

Chapter Ten: Denali at the Cusp of the Millennium, 1995-present

By the mid-1990s, it had become increasingly clear that if new commercial growth were to take place in the park, that growth would be located south of the Alaska Range. In that area, NPS managers and planners had been working with the State of Alaska and the private sector since the late 1960s on a plan that might bring about a hotel or other major visitor development. The Denali Task Force, in its 1994 report, reiterated this longstanding interest. The report also underscored another longstanding policy, that “the existing character of the park road should be maintained.”¹ New growth could not take place along the park road corridor, for ecological reasons; new accommodations in the entrance area, or an increased number of buses along the park road, would have a demonstrable and negative impact on wildlife sightings and wildlife behavior—and thus destroy the very characteristics that attracted visitors to Denali.

Front Country Development Planning

As had been true since the early 1980s, the park’s most critical issues dealt with growth and its impacts. Inasmuch as most park visitors spent the lion’s share of their time in the so-called “front country”—that is, the park entrance area and road corridor—agency officials concentrated much of their management efforts within that area. As noted in Chapter 9, NPS officials had signed a key amendment to the park’s concessions contract in June 1994, and the criticisms that arose from that contract signing—from the Denali Task Force and from various advocacy groups—prodded the NPS into commencing yet another management plan for that area. Park-based NPS personnel, assisted by Denver Service Center staff, worked on the plan and, in June 1996, the agency presented a draft of that plan for public comment.

It was recognized from the outset that certain management actions were set in place, regardless of the plan’s outcome. For example, the total annual bus capacity and the number of campground spaces west of the entrance area would not change; and NPS road maintenance crews would continue, as before, to obtain gravel from the Teklanika Pit (mile 26.0 of the park road) and Toklat River (mile 53.4). And certain improvements were similarly incorporated into all plan alternatives: new interpretive signs would be erected around headquarters, new residences and support facilities would be built at Toklat Road Camp, housing would be improved at

both “C-Camp” and Toklat, and utilities would be upgraded in the headquarters and entrance areas.² But other potential actions would be decided via the public involvement process. For instance, would Eielson Visitor Center be retained or replaced? Would the existing hotel be retained, improved, or demolished? Would the existing entrance area support facilities (the store, showers, and post office) be retained or replaced? Would interpretive facilities be limited to the existing Visitor Access Center (VAC) or would the agency construct a new visitor center to complement it? Potential scenarios regarding these and other questions were encapsulated in the draft environmental impact statement (EIS) for the entrance area and road corridor development concept plan. In addition to the two no-action scenarios, three other alternatives were presented. The purpose of one no-action alternative was simply to ensure that the various recommendations from previously-approved plans—specifically the 1986 General Management Plan and a 1992 document that, among its other provisions, updated the 1983 Development Concept Plan (DCP) for the park road corridor—would be implemented. One of the action alternatives was intended to reduce park facilities and services; another was to “emphasize traditional NPS programs,” and a final alternative was aimed to “emphasize visitor services and recreational opportunities. Alternative D, the aim of which was to “emphasize traditional NPS programs,” was a compromise between the cautious tone of Alternative C (which called for a reduction in facilities and services) and the development-oriented Alternative E, and agency personnel recommended Alternative D as its proposed action.³

The document was open to public comment beginning June 21, 1996, and between August 5 and August 14 the agency held hearings on the plan in Anchorage, Fairbanks, and four communities adjacent to the park. By the August 19 deadline, 262 members of the public had offered written comments and another 40 people had testified at the public hearings. Agency planners studied those comments and, in December, published an abbreviated Final EIS which called for the adoption of Alternative D, but with several significant modifications that incorporated elements from alternatives C and E.⁴

The plan recommended a detailed package of actions that was intended to guide the future

Denali’s welcome sign, wintertime.
Tom Habecker Collection

Since the 1988 demolition of the two-story railroad depot that housed the post office, the Denali National Park post office was located in a temporary building near the railroad wye. Outdoor postal boxes, on the right, were used for seasonal residents during the summer. This facility remained at this site until 2002. Tom Habecker Collection



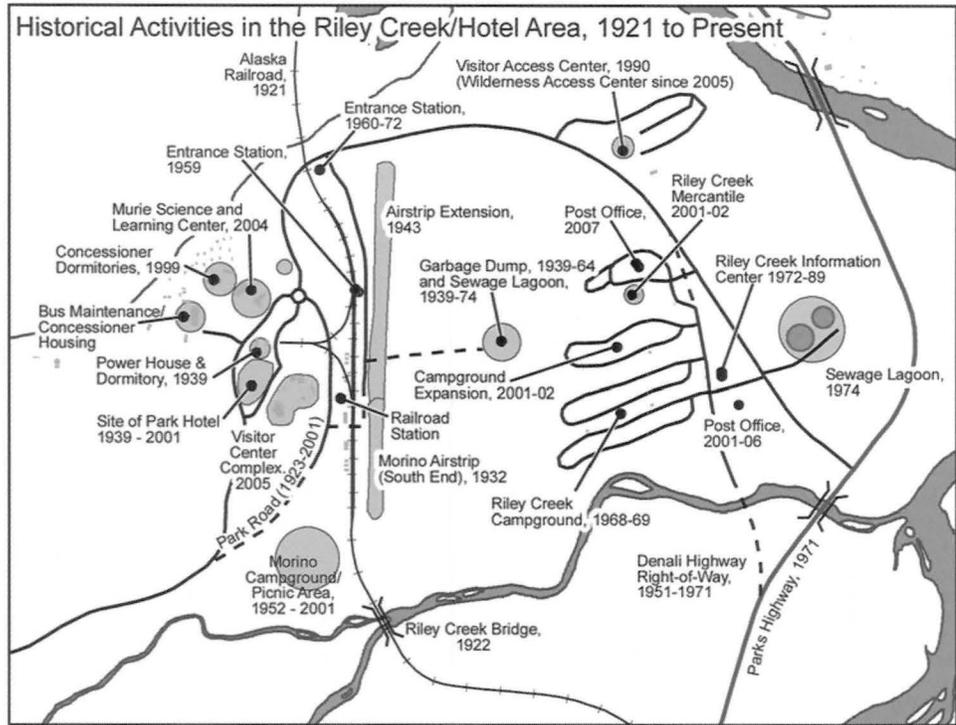
park. Perhaps most significant were recommendations to completely restructure the entrance area by:

- closing the park hotel (no later than 2002, the plan specified),
- expanding the VAC,
- constructing an entrance station just west of the Parks Highway junction,
- constructing a new visitor services building adjacent to the VAC (an idea that, as noted in Chapter 9, had first surfaced during the 1980s when the VAC was being considered)
- building a new environmental education and science center near the former hotel site,
- tearing down the old store (now known as the park mercantile), moving the existing post office (then located on the former railroad wye), and erecting new visitor support facilities (post office, store, and showers) near Riley Creek Campground,
- adding 50 new tent-only and walk-in spaces to Riley Creek Campground, which would allow agency officials to close the old, 60-site Morino Campground
- building a large new parking lot for the visitor services building,
- prohibiting the construction of a “hostel or other economy lodging” (as had been specified in the 1986 GMP), and
- closing the McKinley Park airstrip.

Away from the entrance area, the major recommended change was to replace Eielson Visitor Center, construct a rest area at Toklat River (where passengers on both the tour buses and shuttle buses often lingered), build rest areas both on the west side of Savage River and near Savage River Campground, and construct back-packer campgrounds in both the Kantishna area and along a yet-to-be-built trail paralleling the Nenana River. The plan recommended many other changes as well.⁵

NPS Regional Director Robert Barbee signed the Record of Decision for the DCP in February 1997.⁶ Meanwhile, the agency proceeded that year with planning the various specific actions that would be needed to carry out the plan. And in 1998, work included site design for the entrance area, site plans for expanding Riley Creek Campground, and interpretive plans for entrance area facilities.⁷

For the time being, all park facilities continued as before until project funds could be obtained from Congress. The Denali National Park Hotel, for example, continued to operate. Hotel operations, however, were predicated on Aramark’s concessions contract, and that contract was set to expire in late September 2001. Inasmuch as Aramark was operating other hotel properties outside the park, they made no move to protest the hotel’s imminent closure, and by January 2001 travel magazines were announcing that the upcoming summer would be the hotel’s last year of operation. The hotel closed its doors, for the final time, in mid-September 2001.⁸

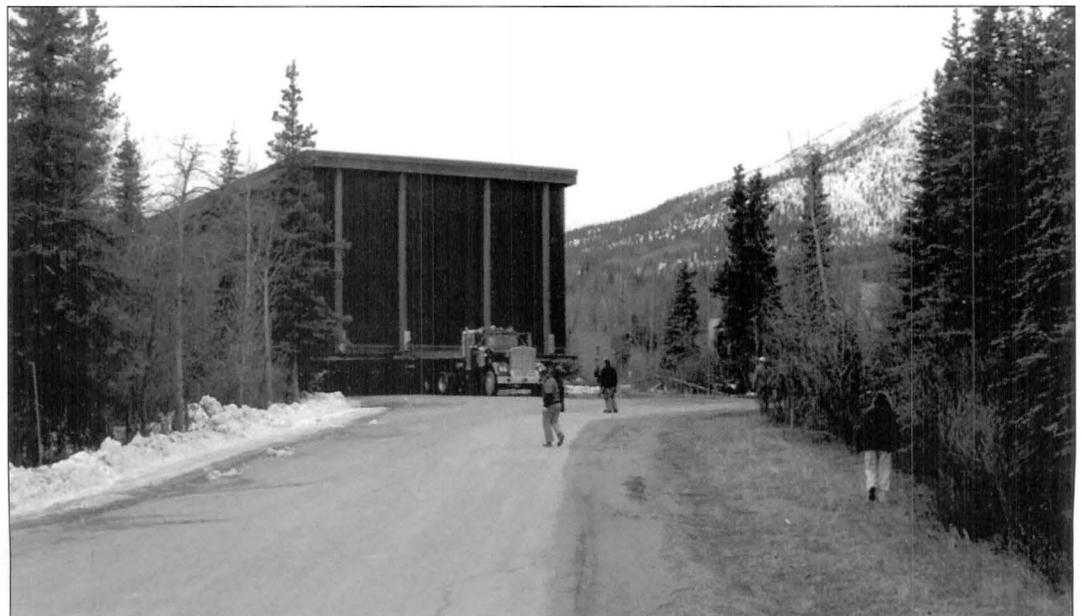


Map 4. Historical Activities in the Riley Creek/Hotel Area, 1921 to Present

The hotel's closure neatly coincided with the NPS's plans for alternative site uses. During the following winter, Congress allotted the necessary funds to proceed with hotel site demolition; and in 2002 the auditorium that had formerly stood behind the hotel was detached and moved outside of the park.⁹ Other parts of the hotel were also recycled. The concessioner moved the 32-year-old west wing to McKinley Village for use as employee housing; a contractor moved the northern and southern hotel-room modules north to Healy, where they were reassembled and used as a hotel; the employee dining facility was moved just a few hundred yards to the concessions area, where it became "Horseshoe Creek

Pizza;" and a local contractor disassembled the hotel's gift shop and salvaged nearly all of the building materials for reuse. The eight railroad cars that had formerly surrounded the hotel entrance were sold for \$1 apiece and moved away. What then remained of the hotel—the lobby, kitchen, and dining area, along with some ancillary buildings—was demolished. By the fall of 2003, no structures remained at the former hotel site.¹⁰ (See Map 4.) The adjacent powerhouse and dormitory, both built during the late 1930s, remained standing.

The same bureaucratic process that funded the razing of the park hotel also provided for other



In 2002, the 5,000 square-foot auditorium was moved in one piece from its location behind the park hotel to a site just north of Healy. Clayton Flagg Collection

The railroad cars that had formerly been pressed into service to create part of the “temporary” hotel after the 1972 fire were sold for \$1 each and moved away. NPS Photo



area construction activities. By the fall of 2001, for example, the construction of a new “Camper Convenience Center” (including a store and shower facilities) and the 50-space expansion of Riley Creek Campground were well underway.¹¹ And work also began on realigning the park road; supported by project funds in the Interior Department’s 2000 budget bill, the park road was moved from the east to the west side of the hotel site, and by the end of the 2002 summer season a new traffic roundabout had been installed just northwest of the Denali Park railroad station.¹²

NPS officials, however, could not proceed with other area improvements without completing a site-specific environmental assessment (EA). So in November 2001, park officials released such a document to the public. Some elements in the EA were a logical follow-up to actions that had been recommended in the 1997 road-corridor DCP; these included the construction of a Science and Learning Center, a “visitor services building,” and the construction of a large parking lot. But NPS officials, in this latest plan, decided to transform the visitor services building into

Those parts of the former McKinley Park Hotel that were not moved for reuse elsewhere were demolished. NPS Photo



a large, multi-use structure that would house a visitor center, a theatre, a food court, a concessions area and an art gallery. Moreover, this new structure—and the accompanying parking lot—would be located on or near the footprint of the old hotel, because the site was adjacent to the railroad station and because the new site protected park resources and animal habitat by using “pre-disturbed land.” And perhaps because of the large size of the new visitor center complex, officials decided to not go ahead with the planned VAC expansion.¹³

After NPS officials issued the Visitor Facility EA, they held three open houses to solicit public comment; these were held between December 6 and 12 in Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Healy. The public was given until January 11, 2002 to provide comments. The agency incorporated those comments into final environmental documents that were approved at the end of January. Those latter-day documents provided greater specificity to what was proposed; the major project elements now consisted of a 14,500-square-foot visitor center and a new Denali Science and Learning Center.¹⁴

During the summer of 2002, crews demolished the 44-year-old store (the so-called “park mercantile”);¹⁵ that same year, the double-wide trailer that had served as the Denali National Park post office since the late 1980s was moved to a site near the entrance to Riley Creek Campground.¹⁶ And based on the results of the recently-completed environmental assessment, NPS officials went ahead with design work on two major new entrance-area structural complexes: the so-called “Denali Science and Learning Center” and the

visitor center complex. By the end of 2002, planning and design work on the two building complexes was essentially complete. The following year, Superintendent Anderson—with the concurrence of Louise Murie MacLeod, Adolph Murie’s widow—decided to name the proposed educational facility in honor of the Murie family; that year also, the Criterion and Davis construction firm won the contract to build the Murie Science and Learning Center (MSLC) as well as the park’s visitor center. By the fall of 2003, work on both building complexes was “underway and on schedule.” A lack of funding, however, forced NPS officials to delay work on the visitor center and exhibits package.¹⁷

As a result, contractors commenced work on the learning center first. Plans for the complex had originally called for three buildings at the site: one organized around meeting rooms, a second for dining facilities, and a third that served as a dormitory for park employees and visiting scholars. The winning contract included funds for the first two structures, but funds were not sufficient to fund the dormitory building. Contractors worked through the winter and into the following summer. On August 16, 2004, NPS officials dedicated the Murie Science and Learning Center with a public open house, accompanied by a lecture on Murie by Alaska Pacific University professor Tim Rawson. Jan Murie, Adolph’s son, represented the family at that event.¹⁸ Just a month later, MSLC gained a new function when it began serving as the park’s wintertime visitor center. During the winter of 2004-05, construction crews and interpretive specialists completed their work on the three-building Denali Visitor Center complex. That complex, which consisted



The new Murie Science and Learning Center, completed in 2004, functions as the winter visitor contact station for the park from October into May, and other educational functions are located there during the summer season. NPS Photo

The new facilities of the Murie Science and Learning Center were officially dedicated with a public open house on August 16, 2004. Officials presiding at the ribbon-cutting ceremony are, from left to right, Dr. Mike Sfraga, Jack Reiss, Marcia Blaszak, Dr. Jan Murie, Dr. James Tate, Mark Moderow, Randy Jones, Dr. Carol Lewis, and Superintendent Paul Anderson. NPS Photo



of the visitor center along with the adjacent Denali Bookstore and the Morino Grill, opened to the public in stages between May 14 and May 27, 2005. Three months later, on August 18, NPS officials dedicated the new center; those on hand included Director Fran Mainella, Regional Director Marcia Blaszak, and Superintendent Paul Anderson.

