
National Park Service
Cultural Landscapes Inventory
2010



Furnace Creek Visitor Center
Death Valley National Park

**OFFICE OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION**

P.O. BOX 942896
SACRAMENTO, CA 94296-0001
(916) 653-6624 Fax: (916) 653-9824
calshpo@ohp.parks.ca.gov
www.ohp.parks.ca.gov



May 11, 2010

Reply In Reference To: NPS091130B

Blair Davenport
Cultural Resources Manager
Death Valley National Park
P.O. Box 579
Death Valley, CA 92328

RE: Rehabilitation of Furnace Creek Visitor Center, Death Valley National Park

Dear Ms. Davenport:

I am writing regarding the ongoing consultation for the above-mentioned project. NPS and I have signed the *Programmatic Agreement Between the National Park Service (U.S. Department of the Interior) and the California State Historic Preservation Officer Regarding Rehabilitation of the Death Valley National Park Visitor Center, Inyo County, California*, but some aspects of the Section 106 consultation still require resolution. One of these is the determination of eligibility for listing the Furnace Creek Visitor Center on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). The National Park Service (NPS) has evaluated this property and presented my office with the following determination:

The Furnace Creek Visitor Center is eligible for listing on the NRHP as a Historic District. The following are Contributors to the District: Museum; Administration Building; Main Courtyard; Reflection Pool and Fountain; Colonnade; Concrete and Metal Benches; Visitor Parking Lot, Access Road, and Sidewalks; and Employee Parking Lot, Access Road, and Walkway. The following are Non-Contributors: Storage Shed; Photovoltaic Array; Visitor Center Sign; Employee Parking Exit Road; and Flagpole.

I have reviewed the documentation you submitted with your original letter, which included an NRHP nomination form and accompanying maps and photographs. In accordance with 36 CFR 800.4(b) and (c), I concur that the Furnace Creek Visitor Center is eligible for listing on the NRHP with the contributors and non-contributors as identified above.

This concurrence resolves Stipulation IV.A of the Programmatic Agreement.

Thank you for seeking my comments and considering historic properties as part of your project planning. If you require further information, please contact Mark Beason, State Historian II, at phone 916-653-8902 or email mbeason@parks.ca.gov.

Sincerely,



Milford Wayne Donaldson, FAIA
State Historic Preservation Officer



Furnace Creek Visitor Center Death Valley National Park

Death Valley National Park concurs with the findings of the CLI, including the management category and condition assessment as identified below:

MANAGEMENT CATEGORY: **B: Should be preserved and maintained**

CONDITION ASSESSMENT: **Good**

Sarah Crayford
Superintendent, Death Valley National Park

9/7/2010
Date

Please return to:

Amanda Bennett
Cultural Landscapes Inventory Coordinator
National Park Service
Pacific West Regional Office
909 First Ave., Floor 5
Seattle, WA 98104

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Inventory Unit Summary & Site Plan

Inventory Summary

The Cultural Landscapes Inventory Overview:

CLI General Information:

Purpose and Goals of the CLI

The Cultural Landscapes Inventory (CLI), a comprehensive inventory of all cultural landscapes in the national park system, is one of the most ambitious initiatives of the National Park Service (NPS) Park Cultural Landscapes Program. The CLI is an evaluated inventory of all landscapes having historical significance that are listed on or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, or are otherwise managed as cultural resources through a public planning process and in which the NPS has or plans to acquire any legal interest. The CLI identifies and documents each landscape's location, size, physical development, condition, landscape characteristics, character-defining features, as well as other valuable information useful to park management. Cultural landscapes become approved CLIs when concurrence with the findings is obtained from the park superintendent and all required data fields are entered into a national database. In addition, for landscapes that are not currently listed on the National Register and/or do not have adequate documentation, concurrence is required from the State Historic Preservation Officer or the Keeper of the National Register.

The CLI, like the List of Classified Structures, assists the NPS in its efforts to fulfill the identification and management requirements associated with Section 110(a) of the National Historic Preservation Act, National Park Service Management Policies (2006), and Director's Order #28: Cultural Resource Management. Since launching the CLI nationwide, the NPS, in response to the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA), is required to report information that respond to NPS strategic plan accomplishments. Two GPRA goals are associated with the CLI: bringing certified cultural landscapes into good condition (Goal 1a7) and increasing the number of CLI records that have complete, accurate, and reliable information (Goal 1b2B).

Scope of the CLI

The information contained within the CLI is gathered from existing secondary sources found in park libraries and archives and at NPS regional offices and centers, as well as through on-site reconnaissance of the existing landscape. The baseline information collected provides a comprehensive look at the historical development and significance of the landscape, placing it in context of the site's overall significance. Documentation and analysis of the existing landscape identifies character-defining characteristics and features, and allows for an evaluation of the landscape's overall integrity and an assessment of the landscape's overall condition. The CLI also provides an illustrative site plan that indicates major features within the inventory unit. Unlike cultural landscape reports, the CLI does not provide management recommendations or

treatment guidelines for the cultural landscape.

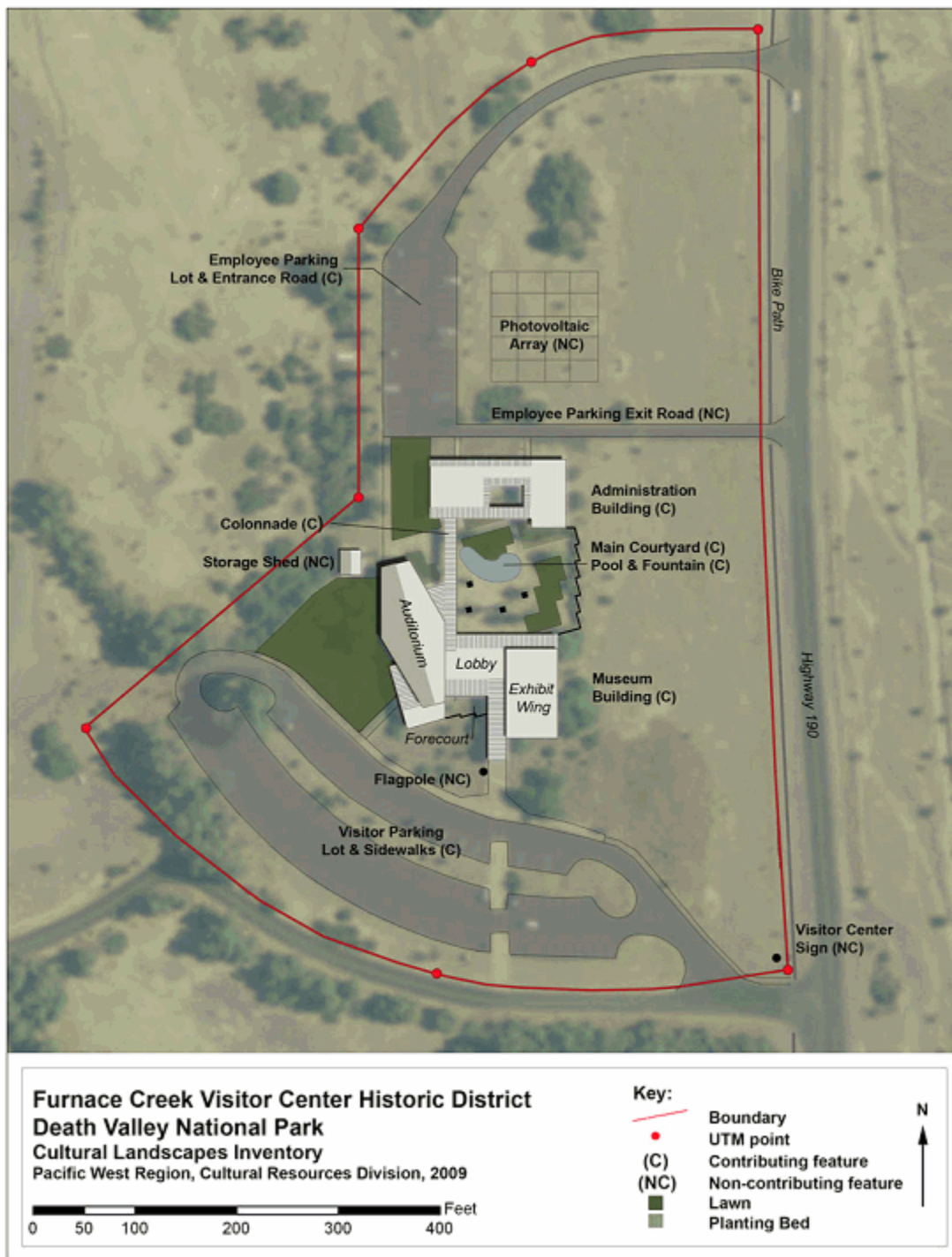
Inventory Unit Description:

The 9-acre Furnace Creek Visitor Center Historic District is located in Death Valley National Park in California. Death Valley is one of the hottest and driest places in North America. The Furnace Creek area is one of the lowest points in North America at almost 200 feet below sea-level. The visitor center was sited within a naturally flat area in the Furnace Creek wash. The land immediately around the visitor center complex is punctuated with a scattering of shrubs and small trees. The Armargosa Range rises sharply to the east with the Funeral Mountains (over 5,000 feet) in clear view from the visitor center. The Panamint Range rises to the west of the visitor center with the tallest peak, Telescope Peak at 11,049 feet high, visible in the distance from the lobby of the Visitor Center.

The Furnace Creek Visitor Center is accessed from Highway 190 by a short entrance road that leads visitors immediately into a flat, open, gently curved parking area. The visitor center is comprised of a complex of two separate, yet interconnected buildings organized around rectangular-shaped main courtyard. Visitor services are located with an irregularly shaped building mass, historically called the “Museum,” which features a lobby, interpretive exhibits, and an auditorium. The second building which frames the north end of the courtyard is historically called the Administration Building and contains NPS administrative functions. The design of the complex was completed by Cecil Doty, one of the most prominent NPS architects during the Mission 66 era, and was informed by early to mid-twentieth century modernism. Design features include blurred distinctions between interior and exterior space, strategic use of large expanses of glass, use of mass produced modern building materials left exposed as part of the design aesthetic of the building, flat roofs that extend beyond the building envelope and an emphasis on horizontality. The courtyard exhibits the idiomatic mid-twentieth California modernist landscape design with an emphasis on geometrically patterned hardscape, raised planting beds, and the iconic kidney-shaped pool.

The visitor center complex retains its integrity and conveys its historical significance as a planned development that displays the characteristics of Mission 66 era planning, design, and construction. The district has four contributing buildings and structures that date to the period of significance (1959-1960), as well as many landscape characteristics that contribute to the district’s overall setting, feeling, and association. The historic character of the proposed district is reflected in the following landscape characteristics: natural systems and features, spatial organization, buildings and structure, circulation, vegetation, and small-scale features. Non-historic intrusions are located mostly in the northern portion of the complex, which is less visible to visitors. The most noticeable intrusions include a metal storage shed (built in the 1970s), a photovoltaic array (built in 2008), and a new visitor center sign added at the entrance to the visitor center parking lot in 2004. The photovoltaic array was determined to have no adverse effect on the historic district by the California State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) on April 28, 2008. The key characteristics that historically define the visitor center complex remain intact. Together, the landscape characteristics and associated features help convey the design intent and aesthetic character of the district.

Site Plan



See the Supplemental Information section for a full 8.5 x 11 inch version of site plan.

Property Level and CLI Numbers

Inventory Unit Name:	Furnace Creek Visitor Center
Property Level:	Landscape
CLI Identification Number:	975530

Park Information

Park Name and Alpha Code:	Death Valley National Park -DEVA
Park Organization Code:	8130
Park Administrative Unit:	Death Valley National Park

Concurrence Status

Inventory Status: Complete

Completion Status Explanatory Narrative:

The Furnace Creek Visitor Center Cultural Landscapes Inventory (CLI) builds off the previous consensus determination of eligibility completed by Elaine Jackson-Retundo and Erica Owens in 2009, which was concurred with by the SHPO on May 11, 2010. Fieldwork for the CLI was conducted by Erica Owens and Bob Hartzler from the Pacific West Regional office, in June 2009. The data compilation and database entry was completed in 2010 by Bradley Pavlik from the Pacific West Region's Seattle office.

Concurrence Status:

Park Superintendent Concurrence:	Yes
Park Superintendent Date of Concurrence:	09/07/2010
National Register Concurrence:	Eligible -- SHPO Consensus Determination
Date of Concurrence Determination:	05/11/2010

Concurrence Graphic Information:

For concurrence letters, see the front of the CLI.

Geographic Information & Location Map

Inventory Unit Boundary Description:

The boundary for this property has an irregular shape that begins at a point just north of the intersection of Highway 190 and the entrance to the employee parking lot. The boundary heads south, following the western edge of the bike path. Just south of the visitor center entrance sign, the boundary turns westward following the northern edge of Airport Road, gently curving northwest. Once beyond the visitor parking lot, the boundary turns northeast and heads straight to a point approximately 50 feet north of the metal shed. The boundary then turns north and follows a gently curving path 30 feet from the western and northern edges of the employee parking lot and entrance road to the point of origin. (See Site Plan and Location Map)

State and County:

State: CA

County: Inyo County

Size (Acres): 9.00

Boundary UTMS:

Source: GPS-Differentially Corrected
Type of Point: Area
Datum: NAD 83
UTM Zone: 11
UTM Easting: 512,034
UTM Northing: 4,035,366

Source: GPS-Differentially Corrected
Type of Point: Area
Datum: NAD 83
UTM Zone: 11
UTM Easting: 512,044
UTM Northing: 4,035,089

Source: GPS-Differentially Corrected
Type of Point: Area
Datum: NAD 83
UTM Zone: 11
UTM Easting: 511,935
UTM Northing: 4,035,085

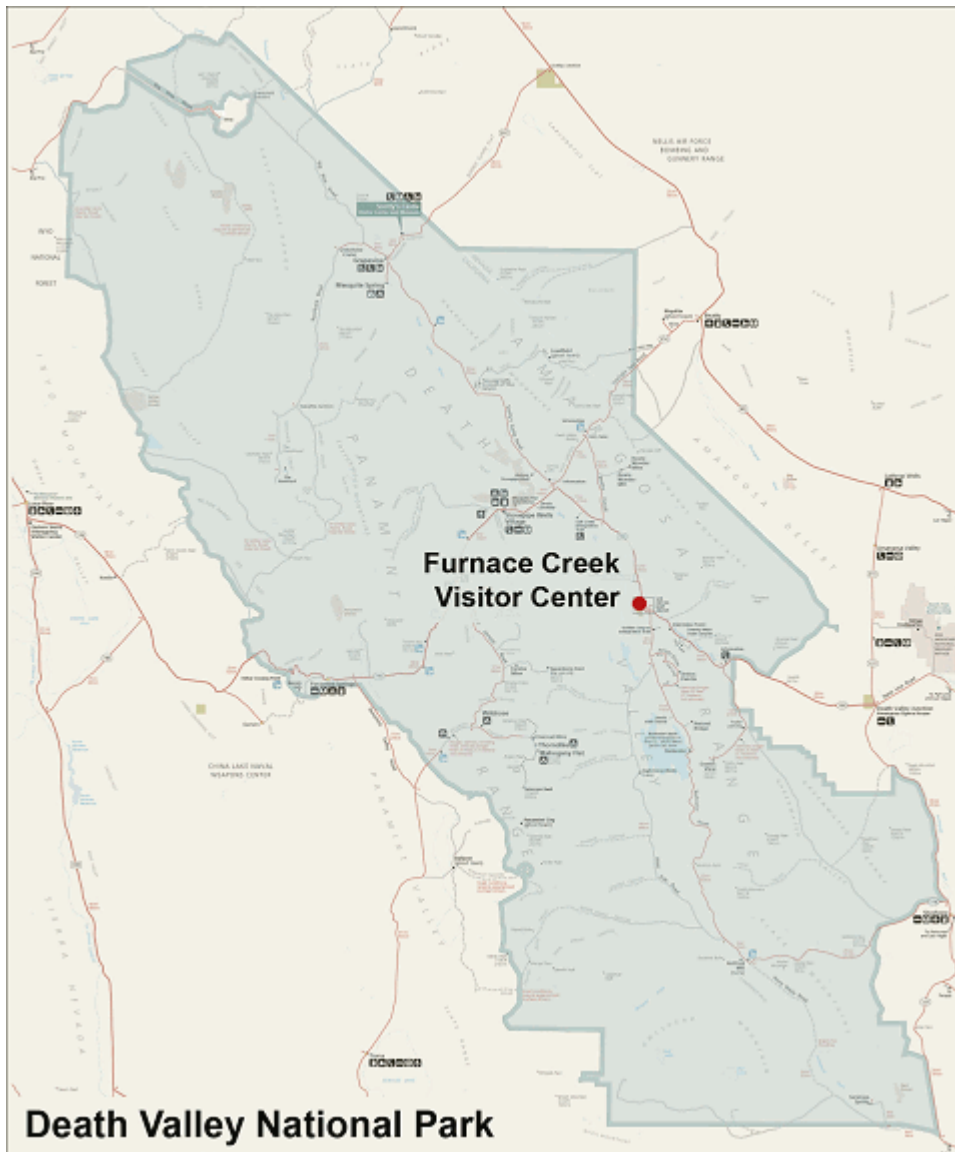
Source: GPS-Differentially Corrected
Type of Point: Area
Datum: NAD 83
UTM Zone: 11
UTM Easting: 511,831
UTM Northing: 4,035,154

Source: GPS-Differentially Corrected

Type of Point:	Area
Datum:	NAD 83
UTM Zone:	11
UTM Easting:	511,911
UTM Northing:	4,035,228
Source:	GPS-Differentially Corrected
Type of Point:	Area
Datum:	NAD 83
UTM Zone:	11
UTM Easting:	511,915
UTM Northing:	4,035,309
Source:	GPS-Differentially Corrected
Type of Point:	Area
Datum:	NAD 83
UTM Zone:	11
UTM Easting:	511,967
UTM Northing:	4,035,359

Furnace Creek Visitor Center
Death Valley National Park

Location Map:



The Furnace Creek Visitor Center Historic District is located in the central and eastern portion Death Valley National Park.

