

# Fall River Entrance

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## Development Concept Plan Environmental Assessment

Rocky Mountain National Park, Colorado  
September 1987

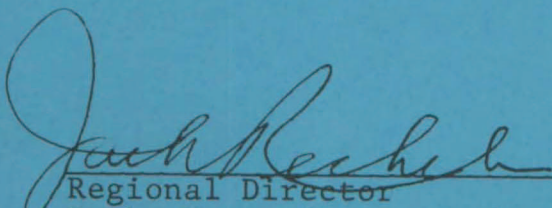


Fall River Entrance  
Development Concept Plan  
Environmental Assessment

Rocky Mountain National Park  
Colorado

National Park Service  
United States Department of the Interior

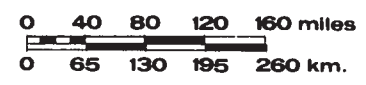
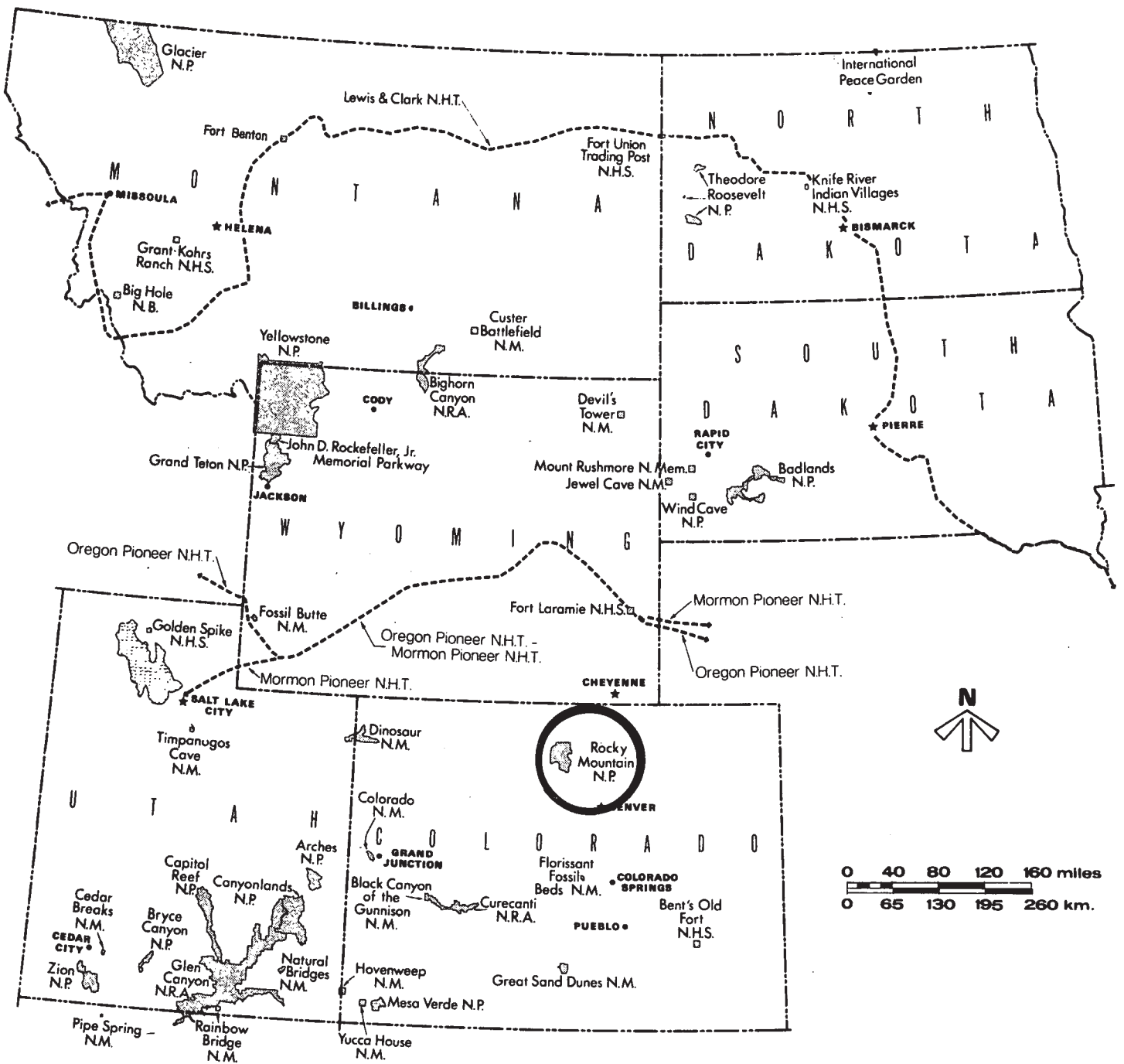
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9/23/87  
Approval Date