The opening of the new visitor center also brought changes to the fifteen-year-old Visitor Access Center east of the Alaska Railroad tracks. The park concessioner, rather than the NPS, assumed management over the facility; it was renamed the Wilderness Access Center; its theater began showing the historical film *Across Time and Tundra* rather than the 22-year-old *Denali Wilderness* film; and the Alaska Natural History Association bookstore moved from the center itself to the adjacent (and new) Denali Bookstore. In addition, all functions related to backcountry activities moved out to the new Backcountry Information Center, located in an adjacent ATCO trailer. The primary function of the Wilderness Access Center was providing visitors the opportunity to enter the park—through reservations and actual boarding—via the concessioner-operated shuttle bus system.¹⁹

The last major construction projects to emerge from the entrance-area DCP were the replacement of Eielson Visitor Center and the construction of visitor facilities adjacent to the Toklat Bridge. As noted in chapters 7 and 8, Eielson

Visitor Center was built between 1958 and 1960 and expanded between 1974 and 1976. Even with the expansion, however, the center was sometimes overcrowded (particularly on inclement days), and it also suffered from structural deterioration. To improve site interpretation, NPS personnel in 1993 started on design work to rehabilitate the center's interior and to add new exhibits and interpretive displays. That work was completed and installed in June 1995.²⁰ But more substantial work did not take place until after the 1997 completion of the entrance-area DCP. In 2003, the NPS completed most of the design work associated with a new visitor center at the site, and in early April 2004 the agency released an environmental assessment pertaining to the proposed project. Public comment, originally set to end in early May, was later extended to May 21.²¹ Shortly afterward, agency officials approved a plan alternative that called for the new visitor center, and the 44-year-old visitor center closed for the last time in September 2004. Demolition began in mid-summer 2005. Each summer since that time, construction crews rather than visitors have occupied the site; during this period, shuttle-bus passengers—who for years had gone on to Eielson before turning around—have instead gone only as far as an unimproved turnaround at “Fish Creek” (Little Stony Creek) at mile 63 of the park road, three miles east of Eielson. Plans call for a new Eielson Visitor Center, which will have more than twice the interior space as the former facility, to open in the spring of 2008.²²



Shown center, in this fall 2004 photo, is the large new parking lot on the former McKinley Park Hotel site, with the hotel powerhouse and dormitory to the right. The Denali Visitor Center is left of center, still under construction. Note the rerouting of the park road from the roundabout on the far right and going to the north of the new parking lot. The old routing of the park road provides access to the depot and terminates there. Fire Management Collection, NPS, Denali National Park and Preserve

The other project planned during this period was the construction of a new rest area just west of the Toklat River. Since 1972, when passenger traffic had been restricted on the park road, the Tundra Wildlife Tour had terminated at various points along the park road. For a number of years until the mid-1970s, the bus turnaround point on clear days had been Stony Hill Overlook (mile 62), which offered a superb view of Mount McKinley, but on cloudy days buses had turned around at the so-called “soapberry patch” just east of the Toklat River Bridge. In 1976, the expansion of Eielson Visitor Center allowed tour buses—on fair days or foul—to continue to the Mile 66 visitor center. But after the June 1981 bus accident (see Chapter 9), the cloudy-weather terminus reverted to the soapberry patch. Nine years later, tour buses moved their foul-weather turnaround point a half-mile west to a cleared area near the west bank of the Toklat River and just 200 yards north of the park road. The 1997 DCP called for improvements there: specifically a rest area, with a shelter and a permanent comfort station. But action regarding those recommendations did not take place until 2004, when Toklat

improvements were included as part of the same funding package (and environmental assessment) as the Eielson Visitor Center replacement. (Of the two action alternatives in the EA, one called for site development at the existing site, 200 yards north of the park road, while the other recommended that improvements be placed 600 yards north of park road. NPS officials chose the second alternative.) Soon after NPS officials approved the project in the late spring of 2004, the site work began, and by late July 2005 a tent-style shelter and newly-installed restrooms (the latter known as “SSTs”) were ready for visitor use.²³

Several other projects that were approved in the 1997 DCP have recently been completed or are under construction. They include a reopened (and rerouted) Triple Lakes Trail, which had been effectively closed for more than twenty years; a Riley Creek cultural resources trail (now called the McKinley Station Trail), and the Savage Alpine Trail which ascends the hill from the Savage River parking area.²⁴ Other projects are slated for near-term development. The NPS, for example, is gearing up to construct an entrance station just



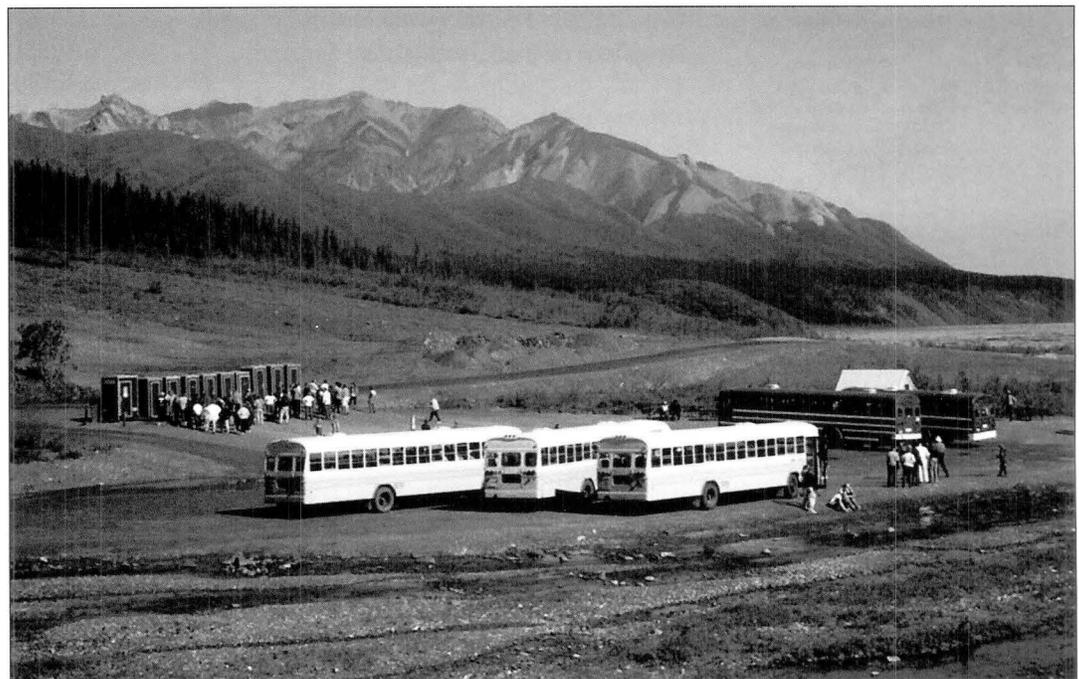
Eielson Visitor Center was demolished during the late summer of 2005. NPS Photo

west of the Parks Highway junction. There are also plans in the works to build a permanent post office near Riley Creek campground. The NPS is also planning, in the not-too-distant future, to build a rest area along the park road in the vicinity of Savage River Campground.

Other portions of the plan, however, have thus far not been acted upon and may not be fulfilled for years if at all. Plans to convert some housing from concessioner to NPS use have thus far been stalled, and there are no immediate plans to construct any new NPS housing. The projected closure of the McKinley Park Airstrip was put on indefinite hold due to protests from both

legislators and pilot advocacy groups.²⁵ Because of protests from existing lodge owners, it is doubtful that any new hostelrys will open in the Kantishna area during the foreseeable future. And along the park's eastern boundary, no action has yet been taken on a Nenana Canyon trail, with or without an accompanying campground.

One recent project that is unrelated to the DCP is a proposed railroad turnaround track. Just north of the McKinley Park railroad depot, the Alaska Railroad had had a wye since the 1920s; that short turnaround spur, however, had been taken up during the 1980s. In 1999, Alaska Railroad president Bill Sheffield broached the idea of a



This area, just west of the Toklat River bridge, was used as a rest stop for shuttle and tour buses. The number of chemical toilets gradually increased over the years. NPS Photo

The new Toklat contact station and "SSTs" (Sweet Smelling Toilets) comprised the main rest area for bus passengers during the Eielson Visitor Center demolition and new construction of 2005-2007. NPS Photo



new wye that would be located just north of the Lagoon maintenance-of-way station and east of the main right-of-way. That idea made little headway, but in 2006 railroad officials initiated discussions about the construction of a balloon wye (i.e., a loop track that enabled trains to change direction) in order to allow train sets to move from Fairbanks to the park and return northbound immediately thereafter. This loop would be in the same general area where the wye had been proposed seven years earlier. Park officials quickly recognized the need for such a track. To remove remaining legal barriers to the deal the Alaska congressional delegation supported a proposed land trade: 25 acres of new railroad easement on park land (in the immediate vicinity of the proposed wye) for 25 fewer acres of railroad easement (just west of the railroad track in the Moody area). Bills to implement the trade were introduced in the House and Senate in February and July 2007, respectively, and in late September hearings on the bills were held in both chambers. An amended bill passed the House on October 22, 2007. As of this writing, the bill awaits Senate action.²⁶

Concessions Issues

ARA Services, Inc., which was doing business as Outdoor World, Ltd., signed a 20-year concessions contract with the NPS on September 26, 1981 (see Chapter 9); this contract allowed ARA to operate both the Denali Park Hotel and tour buses into the park. By the early 1990s, ARA's name had changed to ARA Leisure Services, Inc., and in 1994 it changed again to Aramark Sports and Leisure; throughout this period, however, the park concessioner was doing business as Denali Park Resorts. Between 1981 and 1995, the NPS and the concessioner had amended the contract three times; one of those amendments, as Chap-

ter 9 noted, had made newspaper headlines and had brought a significant shifting of operational responsibility for the park's bus system from NPS to the concessioner. During the remainder of the 1990s the contract was amended two more times, but neither of these amendments was of particular public interest.

Both the park concessioner and NPS officials were well aware that the concessions contract would expire shortly after the 2001 visitor season. NPS officials, in response, had much of the paperwork for a new contract ready as early as 1999. But bureaucratic fallout from Congress's passage of the 1998 concessions law,²⁷ plus new agency procedures which brought a non-NPS partner into the prospectus-writing process, forced a protracted revision of that paperwork. As a result, concessions and agency personnel were unable to fashion a new contract in time; in its stead, they inked an interim document. On October 1, 2001, the NPS and the concessioner—which was now called Aramark Sports and Entertainment Services, Inc.—signed a one-year extension to the 1981 contract.²⁸

Late in 2001, NPS officials were finalizing bid specifications for a new 10-year contract. On February 15, 2002, the agency issued a contract prospectus for "transportation and related services" at the park, and bidders were given until May 20 to respond. The concessioner, during this period, may have been aware that, according to Section 1307(a) of ANILCA, concessioners who had been providing visitor services within Alaska's conservation units prior to January 1979 would be able to continue providing those services, so long as those services were consistent with the purposes of that conservation unit. But beginning in 1984, a series of stock transfers

The Denali Visitor Center opened in the spring of 2005 and was officially dedicated on August 18, 2005. NPS Photo



changed ARA Services, Inc. from an independent corporation into a subsidiary of ARA Holding Co. Because of this action, NPS officials informed the concessioner that it was no longer a “historic operator of visitor services” and was thus ineligible for a preference on its renewal application.²⁹

The NPS received two responses to the bid prospectus, and both met all of the minimum contract requirements. One bid came from Delaware North Parks Services, a Buffalo, New York-based company that had concessions operations at Yosemite and Sequoia national parks as well as in several state parks and other visitor areas. The other bidder was a joint venture between the existing concessioner (Aramark) and Doyon, Limited. Doyon, which since the early 1970s has been the designated Native regional corporation serving much of Interior Alaska, had a 51% controlling interest in the new venture. Inasmuch as Section 1307 of ANILCA provided a preference in the provision of visitor services for either local residents or for “the Native Corporation which ... is most directly affected by the establishment or expansion of such unit,”³⁰ this partnership was doubtless created in order to take advantage of that preference. That preference, however, was not needed. Because of cost factors, and a commitment to provide fuel-efficiency in both buses and fuel type,³¹ NPS Director Fran Mainella approved the Aramark/Doyon partnership proposal on July 24, 2002. Six days later, NPS officials announced that they had awarded the

Doyon/Aramark joint venture a ten-year park concession contract.³² It was the first time in which an Alaska-based Native corporation had partnered and successfully bid on a large NPS concessions contract.³³

The new contract required the concessioner to construct \$4.55 million in facilities improvements, including the Murie Science and Learning Center and the Morino Grill. In addition, the concessioner assumed control over the operation and maintenance of both the Riley Creek and Savage River campgrounds. The joint venture’s bid promised higher income to the government; the concessioner would now be paying the NPS 15.4 percent of gross revenue rather than approximately 7.5 percent, which had been the norm since 1996. The concessioner’s franchise fee, almost \$2 million based on an annual (2003) gross of \$13 million, would be used for concession related needs first, and secondarily for other park operations (as opposed to the previous contract, when all fees were used for concession related capital improvements at the park). For the park visitor, the new contract promised newer bus equipment and, temporarily, a reduction in shuttle bus fees. These fees, in 2002, ranged from \$17 to about \$30 depending on ride length and the rider’s age.³⁴

As noted in Chapter 9, the surge in park visitation between the early 1980s and the mid-1990s had forced NPS officials to devote an enormous amount of attention to the bus capacity issue.

Part of the Denali Visitor Center complex, the Denali Bookstore, on the left, and the Morino Grill, right, were completed and opened in May, 2005. NPS Photo



This had been a particularly high-profile issue during the mid-1980s, when the park general management plan (GMP) was being prepared; during the late 1980s and early 1990s, when officials prevented passenger cars from accessing most of the park's campgrounds; during the early 1990s, when battles were fought over road ownership and a second road to Kantishna; and during the mid-1990s, when a proposed concessions contract amendment temporarily offered the promise of additional shuttle bus capacity. The 1990 introduction of the Denali Natural History Tour, to Primrose Ridge, provided an additional opportunity for tour bus passengers; visitors took the tour because their tour-package option gave them a limited amount of time to see the park, and NPS officials recognized the need for the tour because it provided an opportunity for increased visitor access without pushing against the established bus passenger capacity ceilings that had been established in the 1986 GMP. And perhaps because of the increasing popularity of the Denali Natural History Tour—which by the late 1990s was hauling as many passengers as both the shuttle bus and the Tundra Wildlife Tour—the bus-capacity issue ceased to be the high-profile headache that it had been earlier.³⁵

Part of the reason that the bus-capacity issue receded into the background was a simple matter of visitor volume. Between 1981 and 1992, the number of passengers heading out the park road (beyond Primrose Ridge) had steadily climbed from about 105,000 to 212,000. But after

1992, traffic west of Primrose Ridge leveled off, and annual passenger traffic totals since 1992 have consistently ranged from about 184,000 to 209,000.³⁶ The reason for the “flattening” in the annual number of visitors west of Primrose is not related to general Alaska visitation trends; indeed, the annual number of out-of-state visitors to Alaska more than doubled during this period.³⁷ Instead, additional visitor demand was apparently satisfied by those who took the Denali Natural History Tour. Pressure on the park's bus system has also eased somewhat because in the ten-year-period after 1993, total recreational park visitation neither rose nor fell to any dramatic degree. This state of affairs has taken place, to some extent, because Outside tour operators have been successful in offering their patrons less crowded alternative tour destinations. In addition, these operators have offered tours with a two-night rather than one-night stay at their Denali-area properties; this lengthened stay has decreased total demand for bus tours out the park road.³⁸

The 2001 concessions contract, similar to its 1994 antecedent, institutionalized the application of fees for those wishing to ride the park's shuttle bus. As earlier chapters have noted, visitors since the earliest days had paid a fee to ride into the park on the concessioner's tour vehicles, and visitors who used the park campgrounds had paid overnight camping fees since about 1970. But the shuttle bus, which had begun operations in 1972, had remained free for years afterward. In the spring of 1988, NPS officials began assessing a



Tour buses regularly stop at Polychrome Rest Stop for passengers to use the restroom facilities and to enjoy the panoramic views. Photo © Kennan Ward, NPS Interp. Collection, #4629

\$3 entrance fee, both to tour bus and shuttle bus passengers. That fee was raised to \$4 in 1994; for tour bus passengers, the fee was included as part of the \$49 ticket price. But as noted in Chapter 9, the concessions contract amendment inked in June 1994 called for the first-ever fees for shuttle-bus ridership; those fees, moreover, would be based on the distance traveled. In January 1995, the NPS announced that bus riders that summer would pay \$26 for a Wonder Lake round trip, \$20 to Eielson, or \$12 to Toklat; discounts or special fares were provided for children, campers, and those who purchased multiple-ride packages. In addition, bus riders were required to pay the lower park entrance fee of \$3 per person, although a new family fee of \$5 was also available.³⁹

The coming years brought additional fee increases that were unrelated to Visitor Transportation System operations. In November 1996, Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt announced that beginning in 1997, the park entrance fee would be roughly doubled, to \$5 per person and \$10 per family. Then, in April 2004, an NPS spokesperson announced a new fee increase, to \$10 per person or \$20 per family. That increase went into effect in January 2005. That action, as all previous fee-related actions, assumed that only adults aged 17 or more would be charged entrance fees;

but in January 2006, in response to the recently-passed Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act, the agency began assessing fees to all visitors who were at least 16 years old. The 1997 and 2005 increases—which were conscious decisions by NPS personnel to spread park fees among all park visitors—affected not only those who rode out the park road, but it was also extended to the relatively small number of mountain climbers and flightseeing passengers who flew into the park’s backcountry.⁴⁰ As for shuttle bus ridership fees since the mid-1990s, most have risen fairly modestly; the adult Wonder Lake bus ride in 2006 cost \$33.25 (a 27% increase since 1995). Trips that year to the “Fish Creek” turnaround spot (3 miles east of Eielson) and Toklat cost \$24.25 (up 21% over the 1995 Eielson fee) and \$19 (up 58% from 1995), respectively.⁴¹

Beyond the ever-present capacity issues, the park’s bus systems in recent years have operated with a minimum of mishaps and rancor. As noted in Chapter 9, the safety of the park’s buses had come into question because of a disastrous 1981 tour bus accident; what followed was an internal investigation and the concessioner’s decision to go no farther than Stony Hill, four miles short of Eielson Visitor Center. Since then, the park’s buses have been plagued by only two

high-profile mishaps: one in 1989, the other in 1998. (In July 1989, a collision of two shuttle buses near Wonder Lake resulted in four injuries, two of them serious, while in July 1998 a Natural History Tour bus heading westbound near the Savage River became engulfed in flames, but all 48 passengers were safely evacuated and avoided injury.)⁴² The drivers, too, retained relatively harmonious relations with the concessioner. In June 1996, the various tour- and shuttle-bus drivers had started a Teamsters-affiliated union, called the Denali National Park Professional Drivers Association, and in mid-July 1999 its members voted overwhelmingly to authorize a strike if the company refused their wage-related demands. But on July 21, the drivers and Aramark reached a tentative agreement on a new, two-year contract calling for higher wages and benefits; union members finalized the agreement via a lopsided vote that August. The contract renewal process in the years since then has gone fairly smoothly.⁴³

In 2006 and 2007, bus drivers figured prominently in another labor issue that affected a broad range of park concessions workers. For a number of years, Teamsters Union representatives had claimed that the provisions of the Service Contract Act (SCA)⁴⁴ applied to concessions employees in Denali. NPS leaders resisted this, relying on a longstanding interpretation of U.S. Labor Department regulations exempting NPS concessions from the SCA, but on June 23, 2006 the Labor Department ruled in the Teamsters' favor. As a result, the Doyon/Aramark joint venture was required to offer its employees increased wages and benefits. (Bus drivers would receive marginally higher pay, while more poorly-compensated employees would receive

more substantial wage boosts.) These increased wages, moreover, had to be effective July 23, 2006. Doyon/Aramark requested a franchise fee reduction to offset the higher wages, claiming the higher wages were not accounted for in the financial model on which the franchise fee had been calculated. In March 2007, the NPS's Alaska Regional Office and Doyon/Aramark agreed to a 15 percent increase in the rates for shuttle buses for 2007. (Tour bus rates were not changed because most of these tickets had already been sold.) In addition, the two parties agreed to support a franchise fee reduction to cover SCA related costs for 2006-2007. Beginning with the 2008 season, both parties agreed to cover SCA related costs with an increase in rates for tour buses and possibly other services rather than a franchise fee reduction.⁴⁵

Continuing Controversy Over Kantishna Access

As noted in Chapter 9, the State of Alaska and local commercial interests had forwarded various proposals during the 1980s and early 1990s for an alternate route into the park. Most of the proposals during the 1980s involved a second road between the Parks Highway and Kantishna over the general Stampede Trail right-of-way; in 1989 these proposals were supplemented by a plan, touted by a Fairbanks engineer, for a railroad to Kantishna that followed much the same right-of-way as the various road proposals. Two years later, these were followed by more sophisticated ideas backed by Joe Fields and other Fairbanks-based development advocates. The Alaska legislature, in response, passed resolutions asking the federal government to support new access routes, and the state transportation department publicized



Shuttle bus drivers, shown here at Eielson Visitor Center, orchestrate a complex schedule. NPS Photo

a proposed road to McGrath that was later recognized as a back-door route to Kantishna. The NPS, however, showed little enthusiasm for any new access routes; although Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt informally broached the idea of a new railroad in the park during a 1993 visit, an agency report in early 1992 as well as the Denali Task Force report in late 1994 recommended no significant changes to existing access patterns.

