

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

1180

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See Instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a)

## 1. Name of Property

historic name Travertine Nature Center

other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

## 2. Location

street & number SW/4 of NW/4 of NW/4 of Section 1 and NE/4 of SE/4 of NE/4 of  N/A not for publication  
Section 2, T1S, R3E

city or town Sulphur  XX vicinity

state Oklahoma code OK county Murray code 099 zip code 73086

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance

national  statewide  local

[Signature] Oct 12, 2010  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria

[Signature] 12/16/2010  
Signature of commenting official Date

Chief Historian / Designated Federal Preservation Officer  
Title State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

## 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is

entered in the National Register  determined eligible for the National Register

determined not eligible for the National Register  removed from the National Register

other (explain) \_\_\_\_\_

[Signature] 1/25/2011  
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

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**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- private
- public - Local
- public - State
- public - Federal

**Category of Property**  
(Check only **one** box.)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	2	buildings
0	0	district
1	0	site
0	0	structure
0	0	object
2	2	<b>Total</b>

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

N/A

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

RECREATION AND CULTURE: museum  
RECREATION AND CULTURE: theater  
LANDSCAPE: parking lot

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

RECREATION AND CULTURE: museum  
RECREATION AND CULTURE: theater  
LANDSCAPE: parking lot

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

OTHER: PARK SERVICE MODERN

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: CONCRETE  
walls: STONE:sandstone  
WOOD  
roof: METAL  
other:

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### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

#### Summary Paragraph

The Travertine Nature Center is a one-story, irregular-shaped, sandstone and wood, Park Service Modern style building with a concrete foundation and a low-pitched, metal shingle-clad, cross-gabled roof. Designed by the Houston, Texas, architectural firm of Mackie and Kamrath, the building was constructed by the Nelson Construction Company of Sulphur, Oklahoma, beginning in 1968. The Travertine Nature Center was dedicated in September 1969 and has been in continuous use since that time. The building straddles Travertine Creek with the creek seamlessly flowing under an arched area on the north end of the building. The Park Service Modern style of architecture was basically an "...adaptation of contemporary American modern architecture" by the National Park Service (NPS) for use in national parks nationwide beginning in the 1950s.<sup>1</sup> As such, the Travertine Nature Center clearly reflects the Wrightian style of architecture, particularly the inclusion of the stream into the building's overall design. Other elements of the Wrightian style evident on the building include the use of Arkansas Hackett sandstone, the low-pitched roof with broad overhanging eaves, the oversize rectangular chimney prominently located on the facade and the geometric light fixtures with variously colored opaque panels. The Travertine Nature Center features double, metal, glazed slab doors and full-height, metal, fixed and casement style windows. Exterior features of the building include the full-width front porch, the partial rear porch, the large stone chimney and the tall stone wall which shields the exterior restrooms from view. Decorative details include ribbon windows, a clerestory, polychromatic stonework and broad boxed eaves. Notable alterations to the building include the replacement of the shake roof in the early 1990s with metal shingles that simulate wood shakes; the conversion of two partial porches to windows; and, the replacement of the doors. While these alterations diminish the building's integrity of materials, overall, the Travertine Nature Center retains the qualities of location, design, setting, workmanship, feeling and association to ably convey the building's historic significance as the first nature center constructed by the NPS west of the Mississippi, the second of only two nature centers erected by the NPS in the 1960s and the first NPS nature center that did not involve reuse of an existing building and site. An additional contributing resource to the property consists of the building site that includes the stone patio area and the adjacent, large, oval-shaped parking area divided by a grassy median. To the back of the building are two small, noncontributing, metal, storage buildings. The property is situated in a heavily wooded area of the park with other features of the park surrounding the Travertine Nature Center. When constructed, the building was part of Platt National Park, one of the smallest National Parks in the United States. In 1976, Platt National Park was combined with the Lake of the Arbuckles Recreation Area to create the Chickasaw National Recreation Area, under which name the combined area continues to operate to the present time.

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### Narrative Description

The Travertine Nature Center is located on the northeast end of the Chickasaw National Recreation Area which is located south of the Oklahoma community of Sulphur in Murray County. The landscape of the park varies from designed to untamed with the Travertine Nature Center being located in an abundantly wooded area. The building is located east of State Highway 177, the main north-south thoroughfare through the park with the Nature Center being located at the tip of the northernmost black-topped loop to the east of Highway 177. The building is located on Travertine Creek, one of the natural water elements of the more than century-old park. Travertine Creek was originally called Sulphur Creek. Initially designated a National Park in 1906 by President Theodore Roosevelt, Platt National Park underwent extensive development in the 1930s and early 1940s under President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal-era program of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). Improvements to the park's amenities in the Travertine Nature Center area at that time included construction of a large, stone, circular pool at Buffalo Springs, enhancement of the water fall at Antelope Springs and construction of a comfort station, two picnic areas, dams, bridges and fire pits throughout the area. The two spring features still dominate the area to the east of the Travertine Nature Center. In the 1960s, as part of the development of the Nature Center, the 140 acres to the east of the building, including Buffalo Springs and Antelope Springs, were

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<sup>1</sup> Sarah Allaback, Mission 66 Visitor Centers: The History of A Building Type (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Cultural Resource Stewardship and Partnerships, Park Historic Structures and Cultural Landscapes Program, 2000), 270-273.

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designated an Environmental Study Area (ESA). New trails were developed that highlighted the naturalesque conditions of the area but the two CCC attractions, as well as the smaller CCC resources, remained a dominant feature of the trails.

To further enhance the natural feel in the ESA, the 1930s road that looped around the outside edge of this portion of the park and two large picnic areas were removed in the late 1960s. However, the entire Nature Center area, consisting of the Travertine Nature Center and the ESA, is included within the proposed National Historic Landmark (NHL) boundaries for the Platt National Park. The period of significance for the NHL spans only the CCC period of park development with both the Antelope Springs and Buffalo Springs areas designated as contributing resources. The resources in the area that are associated with the late 1960s Nature Center development are designated as noncontributing to the NHL due to insufficient age. Because the larger ESA remains dominated by the CCC resources, as evidenced by inclusion within the NHL, the preponderance of the ESA is not included within the boundaries of this nomination. Instead, the nomination focuses on the Travertine Nature Center building and its directly associated resources, consisting of the contributing building site and two noncontributing storage sheds. This property is clearly the dominant resource associated with the late 1960s development of the Nature Center at Platt National Park and, therefore, merits recognition for its contribution to history.

The foundation of the Travertine Nature Center is concrete. The building's low-pitched, cross-gabled roof is currently clad with a metal shingle that mimics the original wood shingles. According to building records on-file with the Chickasaw National Recreation Area, the roof was re-clad in 1984 with hand split cedar shake shingles. The flat section around the perimeter of the shingle roof was covered with a torch applied modified bitumen which had a white paint coating. On the southeast side of the building, there was a gravel-covered built-up roof. By 1991, the roof was leaking at the transition between the sloped and flat roofs and at the south end of the east elevation's clerestory windows. Upon the recommendation of the roofing professionals, the Travertine Nature Center was re-roofed in 1992 using metal shingles that mimic the appearance of the original cedar shake shingles. Based upon aerial images of the building, the original configuration of the roof remains intact with the flat section extending along nearly the entire outside edge of the building and two skylights on the southeast side. Notably, while this alteration diminishes the building's integrity of materials, due to the compatibility in appearance, it does not dramatically impact the building's integrity of feeling and association.

The building is set at an angle with Travertine Creek flowing under the north portion of the building. To the west of the building is the large parking lot. To the immediate north of the building is an east-west dirt walking trail. To the east of the building is a wooded area divided by the waters of Travertine Creek. Although the original plans for the building indicated the façade of the building was the north elevation, in actuality the front of the building is appropriately the west elevation. Thus, the short elevation of the building that fronts to the northeast is designated as the north elevation in this description. The rear elevation of the building which faces towards the southeast is termed as the east elevation. The short elevation which fronts towards the southwest is designated as the south elevation.

The primary elevations of the Travertine Nature Center, consisting of the façade, north and south elevations, are constructed entirely of a brown, orange and white colored, Arkansas Hackett sandstone that is laid in a broken rangework pattern. The east elevation of the building is clad with a combination of sandstone and a wide, dark brown, wood siding. Overall, the choice of building materials, enhanced by the long, low design, was intended to allow the building to blend with its natural environment.

The Travertine Nature Center's façade is separated from the looped parking area by a commodious, open-air, patio area (see photographs 1 and 2). The patio area is divided into two sections. The larger section of the patio is located immediately off the parking lot. This patio area has two wide, stone sidewalks that converge near the second smaller section of patio. The large patio area has no walls. The only vertical elements in the sidewalk consist of a tree in a small grassy plot that divides the two sidewalks and a metal flagpole that is located on the short, east-running section of sidewalk on the south side of the patio area.

The small section of patio immediately in front of the building is separated from the larger portion by Hackett sandstone walls that match the building. The walls are topped by a narrow stone cap. The patio walls are zigzagged which creates a sitting area in front of the building's front entry that includes concrete benches built into the stone walls. On the corners of the side wall nearest the building are Wrightian-style, geometric, wood lights. There is a light on the corner of the wall in front of the main entry and on the opposite corner near the north side of the building. The geometric lights have predominately white opaque panels with a scattering of colored panels.

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The main entry to the Travertine Nature Center is located slightly off-center on the west elevation which measures about 183 feet long in its entirety (see photographs 1, 2, 3 and 4). The length of the façade is sheltered by the broad, boxed, wood eaves that extend more than halfway towards the stone patio wall. This creates a full-width porch along the façade. The porch has a plain concrete floor. To the north of the entry, is the portion of the building that spans Travertine Creek. The creek flows under this section of the building but does not flow into the building in any manner. The building features a low, round, concrete arch over the creek. The primary entry consists of metal, double, glazed, slab doors that are flanked by divided light, full-height sidelights and were apparently replaced in 1984. To the immediate south of the entry is the wide, stone, tall chimney that pierces the roof of the building at the juncture of the flat roof with the sloped roof. The chimney has a wide, metal cap that has been painted brown to match the rest of the building trim. On the south side of the chimney is a rectangular inset area that contains a metal ledge and a public pay telephone, a rarity anymore but an original feature of this building. South of the telephone area, there is a brown, wood sign with white letters noting "Restrooms" and an arrow pointing to the south. The exterior restrooms are sheltered from the general view by a tall stone wall situated on the outside edge of the full-length, concrete porch in front of the building. The wall extends the length of the south portion of the façade. On the north end of the wall on the side facing towards the patio and parking lot areas, are the words "Travertine Nature Center" with a classic, brown, wood, NPS sign below the first word. Back on the building's proper west elevation, to the south of the restroom sign, there is a rectangular, single pane, metal, fixed window with a stone sill at the top of the wall. The door to the Women's room is located south of the window. Located in a small inset area south of the Women's restroom door are two metal drinking fountains. The door to the Men's Restroom is south of the water fountains with a matching, metal, single-pane, fixed, rectangular window high on the wall to the south of the door. Both the restroom doors are brown, wood, slab doors with metal kickplates and handplates. Both have signs designating "Women" and "Men" as well as signs with male/female symbols and "Thank you for Not Smoking." Above each door in the boxed eave is a rectangular, flush light. There are no openings in the wall south of the window for the Men's restroom.

