your participation is a key component of this process.

Sincerely,

David Smith
Superintendent
Joshua Tree National Park

Join Us for Upcoming Public Meetings!

Online Meeting

July 29, 2015 • 1:30 -3 pm Pacific Time

Desert Center, CA

August 4, 2015 • 6-8 pm

Joshua Tree, CA

August 5, 2015 • 6-8 pm

Palm Desert, CA

August 6, 2015 • 6-8 pm

Newsletter Contents

This newsletter provides an introduction to the study, including:

- What is a boundary study?
- Study area map and description
- Why is the NPS conducting this study (purpose and need)?
- Preliminary findings and boundary options
- How you can participate
- Public meeting schedule and locations

What is a Boundary Study?

This study examines the cultural, historic, and natural significance of the study area lands to determine whether they contribute to the purpose of Joshua Tree National Park. The NPS will evaluate the properties under consideration according to criteria set forth in NPS *Management Policies* 2006. For lands to be included in a boundary expansion, at least one of three criteria must be met.

The inclusion of the properties must:

- protect significant resources and values, or enhance opportunities for public enjoyment related to park purposes;
- address operational and management issues, such as the need for access or the need for boundaries to correspond to logical boundary delineations such as topographic features or roads; or
- otherwise protect park resources that are critical to fulfilling park purposes.

Those lands found suitable under the foregoing criteria must further meet the following two requirements:

- The added lands will be feasible to administer, considering size, configuration, and ownership; costs; the views of and impacts on local communities and surrounding jurisdictions; and other factors such as the presence of structures, hazardous substances, or nonnative species.
- Other alternatives for management and resource protection are not adequate.