Alaskans hoping to see a new route into the park were encouraged to see that the National Park System Advisory Board, at its December 1994 meeting, endorsed the idea of “a new northern railroad route” into Denali. And they were also glad to hear that Kantishna Holdings, Inc.—the Fairbanks group headed by Joe Fields that had formed several years earlier—was getting more serious with its plans to build a privately-financed, 90-mile-long railroad between Healy and Wonder Lake. In June 1995, Fields announced specific plans for the railroad, which would run all year long and would consist of a natural gas-fired locomotive hauling double-decker train cars. Fields felt that the project could be profitable because there were 250,000 annual visitors, in his estimation, who arrived at the park but were unable to access the park’s more distant western points. He estimated that \$280 million would be able to pay for a 90-mile-long railroad as well as a 300-room hotel at both ends of the proposed rail line. To finance the project, Fields averred that there were private (although undisclosed) syndicates willing to put up the “big money.” The three-member Alaska congressional delegation, upon hearing of the plan, reiterated its support for the construction of a railroad into Denali. Sen. Frank Murkowski was especially supportive of any plan that promised new access; he did, however, admit that “there has always been a light brushover of the financing” for the Fields proposal, and he likewise encouraged a rail terminus at Kantishna rather than Wonder Lake.⁴⁶

Murkowski, a Fairbanks Republican with 16 years of Senate seniority, responded to the Fields proposal by asking the NPS to conduct a new park access study. Noting that the agency had reported about 500,000 recreational visits into the park during each of the three previous seasons, and recognizing that about 250,000 people rode buses into the park in 1994, Murkowski concluded that the other 250,000 visitors “were not able to enter the park” because the buses were full. Stating that the park had “a short season and everything is plugged,” Murkowski in August 1995 used his position as the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee chair to insert an amendment into the 1996 Interior Department budget bill calling for the NPS “to conduct a Feasibility Study for a

northern access route” into the park.⁴⁷ That bill, which became law the following spring, called for the study’s completion by April 1997.⁴⁸

The NPS responded to Congress’s directive in two ways. First, it recognized that it needed to change its visitor counting methodology from one that counted total vehicle traffic heading up the park road (i.e., number of visits, including casual local traffic) to one that more accurately reflected the actual number of park visitors. Given that change in counting methods, recreational park visitation slipped from 543,309 in 1995 to 341,395 in 1996 (a 37 per cent drop), even though overall visitation dropped only slightly. These new visitation figures demonstrated—Senator Murkowski’s claims to the contrary—that relatively few visitors were unable to access the park’s interior and that, consequently, the market for an alternative access route was significantly smaller than had been perceived.⁴⁹

Second, the NPS responded to the Congressional mandate by completing another study investigating the viability of various northern access routes into the park. As noted in the park’s annual report, the “park staff worked closely with the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities [DOT&PF], the Alaska Railroad Corporation and others to insure that the final report contains accurate information presented in an objective manner.” In late January 1997, NPS staff conducted open houses in Anchorage, Healy and Fairbanks “designed to share information about the Northern Access Feasibility Study.” At those meetings, agency officials stated that a proposed road or railroad along the Stampede route did not appear to pose any insoluble engineering hurdles. The routes would, however, be expensive: about \$100 million for a narrow paved road and up to \$198 million for a railroad. The study also tentatively concluded that visitors along a northern route would see fewer bears, wolves, and other wildlife, although they would have more views of Mount McKinley, weather permitting. The study was completed, as scheduled, in April 1997. The 32-page final report provided a number of detailed options regarding construction costs: \$87.4 million for a narrow, 80-mile-long gravel road, \$100.1 million for a paved road, and between \$136.1 million and \$227.5 million for an 86-to-95-mile-long railroad. Given the study’s cost figures, NPS officials concluded that building a new access route was “not a high priority of the tourism industry when compared to other potential developments in the state.”⁵⁰

During this same period, however, Kantishna Holdings remained active in its pursuit of a privately-funded rail line between the Healy

area and Wonder Lake. In response, various Railbelt communities (both cities and boroughs) endorsed the project.⁵¹ The Alaska Legislature also did what it could to advance the project. During its 1997 session, House and Senate members sponsored identically-worded joint resolutions “supporting enhancement of visitor access” to the park “through development of a northern railroad route corridor access to the vicinity of Wonder Lake.” The Senate’s resolution—which was sponsored by four senators and two representatives, most of whom hailed from the Fairbanks area—moved quickly and uneventfully through the legislature, and Governor Tony Knowles signed the measure on May 21.⁵²

After the NPS’s Denver Service Center completed the north access feasibility study in April 1997, it was approved by successively higher-echelon officials, and in late October 1997, the Interior Department was finally able to transmit the study to Alaska Senator (and Energy and Natural Resources Chairman) Frank Murkowski. That report noted that as many as 241,000 people per year would use the new route, but the route “would have a greater effect on the number of visits than the number of visitors.” The Department also stated that the new route would be contrary to the park’s general management plan and that the construction cost—even for a gravel road—would (according to the Department’s transmittal letter) “eat up every dollar planned for park access development in the state for the next decade.” Senator Murkowski, however, was not dissuaded by the high cost figures; he noted that by the time project design was completed, “there is no doubt ... that the existing park road, which is insufficient now to handle current visitation, will be totally inadequate to serve Alaska’s No. 1 tourist attraction.” He therefore stated that in 1998, he would introduce legislation to authorize funding for an extensive environmental review and planning for the new access route; these funds would underwrite an environmental impact study and more detailed engineering proposals.⁵³ Murkowski did as promised, and on June 9, 1998, President Clinton signed a massive highway bill known as the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century, otherwise known as “TEA-21.” A provision within that bill authorized the expenditure of \$1.5 million to “construct [a] North Denali access route.”⁵⁴ State officials designated that the Denali Borough, within which the proposed route was located, would be in charge of overseeing the expenditure of these funds.⁵⁵

Even before that bill became law, the Alaska State Legislature intervened to stimulate interest in the project. In February 1998, the House Rules

Committee, at Governor Knowles’ request, had introduced a bill to provide projects and funds for the Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority (AIDEA). As the bill made its initial steps through the legislative process, it made no mention of Denali-related projects. But on May 10—less than a month before TEA-21 became law—the Senate Transportation Committee emerged with a committee substitute that provided for AIDEA to “issue bonds to finance the development of a railroad right-of-way within a railroad and utility corridor from near the village of Healy along the general alignment of the Stampede Trail to the eastern boundary of Denali National Park.” Up to \$28,000,000 in bonds would be made available for this purpose. The bill also stated that the state would grant AIDEA a 300-foot-wide corridor in the so-called “wolf townships,” the land to be used to assist Kantishna Holdings, Inc. for a proposed utility corridor and for “maintenance of a railroad and facilities to support that development project.” Just two days later, on May 11, the bill passed the Senate, and Governor Knowles signed it into law on June 18. The bill, however, pertained only to state-owned lands, and because Congress made no move to provide an easement for the remaining 55 miles of federal land in the proposed railroad corridor, AIDEA made no attempt to issue the bonds that the legislature had authorized. AIDEA’s lack of activity, plus the legislature’s apparent lack of interest in providing state matching funds, prevented much progress from taking place during this period.⁵⁶ One person who was an active project participant, however, was Don Lowell, a Fairbanks consultant well-known to DOT&PF officials. Lowell, beginning in late 2000 and continuing into 2001, apparently was paid \$180,000 for planning services pertaining to an alternate route into Kantishna.⁵⁷

The funds that Congress had authorized for environmental work—originally \$1.5 million, now reduced to \$1.32 million—required state matching funds, so on the opening day of the 2001 Alaska legislative session, State Senator Eugene Therriault submitted a bill “making a special appropriation for studies for the northern access into Denali National Park and Preserve.” The bill initially allotted \$264,000 in matching funds for these studies, but a month later the total increased to \$330,000. Therriault’s bill was later folded into the state’s capital budget bill, where it became Section 20; this bill passed the legislature on May 8 and was signed by Governor Knowles on June 30. These funds were matched with the \$1.32 million that remained from the “TEA-21” bill.⁵⁸ A total of \$1.65 million was therefore available for the preparation of a North Denali Access Route Planning and Reconnaissance Study.



Where the Stampede Road crosses the Sushana River, a bus was left by the Stampede Road contractor. Since the 1960s it has been used as a temporary shelter by hunters, trappers and other travelers along the trail. NPS Photo

Neither TEA-21 nor the matching state grant gave any specific direction regarding where the state should locate its northern access route. Another bill that year in the Alaska legislature, however, recommended the Stampede Road route. As noted above, legislators in 1998 had passed a bill authorizing AIDEA to issue bonds for relevant development activities on state lands in the “wolf townships” corridor. Following on that previous effort, Rep. Jeannette James (R-North Pole) and six other House members sponsored a bill that would remove AIDEA’s bond issuing authority; it would also remove the Authority’s “wolf townships” land grants, and instead transfer those land parcels to the Denali Borough. James’s bill moved quickly and it passed the Alaska House, with only a single dissenting vote, on April 29.⁵⁹

But after holding a hearing on the bill, the Senate Resources Committee chose to not move the bill because the bill was a giveaway of state lands for a private development project. Critics, noting that the bill named Kantishna Holdings, Inc. (which had long espoused a Stampede Road right-of-way), called the bill premature, inasmuch as the

\$1.65 million planning study—which had not yet begun—would compare and contrast a number of potential northern access routes. James and other supporters, however, were able to get the bill moving again. It passed the Resources Committee on May 4, and three days later it passed the Senate on a 13-6 vote. Governor Knowles, weighing the bill’s merits, felt that “the basic premise of this bill ... is in the best interests of the state.” But he vetoed the bill because it would transfer land “of undeniable statewide and national interest to a borough [Denali Borough] which currently lacks adequate authority or capacity to administer transportation services or to conduct land planning and zoning.” James and other legislators angrily denounced Knowles’ veto and vowed to override it during the upcoming legislative session. Sure enough, Senator Loren Lemman moved to overturn the veto on January 16, 2002, and that day both the House and the Senate (by votes of 28-11 and 13-7) had overridden Knowles’s veto and thus passed Representative James’s bill.⁶⁰

Given the passage of both the “TEA-21” bill in 1998 and the state’s matching funds in 2001, state



This open landscape, as seen near Eightmile Lake, is typical of the Stampede Road corridor. NPS Photo

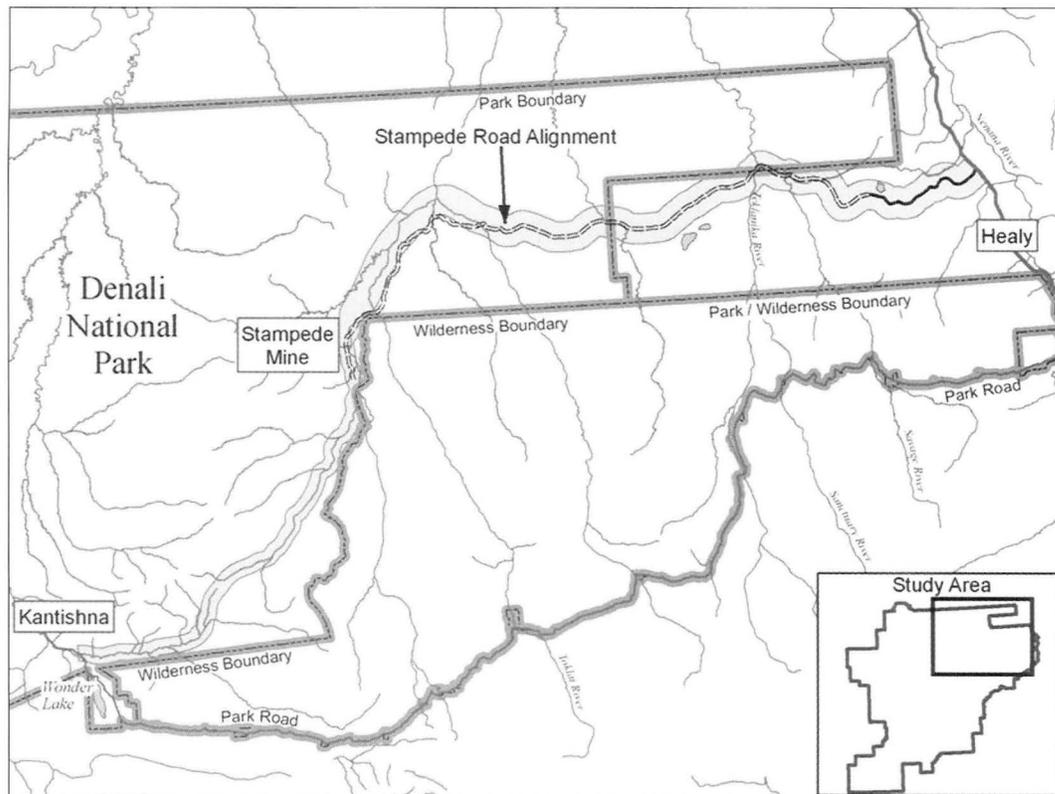
officials moved to start work on the North Denali Access Route Planning and Reconnaissance Study. On March 6, 2002, the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities signed a Transfer of Responsibilities Agreement with Denali Borough. Soon afterward, the project's first phase began, and Eileen Armstrong was selected as the borough's study coordinator. In January 2003, Armstrong hosted public meetings in Healy, Fairbanks, and Anchorage, hoping to solicit ideas on the best route to follow between the Stampede Road area and Kantishna.⁶¹ In April 2003, borough personnel completed a preliminary report. The next step, according to a state DOT&PF official, was the preparation of a more detailed reconnaissance study, and in January 2005, the department was preparing to hire a contractor to "look at the possibility of extending a road or rail line" into the park.⁶²

The study, an effort by CH2MHill, assisted by Dowl Engineers, began that April; it was the subject of an October 2005 open house in Healy, and in August 2006 it was completed. It investigated four possible route alignments between the Parks Highway-Alaska Railroad corridor and Kantishna: the Rex Corridor (beginning just south of Rex), two Rock Creek corridors (both beginning near Ferry), and the Stampede Corridor (beginning just north of Healy). The study examined the economic and environmental feasibility of these corridors as they pertained to trail, road, and rail access. The study was thorough—it was 652 pages long—but the recommendations were less than conclusive. They stated that "no alignment stands out as having a distinct advantage over the others with respect to engineering, environmental, or user-benefit considerations."

It also found, perhaps not surprisingly, that of the three modes studied, a trail offered the smallest footprint, cost, and user benefit and that a railroad had the largest footprint, cost, and user benefit. Based on these findings, "the recommendation at the conclusion of the North Denali Route Reconnaissance Study is to defer further work on the North Denali Access Route project until funding is available for recommended additional studies." (See Map 5.)⁶³

In May 2005, the state legislature—perhaps hoping to stimulate interest in one possible access corridor—provided a \$5 million appropriation (via the FY 2005 supplementary capital budget) to improve the existing Stampede Road, using state funds only, between the Parks Highway and Eightmile Lake. That fall, DOT personnel announced specific plans for the project; they planned to start the eight-mile construction job in the spring of 2006, and hoped to extend the road that summer all the way west to Savage River.⁶⁴ In early 2006, Governor Murkowski requested in his proposed capital budget that the legislature provide the DOT an additional \$9 million that would extend those road improvements to the Denali National Park boundary. The legislature, however, did not accede to that request.⁶⁵ Meanwhile, construction of the initial eight-mile road improvement was held up by DOT's inability to secure Army Corps of Engineer permits.⁶⁶ Murkowski, whose administration pushed for the road improvements, was not re-elected in 2006. Just a month after his successor, Sarah Palin, was sworn into office, the Fairbanks DOT office withdrew its support for the project. Recognizing that many local residents were strongly opposed to the project, DOT official Howard Thies noted

Map 5. This map shows the “Stampede Road Alignment” for planning purposes to identify possible locations for visitor facilities between Healy and the Kantishna area. North Access Visitor Facilities Study, National Park Service and Alaska Department of Natural Resources



that “recreational roads such as the Stampede Road project are going to have to demonstrate a greater need in this time of fiscal restraint.”⁶⁷

Congress gave the NPS further development recommendations in 2001. Because of difficulties designing a visitor center for Glacier Bay National Park, Senator Murkowski recommended that the Interior Department, as part of its appropriations bill, reprogram \$372,000 in NPS funds for a “cooperative study with the State of Alaska to explore the location of campgrounds, trails, and other visitor facilities along the Stampede Road alignment.”⁶⁸ NPS officials and others were perplexed at the senator’s action, inasmuch as the TEA-21 bill, in 1998, had asked the State of Alaska to examine a number of northern access route options. They nevertheless moved to satisfy Congress’s intent. By early 2003, the agency had allocated \$100,000 of those funds to the Alaska Department of Natural Resources to support a coordinator (Michelle Roller) for the study, and by that summer the preparation of a Visitor Facilities Study was well underway. In July 2003 NPS planner Pat Welch, assisted by Roller, hosted a series of public open houses in Fairbanks, Healy, Cantwell, and Anchorage. Given the comments gathered at those meetings, the state and federal agencies jointly completed a draft North Access Visitor Facilities Study in late April 2004 and, after a public comment period, they released a final study four months later. The study recommended that up to ten “nodes of development” should be located along the

proposed Stampede Road alignment between the Parks Highway and the Kantishna/Wonder Lake area; within those nodes, a broad variety of development options—from trails and waysides to a lodge or food service facility—might be considered.⁶⁹ Based on these recommendations, the State of Alaska, at some time in the future, may commence visitor development activities along its portion of the road; development on lands within Denali National Park, however, will be precluded until the construction of a full 90-mile road has been authorized.

