

NDCRS ARCHITECTURAL FORM

PAGE 1

Field Code NPS-THRO-PCVCSITS# 32 BIMap Quad Fryburg NWSite Name Painted Canyon Visitor Center

Map Quad _____

Site Name _____

LTL T. 140 N., R. 101 W., Sec. 35 QQQ of the QQ 6 of the Q 6
 LTL T. 140 N., R. 101 W., Sec. 35 QQQ of the QQ 5 of the Q 6
 LTL T. 140 N., R. 101 W., Sec. 36 QQQ of the QQ 7 of the Q 7
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NAD 1983 UTM 623442 Zone 13NNAD 1983 UTM 5194656City: Belfield

Subsection
 1 = N½
 2 = E½
 3 = S½
 4 = W½
 5 = NE¼
 6 = SE¼
 7 = SW¼
 8 = NW¼

Street Number: Exit 32Street Name: I-94/Painted Canyon Road

Urban Legal Description: _____

Total Number of **Architectural** Features: 1Fieldwork Date: 05/20/2026

Reconnaissance Survey _____

Intensive Survey ☒

Project & Principal Investigator:

Determination of Eligibility - Theodore Roosevelt National Park, Painted Canyon Visitor Center
 Leah Edwards, NPS MWRO Historical Landscape Architect
 John Rosemurgy, NPS MWRO Historical Architect

Contracting Firm or Agency Completing the Form:

National Park Service

Additional Information:

SHSND USE

Component _____ Study Unit _____ Verified Site _____ CR Type _____

Component _____

Component _____

Recorded By: Leah Edwards/John Rosemurgy Date Recorded: 06/15/2026

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NDCRS ARCHITECTURAL FORM
PAGE 2 – Feature DataField Code NPS-THRO-PCVCSITS# 32 BI

Complete one Page 2 for each architectural feature at the site.

Architectural Feature # 1Construction Date 1977Feature Date 1975-1990Structural System Wood FrameOriginal Owner's Ethnicity OtherFeature Type 39 - Park; Parade groundContext Government, NationalPrimary Exterior Composition BoardSecondary Exterior Wood, Horizontal SidingCondition GoodPlan Shape OtherStyle ContemporaryArchitect/Builder National Park Service, Robert NewcombFoundation Concrete Stories 1.0Roof/Cornice Flat and slopedWindow Integrity most original windows replaced, openings intact

Dating Method(s) _____

Miscellaneous Information _____

Feature Preservation Recommendation(s) (Check all that apply):☐ Individual nomination☐ Contributes to a potential district☒ No nomination potential☒ Will not contribute to a district☐ Potential district—feature would be a contributing element if other properties constitute a district☐ Thematic nomination potential☐ Component of a historic site or landscape☐ Moved (specify all applicable choices)—a) relocation occurred within a historic period; b) recreates original site, orientation, landscape, and spatial relationships; c) compatible in context with neighboring structures; d) relocation has damaged eligibility☐ Historical associations require further investigationRecorded By: Leah Edwards/John Rosemurgy Date Recorded: 06/15/2026

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NDCRS ARCHITECTURAL FORM
PAGE 3 – Feature Data**Field Code** NPS-THRO-PCVC**SITS#** 32 BI**Complete one Page 3 for each architectural feature at the site.****1. Feature Description, Integrity, Eligibility:****Description**

The Painted Canyon Visitor Center is a wood frame complex comprised of two single-story buildings, the primary contact station and supporting comfort station (restroom facility), connected by a sheltering canopy. The visitor contact station has an Isosceles trapezoid-plan measuring 37'-4" long on the north wall, 89'-7" long on the south wall, and an overall width of 24'-0" with a rectangular entry vestibule measuring 22'-0" long by 6'-10" wide attached at the middle of the south wall. The building has a double-sloped roof with two 8'-0" square, 18'-0" high flat-roof tower features punctuating the east and west acute corners, and 5'-0" square masses anchoring the obtuse angle corners under the roof fascia. The diagonally oriented 30'-5" square-plan restroom facility has a flat roof with a hexagon-plan entrance vestibule projecting from the west corner and a 18'-2" long by 9'-6" wide rectangular-plan machinal room attached to the east corner. A 75'-6" long flat roof canopy, also in the shape Isosceles trapezoid, is oriented perpendicularly to the visitor contact station. It connects to the east corner of the visitor contact station and the west vestibule of the restroom facility. It is also supported by three 2'-4" square stone masonry columns in staggered placement as the canopy extends north and south to cover a portion of the concrete approach walkway.

The contact station has a full basement with reinforced concrete foundation walls. West and east tower elements have reinforced concrete slab foundations at grade. The restroom facility also has a reinforced concrete foundation at grade with thickened concrete perimeter footings. Walls for both buildings are wood frame with load-bearing stone-clad concrete walls at the contact station south vestibule and restroom facility west wall. Wood floor joists at the contact station bear on perimeter concrete walls and an intermediate steel beam. Prefabricated wood trusses form the broad-sloping north roof of the contact station with stick-built wood roof framing used for the steeply pitched south slope and the flat roof of the restroom building. The canopy roof is comprised of wood joists supported by steel beams bearing on reinforced concrete columns.

Exterior cladding for both buildings was originally resawn shiplap cedar applied at 45-degree angles in a chevron pattern across the walls and wide fascia band. The rustic texture siding was originally stained a medium brown. In 2022, the original wood siding was taken down and replaced with horizontal composite wood siding on the walls, while vertical composite boards were installed on the fascias. Both types of siding were painted gray. Accent walls and canopy columns are faced with locally quarried stone masonry laid in an ashlar configuration. Stone colors range from light tan to ochre set with a contrasting gray mortar. A 7'-0" high metal frame fence with composite vertical boards extends from the east wall of the restroom building. It encloses an area roughly 20'0" square and conceals mechanical equipment.

Windows are fixed double-glazed units with aluminum frames, a portion of which may be original to the

2. Current Owner:

National Park Service

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Field Code NPS-THRO-PCVCSITS# 32 BI*Feature Data – Feature Description, Integrity, Eligibility cont.*

building. Original exterior entrance doors are wood with narrow glass panels. Exterior utility doors were originally wood but have been replaced by metal. Four square wall openings with metal louvered vents were originally arranged in a series along the upper northwest wall. Three of the four openings have since been covered over and a smaller new square vent has been added above.

The broad sloping north roof of the contact station is built-up bituminous with a mineral surface and exposed metal coping along the perimeter. The steeply pitched south slope was originally intended to be covered entirely by photovoltaic (PV) solar panels. Currently the roof is clad in standing seam metal with PV panels covering approximately 25% of the roof surface. The flat roof towers, restroom building, and canopy have built-up bituminous roofs with mineral topping. Two square skylights penetrate the restroom roof. Soffits and the underside of the canopy are clad in original resawn wood shiplap.

The entrance to the contact station is through the south vestibule by the stone masonry accent wall. The interior west and north walls of the vestibule are covered in diagonal resawn wood shiplap boards. The top of the west wall has a triangular window that is integrated into the chevron configuration of the wood shiplap. Doors are wood with a stained finish and feature full glass panels. The entrance vestibule floor is concrete with an exposed aggregate finish to match exterior paving surfaces.

The vestibule leads to the visitor contact station—an open space, 9'-0" in height, with a flat gypsum board ceiling and an 8'-0" high, 4'-6" wide perimeter soffit covered in wood shiplap with integral cove lighting. North-facing walls have long horizontal windows that overlook the canyon. The east end of the space is used for staff operations (office) and is separated from the public area (lobby) by a service counter. The lobby floor was originally wood parquet but has since been covered in carpet. Walls are primarily painted gypsum board with diagonal resawn wood accent panels in the north corners. Windows and wood entry doors have matching stained wood trim. The east corner tower room is a staff toilet room. The north corner tower is a storage closet. An enclosed stair leading to the basement is situated along the south wall.

