

Project Summary

Rocky Mountains Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit

Project Title: Development of Cultural/Natural Landscape Management Plan for the Utility Area of Rocky Mountain National Park

Discipline: Interdisciplinary
Type of Project: Technical Assistance
Funding Agency: National Park Service
Other Partners/Cooperators: University of Colorado at Denver
Effective Dates: 5/15/2011 - 14/30/2011
Funding Amount: \$20,000

Investigators and Agency Representative:

NPS Contact: Karen Waddell, Cultural Resources Specialist, Rocky Mountain National Park 1000 Highway 36 Estes Park, CO 80517, ph. 970 586-1332, karen_e_waddell@nps.gov

Investigator: Charles Chase, Landscape Architecture Studies, College of Architecture and Planning, University of Colorado Denver, Campus Box 126, PO Box 173364, Denver, CO 80217-3364; (303) 492-4001, charles.chase@colorado.edu

Project Abstract: The purpose of this project is to develop a Cultural/Natural Management Plan for vegetation management that provides guidance for ongoing stabilization and preservation work in the Rocky Mountain National Park's (ROMO) Utility Area, a majority of which was designated an Historic District in 1982. In addition, the utility area includes the National Historic Landmark ROMO Administration Building (aka Beaver Meadows Visitor Center) and its associated landscape, a potential Mission 66 National Historic District, two riparian corridors and two wildlife movement corridors as well as significant elk foraging habitat. This Superintendent has identified this as a priority project due to proposed structural defense fire activities; the development of a headquarters area master plan; and the expected bark-beetle die-off of significant numbers of ponderosa pines, some of which date to the historic period of the 1920-1930's. The Cultural Resource Management Team at ROMO has identified this project as its top priority for 2011.

Some of the specific questions that managers need to be answered include:

1. What are the character defining features of the designed landscape? What features best represent the National Park Service's naturalistic design era?
2. How can structural defense be accomplished while preserving historic and natural vegetation?
3. How can wildlife habitat be maintained while improving structural fire defense?
4. In which cases should trees be removed and not replaced, or replaced with smaller slow-growing, less flammable species?
5. How did some of the dramatically weedy patches of vegetation in the district become so infested and are there approaches that might allow for their restoration?
6. If structures are removed within the project area, how should those areas be revegetated to simulate historic and/or natural vegetation?

In addition to providing a vegetation plan, this project will greatly enhance existing documentation for the ROMO Utility Area Historic District. When the National Register nomination was completed in 1982, it completely ignored landscape features and vegetation and did not consider resources built after World War II. Yet the Utility Area evolved over time and continues to be a working landscape. Since this project will expand the focus beyond buildings constructed before World War II, it will also allow the park's cultural resource manager to revise the National Register nomination for the district to current standards.

Planning for cultural and natural landscapes encompasses such diverse activities as involvement in park planning, facility design, preparation of maintenance work procedures, and compliance. The central purpose of all such activities is to identify ways of protecting cultural resources while achieving habitat management and park management objectives. This is usually best done by thoughtful evaluation of a diverse range of alternatives. Treatment, preservation and use are the central issues in planning for cultural and natural landscapes. Closely related concerns include consideration of park administrative and interpretive needs, compatibility of new and old development, and accommodation of building codes and contemporary regulations, and the overall condition of the landscape.

Outcomes with Completion Dates: The following products will be due no later than February 28, 2013: **Cultural and Natural Landscape History**; Existing Conditions Analysis; Vegetation Management Plan; Preservation/Restoration Guidelines; Documentation Guidelines. **Annual Reports are due on December 31, 2011 and December 31, 2012**

Keywords: Rocky Mountain National Park Service, University of Colorado at Denver, Cultural/Natural Management Plan, vegetation management, stabilization, preservation