To the north of the main entry on the west elevation, the wall is divided by stone pilasters into six bays. The south five bays on the north side of the west elevation are equal in size and now each contain a triple window. The windows light the commodious exhibit room on the interior and were designed to encourage visual stimulation between the interior of the building and the surrounding scenic bounty. Originally, the fifth bay from the main entry contained another entry consisting of a double door flanked by full-height windows. The porch was converted to a window at an unknown time but probably when the corresponding porch on the east elevation was also changed to a triple window. The center window in each of the five bays is picture wide with narrow windows to each side. All of the windows have two panes with the upper pane being larger and fixed. The lower pane on the center window is also fixed with the corresponding pane on the side windows being an operable casement. The smaller sixth bay on the far north side contains only a single narrow window with an operable lower pane. North of this window, the stone wall is flush with no openings.

The northernmost wall of the Travertine Nature Center is relatively small, measuring just thirty feet in length (see photograph 4). The roof's flat sections wraparound the north elevation, creating a flat ledge on both sides of the dominant gabled roof. The north elevation features a large, center, full-height, fixed window flanked by stone pilasters. The center window extends from the concrete foundation to the roof, again to encourage interaction between the building's interior and surroundings. The center window is divided into three unequal panes. To the outside edge of the pilasters are narrow windows. As on the façade, the side windows are divided into a fixed, upper pane and an operable, casement, lower pane.

The east elevation of the building consists of three sections: the north section, the center auditorium wing and the south mechanical/carport section (see photographs 5, 6 and 7). Because this elevation faces onto the creek and wooded area, it is not readily visible due to the heavy vegetation. The north section of the east elevation can be further divided into two portions: the north demonstration room portion and the south stream portion. The demonstration room portion of the north section of the east elevation is sided with wide, wood siding that has been painted brown. In about the center of this portion, which measures roughly thirty feet in length, is a double set of metal, glazed, slab doors. As with the front doors, these exterior entry doors were apparently replaced in 1984. Flanking the doors are narrow, full-height windows that match the flanking windows on the façade. The entry is sheltered by the projected, closed, boxed eaves that extend the length of the section. A large concrete sidewalk divides the wall from the adjacent wooded area with a wood lattice fence providing a visual and physical barrier.

The larger south stream portion of the north section of the east elevation measures about sixty-seven feet in length. This portion of the building extends eastwards about fifteen feet farther than the demonstration portion of the north section of the east elevation. In the north wall thus created is another double, metal, glazed, slab entry that is also flanked by full-

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height windows matching the windows on the façade. A stone pilaster is located to the east of the entry bay with a full-height, wraparound window adjacent to this. The wraparound window contains a large corner window that is flanked by the narrow full-height windows. Another stone pilaster separates this window section from what was originally another porch area. This porch area, which opened directly onto the wooded area behind the building, retains its stone steps with a metal railing. The porch was converted to a three-part window matching the façade windows at an unknown time. On the south side of the former porch, there is a stepped, stone, porch wall that separates the porch area from the north banks of Travertine Creek. There are four bays of triple windows to the south of the porch in the section of the east elevation that spans Travertine Creek. As on the façade, the bays are separated by projecting stone pilasters. These triple windows match the triple windows on the west elevation. Along the roof of this portion of the north section of the east elevation is the clerestory which provides abundant natural light to the main exhibit room of the building. The clerestory consists of six equal sections of triple windows divided by the projecting ends of the interior roof beams. The beams are painted orange. The triple clerestory windows consist of a wide middle section flanked on each side by operable casement windows. The clerestory windows are operated via a motorized mechanical arm on the interior.

The auditorium wing of the east elevation juts eastward approximately sixty feet farther than the main wing of the building along the south bank of Travertine Creek (see photographs 5, 6 and 7). The north-facing wall of the auditorium wing is clad with the broad wood siding and has four symmetrical windows. There are no doors on this wall of the auditorium wing. Unlike the façade windows, the windows in the north wall of the auditorium wing are double, metal, casement. Each window has two panes, a small, fixed, upper pane and a longer, operable, lower pane. The east elevation of the auditorium wing is also clad with the wide wood siding and has no openings at all. This wall measures about thirty-six feet in length. The south wall of the auditorium wing is similarly clad and has a double set of metal slab doors centrally located along the approximately forty foot long wall. As on the façade and north elevation of the building, this entry is sheltered by the broad, boxed eaves of the overhanging flat section of roof. This section of roof also extends past the east wall of the auditorium wing, requiring a square, wood support off the southeast corner of the auditorium wing.

The south mechanical/carport section of the east elevation is clad in a combination of wood siding and sandstone (see photograph 7). The building's mechanical room is located on the north side of this section. Much of the building's original mechanical equipment remains in place inside the mechanical room. The exterior of the mechanical room is clad with the wide wood siding. There is an off-center, metal, louvered vent on the east-facing wall of the mechanical room. On the south-facing wall of the mechanical room are double, metal, slab doors with two louvered vents to the west of this. South of the mechanical room is an inset carport. The south wall in this part of the mechanical/carport section of the east elevation is Arkansas Hackett sandstone. To the south side under the integral carport are another set of double, metal, slab doors. There are no other openings south of this on the east elevation. Located adjacent to the far south side of the east elevation are various, large, mechanical units, all situated on a concrete pad. For safety purposes, the units have been encircled with a chain link fence.

The south elevation of the building measures approximately forty feet in length (see photograph 8). The gabled end wall has only two symmetrical openings consisting of two sets of triple, metal, casement, single pane windows. These windows are located in the middle of the wall and are the only regular size windows located in a standard mid-wall position on the building. The windows have stone sills and no discernible headers. Extending towards the south from the east corner of the westernmost window is a stone wall which measures about thirty-six feet in length. The wall is similar to the other walls on the front of the building with a stone cap.

#### INTERIOR DESCRIPTION:

The Travertine Nature Center has eleven rooms. The primary interior space is the central, large exhibit room (see photograph 9). To the southeast of the exhibit room is the auditorium which forms the back wing of the building. To the north of the exhibit room is the demonstration room which was designed for use as a learning laboratory for visitors. South of the exhibit room are the offices and work rooms for the Nature Center's staff, including a library space. The building's restrooms, which are accessed only from the exterior of the building, are located to the west of the office and work rooms. For the most part, the interior rooms retain their original configurations and materials.

To the south of the main entry in the exhibit room remains an operable, stone, wood burning fireplace. To the east of this, is the information counter with a full-height cage in the far southeast corner of the main exhibit room. The counter was rebuilt in the mid-1990s to accommodate modern needs and equipment. The cage is a living exhibit area for relatively small wildlife that frequents the area. The exhibit room features a concrete floor and a vaulted ceiling supported by wide,

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exposed beams. The interior walls in this section are sandstone matching the exterior walls. The large windows on both the west and east elevations allow the surrounding environs to be part of the overall natural picture.

The auditorium was reconstructed in late 1976/early 1977. The auditorium was closed in 1975 because the wood ceiling trusses were exhibiting signs of excess checking and structural cracks. The material failure was identified when the projection booth floor and supporting truss at the back end of the auditorium sagged, causing them to rest on the folding doors. This, in turn, caused the folding doors to be inoperable. As part of the project to fix the ceiling materials failure, the roof over the auditorium wing of the building was re-shingled. In 1984, the acoustical wall covering and new chairs were installed in the auditorium.

#### CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES:

**TRAVERTINE NATURE CENTER SITE:** The Travertine Nature Center site consists of the large parking lot, the patio area to the west of the building and the other areas immediately surrounding the building (see photographs 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 10, 11 and 12). Because none of the individual components of the site are singularly significant by themselves, the overall site with all components is considered as one contributing resource. The parking lot, located to the west of the building and stretching to the adjacent park road, is blacktopped with stone curbing. The parking lot has two openings onto the adjacent park road with a clear one-way flow of traffic. The entry is on the south with the exit on the north. Large rocks line the entry with a stop sign marking the exit. The parking lot is divided into two sections by a large grassy median strip which features several large trees, concrete walks and a convenient trash can. The south side of the parking lot contains no sidewalks. The north side has a concrete walk that is lined on both sides with flagstones. Located away from the building in the grassy stretch north of the north walkway is a brown wooden sign that has white lettering, a wood shake gabled "roof" and a brick foundation. The sign announces the name of the building and other information, including exhibits and hours. The patio area is described above, including the flagpole located on the stone walk in the southern portion of the patio area near the black-topped drive that extends around the back of the building. Behind the stone wall extending off the south elevation of the building, in a small picnic area, is an older trash receptacle. The trash receptacle is painted red and consists of a metal trash can on the bottom and an upper component that resembles a mail slot with a drop down lid. The upper component is supported by a round pipe stuck into the ground.

#### NONCONTRIBUTING RESOURCES:

To the rear of the Travertine Nature Center on the southeast side, there are two noncontributing storage sheds of indeterminate age (see photograph 13). Due to their rear location and relatively insignificant scale, the two noncontributing buildings do not interfere with the ability of the Travertine Nature Center to convey its historic significance. Immediately off the auditorium wing of the Nature Center is a brown, corrugated metal, storage shed. This shed is likely older than the other shed. The shed has a metal, front-gabled roof and a concrete foundation. The shed has an off-center, metal, slab door with two louvered vents. The upper vent appears to have been replaced as it is silver rather than being painted brown. The east side of the building features a sliding, two-pane window. On the rear of the building, there is a small, louvered, vent high in the wall. The west side of the shed has no openings.

The newer, noncontributing storage shed is metal with a flared, metal, front-gabled roof and a concrete foundation. On the front of the building, there are double, metal, slab doors. There are no openings in the doors or on the sides of the building. These buildings are noncontributing due to insufficient age and lack of significance as related to the Travertine Nature Center.

#### ALTERATIONS:

The Travertine Nature Center retains a good degree of historic integrity. The exterior of the building has been altered by the replacement of the wood shake roof with a metal, simulated shake roof in 1992. In 1977, as part of the work on the auditorium, the double doors on the south wall of the auditorium were replaced with matching doors. Other notable changes to the exterior of the building include the replacement of other exterior doors in 1984, at which time it is possible that the two entries on the north side of the west and east elevations were altered to windows, and the addition of modern mechanical units on the southeast corner of the building. While the changes to the roof and doors affect the building's integrity of materials, they do not diminish the ability of the building to convey its historic significance. The modification of the entries to windows has an impact upon the building's integrity of design but due to the compatibility in the replacement

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windows and that the rear porch elements remain intact, this change is not devastating to the building's integrity. Overall, the Travertine Nature Center maintains its integrity of setting, location, design, workmanship, feeling and association.

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**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

CONSERVATION

EDUCATION

ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

ARCHITECTURE

**Period of Significance**

1968-1969

**Significant Dates**

1969

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Mackie and Kamrath, architects

Nelson Construction Company, builder

**Period of Significance (justification)**

The period of significance for the Travertine Nature Center begins in 1968 with the construction of the building and extends to 1969 to conform to the dedication of the building on 20 September 1969.

**Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)**

The Travertine Nature Center meets Criteria Consideration G for its exceptional significance as the first nature center constructed by the National Park Service (NPS) west of the Mississippi River, the second of only two nature centers constructed by the NPS in the 1960s and the first NPS nature center constructed that did not involve re-use of an existing facility.

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**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria.)