The restroom building interior is divided diagonally by a narrow rectangular utility space creating two nearly triangular-plan restrooms. Porcelain lavatories and toilets with metal partitions are located along the interior wall. Storage rooms are fitted into the north and south corners. Floors and walls are ceramic tile. Aluminum frame windows are positioned high on exterior walls. Ceilings are gypsum board with a single square skylight centrally located in each restroom. The hexagon-plan entrance vestibule is on the west corner of the building; it has a concrete floor with exposed aggregate matching the exterior paved surfaces. Restroom interiors were altered in the 1990s, and later in 2022, with new plumbing fixtures, partitions, and tile surfaces.

Propane-fueled furnaces with forced air supplies heat to the contact station and restroom building with ducts extending through the canopy roof. Cooling is supplied by a split system with new exterior condensing units located at the west end of the building surrounded by a 4'-0" high wood fence.

Underground electrical service leads to a basement circuit panel with branch wiring. Interior contact station lighting is limited to indirect lighting from fixtures mounted within the perimeter cove. Originally, lighting also included surface-mounted rectangular fluorescent fixtures, since removed. Restroom lighting consists of round recessed fixtures replacing original surface-mounted lighting. Exterior lighting is limited to recessed fixtures in the canopy ceiling and the vestibule soffit. A groundwater well supplies water to the facility. A septic system serves sanitary functions.

Recorded By: Leah Edwards/John Rosemurgy Date Recorded: June 2026

NDCRS CONTINUATION PAGE**Field Code** NPS-THRO-PCVC**SITS# 32** BI**History of the Resource**

The Painted Canyon Visitor Center facility is first documented in Schematic design drawings issued by the National Park Service (NPS), Denver Service Center in April 1975. In addition to civil engineering and site utility plans, the set includes five architectural sheets depicting preliminary design of the Visitor Contact Station, a complex consisting of a visitor center building with a connected restroom facility and two picnic shelters. Construction drawings for the Painted Canyon Visitor Center were completed in April 1977 with construction occurring between 1977 and 1979. NPS architect, Robert Newcomb, was project lead and designer.

The design of the Painted Canyon Visitor Center does not fit a singular architectural style. Rather, the building is a blend of late mid-20th century modern architecture influences that were adopted by the NPS Mission 66 and Parkscape USA programs. An emphasis on angular forms, rough surfaces, unusual shapes, and an austere outward presence also link the Visitor Center design to Brutalist principles but on a smaller scale than typically associated with large Brutalist public buildings. Additionally, the building shares aspects with what is known as the Shed Style, primarily a residential architecture trend from the late 1960s to early 1980s, noted for use of single sloped shed roofs creating asymmetrical massing often paired with diagonally oriented siding. This style also coincided with an interest in solar power photovoltaic panels on south-facing roof slopes—an essential feature of the Painted Canyon design.

Newcomb's career with the NPS spanned over 23 years. His architectural designs were Influenced by Modernist principles adapted by the Mission 66 and Parkscapes USA programs with an emphasis on horizontal massing, expanses of glass, and site integration. Newcomb designed multiple visitor centers and many other buildings at a time when the NPS was expanding facilities nationwide. His major works, including the Lake Mead National Recreation Area Temple Bar Visitor Center (1963), Jewel Cave National Monument Visitor Center (1967), and Rocky Mountain National Park West Side Administration Building (1969), share an organizational scheme similar to Painted Canyon with key functions are grouped into pods linked to frame landscape views. However, unlike the Painted Canyon Visitor Center, these park buildings have been maintained in a manner that is consistent with their original appearance and exemplify Newcomb's impact on NPS architecture.

The NPS operated the Painted Canyon Visitor Center from 1979, the year construction was completed, through 2025. It was open as a seasonal facility and managed by the Theodore Roosevelt Nature and History Association.

Eligibility**Criterion A - *Property is associated with significant events in history***

To qualify under Criterion A, a property must not only be associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of history but also retain historic integrity, sufficient to convey the association. The Painted Canyon Visitor Center was constructed between 1977-1979, well after the conclusion of the NPS Mission 66 program of 1954 – 1966, and outside the timespan of the Parkscape USA initiative of 1967 – 1973. During its period of operation, no significant events are known to have taken place at Painted Canyon. The property is not significant under Criterion A.

Criterion B – *Property is associated with the lives of past significant persons*

To qualify under Criterion B, a property must be associated with a historically significant individual. This criterion is generally restricted to properties that convey an individual's important achievements. It is acknowledged that NPS Architect Robert Newcomb had a productive career designing buildings for the National Park Service and that several of his buildings are either listed or eligible for listing on the National Register. However, no known DOEs or National Register nominations for a Newcomb-designed building list Criterion B as applicable.

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The 2015 National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form for Mission 66 Era Resources identifies several Newcomb-designed buildings but under Criterion Consideration B, states the following: "It would be highly unlikely for a property, such as a visitor center, to be listed under Criterion B because establishing association with an architect, landscape architect, or engineer's productive life, primary residence, or place of work is improbable." The property is not significant under Criterion B.

Criterion C – Property embodies distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, represents the work of a master, possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

To qualify under Criterion C, a property must embody distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction; represent the work of a master; possess high artistic value; or represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction. Modifications to the Painted Canyon Visitor Center have altered its appearance to the extent that the original design intent is substantially diminished and fails to convey significant architectural design or distinctive construction. The property is not significant under Criterion C.

Criterion D - Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

To qualify under Criterion D, the property must have physical material with important information to contribute to the understanding of human history or prehistory. There are no known archeological sites or features associated with the Painted Canyon Visitor Center. National Park Service Midwest Archeological Center archeologists surveyed the site and excavated shovel probes, confirming the location of a previously recorded archeological site and identifying a second precontact site (Wiewel 2026). Additionally, remnants of earlier visitor-use facilities were observed eroding from the rim of Painted Canyon. Nothing encountered during the investigation indicated a likelihood that significant historic or precontact cultural resources are present within the larger site. Therefore, the Painted Canyon Visitor Center is not significant under Criterion D.

Aspects of Integrity**Introduction**

Although the original massing remains intact, exterior modifications have been made to the design, materials, and feeling of the Painted Canyon Visitor Center that negatively impacts integrity.

To retain historic integrity, a property should generally possess a majority of seven aspects.

Location

The Visitor Center is in the South Unit of Theodore Roosevelt National Park along Interstate Highway 94, approximately eleven miles west of Belfield, ND and seven miles east of Medora, ND. It is located approximately a quarter of a mile north of Exit 32, on Painted Canyon Road. The property retains integrity of location.

Design

Primary massing and roof forms remain unchanged from the 1979 as-built drawings. The Painted Canyon Visitor Center remains as two separate buildings linked by a flat roofed canopy. However, the later addition of mechanical equipment enclosures on the far west and east ends extend the building profile in a manner that inconsistent with the original design intent, obscuring the building profile set against the background of the canyon. In the 1990s, the south-facing photovoltaic panel roof was removed and substituted with a standing seam metal roof with a smaller surface-mounted photovoltaic array. This change has visually fragmented what was once a uniform building feature. Exterior wood board siding was originally arranged in diagonal chevron patterning across exterior walls to convey a sense of movement and dynamic integration with the building massing. This feature is now missing and has been replaced with synthetic cladding installed in horizontal rows that wrap the structure in a uniform and cover without visual variety.