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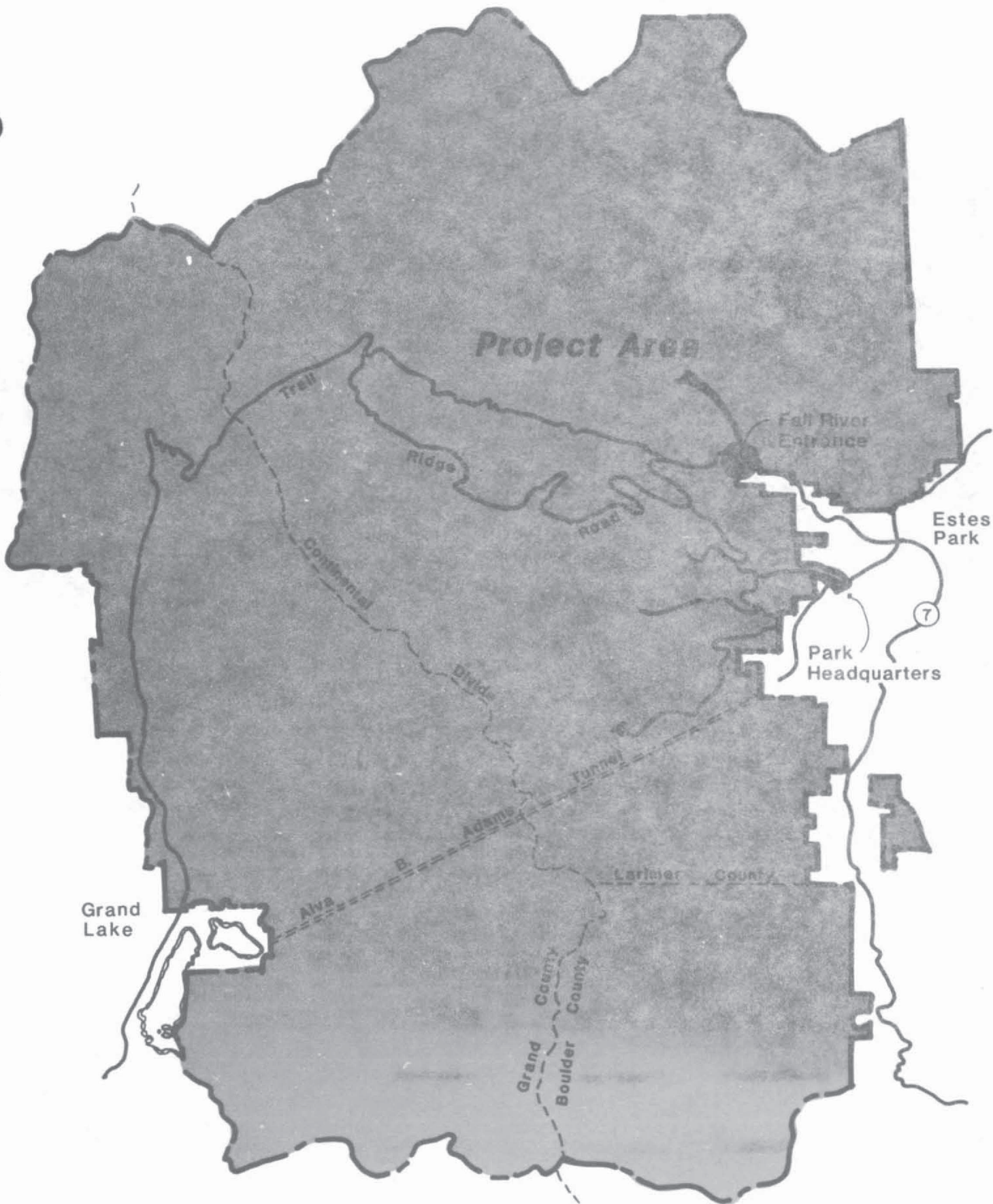
- Locations of Major Cities
- \* Locations of State Capitals
- State Boundary Lines
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**ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGION**