The Travertine Nature Center, now located in the Chickasaw National Recreation Area but originally part of the Platt National Park, is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its association with environmental education efforts of the 1960s and Criterion C as an excellent example of a federally-sponsored nature center. Constructed in 1968-1969, the Travertine Nature Center is an exemplary example of the federal response to the environmental movement of the 1960s at the local level, particularly the effort to educate the public while also providing a means of back-to-nature entertainment and recreation. The Travertine Nature Center was constructed with the expressed intent "...to put people in direct contact with nature, to show how tampering with nature may lead to human disaster, and to show that man's survival depended on the survival of the natural environment."<sup>2</sup> The building meets Criteria Consideration G as the first nature center constructed by the National Park Service (NPS) west of the Mississippi River. The building is also the second of just two nature centers erected by the NPS in the 1960s. The Rock Creek Park Nature Center, located in Rock Creek Park in Washington, D.C., was dedicated in January 1960 and, thus, is the first nature center constructed by the NPS. In addition to stylistic differences and construction dates separated by nearly a decade, the two nature centers are differentiated by the fact that the Rock Creek Park Nature Center incorporated into its design the useable portions of a 1936 park caretaker's residence. From the building site to the infrastructure to the building, the Travertine Nature Center represents a wholly new construction effort. This allowed the Travertine Nature Center greater flexibility in its design which is represented by the shift in the original concept of a building with a nearby bridge over Travertine Creek to the final executed design of a building which itself spans the creek. The period of significance for the building extends from 1968 to 1969 or from the start of construction to the dedication of the building on 20 September 1969.

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least one paragraph for each area of significance.)

For centuries, the unique mineral springs and fresh water on the north edge of the geological formation called the Arbuckle Uplift in what is now south central Oklahoma has been recognized as an area of public interest and use. The area contains fresh water streams and numerous mineral springs of various compositions. The desire to "...preserve, protect and develop the waters for the use and enjoyment of the people" is what led to the establishment of the Sulphur Springs Reservation in 1902 through a supplemental agreement to the Atoka Agreement between the Chickasaw and Choctaw Nations and the federal government. At that time, the reservation consisted of 640 acres. In 1904, the park officially opened to the public, as well as expanded its boundaries to encompass 858 acres. Two years later, the reservation was designated a National Park with the name changed to Platt in honor of Senator Orville Hitchcock Platt of Connecticut.<sup>3</sup>

The park was not the only resource renamed in 1906. Upon the suggestion of University of Oklahoma Professor Charles Gould, an eminent Oklahoma geologist who was surveying the springs in the park for the second time, Sulphur Creek was renamed Travertine Creek for the "...great deal of travertine rock and formations" in the creek. As part of his study and recommendation, Gould established that all the springs located along Sulphur Creek were fresh water with no sulphur springs flowing into the creek. Primarily fed by Antelope Springs and Buffalo Springs within the park, Travertine Creek was also fed by drainage from the large area of hills and valleys east of the park. The creek winds through the park for about 1 ½ miles from the springs in the park to its confluence with Rock Creek. The creek drops 135 feet in elevation between Buffalo Springs and Rock Creek. Points of interest along Travertine Creek that have been significant in the park's more than a century of use include Antelope Springs, Buffalo Springs, Lake Placid, Grand Rapids, Little Niagara, Cave Island, the crossing at Sycamore Falls, Bear Falls, Lost Falls, Ole Swimming Hole, Pebble Falls, Sylvan Cove, Panther Falls, Lover's Tryst, Travertine Falls, Ripple Lake, the Punch Bowl and Council Rocks.<sup>4</sup>

Although one of the smallest parks in the National Park system, Platt National Park continued to develop throughout the first half of the twentieth century. By 1913, 36,000 visitors visited Platt National Park with the number jumping to 173,318 visitors in 1920. Various facilities and attractions were constructed during these years. However, the primary period of

<sup>2</sup> The Sulphur (Oklahoma) Times Democrat, 18 September 1969.

<sup>3</sup> National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior, "Mission 66 for Platt National Park," available in the Robert S. Kerr Collection (Conservation Series, Box 8, Folder 10), Carl Albert Congressional Research and Studies Center Congressional Archives, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma (1957). See also Dennis Muncrief, A History of Platt National Park: A Century of Progress (Bloomington, Indiana: AuthorHouse, 2007), 18 and 26.

<sup>4</sup> Muncrief, A History of Platt National Park, 99-102.

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development during the park's first fifty years was the otherwise trying decade of the 1930s. President Franklin D. Roosevelt's "Tree Army," also known as the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), thoroughly redesigned Platt National Park during the years of 1933 through 1940. This included creation or improvement to a variety of spring pavilions, creek dams, swimming holes, wooded picnic grounds, hiking trails and campgrounds, as well as development of a cohesive landscape, including plantings and shaping of the land, that revealed the park's "...natural, geological, and aqueous marvels, yet also provid(ed) for visitor recreation in and enjoyment of nature."<sup>5</sup>

Among the resources at Platt National Park that the CCC augmented were Antelope Springs and Buffalo Springs on the far east side of the park. As indicated above, these springs, along with the creek that they fed, had long been important natural elements of the park. The spring sites were also popular with the public from the park's founding at the turn-of-the-twentieth-century. To further build upon the public interest, the CCC made improvements to both sites. The CCC work at Buffalo Springs is more obvious with the construction of a magnificent, circular, masonry structure around the springs. The CCC work at Antelope Springs was more naturalistic in appearance, consisting of reconstruction of the springs including development of three earth and boulder dams, a constructed stream and a series of scenic ponds. Other CCC work in the area included extending the park perimeter road around both springs and construction of various amenities, including two large picnic areas with parking lots.<sup>6</sup>

CCC work at Platt National Park came to an end in June 1940 when Company 808 was reassigned to Rocky Mountain National Park in Colorado. The CCC itself lasted only three more years before being terminated as the country turned its attention and resources to World War II. During the following two decades, very little physical change occurred within the park due to a dearth in funding compounded by the status of the park as one of the smallest in the Park Service system. By the mid-1950s, as the NPS embarked upon the ambitious "Mission 66" program, the available facilities at Platt National Park were deemed inadequate for the 350,000 visitors to the park in 1940, let alone the more than 1.1 million park visitors during the year 1955.<sup>7</sup>

Conceptualized in early 1955 and given Presidential administrative approval in January 1956, the Park Service's "Mission 66" program was a comprehensive, nationwide, ten-year program of park improvement to address the ever-increasing deficiencies in park development and maintenance during the war and post-war eras, as well as the problems related to the explosive growth in visitation fueled by post-war automotive and recreation trends. Requiring more than \$670 million, the program "...would allow the Park Service to repair and build roads, bridges and trails, hire additional employees, construct new facilities ranging from campsites to administration buildings, improve employee housing, and obtain land for future parks." The program was designed to terminate in 1966 to coincide with the Park Service's golden anniversary of its 1916 founding.<sup>8</sup>

Platt National Park's first Mission 66 plan was developed in the spring of 1955 by Park Superintendent William Supernaugh. Although well-received by the Park Service's regional office, the prospectus was rejected by "Washington" in February 1956. In addition to citing the abundant development of Platt National Park during the 1930s, the regulators also indicated that the ultimate goal should be the transfer of the park from Federal control to that of the State of Oklahoma. Superintendent Supernaugh's successor, William Branch, immediately responded with a flurry of letters to Senators and the regional office sufficient to cause the powers-that-be to reconsider their stance and include Platt National Park in the Mission 66 program.<sup>9</sup>

Because it was "obviously impracticable" to address Platt National Park's underlying size issue, park authorities in 1957 determined that the park "...must seek a stepped up visitor service to care for the ever increasing crowds, at the same time affording protection for the natural features of the park." To accomplish this goal, the park developed a five step, multi-year, Mission 66 program. The primary step was to "Build a carefully planned, well equipped and centrally located Visitor Use Center." The benefit of the new visitor center would allow the park contact with the "thousands" not reached by the current facilities. This in turn would allow the masses to "...receive proper orientation and information which (would) assist them materially in enjoying the park and leaving it unmolested for succeeding generations." Other steps included

<sup>5</sup> Heidi Hohmann, Draft National Historic Landmark Nomination "Platt National Park," (August 2008), 4 and 33.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 25-26.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 42. See also "Mission 66 for Platt National Park," unnumbered pages.

<sup>8</sup> Allaback, Mission 66 Visitor Centers, 2-3.

<sup>9</sup> Heidi Hohmann and Katarzyna Grala, "Cultural Landscape Report: Platt Historic District, Chickasaw National Recreation Area, Oklahoma," (Iowa State University and National Park Service, 2004), 129-130.

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rehabilitation and expansion of the park's utility systems; improvement by realignment and resurfacing of roads and trails, including improving stream crossings and augmenting parking availability; rehabilitation of existing buildings which ranged in age from twenty to sixty years; and, increase staff in the fields of protection, maintenance and interpretation "...to the degree consistent with actual needs." The total estimated cost for this program was \$386,200, minus the cost of additional park staff, with \$83,800 to be expended on the roads and trails; \$152,400 on rehabilitation of existing buildings and utilities; and, \$150,000 for the construction of the new visitor center.<sup>10</sup>

In 1958, a Mission 66 Master Plan for Platt National Park was developed. The plan included a new Visitor Center with a commodious ninety-car parking area to be situated near the park's Administration Building located to the west of Highway 177, as well as various realignments and augmentation of parking areas. Overall, however, almost no work occurred in the park under the Mission 66 Master Plan. The only identified exception was the expansion of the Rock Creek Campground done as part of "The first construction done at Platt National Park in many years." At the campground, forty new camping units, additional picnic facilities and four new comfort stations were erected. The work was completed in 1966 as the Mission 66 program came to an end.<sup>11</sup>

"Parkscape U.S.A." was the successor program to Mission 66. The Parkscape program, also a multi-year plan, clearly reflected the growing environmental movement as it was "...designed to mobilize the resources and capabilities of the National Park Service in support of the new conservation." This "new conservation" was "...beyond the traditional concepts of conservation" as it spoke "...not of nature alone, but of man's total relationship with the world in which he lives." The Parkscape program grew out of the 1965 White House Conference on Natural Beauty. The Parkscape program sought to sustain the vitality of the National Park idea through the pledge "...to make the beauty and history of the land a richer and more meaningful part of the daily life of every American; to renew beauty where it has already been destroyed, and to seek out and protect the surviving landmarks of national heritage." Similar to the Mission 66 program, Parkscape was designed to terminate in 1972 to mark another major NPS milestone, the centennial of Yellowstone, the first National Park. While the seed for the Travertine Nature Center was established during the Mission 66 years through the clear definition of the need for improved visitor facilities, the actual development and construction of the Nature Center occurred during the Parkscape, U.S.A. years of the mid- to late-1960s.<sup>12</sup>

As early as 1963, consideration was given to construction of a Nature Center at Platt National Park. With roots in the conservation movement of the previous decades, the development of nature centers came to prominence in the decades of the 1960s and 1970s as the modern environmental movement took hold. In general, the 1960s was a decade of unprecedented societal change as the civil rights, women's rights and anti-Vietnam movements resulted in re-definition of acceptable social norms. As an intrinsic part of this societal evolution, "...issues of environmental quality came to the forefront of public concern." Although the conservation movement extended back to the eighteenth century, the birth of the "modern environmental movement" is generally credited to the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962. This book brought to the public's attention the issues of pesticide use upon nature, including humans and the ecosystem. This, in turn, gave rise to other environmental quality issues that the public latched onto with alacrity. Within the National Park Service, the 1962 report by the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission, the 1962 establishment of the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation and the formation of the Land and Water Conservation Fund in 1964 were the beginning of "...the drastically enlarged scope of the conservation movement which took shape during the 1960s."<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> "Mission 66 for Platt National Park," unnumbered pages.