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Interior alterations to the visitor contact station include concealment of the original wood parquet flooring with carpeting and removal of the original customer service desk, replaced with a reconfigured design. The overall integrity of design is diminished.

Setting

The building is situated on an open plateau on the south rim of Painted Canyon. The Visitor Center's relationship to the surrounding landscape and views of the terrain remain intact. The property retains integrity of setting.

Materials

Intact original exterior materials include stone masonry walls and columns, wood shiplap soffits and canopy ceilings, exterior entrance doors, and some windows. Conversely, the original south facing photovoltaic panel roof has been replaced with standing seam metal roofing. Original diagonal wood siding that conveyed a textured and rustic appearance, has been replaced with cement fiberboard siding that has a low sheen with a simulated woodgrain surface texture. Materials that were originally specified for their natural qualities have been replaced with incompatible synthetic substitutions. The overall integrity of materials is diminished.

Workmanship

Original construction incorporated installation of diagonally configured wood siding. This effort required precision and skill, particularly where the siding intersected into chevron patterns. Through removal, this ornamental detailing has been completely lost. The overall integrity of workmanship is diminished.

Feeling

Changes to the property's design, materials, and workmanship have collectively reduced the visual characteristics that would have conveyed the essence of a late midcentury NPS visitor center. The overall integrity of feeling is diminished.

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NDCRS ARCHITECTURAL FORM**PAGE 4 – Site Description****Field Code** NPS-THRO-PCVC**SITS#** 32 BI3. Site Area (ft²): 1,541,775

4. Description of Access and Site Setting:

The Painted Canyon Visitor Center Site is located within the South Unit of Theodore Roosevelt National Park (hereafter may be referred to as "the park") in Billings County, North Dakota. Situated at Interstate 94 Exit 32, approximately 11 miles west of Belfield and 8 miles east of Medora, the site is accessible to travelers from both eastbound and westbound directions along Interstate 94. For westbound I-94 travelers, it serves as the first National Park Service visitor contact area within the South Unit of the park.

The site occupies approximately 35 acres along the rim of Painted Canyon within the Little Missouri River Badlands. The surrounding landscape consists of mixed-grass prairie and eroded badlands formations characterized by expansive views into Painted Canyon and the surrounding terrain.

5. Summary of ALL Site Features and Evaluation of Significance:

Terminology Note: The 1970s planning and construction drawings generally identify the primary building as a "visitor contact station," reflecting the terminology used during the site's development. For consistency throughout this Site Description, the term "visitor center" is used when referring to the primary building.

Historic Development

The Painted Canyon area emerged as a scenic roadside overlook associated with Interstate 94 prior to the development of the visitor center complex. Drawings, primarily topographic in nature, were prepared in 1963 to document proposals for improving visitor facilities at the overlook and integrating the site into the park's broader visitor-use system. The existing overlook and its expansive views into Painted Canyon established the location as a significant visitor orientation and viewing area and provided the foundation for subsequent planning and development.

The 1973 Master Plan reaffirmed the importance of the Painted Canyon overlook as a major visitor-use area and proposed additional facilities and site improvements, including a visitor center, comfort station (restroom), viewing terrace, picnic facilities, parking, ornamental and foundation plantings, and supporting utilities. The plan emphasized the site's role in introducing travelers to the badlands landscape and encouraging further visitation to the park.

By 1975, planning for improvements at Painted Canyon had progressed into detailed design and engineering. Existing facilities at the site included an information booth, comfort station, picnic shelter, parking areas, and associated utilities. Working drawings prepared in 1975 translated earlier planning recommendations into detailed construction documents for the visitor center complex and associated facilities, establishing the layout, circulation patterns, utility systems, and site improvements ultimately constructed at the overlook. The plans retained the site's established function as a roadside visitor contact point while reorganizing circulation and concentrating development within a compact arrangement of facilities designed to capitalize on views into Painted Canyon.

6. References/Comments:

Harmon, David. At the Open Margin: The NPS's Administration of Theodore Roosevelt National Park. Medora, ND: Theodore Roosevelt Nature and History Association, 1986.

National Park Service. Existing Conditions 1976 Painted Canyon Theodore Roosevelt NMP. Drawing no. 387-80007. March 1975. National Park Service Electronic Technical Information Center, Denver, CO.

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Access is via a paved entrance road from I-94 leading to a parking area adjacent to the visitor center. The developed site includes the visitor center, picnic shelters, overlooks, sidewalks, parking areas, trail connections associated with the Painted Canyon Nature Trail and Painted Canyon Trail, and a wastewater treatment lagoon. These features are clustered along the canyon rim and oriented to take advantage of views into Painted Canyon and the badlands landscape.

Site Description – Summary of ALL Site Features and Evaluation of Significance cont.

Construction of the Painted Canyon visitor center complex followed in the mid-1970s as the park implemented the approved construction documents. Existing facilities at the Painted Canyon overlook were removed and replaced with a coordinated visitor-use development that included a visitor center and comfort station, overlooks and viewing terraces, picnic shelters, pedestrian walkways, utility systems, wastewater lagoons, and expanded parking and circulation facilities. Roadway circulation was substantially reconfigured through relocation of the northeast exit ramp and construction of new access roads and parking facilities. Completed in 1979, the project transformed the site from a roadside overlook into a developed visitor orientation and interpretation facility designed to introduce travelers to Theodore Roosevelt National Park.

Following completion of the Painted Canyon visitor center complex in 1979, modifications have occurred periodically to support visitor use and park operations. In 1988, the historic stone entrance pylon, associated with the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) development of the South Unit, was relocated from the historic and former east entrance on Highway 10 to the grassy median at the entrance to the Painted Canyon Visitor Center Site and was repaired. Additional changes have included rehabilitation of the Painted Canyon Nature Trail, removal of the former service road extending north from the parking area toward I-94, minor reconfiguration of wastewater treatment lagoons, installation of solar-powered parking area lighting, and construction of a weather and air quality monitoring station north of the lagoon area.

Site Feature Descriptions**Painted Canyon Visitor Center Site**

The visitor center site occupies approximately 35 acres along the rim of Painted Canyon and contains a collection of visitor-use and operational features associated with the 1970s development of the overlook area. The developed portion of the site is characterized by maintained lawn areas, scattered trees and shrubs, pedestrian circulation routes, overlooks, picnic facilities, and supporting infrastructure. Mature ash trees are concentrated primarily along the parking area, while ornamental vegetation is limited to a small number of shrubs adjacent to the visitor center. The developed landscape is surrounded by open grassland and badlands terrain, creating a contrast with the surrounding natural landscape. Views into Painted Canyon and the badlands landscape are a defining characteristic of the site and influence the organization and orientation of many site features.

Entrance Drive

The entrance drive provides primary vehicular access to the visitor center site from I-94. The drive begins at a metal cattle guard and green-painted metal gate before curving east and continuing as a one-way roadway parallel to the parking area. A grassy median separates the entrance drive from the parking area and contains the historic entrance pylon sign. The drive is paved with bituminous asphalt and is marked with painted centerlines and directional arrows guiding traffic into the visitor-use area.

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The parking area is located immediately west of the entrance drive and is organized into two separate parking lots divided by a grassy median. The eastern parking lot primarily accommodates larger vehicles, including recreational vehicles, campers, and horse trailers, while the western parking lot is intended for passenger vehicles. Both parking areas are paved with bituminous asphalt and are connected by internal circulation drives. The western parking lot is situated adjacent to the visitor center and is directly connected to the site's sidewalk network by curb-and-gutter edges and pedestrian walkways. The parking area is oriented parallel to the visitor center complex and canyon rim, providing direct access to visitor facilities and overlook areas.