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**Fall River Entrance  
Development Concept Plan  
Rocky Mountain National Park  
Colorado**



## PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION

The Fall River entrance is identified as an existing development in the Master Plan for Rocky Mountain National Park, approved in 1976. The area includes: the existing entrance station office and kiosks, the Bighorn District Ranger Station (H.S. 169), District Ranger's residence (H.S. 44), a fire-fighting equipment storage structure (H.S. 168), a trailer home, a pump house, and the turnoff road to Aspenglen Campground.

Because of changing traffic patterns around the city of Estes Park, visitation from the east on U.S. Highway 34 through the Fall River entrance now exceeds that of the Beaver Meadows entrance, where the park administrative offices and the primary visitor center are located.

The kiosks and office at the Fall River entrance are completely inadequate for visitor information purposes and no other visitor information services are in the vicinity. The heavy volume of visitation precludes entrance station personnel from taking time to answer visitor questions. There are no public restrooms or public telephones available at this entrance.

The kiosks and office at the Fall River entrance are unattractive and are deteriorating. They were not designed for year-round use, and will soon require replacement.

The Fall River entrance is identified as an existing development in the Master Plan for Rocky Mountain National Park, approved in 1976. The park's Statement for Management (1982) contains several objectives appropriate to the proposed development at the Fall River entrance. Key objectives include:

to remove administrative facilities from the park's interior, except where essential for resource protection and visitor services, and to centralize such facilities on peripheral lands having the least impact on visitor use, scenic values, and natural resources.

to reduce congestion on park roads, improve visitor circulation, and minimize the impacts of automobiles on park resources.

to increase public awareness of the park's fragile and unique resources, and of the public support and cooperation that is needed to perpetuate park values.



to manage visitor use and enjoyment of the park, including camping, fishing, hiking, picnicking, sightseeing, and other appropriate activities in a manner that is compatible with the natural and cultural environment.

to provide park operations, activities, and facilities which reflect the most advanced technology available for reducing adverse impacts on park resources, and for assuring health and safety standards.

### DESCRIPTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT

The elevation at the Fall River entrance to Rocky Mountain National Park is approximately 8,250 feet above sea level. Bighorn Creek crosses the study area near the Bighorn Ranger Station and empties into Fall River about one half mile downstream. The region is characterized by glaciated bottomlands with interspersed dry meadows and the upper montane vegetation zone. The southerly exposures maintain a ponderosa pine/grass/shrub vegetation type while the northerly exposures support Douglas fir (heavily infested with spruce budworm and Douglas fir beetle), Engelmann spruce, and subalpine vegetation types. Stands of aspen are interspersed throughout the meadows.

In the immediate area of the entrance station, the terrain is moderate to steep, and is covered with a stand of mature ponderosa pine and scattered Douglas fir. The access road to the Aspenglen Campground branches off to the south, adjacent to an open meadow.

About 16 inches of precipitation fall annually, mostly in the spring and summer. Temperatures are moderate, with a 43° F average. High winds are common in the winter, often reducing snow accumulation to drift areas and moving soil on disturbed sites.

Elk and mule deer use the above-mentioned meadow, and bighorn sheep often are seen on the slopes just north of the kiosks. Small mammals here include the Richardson's ground squirrel, Abert's squirrel, and the coyote; common birds include robins, magpies, Steller's jays, and red-tailed hawks.

The park's Natural Resource Management Plan (1983) identifies two endangered bird species occurring in the park - the bald eagle and the peregrine falcon. The

Fall River entrance area is not critical habitat for either species and no impacts would occur. The same plan states that "There are presently no known plant taxa in Rocky Mountain National Park that are listed on the Federal Endangered and Threatened Species list." However, in January of 1983, the Colorado Natural Heritage Inventory published a list of plant associations of special concern in Colorado. One of these associations is Purshia tridentata/Muhlenbergia montana, which has been found in some areas on southerly exposures not far from the Fall River entrance.

