

Monte Cristo State Recreation Area

Area Management Plan September 2009 Draft

**Public Comments accepted on this draft area
management plan until October 30, 2009:**

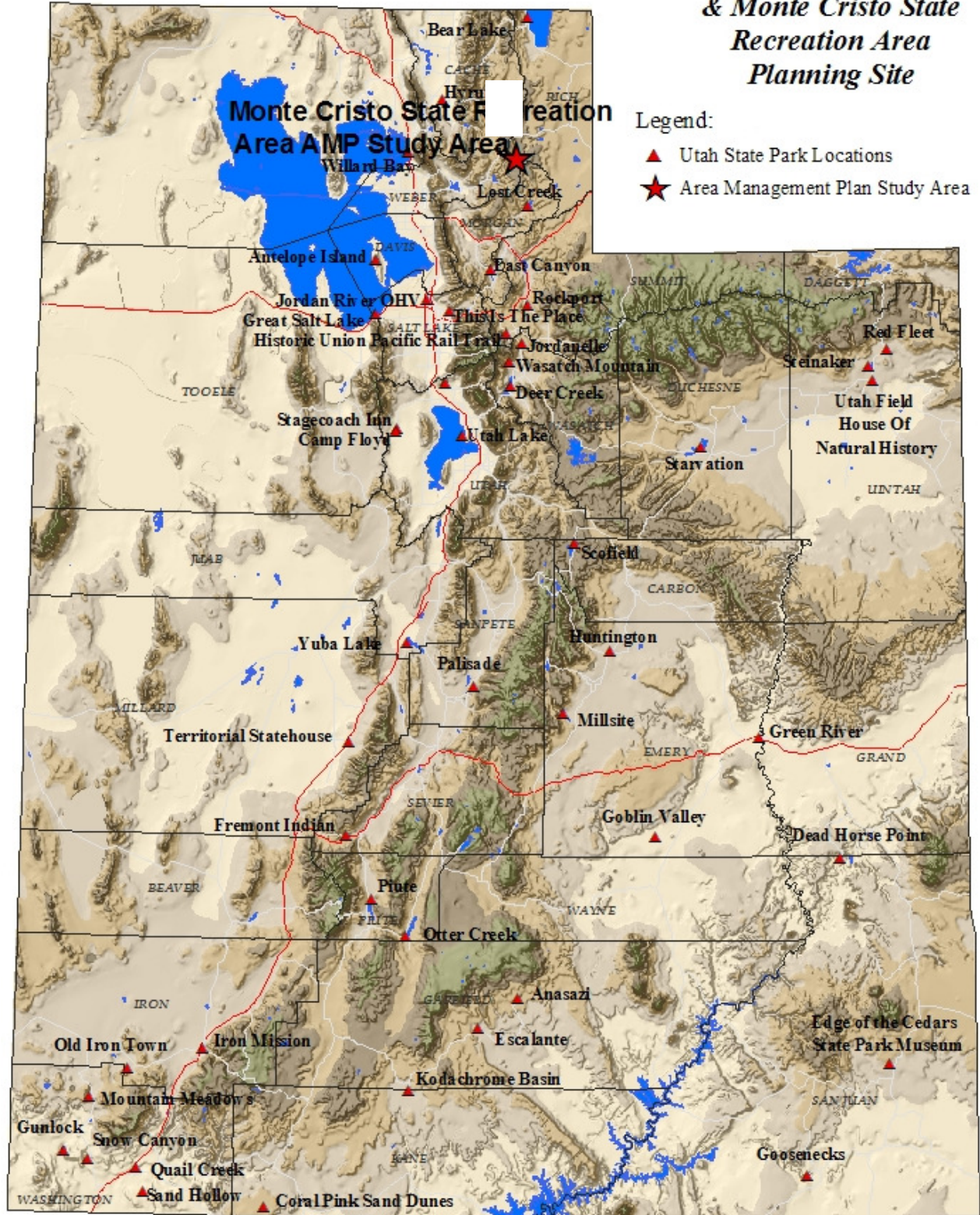
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Utah State Parks & Monte Cristo State Recreation Area Planning Site



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Appendix A – Summary of Public Comments and Responses

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Executive Summary

In April 2008, Division of Utah State Parks and Recreation (Division) planners and administrators met with staff from Willard Bay State Park, managers of the operation at Monte Cristo State Recreation Area (MC) to discuss issues at the site and to make a list of stakeholders. Nine individuals from that list were selected to serve as members of a planning team, tasked with developing recommendations for a MC area management plan (AMP). Additionally, two planners from the Division served as staff to the team.