Walkways

A network of concrete and exposed-aggregate walkways provides pedestrian circulation throughout the developed portion of the site. A concrete sidewalk extends along the western parking area and connects the visitor center, picnic shelters, overlooks, and trailheads. North of the parking area, an exposed-aggregate walkway follows the rim of Painted Canyon before transitioning to concrete and continuing to the primary stone overlook. Additional concrete walkways extend south from the overlook area to the picnic shelters and reconnect with the sidewalk adjacent to the parking area. Concrete walkways also provide access to and circulation around each picnic shelter. Combined, the walkway network extends approximately 2,000 linear feet and generally ranges from 6 to 8 feet in width, with wider sections adjacent to the parking area. Two informal pedestrian paths are present within the site, including a route connecting the Painted Canyon Trail trailhead to the northern walkway and a second path extending from the southern walkway corridor to a fenced viewpoint area.

Stone Overlook Wall (Primary Overlook)

A limestone and mortar wall defines the primary overlook and viewing area into Painted Canyon. Constructed of uniform rectangular and square limestone blocks, the wall consists of a central section flanked by two lower angled sections that extend outward and connect to the split-rail fence along the canyon rim. The side wall sections measure approximately 32 inches in height and 20 inches in width, while the central wall section measures approximately 43 inches in height and 20 inches in width. The central wall section serves as the focal point of the overlook area. An interpretive wayside is in front of the wall. Positioned along the rim of Painted Canyon, the overlook provides expansive views of the canyon and surrounding badlands landscape.

Painted Canyon Trailhead and Painted Canyon Nature Trailhead

Two trails originate within the visitor center site and offer pedestrian access into Painted Canyon. The Painted Canyon Trail trailhead is located north of the entrance drive and parking area and consists of an unpaved trail entrance marked by an orientation and interpretive sign providing trail information. The Painted Canyon Nature Trail trailhead is located south of the primary overlook and adjacent to the picnic shelters. Similar in character, it consists of an unpaved trail entrance marked by an orientation sign and includes a simple, brown-painted wood bench. Both trailheads transition from the developed visitor area to natural-surface trails consisting primarily of compacted soil, rock, and stone steps as they descend into Painted Canyon.

Picnic Shelters

Two picnic shelters are located south of the primary overlook near the canyon rim. Each shelter is approximately 18 feet by 15 feet and consists of an open-sided structure supported by stone columns at each corner. Heavy timber framing supports a gabled roof with exposed wood plank decking beneath. Four picnic table bays are located within each shelter, with a picnic table positioned within each bay for a total of four picnic tables per shelter.

Fencing

Several fence types are present throughout the site. A post-and-wire fence extends east and west from the entrance gate and generally follows Interstate 94 right-of-way beyond the boundaries of the visitor center site. A wood split-rail fence follows the canyon rim between the Painted Canyon Trail and Painted Canyon Nature Trail trailheads, defining the edge of the developed visitor area adjacent to Painted Canyon.

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A black chain-link fence encloses the wastewater lagoons located east of the entrance drive and parking area and measures approximately 404 feet in length by 252 feet in width.

Entrance Pylon Sign

Located within the grassy median at the entrance to the visitor center site, the entrance pylon sign is a historic feature that contributes to the eligibility of the CCC-era resources of the South Unit of Theodore Roosevelt National Park. Constructed in 1938 of ashlar sandstone with wrought-iron lettering and decorative ironwork, the sign was originally erected at the former east entrance to the South Unit. It was relocated to the Painted Canyon overlook area in 1968 and repositioned within the entrance median in 1988, where it remains today.

Wastewater Lagoons

The wastewater treatment facilities are located east of the entrance drive and parking area and consist of three earthen lagoon cells enclosed by a black chain-link fence. The lagoon cells are generally rectangular in form and separated by earthen berms. A gravel service road provides access to the facility from the visitor center site. The lagoons serve the wastewater treatment needs of the visitor center site and associated visitor-use facilities.

Gravel Service Drive

A gravel service drive extends east from the division between the entrance drive and parking area to the wastewater lagoons and air quality monitoring station. The drive provides maintenance and operational access to these facilities and is separated from the primary visitor-use portions of the site. The road surface consists of compacted gravel and follows a generally east-west alignment through the service area.

Air Quality and Weather Monitoring Station

The air quality monitoring station is located north of the wastewater lagoons across the gravel access drive. The facility consists of a small monitoring building, meteorological equipment, a Remote Automatic Weather Station (RAWS), and an associated state-owned trailer used to support monitoring operations and data collection. The station occupies a fenced service area separated from the primary visitor-use portions of the site and supports air quality and weather monitoring activities within the park.

Evaluation of Significance and Integrity**Introduction**

The Painted Canyon Visitor Center Site was developed between 1975 and 1979 as a visitor orientation and scenic viewing area associated with Theodore Roosevelt National Park. The site includes visitor-use facilities, overlooks, pedestrian circulation systems, picnic facilities, supporting infrastructure, and landscape features organized along the rim of Painted Canyon. Evaluation of the site considered National Register Criteria A through D as well as the seven aspects of integrity identified in National Register Bulletin 15.

Criterion A

To qualify under Criterion A, a property must not only be associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history but also retain historic integrity, sufficient to convey the association. The Painted Canyon Visitor Center Site is associated with the expansion of visitor facilities and services at Theodore Roosevelt National Park during the 1970s. Developed between 1975 and 1979, the site provided visitor orientation, interpretation, scenic viewing opportunities, and access to Painted Canyon for travelers along Interstate 94. While the site reflects ongoing National Park Service efforts to improve visitor services and accommodate automobile-based tourism, these activities represent routine park development and management practices rather than events or trends.

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of exceptional historical significance. Research did not identify any significant events associated with the site, nor did its development result in a significant contribution to broad patterns of local, state, or national history. Therefore, the Painted Canyon Visitor Center Site is not significant under Criterion A.

Criterion B

To qualify under Criterion B, a property must be associated with a historically significant individual. Research did not identify any individuals of recognized historical significance whose important activities or accomplishments are directly associated with the Painted Canyon Visitor Center Site. While the site was planned, designed, and constructed through the efforts of National Park Service personnel and consultants, these associations do not rise to the level required under Criterion B. Therefore, the Painted Canyon Visitor Center Site is not significant under Criterion B.

Criterion C

To qualify under Criterion C, a property must embody distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction; represent the work of a master; possess high artistic values; or represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction. The Painted Canyon Visitor Center Site reflects National Park Service development, planning, and design practices associated with visitor facilities constructed during the late 1970s and includes features such as overlooks, pedestrian walkways, picnic shelters, parking areas, trailheads, and supporting infrastructure. The arrangement of these features was intended to facilitate visitor orientation, scenic viewing, interpretation, and access to the Painted Canyon landscape. While the site retains many characteristics associated with its original development, the organization and composition of its features primarily reflect functional planning objectives rather than a distinctive landscape design, innovative planning concept, or exceptional example of park development. Research did not identify exceptional artistic values or associations with a master designer that would distinguish the site from other examples of NPS visitor facility development. Therefore, the Painted Canyon Visitor Center Site is not significant under Criterion C.