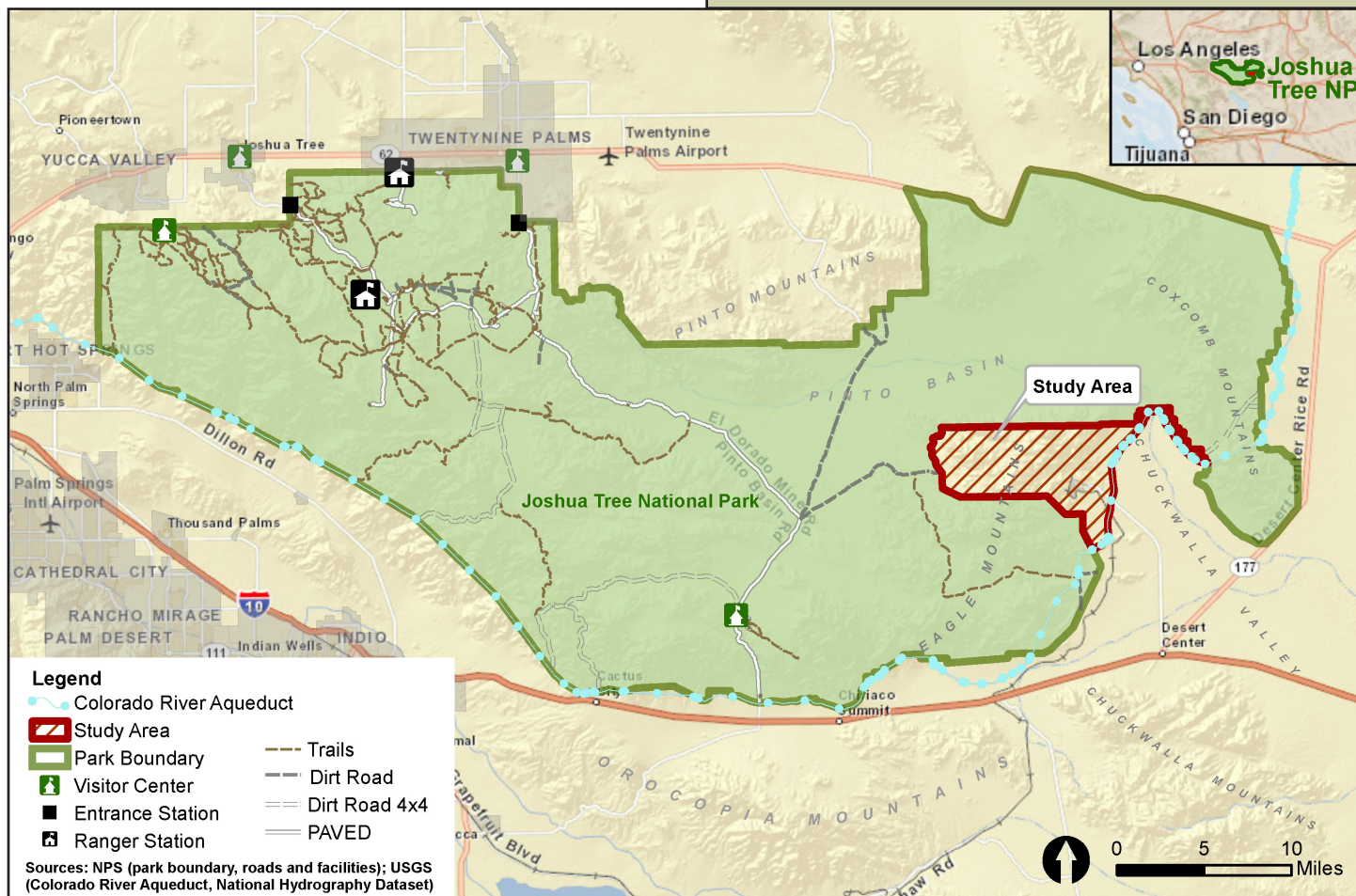
Elements of the Boundary Study

In evaluating properties for possible inclusion within the park's boundary, the process includes the following steps:

- Identification of the study area;
- Evaluation of study area resources, land uses, and opportunities;
- Application of the boundary adjustment criteria to potential addition lands;
- Development of alternatives;
- Assessment of the impacts of each alternative (including a no action alternative) on cultural, natural, and socioeconomic resources.

Study Area

The study area includes approximately 32,000 acres of land in the Eagle Mountains and Chuckwalla Valley. Located in Riverside County, California, the study area is bounded to the south, west, and north by Joshua Tree National Park. The eastern border is defined by the Colorado River Aqueduct, which roughly formed the original park boundary established in 1936. Located approximately ten miles north of Interstate 10, primary access to the area is through the town of Desert Center via Kaiser Road. Most lands are owned and managed by the Bureau of Land Management. However, the area also contains state, school district, private, and Metropolitan Water District of Southern California-owned lands.



Purpose and Need

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the potential for adding study area lands to Joshua Tree National Park in order to (a) protect important natural and cultural resources associated with the primary purpose of the park, and (b) address other park management issues.

A separate but related process is under consideration between the National Park Service (NPS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to explore an administrative transfer of BLM lands in the Eagle Mountain area to the NPS to manage as part of Joshua Tree National Park. This process would be initiated through the publication of a notice in the Federal Register indicating that the BLM lands in the area would be closed to new mining, mineral, and geothermal claims and to sale and settlement for up to two years while the agencies evaluate the effects of a potential land transfer. Valid existing rights in the public lands would not be affected by this notice. During this two-year period, proposed new land uses under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act would have to take into consideration any potential effects on NPS resource values. A federal land transfer will be the subject of a separate public meeting that will take place in Fall 2015.

Need

Originally part of Joshua Tree National Monument when designated in 1936, the area was later removed for mineral extraction activities in 1950. Major mining activities in the

study area ceased around 1983, although some smaller scale mining activity has continued. In 1989, the area was proposed for a landfill. After decades of challenges and litigation, the landfill proposal was withdrawn in 2013. However, lands within the area and surrounding region continue to be open to various development proposals.

Through the California Desert Protection Act of 1994, Congress expressly found that “the monument boundaries as modified in 1950 and 1961 exclude and thereby expose to incompatible development and inconsistent management, contiguous Federal lands of essential and superlative natural, ecological, archeological, paleontological, cultural, historical, and wilderness values.”