Regional Context:

Type of Context: Cultural

Description:

The entire Furnace Creek Visitor Center Historic District is located within a much larger proposed 37,807-acre Tumpisa District, a Traditional Cultural Property (TCP) associated with the federally recognized Timbisha Shoshone Tribe. A draft nomination has been prepared for the TCP, but has not been completed. Approximately ten families of the Tribe lived in the vicinity of the Furnace Creek Visitor Center, from 1930 to 1937 until they were moved by the park to another village located a quarter of a mile south of the visitor center. Although their habitation of the area is known, no known archeological sites have been located due to the fact the area was extensively disturbed when the park removed all traces of their habitation after the tribe was moved and disturbed again during construction of the visitor center and campground between 1958 and 1962. (U.S. Department of the Interior. National Park Service, Death Valley National Park, "Section 106 Consultation for the Installation of Photovoltaic Array by the Visitor's Center, Death Valley National Park, CA: Assessment of Actions Having an Effect on Cultural Resources," 2008)

Management Information

General Management Information

Management Category: Should be Preserved and Maintained

Management Category Explanatory Narrative:

The Furnace Creek Visitor Center Historic District meets all three criteria for Category B – Should Be Preserved and Maintained. The historic district meets National Register criteria, is compatible with the park's legislated significance “for the benefit and inspiration of the people,” and has a continuing purpose that is appropriate to its traditional use or function.

NPS Legal Interest:

Type of Interest: Fee Simple

Public Access:

Type of Access: Unrestricted

Adjacent Lands Information

Do Adjacent Lands Contribute? No

Adjacent Lands Description:

Furnace Creek Visitor Center

Death Valley National Park

The Furnace Creek Campground was constructed at the same time as the Visitor Center, located immediately northwest of the visitor complex. Information gathered through fieldwork and archival research suggests that the campground has been significantly altered since the early 1960s and no longer retains historic integrity. The California SHPO concurred with park's finding that the Furnace Creek Campground is ineligible for listing in May 2010. (See Supplemental Information for documentation.)

The Furnace Creek Campground and Furnace Creek Visitor Center were planned and designed together in the late 1950s as a "Public Use Area," as indicated in original master plan drawings. The visitor center (constructed 1959-60) and campground (constructed 1960-62) were considered one development with two distinct areas connected by access roads originating from the vicinity of the visitor center parking lot. Historically, the campground was accessed from the same junction with Highway 190 that leads to the visitor center public parking lot. At the turn off, visitors could continue straight, following a road directly to the campground or take an indirect route through the visitor center parking lot where a short road at the far end of the lot connected back to the entry road.

Since its establishment in 1960, the campground has lost integrity with subsequent expansion and reconfiguration of campsites. The main entrance to the campground has been shifted from the southern end to the northern end, the road system has been expanded greatly from the original single loop around a comfort station to several loops, non-historic comfort stations have been added, campsites have been reconfigured, and non-historic grills and fire pits have been added. The current campground no longer reflects its historic character from 1960, nor does the expansion of the campground loops reflect any of the Mission 66 design drawings produced for the area. As a result, the campground has been excluded from the boundary of the historic district.

National Register Information

Existing National Register Status

National Register Landscape Documentation:

SHPO Documented

National Register Explanatory Narrative:

The consensus determination of eligibility (DOE) for the Furnace Creek Visitor Center Historic, completed in 2009 and signed by the California SHPO in 2010, adequately documented the landscape features associated with the historic district.

National Register Eligibility

National Register Concurrence: Eligible -- SHPO Consensus Determination

Contributing/Individual: Individual

National Register Classification: District

Significance Level: Local

Significance Criteria: A - Associated with events significant to broad patterns of our history

Significance Criteria: C - Embodies distinctive construction, work of master, or high artistic values

Period of Significance:

Time Period: AD 1959 - 1960

Historic Context Theme: Expressing Cultural Values

Subtheme: Architecture

Facet: NPS Mission 66

Time Period: AD 1959 - 1960

Historic Context Theme: Expressing Cultural Values

Subtheme: Landscape Architecture

Facet: NPS Mission 66--Landscape Architecture

Area of Significance:

Area of Significance Category:

Architecture

Area of Significance Category:

Landscape Architecture

Statement of Significance:

Note: The following narrative has been adapted from the consensus determination of eligibility (DOE) for the Furnace Creek Visitor Center signed by the California SHPO in May 2010.

The Furnace Creek Visitor Center Historic District is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) at the state level under Criteria A and C for its association with the National Park Service's (NPS) Mission 66 Program. The period of significance is 1959-60, which corresponds to the dates of construction and official opening of the Visitor Center Complex. Designed by NPS architect Cecil Doty, the visitor center reflects the NPS's interpretation of modern architecture and landscape design widely prevalent across the United States at the time. The complex is highly intact and remains an excellent example of modern architectural design within the state of California.

CRITERION A

Significant under Criterion A, the Furnace Creek Visitor Center Historic District is associated with events that have made significant contributions to the broad national patterns of American history, specifically, with the NPS's Mission 66 Program. Mission 66 played a critical role in the modernization of the NPS and, in particular, Death Valley National Park (1). During this era of NPS development, the monument received funding for projects such as the Furnace Creek Visitor Center, new campgrounds, telephones, reliable electricity, improved roads, and upgraded water systems. These upgrades not only helped modernize the park unit and provide public access and amenities, but also helped promote the status of the monument within the park service. (See the Supplemental Information section for a discussion of the history of Mission 66 throughout NPS as a whole).

Mission 66 played a critical role in updating and modernizing Death Valley National Park. In 1954, when Superintendent Fred W. Binnewies arrived at the monument, he found that its facilities were inadequate to meet demands and in poor condition. He noted that the monument's power supply was not dependable, water and sewer systems were in disrepair, and the Civilian Conservation Corps-era buildings were deteriorating. He supported the idea of a museum as he "recognized the importance of interpretation programs for visitors and regarded museum construction as a crucial step in serving the monument's growing audience (2)". He placed immediate emphasis on the planning process to address park needs. In the 1954 master plan, Binnewies recommended collecting entrance fees, which was not a common practice for remote parks, and increasing staff in addition to physical improvements. Although this plan initially received little support from the NPS, by 1956 Binnewies' emphasis on planning placed the monument in a position to quickly produce a request for Mission 66 funding. With their up-to-date planning documents, the monument became an early recipient of Mission 66 funds,

receiving approval of their plans by September 1956 (3).

Mission 66 resulted in a significant amount of development and infrastructure still found at Death Valley National Park today. By the end of 1958, the monument had new agency residences; new water, sewer, gas, and electrical systems at Cow Creek; an improved water pipeline from Nevares Springs; and four road-related projects under way, including a new parking lot at Ubehebe Crater (4). In 1959-60, the Furnace Creek Visitor Center was built. The 1960 Master Plan for Death Valley, entitled the "MISSION 66 Edition," optimistically emphasized the future contributions of the visitor center: "Many of our present shortcomings will be solved when we move into the new Visitor Center. No longer will we be plagued with no decent place to attract and contact visitors. There will be offices of sufficient size to conduct naturalist activities. Scientific collections, photographs, library materials and other interpretive materials will be housed in a clean and appropriate manner. The illustrated talks can be held in our auditorium and under our own rules (5)."

The visitor center, a key component of the program, was also an important symbol of elevated importance within the park system. As noted in the Administrative History for the park: The most important development that Mission 66 funded was the new visitor center and headquarters at Furnace Creek. . . . A new visitor center was an emblem of importance in the park system, marking the first time since the New Deal that Death Valley received a visible share of available agency resources. Advocates of the monument celebrated its construction and their involvement in it. The Death Valley 49ers Association played a prominent role and the visitor center even attracted the attention of Horace M. Albright, more than twenty years out of the National Park Service, but still a considerable force. He offered suggestions on a draft plan for the facility and helped shape its final contours. More than any other event since the establishment of the monument, the visitor center's completion signaled a new moment in the history of Death Valley (6).

Under subsequent superintendents Granville Liles and John A. Aubuchon, the Mission 66 master plan continued to be implemented. From 1960-65, the monument completed construction of a second apartment structure, apartments at the Grapevine housing area, new water systems in all existing campgrounds, a 300,000-gallon reservoir at Furnace Creek, added new sewage systems, diesel-fired power generating plants, a new telephone system, and a dependable source of electricity (7). By 1965, the Mission 66 master plan had been completed and brought the monument up to modern standards of its time.

CRITERION C

Significant under Criterion C, the Furnace Creek Visitor Center Historic District embodies the distinguishing characteristics of the Mission 66 visitor center property type and mid-century modernist architecture and landscape design in the park service. The Furnace Creek Visitor Center at Death Valley National Park remains as one of the best and most intact examples of a visitor center complex within the state of California associated with the Mission 66 Program. . (See the Supplemental Information section for a general history of Mission 66 architecture in the National Park System).

The Furnace Creek Visitor Center Historic District is one of seven existing Mission 66 visitor centers in California. The other existing visitor centers include the Cabrillo National Monument Visitor Center, the Joshua Tree National Park's Oasis Visitor Center, the Yosemite Valley Visitor Center, the Happy Isle Nature Center (at Yosemite National Park), and the Grant Grove and Lodgepole visitor centers at Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks. The Mission 66 visitor center at Lassen Volcanic National Park has since been demolished.

Compared to the other remaining Mission 66 visitor centers within the state of California, the Furnace Creek Visitor Center stands apart as an excellent example of an intact visitor center complex located within a desert setting that continues to embody distinctive characteristics of the modern style adopted by the NPS during the Mission 66 era as described below.

The Furnace Creek Visitor Center meets all four characteristics as listed by Allaback (2000) to be considered eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places:

1. The visitor center should be one of the important precedents of the Mission 66 program (1945-1956), be one of the visitor centers originally planned and built as part of the Mission 66 program (1956-1966), or as part of the Parkscape program (1966-1972). The property's period of significance should fall within the years 1945-1972.

The Furnace Creek Visitor Center was originally planned and built as part of the Mission 66 program. The complex was designed in 1958 and constructed in 1959-60.

2. The visitor center should retain most or all of the physical characteristics described in the description of the property type. The visitor center should be a centralized facility that includes multiple visitor and administrative functions within a single architectural floor plan or compound. Programming elements should include interpretive displays, space for slide shows and films, visitor contact, restrooms, and other services. The visitor center should be intended to serve the public by interpreting scenery, natural resources, and cultural sites, and should be a major point of visitor arrival, orientation, and service.

The visitor center complex was designed to centralize both visitor services and administrative functions. The Museum serves as the main point of contact for the visitor, with a lobby, public restrooms, museum exhibits, and an auditorium. The auditorium was oriented so that once the film came to its end, the curtains along the eastern wall could be pulled back to reveal a view of the Funeral Mountains. The Administration Building provided space for offices, storage, and outdoor space for employees separate from public space.

3. The visitor center should possess physical integrity to the period of significance. The NRHP requires that the integrity of a property be evident through historic qualities including location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

The Furnace Creek Visitor Center is an intact example of a Mission 66 NPS visitor center within the state of California. The district retains historic integrity from its period of significance, 1959-60. All historic buildings and structures remain in their original locations, the original design, materials, workmanship of the buildings, courtyard, and circulation features reflect modern architecture and landscape architecture style as adapted by the NPS during the Mission 66-era, and the remaining lawns

and vegetation, contrasted with views of the surrounding desert and mountain ranges, continue to convey the historic setting of the district.. As such, the complex maintains historic integrity. Some changes have been made to the complex since 1960. The most notable changes that have occurred include the replacement of the lobby information desk, the reconfiguration of office space within the Administration Building, the addition of some new interior finishes in the buildings such as the carpet in the lobby, the addition of a metal storage shed and a photovoltaic array in the northern portion of the complex (which was determined to have no adverse effect in 2008 by the California SHPO). Assessed as a whole district, these changes have had minimal impact on the overall historic flow and the visual character of the district.

4. The visitor center should embody distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction that represent high artistic values. Specifically, the visitor center should be a successful reflection of the principles of "Park Service Modern" style.

Designed by NPS architect Cecil Doty, the visitor center reflects the NPS's interpretation of modern architecture and landscape design widely prevalent across the United States at the time. The buildings and landscape design incorporated architectural characteristics typical of the style, such as flat roof, low, horizontal profiles, a clear emphasis on visitor flow through the site, separation of public and administrative spaces, and integration of interior and exterior spaces. The Furnace Creek Visitor Center courtyard was noted in the draft Multiple Property Listing for Pacific West Region Mission 66 Resources (Jackson-Retondo 2004) as one of the better examples of a modern landscape designed under the Mission 66 program in the Pacific West Region.

ENDNOTES

(1) Death Valley National Park was first established as Death Valley National Monument in 1933 and later designated a national park in 1994.

(2) Hal K. Rothman, *To Ride Alone in a Forever Unpossessed Country: An Administrative History of Death Valley National Park* (Draft) (Henderson, Nev: Hal K. Rothman and Assoc., [2000])

(3) Ibid.

(4) Ibid.

(5) As quoted in Carey & Co. Inc, *Determination of Eligibility: Death Valley National Park Visitor Center* (Draft) (San Francisco, Cal: Prepared for the National Park Service, 2001).

(6) Hal K. Rothman, *To Ride Alone in a Forever Unpossessed Country: An Administrative History of Death Valley National Park* (Draft).

(7) Ibid.

National Historic Landmark Information

National Historic Landmark Status: No

World Heritage Site Information

World Heritage Site Status: No

Chronology & Physical History

Cultural Landscape Type and Use

Cultural Landscape Type: Designed

Current and Historic Use/Function:

Primary Historic Function: Visitor Contact (Visitor Center)

Primary Current Use: Visitor Contact (Visitor Center)

Other Use/Function

Museum (Exhibition Hall)-Other

Auditorium

Other Type of Use or Function

Both Current And Historic

Both Current And Historic

Current and Historic Names:

Name

Furnace Creek Visitor Center

Type of Name

Both Current And Historic

Ethnographic Study Conducted: No Survey Conducted

Associated Group:

Name of Group: Timbisha Shoshone Tribe

Chronology:

Year	Event	Annotation
AD 1930 - 1937	Removed	Approximately ten families of the Timbisha Shoshone Tribe lived in the vicinity of the Furnace Creek Visitor Center. They were moved by the park service to another village location a quarter of a mile south of the visitor center.
AD 1933	Established	Death Valley National Monument was established.
AD 1938	Planned	A Death Valley National Monument master plan stated the need for museum and centrally located office facilities for information, education, and protection.
AD 1942	Planned	An 'Outline of Work Proposal' confirmed museum facilities had not yet been constructed at Death Valley, but that plans for such a facility had been approved.

Furnace Creek Visitor Center
Death Valley National Park

AD 1954	Planned	A master plan for Death Valley Monument was completed, which recommended collecting entrance fees, increasing staff, and physical improvements such as a museum.
AD 1955	Planned	Wirth proposed a ten-year park development program known as Mission 66. The program was intended to modernize, enlarge, and even reinvent the park system by 1966, the fiftieth anniversary of the National Parks Service.
AD 1956	Established	The Death Valley Monument master plan was approved.
AD 1957	Established	The Death Valley museum and a visitor center had been added to the Mission 66 plan, giving the project greater viability in the federal appropriations process and creating an unusual circumstance: the park stood to receive money for the museum from both state and federal sources.
AD 1958	Land Transfer	Congress ratified the exchange of land for the Death Valley Visitor Center from the U.S. Borax company for rights-of-way and water rights near its land holdings within the monument which would become the site of the Visitor Center.
	Designed	The schematic architectural drawings and principal design for the Visitor Center were drafted by Cecil Doty, one of the most prominent NPS architects during the Mission 66 era. The final plans were prepared by the architectural firm of Welton Becket and Associates of San Francisco, but very few modifications appear to have been made to Doty's original schematic design.
AD 1959 - 1960	Built	The Furnace Creek Visitor Center complex of contributing buildings and structures were constructed.
AD 1960	Built	NPS declared the building complete on March 24, 1960, although the new museum and visitor center could not be opened immediately as a result of a lack of electrical power required for heating and air conditioning systems. After NPS engineers resolved the electric problem, the museum was ready for internal design.

	Built	The Western Museum Laboratory company completed exhibit installation in October 1960.
	Memorialized	A dedication ceremony was held on November 12, 1960. Over 2,000 people attended the ceremony including such notable guests as Director Wirth, State Senator Charles Brown, Lord Clitheros of Borax Limited, President Ralph Merritt of the Death Valley '49ers, and other distinguished politicians and leaders from California and Washington D.C.
AD 1970 - 1979	Built	The metal storage shed (non-contributing building) was built during the 1970s.
	Removed	The campground access road that extended from the western end of the parking lot was closed and, the alignment is still marked by an asphalt foot path.
AD 1980 - 1989	Altered	During the 1980s, the reflection pool in the main courtyard was drained and has not been filled since.
AD 1990	Built	Two simple, metal street lights were installed in the visitor parking lot.
AD 2004	Built	A new visitor sign was added to the entrance of the visitor parking lot.
AD 2007	Built	ADA compliant ramps were added to the existing walkway that crosses the parking lot and islands.
AD 2008	Built	The photovoltaic array (non-contributing structure) located north of the administrative building was constructed, and determined to not have an adverse effect on the historic district by the California State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO).

Physical History:

1933-present

Note: The following narrative has been adapted from the consensus determination of eligibility (DOE) for the Furnace Creek Visitor Center signed by the California SHPO in May 2010.

Planning and Construction of the Furnace Creek Visitor Center

The need for centralized visitor services was identified early in the park's history. Death Valley National Park was first designated as a National Monument in 1933, but as early as 1938, park documents indicated a need for museum and auditorium facilities. A master plan from that year states: "The need for a museum building of moderate size has become increasingly a necessity for the past five years. . . . There is also a very decided and immediate need of centrally located offices for information, education, and protection." A 1942 'Outline of Work Proposal' confirms museum facilities had not yet been constructed at Death Valley, but that plans for such a facility had been approved. World War II, however, caused the project to be further delayed as the federal budget was strained with the war effort. In 1951, to help address growing needs of the parks, NPS Director Conrad Wirth urged all national park superintendents to meet with their district Congressmen to campaign for federal appropriations and legislation to help update and improve conditions at the parks for the benefit of the American people (1).

Through efforts by the NPS and the Death Valley '49ers Association, money for the museum was attained. As summarized in the Administrative History of the park: Death Valley staff made overtures to the California State Legislature and the U.S. Congress about museum funding. In 1955, California State Senator Charles Brown, a longtime advocate of Death Valley, introduced the first state funding bill for the museum. Despite winning legislative approval, California's Republican governor, Goodwin J. Knight, vetoed the measure along with other park funding bills. After the veto, the Death Valley '49ers Association, a powerful and vocal constituency founded in 1949 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Death Valley expedition that named the area, lobbied the government to put the museum bill on the 1956 legislative calendar. Knight yielded. The 1956 California state budget included authorization of \$350,000 for construction of a museum at Death Valley. By 1957, the museum had been added to the Mission 66 plan for a new visitor center, giving the project greater viability in the federal appropriations process and creating an unusual circumstance: the park stood to receive money for the museum from both state and federal sources (2).

