



Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument

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FLFO Phone 719-748-3253

After four decades, Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument Will Build Its First Permanent Visitor Center

Shortly after Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument was established 42 years ago, plans were made to build a visitor center. Four decades later, those plans are about to be realized with a new “green” building, powered and heated almost entirely by solar power.

When Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument was established in 1969, the decision was made to utilize the old Pike Petrified Forest tourist contact station as a temporary visitor center, until a proper center could be built. Originally built of salvaged materials in 1924, age and time have continued to take their toll on the old building, which now has numerous and costly building and climate control issues. The National Park Service announced that funding has finally been approved to build the 4,400-square-foot visitor education, research, and museum facility to replace the old building.

The new visitor center, to be built at the location of the current visitor center, will also house a paleontology research and storage facility. This new space will better protect thousands of fragile fossils now being stored in substandard conditions in other park buildings.

Over 65,000 people from all over the world visited Florissant Fossil Beds last year to see one of the world’s richest fossil deposits. When the new visitor center is complete, park-visitors will be able to see more fossils on display, experience new interactive exhibits, and experience a building whose design will be one of the best examples of sustainable, energy-efficient construction in Colorado and in the National Park Service.

The new facility will be nearly 2-1/2 times the size of the present visitor center yet will require about two-thirds less energy than the old visitor center it replaces. Nearly all of the new building’s electrical and heating needs will be supplied through photovoltaics and solar hot water systems.

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Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument P.O. Box 185, Florissant, CO 80816 Phone: (719) 748-3253, www.nps.gov/flfo

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The National Park Service cares for special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

“This building has been in the works for a long time,” said Keith Payne, superintendent of the monument. “Our park partners and communities have been fighting for years to get it built because they know that Florissant Fossil Beds visitors deserve the best experience they can have -- and the fossils deserve the best protection possible.”

Construction is scheduled to begin this fall, with an estimated completion by the summer of 2013. The monument expects the project to bring additional economic activity to Teller County in the form of food, fuel and lodging for construction workers. The park expects the new visitor center will boost monument visitation, resulting in an increase in Florissant Fossil Beds’ annual contribution to the local tourism economy which is over \$3 million dollars per year.

During construction, the monument will continue to be open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily, year-round. Regular park visitor services and programs will continue as usual.

To learn more about the visitor center, visit Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument’s website at www.nps.gov/flfo and click the link for “Visitor Center 2013” More details also are available from the monument at (719) 748-3253.

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