The cumulative and synergistic effect of changes in land use to the region as a result of energy development, urbanization, and the effects of climate change have the potential to dramatically impact the protection of biodiversity within Joshua Tree National Park. The Eagle Mountain area remains a key building block for landscape-scale conservation in the California desert.

Recent studies have documented the particular importance of the area for the migration of bighorn sheep populations. In addition, the study area: 1) contains prehistoric and historic resources that expand on cultural themes interpreted at the national park; 2) could offer new opportunities for public enjoyment; and 3) contains areas important for maintaining wilderness values within Joshua Tree National Park.

Resources Related to the Purpose of Joshua Tree National Park

For areas to be considered for a boundary adjustment, they must be found to protect significant resources and values, or enhance opportunities for public enjoyment related to park purposes. The purpose statement of a national park identifies the specific reason(s) for establishment of a particular park. Purpose statements are grounded in a park’s authorizing legislation. Preliminary analysis by the NPS indicates that the following resources and values within the study area could contribute to the protection of resources related to the purpose of Joshua Tree National Park.

Biologically Rich Mojave and Colorado Desert Landscapes

Outstanding examples of Mojave and Colorado Desert landscapes that converge at Joshua Tree National Park create a biologically rich system of plant and animal life characterized by iconic Joshua tree woodlands, native palm oases, and vast expanses of creosote scrub that are uniquely adapted to desert conditions. The park also contributes significantly to the connectivity of open lands and large protected areas across the California desert.

The study area contains a rich array of desert habitat. Of particular importance is the use of the area for the migration of sensitive wildlife in Joshua Tree National Park and other protected areas in the Mojave and Colorado deserts. One of the most genetically diverse bighorn populations reside in the Eagle Mountains. Recent studies indicate that the study area contains an important regional genetic and demographic corridor for desert bighorn sheep. The study area also contains habitat for golden eagles and the threatened desert tortoise.

“The purpose of Joshua Tree National Park is to preserve and protect the scenic, natural, and cultural resources representative of the Colorado and Mojave deserts’ rich biological and geological diversity, cultural history, wilderness, recreational values, and outstanding opportunities for education and scientific study.”





almost 1.5 million visitors annually. Existing infrastructure within the study area such as roads and facilities could provide access for visitors to an area of the park that is currently difficult to reach and experience. Such infrastructure could also help address current recreational demands at Joshua Tree National Park such as for camping and biking. Cultural resources provide new opportunities for interpretation and education regarding the area’s cultural history.

Protection of Wilderness Values

Outside of the disturbed mine areas, the study area contains pristine and untrammled lands that abut Joshua Tree National Park wilderness areas. Solitude, dark night skies, quiet, and expansive views reward the exploring visitor who wanders beyond the main roads into Joshua Tree Wilderness. The congressionally designated Joshua Tree Wilderness comprises approximately seventy-five percent of Joshua Tree National Park. Collectively, 84% of the park is designated, proposed or potential wilderness.

The wilderness areas adjacent to the study area are some of the most pristine in the national park. Values include dark night skies, high air quality, and natural quiet, all of which could be affected by proposed future uses of the area. Inclusion of these lands within the national park boundary could ensure a greater degree of protection of the park’s wilderness values.

Scenic Resources

Geologic, climatic, and ecological processes create scenic landscapes unique to deserts and fundamental to the character of Joshua Tree National Park. Despite visual disturbances from previous mining activities, much of the study area contains scenic landscapes visible from Joshua Tree National Park. Protection of lands adjacent to Joshua Tree National Park wilderness could benefit the natural and untrammled character of the park’s designated wilderness areas.

Addresses Operational and Management Issues such as Access and Boundary

Including study area lands within the national park boundary could address a number of operational and management issues including: improved access for visitors and NPS staff to this remote area of the park, a more logical boundary delineation, the ability for NPS to ensure that these lands are managed in a way that will not impact park resources.

Research and Educational opportunities

Joshua Tree National Park offers unparalleled opportunities for research of arid land ecosystems and processes, adaptations of and to desert life, sustainability, and indications of climate change. The proximity of the park to urban regions of Southern California and Nevada enhances its value for scientific research and education. The Eagle Mountain area could provide new opportunities to conduct research on the restoration of ecological communities, wildlife habitat values, and cultural resources within the study area.