Throughout this period, it seemed clear that many Alaska officials—including the state’s Congressional delegation, the state legislature, cities and boroughs up and down the Railbelt, and many local residents—were in favor of a new access route into Denali. Large numbers of Alaska residents, however, were opposed to the idea. Opponents included the Panguingue Creek Homeowners Association (located just west of Healy), the Denali Citizens Council, the Wilderness Society (which in 2000 nominated Denali as one of its “15 most endangered wildlands”), and the National Parks Conservation Association (which in 2001 cited Denali in its annual “10 most endangered parks” listing). Even Taxpayers for Common Sense came out against the proposed road, decrying it as one of the “ten worst highway projects in America.”⁷⁰

The National Park Service, as it had for years, opposed new access. Agency officials continued to

abide by the recommendations contained in the 1986 general management plan, the 1992 Denali Access Study, the 1994 Denali Task Force report, and the 1997 North Access Feasibility Study. As park planning chief Mike Tranel noted in 2003, existing facilities and routes were adequate for the foreseeable future. “We have room for more people on the existing road. ... This is where we would like to focus our immediate efforts.” And recognizing that Congress was in the midst of providing planning and design funds for visitor facilities south of the Alaska Range, Tranel added, “when you ask the bigger question of what’s the best way to provide for more visitor use of Denali National Park, we are saying we think we can do it with the road we have now and with the south side coming on line.”⁷¹

Clashes Over Snowmachine Access

During the 1980s and on into the 1990s, different parts of the park unit—following the dictates of ANILCA and the regulations that followed—offered varying levels of off-road vehicle (ORV) access. In Denali National Preserve and in those parts of Denali National Park that Congress had established in 1980, subsistence users were free to access the park so long as they used “traditional” transportation modes. In addition, these users needed to hail from either one of four designated resident zone communities (Cantwell, Lake Minchumina, Nikolai, or Telida) or—for those who lived outside of these communities—they needed to be holders of a subsistence permit (also known as a 13.44 permit).⁷² Because of administrative action in 1983 (see Chapter 9), federal and state officials recognized that areas within the boundaries of the old Mount McKinley National Park were open to snowmachine access for recreational purposes. Most user groups, however, showed little interest in obtaining snowmachine or other ORV access into the “old park” during this period, either during the 1983–86 general management planning process or for the remainder of the decade. And during much of the 1990s, there was a widespread public belief that snowmobiles could not legally enter this area. But the issue remained low-key throughout this period; snowmachiners never made a public demonstration of entering the “old park,” and NPS officials never publicly stated that the “old park” was closed to snowmobiles, nor did they otherwise attempt to prohibit snowmachine use.⁷³

Beginning in the early 1990s, snowmachines became an increasingly popular form of recreation in Alaska, particularly among Anchorage and Fairbanks residents, and one byproduct of that popularity was an ever-broadening search among its enthusiasts for recreational destina-

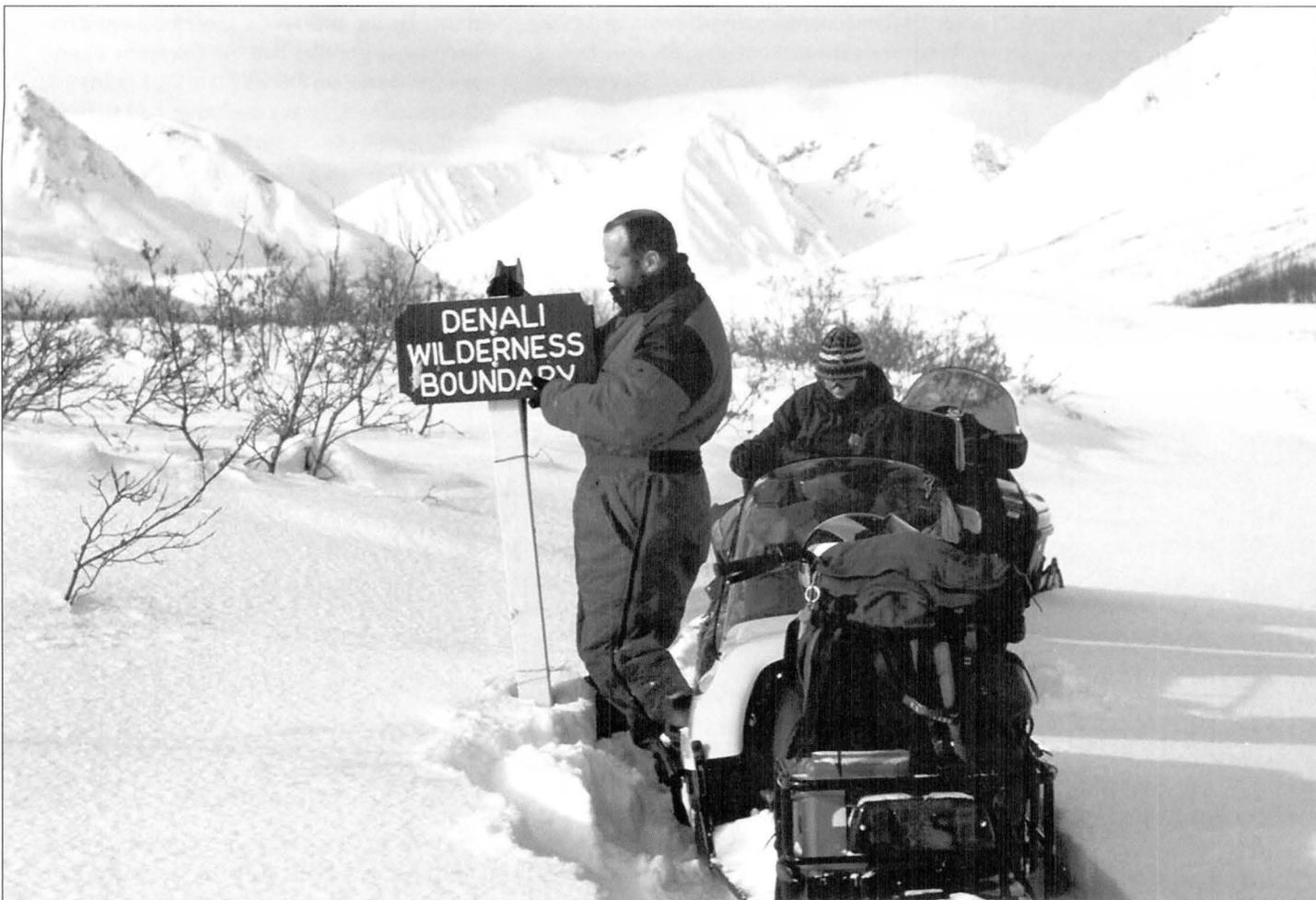
tions. By the mid-1990s, snowmachining had become so popular that the Tokositna drainage (primarily on Denali State Park land) was described as a “heavy use” area, and state park staff—citing use conflicts—publicized the need to establish a large “quiet zone”—off-limits to snowmachines—in the hills east of the Parks Highway.⁷⁴ Other snowmachine enthusiasts enjoyed their sport in the newly-added portions of Denali National Park, particularly near the Yentna, Kahiltna, Tokositna and Ruth glaciers and in areas surrounding the Dunkle and Golden Zone mines.⁷⁵ And a few riders, perhaps bolder than others, began to take their snowmachines into the Cantwell Creek and Easy Pass areas of the “old park.”⁷⁶



In the face of snowmobiling’s growing popularity, many NPS officials grew increasingly restive. They recognized that most of the “old park” was designated wilderness, and they also recognized that the “old park”—unlike most of the land that surrounded it—had experienced only light and occasional snowmobile activity over the years; as a result, snowmachines were not a “traditional” way to gain access into the pre-1980 park. They had received ample evidence, based on experience in other national parks, that snowmachine activity had had negative impacts on both wildlife and vegetation, and they also felt that it was an inadvertent oversight in the ANILCA legislation that had sanctioned snowmachine access since 1980. For all those reasons, the NPS personnel in 1996 began crafting regulations that would have closed the “old park” once again to snowmachines.⁷⁷ That effort stalled, but in October 1998, a Joe Gauna article in the newsletter *Alaskan Snow Rider* stated that the author intended

to be back at Anderson Pass as soon as snow allows, as well as Easy Pass and Foggy Pass [all three of which are within the Old Park]. ... The route from Healy via the Stampede Trail to Wonder Lake and the Eielson Visitor Center is quite interesting, I’m told, and I expect to ride it as soon as conditions allow.

Snowmachine tracks in the Broad Pass area attest to the popularity of this activity. NPS Photo



Rangers mark the location of the park boundary with visible signs erected in the snow. Tom Habecker Collection

These and similar *Alaskan Snow Rider* articles re-invigorated the agency's earlier efforts and pushed park officials to protect the park's resources.⁷⁸

On November 10, 1998, the NPS announced that it was temporarily closing the "old park" to snowmachines. Park superintendent Steve Martin stated that the action, which might be in effect for as long as a year,⁷⁹ was necessary because snowmobiles—which in his opinion were not traditional according to the Section 110(a) provisions—damaged wilderness values and clashed with traditional forms of backcountry travel such as skis and dog teams. He tentatively planned to place the ban in effect on December 1. He and other park officials, however, promised to keep an open mind on the matter; they scheduled a series of public hearings and promised to rule, within a year, regarding whether the closure would be made permanent.⁸⁰ Snowmachine users, not surprisingly, howled in protest at the agency's action, and the four public meetings that were held November 22-25 were contentious, well-attended affairs (200 people showed up in Anchorage, and some 400 in Fairbanks) that pitted wilderness advocates against motor sports fans. The public comment deadline, originally

scheduled for December 1, was extended to December 15, and the apparent volume of protests against the proposed rule convinced NPS officials to hold off enforcing the snowmachine ban until early 1999, after it had evaluated the public's written and oral comments.⁸¹

Meanwhile, the U.S. and Alaska legislatures weighed in on the issue. In early December, U.S. Representative Don Young (R-Alaska), who headed the House Resources Committee, wrote an Interior Department official and asked him to drop the proposed regulations. Shortly afterward, Young launched a Resources Committee investigation into "why the agency has apparently misapplied the access provisions" of ANILCA. He asked the Interior Department to provide, by January 8, 1999, any records related to the snowmachine regulations. Officials complied with the House Committee's request; the committee, in response, made no specific actions based on this data.⁸² Also in early 1999, members of both the Alaska House and Alaska Senate submitted nearly identically-worded resolutions that opposed the proposed snowmachine closure. The House resolution, which opposed "the closure of any portion of Denali National Park and Preserve to snowmachine access," never made it beyond

the committee stage, but the Senate's resolution, which more specifically opposed "the closure of the former Mount McKinley portions of Denali National Park and Preserve to snowmachine use," proved uncontroversial. Introduced on January 27, it passed the Senate on February 10 and the House on March 12; two weeks later, Governor Tony Knowles sent it on to the Lieutenant Governor's office for filing.⁸³

During the same period, user groups contemplated whether they should file a lawsuit as a way to stop the regulations from being implemented. On a more pragmatic level, snowmachine groups informed NPS officials that their area of greatest interest was a small area near Cantwell; and in response, Superintendent Martin stated that he was willing to consider opening some areas of the "old park" to snowmachines.⁸⁴

On February 4, 1999, the NPS made its decision in the matter. Trying to reach a reasonable balance between competing groups, agency officials chose to prohibit snowmachine access in most of the "old park," but stated that access would be allowed on a total of 6,500 acres, located in two corridors near Cantwell. One corridor was a 25-mile loop that included Windy Creek and its West Fork, Foggy Pass, and the Cantwell Creek drainage; the other corridor included portions of the Bull River valley. Park officials stated that the order would be in effect for the following year, by which time formal regulations would be in place; in the meantime, the corridor area would be studied to see how snowmachine traffic impacted wildlife and other park values. An Alaska State Snowmobile Association leader was so miffed at the NPS's decision that the group planned to file a lawsuit against the order; conservationists were also disappointed at the ruling, one noting that he needed to "decide on what legal remedies are available."⁸⁵ Both groups, in fact, followed through on their predictions; the snowmobile group filed suit against the Interior Department in U.S. District Court in late February, and in early April a coalition of nine conservation groups also sued the government in hopes of getting the agency to renege on its decision to allow snowmachine access in the "old park."⁸⁶ The cases, which gained nationwide attention, were slated to begin that fall, the thought being that the matter might be resolved before the winter (and the snowmobiling season) began.⁸⁷

In July 1999, the NPS—as it predicted it would in February—moved to formalize its regulations when it announced that it had formulated a Proposed Special Regulations Package. One element of this five-part package stated that the agency planned to "continue the prohibition

on snowmachines [sic] use in the core area of the park ... to protect wildlife and other park resources in the 'Old Park.'" Four months later, after the Office of Management and Budget had completed its review, the agency went through with its plan when it issued its package of regulations (as a so-called "proposed rule") in the *Federal Register*. These regulations called for all of the "old park"—including the 6,500 acres near Cantwell excluded in February—to be closed to snowmobiles, and it also provided a definition of a "traditional activity." Superintendent Martin moved to close these corridors because, according to ANILCA, his February 1999 action allowing snowmachine access in two corridors had not been legal.⁸⁸

Just one day before the Interior Department issued its proposed regulations, the NPS completed an environmental assessment on the damage that snowmachines might cause to vegetation and wildlife in the park's core; in that document, the agency stated that the "permanent closure of the old park to snowmobile use" was its preferred alternative (among four alternative presented). This document, as well, defined a "traditional activity," using the same definition that appeared in the "proposed rule."⁸⁹

During the same week that the proposed rule and the environmental assessment were released, two major events took place in the lawsuit that the snowmachine groups had filed in late February. The case now pitted the Alaska State Snowmobile Association and three individuals against two Interior Department officials, three NPS officials, and nine environmental organizations. On November 8, Judge John Sedwick issued a Preliminary Order in the case. Basing his decision on what had been filed on both sides, he stated that the NPS's February 4 decision to close most of the "old park" to snowmachine access was "arbitrary and capricious because the absence of any definition of traditional activities necessarily means that the Decision contains no rational basis for the conclusion that the use of snowmachines for traditional activities in the Old Park is detrimental to the resource values of the Old Park." He cautioned, however, that his decision did "not present the court's final order." Recognizing that a court date was set for November 12, Sedwick issued his preliminary order to "assist the parties prepare for and conduct oral argument."⁹⁰

On November 12, the snowmachine industry's lawsuit was adjudicated before Judge Sedwick of the Anchorage District Court. Pertinent questions aired that day included, first, the extent to which snowmachine use would damage the

park, and also the definition of a “traditional” activity. Because Interior Department lawyers could not answer either question to the judge’s satisfaction—their recently-issued “traditional activities” definition was still in the proposal stage—Sedwick ruled on November 18 in favor of the plaintiffs. His final decision, to a large extent, reaffirmed his preliminary order and invalidated the NPS’s eight-month-old snowmachining ban. Park Service officials admitted that they were unsure of the agency’s next steps; they did, however, plan to incorporate the judge’s concerns into the recently-issued proposed rule, which would be subject to public hearings during the following month.⁹¹



Snowmachine tracks lead to upper Cantwell Creek, on the south side of the Alaska Range. NPS Photo

The agency advertised a series of four public meetings on the issue (between December 6 and December 9), with a December 10 public comment deadline. Given that time frame, the NPS hoped to issue a rule as soon as January 2000 that would temporarily ban snowmachines from the “old park” for the remainder of the winter. At the same time, the agency followed up its issuance of the November 10 proposed rule (for a permanent closure) by giving the public until January 11 to comment on its provisions.⁹²

The four meetings—which allowed the public to comment on both the short-term and long-term snowmobile bans—were held as scheduled in communities up and down the Railbelt. About 330 people attended one of the four hearings, and most of the attendees supported the NPS’s proposals. Both sides in the fight, by this time, were fearing the worst; snowmachine advocates felt that an NPS victory would be a prelude to closures on tens of millions of acres of other Alaska parklands, while conservationists openly worried that if snowmachines gained a toehold at Denali’s “old park,” the pristine values of one of Alaska’s most protected, treasured places would be lost.⁹³

Because there were no legal or regulatory prohibitions in place, the “old park” was open to snowmachine enthusiasts throughout the winter of 1999-2000.⁹⁴ In mid-December, Superinten-

dent Martin announced that areas south of the Alaska Range were open if they were below 3,000 feet in elevation.⁹⁵ (Areas north of the mountains, he noted, did not yet have adequate snow cover.) The park, however, would be accessible only to those who engaged in “traditional activities,” whatever that implied.⁹⁶ And in addition, riders would be expected to follow existing NPS regulations regarding snowmobile use; these included a 45 mile-per-hour speed limit, a helmet use requirement, a minimum age limit, and so forth. Given the new reality, riders continued to visit the Bull River, Cantwell Creek, Windy Creek, and other corridors; so far as is known, all snowmachine enthusiasts remained south of the Alaska Range save one group that rode into the Wonder Lake area.⁹⁷

Meanwhile, the agency concentrated on how it would respond to the permanent ban which it had proposed on November 10, 1999. Public comments about the ban, pro and con, were so strong that officials decided to move the comment deadline back from January 11 to January 25.⁹⁸ Two months later, park spokeswoman Jane Tranel noted that the public had overwhelmingly backed the agency’s proposed rule; of more than 6,100 responses to the proposal, 96 percent favored an “old park” snowmachine ban; among the 2,000-plus Alaskan comments, 91 percent favored the ban. During this same period, the National Parks Conservation Association shed additional light on the issue when it nominated Denali as one of its “Ten Most Endangered Parks,” largely due to the perceived snowmachine threat.⁹⁹

Based on the public’s overwhelming support for the proposed rule, the NPS moved to ban snowmobiles from old Mount McKinley National Park. In June 2000, it issued a Statement of Finding” which determined “that any snowmachine use in the Old Park would be detrimental due to the unique history and resource values of the area.” The agency also concluded that “there are no traditional activities in the Old Park that utilize snowmachines during periods of adequate snow cover.”¹⁰⁰ Based on these and similar conclusions, the Interior Department moved to permanently close the Old Park to snowmachine use. Assistant Interior Secretary Donald J. Barry issued the final rule on June 19, 2000.¹⁰¹ Since that time, several violators have been successfully prosecuted under the NPS closure regulations.¹⁰²

The rule went unchallenged for the next several months, but the November 2000 election brought forth a new, conservative president, George W. Bush. The president-elect’s nominee as Interior Secretary, Gale W. Norton, had



The popularity of snowmachine riding in the Broad Pass area increased dramatically in the 1990s. NPS Photo

previously worked as an attorney in the Reagan administration. Given the apparent change in political winds, the snowmachine industry, which had protested the June 2000 “old park” snowmachine prohibition, renewed its two-year-old lawsuit against the NPS; shortly afterward, a coalition of environmental groups renewed their own lawsuit as well.¹⁰³

Shortly after Bush was sworn into office, Interior Department leaders began discussions with William Horn, the snowmachine industry’s legal representative, over NPS policies at both Yellowstone and Denali national parks. Horn, in mid-April 2001, noted that he was engaged in “preliminary discussions” aimed at settling the industry’s lawsuit. But environmental groups, who had filed their own lawsuit, were not part of those discussions and were “totally kept in the dark” about the progress of those discussions.¹⁰⁴ By the end of April, Horn announced the results of those talks; the industry would drop its lawsuit if the NPS would open up some of the “old park” to recreational snowmachines, and more specifically if the agency agreed to participate in the development of legislation that would allow increased snowmachine access. Upon hearing the news, snowmachine enthusiast Joe Gauna made the groups’ intentions clear: “All we ever wanted is to ride snowmobiles in the southeast corner of the Alaska Range,” near Cantwell. And NPS spokesman John Quinley

averred that the new proposal might be an acceptable compromise.¹⁰⁵

By the end of May, a draft bill had been prepared that would have opened up 300,000 acres of the 1,900,000-acre “old park” to snowmachines. Given that potential legislation, snowmachine groups announced that they were dropping their lawsuit, hoping for a legislative rather than judicial solution. In response, Interior Secretary Norton stated that “the department intends to review in good faith any such introduced legislation.” But a conservation-group spokesman worried that Norton and the snowmachine groups had “cut a deal” to push the draft legislation.¹⁰⁶

