

Great Smoky Mountains National Park News Release

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Smokies Announces Status of North Shore Road Environmental Impact Statement

Great Smoky Mountains National Park Superintendent, Dale A. Ditmanson, has announced that the National Park Service (NPS) has begun preparation of a Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) which was undertaken to resolve the long-standing issues regarding the proposed North Shore Road in the Swain County, NC area of the Park. As currently drafted, the FEIS will call for a monetary settlement to Swain County as the National Park Service's Agency Preferred Alternative. The Park expects to publish a Notice of Availability of the FEIS in The Federal Register in September and then will accept public comments for a 30-day period prior to publishing a Record of Decision.

"Even though the FEIS will not be released for several months, we wanted to be responsive to the intense public interest in the status of this undertaking," Ditmanson explained. "In most cases the National Park Service would have identified its Agency Preferred Alternative in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). In this instance we did not select a Preferred Alternative because the DEIS presented new information, specifically, much higher cost estimates for several of the alternatives, which the public had not seen before."

According to Superintendent Ditmanson, "The National Park Service selected its Agency Preferred Alternative, in the draft FEIS, based upon an extensive review of the nearly 76,000 public comments received in response to the DEIS and analysis of the impacts of each alternative on the Park's natural, cultural and recreational resources.

Debate over whether a 34-mile road should be constructed dates back to World War II when an agreement was signed, in 1943, between the Department of the Interior, the State of North Carolina, Swain County North Carolina, and the Tennessee Valley Authority. Under terms of this "1943 Agreement", a new road to replace NC 288, which was flooded during construction of TVA's Fontana Dam, would be built if Congress appropriated the funding. In the 1960's the NPS constructed approximately 7 miles of the road before abandoning the effort due to environmental impacts and engineering problems. No further federal funding was received for the road until 2001 when \$16 million was appropriated to resume work on the project, triggering the current EIS process.

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