

Assessment of the Trails and Entry Area Around the Visitor Center



Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument



January 2004

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AND
ENTRY AREA
AROUND THE VISITOR CENTER**

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National Monument**



A Report Prepared for:

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Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument**

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Trip Purpose

On November 3, 2003, Debra Frye Landscape Architect in the Office of Facility Management – Intermountain Region and Linda Lutz-Ryan Interpreter in the Office of Interpretation – Intermountain Region traveled to Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument to meet with Park staff to discuss, evaluate and make recommendations for improvements to the existing trails and entry area around the Visitor Center. Debra and Linda met with Jeff Mow – Superintendent, Ken Springer – Facility Manager, Jeff Wyolin – Chief of Interpretation and Rick Wilson – Chief Ranger. The following is the evaluation and recommendations for the trails beginning around the Visitor Center and the entry area in front of the Visitor Center.

Trails

There are many trails in Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument, but for this assessment we are only looking at the trails that begin at or around the Visitor Center. These trails are the Petrified Forest trail, the Ponderosa trail (formally called the Walk Through Time trail) and the Sawmill trail.

Central “Trailhead”: Currently the trails around the Visitor Center are somewhat unorganized as some of the trails begin in the front and some begin in the back of the Visitor Center. While at the Park, I observed some visitors confused as to the location of the trailheads. The Park staff has also recognized this problem and would like to have all the trails begin and end at a central location, i.e. a “central trailhead.” At this central “trailhead” information such as trail length and difficulty, accessibility, interpretative information, as well as maps and brochures can be provided to the visitor. Currently, there is an information kiosk located behind the Visitor Center which could serve as the central “trailhead” location. It will be necessary to expand and modify the area, as well as the existing information kiosk to reflect current information about the trails.



Existing Information Kiosk Located Behind Visitor Center

Another concern the Park staff voiced was the number of visitors who come to Florissant to hike, but do not pay the visitor use fee. By centrally locating the trailheads behind the Visitor Center and channeling the visitors through the Visitor Center the ability to collect the visitor use fee will improve. One drawback to locating the “central trailhead”

behind the Visitor Center is the visitors will not have a visual cue as to where they should go to get to the trailheads. It will be important to have an informational/directional sign in the front entry area directed the visitors through the Visitor Center to the “central trailhead.”

If visitors are directed through the Visitor Center to the “central trailhead”, it will be important to upgrade the interior and exterior Visitor Center to meet ADA accessibility standards. In addition, the modifications will also be necessary to accommodate the larger number of visitors that would be in the Visitor Center at a time.

Petrified Forest Trail: This 1 mile loop trail begins behind the Visitor Center and ends at the parking area in front of the Visitor Center. The trail encircles the large meadow which was once an ancient lake to the north of the Visitor Center. The Park would like to change the end of the trail by splitting the trail at the last interpretative stop and redirecting the new section away from the parking area and ending at the central trailhead. The new section of trail would traverse the large meadow to intersect with the beginning of the trail. This new section of trail will have to be carefully laid out as the existing leach field is located in the meadow. It may be a good idea to contact one the environmental engineers in the Intermountain Regional Office to conduct an assessment of the extent of the size of the leach field to assure the new trail does not traverse the leach field.

The second section would still end at the parking area, but would intersect the parking area toward the upper end. Drainage issues should be addressed and the old trail section revegetated. In addition, new signs will be needed to direct and provide information to the visitors.

An accessibility assessment should be conducted on this trail to determine if the trail would qualify for accessibility. This trail may be a good candidate for accessibility

as the grades seem to be fairly flat with the exception of one area. The Outdoor Accessibility Standards state accessible trails need to be a minimum of 500 feet long and it does not need to be a loop.



Looking toward the Visitor Center and the intersection of the Ponderosa and Petrified Forest trails.

Ponderosa Trail (formally the Walk Through Time Trail): This trail begins and ends behind the Visitor Center and forms a .5 mile loop. It is one of the busier trails in the Park because of its close proximity to the Visitor Center and the short length. Currently, there are plans and construction dollars to rehab this trail for accessibility in 2004. This trail also has interpretative pullouts along the trail. The rehab of the trail will remain on the same alignment with corrections made to improve drainage and replacement of some structural elements. The realigned section will turn off before the small amphitheater and wind its way across the slope through the ponderosa pines and connect to the existing trail below the amphitheater. The old section will be regraded and revegetated. Access to the amphitheater will still be from the lower portion of the Ponderosa trail.