Several areas were considered for the new visitor center, but as H. Rothman states in the Administrative History:

Furnace Creek was the most logical location [for the visitor center], for it had become the central area of the monument because of the presence of Furnace Creek Ranch. The land in the vicinity belonged to U.S. Borax, formed by the merger of Pacific Coast Borax and U.S. Potash on June 1, 1956, and the National Park Service needed its cooperation. The company proved a willing partner. In 1957, the National Park Service sought lands near Furnace Creek Ranch to which the borax company held subsurface mineral title. As always, the longstanding relationship and Albright's insistent presence assured that the agency and the company would

negotiate successfully. . . . The exchange helped the borax company because the resort needed rights-of-way and water rights near its inholdings; in exchange the National Park Service received important lands for the visitor center. U.S. Borax owned ninety acres just north of the Furnace Creek Ranch, an ideal location for a new visitor center and campground from both National Park Service and company perspectives. . . . On July 2, 1958, Congress ratified the exchange (3).

Following acquisition of the land, planning efforts were immediately underway. The schematic architectural drawings and principal design for the Visitor Center were drafted in 1958 by Cecil Doty, one of the most prominent NPS architects during the Mission 66 era. As noted by Allaback (2000), “During the Mission 66 program, Doty designed visitor centers for a range of climates and locations, according to varying needs and anticipated visitation. His level of involvement also varied. In some cases, he never visited the site; in some he designed the building and then contract architects prepared the construction drawings (this was what was the case at [Furnace Creek Visitor Center]); and in others, his involvement continued through the final working drawings. At the official conclusion of the Mission 66 program in 1966, Doty received the Department of the Interior's distinguished service award.” The final plans were prepared by the architectural firm of Welton Becket and Associates of San Francisco, but very few modifications appear to have been made to Doty's original schematic design.

Construction of the visitor center quickly followed the design. The construction contract was “awarded to William A. Drennan of Oildale, California. Museum and visitor center construction began May 23, 1959. Based on inspections conducted early in 1960, the National Park Service declared the visitor center complex (including the administrative building, museum, auditorium, and courtyard), employee and visitor parking lots, and surrounding landscape complete on March 24, 1960. Although the new visitor center complex could not be opened immediately as a result of a lack of electrical power required for heating and air conditioning systems. After National Park Service engineers resolved the electric problem, the museum was ready for internal design. The Western Museum Laboratory company completed exhibit installation in October 1960 (4).” Following completion, a dedication ceremony was held on November 12, 1960. Over 2,000 people attended the ceremony including such notable guests as Director Wirth, State Senator Charles Brown, Lord Clitheros of Borax Limited, President Ralph Merritt of the Death Valley ‘49ers, and other distinguished politicians and leaders from California and Washington D.C (5).

Since the completion of the visitor center complex in 1960 there have been some small changes made to the historic district. Just after its opening in 1960 the lawn areas to the south and north of the complex were removed due to pitting and discoloration of the concrete walkways and CMU building walls caused by the high-salinity of the irrigation water supply. During the 1970's, a metal storage shed (non-contributing) was constructed west of the auditorium and the original campground access road that extended from the western end of the parking lot was closed. The alignment of this road is marked today by an asphalt foot path. During the 1980's the reflection pool in the main courtyard was drained and has not held water since. In 1990, two simple, metal street lights were installed in the visitor parking lot. A new visitor sign was added to the entrance of the visitor parking lot in 2004. In 2007, ADA compliant ramps were

added to the existing walkway that crosses the parking lot and islands. The most recent addition to the historic district was a photovoltaic array (non-contributing structure) located north of the administrative building in 2008. The array was determined to not have an adverse effect on the historic district by the California State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO).

ENDNOTES

- (1) Carey & Co. Inc, Determination of Eligibility: Death Valley National Park Visitor Center (Draft).
- (2) Hal K. Rothman, To Ride Alone in a Forever Unpossessed Country: An Administrative History of Death Valley National Park (Draft).
- (3) Ibid.
- (4) Hal K. Rothman, To Ride Alone in a Forever Unpossessed Country: An Administrative History of Death Valley National Park (Draft).
- (5) Carey & Co. Inc, Determination of Eligibility: Death Valley National Park Visitor Center (Draft) (San Francisco, Cal: Prepared for the National Park Service, 2001).



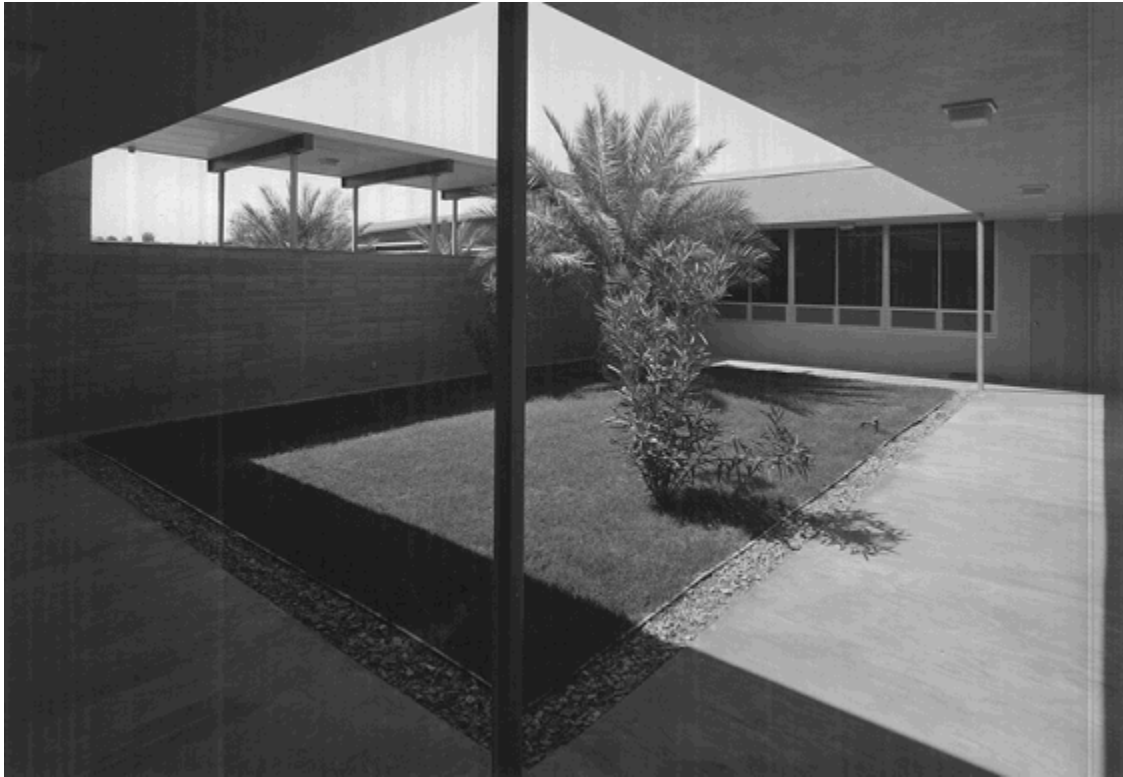
Circa 1960 photograph showing the lawn and visitor parking lot in front of the Museum looking northwest. NEG2892 located at the Death Valley National Park archives. (DEVA Archives, NEG2892)



Circa 1960 photograph showing the lawn and visitor parking lot in front of the Museum looking northeast. Note the louver panels along the southwestern wall of public restrooms (left). #143-010 located at the NPS Technical Information Center, Denver Service



Circa 1960 photograph of the forecourt of the Museum near the lobby entrance, looking northwest. Note the rock garden to the left of the wall and lawn to the right. #143-008 located at the NPS Technical Information Center, Denver Service Center. (Denver S



*Circa 1960 photograph of the Administration Building courtyard looking southwest.
#143-003 located at the NPS Technical Information Center, Denver Service Center.
(Denver Service Center, ETIC, #143-003)*



Circa 1960 photograph of the main courtyard looking southwest toward the back side of the lobby wing of the Museum. The mushroom shaped lighting fixture near the center of the photo was used throughout the courtyard. #143-006 located at the NPS Technica



Circa 1960 photograph of the main courtyard with views towards the Funeral Mountains, looking east. NEG3495 located at the Death Valley National Park archives. (DEVA Archives, NEG3495)

Analysis & Evaluation of Integrity

Analysis and Evaluation of Integrity Narrative Summary:

The Analysis and Evaluation narrative has been adapted from the consensus determination of eligibility (DOE) for the Furnace Creek Visitor Center signed by the California SHPO in May 2010.

The physical condition of the Furnace Creek Visitor Center is good and remains much as it did during the period of significance. Seven landscape characteristics help to convey the historic character of the Furnace Creek Historic District; they include: natural systems and features, spatial organization, buildings and structures, circulation, vegetation, and small scale features.

Natural systems, including climate, geomorphology, and native vegetation create the desert setting within which the visitor center is located and also influenced its development. In response to the desert climate, covered walkways were designed to provide relief from the sun. Buildings were also oriented to take advantage of views of the surrounding mountain ranges. The historic spatial organization of the buildings, structures, open spaces, and circulation systems is still intact and reflects similar layouts developed for other Mission 66 visitor centers in the NPS. The visitor center is comprised of Modern-style buildings, courtyards, and covered walkways that blurred distinctions between interior and exterior spaces. Contributing buildings include the Museum (which contains the exhibit space, lobby, auditorium, public restrooms, and a forecourt) and the Administration Building (which includes an interior courtyard). The Main Courtyard, a contributing site, is located between the two buildings and includes a reflection pool (contributing structure), concrete planters, a zigzag wall, and benches (a contributing small scale feature). Another contributing structure is the colonnade that crosses through the western portion of the Main Courtyard and connects the two buildings. Lawns were historically planted around the perimeter of the building complex and a portion of these lawns still remain. The historic circulation system includes two parking lots, for visitors and employees respectively, and a series of walkways that connect the buildings and various use areas. Together, these remaining landscape features and patterns reinforce the integrity of the historic district as a whole.

The nine-acre historic district includes all buildings, structures, and landscape features associated with the Mission 66 visitor center designed by NPS architect Cecil Doty and constructed in 1959-60. Non-historic intrusions are located mostly in the northern portion of the complex, which is less visible to visitors. The most noticeable intrusions include a metal storage shed (built in the 1970s), a photovoltaic array (built in 2008), and a new visitor center sign added at the entrance to the visitor center parking lot in 2004. The photovoltaic array was determined to have no adverse effect on the historic district by the California State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) on April 28, 2008.

The Furnace Creek Visitor Center retains historic integrity in terms of setting, location, design, workmanship, materials, feeling, and association, which together successfully convey its state-wide significance as a highly intact NPS Mission 66 Visitor complex within the state of California.

The setting and location of the complex is the unique desert landscape of Death Valley, one of the hottest and driest locations in North America. The location is at nearly 200 feet below sea level.

Surrounded by two mountain ranges, the Panamint and Armargosa ranges define the valley and are the focal point of views from the complex. The desert creates a contrasting setting to the green lawns and plantings within the courtyard. All existing historic buildings, structures, and circulation features remain in their original locations.

Influenced by architectural styles of the time, the visitor center retains the distinct mid-twentieth century Modern feeling in its design, workmanship, and use of materials. The historic visitor flow through the complex is still carefully orchestrated, as is the organization and separation of public and administrative spaces. Original materials that are characteristic of the district remain intact including: mauve-tinted CMUs, walkways, courtyard surface, and pool; large expanses of glass in the lobby and auditorium; original interior light fixtures and original museum exhibits; and the plantings; and remaining lawns throughout the complex.

Some changes have been made to the complex, but have had a minimal impact to its overall historic character. The greatest change to the historic buildings has been on the interior of the Administration Building. Although the interior remodeling has impacted flow within the building, the overall building footprint, massing, and exterior appearance remains intact and continues to convey the historic character of the historic district. The non-historic metal storage shed, photovoltaic array, and free-standing visitor center sign by the highway entrance do not significantly impact the overall integrity of the district. On April 28, 2008, the photovoltaic array was determined to have no adverse effect on the historic district by the California SHPO. It is tucked at the back of the Administration Building where it is not highly visible. The metal storage shed is also located in a discreet location. The entrance sign is not in a historic location and is reversible. The historic circulation patterns have changed very little since the period of significance with the original flow of circulation between buildings and parking lots still intact.

With the extreme climate of the Furnace Creek area, it is not surprising that there has been some loss of individual original plants. However, the character of vegetation is not defined by individual plants, but rather the composition of plantings as a whole. Some of the greatest impacts have been the removal of some lawns due to the damage caused to buildings and walkways by their irrigation. The original lawn in front of the complex and the forecourt was replaced with a less water-consumptive, xeriscaped design that included alluvial rock, native shrubs, and forbs. The alluvial rock surface does not provide the green, lush character of the historic lawn, but it still retains the flat horizontal plane that compliments the simple lines of the building architecture. However, over time shrubs and small trees have grown up within the rock and are breaking up the horizontal ground plane. The overall character of the historic planting plan has been retained through the continued use of native and/or drought tolerant plants that were planted historically and the continued maintenance of the remaining lawns.

The Furnace Creek Visitor Center complex including the two original buildings, the central courtyard and the associated designed landscape retain a high degree of integrity to the period of significance.

Landscape Characteristic:

Natural Systems and Features

Natural systems and features are defined as natural aspects that have influenced the

development and physical form of the landscape. Natural systems and features that have significantly influenced the development of the Furnace Creek Visitor Center include climate, topography, and native/invasive vegetation. These features of the natural setting have influenced the design of the Visitor Center when it was completed in 1960, and continue to define the historic setting of the property.

Climate

Of all the natural systems and features influencing this property, climate has had the greatest impact on the design and development of the visitor center. Death Valley is one of the hottest and driest places in North America. Temperatures can exceed 120 degrees Fahrenheit in summer, but in contrast, can be very pleasant in the winter and spring. The average rainfall in the valley is less than 2 inches per year. The sky is typically clear and sunny, but occasional clouds are brought in by winter storms and summer monsoons. It is often windy, especially in the spring, with occasional dust storms. Overall, though, high temperatures and dry weather tend to be the characteristic climate factors associated with the Furnace Creek Area.

The influence of climate on the design of the visitor center resulted in a combination of design aspects that were both in harmony and in contrast to the desert. On one hand, materials and architectural details of the buildings were designed to blend in with the desert landscape, provide shade and protection from the sun, and take advantage of desert and mountain views. The reddish-tan color of the concrete blocks and pavers were intended to blend in with the natural colors of the surrounding desert landscape. The buildings are connected by covered walkways (and a colonnade) that help provide sun protection for people walking between buildings and wide overhanging eaves provide additional shelter and block the sun from beating directly through the windows into the buildings.

On the other hand, the central courtyard was designed with an oasis-like garden, with palms and a small pool, which sharply contrasts with the desert. This is a place where a visitor can get psychological, if not physical, respite from the desert. The buildings are arranged around the courtyard and provide shade along its edges. A 5-foot high wall along its fourth edge gives a sense of separation from the desert landscape while still allowing views out toward the surrounding natural landscape. The courtyard is a verdant garden with (historically) a refreshing pool of water as its focal point – water being one of the most limiting factors for survival in the desert. In addition, the landscape immediately around three sides of the complex was planted with lawn that further extended the feeling of an oasis to the outlying parking lots.

Geomorphology

The topography of the Furnace Creek Visitor Center area was a naturally flat area located within the Furnace Creek wash. As a result, the area required little grading to prepare the construction. In addition, the area is one of the lowest points in North America at almost 200 feet below sea-level. The Amargosa Range rises sharply to the east with the Funeral Mountains (over 5,000 feet) in clear view from the visitor center courtyard and parking lots. The Panamint Range rises to the west of the visitor center with the tallest peak, Telescope

Peak at 11,049 feet high, visible in the distance. The site planning for the complex was influenced by the views of the Funeral Mountains, obvious in the orientation of the auditorium and the courtyard. Historically, park visitors were presented a short film in the auditorium, after which the curtains would be drawn back from the large windows, revealing the panoramic view of the Funeral Mountains.

Native Vegetation

Scrub is the dominant vegetation type found at Furnace Creek, which is the most extensive vegetation type in Death Valley covering approximately three-fourths of the park landscape. The most common native species found in the area include creosote bush (*Larrea tridentata*), desert holly (*Atriplex hymenelytra*), and mesquite (*Prosopis* spp.), which are well-adapted to the dry, hot conditions at the lower elevations of the valley.

The planting plan that was developed for the visitor center included a combination of native and non-native species that were chosen for their adaptations to drier climates (with the exception of the lawn). Some of the native species that were planted included honey mesquite (*Prosopis glandulosa*), desert saltbrush (*Atriplex canescens*), and creosote bush (*Larrea tridentata*).

Spatial Organization

Spatial organization is defined as the three-dimensional organization of physical forms and visual associations in the landscape. The overall design of the Furnace Creek Visitor Center Historic District was informed by early to mid-twentieth century modernism especially as it was manifested in California by well-known architects such as Richard Neutra, Rudolph Schindler, Raphael Soriano, and John Lautner. These features include blurred distinctions between interior and exterior space, strategic use of large expanses of glass, use of mass produced modern building materials left exposed as part of the design aesthetic of the building, flat roofs that extend beyond the building envelope and an emphasis on horizontality. The courtyard exhibits the idiomatic mid-twentieth California modernist landscape design with an emphasis on geometrically patterned hardscape, raised planting beds, and the iconic kidney-shaped pool referencing the works of well-known landscape architects such as Thomas Church, Lawrence Halprin, Robert Royston, and Garrett Eckbo.

The Furnace Creek Visitor Center is accessed from Highway 190 by a short entrance road that leads visitors immediately into a flat, open, gently curved parking area. An employee parking lot located on the north side of the complex. It is hidden from view and is accessed by a separate entrance road, north of the complex. The land immediately around the visitor center complex is flat, punctuated with a scattering of shrubs and small trees.

The Furnace Creek Visitor Center consists of a complex with five distinct functional areas (museum, lobby, auditorium, administrative, and courtyard) distributed into two separate yet interconnected buildings arranged around a mostly rectangular-shaped, mostly hardscaped courtyard. Visitor service areas are distributed in a somewhat irregularly shaped building mass, historically called the “Museum,” that creates the front (south) of the complex. A shallow u-shaped building, historically called the “Administrative Building”, contains NPS administrative functions and forms the back or north edge of a designed openspace called separating the two

buildings and is called the “Main Courtyard”. The tops of palms extending above the rooflines provide hints of the courtyard within. The complex is visually unified through consistent use of integrally-colored split-face concrete masonry unit (CMU) walls, selective use of light colored stucco/plastered panels on portions of walls facing the courtyard, and a flat roofed light-colored covered walk way that also physically connects the buildings with one another.