Rocky Mountain National Park is a mandatory Class I Air Quality Area under the Clean Air Act. The Fall River entrance is not a part of either of the two identified integral vistas in the park. There are no floodplains or wetlands with the potential of being impacted by improvements to the Fall River entrance.

The National Register of Historic Places Inventory - Nomination Forms for the Fall River Entrance Historic District were submitted in May 1987, to the Colorado State Historic Preservation Officer. The Historic District was described as follows:

"Boundary Justification and Description: This boundary comprises an irregular shaped area measuring approximately 900 by 300 feet. The southern boundary follows the northern edge of the short access road, crosses the driveway that leads to the garage and office (169) and continues along the northern edge of the access road before cutting diagonally across a few parking spaces to a point approximately 10 feet southeast of the southeasternmost corner of the storage building (168). The remainder of the boundary (the west, north, and east) forms a rectangular shape around the area.

"The boundary includes the residence (44), the garage and office (169), the storage building (168), a treatment building, and a trailer house. The eastern boundary is approximately 20 feet east of building 168. The northern boundary is approximately 35 feet north of building 168, approximately 60 feet north of building 169, and approximately 50 feet north of building 44. The western boundary is approximately 25 feet west of the west side of building 44. The residence is approximately 60 yards north of the park entrance road. Building 169 is approximately 20 feet east of building 44, and building 168 is approximately 600 yards east of



**Fall River Road  
Historic District**  
Rocky Mountain National Park

Entrance Station

to Estes Park 4.5 miles,  
and park boundary  
450 feet

Storage Structure  
(H.S. 10505)

Trailer House

Pump House

District Ranger Station  
(H.S. 10506)

District Ranger's Residence  
(H.S. 10504)

Road

Ridge

Trail

to Aspenglen  
Campground

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building 169."

The three historic log buildings listed above - numbers 44, 168, and 169 - are shown on the historic district sketch map on the next page. They were constructed in 1936 and are similar in appearance to those in the Utility Area Historic District - the other historic district in the park with structures related to the theme of National Park Service Rustic Architecture.

### ALTERNATIVES

No Action. This alternative would perpetuate the existing conditions at the Fall River entrance. (Refer to Existing Conditions Map.) Increasing numbers of visitors would continue to use this entrance, and would experience existing or lower levels of service. This area has no phones, comfort facilities, or substantial information about the park. Visitors must drive about seven miles to the visitor center at Beaver Meadows for these services. From this entrance, the park has little opportunity to influence how its resources are used.

### Preferred Alternative-Design and Construct New Entrance Facilities.

Preliminary design at the Fall River Entrance Station provides for three new kiosks, a new office, a visitor center with restrooms, parking facilities, and a redesigned traffic flow into the park and at the Aspenglen Campground turnoff. Refer to the proposed Development Concept Plan, Phases I and II for the basic elements and locations of the proposed new facilities.

The 3,550 square foot visitor center building would serve to provide park orientation and protection of the resources. Functions inside the building include:

Lobby - 1,300 square feet.

Information desk, association sales, 8' x 10' topo relief map, information displays, entry to auditorium.

Backcountry Office - 140 square feet.

Issue backcountry permits.

Auditorium - 700 square feet.

50 seats, projection booth.



Public Restrooms - 700 square feet.

Open to outside; heated.

Multi-Purpose Room - 200 square feet.

Emergency first aid, employee break room with sink.

Office Space - 240 square feet.

Two offices for interpretation staff; one office has a safe.

Exterior Information Patio - 1,200 square feet.

Sheltered, with map and information displays.

Hall Space - 60 square feet.

Storage - 40 square feet.

Janitor Closet - 50 square feet.

Mechanical Room - 120 square feet.

Contingent on funding, the visitor center will possibly remain open to the public on a year-round basis. Should it become necessary to close the structure during the winter, the information patio and restrooms would be open to the public. Therefore, the restrooms should be accessible from both the building's interior as well as its exterior.