Sawmill Trail: The existing Sawmill trailhead begins to the south of the Visitor Center. The end of the trail connects to the Ponderosa trail behind the Visitor Center. This is a very popular 2.2 mile trail as it travels through open meadows and forested areas. In keeping with the “central trailhead”

concept the beginning of the trail would be moved to the back of the Visitor Center. The beginning of the trail would follow the new handicap accessible segment of the Ponderosa trail to where it intersects with the existing Ponderosa trail. From this point a new segment would be constructed that would connect to an existing section of the Ponderosa trail. The old trailhead and trail segment located on the front of the Visitor Center would be regraded and revegetated. An accessibility assessment should be conducted on this trail to determine if this trail would be suitable for accessibility.



Winter and summer view of the front entry of the Visitor Center

Buildings

Front Entry Area to the Visitor Center: The Visitor Center is located in an old farm house. The building is a somewhat unconventional for a Visitor Center and it may not be obvious for some first time visitors that this is the place to go for park information. The Park staff would like to direct more of the visitors through the Visitor Center to provide them with more information about the Park and also to collect the visitor use fee.

Currently, the front of the Visitor Center is somewhat hidden behind two tall kiosk and many trees. One of the kiosks provides information about the park, the other kiosk serves as a fee collection station. In the summer when the trees are leafed out the entry to the Visitor Center becomes even more obscured. There is no real sense of entry or arrival to the building and the entry area in front of the building is somewhat disorganized and unconnected. In addition, the sign identifying the building as the Visitor Center is placed to the back of the entry area and is somewhat hidden by vegetation.

To the south of the Visitor Center there is the trail head for the Sawmill trail and two path ways that lead to the back of the Visitor Center. One pathway leads to a side door of the Visitor Center, the other path leads toward the temporary administration trailer and the Ponderosa trail. There is no clear signage informing the visitor where these paths lead. In addition, there is a picnic area and a small utility building adding to the clutter.



Area south of the Visitor Center showing multiple trails



Main access from parking area to Visitor Center showing no defined sidewalk

To the north there is a small sidewalk that leads to the back of the Visitor Center. This sidewalk is the accessible route that enables visitors to enter the Visitor Center from the back entry. There is also a small employee parking area to the north. The trail/pathways to the south and the sidewalk and parking area to the north add to the clutter and confusion of the front of

the Visitor Center. From the parking area there is no clear route directing the visitors to the Visitor Center.

Currently, handicap accessibility is through the back door of the Visitor Center. The Park would like to explore options to make the front entry accessible. If the Park staff would like to have all the visitors travel through

the Visitor Center, the front entry porch and doorway will need to be modified to meet ADA standards. Most likely, there would be a “U” shaped ramp and landing configuration built to the north side of the existing entry porch. The exhibits in the entry porch would need to be relocated, as well as relocation of the pay phone and access to the side utility room to make way for the accessible ramp and other entry modifications. It may be necessary to relocate or remove some of the vegetation in the front of the Visitor Center to accommodate the ramp.



*North side of the front of the Visitor Center
where accessible ramp would be located*

With all of these different activities and components it would be a good idea to simplify and organize the front entry. Eliminating the pathways on the side of the Visitor Center, relocating the Sawmill trailhead to the “central trailhead” location and having a defined and direct route from the parking area will help reduce the confusion. Removing and/or pruning vegetation will help open up the building and make it more visible from the parking area. Using landscape elements such as paving will give shape and form to a seating/gathering areas. Removing or relocating the two kiosks, relocating the sign and modifying the doorway to provide a greater sense of entry into the building, as well as providing accessibility to the front will all help in defining and organizing the front of the building.

