

## **KICKOFF MEETING FIELD TRIP REPORT – FINAL PETRIFIED FOREST NATIONAL PARK – AIR TOUR MANAGEMENT PLAN (ATMP)**

**Date:** April 21, 2010, Time 1:00 PM – 4:30 PM PT

**Location:** Painted Desert Visitor Center, Petrified Forest National Park, AZ

### **Attendees:**

- Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)
  - Program Manager, Special Programs Staff: Keith Lusk
  - Flight Standards, 135 Flight Operations Branch: Joe Foresto
- National Park Service (NPS)
  - Project Manager, Natural Sounds Program: Lelaina Marin
  - Regional Soundscape Coordinator, Intermountain Region: Theresa Ely
  - Superintendent, Petrified Forest National Park: Cliff Spencer
  - Archaeologist, Petrified Forest National Park: Jason Theuer
- Volpe National Transportation Systems Center (Volpe)
  - ATMP Project Manager: Jennifer Papazian
  - Acoustics Engineer: Cynthia Lee
- Parsons Brinckerhoff (PB)
  - Project Delivery Manager: Scott Polzin
  - Project Manager: Rhonda Boyer

### **Report:**

- The field trip began at approximately 1:00 PM at the Painted Desert Visitor Center.
  - The center is the Park Headquarters and it is located near the northern entrance of the Park.
  - There is an administration building and public restrooms, gas station, bookstore, and a souvenir shop and restaurant.
  - The center is oriented such that it faces the old Route 66 highway.
- Pat Thompson, Chief of Resource Management, gave a brief overview of the Park and issues of concern:
  - Natural sounds and wilderness areas are major concerns
  - Night skies and silence is a fantastic experience offered at the Park
  - The EA for the boundary expansion is just finishing up
- Attendees conducted the tour in two separate vehicles, driven by Cliff Spencer, NPS Superintendent, and Jason Theuer, NPS Archaeologist. The tour left the Painted Desert Visitor Center and proceeded along a paved, two-lane road. Cliff Spencer led the trip to key points and vistas around the Park. Below are a few comments Cliff gave as the tour began:
  - In 1906 the Park was designated the Petrified Forest National Monument
  - In 1962 there was a land acquisition phase
  - 1,500 acres of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land was recently acquired as a result of the 2004 law authorizing expansion of the Park boundary
  - \$4.5 million dollars from the Land and Water Conservation Fund was appropriated this year for land acquisition
  - There are four main landowners from which the Park could acquire land; BLM, State of Arizona, and two private landowners.
- The 23-mile trip took us by Tiponi Point, Tawa Point, the Painted Desert Inn National Historic Landmark, Kachina Point, Pintado Point, Nizhoni Point, Whipple Point, Lacey Point, across the original Route 66, Puerco

Pueblo, Newspaper Rock, the Tepees, Agate Bridge, Crystal Forest, to the Rainbow Forest Museum and visitor center.