Cultural Resources

Joshua Tree National Park preserves a rich array of prehistoric, historic, and contemporary resources that demonstrate the integral connection between desert ecosystems, land use, and human cultures. Encapsulated in this aspect of park significance is a wide array of archeological resources, historic structures, and cultural landscapes.

Study area resources such as the Eagle Mountain mine, Townsite, and railroad could expand on mining history themes currently interpreted at Joshua Tree National Park. Structures sites, structures, and artifacts within the study area related to the Eagle Mine operations provide an opportunity to convey the cultural contribution and story of mining in the 20th century, and its relevance to the growth of southern California. The study area may also offer opportunities to protect and interpret new types of resources that depict human history in the desert, including the Colorado River Aqueduct and General Patton’s World War II Training Camp.

New Visitor Opportunities

Joshua Tree National Park provides accessible and diverse opportunities in a remote desert to large and burgeoning urban populations. It is within a two-hour drive from the Los Angeles and San Diego metropolitan areas and receives



Preliminary Options for Boundary Adjustments

The National Park Service has developed some preliminary options to explore a range of opportunities through the study process. Through evaluating these options, the NPS will develop alternatives that will be evaluated in a draft study report along with an environmental assessment. These options, along with current management and ownership which would be considered as a no action alternative in the boundary study, are described in the pages to follow.

Implementation of any of the options considered in the study would require additional action. Federal lands managed by the BLM could be administratively transferred to the NPS as authorized by provisions of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Act and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA). Inclusion of local, state, or privately-owned lands in a boundary adjustment would require Congressional action, unless such lands were donated to the National Park Service, in which case such lands could be included in an administrative boundary adjustment.

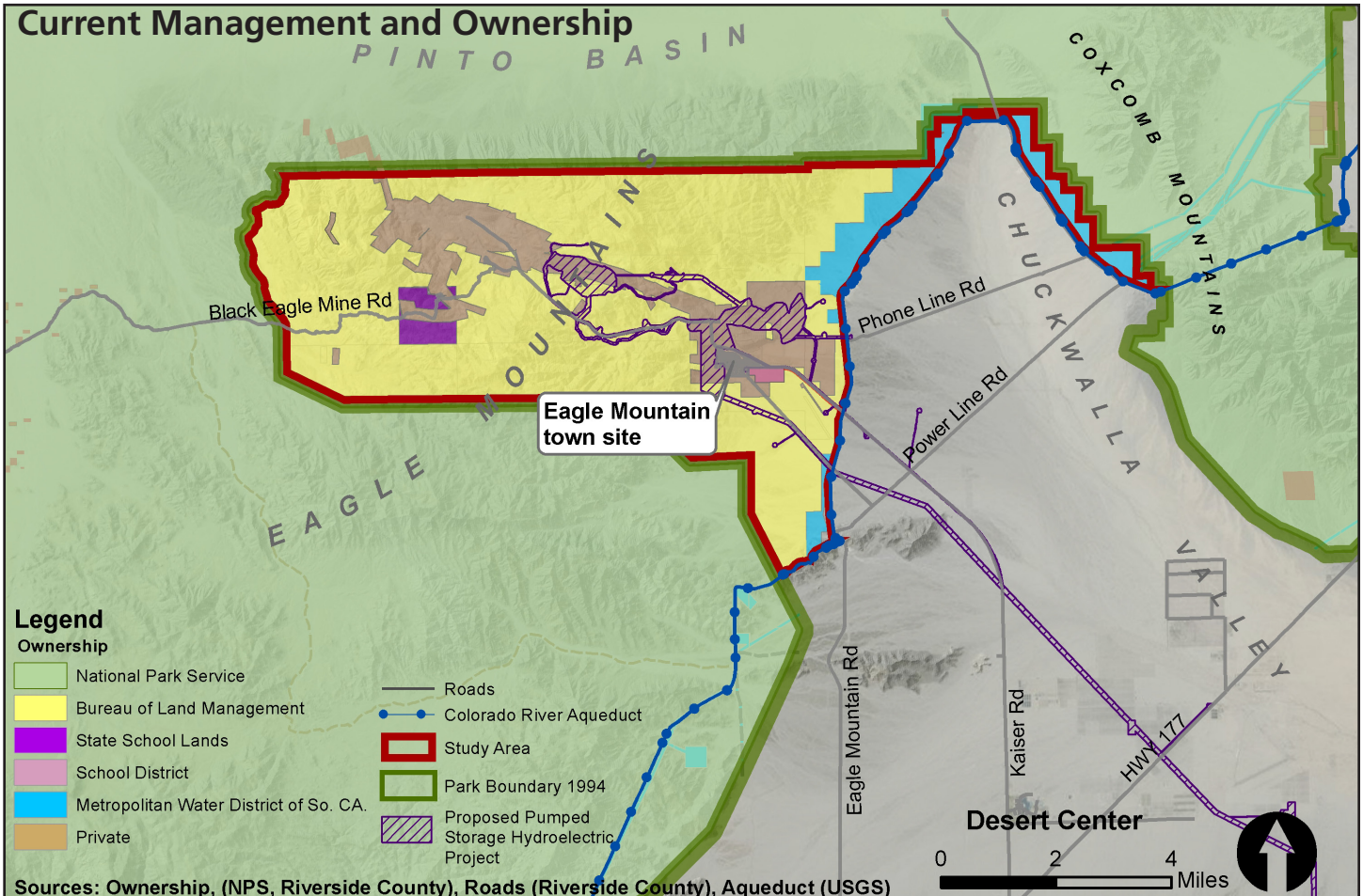
None of the options considered would change private land ownership or mineral rights.