<sup>11</sup> Hohmann and Grala, "Cultural Landscape Report," 130-131. See also United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, "1966 Calendar Year Activities," available in the Honorable Carl Albert Collection (Departmental Series, Box 64, Folder 6), Carl Albert Congressional Research and Studies Center Congressional Archives, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma, (1 February 1967).

<sup>12</sup> United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, "1967 NPS Briefing Book," available in the Honorable Carl Albert Collection (Departmental Series, Box 64, Folder 6), Carl Albert Congressional Research and Studies Center Congressional Archives, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma, (1967), 25. See also United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, "NPS Criteria for Parklands," available in the Honorable Carl Albert Collection (Departmental Series, Box 64, Folder 6), Carl Albert Congressional Research and Studies Center Congressional Archives, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma, (no date), foreword and introduction.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 157. See also Carolyn Merchant, The Columbia Guide to American Environmental History (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 174-179 and Ronald F. Lee, Family Tree of the National Park System, Part VI, (1972, available [http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online\\_books/lee2/lee6.htm](http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/lee2/lee6.htm), retrieved 22 January 2010), 1.

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Adding to the prominence of the 1960s as the founding decade of the modern environmental movement was the passage of various Federal environmental laws. This included the Clean Air Act of 1963, the Wilderness Act of 1964, the Water Quality Control Act of 1965, the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968 and the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 which President Richard Nixon signed into law on 1 January 1970. These laws provided a new legal framework of federal involvement in the myriad of environmental issues that continues to the present day.<sup>14</sup>

A known key to the success of the environmental movement of the 1960s from the very beginning was an informed and engaged public. Education was a fundamental tenant of the conservation movement throughout the twentieth century. Even more pressing than in previous decades, the modern environmental movement of the 1960s and 1970s required interpretive and educational programs that were sufficiently advanced so as "...to effect a greater understanding of our environmental problems and what must be done to correct them." As such, "the need for outdoor interpretive programs, nature centers, laboratories, and outdoor training for teachers and youth leaders (was) urgent."<sup>15</sup>

The fundamental purpose of a nature center was "...to provide an area of undeveloped land where facilities and services (made) possible outdoor programs in nature and environmental education." Every nature center was to be innovative, exemplary and illustrative for its region. The associated nature center program was to provide the means and opportunity for education, research, conservation and culture. The intended audience of the nature center from the late 1960s forward was to be all ages, from the youngest to the oldest. A nature center was charged with acquainting

young children with the mysteries and wonders of nature, a task that is becoming more difficult with the relentless destruction of native habitats. It affords teenagers an opportunity to engage in wholesome activities that are both constructive and educational. It also provides a training ground for youths who wish to become scientists. The land can be a significant outdoor laboratory for college students. Adults can utilize the center facilities and resources for serious study and the pursuit of hobby interests. A nature center is also a place where a man can take his family for a walk to see a meadow, a swamp, a stand of native trees, or to explore the shores of a secluded lake.<sup>16</sup>

In 1963, Platt National Park Superintendent Paul Steel contacted the National Capital Region about the Rock Creek Nature Center, the Park Service's only nature center. Steel indicated that Platt National Park had under consideration development of a "...visitor center at Platt along the lines of..." the Rock Creek Nature Center and he asked for plans, layouts and other information about the existing nature center.<sup>17</sup> The Rock Creek Nature Center in Washington, D.C.'s Rock Creek Park was developed in the 1950s as a pilot project for the NPS. The nature center project originally centered around the park's Peirce/Klingling Mansion which had become rundown due to a lack of maintenance. With the concept of a nature center being new, "...the Peirce/Klingling mansion's nature center served as a sort of experiment to give the park the experience needed to decide what to include in a permanent nature center." In June 1957, it was determined that a new nature center facility would be located on the site of an existing caretaker's residence that was no longer deemed necessary. The chief architect for the National Capital Parks system, William M. Hausmann, designed the new nature center building which incorporated the "...usable portions" of the caretaker's house. Cee Bee Contractors of Coral Hills, Maryland, received the construction contract for the Rock Creek Nature Center in June 1959. Due to delays in materials, the building's original completion date of December 1959 was pushed to mid-1960. At a total cost of \$333,500, the Rock Creek Nature Center opened to the public on 4 June 1960 and continues to operate to the present day. Notably, the nature center was "Meant to appeal primarily to young people..." and, as such, the dedication ceremony was entirely conducted by children.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Merchant, The Columbia Guide, 179-181.

<sup>15</sup> Byron L. Ashbaugh, "Nature Center Purposes and Values," Environmental Education 2:3 (Spring 1971), 4-5.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>17</sup> Hohmann and Grala, "Cultural Landscape Report," 157.

<sup>18</sup> "Rock Creek Park Nature Center and Planetarium," Rock Creek Park (U.S. National Park Service),

<http://www.nps.gov/rocr/planourvisit/naturecenter.htm>, retrieved 11 December 2009. See also Barry Mackintosh, Rock Creek Park: An Administrative History (Washington, D.C.: History Division, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1985; available <http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online-books/rocr/adhi/adhi.htm>, retrieved 20 May 2010).

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In January 1965, George B. Hartzog, Jr. of Washington, D.C. and Director of the NPS spoke at the annual Sulphur Chamber of Commerce banquet in Sulphur, Oklahoma. Hartzog was accompanied by Bill Newbold, Information Officer and Roger Allin, Assistant Regional Director for Cooperation Activity at Santa Fe, New Mexico. During this speech, Hartzog disclosed that the Park Service would develop a nature center for Platt National Park in the near future. During a press conference prior to the program, Hartzog indicated work was already being done in planning for the nature center, including determining a suitable location in the park for a new building in which to house the proposed nature center. One of the issues being studied was the architectural theme of the anticipated building. Hartzog also announced that he foresaw a single unit of management for both Platt National Park and the new Lake of the Arbuckles Recreation Area, as well as future expansion for both areas. Anticipated areas to be included in Platt National Park were part of the Arbuckle Uplift which Hartzog described as "...one of the most outstanding geological formations in the country" and Sulphur's Veteran's Lake.<sup>19</sup>

The Western Office of Design and Construction developed plans for a visitor center in the park's Flower Park in 1965; however, Superintendent Steel countered with a proposal to develop a nature center at the Travertine Island site. Steel contended that "...the Travertine Island site offers a great deal of opportunity for architectural ingenuity and...that a compatible design to the Travertine Island site could afford an excellent opportunity for an architect to utilize some of the more modern approaches to interpretive endeavor." Despite extremely dry conditions during the years between 1963 through 1965 which had "...cast a damper on the Travertine Creek areas of the park..." 1.5 million visitors experienced Platt National Park in 1965. It was estimated in early January 1966 that there were 38,000,000 folks living in a 600 mile radius of the park that were prospective visitors. This caused the local newspaper to make note of the reality that

Sometime (sic) we can live too close to a national park. We are prone to take its assets, its beauties and its attractions for granted. But while we are doing this, thousands of other people are taking advantage of its attractions and recreation.<sup>20</sup>

Shortly after this at the end of January 1966, Congressman Carl Albert sent a telegram informing the community that the new federal budget just submitted to Congress included a project to construct a \$314,000 Nature Center at Platt National Park. If the funds were approved by Congress, the project would consist of the "...erection of the building and necessary utilities for a stepped up program of interpretation and visitor orientation for the entire Platt National Park and Arbuckle region." The 9,250 square foot, native stone building was to be situated in the wooded area east of Little Niagara in the eastern end of the park. Trails from the proposed Nature Center would lead to Antelope Springs and Buffalo Springs. In addition to the typical park exhibits that explained the area to visitors, the building as conceived would include space for an audio visual program that would facilitate better understanding of the area's natural resources, as well as space for "...school classes to visit and pursue their nature studies." The ability to accommodate the students from the Sulphur schools, as well as visiting school groups, would be new to the park according to Superintendent Don Spalding.<sup>21</sup>

On 1 August 1966, the Department of the Interior awarded a \$14,250 contract to the Houston, Texas, architectural firm of Mackie and Kamrath for design and construction drawings for a nature center building and a small bridge in Platt National Park. U.S. Senators Mike Monroney and Fred Harris joined Congressman Albert in making the announcement to the local community. The "architecture" of the building was to "...be in keeping with the park surroundings." The building was to contain meeting rooms, demonstration rooms, an auditorium that would offer a continuous interpretation program about the park and an office for the Park Naturalist. The project also called for a bridge over Travertine Creek to be located near the building. NPS officials hoped to have construction of the building underway by 1 April 1967; however, the plans for the building were not completed until February 1967.<sup>22</sup>

The NPS began taking bids on the Travertine Nature Center project during the last week of May 1967 with a bid opening set for 2 p.m. on 15 June 1967. The project was "...expected to give Platt National Park one of it's (sic) most substantial boosts in many years." In a notable shift from the original conception which called for a bridge spanning Travertine Creek near the building, the final building plans called for the exhibit room to "...span the streambed and...provide an excellent

<sup>19</sup> The Daily Oklahoman, (Oklahoma City, Oklahoma), 12 January 1965.

<sup>20</sup> Hohmann and Grala, "Cultural Landscape Report," 157. See also The Sulphur Times-Democrat, 6 January 1966.

<sup>21</sup> The Sulphur Times-Democrat, 27 January 1966.

<sup>22</sup> "Contract Award," available in the Honorable Carl Albert Collection (Departmental Series, Box 58, Folder 14), Carl Albert Congressional Research and Studies Center Congressional Archives, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma, (29 July 1966). See also The Sulphur Times-Democrat, 17 February 1967 and Hohmann and Grala, "Cultural Landscape Report," 157.

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view of the surrounding woodland and stream areas." According to the announcement made by Acting Superintendent Robert W. Peters, the new Nature Center would "...be the second one of its type in the National Park System."<sup>23</sup>

In mid-July 1967, Park Superintendent Jack Stark reported that "...a Nature Center (would) be established in the east end of the park, somewhere in the region of Buffalo and Antelope springs." The building was to be a "...museum-type." In the same issue of the local newspaper, another article announced that the new Visitor Use Center that was to be constructed in the eastern portion of the park was delayed. Bids had been received on the proposed building several weeks before; however, all bids were higher than anticipated. As such, the building was "...currently being redesigned to bring it within funds available for the project." Although the name of the building was not consistent between the two articles, that the second article about the new Visitor Use Center was in actuality referring to the Travertine Nature Center is clear in the statement that the building was to be built "...astride Travertine Creek, above Little Niagara and will give visitors to Platt National Park a very comprehensive interpretive picture of what Platt offers the visitor, botanically, zoologically and in order (sic) fields." In addition to exhibits, the building would offer slides and motion pictures with sound to "...provide a complete educational program on the park."<sup>24</sup>

Plans and specifications for the Travertine Nature Center roads and parking area were made available for bids in August 1967. In addition to the Travertine Loop Road and four parking areas, the project also involved the laying of a sewer line to support the new building. Approximately 1,500 feet of paved roadway, parking areas and walks were planned and 4,715 feet of sewer line. Bids on the road, parking and sewer project were to be sent to the NPS' regional office in Santa Fe with a bid opening date of 31 August 1967. This was the first step in the nature center program which was anticipated to "...bring substantial improvements to the upper portions of Travertine Creek in Platt National Park...". As part of the road project, the existing perimeter drive above the building site was to be changed into a footpath and bicycle trail. Nature walk trails would also tie the building with Antelope Springs and Buffalo Springs, along with other areas in the eastern part of the park. The second step in the program, of course, was the construction of the building. At the end of August 1967, it was anticipated that bids on the building would be opened in October 1967. As indicated by Superintendent Stark, some changes had been made in the building design. The building was to be built of glass, native stone and rough sawn siding which would allow the building "...to blend into the natural surroundings of the area." The exhibit room was to be largely of glass and the audiovisual room was to provide a continuous interpretative program.<sup>25</sup>