The overall design of the complex, including the site planning, reflects an attempt to be responsive to the climate and geographic features of the area. Framed views of the Armargosa Range rising sharply to the east, the Funeral Mountains (over 5,000 feet) and the Panamint Range are strategically located within the complex. The influence of climate on the design of the visitor center is evident most obviously in the inclusion of shade structures and vegetation plantings within the Main Courtyard that were intended to provide relief for visitors.

Around the perimeter of the visitor center complex, beyond the buildings and courtyard, lawns were historically planted on the north, west, and south sides of the complex. The effect was an open, level ground plane around the building complex that generally complimented the clean, horizontal lines of the architecture and created a contrast to the desert landscape. Since 1960, the lawn areas to the south and north of the complex have been removed because their irrigation with the local, high-salinity water supply has caused pitting and discoloration of the concrete walkways and CMU building walls.

The visitor entry to the complex is clearly visible from the parking area located to the south of the building. The low, somewhat dark colored horizontal masonry silhouette created by the museum building is softened and counter posed by the L-shaped lightly framed and colored roofed colonnade over the entry walkway that runs along the west side of the exhibit wing and the front of the recessed lobby area. The freestanding side of the colonnade opens onto a small forecourt. The covered walkway extends well beyond the low wall and the exhibit wing to create a free-standing covered entry colonnade. The repetitive rhythm created by the slender columns of the colonnade and the lower height of the roof provide both a more inviting human-scaled feature and an obvious pedestrian circulation path.

The lobby entry features a pair of glazed aluminum doors with aluminum transoms above. The large expanse of windows in the south wall of the lobby faces out to a forecourt area. The forecourt is an “outdoor room,” or extension of the lobby space defined by the exterior walls and covered walkways of the Museum and a low, approximately 3-foot high CMU wall laid out on its southern edge in a saw tooth or a zigzag pattern in plan. The concrete wall along the southern edge of the forecourt creates a partially enclosed feeling within the small courtyard, but still allows views toward the Panamint Mountain Range from the forecourt and from the lobby.

Main Courtyard (Contributing Site)

The Main Courtyard, located between the Museum and the Administration buildings, is a roughly rectangular-shaped space measuring approximately 120 feet by 136 feet. It is partially

enclosed by the exterior walls of surrounding buildings, a colonnade, and a wall. The southern edge of the courtyard is defined by the north elevation of the lobby and exhibit wing of the Museum, the northern edge is defined by the south elevation of the Administration Building, the eastern edge by a CMU wall, and the western edge by the east elevation of the auditorium and a colonnade that runs between the lobby and the Administration Building. The auditorium splays away from the other enclosing walls, providing a softened open feel to the courtyard. The wall that defines the eastern edge of the main courtyard follows a saw-tooth alignment that follows the canted grid of the concrete squares. It is approximately 5 feet tall and composed of the same mauve-tinted concrete block used to construct the buildings. A plaque honoring Stephen Mather was historically attached at the wall's northernmost end and still remains. Original light fixtures are located at each corner of the saw-tooth pattern along the base of the wall. Historically, the lights were used to illuminate the courtyard at night, but they have not been in use for some time.

The courtyard can be divided into three zones: covered transitional space between indoor and outdoor space where visitors might stand or sit in the shade, covered circulation between the two buildings, and open, uncovered space. The roofs extend from the surrounding buildings into the courtyard to create large shaded areas that create a transition between exterior and interior space and provide outdoor spaces protected from the sun. These roof extensions in combination with the colonnade between the lobby and the Administration Building create covered circulation paths around the courtyard. The central portion of the courtyard is open and exposed to the elements.

The surface of the courtyard has a canted grid of concrete squares interspersed with planting areas and areas of lawn. The angle of this canted grid was drawn directly from the north-south centerline of the auditorium. Formally, the grid is used to unify or order the courtyard. The areas defined for vegetation are all defined by the grid of the concrete, as is the zigzag layout of the concrete wall to the east. The concrete squares measure 8 feet by 8 feet, alternating with square of exposed aggregate squares and mauve-tinted squares. The mauve-tinted concrete squares have a broom finish that alternates ninety degrees every other row, reflecting a typical pattern found on the concrete walkways throughout the complex. A two-inch wide redwood divider is located between each square of concrete. Some concrete squares have experienced significant erosion or pitting from high-saline water runoff from adjacent lawn irrigation. Other concrete squares are cracked and exhibit general wear. A kidney-shaped reflection pool and fountain, and the raised planters are located within the Main Courtyard.

Plant beds and lawn areas are interspersed throughout the grid pattern of the courtyard paving. Four square, raised planters exist within the grid pattern of concrete squares of the main courtyard. The planters are constructed of mauve-tinted concrete. They measure 8.5 feet by 8.5 feet wide at the top with a 6.5 feet by 6.5 feet opening for plants. The concrete walls are 1.5 feet tall and 12 inches thick at the top. They taper to approximately 8 inches thick at their base.

The central courtyard includes vegetation (palms, shrubs, and lawn) and a small reflection pool and fountain that provided visual relief from the hot and dry desert landscape. The pool has not been filled with water since the 1980s.

Character-defining Features:

Feature: Main Courtyard (Site)

Feature Identification Number: 147491

Type of Feature Contribution: Contributing

Landscape Characteristic Graphics:



Photograph of the main courtyard, looking northeast. (PWRO 2009)



Photograph of the main courtyard, looking southwest toward the back of the lobby wing of the Museum. (PWRO 2009)

Buildings and Structures

Buildings are defined as those features that are built primarily for sheltering any form of human activity. Structures are defined as features constructed for purposes other than sheltering human activities. Most of the historic buildings and structures located within the boundaries of the Furnace Creek Visitor Center Historic District were constructed from 1959-1960, within the period of significance. There are two buildings (the museum and administrative building) and two structures (the colonnade and reflection pool/fountain) that contribute to the cultural landscape. There is one building (metal shed) and structure (the photovoltaic array) that are non-contributors.

Museum (Contributing Building)

The Museum is an irregularly shaped building mass with three primary spaces (exhibit wing, lobby, and auditorium). A varied roof line and profile provide visual demarcation of the functional areas within the building.

Starting from the east, the exhibit area is contained within a double-height, single-story flat-roofed masonry building form oriented with the longitudinal axis running north/south. The

east, south and west elevations are solid masonry walls of split-face CMU laid in a stack-bond pattern. The lobby is connected to the north end of the west wall of the exhibit wing. The long south facing wall consists of floor to ceiling fixed aluminum-frame windows across the entire length and provides views out across the landscape toward the Panamint Range in the distance and into the forecourt. The north wall of the lobby, faces the courtyard and provides public access to the outdoor space. The auditorium is connected to the west end of the lobby space. Most of the auditorium's building mass forms the west edge of the courtyard with only a small portion extending south beyond the connecting lobby area. The auditorium features a gabled roof with open eaves that expose steel rafter tails. The height of the ridge beam rises from south to north. Each rafter is supported on the exterior wall by a pilaster that consists of a square tube column enclosed in reinforced split-faced block with mortared cavities. The east elevation of the auditorium, which faces the main courtyard, features several large, sliding doors. The space immediately outside the sliding doors is a covered outdoor seating area with an adjacent covered colonnade that leads north to the Administration Building.

The public restrooms are located at and connected to the south end of the auditorium by an open ended covered hallway that features steel vertical louvers. The south wall of the restroom is a solid CMU wall, while the east and west elevations exhibit a recessed wall with a small rectangular slider window set high in the wall plane. Both walls are finished with cement plaster painted off-white. These elevations also feature a row of vertical porcelain metal louvers that create a screen in front of each wall. The row of louvers aligns with the end of the perpendicular CMU walls.

The main entrance to the Museum has an L-shaped lightly framed and colored roofed colonnade over the entry walkway that runs along the west side of the exhibit wing and the front of the recessed lobby area. The freestanding side of the colonnade opens onto a small forecourt. The large expanse of windows in the lobby face out onto this area at the north side and a low CMU wall laid out in a saw tooth or a zigzag pattern in plan defines the southern edge of the forecourt area. The covered walkway extends well beyond the low wall and the exhibit wing to create a free-standing covered entry colonnade. The colonnade has a flat built-up roof finished on the underside with enameled steel panels and original light fixtures. A series of frames spaced approximately 16 feet on center that consist of slender, square metal-tube columns, and a small steel I-beam support the roof. The columns, like the louvers, originally were painted blue-green; they are now painted off-white.

The forecourt is an "outdoor room," or extension of the lobby space defined by the exterior walls and covered walkways of the Museum and a low, approximately 3-foot high CMU wall laid out on its southern edge in a saw tooth or a zigzag pattern in plan. The concrete wall along the southern edge of the forecourt creates a partially enclosed feeling within the small courtyard, but still allows views toward the Panamint Mountain Range from the forecourt and from the lobby.

Administration Building (Contributing Building)

The Administration Building, located on the north side of the complex, contains NPS

administrative functions. The building has a shallow U-shaped form with the legs extended toward the Museum building. The opening of the “u” is an unroofed interior courtyard separated from the larger main courtyard by mid-height CMU wall that is meant to serve as a separate, private outdoor space for park staff.

The main entrance to this building is near the southwest corner. To the west of the entry door is a series of seven tinted, fixed aluminum sash windows with operable hopper units beneath. To the east of the entry are two more of these windows. A covered walkway follows the south elevation of this office building which faces the main courtyard. The inner courtyard is an “outdoor room” or extension of the administration space. Ribbon windows on the south and north walls and the north portion of the east and west walls facing the small courtyard provide natural light and views from the administrative offices. These bands of windows are set in the same type of cement plaster finished walls that surround all of the fenestrations on the courtyard side of the buildings. The southern edge is defined and separated from the larger main courtyard by an approximately 6.5-foot tall CMU wall and the roofline of a covered walkway on the other side of the wall.

The roof and bulkhead of the Administration Building extends into the courtyard for approximately 4 feet along the north and east side to create a covered walkway between the doors. The rear, north elevation, features two employee entrance doors and a ribbon of twenty aluminum sash windows, identical to those found at the south elevation. The exterior surfaces of the courtyard, the south entrance, and most of the north elevation of the Administration Building are finished with smooth concrete plaster. Otherwise the Administration Building exterior walls are constructed of the same split-face CMUs used throughout the complex.

Colonnade (Contributing Structure)

A covered colonnade demarcates a travel path between the Administration Building and the Museum and connects to the Administration Building at its main entry. This colonnade is of similar design to the other colonnaded walkways and covered outdoor areas with its original light fixtures; however, it is approximately two feet lower in height and narrower in width. The column spacing is the same; however, the roof is framed differently. Like the building it serves, the colonnade marks a secondary path of travel that most visitors will not take; the lower height and smaller scale of this colonnade reflect its function.

Like the other covered walkways, the colonnade has a flat built-up roof finished on the underside with enameled steel panels and original light fixtures. A series of frames spaced approximately 16 feet on center that consist of slender, square metal-tube columns. The columns, like the louvers, originally were painted blue-green; they are now painted off-white.

Reflection Pool and Fountain (Contributing Structure)

The dominant feature of the main courtyard is the small kidney-shaped reflection pool and fountain. The kidney-shaped pool provided relief to the grid and, when filled with water, relief from hardscaped surfaces of the courtyard and desert landscape beyond, however, the pool has not been filled since the 1980s. The structure is constructed of a mauve-tinted concrete and has two sections that held water: a smaller, square pool that flowed into a larger kidney-shaped

pool. The smaller, square pool measures approximately 8 feet square and 2 feet tall. The walls are 1-foot thick leaving an opening for the pool that is approximately 6 feet square. The depth of water in this pool was approximately 1 foot and 4 inches deep. The water flowed out of the square pool into the kidney-shaped pool through three copper-lined rectangular openings that measure 12 inches wide by 2 inches tall. The kidney-shaped portion of the pool is defined by a 12-inch high concrete wall. Both front and back sides of the wall angle inward so that it tapers from 12 inches thick at the top to 8 inches at its base. The depth of the water in the pool was approximately 9 inches. An approximately 3-foot by 3-foot pump house extends from the west side of the small, square pool at an angle. It housed a re-circulating pump, has an intake opening that measures 12 inches wide by 3 inches tall, and a plywood access door.

Storage Shed (Non-contributing Building)

The metal storage shed northwest of the auditorium was probably constructed in the 1970s. It is rectangular in plan, measuring approximately 25 feet by 20 feet. It has a low-pitched gable metal roof. On the east elevation, the shed has a garage door, a single panel door, and a small window. The north elevation has a single panel door. Siding is galvanized metal painted tan.

Photovoltaic Array (Non-contributing Structure)

A photovoltaic (PV) array was installed north of the Administration Building in 2008. It consists of four rows of PV panels arranged on support structures, tilted at a 30 degree angle towards the south. The rows of panels are 7 feet tall and spaced 12 feet apart.

Character-defining Features:

Feature: Furnace Creek Visitor Center Museum Bldg

Feature Identification Number: 147417

Type of Feature Contribution: Contributing

IDLCS Number: 823626

Feature: Furnace Creek Visitor Center Admin Bldg

Feature Identification Number: 147421

Type of Feature Contribution: Contributing

IDLCS Number: 823627

Feature: Furnace Creek Visitor Center Colonnade

Feature Identification Number: 147423

Type of Feature Contribution: Contributing

IDLCS Number: 823628

Feature: Furnace Creek VC Pool and Fountain

Feature Identification Number: 147425

Furnace Creek Visitor Center
Death Valley National Park

Type of Feature Contribution: Contributing

IDLCS Number: 823629

Feature: Furnace Creek Visitor Center Storage Shd

Feature Identification Number: 147427

Type of Feature Contribution: Non Contributing

Feature: Furnace Creek VC Photovoltaic Array

Feature Identification Number: 147429

Type of Feature Contribution: Non Contributing

Landscape Characteristic Graphics:



Photograph of Furnace Creek Visitor Center complex from the visitor parking lot, looking northwest. (PWRO 2009)



Photograph of Furnace Creek Visitor Center complex from the visitor parking lot, looking northeast. (PWRO 2009)



Photograph of small forecourt near lobby entrance of the Museum Building, looking northeast. The original lawn has been replaced with alluvial rock, but the wall and the palm still remain. (PWRO 2009)



Photograph of the Administration Building south entrance, looking northeast. (PWRO 2009)



Photograph of the Administration Building courtyard looking southwest. (PWRO 2009)



Photograph of the north elevation of the auditorium (right) and the colonnade (left) through to the main courtyard. (PWRO 2009)



Photograph of the colonnade from the lobby to the administration Building south entrance, looking north. (PWRO 2009)



Photograph of the Furnace Creek Visitor Center main courtyard reflection pool and fountain. (PWRO 2009)

Circulation

Circulation is defined as spaces and features which constitute systems of movement within a landscape. Contributing circulation features at Furnace Creek Visitor Center include the exterior pedestrian circulation around the museum and administrative building and vehicle and pedestrian circulation associated with both visitor and employee parking. The employee parking exit road was not in the original plan for the historic district and is not a contributing feature.

Exterior Pedestrian Circulation (Contributing)

As with most Mission 66 visitor centers, the pedestrian circulation at the Furnace Creek Visitor Center is a key character defining feature of the design, in this case both terms of layout as well as architectural and formal expression. The system of walkways through the visitor complex is highly intact from the period of significance with very few walkways being replaced or added since then. The original system of exterior walkways designed and constructed during the period of significance includes five concrete paved walks that connect the parking lots and buildings. Four of the walkways are associated with the museum building and a fifth walkway is associated with the Administration Building, all five are described below.

The walkways tend to follow straight lines with sharp, angular turns. (The only curvilinear walkway is the sidewalk along the main parking lot, described below.) The walkways are constructed with mauve-tinted concrete. They typically measure 8 feet wide, except the

walkway leading to the front entrance of the lobby (approximately 16 feet wide) from the entrance to the lobby to the public restrooms (approximately 12 feet wide). The walkways are scored every 4 feet, creating 4-foot by 4-foot squares. The broom-finish on the concrete squares alternates direction 90 degrees on each square.

From the visitor parking lot a walkway leads to the lobby entrance and to the public restrooms and auditorium from the lobby entrance. A covered structure similar to the colonnade reaches out from the lobby entrance extending past the museum building to shade the walkway. On the north side of the Museum a similar covered walkway extends the length of the Museum and Lobby. This covered walkway meets the colonnade (which extends from the Lobby to the Administration Building) and provides shaded pedestrian circulation from the Museum to the Auditorium.

One non-historic walkway has been added to the northwest elevation of the auditorium. It is constructed of gray concrete with a wavy-brushed finish and incorporates a historic mauve-tinted concrete pad adjacent to an access door. At the northwest corner of the Administration Building, a gray concrete walkway has replaced a historic walkway from the employee parking lot to an access door. Further east, along the same elevation, a portion of a second walkway has been repaired, but some of the original walkway still remains in a deteriorated state. In addition, the historically concrete paved access area behind the northeast wing of the building has been removed, regraded, and paved with asphalt.

Visitor Parking Lot, Access Road, and Sidewalks (Contributing)

Parking areas planned and constructed as part of Mission 66 visitor centers were an integral part of the visitor center concept. Historian Sara Allaback identified this underlying planning principle for Mission 66 visitor centers in her 2000 Mission 66 Visitor Center Study: “Like the contemporary ‘shopping center,’ the visitor center made it possible for people to park their cars at a central point, and have ready access to a range of services or attractions.”

As with most Mission 66 visitor centers, the parking area is easily accessible from a primary access roadway, in this case Highway 190. Off of the highway, a short, curved access road leads into the main parking lot south of the visitor center complex. The parking lot is crescent-shaped and divided into two parking areas by a narrow parking island. It is separated from the Airport Road to the south (that was used historically to access the Furnace Creek Campground in addition to the Airport) by a second, wider parking island. The parking area closest to the Museum building measures 45 feet wide and approximately 400 feet long. The second parking area is 65 feet wide and approximately 600 feet in length. The lot is surfaced with asphalt. Its edges are defined by concrete curbs and sidewalks. The curbs are 6 inches tall and constructed of mauve-tinted concrete. Some of the curbs have concrete gutters that extend 1 foot from the base of the curbs.

The parking island closest to the Museum building and lobby is approximately 15 feet wide and filled with gravel and native shrubs. Both ends of the island are defined by widened circular

shapes that help to define the parking areas from the access road. The other parking island measures approximately 30 feet wide near the entrance of the parking lot, but gradually widens until it meets up with the existing grade to the west and the south of the parking lot. This island is defined by concrete curbs and gutters along its northern edge only. Its eastern terminus is defined by a widened circular shape that helps to define the parking area from the access road.