A year later, the snowmachiners’ concerns resulted in a renewed attempt at Congressional legislation. On May 7, 2002, Rep. Don Young (R-Alaska) introduced a bill that would open up about one-fifth of the “old park”—approximately 400,000 acres—to recreational snowmachine access. Young, at the time, noted that “this compromise gives each side what they say they want,” but environmentalists vowed to fight his bill.¹⁰⁷ A month later, Sen. Frank Murkowski submitted a similar bill. Neither bill, however, got beyond the committee stage.¹⁰⁸ Early in 2003, Sen. Ted Stevens (R-Alaska) indicated an interest in continuing the efforts begun by the other members of the state’s congressional delegation. That interest, however, did not result in a bill submission.¹⁰⁹

Studies were conducted by the National Park Service to guide backcountry management planning for the park. NPS Photo



Beginning in 1999, the NPS began work on a backcountry management plan for the park, and questions regarding access were a major element of that plan. The plan and its evolution is discussed in greater detail in the next section of this chapter. But one of the major elements of the plan dealt with snowmachine regulation; indeed, one of the major reasons for the plan's formulation was the need to manage the growing number of snowmachines using portions of the "new park."¹¹⁰

Based on that premise, the draft backcountry plan (released in February 2003) created 29 management zones in the "new park" and preserve. In the agency's preferred alternative, all of these zones would be open to qualified subsistence users. But only two of them, plus small portions of two others, would be "concentrated use" areas where "wide corridors would be designated ... for day use and overnight touring and access." A majority of the new park and preserve was composed of "dispersed use" areas that "would allow snowmobile access for subsistence and for a limited number of day and overnight trips by permit." And six units, comprising perhaps one-fifth of the "new park" and preserve, prevented motorized access to all but subsistence users.¹¹¹

As noted below, there was a massive public response to the draft plan. More than 90 percent

of individual comments supported the agency's proposal; fewer than 1 percent, by contrast, specifically opposed restrictions on snowmachine use in the park and preserve. The State of Alaska, which had gone on record two years earlier to keep the "old park" open to snowmachines, was vehement in its opposition to the plan; state officials had no problem with the NPS's division of the park into management zones (which were a key feature of the plan); they did, however, protest that the prohibition of recreational snowmachines in six management zones was a potential violation of Section 1110(a) of ANILCA. In August 2003, officials from the NPS (led by Deputy Director Randy Jones) and the State of Alaska met to discuss their differences; at that meeting, state officials—whose views were similar to those of Interior Secretary Norton and her assistants—hinted that major changes would be necessary if the NPS wanted to move from a draft to a final plan. As a result, park officials agreed to issue a revised draft plan that, among other changes, would not prohibit snowmachine access anywhere outside of the "old park" but would instead place that access in the broader context of overall management planning.¹¹²

In the midst of the agency's preparation of the park's revised draft, the "traditional activities" issue—which had been a key element of the 1999-2000 process that had closed snowma-

chine access in the old park—came to the fore as it pertained to land in the new park and preserve. The draft backcountry plan had noted that in the preamble to the June 2000 final regulations, the NPS intended “to define traditional activities and apply such definitions to other park areas, including the remainder of Denali in subsequent processes, such as future rulemakings to implement backcountry management plans.” The draft plan, however, did not recommend a specific definition or the application of an existing definition to areas outside of the old park. NPS officials readily admitted that there was no enforceable definition of “traditional activities” for these areas. As a result, the definition (as it pertained to these areas) was a “can of worms,” according to a park spokesperson, and was unenforceable.¹¹³

The revised draft, released in April 2005, divided the “new park” and preserve into four levels of “management areas.” Management Area A, which allowed the highest level of visitor access and a “diversity of opportunities for wilderness recreational activities,” comprised 17.7 percent of the study area in the agency’s preferred alternative, and no areas were specifically excluded from recreational snowmachine use. The plan, in general, stated that “snowmachine access for traditional activities would continue,” but as in the draft plan, the agency did not try to define the term “traditional activities.” In addition, it stated that “snowmachine access would be managed to meet the standards ... specified for each management area,” and several use corridors were demarcated.¹¹⁴ Conservation groups, frustrated by the change in the agency’s recommendations, complained that the plan gave snowmachines “virtually unlimited access” to the new park and preserve, so they vowed to “devise an alternate management plan.” Not long afterward, they did so.¹¹⁵

The final plan, released in January 2006, reduced the size of acreage allotted to Management Area A from 17.7 percent to 9.2 percent.¹¹⁶ Otherwise, however, the plan continued to state that “snowmachine access for traditional activities would continue.” The agency “would generally allow independent, cross-country travel by any legal means,” and the agency was “committed to providing visitors ... with reasonable access for wilderness recreational activities, traditional activities, and for other purposes...”. (No definition of “traditional activities” was provided, however.) More specifically, the plan stated that “racing or high-marking with snowmachines” was “not appropriate at Denali given the park’s statutory guidance.” The plan, with its snowmachine provisions, went into effect in mid-March 2006.¹¹⁷

Cantwell-Area

All-Terrain Vehicle Access Issues

In the midst of the long-running controversy over snowmobiles in the “old park,” a similar battle erupted over subsistence access rights for certain off-road vehicles, used during the summer season, in the “new park.” This new battle was fought in the Cantwell area: more specifically in the Windy Creek, Bull River, and Cantwell Creek drainages, near the scene of similar fights over snowmachine use.

As noted in Chapter 9, regulations written following the passage of ANILCA had specified that Cantwell would be one of four “resident zone communities,” where “persons who have customarily and traditionally engaged in subsistence uses within the national park or monument permanently reside.”¹¹⁸ The implementation of their “customary and traditional” provision, however, demanded a specific determination regarding the extent of that customary and traditional use. Lacking that determination, and given the fact that the State of Alaska enforced the subsistence hunting regulations, Cantwell residents during the 1980s hunted—as they had for decades—in a variety of areas surrounding their village, some of which were within the boundaries of the newly-designated Denali National Park.

During the mid-1980s, as noted in Chapter 9, the NPS underwent a three-year process that resulted in the park’s 1986 *General Management Plan* (GMP). The access provisions of the plan, which to some extent were based on language in ANILCA and the June 1981 regulations, stated that there was no specific provision for “transportation modes other than snowmobiles, motorboats, and other means of surface transportation traditionally employed.” As it applied to the Denali National Park additions, the plan noted that “existing information indicates that specific ORV use has not regularly been used for subsistence purposes.” But it also noted that “any additional information about traditional means will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis” and that “off-road vehicles are permitted for access for subsistence purposes where they can be shown to be a traditional means of access.” (“Traditional activities” were those deemed to have been an established cultural pattern ... prior to 1978 when the unit [Denali National Monument] was established.”) Most Cantwell residents, however, were unaware of the plan’s provisions; this ignorance, to some extent, existed because none of the public meetings during the plan’s preparation had been held there.¹¹⁹

During the 1980s, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G)—in response to a process

meted out in Section 805(d) of ANILCA—managed subsistence hunting regulations throughout the state. And more specifically, the on-site regulation of Cantwell-area hunting provisions came each spring, when an ADF&G officer visited the village and issued registration permits for Unit 13 moose and caribou harvesting. But on July 1, 1990, in the wake of the December 1989 McDowell court decision, the federal government assumed jurisdiction over subsistence hunting activities on many of the state’s federal lands. The following spring, Hollis Twitchell, a subsistence specialist for Denali National Park and Preserve, arrived in Cantwell to issue the Unit 13 registration permits. He did much the same job as had his ADF&G predecessor, but with one notable exception: given the language in the park’s 1986 general management plan, all of the permits stated that no all-terrain vehicles would be allowed for subsistence activities in Denali National Park.¹²⁰



Advances in ORV technology have allowed an increasing number of subsistence hunters to access areas in the park. NPS Photo

Several Cantwell residents, predictably, chafed at the new provision, and at least some of the residents’ dissatisfaction was based on their opinion that off-road vehicles had been used for subsistence activities in the “new park” prior to 1978. They demanded to know the legal basis for the park’s action, and in 1992, eight local residents responded with affidavits stating that because they had traditionally used off road vehicles for access into the national park, they requested the removal of the ORV restrictions. Superintendent Russell Berry, upon receiving the affidavits, recognized that there was sufficient merit in the residents’ protests that he asked park staff to make an assessment of historical ORV use. Berry held a public meeting in Cantwell on the issue, which

was attended by 16 local residents, and he also requested an open comment period in which a broader range of Cantwell residents might weigh in on their long-term subsistence patterns. Berry transferred to another park before a decision could be made in the matter; his replacement, in the fall of 1994, was Steve Martin.¹²¹

When Martin began his tenure, a regional office task force was in the midst of analyzing the agency’s off road vehicle policies. This effort prevented him, for the time being, from making sweeping changes to ORV policy in the Cantwell area. Martin did, however, agree to visit several areas west of Cantwell with two local subsistence users, Lee Basner and Vernon Carlson. (Both men were members of the Denali Subsistence Resource Commission, and both had signed affidavits back in 1992 protesting the NPS’s changed policy.) The field party recognized that portions of several ATV trails either rested on gravel or were denuded of vegetation; other trail segments, however, needed to be protected from further resource damage. As a result of that visit, Martin established an interim policy stating that the agency would not enforce ORV use prohibitions on portions of three area trails: the lower section of the Windy Creek trail, the old airport road (Cantwell Airstrip trail), and a short segment of lower Cantwell Creek. Agency personnel then proceeded to begin writing a draft environmental assessment that would have officially sanctioned use on those trails. That EA was never completed. Even so, park subsistence specialist Hollis Twitchell was authorized to issue ORV use permits over these three routes, and for years afterward, some Cantwell residents had been permitted ORV access for subsistence purposes into portions of the “new park.”¹²²

Key to any decision over the legality of ORV use in the Cantwell area was whether local residents had established patterns of subsistence access into the “new park” prior to 1978. To shed more light on this question, the NPS sponsored a 1999 study—a Community Use Profile update—which, among other purposes, would gather data establishing a specific historical context for residents’ subsistence activities. State of Alaska anthropologist William Simeone was asked to undertake the study, and in 2002 he completed it. The study noted that “after World War II people used surplus military vehicles and commercially made all terrain vehicles or ATVs. ... Some of the areas where Cantwell people hunted with ATVs were the Dunkle Hills ... Bull River, and Windy Creek up to the National Park boundary, and Cantwell Creek.” And lands in the “new park” were a key part of local subsistence harvests; as Simeone wrote, “Cantwell residents feel squeezed

between urban Alaska and the National Park Service. Pressure from urban hunters [particularly after the 1971 completion of the Parks Highway] has ... caused game populations to dwindle, especially in areas that were once traditionally used by the residents of Cantwell. As a consequence many Cantwell residents now hunt almost exclusively on National Park lands, which are closed to urban residents.”¹²³

By the time Simeone’s study was complete, a new park superintendent was in place: Paul Anderson. Not long after Anderson assumed the job in January 2002, Twitchell apprised him of the situation. Anderson, in response, was surprised that such a policy existed without an NPS determination that ORVs were “traditionally employed” for subsistence access, and without accompanying regulations, as provided for by ANILCA. Accordingly, he concluded that the existing policy was likely illegal.¹²⁴ Anderson, in response, made no moves to alter the status quo for the time being, and NPS officials continued the policy that had been set in the mid-1990s. That policy, as noted in Chapter 9, stated that local residents were officially prohibited from entering the “new park” on ORVs for subsistence purposes, but on an informal level, regulations were not enforced on portions of three specific trail segments.¹²⁵

This state of affairs abruptly changed in September 2003, when three Cantwell subsistence hunters rode their ORVs into the area between the Bull River and the Dunkle Hills in the “new park.” They inflicted damage on several miles

of tundra vegetation, some of it in wetlands areas.¹²⁶ That winter, Anderson notified local Subsistence Resource Commission (SRC) members that the NPS would no longer allow subsistence hunters to use their ORVs on any trails or areas within the park because they were not “traditionally employed” according to the park’s 1986 management plan.¹²⁷

By this time, the SRC was already on record requesting that the NPS reconsider its determination (from the 1986 GMP) based upon evidence provided by Cantwell subsistence users. As a follow-up to that request, Cantwell residents attended an August 2004 SRC meeting and indicated that they had additional information for the park to consider in regard to the “traditionally employed” issue. That same month, park officials visited Cantwell. At a public meeting, they stated that they would establish a Cantwell “traditional use area” that would include the most popular ORV use areas; they then noted that they would conduct a new review of all available information and make a new determination as to whether ORVs were “traditionally employed” in that area by members of the Cantwell Resident Zone Community. (As noted in Chapter 9, Cantwell had been a resident zone community since 1981.) Park officials stated that any sanctioned activities fitting the “traditional” definition needed to have occurred in the specific area for “at least two generations” prior to the withdrawal of the lands as part of the new Denali National Monument on December 1, 1978. This new interpretation, which was based



In September, 2003, three ORVs used during one subsistence hunting excursion created several miles of new ORV tracks, impacting an area of the “new park” west of the Bull River. NPS Photo

In response to increasing resource damage, the NPS began documenting the location and condition of ORV trails. NPS Photo



on the “traditional” definition cited in both the GMP and in 1979 House and Senate reports, irked not only Cantwell residents but also State of Alaska officials and the Alaska Congressional delegation.¹²⁸

Given the looming controversy, NPS officials intensified their interest in resolving the issue. They recognized that in order to accurately determine the status of Cantwell’s “traditional uses” in the newly-expanded national park as part of an upcoming environmental assessment (EA), they needed to gather additional material about the village’s historical subsistence patterns. They therefore asked two anthropologists from the agency’s Alaska Regional Office, Donald Callaway and Rachel Mason, to conduct interviews with area residents. (These interviews would be a logical follow-up to Simeone’s 2002 study.) The researchers, in response, interviewed 17 long-time Cantwell-area residents on various dates between December 2004 and February 2005.¹²⁹

Callaway, on May 12, summarized the results of the transcribed interviews to a meeting of Cantwell residents. Two months later, the interviews served as the keystone of a large NPS report that discussed historical patterns of ORV use by Cantwell-area subsistence users. The report’s purpose was to help determine “whether there was traditional ORV access for subsistence purposes by the Cantwell community to Denali National Park Lands in the Cantwell area.” The

interviews confirmed that, indeed, there had been “multi-generational use utilizing ORV technologies for the Cantwell area with some families demonstrating as much as three or even four generations.” The findings, in a detailed fashion, corroborated what Simeone had noted three years earlier. Specifically, the report stated that the first ORVs had been Willys Jeeps, used during the 1940s, after which several other ORV types were introduced, in stages, between the 1950s and ANILCA’s passage in 1980.¹³⁰

Based on the conclusions in the Callaway-Mason report, the NPS assembled a brief report that determined whether specific ORV use areas near Cantwell were “traditional.” That “traditionally employed” study, completed on July 22, stated that the NPS would allow subsistence ORV use by Cantwell residents in a 32,159-acre “traditional use area” of the New Park that would comprise the Windy Creek, Cantwell Creek, and Bull River drainages. (According to a news report, areas west of the Bull River did not meet “traditional” standards.)¹³¹ As noted above, NPS officials had decided in August 2004 how “traditional,” in a general sense, would be defined. The report completed on July 22, however, provided three specific criteria that would be used to determine whether or not ORVs were “traditionally employed” in the various drainages west of Cantwell.¹³²

The following day—Saturday, July 23—the park superintendent concurred in the study’s find-

ings, and the agency ruled “that ORV’s have been traditionally employed for access for subsistence purposes by residents in the Cantwell area of the ANILCA park additions to Denali National Park and Preserve.” But “to protect sensitive park resources in this area from adverse impact by ORV’s,” the agency simultaneously decided “to temporarily close portions of the areas to ORV use while studies and a permanent management plan are being developed.” This 120-day closure, which was sufficient to cover the 2005 hunting season as it pertained to ORV use, covered all of the “traditional use area” except for three trails because they “were considered stable enough that they would not exhibit adverse impacts.” (These three were the Windy Creek trail, the Cantwell Airstrip trail, and the Cantwell Creek trail.) Agency officials scheduled a public hearing at Cantwell for Monday, July 25; at that meeting, they discussed the issue with local residents and explained the rationale for their actions.¹³³

An NPS team, with employees from both the park and the regional office, then began to compile an environmental assessment outlining several alternatives for managing subsistence ORV use in those portions of the “new park” located near Cantwell. In December 2005, the agency mailed out a scoping letter and held open meetings on the subject in both Cantwell and Anchorage. By March 2006, the team had emerged with a newsletter outlining five preliminary management alternatives; it also announced additional public meetings on the subject, to be held April 4-5 in Cantwell and Anchorage, respectively. The NPS, at this point, had not publicly identified a preliminary alternative. But after a contentious process, the agency in August issued an internal review draft of the environmental assessment. None of the alternatives outlined in that document was announced as the agency’s preferred alternative; the document did, however, note that Alternative 4 [which would close the entire Cantwell traditional use area to ORV use, although the NPS would encourage the implementation of a winter subsistence hunt by snowmachine] “is the environmentally preferred alternative because it would have the fewest impacts to the biological and physical environment.”¹³⁴

Because the public process was still in flux, NPS officials decided to again issue a 120-day closure order as they had in August 2005; this order likewise allowed ORV access along the same three designated routes, and it was likewise preceded by a public hearing held in Cantwell (on August 1), where local residents were invited to apply for subsistence hunting permits. At the Cantwell meeting, NPS officials stated that the agency’s

environmental assessment for the permanent ORV management plan would be completed by the end of the calendar year.¹³⁵ Other matters intervened, however, and it was not until June 4, 2007 that the agency issued its *Environmental Assessment for Managing Off-road Vehicle Use for Subsistence in the Cantwell Area*. The document offered four access alternatives. The preferred NPS alternative called for the continued ORV use of the Cantwell Traditional Use Area by qualified subsistence users, so long as they remained on specific, designated trails and routes. The alternative also called for the Park Service and the Federal Subsistence Board to work cooperatively on implementing a winter subsistence moose hunt.