Option: Current Management and Ownership (No Action). Most study area lands (over 70%) are owned and managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), approximately 23,000 acres. BLM's 1980 California Desert Conservation Plan classifies lands in the Eagle Mountain area as Class M (moderate use) and Class I (intensive

use). The area also contains privately-owned lands, most of which are associated with the former Eagle Mountain mine and townsite. The patented and unpatented mining claims comprising the mine site are owned by Kaiser Eagle Mountain, LLC. The State Lands Commission manages over 400 acres of State School Lands within the east and central mine pits. The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California owns and manages approximately 2,800 acres to operate, manage, and maintain the Colorado River Aqueduct. Finally, the Eagle Mountain School (K-8) is located adjacent to the Eagle Mountain Townsite area and is operated by the Desert Center Unified School District.

Under current management recreation and visitation is sparse. Access to the area is limited and much of the surrounding lands are remote wilderness areas within Joshua Tree National Park. There is no visitor access from the south as lands associated with the Eagle Mountain mine are closed and gated. From the west, access is from the park via Black Eagle Mine Road. However, the road is only passable by all-wheel drive vehicles and it is closed/blocked approximately several miles east of the national park boundary.

Two energy-related projects are proposed for the area, including lands that have been withdrawn under the Federal Power Act for the Eagle Crest Energy Company's (Eagle Crest) Eagle Mountain Pumped Storage Hydroelectric Project. This project received a 50-year license from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) in June 2014.

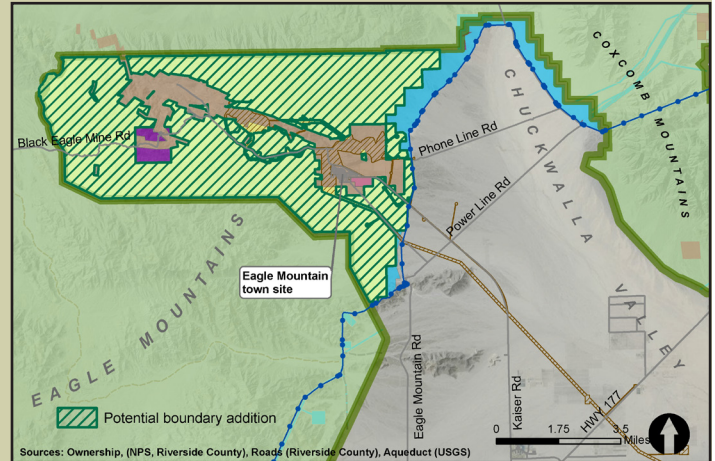


Preliminary Options for Boundary Adjustments

Option: Federal Agency to Agency Land Transfer (~22,500 acres)