Criterion D

To qualify under Criterion D, the property must have physical material with important information to contribute to the understanding of human history or prehistory. The Painted Canyon Visitor Center Site was evaluated for its potential to contain archeological resources or other information important to understanding the history or prehistory of the area. National Park Service Midwest Archeological Center archeologists surveyed the site and excavated shovel probes, confirming the location of a previously recorded archeological site and identifying a second precontact site (Wiewel 2026). Additionally, remnants of earlier visitor-use facilities were observed eroding from the rim of Painted Canyon. Nothing encountered during the investigation indicated a likelihood that significant historic or precontact cultural resources are present within the site. Therefore, the Painted Canyon Visitor Center Site is not significant under Criterion D.

Evaluation of the Painted Canyon Visitor Center Site under National Register Criteria A through D did not identify significance sufficient to support eligibility for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The site is therefore not significant under Criteria A, B, C, or D.

Aspects of Integrity

To retain historic integrity, a property should generally possess a majority of seven aspects.

Location

The Painted Canyon Visitor Center Site remains in its original location along the rim of Painted Canyon adjacent to Interstate 94 within Theodore Roosevelt National Park. The relationship between the site, the canyon overlook, the surrounding badlands landscape, and the transportation corridor that historically provided visitor access remains unchanged. The site retains integrity of location.

Recorded By: Leah Edwards/John Rosemurgy **Date Recorded:** June 2026

NDCRS CONTINUATION PAGE**Field Code** NPS-THRO-PCVC**SITS# 32** BI**Design**

The overall design of the visitor center site remains readily identifiable and continues to reflect the organization established during the site's development between 1975 and 1979. The entrance drive, parking areas, visitor center, primary overlook, picnic shelters, trailheads, walkway network, wastewater treatment facilities, and their spatial relationships remain largely intact. The site's historic organization along the rim of Painted Canyon and its orientation towards scenic views of the canyon and surrounding badlands landscape also remain evident.

Several alterations have occurred since the site's completion. Changes include the removal of a segment of walkway leading to the former eastern overlook, removal of a masonry sign, removal of the service road extending to Interstate 94, reconfiguration of the wastewater lagoons, installation of the air quality and weather monitoring station, addition of a minor overlook along the northern walkway, and the development of informal pedestrian paths. In addition, ornamental and foundation plantings identified in the original plans are largely absent.

While these changes have modified individual features and portions of the site's circulation system, they have not substantially altered the overall organization, circulation patterns, or visitor-use functions established during the historic period. The site retains integrity of design.

Setting

The Painted Canyon Visitor Center Site retains its historic setting along the rim of Painted Canyon within the Little Missouri River Badlands. Expansive views into Painted Canyon and the surrounding badlands landscape remain largely unchanged and continue to define the visitor experience. The site's relationship to Interstate 94, open grasslands, and the surrounding natural landscape also remains intact.

Modern additions and alterations within the site include the air quality and weather monitoring station, modifications to the wastewater lagoon facilities, installation of solar-powered parking area lighting, and changes to vegetation and circulation features. However, these changes do not substantially alter the site's overall setting or its relationship to the surrounding landscape. The site retains integrity of setting.

Materials

Many of the materials associated with the historic development of the Painted Canyon Visitor Center Site remain intact. Asphalt paving, concrete and exposed-aggregate walkways, limestone masonry, stone shelter columns, wood structural elements, split-rail fencing, and earthen wastewater lagoons continue to be present throughout the site. While some individual features have been altered, removed, or added since the site's completion, these changes have not substantially affected the overall presence of historic materials. The site retains integrity of materials.

Workmanship

Workmanship associated with the historic development of the Painted Canyon Visitor Center Site remains evident in features such as the limestone overlook wall, stone picnic shelter columns, heavy timber shelter construction, and exposed-aggregate walkways. These features continue to reflect the construction methods and craftsmanship employed during the site's development in the late 1970s. Although some site features have been altered or removed, sufficient evidence of historic workmanship remains. The site retains integrity of workmanship.

Feeling

The Painted Canyon Visitor Center Site continues to convey the historic character of a late-1970s National Park Service visitor orientation and scenic viewing area.

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NDCRS CONTINUATION PAGE**Field Code** NPS-THRO-PCVC**SITS# 32** BI

Visitors experience the site much as it was historically intended, with overlooks, walkways, picnic facilities, trail access, and visitor services organized around expansive views into Painted Canyon and the surrounding badlands landscape. Although alterations have occurred since the site's completion, including changes to circulation features, vegetation, wastewater treatment facilities, and the addition of monitoring equipment, the site continues to evoke its historic function and character. The site retains integrity of feeling.

Association

The Painted Canyon Visitor Center Site continues to maintain its historic association with visitor orientation, interpretation, and scenic viewing within Theodore Roosevelt National Park. The site remains in active use for the purposes for which it was developed and continues to provide visitors with access to overlooks, trails, visitor services, and views into Painted Canyon. Although alterations have occurred since the site's completion, the relationship between the site and its historic function remains readily apparent. The site retains integrity of association.

Conclusion

The Painted Canyon Visitor Center Site was evaluated under National Register Criteria A, B, C, and D and was not found to be significant under any criterion. While the site reflects National Park Service planning and development practices associated with visitor facilities constructed during the late 1970s, research did not identify associations with significant events or persons, distinctive design characteristics, exceptional artistic values, or the potential to yield important historical or prehistorical information. Although alterations have occurred since the site's completion, the site retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association sufficient to convey its historic character and function. However, because the site lacks significance under the National Register Criteria for Evaluation, it is recommended as ineligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

The evaluation and recommendation presented herein apply only to the Painted Canyon Visitor Center Site. The historic entrance pylon sign located within the site is a contributing feature to the previously determined eligible CCC-era resources of the South Unit at Theodore Roosevelt National Park and is not included in this recommendation of ineligibility.

Recorded By: Leah Edwards/John Rosemurgy **Date Recorded:** June 2026

NDCRS CONTINUATION PAGE

Field Code _____

SITS# 32 _____

Site Description – References/Comments cont.

National Park Service. *South Unit–Entrance Sign Painted Canyon (HS-302, Resource ID 023045)*. Historic Structures Inventory (HSI), Cultural Resources Inventory System (CRIS). Accessed April 2, 2026.

National Park Service. *Theodore Roosevelt National Park Foundation Document*. Omaha, NE: National Park Service, 2014.

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Field Code NPS-THRO-PCVC

SITS# 32 BI

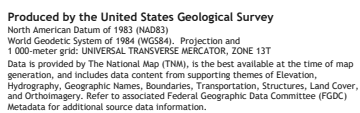


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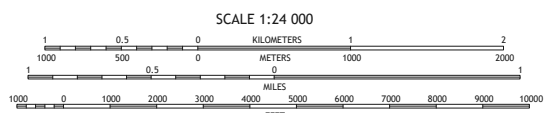


7.5-MINUTE TOPO QUADRANGLE
NORTH DAKOTA - CUSTOM EXTENT
7.5-MINUTE TOPO



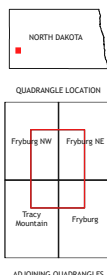
This map is not a legal document. Boundaries may be generalized for this map scale. Private lands within government reservations may not be shown. Obtain permission before entering private lands. Temporal changes may have occurred since these data were collected and some data may no longer represent actual surface conditions.