The parking lot would be constructed in two phases, with the first phase providing for approximately 50 parking spaces (including handicapped parking) and spaces for 8 oversized vehicles. If a need for additional parking becomes apparent, spaces for 75 additional vehicles would be provided to the west. These additional spaces would be for 75 cars, or 15 oversized vehicles, or a combination of vehicle type.

Unlike the alignment of the existing kiosks, the new kiosks would be somewhat staggered to facilitate traffic flow. Lanes between the kiosks would be 14 feet wide, to accommodate snow plows.

Realignment of the Aspenglen Campground road/Trail Ridge road junction is also incorporated in the proposed design. The redesign eliminates the boulevard-type intersection, simplifying circulation and eliminating existing safety problems.





**Existing Conditions**

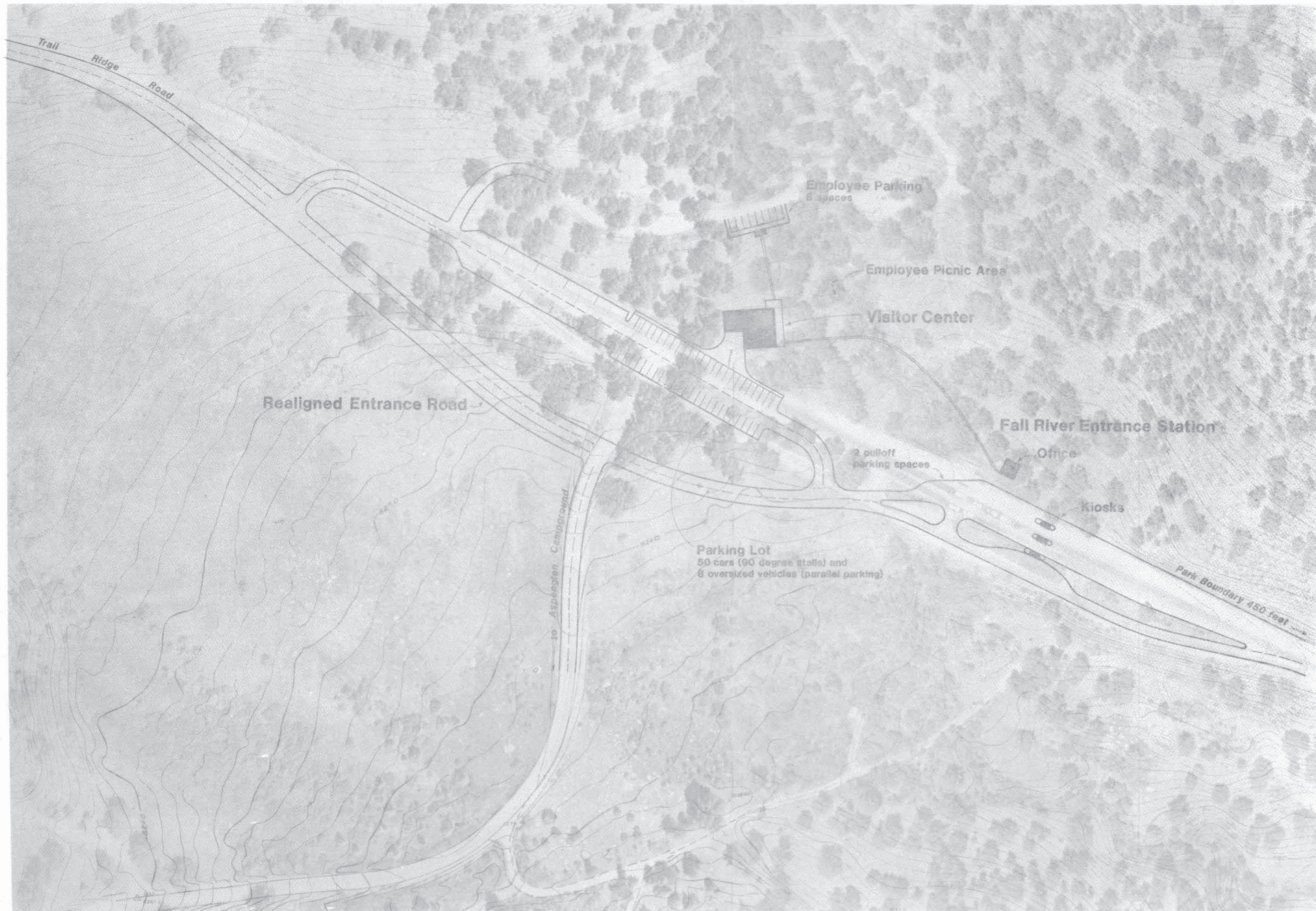
**Fall River Entrance**  
 Rocky Mountain National Park  
 Colorado