Under this option the Joshua Tree National Park boundary could be expanded to include existing federally-owned and managed lands within the study area. Approximately 22,500 acres of land would be transferred from the BLM to the NPS. All mineral rights would be retained by current owners. Proposed transfer areas would not include BLM lands that have been previously withdrawn under the Federal Power Act for the Eagle Crest Energy Company's Eagle Mountain Pumped Storage Project. This project received a 50-year license from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) in June 2014.

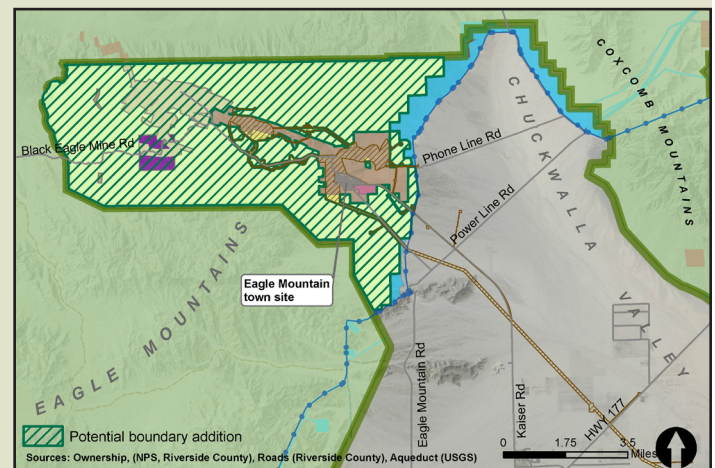
This option would include undisturbed lands that contain habitat important for landscape-scale conservation of the California desert and protect park wilderness values. Visitor opportunities and access from the park could be improved under this option. For example, there is potential for backcountry hiking and informal camping. Access would continue to be limited on private and state-owned lands. However, the NPS could explore cooperative opportunities to provide access from the east.



Option: Agency Transfer with Enhanced Habitat Connectivity and Recreation (~24,800 acres)

Under this option the Joshua Tree National Park boundary could be expanded to include existing federally-owned and managed lands within the study area. Privately-owned lands west of the FERC license withdrawal area could also be considered for inclusion in the park boundary in this option. The boundary adjustment would not change private land ownership and mineral rights. Private land could be acquired through donation or purchase (in fee). NPS policy is to acquire land from willing sellers.

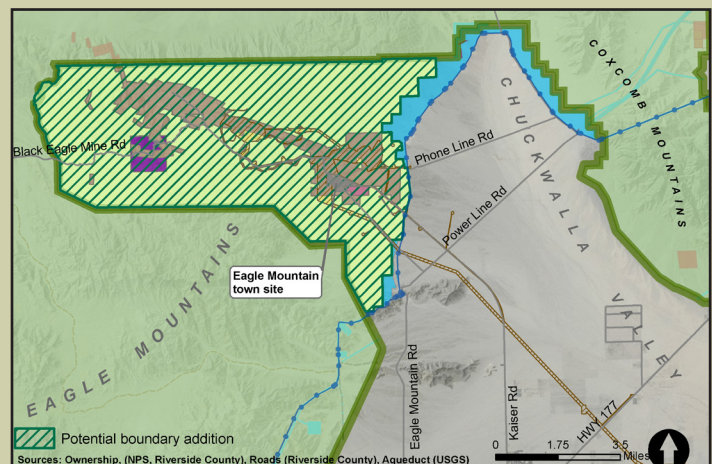
This option could allow for greater protection of existing habitat, restoration opportunities, and landscape connectivity for wildlife such as bighorn sheep. Visitor opportunities would be similar to the agency to agency land transfer option. Access would be limited on private and state-owned lands and on the lands needed for the FERC-licensed energy project. However, the NPS could explore cooperative opportunities to provide access from the east.