The planning team was provided with background information to help them identify issues for the site. The team examined the issues in depth and used the information provided, and their own expertise, to develop action recommendations to help guide the Division in its stewardship responsibilities for the site.

Two planning meetings resulted in the following recommendations from the team:

- X The area owned by Utah State Parks should be renamed *Monte Cristo State Trailhead*. The site is primarily a winter snowmobiling trailhead, with recreational activities occurring on nearby United State Forest Service lands.
- X Recommended facility improvements include additional diesel fuel storage, development of a culinary water supply, septic system, expanded parking area,

informational kiosks and connector trails for summer use.

- X Investigate the possibility of using a contractor to empty trash and clean restrooms.
- X Provide better signage and information to help address trespass and resource management issues.
- X Continue providing existing concession services and expand as utilities are added.
- X Expand use of site to non-winter activities by developing off-highway vehicle trail connections from MC to trails on nearby public lands.
- X Encourage the upgrade of communication services for the area to enhance visitor safety and resource protection.
- X Stop illegal firearm use at MC.
- X Work with landowners to limit recreational trespasses on adjacent privately owned lands.

These recommendations are geared toward improving and expanding recreational opportunities at the trailhead, protecting its resources, and providing visitors safe and enjoyable experiences. Achievement of these objectives will require the continued support, cooperation and collaboration of users, legislative and community leaders, and the Division of Utah State Parks and Recreation.



Area Management Plan Purpose and Process

Purpose of the Plan

This Area Management Plan (AMP) was developed to help guide the Division of Utah State Parks and Recreation (Division) stewardship obligations for Monte Cristo State Recreation Area (MC) and the greater Monte Cristo snowmobile complex, including groomed trails on United States Forest Service (USFS) and other lands. Planning for the facility is essential given the increase in visitation to the area in the past 10 years and the projected short and long-term growth of the local population.

MC is primarily a winter trailhead offering access for the snowmobiling community from all of northern Utah. Its location in the scenic and snowy Wasatch Mountains makes it suitable for its use as a snowmobile trailhead in winter.

Recommendations and suggestions were arrived at by consensus of the planning team. Issues considered included name change, additional parking, expanded recreational activities, facility improvements, and concession services. Issues and recommendations are listed later in this document.

The Planning Process

Planning for a recreational resource such as MC is required to protect this unique resource and ensure the efficient and effective expenditure of state and private funds. Effective

planning is necessary for long-term protection and public enjoyment of opportunities and resources at MC. This AMP is required by the Utah State Legislature and the Board of Utah State Parks and Recreation to guide short and long-term site management and capital development.

The Division of Utah State Parks and Recreation's long-range strategic plan, Vision 2010, outlines the required planning actions needed to effectively meet customer recreation and leisure needs for the next five to 10 years. Vision 2010 identifies resource management planning as essential to the effective administration and operation of all parks in the agency's system. Under the guidance of Vision 2010, each plan is developed around one core concept: meeting the needs and expectations of customers, visitors and citizens of Utah, while protecting each area's unique resource base. In short, the process is customer-driven and resource-based.

The planning process recommends limits of change or modification, and a future vision for the site. Specifically, the process: (1) recognizes impacts will result from use and enjoyment of the site; (2) defines how much and what types of impacts may be accommodated while providing reasonable protection of the resources for future visitors; (3) incorporates values of resource sustainability, quality facilities, and education and information for visitors; and (4) seeks to determine the conditions under which this can be attained.

In April 2008, Division planners and administrators met with the management staff for MC in a sideboard meeting. During this meeting, staff identified issues and trends affecting the area and made a list of community members with an interest and expertise in MC. A planning team was selected from the list and charged with developing recommendations for the AMP. Team members were selected for a variety of reasons ranging from technical expertise to interest in the area. All team members participated on a voluntary basis and expressed a willingness to contribute a portion of their time and expertise to the process. Nine individuals were selected to serve on the planning team and two representatives from the Division served as staff to the team. Two planning meetings were conducted.