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CONTOUR INTERVAL 5 FEET
NORTH AMERICAN VERTICAL DATUM OF 1988
CONTOUR SMOOTHNESS = Medium

USER DEFINED CONTENT



ROAD CLASSIFICATION

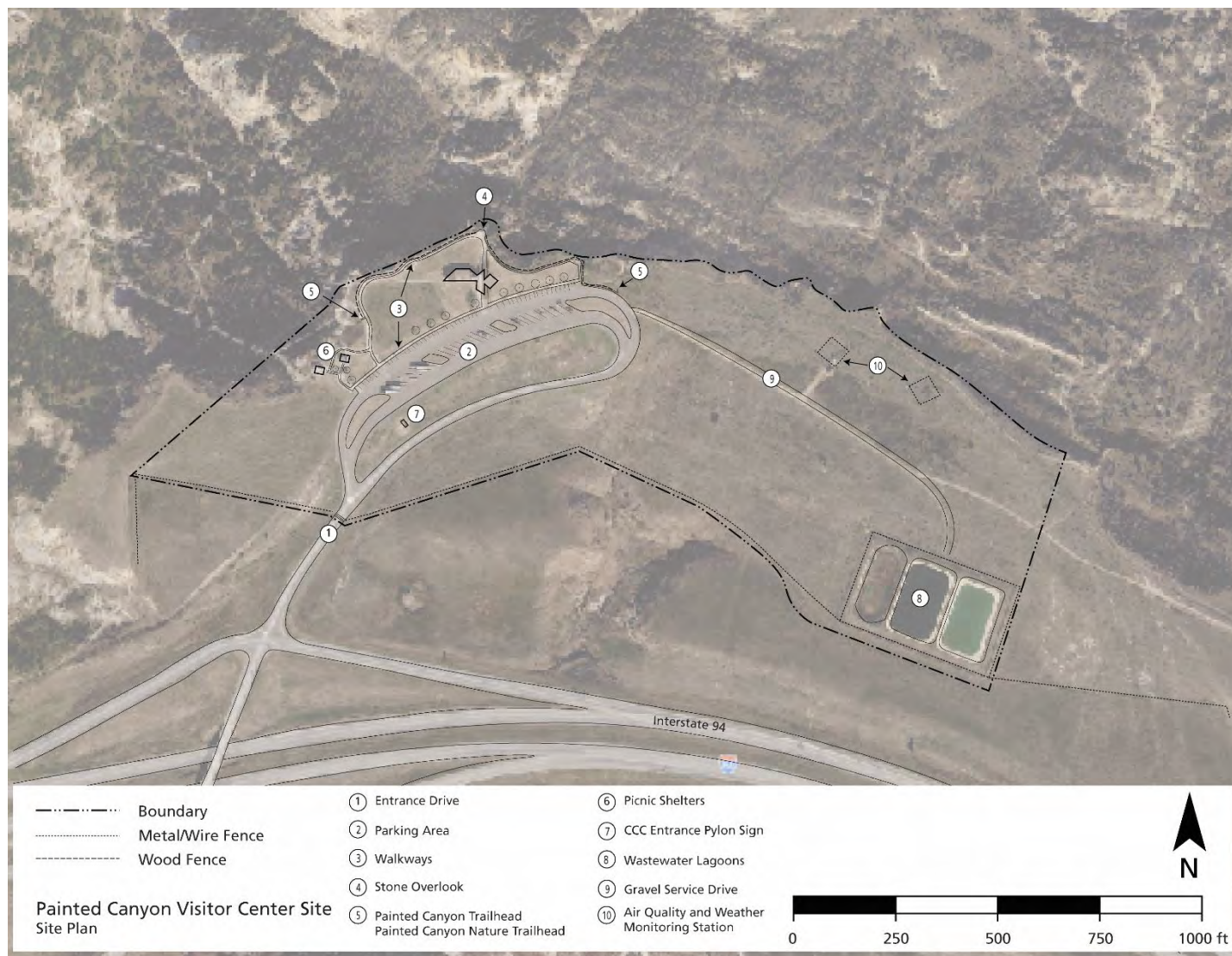
Expressway		Local Connector	
Secondary Hwy		Local Road	
Ramp		4WD	

 Interstate Route	 US Route	 State Route
 FS Primary Route	 FS Passenger Route	 FS High Clearance Route

Check with local Forest Service unit
for current travel conditions and restrictions

7.5-MINUTE TOPO, ND
2026

NDCRS ATTACHMENT SECTION

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Painted Canyon Visitor Center Site—Site Plan. Adapted from Google Earth imagery by Edwards, 2026.

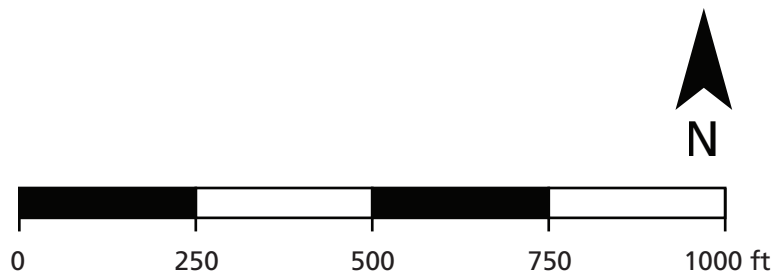
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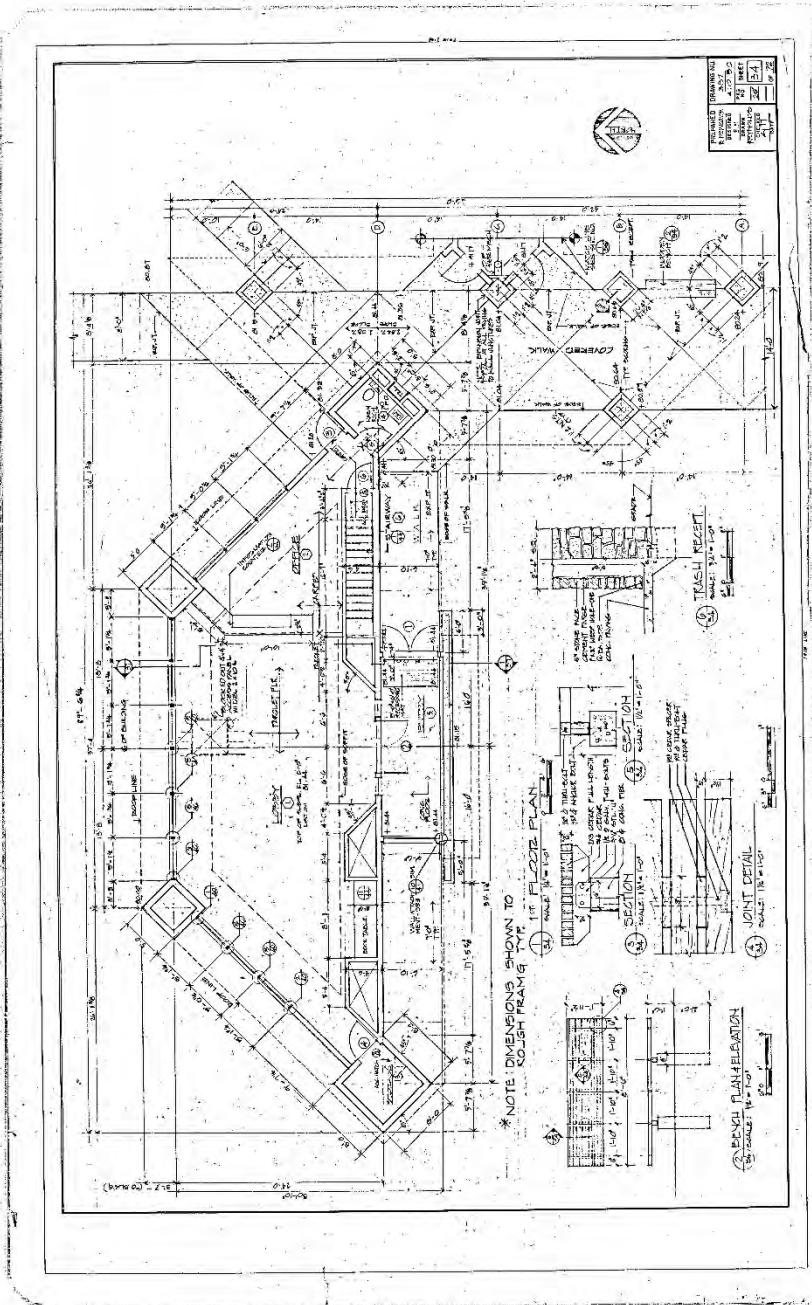
- Boundary
- Metal/Wire Fence
- Wood Fence