Visitor Center Interior: The Visitor Center has several park staff offices. These offices will be moved to the new Administration building leaving empty space in the Visitor Center. The Park would like to have all the visitors pass through the Visitor Center, but the current layout of the Visitor Center may not be able to accommodate the increase visitor traffic. The visitor will be spending more time in the building looking at exhibits and getting information about the park. The increase number of people could

make the small interior space very crowded. With the offices no longer in use, the Park may consider relocating some walls and the information desk to take advantage of this new space to provide more circulation for the visitors. It may be a good idea to contact an architect and a structural engineer from the Intermountain Regional Office to get some ideas about redesigning the interior of the Visitor Center.



Interior north side front of the Visitor Center where accessible ramp would be located



New Administration Building:

This spring a new Administration building will be built to replace the existing Administration trailer.

The site of the new building will be to the south of the Visitor Center. There will be a small parking area and entry road to the building off the existing parking area. The existing Administration trailer located behind the Visitor Center will be removed and the area regraded and revegetated. The Park has two Yurt canvas structures that have been used in the past for interpretative programs and an area for group gathering. The Park would like to relocate one of the Yurt canvas structure in the area of the old Administration trailer and continue to use it for group gatherings and interpretative programs.

Even though the new Administration building will be located to the south of the Visitor Center, there was some concern the new Administration building may be mistaken for the Visitor Center. It then becomes even more important to make changes to the front entry of the Visitor Center to enhance and define the building so the public does not become confused as to which building is the Visitor Center. In addition, placing berms and using vegetation to create a physical and visual barrier around the Administration building will also help to direct the visitors to the Visitor Center.



Existing Parking Area

Parking Area: The Park staff felt that the overall size of the parking area was adequate. During the busy season there are times when the parking area is full and some additional parking would be needed. There is some space in the existing parking area that could accommodate

additional 3 or 4 standard parking stalls (10' x 20'). In addition, there is an area to the east of the Romtec toilet that could be used for parking area expansion. This area would require bringing in additional fill and regrading to accommodate additional spaces.

There was also a question as to whether or not the current parking area configuration is the best layout with regard to vehicular circulation, bus parking and drop off location. The Park would like have a drop off area near the Visitor Center. The drop off area would be used primarily by school busses during the off season. In discussion of the drop off area, it was noted that a few of the parking spaces by the Romtec toilet could be blocked off and used as a school bus drop off during the off season. The central section of the parking area is large enough to accommodate the number of cars during the off season. In redesigning the front entry there may be an area that could be used for a vehicular drop off.

The question arose as to whether or not to address the parking area issues at this time. There is a possibility a new Visitor Center maybe be built in the future and at that time a new parking area would probably be a part of the planning and design process.

Recommendations:

Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument is a very busy place. The setting is beautiful and the resources and history are interesting and unique. It is a Park that maturing and is quickly growing out of the physical facilities. Visitation is increasing and the need to provide services and facilities are important. However, resources for the park and visitor needs are reduced yearly and we are all faced with doing more with less. With this in mind, the following recommendations can be made to make changes to the existing facilities that will upgrade and improve services for the visitor without costing a small fortune.

Central Trailhead: The idea of a “central trailhead” makes sense as it consolidates a starting point and an ending point for the trails around the Visitor Center. The park would like to develop the “central trailhead” area behind the Visitor Center. The “central trailhead” will be a gathering place for all hikers and therefore needs to be designed and developed to handle the increase number of visitors. This area should be a place when there is abundant amount of information, such as trail guides, maps and interpretative information. This could be in the form of several informational panels. In addition, this area should provide some kind of bench seating.

Estimated cost: \$15,000.00 - \$20,000.00

As the population of Visitors becomes older, it is important to provide trails that are accessible. Currently the park is modifying one trail to meet accessibility standards. It may be a good idea to do an accessibility assessment on all the trails in the park to determine if other trails could be modified to become accessible.

Estimated Cost: \$10,000.00

Front Entry: The front entry of the Visitor Center is in need of some design reorganization and simplification. In addition, if the Park would like to have all the Visitors pass through the Visitor Center the front of the building should be accessible. In addition, there should be some access improvements made from the parking area to the Visitor Center.