Original sidewalks and vehicular patterns throughout the parking lot are in the same locations and consist of their original or compatible materials. In line with the main entrance of the lobby, a walkway crosses the parking lot and islands, with mauve-tinted concrete surface and curbs jutting into the parking areas perpendicular to the vehicular flow. This walkway is approximately 15 feet wide. More recently, in 2007, the walkway was altered to add ADA compliant ramps. The ramps were constructed using mauve-tinted concrete that blend well with historic walkways. These changes have had minimal impact on the visual character and flow of the parking lot because they are constructed of compatible materials and have a low visual impact on the overall character of the parking lot.

Another sidewalk follows the northern edge of the parking lot, leading pedestrians to the main entrance. This sidewalk is also constructed of mauve-tinted concrete. It measure 8 feet wide with scores spaced 4 feet apart. The broom finish alternates direction 90 degrees every 4-foot section. A small asphalt ramp has been added to the western end of the sidewalk. To the east, the sidewalk has been extended to the bike path along Highway 190 with a 6-foot wide, asphalt-surfaced sidewalk and concrete curb. This portion of the sidewalk is an incompatible addition to the parking lot.

Vehicular traffic through the parking lot remains one-way traffic circulating in a counter-clockwise direction. However, in the 1970s, a campground access road that extended from the western end of the parking lot was closed because the campground entrance was moved, making this entrance road obsolete. The historic alignment of the road is still marked by a 4-foot wide, asphalt foot path.

Despite some changes, the overall layout of the parking lot is nearly identical as it was designed and constructed during the period of significance. The parking lot is still an open area that allows unobstructed views of the Museum building from the highway and the parking lot, it reflects the same materials, and serves its historic purpose as the main parking area for visitors.

Employee Parking Lot, Access Road, and Walkway (Contributing)

The employee parking lot is located to the north of the Administration Building. It is accessed by a one-way curvilinear road from Highway 190, north of the building complex. The access road curves southwest to the parking lot where the road widens to accommodate perpendicular parking on both sides. The western edge of the parking lot is defined with a historic 6-inch tall, mauve-tinted concrete curb. Since the period of significance, the parking area was widened to the east an additional 10 feet or so. This widened area is a compatible addition to the parking lot, using historically appropriate materials and retaining the overall rectangular form of the

parking lot. There is a concrete walkway that leads from the southwest corner of the employee parking area to the northwest corner of the courtyard paving. This walkway reflects the same dimensions, material, and finish texture as other walkways throughout the complex: constructed with mauve-tinted concrete, measures 8 feet wide, scored every 4 feet, creating 4-foot by 4-foot squares, and the broom-finish on the concrete squares alternates direction 90 degrees on each square. The overall character, location, materials, and function of the parking area, entrance road, and walkway remain relatively the same. The exit road is a non-contributing structure described below.

Employee Parking Exit Road (Non-contributing)

At the south end of the employee parking lot is a narrow, one-way exit road to Highway 190 that was not a part of the original plan of the historic district. In the same vicinity there was originally an 8-foot wide access path for the back side of the Administration Building that terminated at the northeast corner of the building (The historic surface of this access path is unknown). It was later widened, extended to the highway, paved with asphalt, and used a major vehicular route for park employees. These changes have significantly altered the original access route and it no longer retains its historic character.

Character-defining Features:

Feature: Furnace Creek VC Exterior Ped. Circ.

Feature Identification Number: 147431

Type of Feature Contribution: Contributing

IDLCS Number: 823628

Feature: Furnace Crk VC Prk Lot, Access Rd, Sidwk

Feature Identification Number: 147433

Type of Feature Contribution: Contributing

IDLCS Number: 823628

Feature: Furnace Ck VC Employee Pking and Circ

Feature Identification Number: 147435

Type of Feature Contribution: Contributing

IDLCS Number: 823628

Feature: Furnace Ck VC Employee Pking Exit Rd

Feature Identification Number: 147437

Type of Feature Contribution: Non Contributing

Landscape Characteristic Graphics:



Photograph showing employee parking lot, looking northwest. (PWRO 2009)



Photograph of visitor parking lot, looking northwest. (PWRO 2009).

Vegetation

The Vegetation section documents human manipulated vegetation: deciduous and evergreen trees, shrubs, vines, ground covers and herbaceous plants, and plant communities, whether indigenous or introduced in the landscape. The original planting plan for the Furnace Creek Visitor Center emphasizes the horizontality of the landscape and buildings through flat lawns and alluvial rock surfaces, while also creating sheltered spaces that protect the visitor from the harsh climatic conditions. The original plantings in the historic district included some invasive species, these as well as other invasive species are managed by Death Valley National Park.

Lawns

Historic lawns were planted on the north, west, and south side of the visitor center complex. The lawns to the north and south were removed because their irrigation with the local, high-salinity water supply has caused pitting and discoloration of the concrete walkways and CMU building walls. To avoid continuing damage, the lawns at the southern and northern edges of the complex and in the forecourt were replaced with a less water-consumptive, xeriscaped design that included alluvial rock, native shrubs, and forbs. The alluvial rock surface does not provide the green, lush character of the historic lawn, but it still retains the simple, flat horizontal plane that is compatible with the architecture. However, over time shrubs and small

trees have grown up within the gravel which are breaking up the horizontal qualities of the ground plane. The lawns were historically used for picnicking and gatherings; the remaining ones continue to be used in the same way today.

Main Courtyard

Several of the plantings and all the lawn areas are original to the main courtyard. To the north of the reflection pool is a planting area with the original palms, mesquite, and lawn. A prominent lawn area with a geometric zigzag pattern that echoes the CMU wall is located in the eastern portion of the courtyard. Original plantings within this lawn area include two date palms, a mesquite, and a small sage. Two original date palms remain near the southeastern wall of the Administration Building. One original fan palm remains near the northeastern wall of the auditorium. All other existing plantings are replacements since 1960. The replacement plantings are compatible with the historic character because they are drawn from the same plant palette used in the historical planting plans for the complex. The planting plan included a combination of native and non-native species that were chosen for their adaptations to drier climates with the exception of the lawn. Some of the native species that were planted included honey mesquite (*Prosopis glandulosa*), desert saltbrush (*Atriplex canescens*), and creosote bush (*Larrea tridentata*). Drought tolerant non-native plants included plants such as date palms (*Phoenix dactylifera*), fan palms (*Washingtonia filifera*), oleander (*Nerium oleander*), athel trees (*Tamarix aphylla*), and purple sage (*Salvia leucophylla*). Lawn areas that have since been replaced with compacted soil or other vegetation include the two planting beds along the southern wall of the Administration Building, and five small planting beds along the eastern saw-tooth wall.

Museum Forecourt

Historically, this small courtyard was planted with lawn, a fan palm (*Washington filifera*) near the public restrooms, and oleander (*Nerium oleander*) along the wall. The fan palm still remains, but the lawn and oleander have been removed and replaced with alluvial stone.

Administrative Building Courtyard

This small courtyard formed by the u-shaped administrative building, which was historically surfaced with lawn, is now surfaced with a sandy material and has a historic date palm (*Phoenix dactylifera*). Historic photos show the small area planted with lawn, a runoff strip with loose pebbles between the grass area and concrete walkway, a date palm, and oleander.

Visitor Parking Lot

During the historic period, the parking islands were filled with alluvial rock and graded level with the curbs. The islands were void of vegetation with the exception of a few previously existing stands of athel trees (*Tamarix aphylla*) that were retained at the west end of the parking lot, according to design drawings. Athel trees have been historically planted, typically as a windbreak or sand-break, in a number of locations in the park such as the Furnace Creek area and Death Valley Junction. These are one of the few trees to thrive and provide shade in the hot desert setting, but they are non-native and water-consumptive. Today, the parking

islands are still filled with alluvial rock, but it has been regraded in areas with low-undulating berms. Low-growing native shrubs dot the islands and the eastern end still has clusters of athel trees. In addition, two simple, metal street lights were installed by 1990, providing light at night, but have low visual impact during the day. Changes to the parking islands have been minimal, using compatible materials, and are easily reversible. The islands' overall shape, edging, materials, and function remain intact.

Perimeter Plantings

Along the western edge of the complex is a historic lawn area that still remains. Within this lawn area, near the northwest corner of the Administration Building, is a historic honey mesquite (one of two that were historically planted in that area). Along the lawn's northwestern edge are two fan palms (*Washingtonia filifera*) that are in line with several other fan palms to the north along the western edge of the employee parking lot. This row of fan palms does not appear in historic photos and are probably not historic. However, they are compatible with historic setting because they are planted where the original planting plan called for a row of mesquite to demarcate the edge of the employee parking lot and they are representative of the plant species historically planted within the complex. (A fan palm was historically planted in the forecourt near the Museum entrance and another near the northern end of the auditorium, both of which still remain.)

Invasive Vegetation

Tamarisk (*Tamarix ramosissima*), or salt cedar, is an introduced shrub or small tree found in the area that spreads aggressively and competes with native vegetation. The park has a management plan to control the spread of this invasive plant. A larger relative, the athel (*T. Aphylla*), has been historically planted, typically as a windbreak or sand-break, in a number of locations in the park (e.g. near Furnace Creek, Death Valley Junction, and Shoshone). Although not as invasive as tamarisk, the athel is also believed to be an invader of native habitats. Death Valley National Park is reducing the potential for reintroduction by encouraging the use of other types of shade trees, landscaping, and windbreak plantings in developed areas within and outside the park. Prior to construction of the visitor center, existing vegetation was cleared at the site except for a few stands of athel trees (*T. aphylla*), which were retained at the west end of the parking lot, according to design drawings.

Landscape Characteristic Graphics:



Photograph showing the juxtaposition of the historic lawn (left) and the non-historic xeriscape (right), looking northeast. (PWRO 2009)



Photograph showing vegetation within the main courtyard, looking northwest. (PWRO 2009)

Small Scale Features

Small-scale features refer to the elements which provide detail and diversity for both functional needs and aesthetic concerns in the landscape. The contributing small-scale features to the district are concrete and metal benches distributed in the main courtyard. Non-contributing features include the visitor center sign and flagpole, as well as other miscellaneous items dispersed throughout the district including; wood and metal benches, garbage cans, recycling cans, propane tanks, picnic tables, satellite dishes, and contemporary road signs. In addition, most landscape light fixtures have been replaced or removed overtime. Historically, the courtyard was scattered with mushroom-shaped light fixtures that have since been removed. A few historic light fixtures still remain, but are no longer in use and/or are damaged.

Concrete and Metal Benches (Contributing)

Interspersed throughout the courtyard are the original, moveable benches constructed of concrete and metal. The seats are pre-cast concrete slabs, measuring 8 feet long by 1-foot and 3-inches wide, resting on three curvilinear, decorative leg supports made of steel or wrought iron.

Visitor Center Sign (Non-contributing)

A non-historic sign was placed at the northwest corner of visitor parking lot entrance and Highway 190 junction in 2004. It is a two-sided sign placed perpendicular to the highway to be visible to travelers approaching from either direction. The sign is a trapezoidal shape. It has a mortared stone base with the NPS logo attached to both sides. It has a wood and metal frame that rises from the base to support a board that reads "Furnace Creek Visitor Center."

Flagpole (Non-contributing Object)

The original flagpole was removed sometime after the period of significance (but prior to 1990) and a new one installed approximately 30 feet north.

Character-defining Features:

Feature: Furnace Creek VC Concrete & Metal Benches

Feature Identification Number: 147439

Type of Feature Contribution: Contributing

IDLCS Number: 823629

Feature: Furnace Creek VC Visitor Center Sign

Feature Identification Number: 147441

Type of Feature Contribution: Non Contributing

Feature: Furnace Creek Visitor Center Flagpole

Feature Identification Number: 147443

Type of Feature Contribution: Non Contributing

Condition

Condition Assessment and Impacts

Condition Assessment: Good

Assessment Date: 07/30/2010

Condition Assessment Explanatory Narrative:

Through the analysis and evaluation of landscape characteristics and features, it has been determined that the Furnace Creek Visitor Center is in “Good” condition. The landscape shows evidence of minor disturbances and deterioration by natural and/or human forces, and some degree of corrective action is needed within 3-5 years to prevent further harm to its cultural and/or natural values.

There are three specific impacts that may be in need of corrective action. The growth of volunteer shrubs and tree species (that are not part of the planned xeriscape) growing around the front façade of the Museum Building where it was once planted with lawn are detracting from the horizontality of the original design. Spray from the high-salinity irrigation water is causing pitting and discoloration of the concrete walkways and CMU exterior building walls. Third, excess irrigation water is puddling around the base of the raised concrete planters in the main courtyard and may cause uneven settling of the pavers and/or the raised planters.

Stabilization Measures:

The following stabilization measures have been identified for the Furnace Creek Visitor Center:

Irrigation

- Redirect irrigation heads to minimize overspray onto concrete walkways and buildings.

Drainage

- Ensure rainwater and any irrigation overspray drains freely to catch basins within the main courtyard.

Impacts

Type of Impact: Other

Other Impact: Water Damage

External or Internal: Internal

Impact Description: Spray from the high-salinity irrigation water is causing pitting and discoloration of the concrete walkways and CMU exterior building walls.

Type of Impact: Improper Drainage

External or Internal:

Internal

Impact Description:

Excess irrigation water is puddling around the base of the raised concrete planters in the main courtyard and may cause uneven settling of the pavers and/or raised planters.

Treatment

Treatment

Approved Treatment: Preservation

Approved Treatment Document: General Management Plan

Approved Treatment Document Explanatory Narrative:

Although the General Management Plan does not specifically address the Furnace Creek Visitor Center, it generally directs the preservation of cultural and historic resources at Death Valley National Park. One of its three specifically stated purposes is to “preserve the cultural resources of the California desert associated with prehistoric, historic and contemporary Native American culture, patterns of western exploration, settlement and mining endeavors.”

Bibliography and Supplemental Information

Bibliography

Citation Title: See Supplemental Information for complete bibliography.

Supplemental Information

Title: Bibliography

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Title: Historic Context for the Mission 66 Program and Architecture

Description: Mission 66: The Significance of the Program (1)

The developed areas of the American national park system are mainly the result of two busy periods of modernization overseen by the National Park Service. While older parks, such as Yellowstone, Glacier, and Grand Canyon, boast hotels and other remnants from the earlier railroad era, the construction of the modern national park system really got underway in the mid-1920s, when Congress began making generous appropriations for the development of public facilities in national parks, particularly for park roads. This was the “rustic” era of park architecture and landscape design, when Park Service designers and engineers developed a unique approach to “harmonious” site development and “landscape engineering.” During the 1930s, the agency oversaw the expansion and development not only of the national park system, but of almost every state park system, as well. Then World War II, followed by low postwar budgets, caused an extended hiatus in federal park sponsorship.

When Congress was again ready to increase park spending in the mid-1950s, a second major wave of national park development occurred. This postwar era of park development was structured around a ten-year program proposed in 1955 by Park Service director Conrad L. Wirth. Characterized by Wirth as “MISSION 66,” the program was intended to modernize, enlarge, and even reinvent the park system by 1966, the fiftieth anniversary of the National Park Service. Wirth and his team of planners proposed a new strategy for park planning throughout the entire system and a budget that convinced Congress to immediately increase national park appropriations and to continue further increases for the next decade. The program responded to a generally perceived crisis that resulted from an extended period of low park funding combined with heavy public use of the park system.

By the late 1940s, a ruinous combination of low budgets and unprecedented numbers of visitors had depreciated the experience of national parks for millions. In the developed zones of parks, or “front country,” people found traffic jams, long lines outside bathrooms, overflowing parking lots, and no available accommodations or campgrounds. With too few rangers, superintendents could not adequately protect their parks, much less staff their museums and interpretive programs. Many park concessioners had suffered economically during the Depression and had shut down during World War II. Now they struggled unsuccessfully to reopen aging and inadequate hotels and restaurants for the sudden tide of visitors. Both the Park Service and park concessioners were forced to manage far larger numbers of people with far fewer staff. Limited public facilities in poor repair, little or no office space or support, and a shortage of decent housing for employees made their tasks more onerous. Almost immediately following “VJ Day” in August of 1945, in other words, national park managers were exposed to the overcrowding, limited budgets, understaffing, and other difficulties.

The inauguration of Dwight D. Eisenhower and the end of the Korean War in 1953 began the changes that would lead to Mission 66. As armed forces demobilized and recession threatened, Eisenhower looked more favorably on public works spending that would stimulate the economy. The extensive bad press the national parks were receiving was also being noticed. After more than three years as director of the Park Service, Conrad L. Wirth decided the hour had come, and he suddenly proposed a ten-year capital program to modernize and expand the national park system. He assembled key staff into special “working” and “steering” committees and instructed his park superintendents to begin preparing “prospectuses” of the work they needed done in their parks. Within eight months they had outlined the scope of the Mission 66 program with preliminary budget estimates. The name of the program (Wirth’s inspiration) captured the desired sense of a crisis, but by evoking the wartime urgency of a “mission,” not a return to New Deal social programs. In any case, the name and the image proved effective. Eisenhower personally endorsed Mission 66 after Wirth presented the program during a cabinet meeting in January of 1956. That spring, Congress indicated a willingness to go along with the over \$700 million budget for the ten-year program by increasing the agency’s budget for fiscal year 1957 to \$68 million (up from \$32 million in 1955). Further increases led to annual budgets greater than \$100 million by 1962. The planning and policy initiative of Mission 66 proved to be the most effective means of increasing Park Service appropriations since the New Deal emergency spending legislation of the 1930s (2).

By 1966, Congress had spent about \$1 billion on land acquisition, new staff and training, general operations, and all types of construction activity in national parks. Seventy new “units” of the park system were authorized between 1956 and 1966. The Park Service constructed or reconstructed thousands of miles of roads and hundreds of miles of trails. Many parks received adequate water, sewer, and electric service for the first time. Hundreds of park residences, administration buildings, comfort stations, and other buildings for public use and park administration were built. Mission 66 expanded and professionalized Park Service staff and established new “training centers.” Above all, Mission 66 funded more than 100 “visitor centers,” a new building type invented by the agency’s planners and architects, which was at the heart of revised park “master planning” goals. A new identity for the agency was forged, represented by a new idiom of park architecture and by the “arrowhead” agency logo, introduced in 1951 and featured prominently on buildings, publications, and redesigned uniforms (3). Although the development (or as was often the case, the redevelopment) of national parks at this scale was almost always beset by controversy, in the end Mission 66 accomplished much of what Wirth intended: the reinvention of the national park system, the National Park Service—and to some extent the national park idea—to meet the exigencies of postwar American society.