Painted Canyon Visitor Center Site
Site Plan

- ① Entrance Drive
- ② Parking Area
- ③ Walkways
- ④ Stone Overlook
- ⑤ Painted Canyon Trailhead
Painted Canyon Nature Trailhead
- ⑥ Picnic Shelters
- ⑦ CCC Entrance Pylon Sign
- ⑧ Wastewater Lagoons
- ⑨ Gravel Service Drive
- ⑩ Air Quality and Weather
Monitoring Station



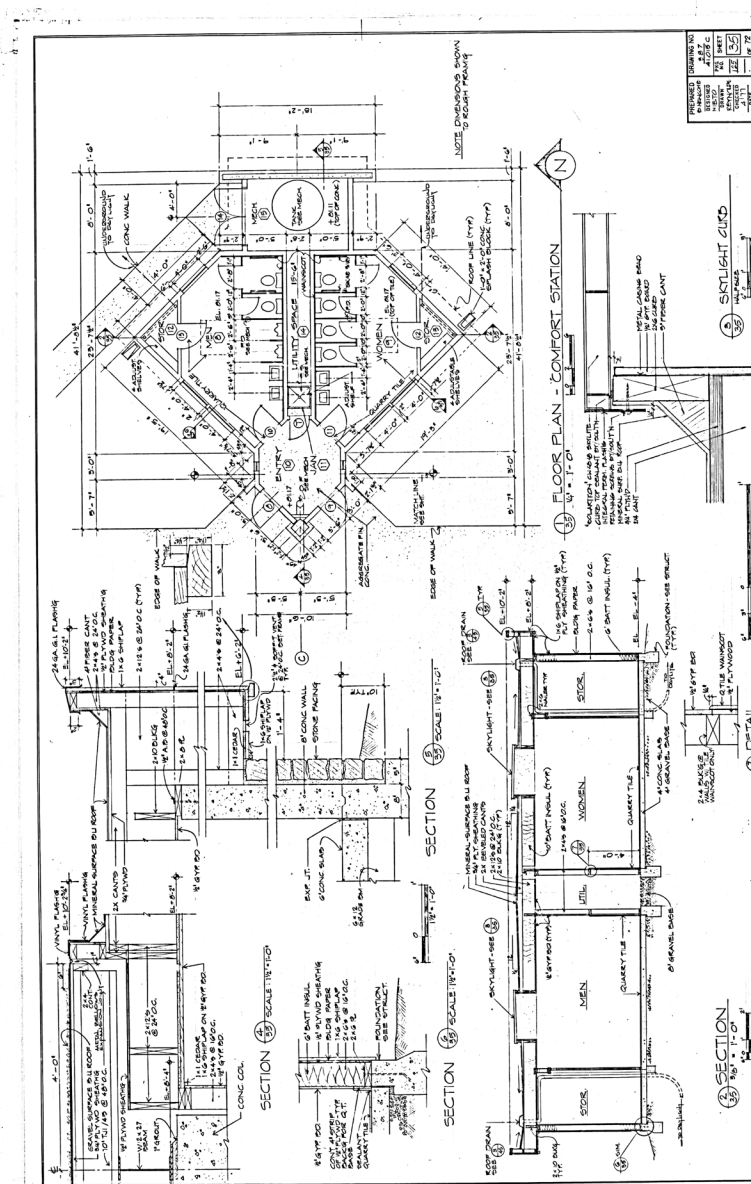
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Field Code NPS-THRO-PCVCSITS# 32 BI

First floor plan, Painted Canyon Visitor Center. From *Painted Canyon Overlook Development*, Drawing No. 387-41015C, sheet 34 of 72, as-constructed drawing set, 1979. Source: NPS eTIC.

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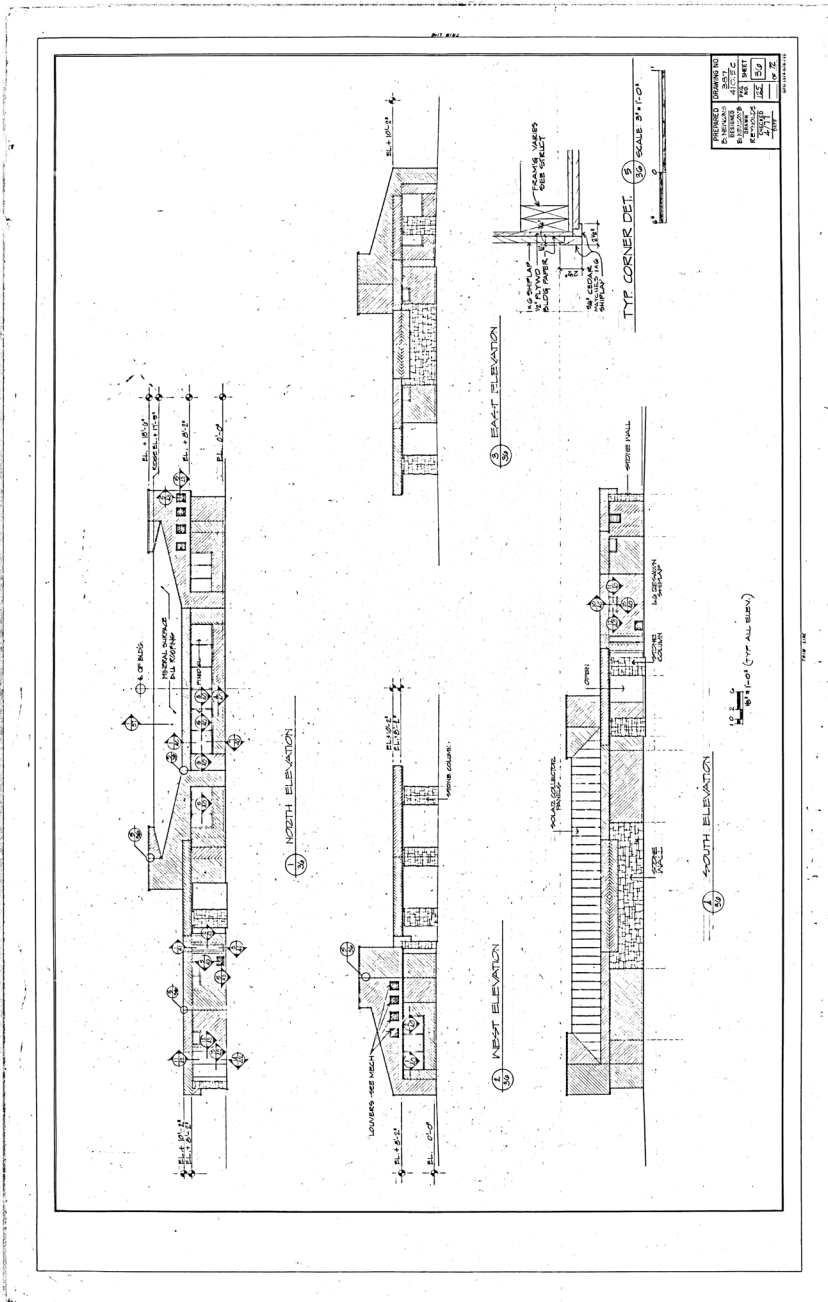
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First floor plan, Painted Canyon Comfort Station. From *Painted Canyon Overlook Development*, Drawing No. 387-41015C, sheet 35 of 72, as-constructed drawing set, 1979. Source: NPS eTIC.