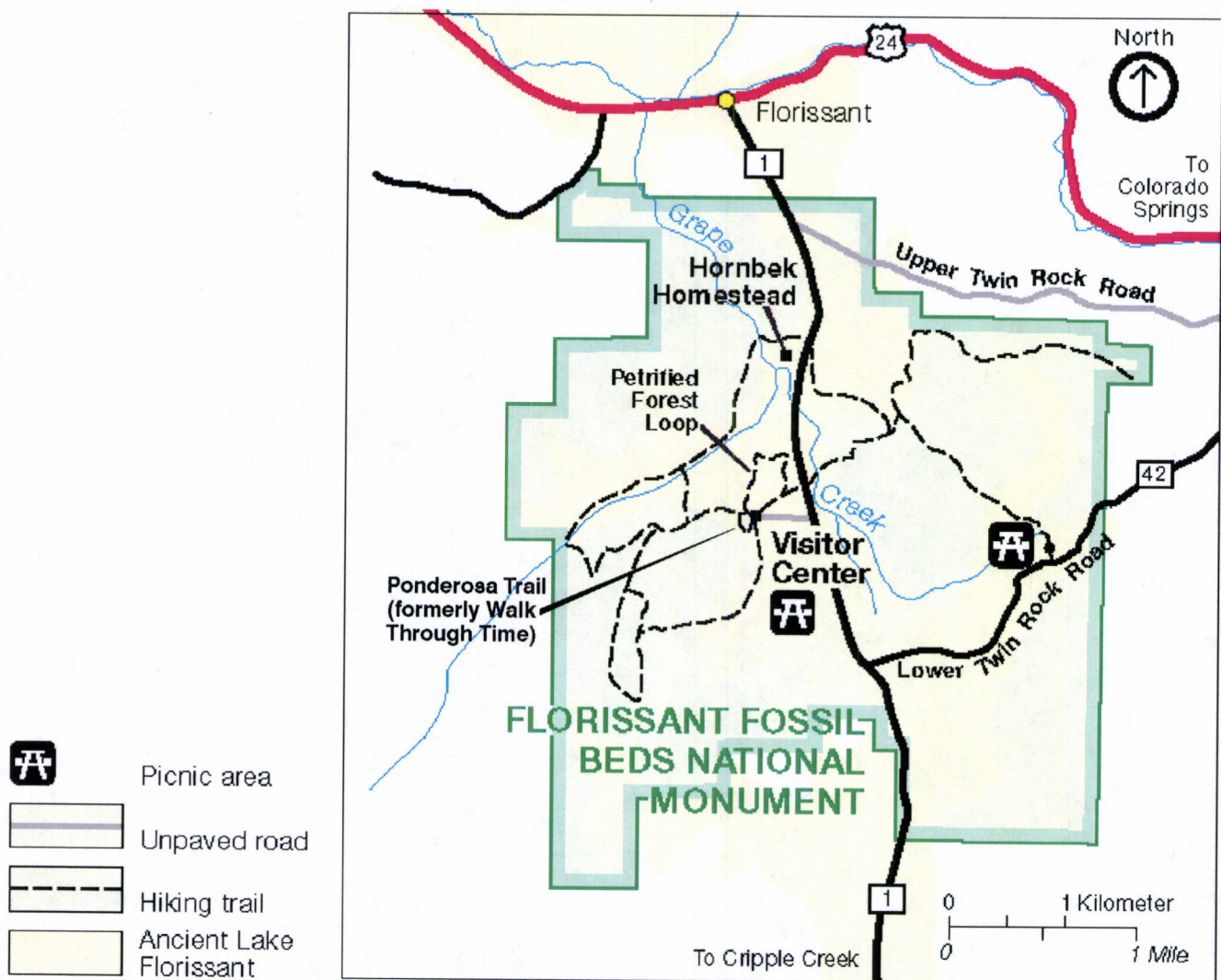
Estimated Cost: \$60,000.00 - \$70,000.00