United States Department of the Interior - National Park Service

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 May 1987 | RMRO

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**Proposed Development  
Concept Plan -  
Phase One**

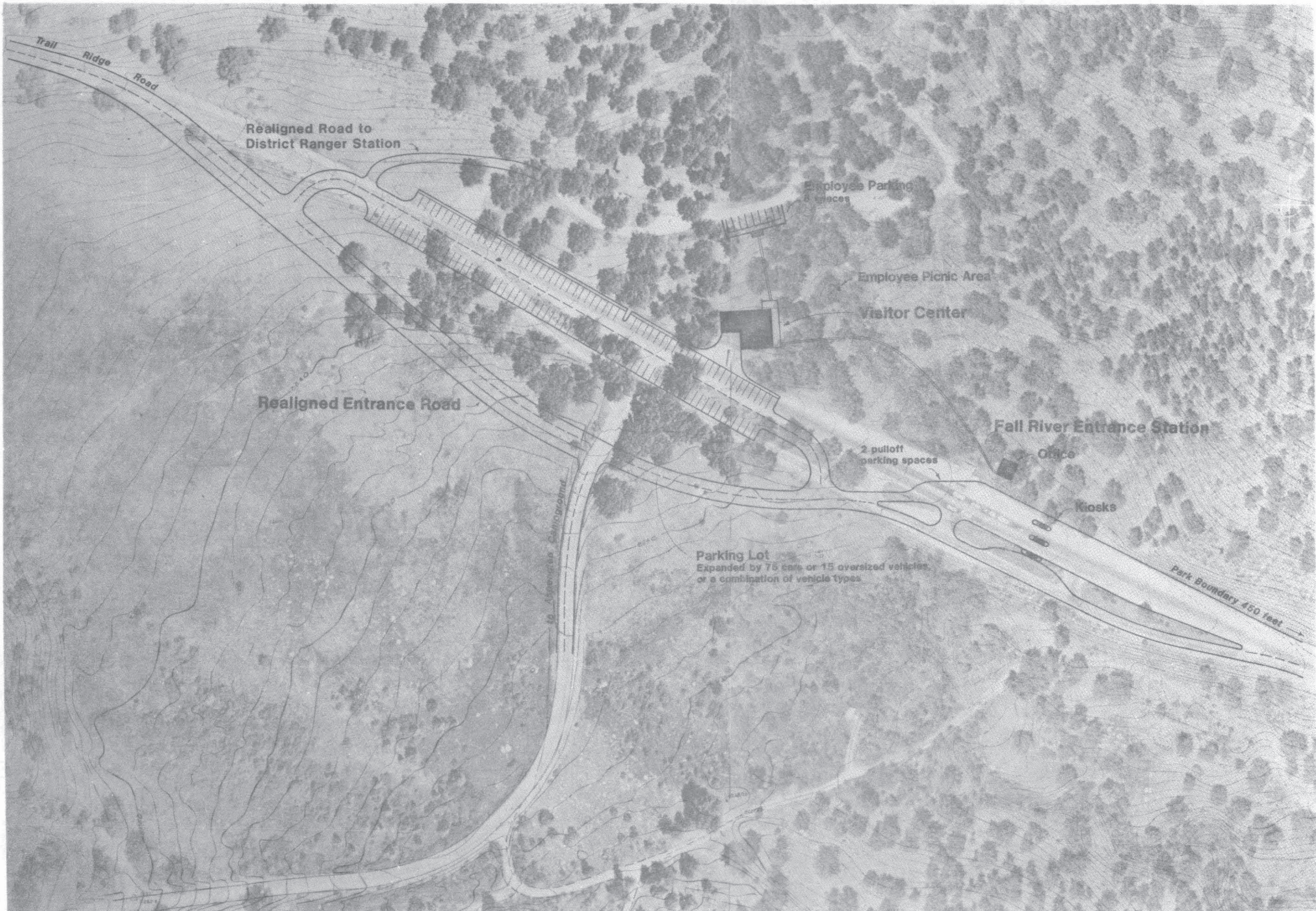
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Colorado**