Monte Cristo State Recreation Area Maintenance Building

About the Area

History

The Division of Utah State Parks and Recreation purchased two parcels of land (1997 and 1998) in the mountains of Weber County from private landowners. These acquisitions totaling 154 acres and bisected by State Road 39, became Monte Cristo State Recreation Area in 1998. Currently, the park manager of Willard Bay State Park has management jurisdiction for the Monte Cristo snowmobile complex that includes the MC trailhead and groomed trails on nearby public lands. These responsibilities include maintaining the trailhead, plowing snow, emergency assistance, direct and indirect management, concessions and snowmobile trail grooming.

Since MC was established, the area has attracted ever-increasing numbers of visitors, especially in the winter months. MC is now one of the most popular snowmobiling trailheads in the state. Snowmobilers are able to park their vehicles and trailers at the site to access the greater Monte Cristo snowmobile complex.

Physical Setting and Facilities

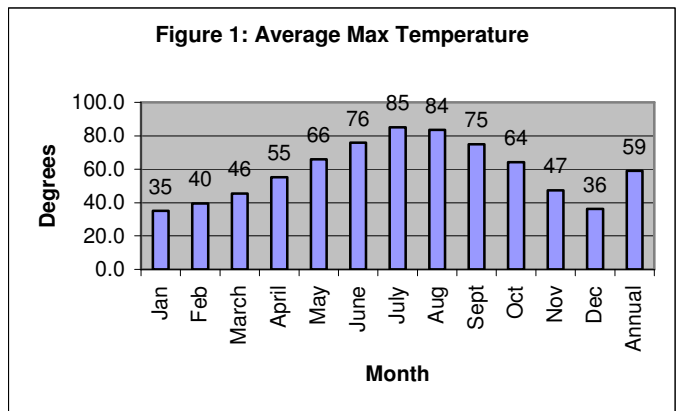
MC is located in Weber County, in the northeast corner of Utah, 39 miles northeast of Ogden, 75 miles from Salt Lake City, and 65 miles south of Bear Lake State Park. Recreational lands accessed from MC are in Weber and Rich counties.

MC's facilities include a maintenance building, concessionaire building,

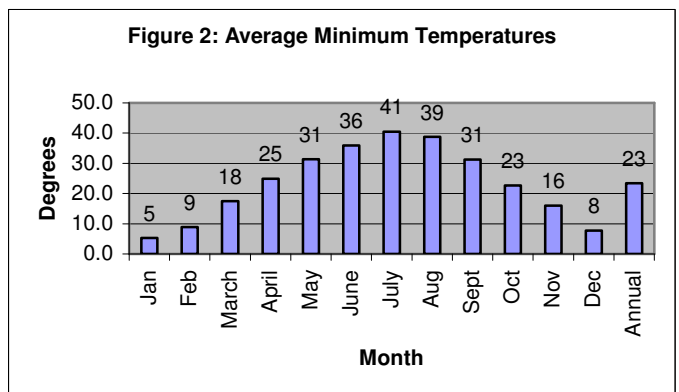
gravel parking areas, and two vault toilets.

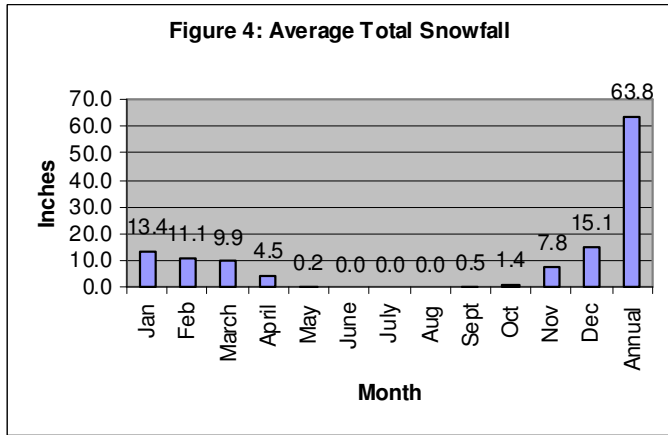
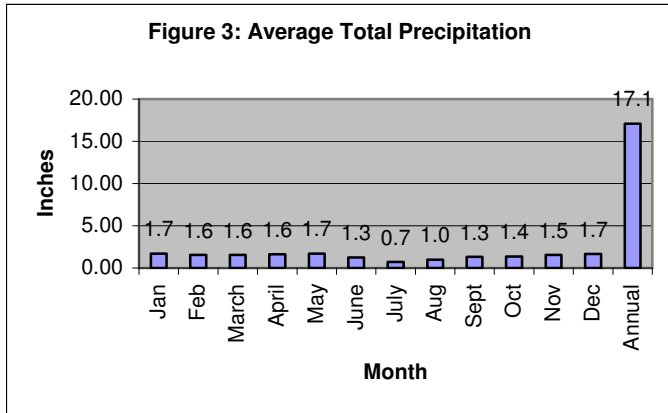
Climate

MC is located at an elevation of 8100 feet. The climate is characterized by moderate precipitation and low humidity, with mild summers and cool winters.