The NPS invited the public to comment on the proposal throughout July. A well-attended, slightly contentious meeting was held in Cantwell on July 9, and the agency held a second meeting in Anchorage three days later. Following the public comment period, park staff prepared a document that, with minor changes, mirrored the recommendations set forth in the agency’s preferred alternative. This document, called a “Finding of No Significant Impact” for the previously-published environmental assessment, was approved by Regional Director Marcia Blaszk on September 18. Agency staff then set to work on drafting regulations to implement the recommendations in that document.¹³⁶

Backcountry Management Planning

As noted in Chapter 8, the first planning specifically related to the park’s backcountry took place in the early- to mid-1970s, shortly after the park had begun regulating traffic over the park road. Due to a boom in backpacking activity and the environmental impacts of that activity, park officials concluded that there was “a need for direct onsite management” in areas of the (old) park that were remote from the road corridor. By the spring of 1974, staff had established 31 backcountry zones and provided maximum overnight use limits for each zone; in addition, the park that year hired the first seasonal backcountry rangers.

During the succeeding decade, the popularity of Denali’s backcountry continued to increase. Park staff, in reaction, increased the number of backcountry zones in the “old park” from 31 to 39, and four additional zones were established in the Kantishna Hills portion of the “new park.” But given the use limitations, an increasing number of backpackers were unable to visit their areas of interest, and some were unable to overnight in the park at all. Backcountry issues, moreover, were omitted almost entirely from the park’s general management planning process of

Backcountry rangers are tasked with a number of responsibilities, including monitoring natural and cultural resource conditions in remote areas. The ranger above checks the Stony Creek Patrol Cabin, built in 1926, one of the early ranger patrol cabins along the northern park boundary. NPS Photo, Kennels Collection



1983–86. Indeed, the only major backcountry-related agency actions during this period were those that led to the preparation of a review of the park’s wilderness eligibility. As noted in Chapter 9, this process, which was completed in 1988, resulted in a recommendation that of 3,726,343 acres in the park’s wilderness study area. The agency recommended that about 60 percent of it—or 2,254,293 acres—should be added to the National Wilderness Preservation System.

After the completion of two other major park plans (dealing with the so-called “front country” and the south side), the time was ripe for a reconsideration of how the backcountry—which comprised 98 percent of the total area in the combined park and preserve—should be managed. Park officials recognized that all aspects of the park’s backcountry were popular: individual backpacking parties continued to fill most if not all available slots during much of the summer season, mountaineering visitation increased, and guided backcountry trips became so popular that the number of licensed backcountry operators increased from 36 in 1993 to 64 in 1996. Many of the activities undertaken by these operators were minimally regulated, but others—such as Kantishna-area hiking services, hunting guide services, river trip guide services, and various dog sled services—were regulated by concessions permits rather than incidental business permits (IBPs). The use of concessions permits allowed the NPS to establish a ceiling on the number of operators; the action did nothing, however, to regulate the number of visitors who were served by those operators.¹³⁷

NPS officials were concerned about the continued growth in the number of flights to Kahiltna Glacier, Ruth Glacier, and similar nearby locations. Hoping to “prevent this place from becoming another Grand Canyon,” NPS officials in 1997 decided to limit the number of air taxi and flightseeing tour operators to the eight currently IBP holders by issuing concession permits to them. That action, by itself, did not limit air traffic, but agency officials let it be known that the number of annual glacier landings might be restricted in the not-too-distant future. Local air taxi operators, proudly independent, had varying reactions to the proposal; as one of them noted, “In some ways, ... it’s kind of nice because it gives you limited competition ... but I don’t know, I don’t think that’s really the way that America was based.”¹³⁸ The limitation was implemented in the spring of 1998.

Because of growing backcountry visitation—and more specifically because of a spike in the number of climbers, snowmachiners, flightseeing tourists and air taxi patrons—agency officials recognized the need for a broad planning effort. The agency thus started the process “to address the rapidly growing level and diversity of uses, resource management needs, and the anticipated demand for future uses not foreseen or addressed in the 1986 General Management Plan.” Park superintendent Steve Martin’s appraisal was honest and to the point: “It isn’t that we have a lot of problems right now, but we need to plan ahead to know where we’re going, so it’s not just whoever gets there first wins.” Martin envisioned that the plan would likely set up zones for

different types of park experiences, from quiet and remote to potentially noisy or crowded; he anticipated that one result of the plan might be a limit on the number of flightseeing trips per day or on the annual number of Mount McKinley climbers.¹³⁹ (Specifics of the plan's impact on the snowmachine activity is detailed in the section above, while the plan's treatment of park mountaineering is detailed in Chapter 13.)

Park planner Mike Tranel began his work on the plan (originally conceived as a winter use plan) in the spring of 1998, and it was announced to the public in early September 1999. A series of four "open house scoping sessions" followed between October 11 and October 14, and the public was given until November 15 to send in comments, both about "who uses what in the park" and about what the final plan should recommend. The agency, at that time, had hoped to issue a draft plan in September 2000.¹⁴⁰ But for reasons related to the impending 2000 elections, progress on the plan was delayed for about a year. By January 2001, park officials had compiled a series of five preliminary management alternatives and announced five meetings—to be held between February 12 and February 21—where the public could weigh in on the plan's progress. After a March 15 public comment deadline, officials began preparing an internal review draft of the plan. During and after this process, the interested public was kept informed of progress on the plan, primarily via periodic updates in the park's newsletter.¹⁴¹

Throughout 2002, park officials compiled a new version of the draft plan, which was released to

the public in mid-February 2003.¹⁴² The document, which was formally called the park's *Backcountry Management Plan, General Management Plan Amendment, Environmental Impact Statement*, was so massive that the agency simultaneously released an executive summary which was one-tenth as long. The draft plan, which was intended to "describe the future for glacier landings, air taxi operators, the number of climbers on Mount McKinley and managing snowmachining in the park additions,"¹⁴³ took the same general direction as had the public meetings two years earlier, but it provided a far more detailed view of what the various alternatives envisioned and what their impacts would be on the multitude of park resources. Of the five outlined scenarios, the NPS's "preferred alternative" (Alternative D) called for a balance between consumptive and non-consumptive activities. (Alternatives B and C had emphasized wilderness values and opportunities for solitude, while Alternative E called for expanded visitor services, additional facilities, and greater motorized access.)

As noted in the section on snowmachine management (above), alternatives B through E (i.e., all but the no-action alternative) divided the new park and the preserve into 29 management areas. Three types of use levels were delineated. The "natural area," the most restrictive classification, provided for "wilderness recreation with outstanding opportunities for solitude;" "primitive areas" provided for "high quality wilderness experience with a range of options for access;" and "backcountry areas" offered "opportunities for backcountry experience for a range of users."



Planning for management of the park's backcountry use began in earnest in 1998. Photo © Kennan Ward, NPS Interp. Collection, #5573



During the park's backcountry use planning effort, it was recognized that the number of climbers on Mt. McKinley would increase. NPS Photo

The agency's preferred alternative called for the designation of 11 zones, containing 58.4 percent of the area in question, to be "natural areas;" all or part of 16 zones, containing 36.2 percent of the study area, to be "primitive areas;" and 2 zones, plus a portion of 2 others, were "backcountry areas" which comprised 5.4 percent of the study area. The plan also recommended some changes to use patterns in the "old park;" due to the surge in mountaineering activity, the number of backcountry units was increased from 39 to 46, and a "mountaineering special use area" was recommended for the small but popular route corridor between the Kahiltna Glacier base camp and the Mount McKinley summit.¹⁴⁴

Given the new zone-based system, which was an extension of the Old Park backcountry units that had been established in 1974, the agency made a number of recommendations to allow high-quality park visits to continue despite the increasing visitor volumes. Hiking groups, for example, would be limited to 12 to 15 people; motorboats would be allowed on some rivers but not on others; recommendations were made for designated

air taxi landing areas; short loop trails would be established, in high-use areas, to prevent resource degradation; additional visitor facilities and trails were proposed in the entrance and headquarters areas; and a public lands information center was proposed in the Cantwell-Broad Pass area.¹⁴⁵

After releasing the plan, the agency scheduled a series of seven informational meetings and public hearings at various Railbelt locations. Plans originally called for a May 7 public comment deadline, but by the time the meetings were held in late April, the level of public interest was sufficiently great that the deadline had been pushed back to May 30.¹⁴⁶ Agency officials, at that time, hoped to have a final plan ready by early 2004. But in the midst of the comment period, state legislative leaders announced that they were objecting to the plan. Senate President Gene Therriault (R-North Pole) stated that the plan contained "references to restricting access to areas of the park because it could impact somebody's feeling of isolation." Given those references, he protested because "when ANILCA was passed

... traditional access was only supposed to be restricted when it was detrimental to the resource itself.” House Speaker Pete Kott (R-Eagle River) offered a similar concern. Therriault and Kott recognized that while solitude was an attraction, it should not be considered a resource; instead, they noted, “resources are physical, tangible resources such as fish and wildlife, water, air, soils and vegetation.”¹⁴⁷

The sheer volume of the public response—the agency received 9,370 comments on the plan between mid-February and late May—plus the “many substantive comments that recommended changes in the approach of the plan” caused NPS officials to reconsider some of the notions that they had put forth in the draft plan. As alluded to in the section above, protests from the State of Alaska related to access—related to snowmachines, a limitation on airplane landings, and registration requirements for overnight users—caused NPS officials to reconsider the project.¹⁴⁸ “After careful consideration,” therefore, “the NPS concluded that [the] alternatives presented in the draft would require significant modification to respond to the range of interests expressed in public comment.” In late July 2004, the agency declared its intention to write a revised draft of the park’s backcountry management plan. (As noted in the *Federal Register*, the agency’s “decision to revise the plan is in response to public comment ... which indicated the need for revised management area descriptions and additional actions.”) The new plan would “present four new

action alternatives” that responded to specific public comments; these alternatives would “broaden the range of potential actions, clarify the descriptions of management areas, and describe methodologies for managing access to the park and preserve.”¹⁴⁹

During the next few months, NPS officials spoke with various major user groups about their opposition to the draft plan. The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association, which represented private pilots, railed against the prohibition against airplane landings (save for emergencies) in the Old Park; in response, the prohibition was lifted, although NPS officials reserved the right to regulate this activity in the future. Point-to-point air taxi operators were able to move from a series of prescriptive actions (as stated in the draft plan) to a series of desired conditions. And scenic air tour operators, who had grumbled that the NPS was on the verge of setting up a quota system, were able to work out a system in which their activities were governed by encounter rates and activity levels rather than simple volume. A final area of contention dealt with climbing. Here, as noted in greater detail in Chapter 13, language in the draft remained; American Alpine Club leaders, despite initial protests, came to recognize that an annual limit of 1,500 climbers made sense.¹⁵⁰

On April 20, 2005, the NPS announced the completion of its revised draft plan. This plan, like its predecessor, offered five alternatives for



Ranger-led day hikes represent another park user group. NPS Photo

the future management of the park's backcountry. As suggested by the agency's efforts after the draft plan's issuance, planners made numerous changes to the park's draft plan. As noted in a press release describing the plan,

The revised draft focuses on setting goals for visitor experience and resource protection for different regions of the backcountry. The [agency's] preferred alternative provides for increased access to the park and preserve backcountry and proposed almost no initial limitations to existing airplane or snowmachine access. Areas for commercial airplane landings are clearly defined. The preferred alternative calls for monitoring visitor experience and resource conditions, and identifies both voluntary and regulatory steps that could be taken to manage access if monitoring demonstrates that goals are not achieved.¹⁵¹

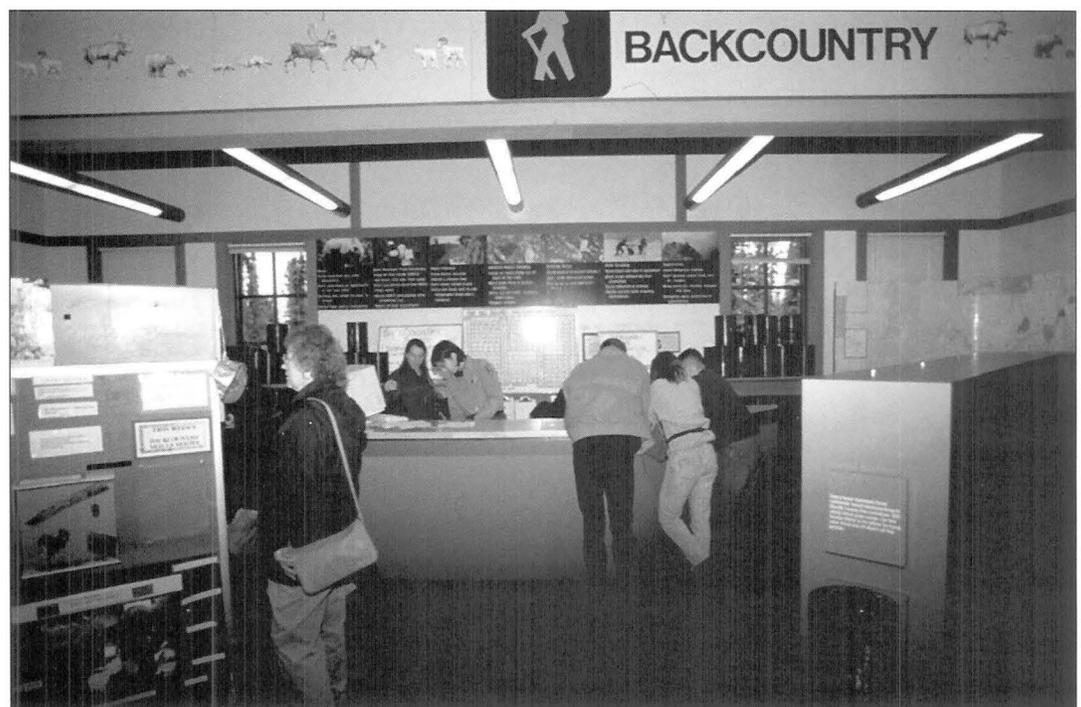
The agency's revised draft abandoned the 25-zone management system that had been featured in the earlier draft, and instead of a three-tiered hierarchy of "backcountry," "primitive," and "natural" areas, the new plan divided the new park and preserve into 48 backcountry units which would be managed in five general gradations of use. These use classifications would be called areas A through E. Area A was to "provide a diversity of opportunities ... that are relatively accessible to day-users and to those who have limited wilderness travel skills or equipment, and Area E—at the other end of the scale—would

"provide opportunities for extended expeditions in remote areas where other parties and signs of civilization would generally not be encountered." Areas B and D offered a gradation between these two extremes, while Area C specifically provided "opportunities for climbing and mountaineering in a wilderness setting."

Given those criteria, each of the four action alternatives divided up the new park and preserve into one of the five management areas. As in the draft plan, the third action alternative (Alternative 4 in this case) was the NPS's preferred alternative; as before, the first and second action alternatives emphasized protection to a relative extent, and the fourth action alternative emphasized expanded visitation and greater motorized access.

Perhaps because the NPS's preferred alternative was less restrictive than two other plan alternatives, it did not recommend that any acreage for the Area E classification. Instead, it classified more than one-sixth of the study area (17.7 percent) as Area A and another 8.2 percent as Area B. About two-thirds of the study area (68.3 percent) was assigned to the relatively restrictive Area D. Land allotted specifically for climbing and mountaineering (Area C) would comprise the remaining 6.3 percent of the study area. Also included in the plan was a large Ruth Glacier Special Use area, within Area A, that provided for "high use of transportation services" for those accessing the Ruth Amphitheatre between May and August. Inasmuch as most near-term visitation was anticipated in the three different units marked Area A, the plan allowed for

At the Backcountry Desk in the Visitor Access Center, backcountry rangers provide information to hikers about units available, hiking conditions and safety. They facilitate backcountry management by issuing overnight backcountry permits and bear resistant food containers to backpackers. In 2005 this function moved just outside the renamed Wilderness Access Center. Photo © Kennan Ward, NPS Interp. Collection, #4612



growth “along the park road in the Old Park and Kantishna; at the Ruth, Tokositna, and Kahiltna Glaciers; and in the Dunkle Hills/Broad Pass area.” The revised draft gave specific use limits for each of 75 backcountry units: 46 units in the old park, 4 new-park units (in the Kantishna Hills) that had long operated under use limits, and 25 additional, newly-established units in the new park and preserve. The plan made many additional recommendations regarding access, commercial services, backcountry facilities, and administrative and scientific activities.¹⁵²

When the revised plan was released, the NPS announced that it would be holding public meetings in five Railbelt communities; these meetings, which would include a formal public hearing, would be held between June 8 and June 15. The public, at first, was asked to submit comments by June 27; that deadline was later extended to June 30, and still later to July 15.¹⁵³ The deadlines were extended because the public responded to the revised draft even more than it had to the original draft; in all, the NPS received 15,198 public comments, almost 6,000 more than it had received two years earlier. More than 96 percent of the comments were form letters, most of which came from adherents to various environmental organizations.¹⁵⁴

In response to the “overwhelming” public interest in the plan, the agency made numerous changes to the revised draft; the public comments, which (according to park Supt. Paul Anderson) “resulted in a much stronger and more refined management plan than would have been possible otherwise,” were reflected in the final backcountry plan, which was released to the public in January 2006.¹⁵⁵ In order to be as transparent as possible, the agency took the unusual step of including, on a word-for-word basis, all text that had been either added to, or deleted from, the revised draft plan. There were, therefore, a large number of changes, of both a substantive and technical nature. Overall, however, the public had a less contentious response to the revised draft than it had had to the draft.¹⁵⁶

In the final plan, the new “modified” preferred alternative kept the same four-tiered management classification as before¹⁵⁷ and defined the four tiers the same way, but many changes were made to the management philosophy to be applied to specific areas. For example, a large area just east of Ruth Glacier was moved from Area A to either Area B or Area C, and acreage north of the Dunkle Hills was moved from Area A to Area B, and a large area on both sides of the road in the Kantishna area was also moved from Area A to Area B. On the other hand, a vast swath of

land in the northern park addition east of Moose Creek from Area D to Area B. The result of these reclassifications meant that acreage managed as Area A comprised 9.2 percent of the new park and preserve (down from 17.2 percent in the revised plan), but Area B comprised another 24.8 percent of the study area (up from 8.2 percent). Acreage in the relatively restrictive Area D classification declined from 68.3 percent to 57.9 percent, while lands allotted to climbers and mountaineers constituted 8.1 percent of the study area, up from a recommended 6.3 percent in the revised draft. The agency also made several other modifications dealing with commercial services, backcountry facilities, and administrative and scientific activities.¹⁵⁸

The issuance of the plan marked the beginning of a 30-day no action period. On February 21, shortly after the conclusion of that period, Acting Regional Director Victor Knox issued a record of decision, after which the NPS began implementing the plan.¹⁵⁹ Easing the agency’s management challenges during its eight year planning effort was the relative lack of growth in backcountry visitation; the number of annual overnight stays, for example, declined from 39,224 in 1998 to 34,016 in 2004 and to 28,623 in 2006. The number of commercial operators licensed to bring visitors into the park has similarly declined, from 64 in 1996 to 53 in 2006.¹⁶⁰

South Side Planning Efforts

During the 1980s and early 1990s, the NPS and the State of Alaska had cooperated on several proposals related to facilities development south of the Alaska Range. (See Chapter 9.) During the mid-1980s, as part of the park’s general management planning process, the two governments had recommended a hotel/visitor center complex at the south end of Curry Ridge, located in Denali State Park. In 1989, as part of the state park’s master planning process, the state—supported by the NPS—recommended facilities at High Lake at the state park’s northern end, near the intersection of the Alaska Railroad and the Parks Highway, plus a small lodge in the Tokositna area. Shortly afterward, the NPS began work on its South Slope Development Concept Plan (DCP). In 1991, an environmental assessment was released that included plans for a large hotel and visitor center, just south of Talkeetna, on land owned by the Cook Inlet Regional Corporation. Additional site studies were completed in 1992.

