

Colossal Cave Management Plan Assessment and Recommendations

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Introduction:

Colossal Cave Mountain Park (CCMP) is a Pima County park, managed under an administrative agreement with the non-profit corporation ESCABROSA, Inc. It is currently being managed by Martie Maierhauser. The Park presently encompasses 2,037.8 acres of the Rincon Mountains in eastern Pima County. Located approximately 22 miles east southeast of the Tucson city center, CCMP boasts unique setting for both Colossal Cave (ranked in the top five to ten percent of commercial caves in the country) visitors and for outdoor recreation enthusiasts seeking a unique desert experience within the lands surrounding the cave and inside the park's boundaries.

In March 1998, Colossal Cave Mountain Park staff, Pima County Natural Resources, Parks and Recreation and Pima County Parklands Foundation developed the CCMP Master Plan background report. The intent of the master plan was to serve as an instrument to guide future development of CCMP. The background report was to provide the informational foundation of a full Management Master Plan. This inventory was thought to be capable of providing the necessary background at the time of it's writing to base future development and management decisions on. The intent of the master planning process was to provide interested private citizens, relevant organizations, and government agencies with a voice in the planning and managing of the park. There was no public process undertaken as part of the planning effort nor have there been any on-going efforts to engage the constituents of the park.

Evaluation of the 1998 CCMP Master Plan Background Report:

The CCMP Master Plan background report developed in 1998 is a comprehensive inventory of existing conditions in that time period but suffers from being outdated, lacks a solid master plan of facility development and most importantly a financial or marketing strategy for current and future use of the park. In addition, aside from encroaching development close to the parks boundaries, three major changes to CCMP have occurred since the 1998 master plan was completed. First, Colossal Cave road was closed to through traffic at the point where it intersects with Pistol Hill Road, and traffic diverted across Pistol Hill Road to Old Spanish trail, ensuring access to the park only from Old Spanish Trail. Secondly, The Eastern Pima County Trails System Master Plan approved by the Pima County Board of Supervisors in September 1989 and later revised and adopted as a formal County ordinance in September 1996, described a plan for a regional trail system, namely the Arizona Trail that brings visitors, from various locations outside, into the park. The Arizona trail has become an attraction for mountain biking and hikers and boasts a regular trail running event, the Fleet Feet Arizona Trail Race

annually. Finally under the 2004 Open Space Bond program, additional properties were acquired around the perimeter of CCMP that are not currently considered part of the park footprint. All of these changes have and will continue to have impact on the operations of the park.

Conclusions derived from evaluation of the 1998 master plan:

1. The 1998 CCMP Background Report was simply an inventory of existing natural resources that suffers from being outdated (lacking current natural resource assessment) and does not respond to changes to the park structure since 1998 as outlined above. Essentially the 1998 report was never translated into a comprehensive Management Plan and is inadequate to guide overall CCMP management.
2. There is no funded strategic marketing plan for increased revenue support and generation. There are no financial or marketing objectives or strategy associated with the master plan, particularly with respect to the land encompassed in CCMP beyond the cave footprint. A lack of a detailed master plan inhibits CCMP to properly manage facility and develop a financial plan.
3. There is no indication of who the constituents are aside from cave visitors who visit the park. Who comes to the park, from where, what recreation opportunities and experiences are they seeking? What experiences are being provided to these visitors via the management plan? To whom is CCMP marketing?
4. There is no clear differentiation of management responsibilities between CCMP and Pima County Natural Resources, Parks and Recreation. Who is responsible for what?
5. General observation; facilities and road infrastructure are run down, outdated and conditions for providing quality recreation experiences are extremely low.

Recommendations:

1. Use the Tucson Mountain Park (TMP) management planning process as a model to follow for updating the CCMP master and management plan. This would entail a revision to the inventory and assessment of natural, cultural and historic resources that would include complete and in-depth public stakeholder/participation process identifying outstanding recreation opportunities and desired experience. This master plan and associated management plan should depict current and future facilities and infrastructure and how the landscape will be managed to provide for high quality recreation experiences. This work could be done in house or contracted out such as was done with TMP. These documents should include a complete marketing strategy and financial plan for revenue generation.
2. The current roles/responsibilities of Director outlined in management contract are narrower than full oversight and management responsibility for the full park. Pima County Natural Resources, Parks and Recreation needs to work closely with CCMP staff to clearly define roles

of responsibilities between the Director and their respective agencies. Again the Park Manager position at TMP is a good model.

3. Pima County Natural Resources, Parks and Recreation, Economic Development and CCMP staff should work collaboratively to establish a set of activity, tasks and outcomes that have a clear definition and metrics for measuring performance that are in compliance to the revised management plan.

4. The expanding of nature trails with picnic tables in shade should be seriously considered. If a shade roof can be seen from other major viewing areas, tilt the roof to be at the angle toward the viewing area so the view shows very little of the roof.