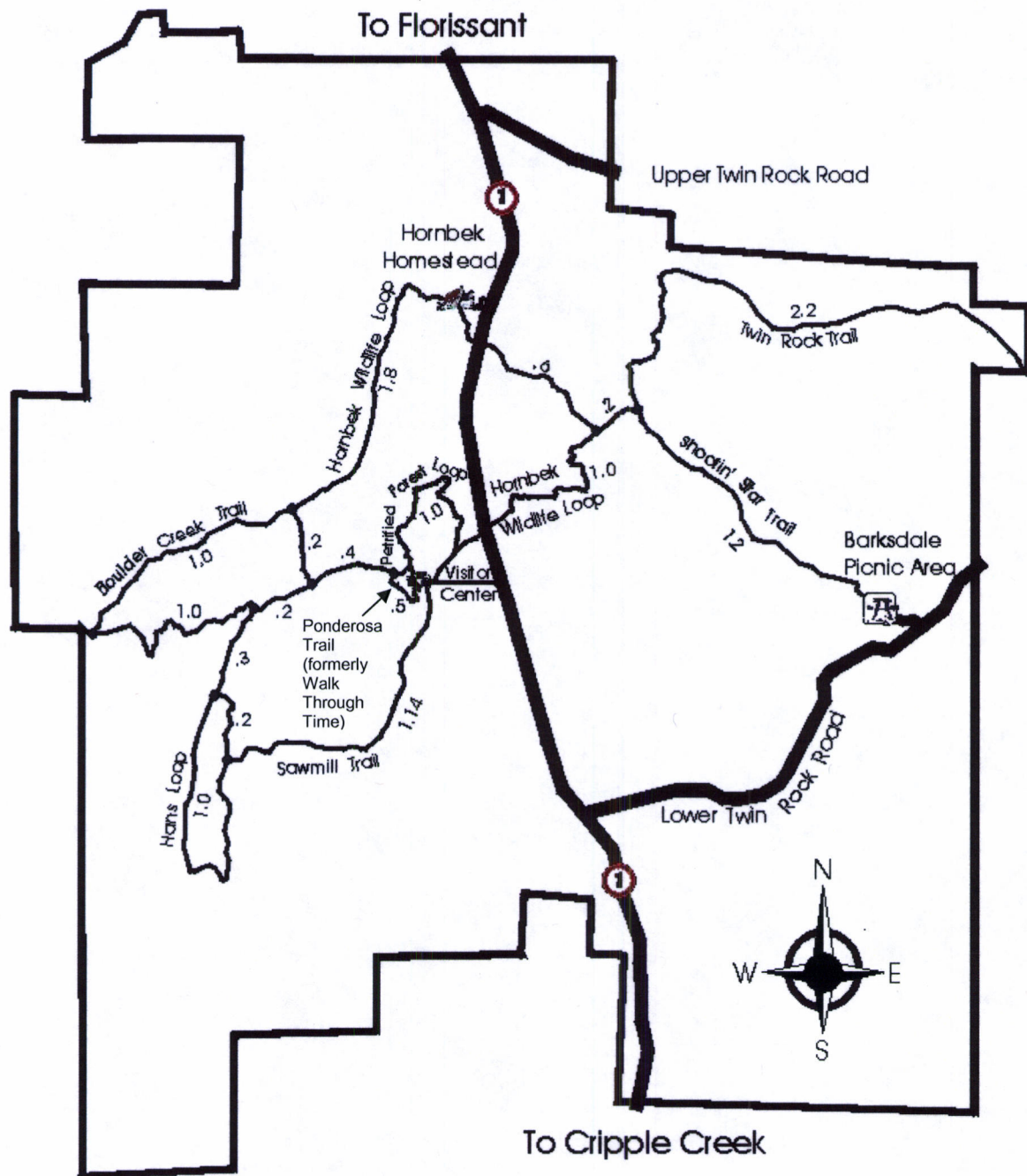
Visitor Center Interior: Changing walls and relocating the Visitor Center front desk. Rehabbing or replacing carpet, ceiling and walls and other items as necessary. This estimate is dependent upon the evaluation and recommendation of an architect and structure engineer.

Estimated Cost: \$20,000.00 - \$30,000.00

New Administration Building Screening: Berming and vegetation for a visual screen placed between the new Administration building and front entry.