Temperature variations are extreme, ranging from 85 degrees Fahrenheit in the summer to 5° degrees in the winter. Average precipitation is approximately 17 inches per year, the majority of which occurs during the fall and spring months.





Area Visitation

In 2008, an estimated 45,000 people visited MC. Most visitation to the site occurs between December and March. Winter visitors primarily came to ride snowmobiles. During the summer, MC is used for camping and as an off-highway vehicle trailhead, despite the lack of facilities and trail connections.

There are no traffic counters at the site. Visitation is estimated using parking fees collected during the winter months and staff observations during other times of year.

Relationship to the Community and Surrounding Area

There are three small communities (Eden, Huntsville and Liberty) within 20 miles of MC. Recreation is an important component of the area’s economy and lifestyle.

Demographic and Socioeconomic Information

The Monte Cristo area lies in close proximity to three counties in northern Utah. According to the Utah Population Estimates Committee, as of 2008 there were 526,451 people residing in Davis and Weber counties. The majority of visitors who use the MC complex for snowmobiling are from these counties.

Figure 5: Cities and Towns near Monte Cristo

City	Population	Distance from Monte
Ogden	78,086	35 miles west
Eden	3,425	29 miles west
Salt Lake	180,651	75 miles southwest
Layton	65,514	59 miles southwest
Huntsville	646	25 miles west

Utah Division of Motor Vehicle records show that there were 7,152 snowmobiles and 33,716 off-highway vehicles registered in Davis and Weber counties in 2008. MC is one of the most conveniently located snowmobile trailheads for these large population centers.

Area Resources

The planning process calls for an inventory and analysis of area resources. It is essential that management decisions affecting the park's natural resources be made upon a foundation of reliable information. This section provides an analysis of MC's geological, biological and cultural resources.

Geological Resources

The MC is located in the Wasatch Mountain Range. A tectonic push from the west that occurred between 65 and 100 million years ago was responsible for the uplift creating the Monte Cristo area.

The area immediately surrounding Monte Cristo consists of gently rolling hills of sandy loams with Tertiary Wasatch Formations through which outcrops of Mississippian Lodgepole Limestone and Paleozoic rocks can be found.

Biological Resources

The area supports an array of plants and animals in various habitats. MC is located in a watershed habitat that is important to a number of species.

Flora

Vegetation communities at MC include aspen forest and woodland, and mixed montane shrubland and grassland. Plant species include aspen, big-toothed maple, Gambel oak, Utah serviceberry, big sagebrush, mountain mahogany, and other shrubs and grasses. There are no

known sensitive plant species or species of concern in the area.

Fauna

MC and the surrounding area provide habitat for a variety of animal species. Wildlife that migrates through the area includes elk, deer, moose, mountain lions and black bears. Birds that may inhabit the area include gray jay, red-breasted nuthatch, hairy woodpecker, pine siskin, red-naped sapsucker, warbling vireo, mountain bluebird, water pipit, MacGillivray's warbler, green-tailed towhee, black-throated gray warbler, and Vesper sparrow.

In addition to those listed above, there may be animal species of special concern in the area. One species of concern that may be found in proximity to the spring on the property is the *Rana luteiventris* or Columbia spotted frog. These species should receive consideration in context of new activities and development.

Cultural Resources

No cultural resource surveys have been completed within the Monte Cristo boundary, but state law, and Division policies and guidelines relating to cultural resources need to be adhered to when new activities and facilities are being planned and developed.



Monte Cristo Flora

Issues and Recommendations

Two planning team meetings were conducted in Eden and Ogden during May and June 2008. A variety of issues were identified and discussed at these meeting, and associated recommendations developed. These issues and recommendations include name change, emergency communications, private property trespass, facility maintenance and development, and recreational activities.

A number of constraints (e.g. available funding, land ownership, facility location and design, federal regulations, etc.) will need to be addressed prior to issue resolution. Team members, planning staff and Division experts identified some of the limiting factors that may hinder implementation of a specific team recommendation.