It was announced in the first week of September 1967 that Nelson Construction Company of Sulphur was the apparent low bidder on the road, parking and sewer project. The Park Service received a total of three bids on the project with the Nelson bid coming in lowest at \$66,530. The other bidders were the Dodson Construction Company of Sulphur and the Evans Construction Company of Temple, Oklahoma. At that time, it was noted that when the Nature Center was finished, "...the upper end of the park will be devoted to nature trails and bicycle paths." The contract for grading, drainage, concrete curbs and gutters, and plant mix surfacing of loop road and parking areas, as well as nature trail construction and sewer work, was formally awarded to the Nelson Construction Company on 20 September 1967 for the amount of \$66,545.51.<sup>26</sup>

Bids for the building were advertised in late September 1967 with an opening set for 26 October 1967. As with the road, parking and sewer project, the plans, specifications and bid documents were available without charge from the Santa Fe regional office. However, in late October 1967, it was announced that the bid opening had been postponed. The project got "caught up in the budget cutting campaign in Congress with a moratorium declared on many projects until the matter is settled." By mid-January 1968, the bid opening had been rescheduled for the end of the month. It was hoped that work on the building would begin as quickly as late March or early April. It was also noted that "The Nature Center will be the first of its kind developed by the National Park Service west of the Mississippi, and will provide basic facilities for educational study in the conservation field." The building was anticipated to "...serve as the focal point for conservation education in the State of Oklahoma and adjoining states." In addition to having extensive audiovisual equipment, the building was to

<sup>23</sup> The Sulphur Times-Democrat, 1 June 1967.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 13 July 1967.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 17 August 1967 and 31 August 1967.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 7 September 1967. See also "Contract Award," available in the Honorable Carl Albert Collection (Departmental Series, Box 64, Folder 6), Carl Albert Congressional Research and Studies Center Congressional Archives, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma, (19 September 1967).

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feature nature exhibits and a library. To further the program, "...the east end of Platt National Park will be converted to a system of nature trails and eventually access to this portion of the park will be by trail only."<sup>27</sup>

With a total of six bidders, the Nelson Construction Company was announced as low bidder for the building project by the first of February 1968 with a bid of around \$240,000. In mid-March 1968, a drawing of the new building was published in the local newspaper with the statement that the facility was a "certainty" as the Nelson Construction Company already had the project under contract. This same drawing of the building appeared in The Daily Oklahoman, the state's daily newspaper, ten days later. It was anticipated that construction would take about a year. The building was to have 9500 square feet of floor space which was to include a "...central lobby with exhibits, an audio visual room where a continuous movie or slide program will be in progress, a library specializing in conservation education, and a demonstration room." Also noteworthy was the "...indoor-outdoor concept" which included the nature trails and outdoor interpretative facilities creating an outdoor classroom that was intrinsic to the overall nature center concept.<sup>28</sup>

Construction on the building was underway by early April 1968. Automobile traffic east of the building site in the park was prohibited after 1 April 1968. By mid-June, it was reported that "...conservation will be one of the principal themes to be expounded in films and sounds when the new Nature Center is opened...". The anticipated impact of the Nature Center was also expanded from the State of Oklahoma to "...people from all over the middle part of the United States..." through the development and implementation of an interpretative program on conservation. Also at that time, it was announced that the cost of the building had risen from \$240,000 to \$310,000 due to problems related to constructing the foundation in the spongy soil. The building was to have seventy-two concrete pilings, some as large as five feet in diameter and running to depths of thirty-four feet. The Hackett sandstone for the building was being acquired from a quarry near Hackett, Arkansas, on the Oklahoma-Arkansas state line. This same stone was used in the construction of Oklahoma's late U.S. Senator Robert S. Kerr's mountaintop mansion near Poteau. Fortunately, the construction activity had not reduced visitation in the park with 639,157 visitors to the park reported by the middle of June 1968 and an additional 179,988 to the adjacent recreation area.<sup>29</sup>

In mid-July 1968, the walking trails east of the Nature Center were opened to the public. The perimeter road had been completely removed with the asphalt surfacing "...ripped up and hauled away." Park personnel were readying to replant the roadway to blend with the surrounding environs. Work on the building continued with the foundation problems still slowing the work. With subtle humor, The Ada Weekly News pointed out that the preservation of native wildlife was, and had been since the park's origination, one of the fundamental functions of the park. According to the Ada paper, this was to now include not only the raccoon, the fox, the bobcat and bison but also another endangered species: Pedestrians. As explained in the article:

A special preserve is being set aside at the extreme east end of the park for the protection of these quaint creatures. And automobiles, which prey devastatingly upon the species, are strictly forbidden here....Anybody who wants to explore the eastern end of the park, the area including Antelope Springs and Buffalo Springs, from now on will have to hoof it.<sup>30</sup>

Work quietly continued on the Travertine Nature Center through the rest of 1968 into January 1969. By mid-January, the concrete foundation work had been completed, along with work on the flagstone walks, ramp area and walls. The raising of the building's framework and partition was underway as the first month of the New Year came to an end. All work on the building was slated to be finished in time to allow for a spring opening. The spring opening was still projected to occur in late March 1969. Also highly anticipated was that the new nature center would "...provide a broad education on the natural features of the park..." which would conceivably answer the longstanding question as to why Platt was a National Park, particularly as noted in the article for even those who had lived in Sulphur for over half a century.<sup>31</sup>

The building was nearing completion in early April 1969, contributing to the expectation of a banner year for visitation to the park. Over 2.5 million visitors were expected in 1969, making it "...the best travel year in the history of the Platt National Park here." Although the building was not yet complete, the Tulip Garden Club kicked off their April 1969 meeting at the

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 28 September 1967, 26 October 1967 and 18 January 1968.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 1 February 1968 and 14 March 1968. See also The Daily Oklahoman, 24 March 1968.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 13 June 1968. See also The Daily Oklahoman, 21 June 1968.

<sup>30</sup> The Ada (Oklahoma) Weekly News, 18 July 1968.

<sup>31</sup> The Sulphur Times-Democrat, 23 January 1969 and 27 March 1969.

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new Nature Center. As part of the meeting, the group took a comprehensive tour of the building. The room-by-room tour was led by W.P. Fairchild, construction engineer. Fairchild explained in detail the function and purpose of each room. The following month, Platt National Park was featured in an article written by Oklahoma newsman Kent Ruth which was published in the magazine section of the New York Times. Among other features of the park, Ruth highlighted the new Nature Center which was again touted as "...the first park service facility of its kind west of the Mississippi."<sup>32</sup>

By early June 1969, the building's opening was pushed to July 1969. Although the long 4<sup>th</sup> of July weekend brought a swamp of visitors to the park, the Travertine Nature Center was not yet ready for its grand opening. In mid-July 1969, it was announced that the opening would likely occur in September 1969. Exhibits for the building were then under construction by the NPS Museum Division in Washington, D.C. The exhibits were to be transported to Oklahoma by the end of the month. At a final cost of nearly \$325,000, the building was to be used in the summertime to "...give visitors both visual and verbal lectures on film of the parks (sic) natural and human history." To maintain activity levels during the slower winter months, the building was to offer "...conservation education programs for youth and adults of the state as well as for other cultural programs" such as the NPS' NEED program or National Environmental Education Development. The NEED program was "...designed to be a cooperative venture with the public schools to acquaint children with resource problems currently facing the nation." The issues considered by the NEED program included "...land, air and water pollution, overcrowding, and man's reshaping of his own habitat into an environmental trap." The NEED program was being developed by Dr. Mario M. Menesini, research specialist in education at the University of California. Along with the equipment and facilities of the Travertine Nature Center, the accompanying trails and springs in the ESA were also part of the Nature Center's advertised attractions.<sup>33</sup>

At the end of July 1969, it was announced that the Travertine Nature Center would be formally dedicated on 20 September 1969. Oklahoma Congressman Carl Albert was scheduled to give the dedicatory address to the anticipated thousands of witnesses. It was also noted that the Nature Center was one of only two nature centers operated by the NPS and that it would "...make a tremendous contribution to the understanding and appreciation of people for Platt National Park" through the use of visual aids which would allow "...visitors and tourists to assimilate information about the park..." better than ever before. Critically, it was believed that "This program is in line with the concepts which brought about the establishment of the park in the first place." While Platt National Park had been thoroughly enjoyed over the years for its camping and picnicking, the Travertine Nature Center would increase awareness and "...appreciation of the true natural resources of the park."<sup>34</sup>

One month before the building's dedication, the local paper explained more about the Travertine Nature Center:

The Nature Center is more than just a building with exhibits and programs. It is also a developing idea of new emphasis in the use of a portion of the park. About 140 acres east of the new building will be maintained in a natural state to be used in connection with the Nature Center as an Environmental Study Area. Guided nature walks will be conducted in the area. Teachers will be encouraged to bring their students to use it as an outdoor nature study laboratory, as a place of inspiration for art or writing assignments and just as a place to sit quietly and think. While positive encouragement will be given to organized educational use, the Nature Center and Environmental Study Area is by no means limited to that use. The facilities are for the use of all park visitors for nature study, and to receive information about the local area. The term "nature center" is new in the National Park System. The only other designated Nature Center in the National Park System at present is located in Rock Creek Park in Washington, D.C. The idea behind a Nature Center has been developing for a long time. Such organizations as the National Audubon Society and other conservations (sic) have been operating nature centers for many years.<sup>35</sup>

At the end of August 1969, it was announced that the "Old Museum" at Platt National Park would close following the last scheduled Labor Day activities on the first. Beginning on 2 September 1969, the exhibits and equipment from the old museum would be transferred to the Nature Center. Following the opening of the Nature Center, all activities previously held at the museum would be at the new facility.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 3 April 1969, 10 April 1969 and 3 July 1969.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 5 June 1969, 10 July 1969, 17 July 1969 and 4 September 1969.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 31 July 1969.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 21 August 1969.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 28 August 1969.