Estimated Cost: \$8,000.00 - \$10,000.00





Walk Through Time - 1/2 mile - A self-guided trail provides a scenic introduction to Florissant Fossil Beds. The path features giant petrified redwood stumps and outcrops of fossil-bearing shale. **Easy.**

Petrified Forest Loop - 1 mile - A self-guided trail through the bed of ancient Lake Florissant exposes an unusual natural history. The colorful "**Big Stump**" dominates a forest of silica giants along the path. **Easy.**

Sawmill Trail - 2.2 miles - The variety of terrain provides a good example of Colorado's Montane Lifezone. Forests of pine, spruce, and fir; meadows frequented by elk; ridgetops viewing Pikes Peak; and shaded streams make this a favorite. **Moderate**

Boulder Creek Trail - 3.2 miles - Meandering out past ponds and wetlands and returning up through the Ponderosa forest, this sunny trail meets the Monument's western boundary at a distinctive rock formation sometimes called "The Caves". Water birds and animal signs are common. **Moderate**

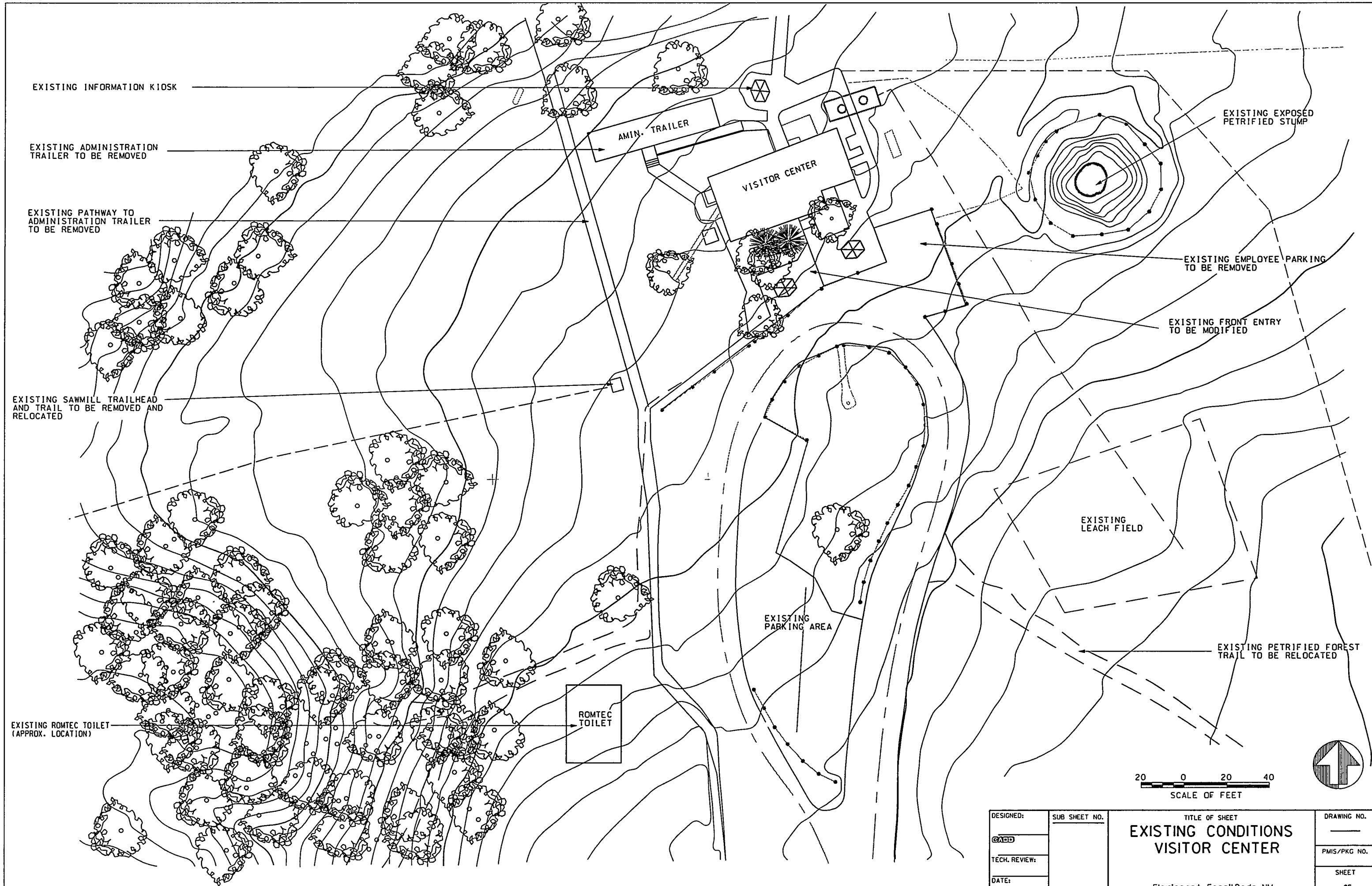
Hornbek Wildlife Loop - 4 miles - Following meadows, the trail to the historic Hornbek Homestead crosses land once occupied by Lake Florissant. The return route overlooks the ancient lakebed and the mountain ranges beyond. Signs of elk, deer, coyote, and other wildlife are common along the scenic loop. **Moderate**

