

# Park's future on drawing board

## Park service, public hash out management plan

By **DAWN WITHERS**  
South County Life

Preserving Pinnacles National Monument's dramatic rock formations and diverse animal habitats are key objectives in a proposed management plan for the park.

A dominant feature in the eastern view from Highway 101 as motorists travel north from King City, the Pinnacles rock formations were formed by an ancient volcanic eruption.

Some of the rock pinnacles rise 500 to 1,200 feet high and make this one of the best rock-climbing locations in California.

Earlier this month in Soledad, the National Park Service held the first in a series of meetings to record public comments on its proposed plan, which will manage Pinnacles over the next 15 to 20 years. The previous plan was adopted in 1976.

About 15 people attended the two-hour meeting at Soledad High School, discussing factors such as maintaining wilderness areas, improving cellular communications, additional camping, horseback riding and educational outreach.

"My kids are grown, but some of our best camping experiences were on the west side campgrounds," said Robert Walton, a King City resident.

Pinnacles National Monument is located off Highway 146 east of Soledad in the southern portion of the Gabilan Mountains. A second entrance with a campground is on the eastern side, accessed through Hollister.

Pinnacles covers 26,000 acres, and its dramatic rock formations — now used by rock climbers — are the remnants of long-extinct volcanoes from 23 million years ago. The park also has talus caves, chaparral and is home to raptors, more than 400 bee species and 14 bat species. President Theodore Roosevelt designated Pinnacles as a national monument in 1908, according to the Park Service.



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The entrance to Pinnacles National Monument is on Highway 146, east of Soledad.

### TO GET INVOLVED

Comments on the National Park Service's management plan will be accepted through May 31 and can be mailed to Pinnacles National Monument, GMP, 5000 Highway 146, Paicines, CA 95043 or online at [www.nps.gov/pinn/parkmgmt/planning.htm](http://www.nps.gov/pinn/parkmgmt/planning.htm).

Last year, 156,389 people visited the park, down from 159,350 the previous year.

Public comments are essential to creating the management plan, Pinnacles Superintendent Eric Brunnemann said, and help officials determine how best to manage natural resources, access to the park's wilderness area, transportation and the changing demographics of park visitors.

The plan will also guide how the Park Service uses nearly 2,000 acres of newly acquired land on the eastern side of Pinnacles.

In the past 30 years, visitor demographics have changed, said Martha Crusius, project manager for the plan. More families come to the park today

### IF YOU GO

■ **WHAT:** Pinnacles National Monument

■ **WHERE:** 5000 Highway 146, Paicines.

■ **DIRECTIONS:** The West District is accessible from Highway 101 near Soledad, then east along Highway 146 to the Chaparral area. The East District entrance is reached via Highway 25, south of Hollister, then west on Highway 146.

■ **PHONE:** 389-4485

■ **HOURS:** The monument is open for day-use activities all year long. The east side is open 24 hours a day. The west side has an automatic gate that opens at 7:30 a.m. and closes at

8 p.m., allowing cars to leave but none to enter after that hour.

■ **COST:** Vehicle: \$5 for seven days. Walk-in: \$3 for seven days. Children younger than 16 get in free.

■ **PAYMENT:** Cash or check, no credit cards

■ **DOGS:** Not allowed on the trails. Dogs are allowed only on roads and in picnic areas, and must be on a leash at all times

■ **ONLINE:** [www.nps.gov/pinn](http://www.nps.gov/pinn)

■ **INSIDER'S TIPS:** When hiking, always carry plenty of water and wear sturdy, comfortable footwear. Summers can be hot (100 degrees plus)

with a desire for less rigorous, shorter trails and more recreational space.

Crusius said it's difficult to gauge whether the decline in visitors will continue or if more people will come to the park in the next 20 years.

A draft version of the management plan, alternate man-

agement plans, as well as an environmental impact report will be available for public review next year, she said. The plan will likely be adopted by the Park Service's regional director in 2009.

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