By May 1993, when the NPS issued its draft DCP, it had downplayed the idea of constructing a south-side hotel. Instead, the agency’s preferred alternative advocated two development sites: an initial visitor center to be located just north of

where the Parks Highway bridged the Chulitna River and, if conditions warranted, a visitor center and possible hotel complex near Talkeetna. Despite the fact that the plan treated Talkeetna as a second-tier development site, area residents fought the plan so stridently that park superintendent Russell Berry stepped in and stopped the planning process. Soon afterward, Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt recommended the establishment of the so-called Denali Task Force to investigate south slope development, among other park-related topics. The task force report, issued in October 1994 and approved by the advisory board two months later, recommended small visitor centers at three south slope sites: Tokositna, Byers Lake, and Talkeetna. (See Map 3.) Its approach, however, differed from previous plans in that “all major landowners and interest groups ... must be involved in development planning to ensure that visitor centers, lodging and access improvements are coordinated.” And it further recommended that “lodging and other primarily commercial facilities should only be developed on private lands.” A top-down approach, in which federal and state interests dictated the direction of area development, would no longer work; in its place a more cooperative planning effort was needed that included key stakeholders and local communities.

Just a few weeks after the Denali Task Force issued its report, the Alaska Region’s new regional director, Bob Barbee, visited the park and met with acting park superintendent Steve Martin and his staff. Well aware that the south slope planning process was at a standstill, Barbee arranged for the park to hire Nancy Swanton to put new life into the plan. Before long, Swanton began meeting with a host of other players—the state, two boroughs, and two Native corporations—on a more cooperative planning effort, which eventually became the *Revised Draft Development Concept Plan* and environmental impact statement for Denali’s south side.¹⁶¹

Soon after Swanton began her work, private sector developers at long last began to seize the economic potential of various sites in the south side planning area. As noted in Chapter 9, development interests as far back as June 1987 had announced plans for a lodge and convention center at a site just north of the Chulitna River bridge. Those plans gained new traction in early 1995 when Leonard “Sonny” Kragness, the owner of a 146-acre parcel just north of the bridge, sold his parcel to Princess Tours, one of Alaska’s largest cruise tour operators.¹⁶² That August, the company announced that it would build a large new hotel on the parcel. A press release noted that the hotel would be marketed to “independ-

ent travelers and those who come on cruise, bus and other package tours.” Princess Tour officials doubtless knew that the March 1993 draft DCP recommended a 10,000-square-foot visitor center in the same general area, but there is no indication that the tour company’s hotel plans were predicated on the visitor center’s construction. Instead, the company’s motives were entirely pragmatic; its business volume was increasing, and it knew that it had a limited range of expansion possibilities at its existing hotel property (the Denali Princess Lodge) at the park’s eastern entrance. Company personnel were well aware that the hotel would be “the first major tourist development on the south side of Mount McKinley.” They were also well aware that the hotel’s major selling point was its location “41 miles from the peak with an unlimited view, weather permitting.” By midsummer 1996, construction work on the new hotel—to be called the Mount McKinley Princess Lodge—was underway. The 162-room, \$25 million lodge opened on schedule in mid-May 1997, just in time for the summer tourism season. This hotel is still in operation; it is now called the McKinley Princess Wilderness Lodge and has more almost tripled in size to 460 rooms.¹⁶³

This long-sought private-sector development further supported the need for additional federal and state planning efforts for that area. As noted above, park planner Nancy Swanton led the agency’s efforts toward producing a revised draft of the South Side DCP, and in May 1995, a newly-assembled cooperative planning team began meeting on a monthly basis. Late that August, the agencies hosted a series of public open houses at various Railbelt points.¹⁶⁴ That October the various agencies announced—before the revised draft was completed—that their preferred alternative would include, as its centerpiece, “an upgrade and extension of the Petersville Road, and a new visitor center at the end of the Petersville Road upgrade in the western end of Denali State Park overlooking the Tokositna Glacier.” The planned visitor center would be just three miles from the national park boundary. In March 1995, the agencies released a revised draft DCP and environmental impact statement. As predicted, the focus of the new plan was “the Tokositna area of Denali State Park”—specifically the Ramsdyke Creek and Long Point area—where “a large visitor center (up to 13,000 square feet)” was planned along with a 50-site campground, up to four public use cabins, and several trails. The plan also called for the development of “visitor facilities and services at Talkeetna, Broad Pass, and in the central development zone of Denali State Park [i.e., the Byers Lake vicinity] when the need and op-

On a clear day from the proposed visitor center site in the Peters Hills, the view looking up the Tokositna Glacier toward Mt. McKinley is spectacular. NPS Photo



portunity to do so are established.” But perhaps because Princess Tours had already announced the construction of a hotel at the south end of the state park, the south side plan did not call for a new agency-funded or agency-constructed hotel. The NPS estimated that implementing the proposal would cost about \$42.9 million, \$30 million of which would be spent on rebuilding and extending the Petersville Road.¹⁶⁵

Soon after the plan was distributed, the intergovernmental team began holding a series of public hearings on the plan; these took place in six Railbelt communities between April 16 and April 25, 1996. Plan backers hoped that the cooperative nature of the plan’s development—with federal, state, borough, and Native representation—would pave the way toward its eventual approval. But an Anchorage news reporter predicted that “if previous Denali plans are a guide, controversy is likely.” That prediction came true. Agencies received hundreds of written comments in response, plus additional testimony at the hearings. Although one conservation group felt that the plan was “on the right track,” many of the comments were heavily critical of the plan. So strong was the criticism that the agency scheduled a seventh hearing (on May 15), and the original comment deadline of May 21 was pushed back to June 5.¹⁶⁶

In November the assembly for the Matanuska-Susitna Borough—which was one of the plan’s major partners—met to pass a resolution supporting the plan. But it ran into a wall of opposition, with 60 people denouncing the plan and just one supporting it. After a three-hour

hearing, assembly members decided to postpone their vote. Two weeks later, the assembly postponed the matter again. Those who opposed the plan, according to one news report, were an “unusual coalition” of pro-development business owners, local politicians, environmental groups and Petersville-area mine claimants. Their primary argument was that choosing the Tokositna site was too expensive (\$44 million, as opposed to a \$9 million plan that included a visitor center along the Parks Highway near Byers Lake) and that the proposal would ruin an area that was used “only by the more adventuresome people.” Both backers and opponents of the plan circulated petitions; more than 60 Trapper Creek residents signed one supporting the plan, but an anti-plan petition garnered more than 100 signatures. The NPS, during this period, backed the idea because it gave people more places to go in the park, because it was a “superior destination” that offered a wilderness experience, and because it promised to relieve pressure on the often crowded eastern entrance. As such, it was cast in the somewhat unusual position of backing development and road construction against the wishes of environmentalists.¹⁶⁷

On January 7, 1997, the Mat-Su Borough Assembly addressed the matter again and voted 7-0 to support the plan despite “overwhelming testimony” against it. More than 100 local residents, by this time, had signed petitions favoring the project, but “about five times that number” opposed it. Project opponents, claiming that “the will of the people” had been thwarted, vowed to lobby state and federal officials to prevent the project from being funded.¹⁶⁸ The NPS and its partners,

meanwhile, completed their work on the final DCP. The new plan, released in late January, was largely similar to the revised draft. One of the major changes was a 60 percent reduction in the size of the Tokositna visitor center, to 5,000 square feet rather than 13,000 square feet. In addition, the visitor center's completion date was pushed back from 2000 to 2002, and other changes were recommended as well.¹⁶⁹

The completion of the plan, however, did not squelch the voice of the plan's dissenters, and in April this group—which was now composed of environmentalists, hunters, miners, mushers and snowmachiners—met and formed the Coalition for Responsible South Denali Development. The group held a May 1 press conference in Anchorage and recommended that planners save \$35 million by building a visitor center along the Parks Highway near Byers Lake. NPS officials countered that such a center would not solve congestion at the northern entrance, nor would it offer much of a wilderness experience. But according to one news report, coalition members protested NPS plans because they “would simply provide a place for ‘industrial tourism’ to dump more tourists to the detriment of Alaska recreationists and those few guides selling wilderness experiences.”¹⁷⁰ Alaska's congressional delegation, during this period, was less than enthusiastic about implementing the plan, both because of local opposition and because its primary park-area development efforts were then being directed toward the construction of a new northern route into Kantishna.

As the controversy continued over the 1997 DCP, substantial modifications were made to address public concerns. To address implementation of the south side plan, Governor Knowles in 1997 chartered the twelve-member South Denali Citizens Consultation Committee, which included representatives from many of the same south side communities and interested user groups that had fought over the failed 1996-1997 plan. The committee, at first, met monthly. For most of its first year of existence, however, this committee was generally unsuccessful in accomplishing its goals.

Meanwhile, private sector developments continued. In May 1997, as noted above, Princess Tours' new lodge near the Chulitna River bridge opened for business, and soon afterward another well-funded tourism operator decided to locate a lodge in the vicinity. Cook Inlet Region, Inc. (CIRI), which was the Native regional corporation in much of southcentral Alaska, began in 1997 to make major investments in the Alaska tourism industry, and in 1998 it formed a subsidiary, Alaska Heritage Tours, to oversee its Alaska

businesses and sell package tours. That same year, CIRI's top tourism official, Dennis Brandon, noted that the area just south of Denali National Park was ripe for development because of the crowded conditions at the park's main entrance in the north. Based on those conditions, and in hopes of also appealing to those seeking a weekend getaway from Anchorage, CIRI decided to construct a new, 98-room lodge just south of Talkeetna. (As noted in Chapter 9, a visitor center—to be located on CIRI land and adjacent to a yet-to-be-built CIRI-sponsored hotel—had been a key part of NPS plans between 1990 and 1994. But protests from Talkeetna residents had halted any further visitor center plans.) In May 1999, the new Talkeetna Alaskan Lodge opened for business. Since then, the lodge has more than doubled its capacity; it now offers 212 rooms to the touring public.¹⁷¹

Because the decision on where to locate the area's major visitor center was still being debated, governmental officials during this period were uncertain whether Petersville Road would be a major tourist access corridor. Despite that uncertainty, Matanuska-Susitna Borough Officials worked with local residents and, in August 1998, finalized a Petersville Road Corridor Management Plan. One of the plan's elements was to enhance the visitor experience for Petersville Road users; to that end, the plan included provisions for interpretive panels, informational kiosks, vegetative buffers, and retention of scenic qualities along the road corridor.¹⁷²

In early 1999, after almost a year of inaction, government leaders once again showed an interest in producing a viable plan for Denali's south side. Attaining a unified plan proved difficult, but in March 1999 the SDCCC unveiled a draft proposal that was aired at a public meeting in Wasilla. The plan was similar to the final South Side DCP in that it featured a modest visitor center (of up to 5,000 square feet) three miles southwest of Long Point. Instead of a nearby campground and parking lot, however, these facilities would be located 10 miles away, near Forks Roadhouse; access between the roadhouse and the visitor center, via a proposed two-lane road, would be limited to shuttle buses. The committee's plan also called for a visitor center along the Parks Highway near Byers Lake.¹⁷³ In mid-December 1999, the committee issued its final report, which was definite in recommending a Parks Highway visitor center (to be located near the “Chulitna Bluffs” in the Byers Lake area). But its plans about Tokositna-area facilities were less certain; it gave no location for its “Peters Hills nature center,” and 4 of the 12 committee members refused to support the

The state-operated campground at Byers Lake, in Denali State Park, is shown here between the Parks Highway and the lake. NPS Photo



idea. The report was forwarded on to state and federal officials.¹⁷⁴ Congress, in response, provided \$175,000 to the NPS to help implement the recently-completed plan, which was to “be used for National Park Service planners and engineers and for funding the cooperative agreements for local participation in this effort.” What emerged from that funding was the 2002 Community/Tourism plan for Talkeetna, and a series of meetings for the Trapper Creek and “Y” community council area which, in partnership with borough officials, led to comprehensive community plans for those areas.

In June 2002, Matanuska-Susitna Borough officials completed and distributed a borough-wide economic development plan. Among its other provisions, that document stated that the northern Susitna Valley was borough’s the key area for tourist-related economic growth. On the heels of that report, Borough officials requested a \$750,000 federal appropriation that would be used to prepare an implementation plan for South Denali facilities. Congress approved the request, and plans were made public in the spring of 2003. Governmental officials, at first, stated that their primary purpose was “to implement the 1997 South Side Plan,” the centerpiece of which was a visitor center in the Long Point area, plus upgrades to Petersville Road.¹⁷⁵ Officials, however, soon reconsidered that notion, and stated that the new Implementation Plan would “evaluate specific locations for proposed visitor and administrative facilities.”

In February 2004, the sponsoring agencies held five public meetings as part of their scoping process. The public was given 60 days to provide ideas on where development might be directed.¹⁷⁶ Most of those who commented during this period recommended a development site away from the Peters Hills, and in mid-April 2004—at the conclusion of the public comment period—government officials announced that the Peters Hills site was no longer being considered.; in its place were three other sites, all fewer than 5 miles away from the Parks Highway. By June 2004, the multi-agency team stated that it was considering six potential development sites: 1) Tokositna, 2) Peters Hills, 3) Kroto Creek, just south of the Peters Hills site, 4) the Chulitna Bluffs (Byers Lake) site, which had been noted in the 1999 consultation committee report, 5) Cari Creek (South Curry Ridge), to be accessed via a road junction at Mile 140 of the Parks Highway, seven miles south of Byers Lake, and 6) “Hill 1007,” located at the south end of Denali State Park, just west of the Chulitna River-Parks Highway corridor.¹⁷⁷ Almost a year later, in March 2005, the government planning team provided the public a preview of the draft implementation plan. By this time, they had officially discarded all action alternatives except for the South Curry Ridge and Peters Hills sites. Their recommended action, however, called for a visitor center midway up the west side of Curry Ridge in addition to Petersville Road facility upgrades, a bicycle-pedestrian path paralleling the road, campgrounds, hiking trails, and two Parks Highway trailhead parking



This view is seen from the most recent site selected for a south side visitor center. NPS Photo

areas. The draft plan, issued in September 2005, again noted that Curry Ridge was the agencies' preferred alternative. The proposed visitor center plan, however, differed from what had been proposed in 2004 inasmuch as the site would be accessed from Mile 134.6 of the Parks Highway, not from Mile 140 as had been proposed a year earlier. More specifically, planners recommended that the turnoff—which was sandwiched between Mary's McKinley View Lodge and the state's Denali Viewpoint South wayside—would mark the beginning of a 3.5 mile paved road to a 16,000-square-foot visitor center complex which would be located at the 1,700-foot level of Curry Ridge. Most of the access road, moreover, would be closed to tourist traffic; instead, a large parking lot and camping area would be located less than one-half mile east of the Parks Highway, and shuttle buses would provide visitor access from there to the visitor center. The draft plan noted that the governments' preferred option would cost \$26.9 million (up from an estimated \$19 million in April 2005); the plan also evaluated a second-tier, \$99.5 million alternative that called for a Peters Hills development.¹⁷⁸

Shortly after the draft plan was issued, the NPS announced a series of public meetings on the plan, which were held between October 19 and November 3 in five Railbelt locations. Turnout at these meetings was generally light; the best attended of them was a November 2 meeting at the Upper Susitna Valley Senior Center, which attracted "about two dozen" Talkeetna and Trap-

per Creek residents. As noted in one newspaper article, "the relatively low cost of the [eastern] state park site and not building along Petersville Road appear to be the plan's biggest draws." But some worried that "the center could spark development that would ruin the area's rural character." Citizens were given until November 15 to comment on the draft plan; during the public comment period, the sponsoring agencies received just 72 comments.¹⁷⁹

Because public opinion favored the Curry Ridge site far more than the Peters Hills site, the three sponsoring agencies continued to support a Curry Ridge visitor center when, in early May 2006, they jointly issued the *Final South Denali Implementation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement*. The final plan closely resembled the draft plan in most if not all major aspects.¹⁸⁰ The issuance of the plan, which was announced in the *Federal Register* on June 13, started a 30-day no-action period. On July 31, Acting Regional Director Vic Knox signed a Record of Decision for the plan's environmental impact statement.¹⁸¹ Finally, almost 40 years after state and federal authorities had begun to entertain specific proposals for Denali south-side development, a workable plan for that development had finally been completed and signed. Actions that have followed since the plan's completion, moreover, suggest that Alaska's Congressional delegation appears to be amenable to near-term funding of the estimated \$28.1 million needed to implement the final plan.¹⁸²

Issues with Park Neighbors

The large number of tourists to the park, the growing number of area residents, and the area's role in the state's economic development has combined, in recent years, to make it all-important that NPS officials work cooperatively with its neighbors on various development plans. Since the mid-1990s, major issues on the park's periphery have included the Healy Clean Coal Project, entrance-area development issues, and relations between the park and nearby communities.

As noted in Chapter 9, the Healy Clean Coal Project had begun in 1989 when public and private authorities teamed up to apply for a Department of Energy grant for a 50 megawatt power plant under the federal Clean Coal Technology program. Later that year, DOE officials approved the grant; at that time, the costs for constructing the plant were an estimated \$161 million, and the plant was scheduled to be completed in 1995. But there were squabbles over project financing, and an environmental lawsuit intervened.