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After the Labor Day weekend, plans continued to pick up speed for the Travertine Nature Center's opening with the number of dignitaries attending the dedication also increasing. In addition to Congressman Carl Albert, the list of notable attendees included U.S. Senator Henry Bellmon of Oklahoma, NPS Director George B. Hartzog, Jr., and Don Greve, President of the Sequoyah Carpet Company. The newspaper also noted that the new building was "...the only structure of this size in the state that is built over a free flowing stream." As an "...introduction and invitation to get outside into the true exhibit area," the building was to contain live exhibits of snakes, frogs, lizards, insects, plants and fish native to the area. Additionally, a beehive and nocturnal animal exhibit were designed for the building. Within the demonstration room, live animal handling was to be demonstrated. In sum, "The nature center thus provides a kind of point of departure to give the visitors some idea of what there is to be seen in the park" with the visitor then able to "...go out and see the real thing."<sup>37</sup>

As part of the dedication, Congressman Albert presented an American flag that had flown over the Capitol Building in Washington, D.C. In addition to providing a history of the flag, Albert discussed the government's efforts to serve the American people through conservation and recreational programs. According to Albert, "We are literally expending millions upon millions of dollars to provide for the saving of our wildlife, for the establishment and maintenance of National Parks for the benefit of our people." Albert estimated that total outlay for recreational resources in 1970 would equal \$372 million, a \$52 million increase over 1969. In justifying this expense, Albert explained "After all, we inherited all of these natural riches from our ancestors, and it is certainly our duty and our obligation to preserve them for generations of future Americans." Albert also lauded the Chickasaw Nation for their foresight in securing the public title of the land for the benefit of all. In discussing the building, Albert noted that "The Nature Center will be the first of its kind developed by the National Park Service west of the Mississippi, and will provide basic facilities for educational study in the conservation field." Albert went on to say "It can be easily seen that all of this equipment will extend and enlarge not only the recreational opportunities of our people, not only here but throughout the state, not to mention the increased and invaluable educational advance occurring from their use." Of particular significance to Albert was the building's library which he judged to be "...of incalculable value." According to Albert, "A library is like a river which flows out into the sea spreading enlightenment and progress over a vast expanse."<sup>38</sup>

Also attending the dedication of the building was Karl Kamrath, architect for the building. As indicated by the original architectural contract, the first nature center concept involved a building with a bridge to span Travertine Creek. At the dedication, Kamrath stated "When I made the first visit to the site I knew the building should span the creek with windows to bring the outside in." Kamrath was born in Enid, Oklahoma, on 25 April 1911 to G.A. and Martha Kamrath. When Kamrath was a young child, the family relocated from Oklahoma to Texas. Kamrath, a graduate of the University of Texas, spent three years in Chicago working for Pereira and Pereira, the Interior Studios of Marshall Field and Company, and the Architectural Decorating Company during the mid-1930s. Returning to Texas in 1937, Kamrath joined forces with fellow University of Texas graduate and Architectural Decorating Company staff, Fred MacKie to open the firm of MacKie and Kamrath in Houston. As was typical with many architectural firms, MacKie took primary responsibility for the planning and business aspects of the firm while Kamrath was in charge of design for the firm. Kamrath became a member of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) in 1939 and was elected to a fellowship in 1955. Along with MacKie, Kamrath served in the United States Corps of Engineers during World War II, attaining the rank of Captain. The firm of MacKie and Kamrath reopened in Houston following the war in 1946. Also in 1946, Kamrath met nationally acclaimed architect Frank Lloyd Wright at Wright's Taliesin. This opportunity "...had a profound effect on Kamrath's architectural designs as he committed himself to creating organic architecture following Wright's Usonian principles." The firm of MacKie and Kamrath "...were among the first Houston architects to design modernist buildings and they swiftly obtained national recognition..." for their buildings. As exemplified in the Travertine Nature Center, the firm's buildings were "...consistently Wrightian in character; they displayed a predilection for horizontal alignment, dramatic structural engineering, and finely executed material and ornamental detailing." While MacKie and Kamrath's work in Houston has been identified as significant, their contribution to Oklahoma's built environment is relatively unknown. As far as has been identified to date, the only building designed by the firm in Oklahoma is the Travertine Nature Center.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 4 September 1969, 11 September 1969 and 18 September 1969. See also The Ada Weekly News, 18 September 1969.

<sup>38</sup> "Dedication Speech of the Travertine Nature Center and Presentation of American Flag," available in the Honorable Carl Albert Collection (Speeches Series, Box 11, Folder 27), Carl Albert Congressional Research and Studies Center Congressional Archives, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma, (19 September 1967).

<sup>39</sup> The Daily Ardmoreite, (Ardmore, Oklahoma), 21 September 1969. See also "Karl Kamrath: An Inventory of His Collection, 1918-2004," Library, University of Texas, <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/taro/utaaa/00065/aaa-00065.html>, retrieved 11 December 2009 and Stephen Fox, "Karl Fred Kamrath," New Handbook of Texas, (Texas State Historical Association, 1996), 1028

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The dedication ceremonies were held outside the building with the weather cooperating perfectly. An estimated crowd of 1,000 toured the building after the ribbon cutting ceremony. Park service workers parked nearly 270 automobiles that day, nearly 100 more than the capacity of the adjacent parking area. After inspecting the building, many of the visitors made the trek along the nature trails to Buffalo Springs and Antelope Springs. All in all, the Travertine Nature Center was "...given a good send-off."<sup>40</sup>

During the last week in September 1969, visitation within the park picked up nearly 10,000 persons as compared to the same time period in 1968. It was undetermined if it was the weather, the new Nature Center or another factor that caused the substantial increase. By the first of October 1969, the Travertine Nature Center was open for daily use. In late October 1969, the Sulphur Business and Professional Women's Club held their meeting in the Nature Center. The meeting included watching the film "Matter of Time" which was described as being about nature. The club members were encouraged by Miss Carlotte Muth, Platt National Park staff member, to "...get out on the nature trails in the Park and find out about nature first hand" following the movie. Showing that "The Travertine Nature Center is growing more popular by the day with civic, study and other type organizations and groups" was the meeting of the Sulphur Sorosis Club in November 1969. At this meeting, the Park Naturalist, E. Macdougall Palmer, showed two films, "A River Must Live" and "Why Man Creates." The first film was classified as "...strictly a conservation film..." which addressed how lakes and rivers are polluted. The second film was an award winning film which focused on man's creative abilities through the centuries. While Palmer did not "...interpret the film for the club..." he did encourage a discussion of the films "...for his own information as well as..." the club members.<sup>41</sup>

In mid-January 1970, the first of many environmental film festivals was held at the Nature Center. The public was invited to watch the free movies which were shown continuously throughout the afternoon. The movies focused on "...some of the environmental problems we face today and how we might solve them." Park staff would also be on-hand to answer questions. In February 1970, visitation at Platt National Park continued to be above average despite cold weather which had dropped visitation numbers at the Lake of the Arbuckles. At the end of March, "The Mayflower Story" was shown at the Nature Center. This film told the story of the "...recent history-making voyage of the Mayflower II." Park officials reported in early August 1970 that large crowds were attending the evening programs that were held nightly at the Travertine Nature Center. The slightly less than hour-long programs were given by different members of the park staff and covered a variety of topics related to the environment, ecology, wildlife, history, insects and plants of the area. The public programs were "...designed to be informative and educational as well as entertaining." This type of public activity continued at the Travertine Nature Center for years, making the Nature Center an invaluable element of the park. In 1975, it was noted that "In addition to those who visit the park primarily for rest and relaxation, recent years have seen an increase in the number of visitors who come to participate in a wide range of environmental and nature programs which are conducted by the naturalists of the park's Travertine Nature Center."<sup>42</sup>

The Travertine Nature Center is architecturally and historically significant at the local level as an excellent example of a federally-sponsored nature center constructed in the 1960s as part of the government's response to providing the needed education on nature and environmental issues for the public, as well as for entertainment and recreation purposes as related to encouraging public use and interest in the site. The decade of the 1960s represents a watershed period for the environmental movement both in terms of public awareness and federal involvement. While the conservation movement had been of specialized interest to various individuals for decades going back as far as the eighteenth century, the 1960s sparked an unprecedented public awareness that continued to build through the ensuing decades. Also new to the 1960s movement was the growing public awareness of the damage done by man to nature and history and the potential that the damage was irreversible.

That the 1960s were a defining decade in the environmental movement has been well established through scholarly study of the movement. Numerous books, articles and websites have been written on the subject that basically conclude that the 1962 publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* was the tipping point for the emergence of the modern environmental movement. Among the scholarly works of particular interest concerning the National Parks is Richard West

<sup>40</sup> The Sulphur Times-Democrat, 25 September 1969.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 2 October 1969, 30 October 1969 and 20 November 1969.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 15 January 1970, 19 February 1970, 26 March 1970 and 6 August 1970. See also Ballard M. Barker and William Carl Jameson, Platt National Park: Environment and Ecology, (available [http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online\\_books/chic/barker-jameson/chap1.htm](http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/chic/barker-jameson/chap1.htm), retrieved 4 December 2009), 1.

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Sellars' *Preserving Nature in the National Parks: A History*. While encompassing the entirety of the history of National Parks from designation of Yellowstone to near the end of the twentieth century, the book includes a chapter on the period of 1963 to 1981 in which the modern environmental movement is addressed. Of particular note is Sellars' conclusion that "Much of National Park Service history since 1963 may be viewed as a continuing struggle by scientists and others in the environmental movement to change the direction of national park management, particularly as it affects natural resources." The Travertine Nature Center represents the effort to provide the visitor to Platt National Park with a more scientific understanding of the site, as well as other environmental issue that were, or should have been, of concern to all.<sup>43</sup>

As indicated above, the Travertine Nature Center building was only one, albeit central, element of the entire nature center concept. The adjoining ESA contributed the outdoor classroom that complimented the indoor conservation education program provided in the building. Notably, the designation of an ESA was not unique to Platt National Park. By 1975, eighty parks had one or more ESAs. While visible effort was made to make Platt National Park's ESA a "natural" environment in the late 1960s through the development of pedestrian trails and the removal of the CCC-era perimeter road and two picnic areas, it was never completely followed through on. Many of the CCC elements, which at that time were thirty years old, remained in place. Notably, the restoration of the area to its native conditions was an already acknowledged unattainable goal. The "restoration of the parks to their primitive conditions required skills and knowledge not now in existence" was a finding of the 1963 Leopold Report, an NPS wildlife management study performed at the behest of Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall by A. Starker Leopold, professor of biology at the University of California at Berkeley.<sup>44</sup>

Overall, the complete obliteration of the CCC resources would not have restored the ESA to its true natural conditions anyway and would probably have resulted in reduced visitation to the area because the CCC amenities were undeniably attractive to the public and remain so to this day. Additionally, over the passage of time, the CCC elements have gained historic significance of their own. Because the CCC features continue to dominate the ESA and the area, therefore, is more reflective of the 1930s CCC-era than the late 1960s environmental era, that area is not included within the boundaries of this nomination. The entirety of the ESA, as well as the Travertine Nature Center building, is included within the boundaries of the NHL nomination for Platt National Park. The building is a noncontributing resource to the NHL nomination due to its lack of historic association with the CCC-era resources. The ESA does remain in place, allowing the Travertine Nature Center to retain its original setting and feeling.

While less than fifty years old, the Travertine Nature Center is exceptionally significant for its unique contribution to Platt National Park's inventory of property types. When the Travertine Nature Center was constructed, it was the second nature center erected at a National Park. However, it was the first nature center built west of the Mississippi and the first nature center building erected entirely from scratch. As noted previously, the Rock Creek Park Nature Center in Washington, D.C., is the first NPS nature center; however, it utilized portions of an existing caretaker's residence and, thus, an existing building site. It is for this reason that the building was classified as a "Visitor Center Addition" in Appendix I of Sarah Allaback's Mission 66 Visitor Centers: The History of a Building Type. As noted by Allaback:

"Additions" could be very significant construction projects, doubling or tripling the size of a building. Usually they included expansion and remodeling of an older building and the installation of new interpretive and other facilities.<sup>45</sup>

Also differentiating the buildings are their stylistic expressions, as well as that the Travertine Nature Center was designed by a private architectural firm and the Rock Creek Nature Center was designed by NPS personnel. As indicated in Section 7 of this nomination, the Travertine Nature Center is stylistically classified as being overall in the Park Service Modern style. More specifically, the one-story building clearly expresses the popular, mid-century, Wrightian architectural style. In contrast, the two-story Rock Creek Nature Center is noted as being derived from the International style with stylistic characteristics that include a low overall mass, flat roof and cantilevered porch. Both buildings utilized stone and wood

<sup>43</sup> Richard West Sellars, Preserving Nature in the National Parks: A History, (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1997), 217.