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**Proposed Development  
Concept Plan -  
Phase Two**

**Fall River Entrance  
Rocky Mountain National Park  
Colorado**

United States Department of the Interior - National Park Service

121 80094  
May 1987, RMRO

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COST ESTIMATE OF PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

The following costs are based on the Class C estimating guide.

VISITOR CENTER AREA

Visitor Center Building - 3,550 Square Feet	\$	710,000
Exterior Info Patio - 1,200 Square Feet		13,000
Back Patio - 600 Square Feet		5,000
Furnishings		71,000
Landscaping		71,000
Parking Lot, Phase I - 50 cars, 8 oversized		130,000
Parking Lot Entrance Roads - 410 Linear Feet		40,000
Ranger Station Access Road - 235 Linear Feet		25,000
Employee Parking - 8 spaces, retaining wall with steps		35,000

ENTRANCE ROAD

Realigned Road - 1,400 Linear Feet		135,000
Landscape and Irrigate Road Scar ½ acre		11,000

ENTRANCE STATION

Move Office Building		10,000
3 New Kiosks	\$	75,000
2 Pulloff Parking Spaces		4,000

Net Total	\$	<u>1,335,000</u>
+31%		<u>413,850</u>

Gross Total \$1,748,850

IMPLEMENTATION

Because of the modest scale of development and related cost, it would be far more economical to go with a single contract to accomplish the project even though it may take a second year to complete construction and landscaping activities. Therefore, there is no need to phase project components.

STAFFING REQUIREMENTS

The additional personnel requirements for staffing the visitor center would be 3 GS-3 positions for 8 months of the year, at a total salary cost of \$26,500. To staff the facility all year, a full additional GS-3 position would be necessary at an added cost of \$11,802.



ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT REJECTED. Several alternative locations for the Fall River Entrance Station were examined, but not given further consideration, for one or more of the following reasons.

1. Too far distant from the park boundary.
2. No convenient access to adequate utilities.
3. Insufficient space for parking and other development.
4. Land privately-owned (e.g. the Stirling Cottages site).
5. High potential for adverse environmental impacts.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES- MITIGATION AND UNAVOIDABLE IMPACTS

A. No Action. It is expected that the Fall River Entrance Station would continue to receive a progressively higher percentage of the park's visitation. If Alternative A is implemented, the problems with the existing facility, as outlined in the "Purpose of and Need for Action" section, would undoubtedly worsen. There would be a continued overloading at the kiosks during busy periods, exacerbating the current inadequate opportunities to provide visitor information and services at the Fall River entrance.

Mitigation would include periodic repair work on the kiosks and office. Existing structures at the Fall River entrance cannot be altered to provide much-needed restrooms and information facilities.

B. Design and Construct New Entrance Facilities. The preferred alternative makes optimal use of already disturbed sites at the Fall River entrance. The parking lot would be located almost entirely on the existing road bed, as would the kiosks. The proposed visitor center, the relocated office, and the northern edge of the meadow traversed by the road realignment - all will be on relatively undisturbed sites. The total area of the latter would be approximately two acres, including road shoulders, access walkways, etc.

Impacts on natural resources should the preferred alternative be implemented appear to be relatively

minor. At the site of the proposed visitor center, one healthy ponderosa pine with a diameter at breast height (dbh) of slightly over two feet would have to be removed, as would about six dead Douglas firs. One ponderosa pine, which is about ten feet away from the planned patio, could be retained with special mitigation.

The finished floor of the proposed visitor center would average about five feet below grade. Topsoil removed during the grade work would be stockpiled. All facilities would be constructed from materials which would complement the landscape as a visual mitigation. The visitor center's water and sewer systems would be tied into those existing systems of Estes Park; no impacts would be anticipated.

