

106 SUCCESS STORY

Unusual and Creative Agreement Produces Preservation Success

Castle Rocks State Park, Almo, Idaho

“As a representative of the people of Cassia County, I worked with the NPS in the 1980s to create the City of Rocks National Reserve. In 2001, IDPR acquired the Castle Rock Ranch which is now Castle Rocks State Park. Both parks preserve traditional uses of grazing, pine nut collecting, and opened the area to rock climbing, hiking, and park activities. The ranch house has been preserved and is rented out to visitors. Even though the parks are not adjacent, they complement each other well, and in the last two years, more than 200,000 visitors have come to the Almo valley. I am very satisfied with the way it all worked out.”

—DENTON DARRINGTON
former Idaho Senator, Cassia County,
phone interview, October 2017



THE STORY

The 28 million-year-old Almo Pluton granite surfaces in southern Idaho form a cluster of magnificent granite spires nestled in the Big Cove just northwest of the village of Almo. Castle Rocks State Park is named for the most prominent of the spires. For centuries, the granite spires, the nearby perennial stream, and the pinyon forest were used by Native Americans including the Shoshone Bannock who still come to the area to collect pinyon nuts. The cluster of archaeological sites consists of surface scatters as well as buried deposits containing hearths. The sites date from the Early Archaic (8,000-4,500 BP) through the mid-20th century. Several of the sites were determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places in 2001.

THE PROJECT

In 1988, Congress established two new National Park Service (NPS) units: Hagerman Fossil Beds National Monument and City of Rocks National Reserve in southern Idaho. The State of Idaho owned a parcel of land containing the Smithsonian Horse Quarry, which was the location of the most famous fossils associated with, but outside, the new National Monument. The NPS wanted to acquire that quarry parcel for the new National Monument and decided to think creatively about how to do it.

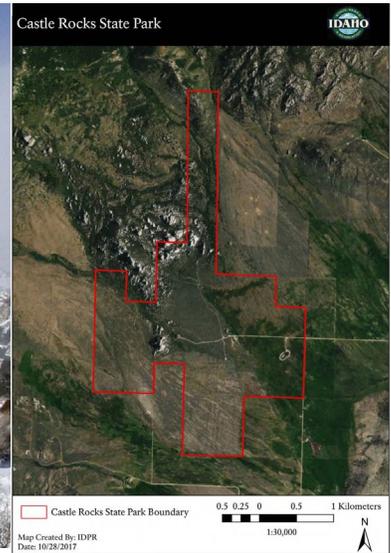
Approximately 100 miles to the southeast of Hagerman Fossil Beds National Monument lies Castle Rock Ranch. NPS and the state knew the property would make a fine addition to the state park system as Castle Rocks State Park and could serve as the base for the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation (IDPR) staff who would also run the newly created City of Rocks National Reserve. The NPS looked to purchase Castle Rock Ranch and trade it to the state for the quarry parcel in Hagerman.

THE 106 PROCESS

The process of creating a new state park would not be without challenge. The endeavor entailed five separate actions: an agreement between Castle Rock Ranch's private landowner (who was finally interested in selling) and the NPS to purchase the land, an

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Photos: Above, Castle Rocks State Park competition wall; Right, the ranch house in winter, the park at sunset with cattle grazing (photos courtesy IDPR)



Left, snow shoe skiers heading toward the rocks at Castle Rocks State Park; Right, aerial photo and map of the park (photos courtesy IDPR)

agreement between the NPS and IDPR to transfer the land, additional funding from the Access Fund (a non-profit rock climbers' group), assistance from the Conservation Fund to hold the funds, and finally an act of Congress to allow NPS to trade land irrespective of the value of the two parcels. These agreements and actions had to come together with perfect timing for the deal to work. If all the parties had not been willing and able to do their parts, the deal would have fallen apart, and the public would have lost access to both the quarry and the granite spires.

The transfer out of federal ownership required NPS to comply with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. Section 106 requires federal agencies to identify historic properties and assess the effects of the projects they carry out, fund, or permit on those properties. Federal agencies also are required to consult with parties that have an interest in the historic property when adverse effects may occur. NPS archaeologists surveyed Castle Rock Ranch and identified a group of archaeological sites that might be adversely affected by the transfer. NPS, IDPR, the Idaho State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) consulted and proposed an unusual agreement as a far-reaching mitigation measure. By creating a Memorandum of Agreement, the ACHP and IDPR formally agreed to treat Castle Rocks State Park as federal land for the purposes of Section 106. As a direct result of the agreement, NPS, the SHPO, IDPR, and the ACHP created an alternative review process to protect the historic properties after the transfer.

THE SUCCESS

The community of Alto is proud of its cultural heritage and appreciative of the natural environment in which residents live and work. Thanks to the Section 106 consultation, the agreement protects the archaeological sites, continues traditional grazing leases, provides for renting the ranch house to the public, and allows climbers access to the granite. This kind of creative mitigation can be a model where parties commit to finding a common path to satisfy historic preservation needs while fulfilling agency missions.

ADVISORY COUNCIL ON HISTORIC PRESERVATION

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Consulting Parties:

National Park Service
 ACHP
 Idaho State Historic Preservation Officer
 Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation
 Access Fund
 Conservation Fund
 Denton Darrington, former Idaho State Senator

For more about Section 106 and the ACHP go to www.achp.gov



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