<sup>44</sup> Barry, Mackintosh. Interpretation in the National Park Service: A Historical Perspective, Chapter 3, "Environmental Interpretation," (available [http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online\\_books/mackintosh2/directions\\_envirnomenal.htm](http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/mackintosh2/directions_envirnomenal.htm), retrieved 4 December 2009), 3. See also Sellars, Preserving Nature, 200-201 and 216.

<sup>45</sup> Allaback, Mission 66 Visitor Centers, 262.

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paneling for materials, allowing them to be "...an updated version of the modern rustic design aesthetic" that the NPS effectively utilized for decades. Although both buildings were also integrated into their settings, this took very different forms, resulting in distinct building attributes. The Travertine Nature Center was constructed spanning Travertine Creek; as such, the free-flowing water becomes a defining characteristic of the building, as well as a major stylistic attribution. In contrast, the Rock Creek Nature Center was banked into a hill; thus, incorporating itself into the terrain but without the aquatic element.<sup>46</sup>

It is unknown exactly why the private architectural firm of Mackie and Kamrath was selected to design the Travertine Nature Center. There was no indication in the research accomplished for this nomination that a design competition was held or if Mackie and Kamrath did other work for the NPS. The selection of this firm from Houston, Texas, may have rested on a regional basis with the chosen architect having at least one, albeit small, Oklahoma tie. As noted above, Karl Kamrath was born in Enid, Oklahoma. Notably, unlike Rock Creek Park which had an on-staff architect available to design the building, Platt National Park did not have the resources to technically design the building in-house. While subtle, the familiarity of the architect with the park, its history and its natural and cultural environments, as well as their work experience in the private and public sectors, undoubtedly had an influence upon the finished product of both nature centers.

The Travertine Nature Center and the Rock Creek Park Nature Center were the only two nature centers opened by the NPS in the 1960s. Significantly, the two nature centers opened at opposite ends of this critical environmental decade; Rock Creek Park Nature Center in 1960 and Travertine Nature Center in 1969. Another defining difference between the two original NPS nature centers is that the Rock Creek Nature Center was aimed at the younger audience while the Travertine Nature Center was designed to attract and educate a broader audience of all ages. This represents an important evolution in NPS nature center construction because it recognizes that environmental education was needed for all ages, not just the youth. This, in turn, relates to the broader application of environmental concerns to man in general that was endemic in the post-1962 environmental movement.

That the Travertine Nature Center was a federal project at Oklahoma's only National Park is significant because it represents another aspect of the federal response to the pressing environmental issues of the period. The environmental legislation enacted during the 1960s has long been recognized for its impact on the American way of life and business. Although arguably more regional in application than federal law, the construction of the Travertine Nature Center represents a "kinder and gentler" effort to address environmental issues by providing a real opportunity directly to the public to experience and learn about nature and environmental issues firsthand.

As acknowledged at the time the Nature Center was constructed:

For many years now, man has been moving away from the land. Not so many years ago people knew what it was like to see a deer, walk in a meadow, hear a bird's flute-like song, feel the dew on the grass... be alone. Today a man can be born, grow to manhood and die without once knowing nature and believe, as many do, that man and nature are separable. With few exceptions the original landscape of America, and indeed the entire planet Earth, is disappearing; giving way to asphalt and concrete.<sup>47</sup>

The Travertine Nature Center represents a tangible, historically significant element of the federal response to that growing crisis. The Nature Center in short was "...a place to bring the people and the land together on intimate terms under the guidance of trained naturalists, so that together they might develop the conscience to preserve this land and to impart aesthetic and emotional, as well as scientific values of the natural science, as we place man in the natural scheme of things." That the Travertine Nature Center was locally successful in its effort was attested to in 1974 when The Ada Weekly News touted the Nature Center's achievement in being "...an authoritative presentation of the wonder and science of nature in this area." As planned, the Travertine Nature Center continued to offer lectures and motion pictures, as well as live exhibits of local reptiles, insects, fish, large and small plants and other natural history. Overall, in addition to being the first nature center constructed by the NPS west of the Mississippi, the second of only two nature centers erected by the NPS in the pivotal environmental decade of the 1960s and the first NPS nature center that did not utilize an existing

<sup>46</sup> William Bushong, "Historic Resource Study," (Rock Creek Park, District of Columbia: United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service: August 1990), 149.

<sup>47</sup> "Fact Sheet: Travertine Nature Center," available in the Honorable Carl Albert Collection (Speeches Series, Box 11, Folder 27), Carl Albert Congressional Research and Studies Center Congressional Archives, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma, undated.

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building, the Travertine Nature Center is historically significant for its contribution to conservation education of the 1960s, as well as nature-inspired entertainment and recreation.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid. See also The Ada Weekly News, 18 April 1974.

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**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)  
 previously listed in the National Register  
 previously determined eligible by the National Register  
 designated a National Historic Landmark  
 recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_  
 recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_  
 recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

State Historic Preservation Office  
 Other State agency  
 Federal agency  
 Local government  
 University  
 Other  
Name of repository: Chickasaw National Recreation Area

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



Travertine Nature Center  
Name of Property

Murray County, Oklahoma  
County and State

**Photographs:**

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

Applies to all photographs:

Name of Property: Travertine Nature Center  
City or Vicinity: Sulphur vicinity  
County: Murray State: Oklahoma  
Photographer: Cynthia Savage  
Date Photographed: 5 February 2010

Photo No.	Photographic Information
1.	Patio (front) and North Elevation (back) from median in parking lot, camera facing southeast
2.	Patio (front), Patio Sign (left) and North Elevation (back), camera facing south
3.	Travertine Creek (front) and North Elevation (rear), camera facing southwest
4.	East Elevation (center), North Elevation (right), camera facing southwest
5.	South Elevation of Auditorium Wing (left), Travertine Creek (right front), South Elevation (right rear), camera facing north
6.	Older Storage Shed (center front), South Elevation of Auditorium Wing (center rear), camera facing northwest
7.	South Elevation, camera facing northeast
8.	West Elevation, camera facing east
9.	Exhibit Room Interior, camera facing northwest
10.	Parking Area from west of building, camera facing northeast
11.	Entry to Parking Area from park road, camera facing southeast
12.	Exit to Parking Area from park road, camera facing south
13.	Noncontributing Storage Sheds, camera facing southeast

**Property Owner:**

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

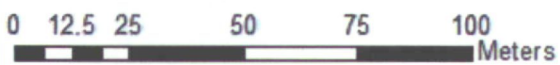
name Chickasaw National Recreation Area, Bruce Noble, Superintendent  
street & number 1008 West Second Street telephone 580-622-7220  
city or town Sulphur state OK zip code 73086

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC

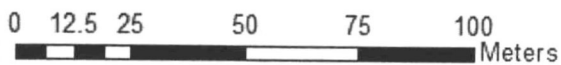


# Travertine Nature Center Boundary





# Travertine Nature Center Boundary



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY NAME: Travertine Nature Center

MULTIPLE NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: OKLAHOMA, Murray

DATE RECEIVED: 12/14/10      DATE OF PENDING LIST: 1/07/11  
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 1/24/11      DATE OF 45TH DAY: 1/29/11  
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 10001180

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N  
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N  
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT     RETURN     REJECT    \_\_\_\_\_ DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

The Travertine Nature Center is significant at the local level under National Register Criteria A and C (Conservation, Education, Entertainment/Recreation, and Architecture). Completed in 1968, the Travertine Nature Center reflects the National Park Service's continuing efforts to update and modernize its visitor experience amenities in the post-war era. The planning and development of the Center was a direct outgrowth of the exceptionally significant, multi-year Mission 66 and Parkscape USA programs and marked an increasing focus on environmental issues. While in effect a "Visitor's Center" for the rapidly growing Platt National Park, the building's emphasis on environmental education and nature study represented an early example of the evolution of Park Service thinking regarding proactive public environmental/conservation programs in the parks during the 1960s. Architecturally, the building reflects the modern design themes of the post-1950 Mission 66 and Parkscape USA eras, while continuing to incorporate many of the visual aspects of the park's rustic, CCC-era buildings (layered stone walls, low ground hugging profile, strong horizontal forms) in a handsome Wrightian-style design by regional architects Mackie & Kamrath.

RECOM./CRITERIA Accept Criteria A+C

REVIEWER Paul R. Lusignan      DISCIPLINE HISTORIAN

TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_      DATE 1/25/2011

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.



Travertine Nature Center  
Sulphur vicinity, Murray County, Oklahoma  
Cynthia Savage  
5 February 2010  
OK / SHPO  
Looking SE  
1 of 13

NATURE CENTER  
DREW BOYD PULASKI  
COMMITTEE  
J. HANCOCK HARRISON

WELCOME TO THE  
NATURE CENTER  
HARRISON FALLS PA



Travertine Nature Center  
Sulphur vicinity, Murray County, Oklahoma

Cynthia Savage

5 February 2010

OK/SHPO

looking S

2 of 13



Travertine Nature Center

Sulphur vicinity, Murray County, Oklahoma

Cynthia Savage

5 February 2010

OK/SHPD

hooking SW

3 of 13



Travertine Nature Center

Sulphur vicinity, Murray County, Oklahoma

Cynthia Savage

5 February 2010

OK/SHPO

looking SW

4 of 13



Travertine Nature Center

Sulphur vicinity, Murray County, Oklahoma

Cynthia Savage

5 February 2010

OK / SHPO

hooking N.

5 of 13



Travertine Nature Center

Sulphur vicinity, Murray County, Oklahoma

Cynthia Savage

5 February 2010

OK/SHAO

hooking NW

6 of 13



Travertine Nature Center  
Sulphur vicinity, Murray County, Oklahoma  
Cynthia Savage  
5 February 2010  
OK / SHPO  
looking NE  
7 of 13



Travertine Nature Center

Sulphur vicinity, Murray County, Oklahoma

Cynthia Savage

5 February 2010

OK/SHR

looking E

8 of 13



Travertine Nature Center (Interior)