Mission 66 was greeted with enthusiasm by Congress, government officials, and by many preservationists. From the beginning, however, the program was also criticized for emphasizing capital construction as a one-dimensional solution to the complex social and environmental problems park managers were facing. Critics also

complained that Mission 66 construction abandoned the architectural theory and building technology of the rustic era. Postwar park architecture made full use of steel, concrete, prefabricated elements, unusual fenestration, climate control, and other aspects of contemporary architecture. Distinctive new buildings adapted various strains of postwar American modernism to the programmatic and aesthetic requirements of the national parks (4). The new park architecture also expressed contemporary planning ideas. The visitor center, for example, had similarities to shopping centers and urban cultural centers, since it also sought to make centralized services accessible to large numbers of people in cars. The Interstate Highway system also influenced Mission 66 road design, and sometimes determined the locations of park developed areas. For preservationists who decried these trends and changes in the American landscape in general, seeing their expression in the frontcountry of national parks was deeply disturbing. If Mission 66 began in an atmosphere of intense optimism, the program soon led the Park Service into bitter controversy, as the postwar environmental movement began to take shape and exert its strength. Mission 66 hastened the advent of environmentalism by creating genuine concern that the Park Service was “overdeveloping” parks while failing to take other steps to preserve “wilderness.”

But for Conrad Wirth, his chief landscape architect, Thomas C. Vint, and the other planners and designers of Mission 66, these critics evaded the fundamental challenge at the heart of managing national parks. From Vint’s point of view, merely designating parks as wilderness would not “solve the national park problem” because “our national park law includes the words ‘for the benefit and enjoyment of the people (5).’” Whether in the case of scenic or historic places, Vint believed preserving a place as a park required providing for public access. In the 1950s, either this compromise would be renegotiated to serve a larger public, or public access would have to be significantly restricted in some way. Wirth, Vint, and many of their colleagues recoiled at the idea that parks would no longer be truly public landscapes, preserved for the benefit of the public at large. They felt they could expand and adapt the national park system, increase its capacity, provide meaningful experiences of the nation’s natural and historical heritage, and still preserve that heritage for future generations. They realized, however, that procedural and even cultural changes would be required of their agency to meet new challenges. Wirth exhorted his colleagues to reconsider all aspects of their professional activities. “Nothing was to be sacred,” he recalled, “except the ultimate purpose to be served. Man, methods, and time-honored practices were to be accorded no vested deference. Old traditions seemed to have determined standards far beyond their time (6).”

If it implemented new planning procedures and design concepts, however, Mission 66 also remained profoundly committed to facilitating public enjoyment of the parks. Wirth again and again insisted that Mission 66 should be seen as a “conservation” not a “development” program, that ultimately would preserve and not destroy “wilderness.” But he also made it clear that he believed the “parks were for the people,” and that preservation outside the context of public enjoyment was simply not

what the parks, nor the Park Service, were intended to achieve.

A change of Administration and changes in the Department of Interior and the National Park Service created a framework for the redefinition that was soon to commence on the ground throughout the National Park System. By the end of 1951, Conrad Wirth became director of the National Park Service. In 1953, the arrival of the Eisenhower administration began the changes that would, two years later, result in Mission 66. In addition, the creation of the Western Office of Design and Construction (WODC) and the Eastern Office of Design and Construction (EODC) in 1954 was essential to the subsequent proposal for Mission 66. The two offices answered directly to Washington and created a centralized administrative structure. The architects, landscape architects, engineers, and other professionals in the new offices had hardly settled in before Wirth proposed his ten-year modernization and expansion of the park system, now unofficially estimated to cost at least \$700 million.

Wirth conceived of the Mission 66 proposal while contemplating the reluctance of Congress to increase park appropriations since 1945 while other agencies, such as Bureau of Public Roads, the Bureau of Reclamation, and the Army Corps of Engineers, were granted with multi-year authorizations for hundreds of millions of dollars that allowed these agencies to efficiently complete massive public works. Capital expenditures for national parks, meanwhile, were inadequate and fluctuated from year to year, making it difficult to plan large projects over extended periods. Wirth struggled with how to present the redevelopment of the national park system to Congress as a national priority requiring a long term, major commitment of funds (7). He finally came to the realization that the modernization of the national park system could indeed be presented as a ten-year program, requiring extensive coordination and planning nationwide, similar to other agencies' proposals. Wirth would present Congress with a total figure and a schedule for the entire job. He was able to argue that long term, coordinated planning was necessary—just as it was to build highways and dams—in order to let larger contracts, benefit from economies of scale, and minimize the overall disturbance to parks and visitors by completing the work quickly.

From the moment he was taken with his idea, Wirth moved quickly. Wirth laid out the arguments for immediate action. Most of these must have been familiar to members of the working group. The parks were being “loved to death” and the public and popular media had been calling for action for years. Budgets had stagnated at a level that had served 21 million visits annually, while in 1954 there had been 46 million visits recorded. The Park Service faced nothing less than “the destruction...of what it is charged with saving.” The task was to “secure a reasonable protection of the parks and yet provide for increased public use in such a way as to not wear them out.” Wirth charged the group to elaborate a “reasoned objective” for Mission 66, and to delineate a program to accomplish that objective. The solution “would not be in the books and in regulations” and might not be possible within the terms of existing legislation; but he wanted answers, regardless of what the group determined would be necessary to implement them (8).

Wirth's program may have been forward looking; however, it was couched in the foundation of the National Park Service. By the end of the first week of planning Mission 66, the working committee prepared a memorandum signed by Wirth to be distributed throughout the Park Service. The "goal to which this Mission is directed," Wirth informed the field, was "nothing new; it was plainly stated in the Act of 1916 establishing the National Park Service." Those concepts were "as sound today as they were in 1916." Wirth decided that the essence of the problem was to "meet fully the responsibilities implicit in those concepts" and "to produce a comprehensive and integrated program of use and protection that is in harmony with the obligations of the National Park Service under the Act of 1916 (9)." Wirth's belief in the continued validity of the concepts in the 1916 legislation would remain the ideological bedrock of Mission 66 until Wirth's retirement in 1964. From the outset, the organizers of the Mission 66 program found their most fundamental justifications in existing, prewar legislation and policy (10). Wirth would repeatedly refer back to the 1916 act that established the Park Service, in particular, as the fundamental mandate of Mission 66.

Within a month, Wirth and his working group offered a set of policies to help guide park planning efforts under the Mission 66 program. Balancing protection and public access, Wirth and his planners advocated removal of development, for both administrative and public service, from within park boundaries or at least outside sensitive areas such as the Yosemite Valley to lesser areas or outside park boundaries. This idea was not completely new. Thomas Vint and members of his staff had advocated removing development to "gateway communities" outside parks, for more than ten years, ever since the postwar situation of the parks had begun to receive serious consideration.

Better roads and faster cars made it desirable, where practicable, to relocate and concentrate overnight and administrative facilities to new "town sites" outside parks. These new "communities" would include residential districts for park employees, who would therefore have to commute to work in the parks (although their families would have easier access to schools and other services). Finally, new plans for national parks would have to consider "completely revamping park transportation systems," particularly to increase the efficient use of buses (11).

A tremendous amount of new development would be required to achieve the kinds of goals that the Mission 66 planners instructed regional staff and superintendents to consider. New strategies—and a huge amount of money—were needed to reduce the impacts of higher numbers of visitors. If the idea of allowing essentially unrestricted numbers of people to come and enjoy the parks were to survive, a new set of priorities would need to guide revised master plans for every unit in the system. Mission 66 described an initiative for developing completely revised park master plans that would respond to the social, technological, and geographical trends of postwar American society.

The whole tenor of Mission 66—a sudden mobilization to address a national crisis—must have recalled the spring of 1933, when many of the same people had rapidly implemented emergency spending programs. This is certainly how many of the employees and officials at the Park Service saw it at the time, and they described a similar sense of purpose and excitement. But in other ways, the spring of 1955 could not have differed more from that of 1933. A popular Republican president now watched over a rapidly expanding economy. For many Americans, twenty years of hard work and sacrifice were giving way to unprecedented material comfort and security, new houses, new cars, and growing families. In these ways the period suggested the 1920s, more than the 1930s, and Mission 66 reflected this difference.

This new approach to planning and development in National Park Service units needed to be tested before full implementation across the system. Mission 66 planners decided to begin a new model master plan for a park selected to be representative of many issues and management considerations. Wirth decided to make Mount Rainier National Park in Washington State the “pilot study” for Mission 66 planning. There were many reasons why Mount Rainier was the perfect vehicle to showcase their ideas for how each park should develop a new program of accelerated redevelopment or, as it was soon described, a “Mission 66 prospectus.” Larger parks had too many specific issues and interest groups to be instructive case studies. Mount Rainier was smaller and featured what the Mission 66 working committee described as “reasonably difficult problems, many of which would be typical of park problems in general (12).” It was also where Vint had first developed national park master planning in the late 1920s. As it had for Vint in the 1920s, Mount Rainier could again serve as a model park, in which a revised form of national park master planning—the Mission 66 prospectus—could be demonstrated.

In this initial planning effort, a basic premise of the entire Mission 66 program immediately emerged: the impact of larger number of visitors in cars could be absorbed without “impairment” of the parks if the patterns and types of public use were rearranged. It was felt that any form of transportation should be allowed within the parks for visitor convenience. With passenger rail services all but ending nationally, the decisions to increase the capacity of park roads and end monopolistic protections for concessioner transportation services assured that the private automobile would strengthen its dominance as the only practical means of experiencing most parks. In order for larger numbers of cars and tourists to get in and out of parks efficiently, Mission 66 would also require the modernization of hundreds of miles of park roads. To accommodate higher traffic volumes at higher speeds, winding routes would need to be straightened and widened, and bridges would need to be replaced. Mission 66 planners also recommended an end to park transportation concessions, both at Mount Rainier and in general.

Out of the experience of creating the Mount Rainier prospectus, the Mission 66 team developed a generalized procedure for how other Mission 66 prospectuses would update and transform national park master plans. The first task was to “determine

and state the important park resources.” Following this inventory, planners were told to “fix a road and trail system” that would allow visitors to “see, experience, and enjoy the values to be derived from” the “important park resources” described at the beginning of the document. In the great majority of cases, such road and trail corridors already existed, but might require realignment, extension, or abbreviation. Then they should “determine what visitor facilities, other than roads and trails,” would be required in order to “provide a reasonable opportunity to enjoy the Park resources.”

The pilot study for Mount Rainier made it clear that a new set of priorities were to be considered. It was an approach that retained much of the traditional ideology of the Park Service—access for public enjoyment—by radically altering the premises of how plans for that access and enjoyment should be made. These new priorities were captured in the “Guiding Precepts of Mission 66” which reiterated the basic themes of Park Service policy that informed the entire Mission 66 project: “Visitor enjoyment” of parks was the “best means of protecting them against exploitation or encroachment”; visitors must be “channeled to avoid overuse” and deterioration in certain areas; “channeling use” in this way required “proper development.” Mission 66 would therefore be a “use and development program” that would achieve the “preservation objectives of the Service (13).” The “interpretive presentation” of a park or historic site should “take full advantage of the actual scene, object, or structure as the interpretive exhibit.” This implied the location of roads, trails, and visitor centers near the historic landscapes and natural features that were to be interpreted by the Park Service and enjoyed by the public.

Wirth and probably almost all of the Mission 66 planners strongly believed that expanded use of the parks could occur without impairing them. Success would require reconceptualizing how parks should function as public places, and redeveloping them accordingly. Making parks into day use destinations, for example, could be achieved with wider roads, larger parking lots, and expanded “visitor use centers” to provide ample interpretive displays, bathrooms, and administrative areas for larger numbers of people. The new iteration of the national park idea was intended to save the parks as truly public parks, even under the greatly increased pressures of the postwar era (14).

Mission 66 was the last major period of intense activity and profoundly new ideas to find expression in a system wide program of national park development. Regardless of how one judges the legacy of Mission 66, a close examination of the era is warranted. We would not recognize the developed areas of the national parks today without the visitor centers, roads, housing, and other facilities acquired and built during these years. Mission 66 greatly enlarged the park system, and expanded entire categories of parks, including national recreation areas and national seashores. For better or worse, the national park system and the National Park Service today are still in many ways artifacts of Mission 66.

Mission 66: The Architecture (15)

By January 1956, Wirth and his agency had elaborated their postwar model for achieving continued “enjoyment without impairment.” The new model for park planning represented both continuity and change; but it was the change that many people noticed first. A dramatic new approach to park architecture, for example, was already taking shape by the early 1950s at Grand Teton National Park. The Grand Teton Lodge and Transportation Company, a subsidiary of the Rockefeller family’s Jackson Hole Preserve, Inc., planned a \$6-million lodge complex as part of what Rockefeller hoped would be a “pilot project” for postwar park development. Gilbert Stanley Underwood, the architect of the Ahwahnee and other prewar national park lodges, designed the new hotel and cabin complex, which Rockefeller personally sited on the shore of Jackson Lake, on a small plateau with sweeping views of the Teton Range. The elegant lodge, redolent of an earlier era of national park tourism, in some ways recalled the architect’s prewar masterpieces. But the novelty of the outward appearance of the Jackson Lake Lodge startled most observers. Built of rough, exposed concrete, the building’s massing was conceived as an interlocking series of large rectangular boxes topped by shed roofs. The massing directly expressed the functions and spaces of the interior volumes. Large horizontal bands of windows and the massive window wall of the main lounge further emphasized and confirmed the influence of contemporary American modernist architectural design (16). Underwood had come out of retirement for this last major commission of his career. While he showed his mastery of a building type he had done so much to develop—the national park lodge—he also made a striking statement about how postwar park architecture could adopt contemporary structural design and construction technology.

Not everyone agreed that the new lodge indicated a positive direction for national park architecture. The Jackson Lake Lodge made passionate architectural critics out of many not previously known for their opinions on such matters. In August, The New York Times reported on the “debate over national parks design” that the lodge had incited. “Those who bitterly deride the appearance of the...lodge,” noted the reporter, “level their aesthetic barbs at the mammoth central structure chiefly because it does not look ‘rustic.’” Unmoved by the building’s efficient handling of larger numbers of tourists, or by its minimal visual presence (it was mostly hidden from viewpoints elsewhere in the park), critics were outraged because the lodge did not look more like the Old Faithful Inn in nearby Yellowstone, or like other classic examples of rustic park architecture that they insisted were more effective in “blending with the scenery.” Part of their concern stemmed from indications that the lodge would serve as a design precedent for the still mysterious “10-year program” Wirth obliquely mentioned in his remarks at the dedication ceremony. Such a program apparently would mean more contemporary architecture that redefined what it meant to “harmonize” with the unique settings of the national parks (17).

The trend to modernist planning and architecture could no more be ignored in national

parks than it could anywhere else in the United States. In the summer of 1956, as a large number of very noticeable park construction projects proceeded, the Mission 66 program burst on the scene with considerable fanfare. From the beginning, Mission 66 also expressed a fully developed commitment to progressive, sometimes striking modernist architectural design. Mission 66 architecture embodied the revised recreational planning policies that had been developed as the heart of the entire program. Wirth and Vint, in particular, had been the officials responsible for promoting and achieving rustic era design. They now embraced the new architecture because it expressed and enabled the new response they had devised to finally mitigate the conditions that had plagued them for the previous decade. For them, the resurrection of rustic design would have negated what they were trying to accomplish. It would embody prewar planning policies that had proven to be inadequate to new challenges.

At the same time, the commitment to modernist architecture was hardly a radical or daring direction for the Park Service. In fact, it put the agency squarely in the mainstream of American design of the period. By the mid-1950s, modernism had become the ubiquitous stylistic choice of corporations, government agencies, cultural institutions, housing developers, and retailers who together were remaking the American landscape. Corporate clients all over the world—from roadside restaurant chains to multinational businesses—embraced various strains of modernist architectural style. Quite apart from stylistic associations and iconographic meanings, modernist architecture was simply a more efficient way of producing buildings, especially large ones. America, and much of the world, had “gone modern” for many of the same reasons the Park Service had: more labor intensive, craft oriented construction was no longer economically competitive, and therefore for most clients—including government agencies—it was no longer an option. The armed forces in particular had preceded the Park Service in the adoption of modernism, for many related reasons.

Another major reason the Park Service adopted modernist architectural design was the general adoption of the idiom by professional consultants and in-house Park Service designers. As Mission 66 moved from planning to construction, architects were rapidly set to work drawing up detailed designs. The work they produced simply reflected the current state and tendencies of their profession. The years immediately before Mission 66 were the apogee of the influence of modernism on American architectural practice. As architectural historian Sarah Allaback observes in her history of Mission 66 visitor centers, the influence of contemporary American architectural practice inevitably extended to national park architecture: “The forces at work—capitalism and a society obsessed with progress—were prevalent throughout the country; it was only a matter of time before they would enter the national parks (18).”

Because the Mission 66 program also generated a sudden increase in the amount of work expected from the in-house design force, the agency expanded its use of private

consulting design and engineering firms. The increased use of consultants influenced Mission 66 design; but Park Service architects and administrators had already set the policies and outlines that, in almost all cases, consultants were expected to follow. Allaback describes how even longtime Park Service architects (some of whom had produced important rustic buildings in the 1930s) by the early 1950s had developed new approaches in response to postwar conditions. “We couldn’t help but change,” explained Park Service architect Cecil J. Doty, “I can’t understand how anyone could think otherwise, how it could keep from changing.” Allaback observes that this statement is “a key to understanding” the purpose of Mission 66 architecture, “which was not to design buildings for atmosphere, whimsy, or aesthetic pleasure, but for change: to meet the demands of an estimated eighty million visitors,” and to do so in a reasonably efficient way, considering the availability of new building technologies and the higher costs of labor and materials (19).

No extensive, official policy statement regarding the adoption of modernist design at the Park Service was ever made. When asked to issue an official policy on architectural design, Wirth responded only with a brief statement: “Structures should be designed to reflect the character of the area while at the same time following up-to-date design standards. Park structures are to conform, to some extent, with the trend toward contemporary design and the use of materials and equipment accepted as standard by the building industry. However, restraint must be exercised in the design so that the structures will not be out of character with the area and so that the structures will be subordinated to their surroundings (20).” In January 1957, Wirth participated by phone in a WODC conference and verbally gave the following “guiding principles” for architectural design: “Whatever we do in the line of development in the Parks, it must fit the terrain and be inconspicuous; Durability is an important attribute; Sound planning is basic to economic results; Nothing should be built unless the need is already realized...; Don’t try to lead your profession in fancy design (21).” Architectural design, in fact, was not a primary concern for Wirth. He felt that park development succeeded by “channeling” public use and therefore mitigating its impacts. In well planned examples, he wrote in 1958, the result would be the same “regardless of decorative colors used, or the style of architecture selected.” These were “details,” important “in their way.” But “park resources [were] neither destroyed nor preserved merely by application of a paintbrush or by a choice of...architectural décor (22).”