Hans Loop - 3.3 miles - An extension of the Sawmill Trail, this trail provides vistas of 14,110 feet Pikes Peak. It passes remnants of a rustic homestead and a wetland habitat rich in plant and animal signs. **Moderate**

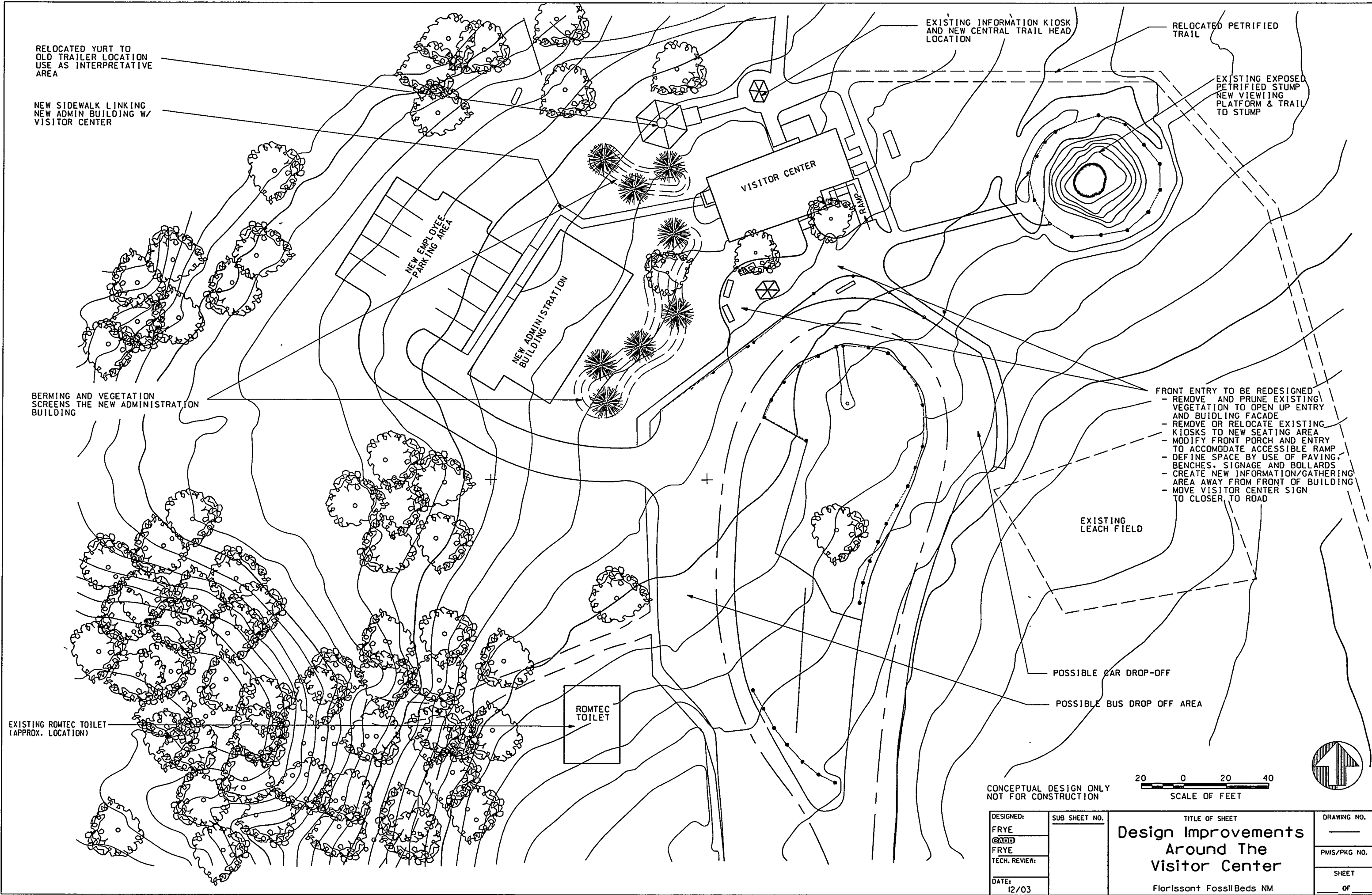
Shootin' Star Trail - 1.4 miles (ONE WAY) - This trail follows an old logging road and leaves the meadows to travel through the Ponderosa Pine forest. It was named after the nearby Shootin' Star Ranch. Look for signs of former agricultural activity. **Moderate**