Sulphur vicinity, Murray County, Oklahoma

Cynthia Savage

5 February 2010

OK/STP

looking NW

9 of 13



Travertine Nature Center

Sulphur vicinity, Murray County, Oklahoma

Cynthia Savage

5 February 2010

OK/SH20

has King, NE

10 of 13



Na  
Ce

Travertine Nature Center

Sulphur vicinity, Murray County, Oklahoma

Cynthia Savage

5 February 2010

OK / SHPO

looking SE

11 of 13



Travertine Nature Center  
Sulphur vicinity, Murray County, Oklahoma

Cynthia Savage

5 February 2010

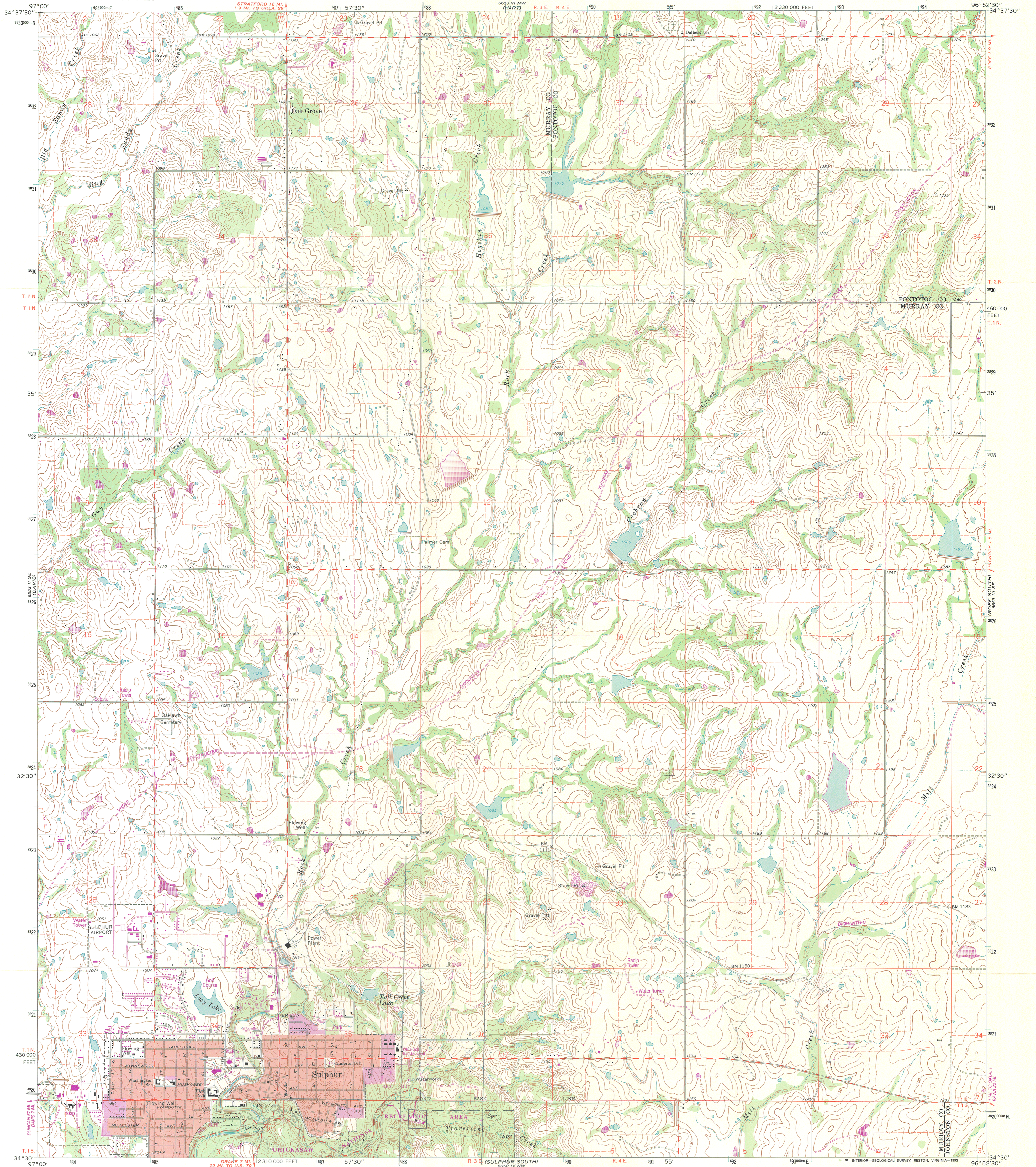
OK / SHPO

looking 5

12 of 13

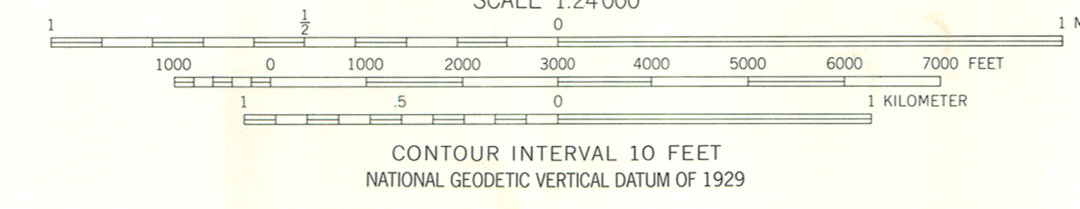


Travertine Nature Center (Out buildings)  
Sulphur vicinity, Murray County, Oklahoma  
Cynthia Savage  
5 February 2010  
OK/SHPO  
Looking SE  
13 of 13

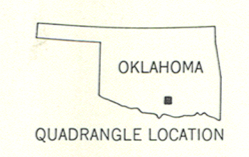


Produced by the United States Geological Survey  
Control by USGS and NOS/NOAA  
Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs taken 1965. Field checked 1967  
Projection and 10,000-foot grid ticks: Oklahoma coordinate system, south zone (Lambert conformal conic)  
1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks, zone 14, shown in blue  
1927 North American Datum (NAD 27)  
North American Datum of 1983 (NAD 83) is shown by dashed corner ticks  
The values of the shift between NAD 27 and NAD 83 for 7.5-minute intersections are given in USGS Bulletin 1875  
There may be private inholdings within the boundaries of the National or State reservations shown on this map  
Red tint indicates areas in which only landmark buildings are shown  
Fine red dashed lines indicate selected fence and field lines where generally visible on aerial photographs. This information is unchecked

UTM GRID AND 1983 MAGNETIC NORTH DECLINATION AT CENTER OF SHEET  
Revisions shown in purple and woodland compiled in cooperation with State of Oklahoma agencies from aerial photographs taken 1991 and other sources  
Contours not revised. This information not field checked  
Map edited 1993  
Purple tint indicates extension of urban area



THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS  
FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, DENVER, COLORADO 80225, OR RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092  
AND OKLAHOMA GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, NORMAN, OKLAHOMA 73069  
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST



ROAD CLASSIFICATION  
Primary highway, light-duty road, hard or hard surface  
Secondary highway, hard surface  
Unimproved road  
Interstate Route  
U. S. Route  
State Route

SULPHUR NORTH, OKLA.  
34096-E8-TF-024  
1967  
REVISED 1993  
DMA 6653 III SW-SERIES V883



United States Department of the Interior  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
Chickasaw National Recreation Area  
1008 W. Second Street  
Sulphur, Oklahoma 73086



IN REPLY REFER TO:

H32 (CHIC)

November 15, 2010

Dr. Robert Sutton, Chief Historian  
National Park Service, 8<sup>th</sup> Floor  
1201 Eye Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20005

Dear Dr. Sutton:

It is my pleasure to submit the enclosed National Register nomination (plus supporting documentation) for the Travertine Nature Center at Chickasaw National Recreation Area. The Travertine Nature Center, now located in Chickasaw National Recreation Area but originally part of Platt National Park, is eligible for the National Register under Criterion A for its association with environmental education efforts of the 1960s and Criterion C as an excellent example of a federally-sponsored nature center. It is being nominated at the local level of significance. The building was dedicated in 1969 and meets Criteria Consideration G as the first nature center constructed by the National Park Service west of the Mississippi River. I might also add that this nomination has already received preliminary review by Alexis Abernathy and the park has incorporated her suggestions into the documentation.

In accordance with 36 CFR Part 60, we have complied with our responsibility to notify locally elected officials. The 45 day commenting period ended on November 1, 2010. The only comment received was a resolution of support submitted by the Sulphur, Oklahoma City Council (copy enclosed). As you will note, this nomination was signed by Oklahoma State Historic Preservation Officer Dr. Bob Blackburn on October 12, 2010.

Thank you for your cooperation and we eagerly anticipate the official listing of this property in the National Register of Historic Places. If you have additional questions, please do not hesitate to contact me either by email or by phone (580-622-7210).

Sincerely,

*Bruce Noble*

Bruce Noble,  
Superintendent

Enclosures

RESOLUTION NO. 2010-9

A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF SULPHUR, OKLAHOMA, IN SUPPORT OF PLATT NATIONAL PARK'S NOMINATION AS A DESIGNATED NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK

WHEREAS, Platt National Park, the sixth established national park in the nation, now managed as a part of the Chickasaw National Recreation Area in Sulphur Oklahoma is an important asset to our community and plays host to millions of visitors each year from around the world; and

WHEREAS, the Platt National Park is historically significant for its association with the Civilian Conservation Corps and as an outstanding example of early twentieth century naturalistic landscape design, architecture, and master planning;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE City Council of Sulphur that the City of Sulphur, a municipal corporation, that the City of Sulphur endorses and supports the nomination of Platt National Park for designation as a National Historic Landmark.

RESOLVED this 11<sup>th</sup> of October, 2010 at Sulphur, Oklahoma.

  
James M. Crews, MAYOR



**EXHIBIT "A"**

**PROPERTY OWNER FORM**

Name of Property: Travertine Nature Center

Location of Property: (street/city/county) SW/4 of NW/4 of NW/4 of Section 1 and NE/4 of SE/4 of NE/4 of Section 2, Township 1 South, Range 3 East, Sulphur vicinity, Murray County, Oklahoma

I, Cynthia Savage, hereby certify that the following constitutes the complete list of owners of record for the property named above. This information was obtained on (date) 11/25/10, from (source of information, county courthouse records consulted) Bruce Noble, Superintendent, Chickasaw National Recreation Area.

Name Chickasaw National Recreation Area

Address 1008 West Second Street

City Sulphur State OK Zip 73086

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

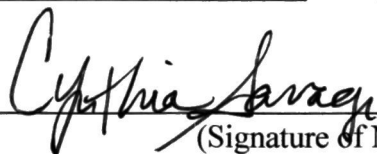
Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_



(Signature of Nomination Preparer)

Typed Name and Title Cynthia Savage, Architectural Historian

Date 27 May 2010

(If additional spaces are needed, type names, addresses, and city/state/zip on plain sheets of paper and staple to this cover form).

**EXHIBIT "B"**

**ELECTED OFFICIALS FORM**

Name of Property: Travertine Nature Center  
Location of Property: (street/city/county) SW/4 of NW/4 of NW/4 of Section 1 and NE/4 of SE/4 of NE/4 of Section 2, Township 1 South, Range 3 East, Sulphur vicinity, Murray County, Oklahoma

1. For a property located within a city or town, provide:

Mayor's Name Mike Crews  
Address 600 W. Broadway  
City Sulphur State OK Zip 73086

2. For a property located outside the city limits of a city or town, provide:

Name of Chairman, Board of County Commissioners  
Bill Frank Lance  
Address P.O. Box 240  
City Sulphur State OK Zip 73086

3. The above named property is located in Oklahoma Senate District(s) #  
014

The State Senator's name(s) is (are) Johnnie C. Crutchfield

4. The above named property is located within Oklahoma State House of Representatives District(s) # 022

The State Representative(s)' name is (are) Wes Hilliard

NOTE: The above information is used for satisfying federal requirements for notification that properties are being considered for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places and for courtesy notices of listing in the National Register.



# United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
1849 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20240

## Memorandum

To: Chief, National Register of Historic Places and National Historic Landmarks

From: Chief Historian, National Park Service *Robert A. Matts 12/6/10*

Subject: Travertine Nature Center National Register nomination, Chickasaw National Recreation Area

Enclosed, please find the National Register of Historic Places (National Register) nomination for Travertine Nature Center. I have signed the nomination as eligible for the National Register. The nomination is being nominated under Applicable Criteria A and C, with conservation, education, entertainment/recreation and architecture as the areas of significance. The level of significance is local.

I am the nominating authority on these nominations and have signed the appropriate box in Section 3 of the National Register form. The Oklahoma State Historic Preservation officer (OKSHPO) has signed the nomination as commenting authority. A resolution of support was also received from the Sulphur, Oklahoma City Council

The resource is less the fifty years old but was constructed at the tail end of the Mission 66 era of National Park construction. The Mission 66 era has been thoroughly documented and its period of significance justified. Travertine Nature Center is an excellent addition to Mission 66 era buildings listed in the National Register.