Option: Restore 1936 Boundary to Provide Diverse Visitor and Resource Protection Opportunities (~28,000 acres)

All areas west of the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California's aqueduct lands would be included in the park (approximately 28,000 acres), restoring lands that were removed from the NPS boundary in 1950. The boundary adjustment would not change private land ownership or existing mineral rights. Private land could be acquired through donation or purchase. NPS policy is to acquire land from willing sellers.

This option could offer the greatest potential for protection of existing habitat and enhancing landscape-scale connectivity and restoration for area wildlife, including bighorn sheep. It would also provide an opportunity to fully protect cultural landscapes associated with historic mining, including the Eagle Mountain Townsite if such lands were to become available. A wider range of visitor opportunities could occur with greater access and more lands potentially available for park use.



How to Participate

Let Us Know What You Think!

There will be several opportunities to share your thoughts and ideas, and your comments are important to us. **Please share your thoughts and insights on the following questions that will help inform the study process:**

1. Among the many factors that the National Park Service will consider in evaluating the criteria and options for a proposed boundary adjustment are public access and the need for the protection of resources associated with the park's purpose. What information should we consider in further investigating these topics? Your knowledge of these lands will help inform the evaluation.
2. Of the various options presented in the newsletter, which one(s) do think would be most appropriate? Are there other options that you think the NPS should consider?
3. What resources in the area do you think are most important. Why?
4. Are there other specific areas of concern that the National Park Service should be aware of?

How to Comment. You can mail or e-mail us your written comments (see contact information below), attend one of the public meetings, or submit your comments electronically through the study website. Comments will be accepted through August 21, 2015.

Public Meeting Schedule

The NPS will host a series of public meetings throughout the study area in Summer 2015 to share information of initial findings. In addition, an online meeting will be conducted via the Internet. Please visit the study website for more information. <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/eaglemountain>

Online Meeting
July 29, 2015 • 1:30 -3 pm
Pacific Standard Time
 See study website for more information.


Desert Center, CA
August 4, 2015 • 6-8 pm
 Lake Tamarisk Community Center
 26-251 Parkview Dr

Joshua Tree, CA
August 5, 2015 • 6-8 pm
 Joshua Tree Community Center
 6171 Sunburst Street

Palm Desert, CA
August 6, 2015 • 6-8 pm
 University of California, Riverside - Palm Desert Center
 75080 Frank Sinatra Drive

Our practice is to make comments, including names, home addresses, home phone numbers, and email addresses of respondents, available for public review. Individual respondents may request that we withhold their names and/or home addresses, etc., but if you wish us to consider withholding this information you must state this prominently at the beginning of your comments. In addition, you must present a rationale for withholding this information. This rationale must demonstrate that disclosure would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of privacy. Unsupported assertions will not meet this burden. In the absence of exceptional, documentable circumstances, this information will be released. We will always make submissions from organizations or businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives of or officials of organizations or businesses, available for public inspection in their entirety.

Boundary Study Schedule

Estimated Time Frame	Planning Activity	Public Involvement Opportunities
Summer 2015	Conduct Public Scoping Share information about the study process Identify issues and information that need to be addressed in the study 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review Newsletter 1 Send us your ideas and concerns Participate in public meetings and voice your ideas and concerns with the planning team
Fall 2015 - Winter 2016	Prepare and Distribute Draft Study/EA Complete boundary adjustment criteria analysis and develop alternatives based on comments from the public, park partners, government agencies, and other stakeholders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review draft study/EA or summary newsletter Send us your written comments on the draft study/EA Participate in public meetings and voice your ideas and concerns
Spring/ Summer 2016	Complete Study Evaluate comments Prepare and issue a Finding of No Significant Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review final documents on study website

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Project Web Site:

For current information and to provide comments directly online:
<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/eaglemountain>

Park Web Site:

<http://www.nps.gov/jotr>

E-mail: JOTR_study@nps.gov

Join us for upcoming
public meetings!
Schedule inside.



Joshua Tree National Park

Eagle Mountain Boundary Study/Environmental Assessment
Newsletter #1, Public Scoping, Summer 2015

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