Twin Rock Trail - 2.2 miles (ONE WAY) - Following a riparian, or stream habitat, this trail features a quiet view of rock formations, open meadows, aspen groves, willows, and pond life. Signs of wildlife are common. **Moderate**

ALL MILEAGES, EXCEPT SHOOTIN' STAR AND TWIN ROCK TRAILS, BEGIN AND END AT THE VISITOR CENTER.



DESIGNED:	SUB SHEET NO.	TITLE OF SHEET	DRAWING NO.
CADD		EXISTING CONDITIONS	
TECH. REVIEW:		VISITOR CENTER	PMIS/PKG NO.
DATE:		Florissant Fossil Beds NM	SHEET
			OF



RELOCATED YURT TO
OLD TRAILER LOCATION
USE AS INTERPRETATIVE
AREA

NEW SIDEWALK LINKING
NEW ADMIN BUILDING W/
VISITOR CENTER

BERMING AND VEGETATION
SCREENS THE NEW ADMINISTRATION
BUILDING

EXISTING ROMTEC TOILET
(APPROX. LOCATION)

ROMTEC
TOILET

VISITOR CENTER

NEW EMPLOYEE
PARKING AREA

NEW ADMINISTRATION
BUILDING

EXISTING INFORMATION KIOSK
AND NEW CENTRAL TRAIL HEAD
LOCATION

RELOCATED PETRIFIED
TRAIL

EXISTING EXPOSED
PETRIFIED STUMP
NEW VIEWING
PLATFORM & TRAIL
TO STUMP

- FRONT ENTRY TO BE REDESIGNED
- REMOVE AND PRUNE EXISTING
VEGETATION TO OPEN UP ENTRY
AND BUILDING FACADE
 - REMOVE OR RELOCATE EXISTING
KIOSKS TO NEW SEATING AREA
 - MODIFY FRONT PORCH AND ENTRY
TO ACCOMMODATE ACCESSIBLE RAMP
 - DEFINE SPACE BY USE OF PAVING,
BENCHES, SIGNAGE AND BOLLARDS
 - CREATE NEW INFORMATION/GATHERING
AREA AWAY FROM FRONT OF BUILDING
 - MOVE VISITOR CENTER SIGN
TO CLOSER TO ROAD

EXISTING
LEACH FIELD

POSSIBLE CAR DROP-OFF

POSSIBLE BUS DROP OFF AREA

CONCEPTUAL DESIGN ONLY
NOT FOR CONSTRUCTION

20 0 20 40
SCALE OF FEET



DESIGNED: FRYE CADD FRYE TECH. REVIEW:	SUB SHEET NO.	TITLE OF SHEET Design Improvements Around The Visitor Center Florissant Fossil Beds NM	DRAWING NO. —
DATE: 12/03			PMIS/PKG NO. —
			SHEET OF