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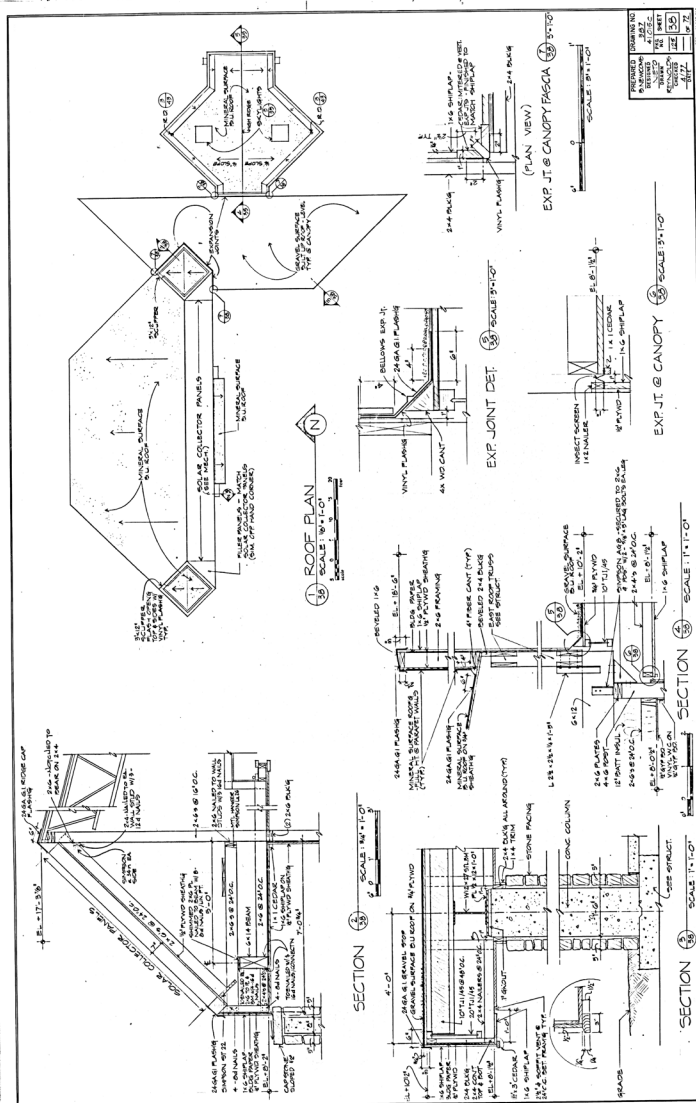
Field Code NPS-THRO-PCVCSITS# 32 BI

Directional Elevations, Painted Canyon Visitor Center and Comfort Station. From *Painted Canyon Overlook Development*, Drawing No. 387-41015C, sheet 36 of 72, as-constructed drawing set, 1979. Source: NPS eTIC

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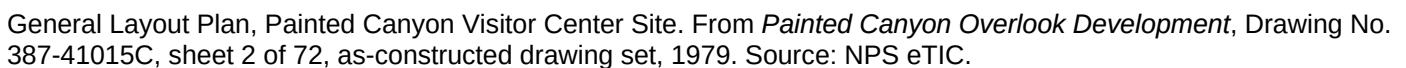
Plan, Detail, and Section of Connected Canopy, Painted Canyon Visitor Center and Comfort Station. From *Painted Canyon Overlook Development*, Drawing No. 387-41015C, sheet 36 of 72, as-constructed drawing set, 1979. Source: NPS eTIC

Recorded By: Leah Edwards/John Rosemurgy Date Recorded: June 2026

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South elevation, Painted Canyon Visitor Center, Theodore Roosevelt National Park. NPS photograph, May 2026.



East elevation, Painted Canyon Comfort Station and Canopy, Theodore Roosevelt National Park. NPS photograph, May 2026.

Recorded By: Leah Edwards/John Rosemurgy **Date Recorded:** June 2026

NDCRS ATTACHMENT SECTION**Field Code** NPS-THRO-PCVC**SITS# 32** BI

North elevation, Painted Canyon Comfort Station and Canopy, Theodore Roosevelt National Park. NPS photograph, May 2026.



North elevation, Painted Canyon Visitor Center, Theodore Roosevelt National Park. NPS photograph, May 2026.

Recorded By: Leah Edwards/John Rosemurgy **Date Recorded:** June 2026

NDCRS ATTACHMENT SECTION**Field Code** NPS-THRO-PCVC**SITS# 32** BI

South elevation, Painted Canyon Comfort Station and Canopy, Theodore Roosevelt National Park. NPS photograph, ca. 2010.



North elevation, Painted Canyon Visitor Center, Canopy, and Comfort Station, Theodore Roosevelt National Park. NPS photograph, ca. 2010.

Recorded By: Leah Edwards/John Rosemurgy **Date Recorded:** June 2026

NDCRS ATTACHMENT SECTION**Field Code** NPS-THRO-PCVC**SITS# 32** BI

South elevation, Painted Canyon Visitor Center, Canopy, and Comfort Station, Theodore Roosevelt National Park. NPS photograph, 2023.



East facing, Interior of Painted Canyon Visitor Center, Theodore Roosevelt National Park. NPS photograph, May 2026.

Recorded By: Leah Edwards/John Rosemurgy **Date Recorded:** June 2026

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NDCRS ATTACHMENT SECTION**Field Code** NPS-THRO-PCVC**SITS# 32** BI

Facing northeast, Painted Canyon Entrance Drive, Theodore Roosevelt National Park. NPS photograph, May 2026.



Facing east, Painted Canyon Parking Area with passenger parking in foreground and larger vehicle parking in background, Theodore Roosevelt National Park. NPS photograph, May 2026.

Recorded By: Leah Edwards/John Rosemurgy **Date Recorded:** June 2026

NDCRS ATTACHMENT SECTION**Field Code** NPS-THRO-PCVC**SITS# 32** BI

Facing northwest, CCC Entrance Pylon Sign, Theodore Roosevelt National Park. NPS photograph, May 2026.



Facing south, Center Wastewater Lagoon, Theodore Roosevelt National Park, NPS photograph, May 2026.

Recorded By: Leah Edwards/John Rosemurgy **Date Recorded:** June 2026

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NDCRS ATTACHMENT SECTION**Field Code** NPS-THRO-PCVC**SITS# 32** BI

Facing west, Painted Canyon Nature Trailhead Sign, Theodore Roosevelt National Park. NPS photograph, May 2026.



Facing northeast, Stone (Primary) Overlook into Painted Canyon, Theodore Roosevelt National park. NPS photograph, May 2026.

Recorded By: Leah Edwards/John Rosemurgy **Date Recorded:** June 2026

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Field Code NPS-THRO-PCVC

SITS# 32 Bl



Facing northwest, Concrete Walkway and Wood Fence Parallel to Painted Canyon Rim, Theodore Roosevelt National Park. NPS photograph, May 2026.



Facing west, West Elevation of Picnic Shelter with Second Shelter in Background, Theodore Roosevelt National Park. NPS, photograph, May 2026.

Recorded By: Leah Edwards/John Rosemurgy Date Recorded: June 2026

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