The following are issues and recommendations developed from discussions by the planning team. The team's recommendations were arrived at by consensus of opinion. The implementation of these recommendations must remain flexible to take advantage of the various funding sources as they become available. In order to expedite development and maximize fiscal efficiency, the Division's construction section will be responsible for implementing the facility improvements and development recommendations.

Area Unit Designation

Issue: Monte Cristo status

All other units in the state park system have a designation describing each unit's purpose. The team decided that MC is a unique part of the state park system, and that the current name (recreation area) and the existing state park designations do not adequately describe the use at the site, which is that of a trailhead. The team also wanted to distinguish the state park facility from nearby U.S. Forest Service lands, also called Monte Cristo.

Recommendation:

Change the name of the area to Monte Cristo State Trailhead.

Facility Improvements and Additional Visitor Opportunities

Issue: Maintenance and Infrastructure Needs

The following recommendations, if implemented, are attempts to improve visitor experiences by addressing maintenance and infrastructure issues. The resource manager for MC is located at Willard Bay State Park nearly 50 miles away from the Monte Cristo trailhead. MC is only staffed during the busy winter months to assist visitors, maintain facilities and collect parking fees.

Many people camp at MC or stop at the trailhead during the summer months hoping to throw away their trash and use the restroom facilities. Campers burn pallets and other objects leaving refuse that is hard to

clean up and is hazardous. Because there are no trash receptacles in the summer months, people leave trash piled up next to the restrooms.

Too often the restroom facilities were vandalized when people were unable to access them. The park staff is unable to keep facilities open and maintained on a regular basis therefore, the facilities are closed during the summer months.

There is no culinary water available at the trailhead. All water used at the site must be hauled to the area. The lack of culinary water has also inhibited certain food concession services at Monte Cristo.

The diesel fuel storage tank at Monte Cristo is too small for the snow grooming service. The maintenance shed has two 500-gallon fuel tanks. One tank is for unleaded fuel. The other tank is holds diesel fuel for the snowcat used to groom area snowmobile trails. The current diesel fuel tank must be refilled once a week during the winter grooming months. The tanks must be continually monitored because the state fueling service does not operate on the weekends.

The final maintenance issue identified was replacing gravel that is pushed to the edges of the parking area during snow removal. When the snow starts melting, the parking area becomes very muddy. The gravel helps keep vehicles from becoming stuck, and visitors from becoming covered in mud

while loading and unloading their snowmobiles.

Recommendations:

- The trailhead's restrooms should be open year-round. The park staff is not able to be on site often during the summer months therefore, the focus group suggests that they try to use an inmate work crew through the Weber county sheriff's office or contract with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) concession service or camp host to perform necessary maintenance duties.
- Develop a culinary water source at the trailhead for staff and public use.
- Increase the diesel fuel storage capacity at the maintenance building for staff convenience and to ensure an adequate supply for snow grooming responsibilities.
- The team recommends creating a regular gravel replacement schedule for the parking area or to pave the parking area.

Issue: Limited Parking at Site

The trailhead has limited development. The planning team discussed expanding the parking area to allow more vehicles to park and unload snowmobiles. The current size of the parking area doesn't meet the demand in winter months. This causes hazardous conditions as people then park along the highway. The Weber County Sheriff frequently has to have deputies monitoring the parking situation to keep the roadway safe. Weber County is considering closing the roadside to parking.

Recommendation:

Expand parking area to enhance safety and to improve the usability of the trailhead.

Issue: Connect MC to Ant Flat Road

The Ant Flat Road provides important access to public lands for both snowmobiles and Off-highway vehicles (OHV) from MC. There is, however, no direct access from MC to the Ant Flat road. Recreationists are accessing Ant Flat from MC by riding on Highway 39 or across a short distance of private land (trespass).

Recommendation:

Work with private landowner to acquire non-highway recreational access from MC to the Ant Flat road (possibly through trade or purchase).

Issue: Other OHV Trail Connections

OHV enthusiasts are parking at MC and using Highway 39 to access nearby Forest Service lands. OHVs must be properly registered and fitted with required safety equipment to operate on state highways. The volume of OHV traffic along this section of highway creates hazards for both motorists and OHV operators. In addition, some OHVs are not in compliance with state law with regard to registration and safety equipment.

Recommendation:

The focus group recommends investigating ways to create trail connections from the MC trailhead parking area, through privately owned land, to USFS lands. This action would make the trailhead an OHV destination and would increase summer use substantially. The Division will need to work with

adjacent private landowners for this recommendation to come to fruition.