The Visitor Center

Modernist park architecture, like the new planning goals of the Mission 66 prospectus, was vital to the implementation and success of Mission 66. But it was not the International Style, or any other style, that primarily interested Wirth, Vint, and their planners; it was the increased functionality and efficiency that could be achieved through modernist design, materials, and building technologies. They did not adopt modernism as a style as much as they invented a distinctly modernist building type—the visitor center—and then used it extensively to implement their revised park planning ideas. The organization of the WODC and the EODC in 1954 brought Park

Service designers, engineers, and historians together in their own offices in San Francisco and Philadelphia, independent of the regional administrative offices. By 1960, Mission 66 had swelled the professional ranks in these two design offices to several hundred in-house landscape architects, architects, and administrative employees. Almost without exception, these managers were longtime Park Service employees who, regardless of where they received academic training, received their most formative professional experience working in state and national parks during the New Deal (23).

It was in the offices of the WODC and the EODC between 1954 and 1957 that idea of the visitor center was elaborated as the successor to park museum and administration buildings. The visitor center adapted modernist ideas of architectural composition to the programmatic and functional purposes of national parks. The integration of indoor and outdoor space in a (usually) one-level, public building evoked the pavilions of Mies van der Rohe; the flow diagrams developed by Cabot and Doty recalled Le Corbusier's use of architectural procession (a dramatic sequence of spaces and views) to organize the experience created by a building. As developed by the Park Service in the mid-1950s, the visitor center became a viewing platform, in which views from interior spaces, roof terraces, and adjacent outdoor terraces or amphitheaters were calculated as a flowing, sequential experience. They were buildings to see from, not to be seen. In this sense they reversed the premise of prewar park museum design. But the outward stylistic or aesthetic appearance of the Mission 66 visitor center—as long as it was minimal and did not visually contrast with its surroundings or call too much attention to itself—was almost inconsequential. The removal of most ornamentation and historical allusion was another aspect of modernism that fit the purpose of the new buildings perfectly. They were not meant to have a powerful presence themselves, but to recede visually, even as they facilitated the appreciation of park landscapes and resources by larger numbers of people. The architecture, ideally, should be nearly transparent: a composition of functional, overlapping spaces and outward views, not of structural mass and decorative façades. The best Mission 66 visitor centers achieved this appropriate adaptation of contemporary modernist ideas to the goals espoused by Park Service landscape architects and interpreters for the redevelopment of national parks. Many successful examples were less expensive, smaller buildings.

Cecil Doty did much of the preliminary visitor center design early in the Mission 66 program, and contributed greatly to the development of this building type. As the principal architectural designer of the WODC, Doty provided many preliminary design schemes, and in some cases developed those designs much further (24). Allaback documents a total of 110 national park visitor center projects and sixteen “additions” to existing buildings with construction contracts let between 1956 and 1966. She also lists 54 preliminary visitor center design projects done by Doty while at the WODC during those years. Not all of Doty's preliminary design projects were built, and many others were significantly altered by other architects as they moved to final design and construction drawings. But Doty's contribution to Mission 66 visitor design in the

mid-1950s, particularly at the initial, conceptual stage of design, was extremely significant (25).

Other projects, such as comfort stations (bathrooms), or other small, utilitarian structures were given standardized plans rather than new designs. Housing had its own imposed cost limitations per unit, necessitating a level of standardization as well, although with flexibility for local conditions and materials. Visitor centers and park administration buildings, however, always required unique designs. Landscape architects and interpretive planners, both in the WODC and EODC and in individual parks, took the schematic idea for the project and worked it into the overall development context of the park's Mission 66 prospectus. The new visitor center was sited, integrated with the park road and trail systems, and planned as part of the overall interpretive strategy for the park. Often "secondary" visitor centers, smaller roadside structures or signs, and short "nature walks" near areas of particular interest composed complementary features of the overall interpretive plan. The landscape architects usually established the footprints of a proposed visitor centers, and even designed parking lots, paths and outdoor amphitheaters that exploited the views of scenery, historic scenes, or other "park resources" in the surrounding landscape. At that point, the architects and engineers (who sometimes never saw the visitor center site) would finish the set of "preliminaries" by developing schematic designs for the building itself including rough cost estimates.

This suite of basic facilities—above all the visitor center—became the sine qua non of a functional unit of the national park system. Without a visitor center, it seemed, no park could be expected to adequately preserve and interpret its resources, and a series of the buildings were considered necessary at larger parks. New visitor centers represented not only consistent standard for the convenience of visitors and staff, but also a standard of administration in every park. The construction of visitor centers was linked to the expansion and training of staff to work in them, as well as the use of slide and movie projectors and other technological means of more efficiently interpreting a park to its public.

As a category of development, visitor centers were the most important single category of Mission 66 architectural construction. The new building type was at the heart of revised planning goals and policies for the park system, and the proliferation of the carefully designed new buildings symbolized the entire program. "Administration buildings" also continued to be built, although they rarely had the same importance that prewar administration buildings originally had. A few Mission 66 administration buildings, such as the Ash Mountain Administration Building (Cecil Doty, WODC, and Walter Wagner & Partners, 1962) in Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks, had similar importance. More often, however, new visitor centers combined administrative functions with the park museum idea, replacing the need for either of the older building types.

ENDNOTES

- (1) The following section is excerpted from the “Draft National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form: National Park Service Mission 66 Resources” by Ethan Carr, Elaine Jackson-Retondo, PhD. and Len Werner (2004), pp. 1-17.
- (2) Dwight F. Rettie, *Our National Park System: Caring for America’s Greatest Natural and Historic Treasures* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, c1995). It is difficult to compare total expenditures on the national park system during the New Deal to the cost of Mission 66, but there is no question that New Deal programs represented a greater overall commitment. The Department of Labor’s and the U.S. Army’s adjusted costs of recruiting, housing, and feeding the Civilian Conservation Corps, for example, alone may have exceeded the Mission 66 total. Mission 66 also did not include the massive state park expansions overseen by the Park Service in the 1930s, nor was it complemented by other federal programs (such as the Public Works Administration, the Resettlement Administration, among others) that greatly augmented Park Service activity during the New Deal.
- (3) Conrad L. Wirth, *Parks, Politics, and the People* (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, c1980) 262-274; R. Bryce Workman, *National Park Service Uniforms: The Developing Years, 1932-1970*, (Harpers Ferry, West Virginia: National Park Service, Harpers Ferry Center, 1998), 31, 33-38; “Mission 66 Progress Report,” March 1966 (National Park Service, Harpers Ferry Center Archive).
- (4) See Sarah Allaback, *Mission 66 Visitor Centers: The History of a Building Type* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2000).
- (5) Thomas C. Vint, “Development of National Parks for Conservation,” *American Planning and Civic Annual* (Washington, DC: American Planning and Civic Association, 1938), 69-71. The words are inscribed on the Roosevelt Arch (1903) at the Gardiner entrance to Yellowstone, and are a quotation from the 1872 legislation that created that park.
- (6) Wirth, *Parks, Politics, and the People*, 237-239; Roy Edgar Appleman, *A History of the Mission 66 Program* (Washington: National Park Service, 1958) 242.
- (7) *Ibid*, 1958) 4-5.
- (8) Appleman, *A History of the Mission 66 Program*, 8-10.
- (9) “Informational Memorandum No. 1, Mission 66,” February 18, 1955 (Box A8213, National Park Service, Harpers Ferry Center Archive). The seven Mission 66 informational memoranda released by Wirth between February 1955 and November 1956 amount to a manual for planning procedures. The documents are available at the National Park Service Harpers Ferry Archive, as well as the Yellowstone National Park Archives, and the Conrad L. Wirth Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.
- (10) All of these documents are collected and described in Larry M. Dilsaver, ed., *America’s National Park System: The Critical Documents* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1994), 28-52, 135-136.
- (11) “Informational Memorandum No. 2, Mission 66—Policies and Procedures,” March 17, 1955, (Box A8213, National Park Service, Harpers Ferry Center Archive).
- (12) Appleman, *A History of the Mission 66 Program*, 18-19.
- (13) “Steering Committee Precepts for Staff Guidance,” unsigned draft [Garrison],

- March 1955, (Box A8213, National Park Service, Harpers Ferry Center Archive).
- (14) Lemuel A. Garrison, "Guiding Precepts Mission 66," draft memorandum, August 29, 1955, (Box A8213, National Park Service, Harpers Ferry Center Archive).
- (15) The following section is excerpted from the "Draft National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form: National Park Service Mission 66 Resources" by Ethan Carr, Elaine Jackson-Retondo, PhD. and Len Werner (2004), pp. 21-34.
- (16) Paula S. Reed and Edith B. Wallace, "Jackson Lake Lodge, National Historic Landmark Nomination." This National Historic Landmark nomination form is available through the National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service, Washington, DC (<http://www.cr.nps.gov/nhl/designations/samples>). The Jackson Lake Lodge was designated a National Historic Landmark in 2003, in part for its significance as an influential precedent of Modernist architectural design in the parks.
- (17) Jack Goodman, "Controversy Over Lodge in the West," The New York Times, Sunday, August 7, 1955.
- (18) Sarah Allaback, Mission 66 Visitor Centers: The History of a Building Type (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2000), 10.
- (19) Ibid, 12-14.
- (20) Conrad L. Wirth, "Design of Structures," memorandum, February 13, 1956 (Box 6, Conrad L. Wirth Collection, University of Wyoming, American Heritage Center).
- (21) These statements were transcribed and distributed to WODC design staff. Conrad L. Wirth, "Excerpt From Telephone Conference Between the Director and Chief, WODC...January 9, 1957" (Box 7, Design & Construction File, RG 79, National Archives). The comments were subsequently read to the Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, Buildings and Monuments at their March meeting in Washington, DC. The Advisory Board was discussing the issue of architectural design quality as a result of criticism, and praise, appearing in different journals. "Summary Minutes, 36th Meeting, Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, Buildings and Monuments, March 5, 6, 7, 1957, Washington, DC," (Yosemite National Park Archives).
- (22) Conrad L. Wirth, "Mission 66 in the Headlines," National Parks Magazine 32, no. 132 (January 1958): 8-9, 36-37.
- (23) Vernon L. Hammons, "A Brief Organizational History of the Office of Design and Construction" (Washington, D.C. : Office of Design and Construction, National Park Service, 1963), 3; "Interview with A. Clark Stratton," March 1, 1962, conducted by S. Herbert Evison, transcript, p. 2, (National Park Service, Harpers Ferry Center Archive).
- (24) "Interview with Cecil J. Doty," conducted by S. Herbert Evison, October 26, 1962, transcript, p. 4, (National Park Service, Harpers Ferry Center Archive); "Interview with Cecil J. Doty," conducted by Jacilee Wray, February 26, 1990, transcript, p. 4, (catalog number GRCA 52220, Grand Canyon National Park Archive); U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Visitor Center Planning (Washington, DC: Department of the Interior, National Park Service, n.d. [1958]), 45.
- (25) Conrad Wirth gives a total of 114 new visitor centers during Mission 66. Wirth,

Furnace Creek Visitor Center
Death Valley National Park

Parks, Politics, and the People, 270. The exact definition of what constitutes a new visitor center (as opposed to an addition or a remodeling) makes it difficult to specify an exact number. Allaback's totals reflect what she could confirm through project records at the Technical Information Center, National Park Service, Denver Service Center. See Allaback, Mission 66 Visitor Centers, 255-265.

Title: SHPO Letter and Documentation for Furnace Creek Campground

Description: In 2010, the California SHPO agreed with NPS findings that the Furnace Creek Campground was ineligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The documentation is available from the regional CLI coordinator or the park cultural resources manager.

Title: Site Plan

Description: Full-sized, 8.5x11, version of the map is available from the regional CLI coordinator or the park cultural resources manager.



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Death Valley National Park
PO Box 579
Death Valley, California 92328



IN REPLY REFER TO:

H4217

January 13, 2010

MAILED USPS CERTIFIED - RETURN RECEIPT

Milford Wayne Donaldson
State Historic Preservation Officer
Attn: Mark Beeson
Office of Historic Preservation
California Department of Parks and Recreation
1416 Ninth Street, Room 1442
Sacramento, California 95814

Dear Mr. Donaldson:

Death Valley National Park is requesting State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) review of information supporting the National Park Service's (NPS) finding that the Furnace Creek Campground is ineligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Furnace Creek Campground and Visitor Center were planned and designed together in the late 1950s as a "Public Use Area," as indicated in original design drawings (Figure 1). The visitor center (constructed 1959-60) and campground (constructed 1960-62) were considered one development with two distinct areas connected by access roads originating from the vicinity of the visitor center parking lot. While preparing the nomination for the Furnace Creek Visitor Center Historic District, inclusion of the campground was considered. However, as assessed under criterion A, the Furnace Creek Campground was not found to be individually eligible for its association with Mission 66 because it does not represent a significant Mission 66 era campground. Although the original campground design was typical for Mission 66 campground, designed with looped roads and parking spots located on either side of the roads creating a herringbone pattern, only a portion (one out of four loops) was actually constructed. The majority of the campground was built at a later date, not following the original Mission 66 design and the small portion that was built has since been significantly altered beyond recognition as a Mission 66 campground.

A 1958 construction document and a subsequent 1959 detail plan (Figures 1 and 2) for the campground show plans for a campground with multiple loops. In the latter map, four loops are labeled as Loops A, B, C, and D. Each loop had a planned comfort station and formalized campsites with designated parking spots on both sides of the roads, creating a herringbone

pattern. The plan was never fully implemented; only Loop A was constructed with 10 campsites (out of 66 proposed campsites). In 1960-61, the campground road and parking areas for Loop A were graded and the comfort station was constructed. Historic photos show that the roads were surfaced with gravel until at least the mid-1970s. The campground was accessed from the same junction with Highway 190 that leads to the visitor center public parking lot. At the turn off, visitors could continue straight, following a road directly to the campground or take an indirect route through the visitor center parking lot where a short road at the far end of the lot connected back to the entry road (Figure 1). In 1961, ten campsites along Loop A were graded, surfaced with gravel, vegetation was pruned, and ten picnic tables and three water faucets were installed. In 1962, ten fireplaces and ten garbage can racks, on loan from Joshua Tree National Park, were installed. (Information gathered from the historic plan for Furnace Creek Campground, 1959, Figure 1, and a 1962 completion report for “Tables and Fireplaces at Furnace Creek Campground” on file at the Death Valley National Park archives.) Historic photos also show that beyond the ten formalized campsites, visitors tended to create their own campsites and access routes through the area (Figures 4 and 11).

Since 1962, the campground has undergone several changes. In the mid to late 1960s, the campground was expanded with an outer loop (Figure 5). This loop did not follow the original Mission 66 proposal for the campground. A 1974 aerial photograph (Figure 6) shows that by this year, the entrance to the campground had been moved from the southern end of the campground to the northern end. A new access road off of Highway 190 was constructed and the southern access roads from the visitor center were removed. Today, a paved footpath still follows the original alignment of the southern access road from the visitor center parking lot. During the 1970s and 80s, a fee collection station was constructed at the northern entrance, the campground loops and campsites were greatly expanded and paved with asphalt, and three new aluminum comfort stations were added (Figures 3, 13, and 14). Over time, the campsites and parking spots have been reconfigured and the campsite furnishings replaced, including the original campsites around Loop A.

The comfort station (Figure 15), which still remains in Loop A, was based on standardized Mission 66 construction drawings prepared by the National Park Service and used in numerous parks throughout the country. The comfort station is a rectangular building measuring 16'x24'. It has a low pitched, gabled roof, and concrete masonry walls set on a concrete foundation. At the gabled ends, the roofline extends into triangular points. The single-width walls are constructed of the same mauve-tinted concrete masonry units (CMUs) that were used in the construction of the Furnace Creek Visitor Center. The upper 2 feet of the walls are wood framed and finished with painted plywood. Vinyl slider windows have since replaced the original fixed windows in the ribbon window configuration in the upper portion of the walls (description is from the Historical Resource Inventory Form prepared by Bright Eastman in 2003). Although the comfort station has undergone relatively minor alterations, its setting has been dramatically altered. The comfort station is not a unique example of a Mission 66 comfort stations that warrants expansion of the boundary of the proposed Furnace Creek Visitor Center historic district.

The cumulative effect of the alterations to the campground since 1962 has lead to the loss of historic integrity. Although remnants of Loop A are still discernable in the campground's existing circulation network and the Mission 66 comfort station remains in its original location, the setting, feeling, and overall design of the campground have changed dramatically so that it is no longer discernable as the Mission 66 campground constructed in the early 1960s. Loop A is no longer recognizable as the original loop as it is now intersected with several non-historic

roads and the campsites along its edges were completely reconfigured. The association with the Furnace Creek Visitor Center was lost when the historic entrance road to the campground was closed and a new entrance road constructed at the northern end. The original design of the campsites has been altered with reconfiguration of the site layout and new furnishings. The current campground no longer retains integrity in terms of design, materials, workmanship or feeling, nor does the expansion of the campground loops reflect any of the proposed Mission 66 designs produced for the area. As a result, it is not eligible for individual listing in the National Register of Historic Places nor for inclusion in the proposed Furnace Creek Visitor Center Historic District.

We greatly appreciate your office's assistance and want to thank you for the review of this finding. If you concur with the finding of ineligibility for the Furnace Creek Campground, please send us a letter stating your concurrence. If you need any additional information, or have questions or concerns, please contact Blair Davenport, Cultural Resource Specialist, at Death Valley National Park (760/786-3287, blair_davenport@nps.gov).