There are three "islands" (lane separators) which would be removed during the proposed construction. Each has vegetation that would, in most cases, be lost. The middle island, however, has Potentilla that could be transplanted as part of the landscaping. The most westerly island would lose five fairly large ponderosa pine, four of which have dbh's of over one foot. The middle island is the most heavily vegetated. Shrubs that would be removed here include Rocky Mountain maple, chokecherry, golden current, and wild rose. Numerous small ponderosa pine would go from the middle island, as would ten larger trees with dbh's over one foot. The ponderosa pines on the most easterly island are relatively small and would be removed, except for the small clump of trees at the eastern end - they would remain.

At the far western end of the proposed parking lot, about eight ponderosa pine, all with dbh's over one foot, would be removed.

The proposed new alignment of the Aspenglen road would require taking out several small ponderosa pine and shrubs. Care would be taken during construction to avoid damaging trees that would be close to the new alignment. However, there would be unavoidable loss of at least 14 larger ponderosa pines, about half with dbh's greater than one foot. At least two large, dead pines would also be removed.

Mitigation at this site would include rehabilitation of the abandoned stretch of Aspenglen road; some of the removed base would be used as a source of fill for the new alignment, and natural regrowth would be

supplemented by plantings of native species.

The new office would be located about 30 feet from the existing office. Only one ponderosa pine (dbh 2.8') would have to be removed. A chokecherry and other shrubs would also be cleared from the office site.

Loss of these ponderosa pines is unavoidable if the preferred alternative is implemented. However, they constitute only a tiny fraction of the conifer forest present at the Fall River entrance, and plantings and natural regrowth would soon fill the voids.

Impacts of vegetation removal to the animal populations there would be minimal. A few Abert's squirrels and other small mammals and birds may be forced to move a few hundred feet to undisturbed stands of pine.

During construction, noise and increased traffic would pose an inconvenience to visitors, but would not likely be a deterrence to their entering the park. Upon completion of the visitor center, increasing availability of information about park resources and programs should lead to greater long-term protection of more sensitive resources - for example, tundra.

Construction activity at the Fall River entrance would likely cause larger mammals to temporarily cease using the area. This would include the number of bighorn sheep that use the slopes north of the entrance road, and the herds of elk that frequent the meadow south of the road.

The proposed development would not physically encroach on the Fall River Road Historic District. Any proposed development that would have the potential to impact the Fall River Road Historic District will be designed to meet the Secretary of the Interior's standard for rehabilitation. Both the Colorado State Historic Preservation Officer and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation will have the opportunity to review and comment on drawings and other pertinent materials prior to initiation of construction.

Visual impacts of the new development would be greatest during the first 10-20 years after construction - that is, until regrowth of vegetation begins to increase the screening effect between the historic district and new facilities. Building design has not yet been made final, but would take into consideration the proximity of the historic district. Cultural resource personnel



would be consulted at each design stage.

The Fall River entrance site has been surveyed (surface) for cultural materials, with negative results. Were cultural materials to be encountered during construction, work would be stopped and the appropriate Regional Office (National Park Service) personnel notified.

During and shortly after construction, minor, short-term erosion of soils will occur in disturbed areas. This will also result in minor, short-term increases in the turbidity of surface water drainage. These impacts will be mitigated through application of erosion control devices and the mulching and seeding of disturbed areas immediately after construction.

#### IRREVERSIBLE AND IRRETRIEVABLE COMMITMENTS OF RESOURCES

Other than the loss of minor amounts of wildlife habitat and existing vegetation, there would be no irreversible commitments of resources if either Alternative A (No Action) or Alternative B (Design and Construct New Entrance Facilities) are implemented.

If the No Action alternative is adopted, there would be an irretrievable loss; many visitors would be denied the opportunity to obtain detailed information on park resources and programs, due to the absence of visitor center facilities at the Fall River Entrance.

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#### REFERENCES

Documents prepared by the National Park Service:

- 1987 - National Register Nomination
- 1985 - Statement for Interpretation
- 1983 - Natural Resources Management Plan, Rocky Mountain National Park
- 1982 - Statement for Management, Rocky Mountain National Park
- 1976 - Final Master Plan, Rocky Mountain National Park
- 1975 - Final Environmental Statement, Draft Master Plan, Rocky Mountain National Park