- Since 1425 AD there has been unbroken human occupation in this region.
- Many visitors to the Park stop on their way to the Grand Canyon and California. The Park is the first restroom stop west of the state line and the New Mexico border (48 miles).
- Last year, the Park reported 630,000 visitors. The Park has 36 permanent employees and 17 seasonal employees.
- The Park has its own post office, and used to have its own school grades K-8. The school complex is now used as Ranger and volunteer housing. There is also a mobile trailer park. There are three highway patrol officers that live in the complex.
- The Park offers wilderness camping; however, there are no campsites. There are no marked trails, and visitors can hike and ride horses anywhere in the Park. Permits are required for overnight camping.
- The Park is in fact two parks in one – Petrified Forest and the Painted Desert.
- The tour stopped at the Painted Desert Inn.
  - The Inn was built by the Lore family in the 1920's and was originally constructed with petrified wood. It was operated as a tourist attraction.
  - Lore sold the property to the Petrified Forest National Monument in 1936.
  - In the 1930's, Lyle Bennett, a nationally-renowned architect, worked with the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) to remodel and stabilize the structural integrity of the Inn. The Inn was covered with adobe and the interior was decorated with Southwest American Indian designs.
  - The Fred Harvey Company took over the facility in the late 1940's and operated it as an inn catering to tourists.
  - Fred Kabotie, a renowned Hopi artist, was hired to paint murals on the dining room and lunchroom walls.
  - Severe structural damage to the Inn forced the Fred Harvey Company to move to the newly completed visitor center complex in 1963.
  - The Inn was closed until the mid-1970's. It was restored in 2003-2004.
  - In 1987, the Painted Desert Inn became a National Historic Landmark because it was a fine example of Pueblo Revival Style, historic work by the CCC, and Kabotie's murals.
  - Two cabins near the Inn are for the Artist in Residence Program.
- The Painted Desert runs from the Grand Canyon to New Mexico. The elevation is approximately 5,800 feet.
- The best views of the Painted Desert are at sunset. On clear days, one can see 120 miles.
- Pilot Rock is north of the Park and Navajo Nation land is north and northeast of the Park.
- The spring and fall are very windy. Winds can get up to 90 miles per hour. July through August is the monsoon season. Snow occurs in the winter. The Park was closed four times this past winter due to snow conditions.
- There are several coal generation plants nearby the Park. The Santa Fe Railroad and Interstate 40 run through the Park as does the Puerco River. The Navajo Nation supplies water to the Park.
- We stopped at the Puerco Pueblo site. There are restroom facilities at this site. The Park is only one mile wide at this location.
  - Puerco Pueblo was a 100 room pueblo housing about 200 people near the Puerco River.
- Jason Theuer listed some of the fauna that live in the Park: Golden Eagle, hawks, owls, porcupines, prairie dogs, Pronghorn, coyotes, etc.
- The Park encompassed approximately 93,000 acres but will ultimately be 225,000 acres with the expansion.
- With the expansion, the Park inherited grazing leases. The Park will maintain these leases. The acquired properties will have ranch roads that will become administration roads and horseback riding and hiking trails. The roads will not be paved. The acquired lands will be designated Wilderness Areas.
- Interstate 40 was built in 1957 and that essentially killed Route 66.
  - There are 9 miles of Route 66 in the Park.

- This is the only National Park that protects a portion of Route 66.
- There has always been a history of migration through the area.
- The tour stopped at Newspaper Rock. Here, there are approximately 650 petroglyphs. Symbols indicate migration. There are permanent commercial binoculars for viewing the petroglyphs. In the 1990's the trail at Newspaper Rock was closed to visitors in order to protect the resources.
- Native Americans use the Park for recreation and some ceremonial activities.
- We continued through the area known as Blue Mesa because of the bluish grey striations in the sides of the cliffs.
  - The bluish grey striations are very rich in paleontology resources.
  - The upper basalt layer is 6 million years old and is on top of layers that are 215 million years old.
- There are roughly 800 identified archaeology sites and an estimated total number of roughly 2,000 in the current Park boundaries. After the expansion it is expected that the number of sites will be 4,000 to 5,000.
- We then passed through the Tepees formations.
- The Park is the rough boundary line between the Hopi nation (to the west) and the Zuni nation (to the east). It has traditionally been the place where tribes have come together.
- Visitation peaks April through May, then September through early October (when many foreign tourists come).
- We passed by the Agate Bridge and Jasper Forest. There used to be a spring near the Agate Bridge but with the development of wells in the region during the 1930's the spring dried up.
- We stopped for a short hike around the Crystal Forest site. The Crystal Forest site is very popular with tourists. There is a lot of petrified wood with amethyst crystal in it. Most wood theft occurs at this site.
  - It is estimated that roughly 1 ton of petrified wood is taken from the Park each month.
  - Roughly 5-10 lbs of petrified wood is mailed back to the Park each week.
  - The returned petrified wood is typically accompanied by a "conscience" letter; a letter from the person who is returning the petrified wood that explains why it is being returned.
  - The Park cannot place the stolen petrified wood back in the Park because it could mislead the archaeological research.
  - The Park used to give visitors small pieces of petrified wood to deter theft; but theft still occurred and the practice was stopped.
- To the east of the road and south of the Crystal Forest trail there is an old water "tank." The tank was created in the 1930's in an effort to bring wildlife to the Park visitors. The Park stopped this practice in the 1960's.
- We continued along the road to the Rainbow Forest Museum which is near the southern entrance to the Park. This is a visitor center that is manned by Park Rangers. There is a book store in the museum. There is also the Rainbow Curios shop in a separate building. This shop sells souvenirs and has been in operation since the 1930's.
- Visitors can access the Giant Logs Trail through the Rainbow Forest Museum. The trail passes the Park's largest log, known as Old Faithful.
- After a short visit at the Rainbow Forest Museum, we back-tracked through the Park to the Painted Desert Visitor Center where we arrived at approximately 4:30 PM.