Sincerely,

Sarah Craighead
Superintendent

Enclosures:

Historic maps (Figures 1-3)
Photos (Figures 4-15)

Cc (w/o attachments):

Elaine Jackson-Retondo, Ph.D., National Register & National Historic Landmarks Program,
National Park Service, Pacific West Regional Office, 1111 Jackson Street, Suite 700,
Oakland, CA 94607-4807

Bcc (w/o attachments):

K Fuhrmann, Chief of Resources Management, DEVA

L Bonstead, Archeologist, DEVA

W Badder, Chief of Maintenance, DEVA

C Shandor, Facility Manager, DEVA

Central Files, DEVA

PWRO:EJ-Retondo:mbd:10/09/2009:x287

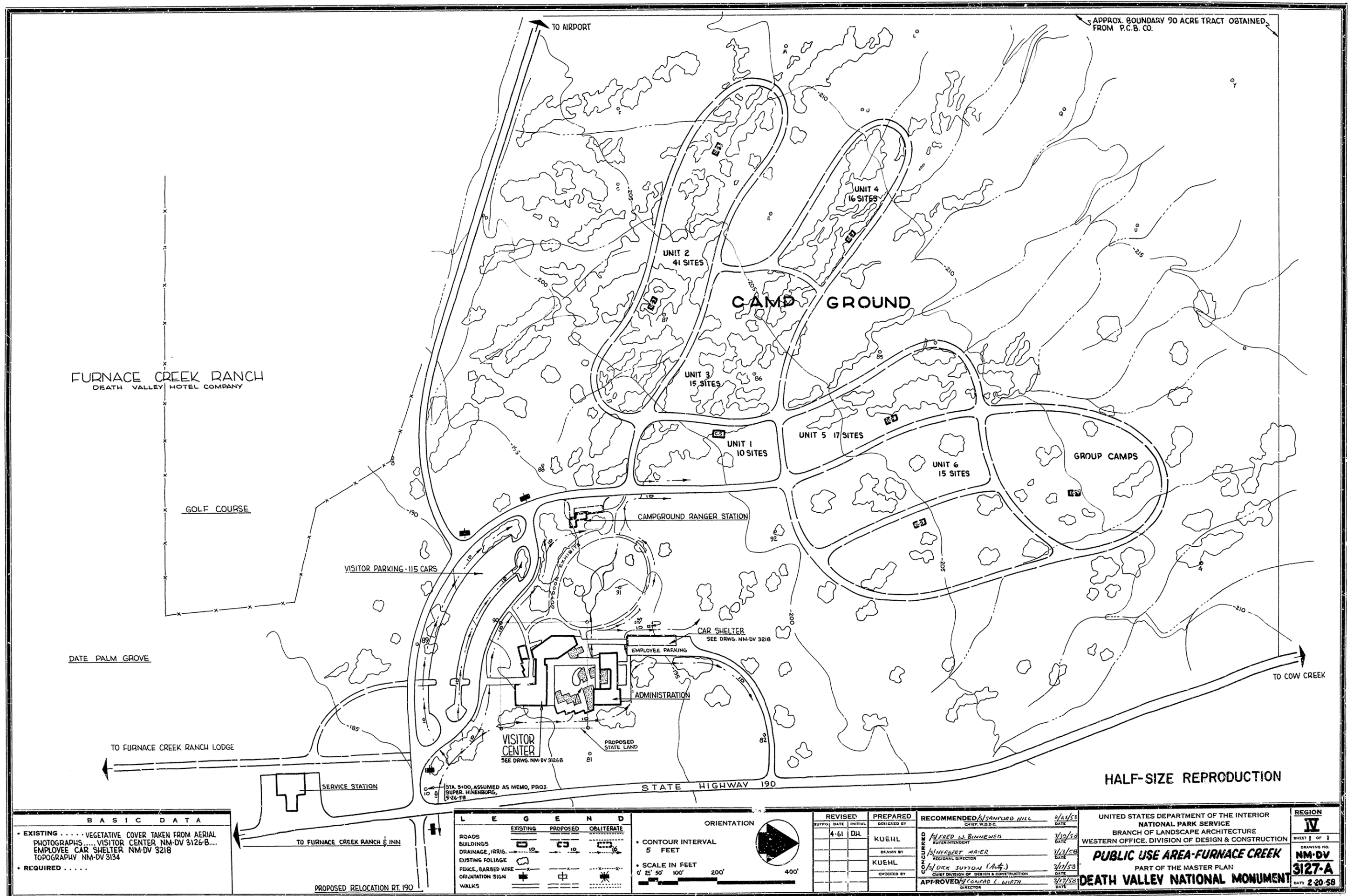


Figure 1. Map from 1958 Master Plan for Death Valley National Park

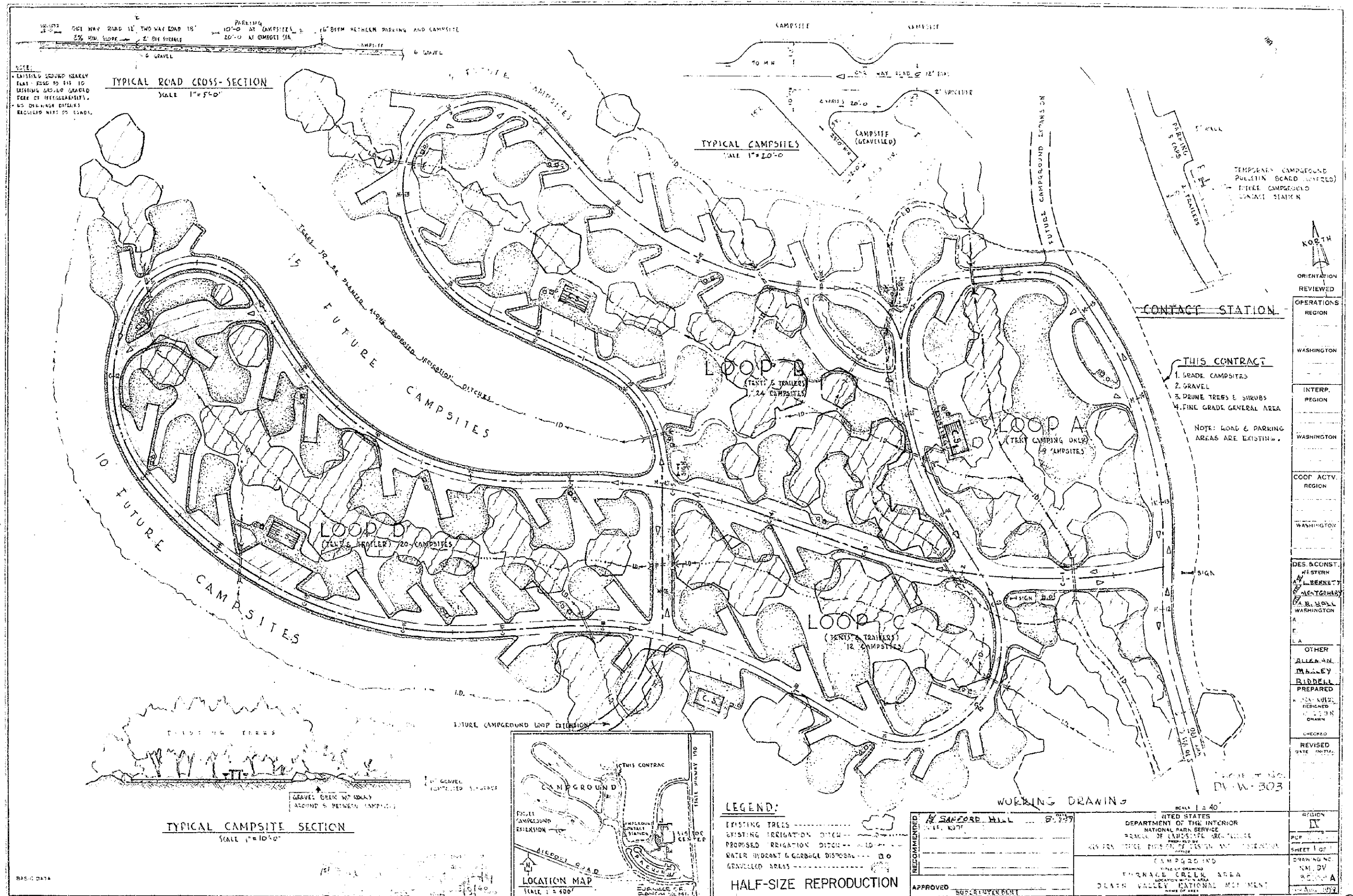


Figure 2. Detail Plan for Furnace Creek Campground, 1959



Figure 3. Existing Conditions, Furnace Creek Campground



Figure 4. An aerial oblique photograph of Furnace Creek Campground in 1962, looking southwest (Death Valley National Park archives, NEG 2987). Loop A and the comfort station, constructed in 1960, are in the middle-ground.



Figure 5. Aerial photograph of Furnace Creek Campground in circa 1965-1970 (National Park Service ETIC, FL06). The campground has been expanded with an outer loop.



Figure 6. Aerial photograph of Furnace Creek Campground in 1974 (Death Valley National Park archives, NEG 7933). By this year, the entrance to the campground has been moved from the southern end to the northern end. The southern access roads have been removed.



Figure 7. Aerial photograph of Furnace Creek Campground in 2005 (Google Earth website, 2009). The campground has been expanded with multiple loops, new campsites, and comfort stations.



Figure 8. In the early 1960s, the campground had ten formalized campgrounds located along Loop A (Death Valley National Historic Park archives, NEG 3986).



Figure 9. Campsites within Loop A, looking north (Pacific West Regional Office, 2009). These campsites have been reconfigured over time and updated with new furnishings. A non-historic road intersecting with Loop A is visible in the center-back ground of the photograph.



Figure 10. Furnace Creek Campground, looking northwest with Loop A in the foreground (Death Valley National Historic Park archives, NEG 5024, n.d. (circa late 1960s/early 1970s)). In the 1960s, the campground roads were surfaced with gravel. In the right-background, the non-historic outer loop built by this time is visible with its additional camping sites.



Figure 11. Furnace Creek Campground, looking southeast toward the visitor center (Death Valley National Historic Park archives, NEG 2583, n.d. (circa 1960s)). In the 1960s, campers often camped in non-designated camping sites beyond Loop A.



Figure 12. Furnace Creek Campground, looking southeast in 2009 (Pacific West Regional Office, 2009). Since the 1960s, additional campground loop roads have been constructed and the number of formalized campsites has increased.



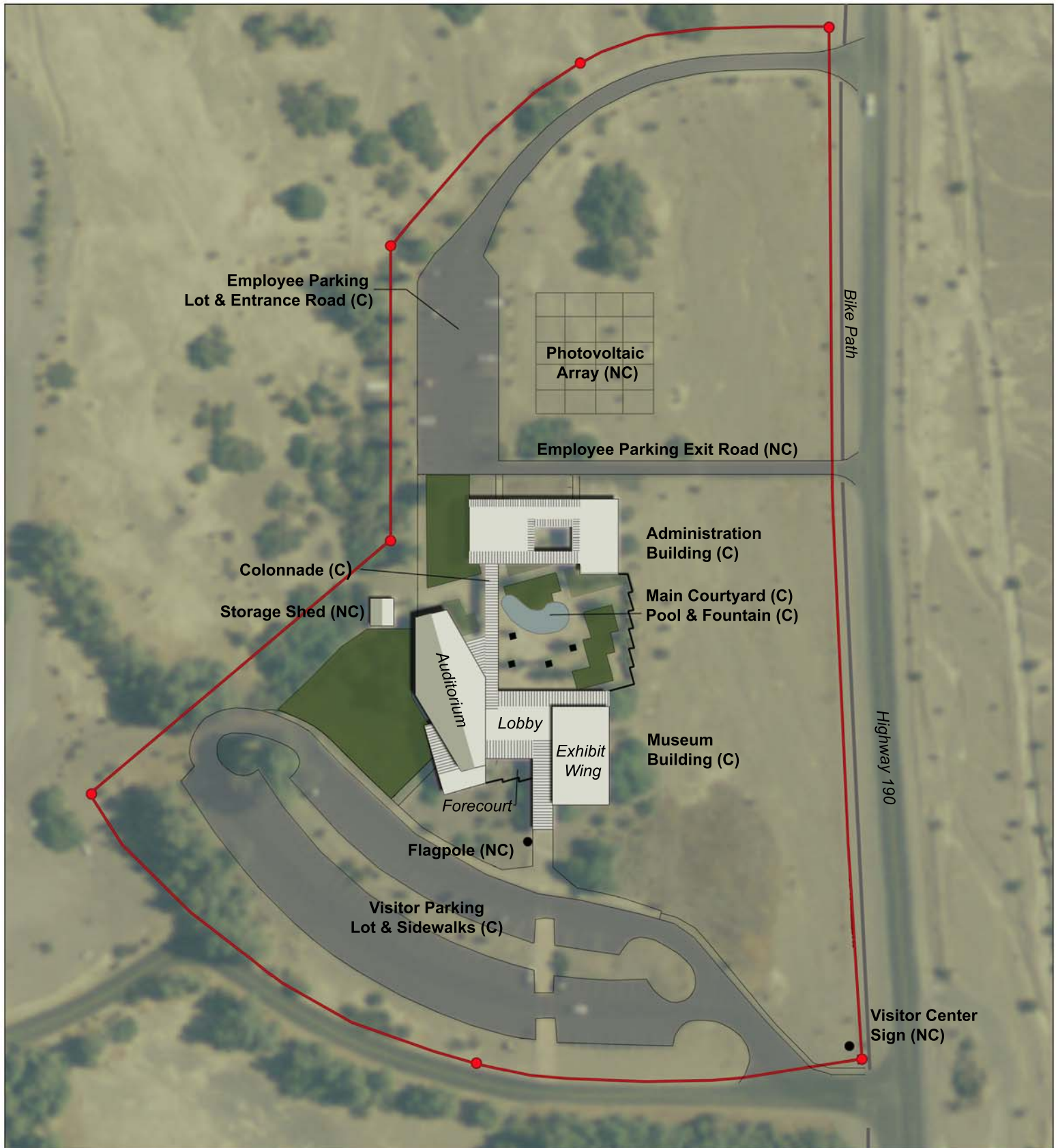
Figure 13. Furnace Creek Campground, looking north (Pacific West Regional Office, 2009). This campground loop and comfort station were added north of Loop A after the period of significance.



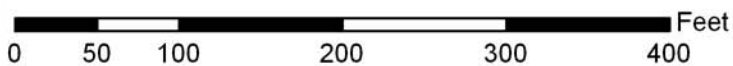
Figure 14. Furnace Creek Campground entrance station, looking southwest (Pacific West Regional Office, 2009). The northern entrance station was added after the period of significance.



Figure 15. The Mission 66 era comfort station within the Furnace Creek Campground, looking northwest (Death Valley National Park, NEG 46832, 1960 (left) and Pacific West Regional Office, 2009 (right)). The comfort station was built in 1960 and is predominantly intact, but its setting has changed dramatically as seen in the aerial photographs and maps.



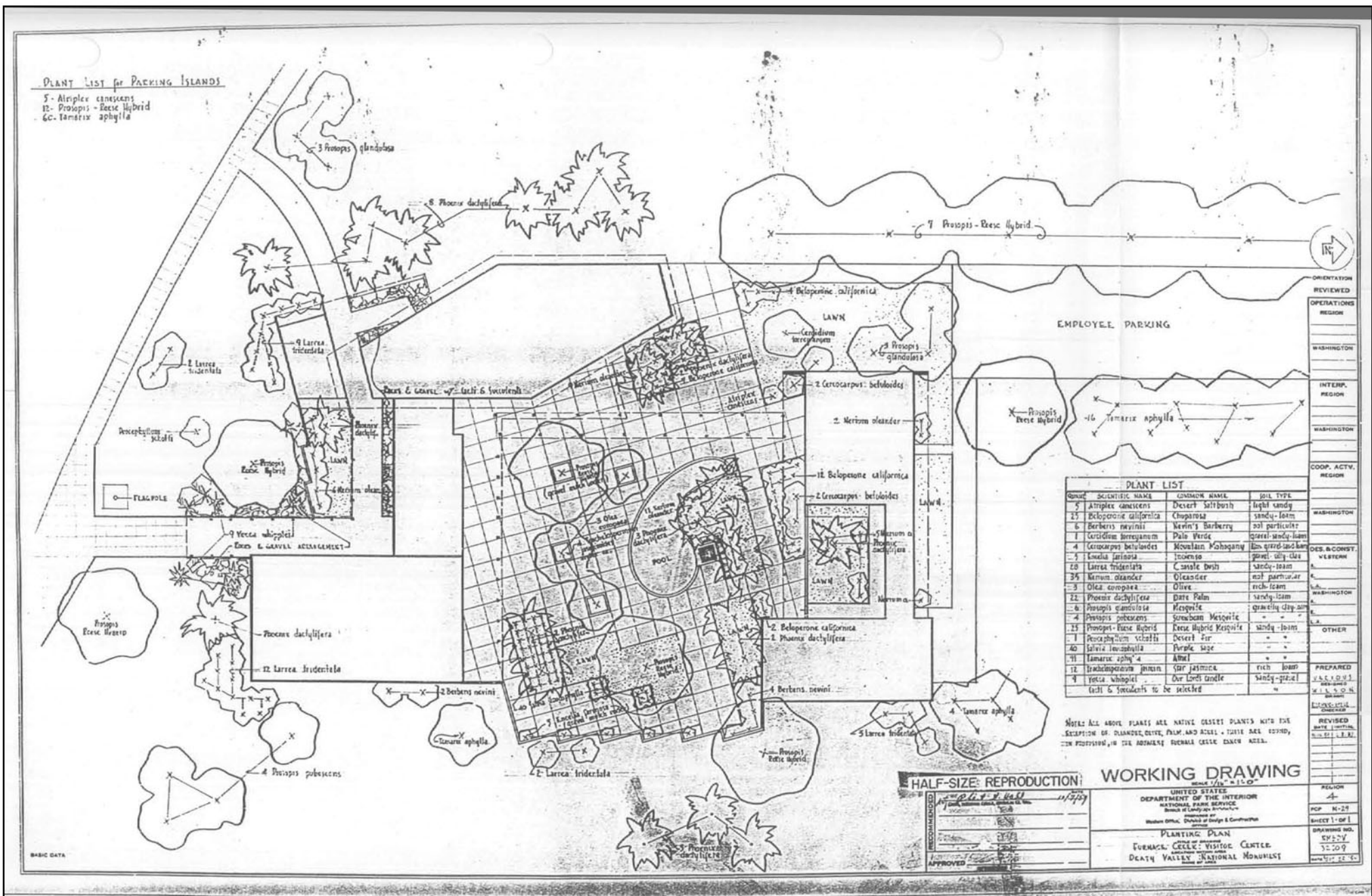
Furnace Creek Visitor Center Historic District
Death Valley National Park
Cultural Landscapes Inventory
 Pacific West Region, Cultural Resources Division, 2009



Key:

- Boundary
- UTM point
- (C) Contributing feature
- (NC) Non-contributing feature
- Lawn
- Planting Bed





Furnace Creek Visitor Center Planting Plan, 1959

Death Valley National Park

National Register Nomination

(Note: The courtyard and lawns were almost entirely planted as planned. However, very few plants around the building complex were planted.)