Issue: Concession Improvements

Concession services came up a number of times throughout the team discussions. Services currently offered at the trailhead are snowmobile and equipment rentals, and gasoline sales. The lack of culinary water and a source of electricity at the trailhead have prevented the concessionaire from offering any food services for visitors.

Recommendation:

Continue offering snowmobile and equipment rentals and the sale of gasoline. Add food services when water and electricity can be provided.

Issue: Expand Other Recreational Activities

MC is mainly used as a trailhead for snowmobiles. The focus group considered additional recreational uses for the site such as OHV, hiking, biking and camping. The expansion of recreational opportunities would increase revenues collected at the trailhead and therefore help to expand the facilities at the site.

Recommendation:

Explore ways to expand non-winter recreation use at the trailhead. There are natural and legal limitations to the viability of any additional recreational opportunities. Without the connection of trails from the parking area to the USFS lands, enhancing summer use at Monte Cristo might not be a viable option.

Public Safety

Issue: Lack of Emergency Communications

Communication of any type is very limited in the MC area. Cell phone coverage is scarce, and emergency services are located some distance away. Consequently, response time for emergency services can be excessive. The Weber county sheriff's office has offered to put in a new repeater station at the maintenance building to improve emergency services communications.

Recommendation:

Allow other agencies and telecommunication companies to place facilities at MC, if they improve emergency communication capabilities in the area.

Issue: Illegal use of Firearms

There are some safety issues at the site that need to be addressed. One safety issue identified during the meetings was the shooting of firearms on and around the property. Signs and structures on both private and public lands have been targeted for this practice. The team recognized that it was an unsafe and illegal practice on the site.

Recommendation:

More of an effort should be made to inform visitors of the potential harm that discharging firearms on or near the property may cause. This encompasses a direct management aspect through the County Sheriff's office and the Utah State Park's law enforcement personnel. The second part of the recommendation is to increase awareness through signage

and publications notifying visitors of allowable recreational activities.

Resource Management

Issue: Trespasses

Snowmobilers and OHV riders sometimes cross private lands when accessing public recreation sites from MC. In particular, OHVs crossing private lands have caused damage and created unwanted trails, which in turn lead to more OHV traffic. Many landowners have posted their property as no trespassing.

Recommendation:

The group recommended that park managers work with adjacent private landowners to mitigate trespass issues. Managers should use signs, maps and other means to education the various motorized users to mitigate problems.

Additional Issues:

Utah State Parks will consider the rights of adjacent landowners when implementing the recommendations of this plan. A number of criteria – feasibility, costs, available funding, availability of staff, etc. – will be considered in the planning, development and implementation of each recommendation. Facility improvements or new construction projects will have to compete for funding with other projects in the state. Many of the team's recommendations are conceptual in nature. The Division's construction section will be responsible for the design and development of funded projects.

Conclusion

This plan is a blueprint to help implement the planning team's recommendations. As such, it outlines the initial steps to be taken in concert with visitors, local communities, and other interested users to: properly develop facilities to meet diverse visitor needs; ensure adequate staffing and funding; protect the natural resources of the area; enhance the trailhead's impact on the community, and the state and local economies; and educate visitors and community members about the MC and its resources.

The plan's recommendations effectively address the current needs for staffing, facility development, resource protection, and land management. However, it is crucial that adequate funding be received to implement these goals and accommodate visitor needs. The plan's success is dependent upon the continued support of the focus group participants and the community as a whole. Park staff must continue their efforts to support park improvements, preserve park resources, interact with local communities, and strive to meet the expectations of visitors in the midst of a rapidly growing community of recreation-oriented citizens.

The recommendations in this plan were arrived at using an open and collaborative process. It is imperative that this collaborative spirit continue to ensure the implementation of these recommendations. This document should be reviewed on a regular basis

to ensure its viability, relevance and usefulness.

This plan is a dynamic document. The plan should have the flexibility to respond to changing resource conditions, visitor needs and expectations, community needs, and agency priorities. Such amendments may occur under the auspices of the Division. Any such changes will include input from visitors, local citizens, community leaders, park management, and others with interests relevant to the operation and maintenance of the park.

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Maps

Map 2: Monte Cristo Site Map

Map 3: Northwest Utah Area Map

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Map 2: Monte Cristo Site Map



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Map 3: Northeastern Utah Area Map



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Appendix A – Public Comments and Responses

To be added after public comment period.

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