By 1995, plant construction costs had ballooned to \$267 million, making it more than twice as expensive as other coal plants. Natural gas producers—who produced a competing form of energy—ridiculed the project because there was no near-term demand for the electricity that the plant would generate.¹⁸³ And even though the plant was purportedly using cutting edge technology, the coal industry by this time had already refined less expensive processes that were just as effective in reducing pollution.¹⁸⁴

In spite of those factors, power plant construction finally began in May 1995. By July 1996 the plant was one-quarter finished, and 350 people—95 percent of them Alaska residents—were working on the coal-fired generator that, according to one news account, “will feed electricity to a new gold mine [Fort Knox] and other Fairbanks-area power users.” Plans called for the plant's completion in August 1997, after which it would operate in a demonstration mode for a year; commercial operation was expected to begin in early 1999. In terms of both sulfur dioxide and nitrogen dioxide emissions, it was hoped that the plant, according to one official, would “probably be four times cleaner than many plants operating in the Lower 48.”¹⁸⁵

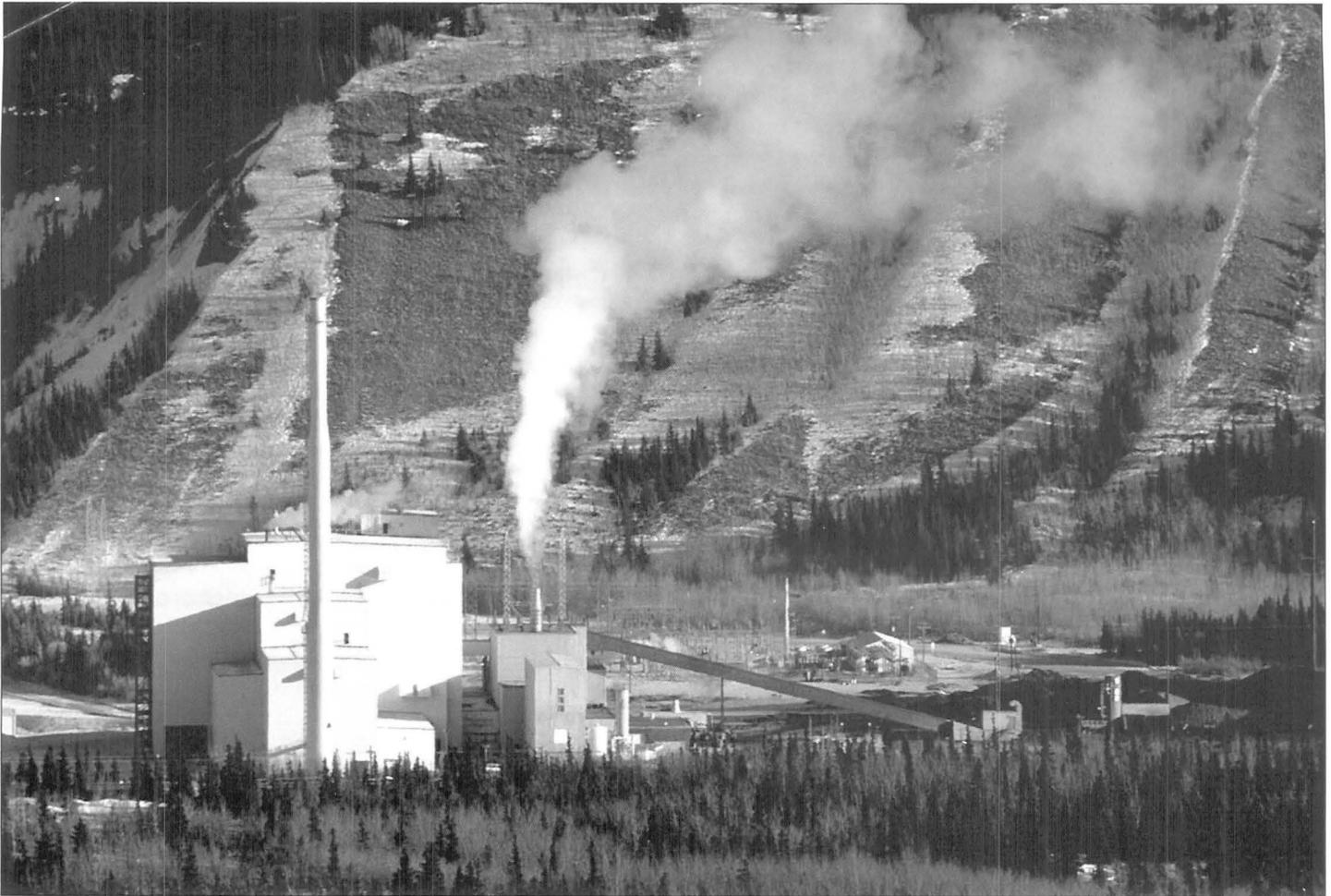
Construction on the plant was completed in 1997, and according to one of the project partners, the new plant began operations in January 1998.¹⁸⁶ But in its first months of operation, Golden Valley Electric Association (GVEA) officials discovered that the experimental technology made the plant more costly to run than the utility's other

power generating facilities; in addition, they felt that the plant was unsafe and unreliable. Based on those conclusions, GVEA filed a lawsuit in the spring of 1998 in hopes of backing out of its part of the contract. The Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority (AIDEA), which helped provide financing for the project, then countersued to ensure GVEA's continued participation.

In mid-August 1999, more than a year after the plant opened, the GVEA commenced a crucial 90-day test of its power-generating capabilities; as called for in the contract, the utility could back out of the deal if the plant could not maintain 85 percent efficiency. The test, however, showed that its efficiency was well above that level; even so, GVEA stated that it didn't want either the plant or its electricity because cheaper electricity was available elsewhere.¹⁸⁷ The plant, in fact, shut down after the conclusion of its 90-day test period, and largely because of the ongoing litigation between GVEA and AIDEA, the plant has been mothballed ever since.

For the first year and a half after the plant shut down, GVEA and AIDEA remained at loggerheads. But AIDEA, which was paying \$6.5 million per year for an idle plant, recognized that it was in the authority's best interest to get the plant running again. In late 2000 the two parties settled their lawsuit; that settlement gave the utility the option to proceed with a full or partial retrofitting of the plant, but it also obligated GVEA to work with AIDEA to get the plant operating again.¹⁸⁸ In a joint attempt to get the plant back in operation, GVEA and AIDEA offered a proposal in September 2001 that centered on replacing the plant's experimental combustors with more economical standard burners. That proposal hinged on obtaining a \$125 million loan for that purpose, perhaps from the Rural Utilities Service or some other federal agency. And of concern to environmentalists, they also needed to convince state air regulators that replacing the combustors would not result in increased pollution levels.¹⁸⁹

The NPS, in the midst of this debate, had sent out mixed messages; in 2000, the agency had gone on record stating that any GVEA retrofit had to undergo a formal technology review as described in clean air laws, but in early 2002 the NPS and GVEA jointly agreed that the utility needed only to prepare an “engineering analysis” explaining why additional pollution control devices were not feasible. This apparent change in stance drew fire from environmental groups, although NPS officials, just as vehemently, argued that the agency's position had not changed; the agreed-upon levels of nitrogen



In 1993, the Department of the Interior negotiated a mitigation agreement with state, federal, and industry proponents of the new Healy power plant to insure protection of the park's Class I airshed. Photo © Kennan Ward, NPS Interp. Collection, #4932

oxide, in fact, were 7 percent lower than had been considered acceptable back in 1993. In order to obtain the \$125 million loan, the Alaska Congressional delegation tried to include it in a spring 2002 energy bill.¹⁹⁰ In mid-April, the Senate voted to include this provision, and later that month the energy bill passed the Senate. The bill then moved to a Senate-House conference committee. The bill remained active until the waning hours of the 107th Congress, but it never reached the president's desk.¹⁹¹ Given the failure of that bill and Golden Valley's continued lack of interest, AIDEA wrote off as a loss about half of its \$125 million investment in the clean coal project. AIDEA officials, however, showed their displeasure by filing suit against the utility; the main contention of the \$167 million suit was that GVEA had breached the terms of a 2000 settlement by denying AIDEA the opportunity to restart the power plant.¹⁹²

Since early 2005, several parties have acted to get the mothballed plant running again. On August 8, Congress passed the Energy Policy Act of 2005 that included \$80 million in loans for plant repairs. These funds were sufficient to get the plant running again. AIDEA officials, however, did not request the loans and showed little inter-

est in borrowing money for this purpose.¹⁹³ But in early October, a new utility—Homer Electric Association—showed interest in the plant by signing an agreement with AIDEA. The Homer utility, which was dependent on natural gas for its electricity source, was concerned about the rising price of natural gas; as part of its agreement, AIDEA and the utility would assess the plant (which by now had cost \$297 million) and determine what work was needed to get the plant operating again using state-of-the-art clean coal technology. The following year, the state legislature did what it could to help; as part of the 2007 capital budget, it authorized AIDEA to spend \$12.5 million from the Railbelt Energy Fund to help restart the Healy power plant. But Homer Electric officials recognized that \$12.5 million was insufficient to get the plant running again, and one Fairbanks-area legislator opposed the legislature's move, calling it “throwing good money after bad.”¹⁹⁴ Perhaps because of those criticisms, Governor Murkowski vetoed AIDEA's request. Homer Electric, however, continued in its quest to obtain the power from Healy's clean coal plant. In November 2006, the utility announced that it had worked out a “potential landmark agreement” with AIDEA to restart the mothballed plant, and in late February 2007 the



The Denali Princess Wilderness Lodge, located 1 mile north of the entrance to the park, opened in 1987 as Harper Lodge. The lodge has had several expansions since that time and is now operated during the summer by more than 500 seasonal and full-time staff.
NPS Photo

two entities finalized that deal. AIDEA, according to the plan, would assume the plant's startup costs, but Homer Electric would operate the plant. The plan, however, was contingent on a resolution of AIDEA's lawsuit against Golden Valley. An AIDEA official, asked about a possible timetable for resolving the legal dispute, stated that he hoped to clear it up "in the near term," possibly within the next six months.¹⁹⁵

A second major issue with which park officials needed to grapple was how to manage growth on the park's eastern margins. As noted in Chapter 9, hotel development on the park's margins began in earnest in 1978-80 with the construction and expansion of the McKinley Chalets. This complex was owned by ARA Services, the park concessioner, and it included a gift shop, restaurant, and lounge. Continued tourist growth soon spawned additional area businesses, and by 1983 "the canyon" (as it was then known) had become home to "taco stands, horse rides, two campgrounds ... and a liquor store." A small (39-room) hostelry, called Denali Crow's Nest Log Cabins, opened in 1985, and the following year

witnessed an additional McKinley Chalets expansion. In 1987, major new growth arrived with the 154-room Harper Lodge, which was owned by a division of Princess Cruises and operated as part of the Princess Tours network.¹⁹⁶ By the summer of 1989 one news report noted that the mile-long strip of highway offered "about eight motels, a half-dozen river raft outfits, several gas stations, a pizzeria [sic] and more or less a brand-new community." In 1992, three new hostelries opened in the area, and during the early 1990s other new businesses included a gift shop and mini-golf course.¹⁹⁷ (See Map 2.) Growth in "the canyon" was matched by similar development to the north and south; during the 1980s and early 1990s eleven new tourism-related businesses sprang up along the two-mile Parks Highway segment surrounding the Healy turnoff, along with five additional businesses on the seven-mile stretch of road south of McKinley Village.¹⁹⁸

Since the mid-1990s, growth has continued along the entire 40 miles of the Parks Highway between Cantwell and Healy, the only exception

to that growth being the 6.8 miles of highway located inside the park. According to one compilation, more than 40 new businesses—21 of them hostelries—have opened up along the park’s eastern margin during this period. Most of the new hostelries were fairly modest in scale.¹⁹⁹ Three, however, exceeded 100 rooms apiece, and two were located in Nenana Canyon, just north of the park entrance: the 112-room Denali Bluffs Hotel, which opened in 1996, and the 150-room Grande Denali Lodge, which opened in the spring of 2001.²⁰⁰ Both of these hotels were east of—and up a steep slope from—the Parks Highway corridor and offered commanding views of the park’s eastern entrance area.²⁰¹ The

mid-1990s had witnessed strong growth in visitation to the park’s backcountry, and particularly heady growth had taken place with flightseeing and air tour operations. But the geographical restrictions of the park’s eastern entrance area limited the number of commercial group options to the tour bus trip down the park road or perhaps a flightseeing trip, and relatively few visitors have showed an interest in hikes to Mt. Healy or other park destinations. Other recreational alternatives have included gold panning, horseback riding, and the increasing number of programs offered through the Murie Science and Learning Center (see Chapter 11). Perhaps most popular has been rafting down the Nenana River. Raft trips on the



With increasing visitation and availability of lodging, a variety of activities have developed to interest area visitors, including raft trips on the Nenana River, flightseeing, hiking front country trails, classes at the Murie Science and Learning Center, and visits to the Denali Visitor Center. NPS Interp. Collection, #2768, Denali National Park and Preserve

Holland America Line, moreover, is in the midst of adding still more hotel rooms in the area; the 150-room Denali Canyon Lodge, located between the Denali Princess Wilderness Lodge and the McKinley Chalets Resort, broke ground in 2005 and opened to the public in the spring of 2006. Plans call for the eventual construction of more than 400 additional rooms on the property.²⁰² In addition, Cook Inlet Region, Inc., the Anchorage-based Native regional corporation, announced plans in 2005 to build a 250-room hotel on the bluff just south of the McKinley Village Resort and west of the Parks Highway. These plans have seen been shelved, at least for the time being.²⁰³

The ever-increasing crowds flocking into these hotels put increased pressure for new access into the park. As noted earlier in this chapter, the NPS in its front country plan tried its best, given the agency’s legal and ecological constraints, to accommodate the need for visitor activities. The

Nenana have been offered since the early 1980s, and by the late 1990s the activity had become so popular that six companies were taking some 40,000 people each summer on either the 13-mile “scenic” or “wilderness” run starting at McKinley Village or the more adventurous “canyon” run beginning at Kingfisher Creek.²⁰⁴

Given such a concentration of economic activity in such a limited area, and the obvious contrast between these businesses and the relatively undeveloped land outside of that corridor, various critics have denounced the area as unsightly, and since the mid-1990s a few publications have used the pejorative term “Glitter Gulch” to describe the area.²⁰⁵ As one 2005 visitor caustically noted, the area offered

row after row of cheap motels, theme eateries and chain franchises, all bunched up against the canyon



“Glitter Gulch” received the first two stop lights in the area in 2003 as part of the Alaska Department of Transportation program to improve safety along this busy section of the George Parks Highway. NPS Photo

walls like commercial lions around a tourist watering hole. ... The highest building of all [the Grande Denali Hotel] is an architectural expletive, a motel carved into a cliff prone to landslides. ... This juxtaposition of Denali and commercial crapola mocks two notions at once: wilderness and sensible land use.²⁰⁶

Such development has invited comparison with other park entrance-gate communities such as West Yellowstone, Montana; Gatlinburg, Tennessee, near Great Smoky Mountains National Park; or Tusayan, Arizona, on the margins of Grand Canyon National Park. Reporters for Alaska newspapers have been no less critical, and typically use the “Glitter Gulch” moniker rather than “Nenana Canyon” as suggested by local business interests.²⁰⁷

National Park Service officials were well aware of the area’s growing unsightliness but, because the area was on state and private land, they were in little or no position to directly influence land use changes. But they were able to participate, to some degree, in a planning process that provided various basic transportation improvements in the mile-long commercial strip. In the mid-1990s the Alaska Department of Transportation and

Public Facilities (ADOT) developed the Nenana Canyon Safety Improvements Project as a way to safely allow both local and bypass traffic; as noted in an October 1996 environmental document, the agency recommended a two-lane highway through the area plus the construction of adjacent frontage roads and bicycle paths. But local businesses, the NPS, and the general public all objected to ADOT’s plans.

To work out a more acceptable alternative, the NPS and ADOT worked with various partners—Denali Borough, the Greater Healy/Denali Chamber of Commerce, and the Alaska Natural History Association—on a Designing for Community Workshop that was held at the Denali Princess Hotel in September 1998.²⁰⁸ At that workshop, local residents argued against the ADOT plan and instead recommended more emphasis on creating a worthy gateway community with more of an emphasis on non-motorized transportation. Those concerns, in turn, were transmitted to the powerful state TRAAK board,²⁰⁹ which successfully urged ADOT to discard its existing plans. In the wake of that cancellation, Denali Borough appointed an Ad Hoc Committee consisting of local business owners, NPS staff, and other local residents. That committee worked with borough and ADOT officials on a plan that was finalized in mid-November

2000. Key to the committee's recommendations was the retention of the existing, two-lane highway, the establishment of bicycle pathways rather than frontage roads, and the construction of several pedestrian underpasses under the Parks Highway. Provisions were also included for two pedestrian bridges (over Kingfisher Creek and the Nenana River), a raft put-in spot at the mouth of Kingfisher Creek, a pedestrian walkway on NPS land south of the Nenana River bridge, and the installation of various interpretive signs.²¹⁰

Matters got more complicated, however, when ADOT officials announced plans for a Parks Highway Corridor Study. This proposed, multi-year study would encompass the entire 323-mile length of the highway, and officials announced that no project funds could be spent along the highway until the study was completed.²¹¹ Protests from Denali-area residents, however, were so strong that ADOT quickly backed down from its announced plans—at least in the Nenana Canyon. Instead, the agency decided to construct an interim project that included most of what the Ad Hoc Committee had recommended. The only major deviation from the earlier plan was ADOT's decision to drop the pedestrian underpasses in favor of traffic signals; these two stoplights would remain only until the completion of ADOT's Parks Highway corridor study. The larger study, however, got bogged down and was never completed. As a result, the "temporary" stoplights that were installed in 2003 have

remained to the present day. Construction of the remaining project elements also began in the spring of 2003. Most project work was completed that season, but the pedestrian bridges were finished the following summer.²¹²

Given the relatively large size of the tourist infrastructure just outside the park and the relatively high seasonal population, local residents began to formulate ways to attract people to the park's margins. Many permanent residents liked the idea of attracting visitors to the area for other than the usual park visitation, and local entrepreneurs were always on the lookout for ways to attract more people to the area. Perhaps the first such widely-publicized effort was the "Moose Scat Scoot," which was first organized in 1994. This event was a series of races; perhaps the most publicized was a 13-mile (or half-marathon) run, but as noted in one press release, shorter distances were also offered that could "be run, walked, bicycled, or done on a scooter." The event has been sponsored by Denali Park Resorts and organized by the company's employees; proceeds have benefited the Alaskan AIDS Assistance Association.²¹³

In early 2001 there began a new, community-based event: the Denali Winter Festival. First held over the weekend of February 23-25, "Winterfest" was an eclectic mix of outdoor sports activities, outdoor education, fiddle music, lectures, and safety demonstrations. Events were held both at Healy's Tri-Valley Community Center and at the



Winterfest activities revolve around demonstrations and participation in winter-related events, including a chili cookoff, cross country skiing lessons and avalanche awareness education. NPS Photo



In 2004, Denali's management team, left to right, included Mike Cobbold, Safety Officer, Kris Fister, Public Affairs, Dutch Scholten, Chief of Maintenance, Philip Hooge, Assistant Superintendent for Resources, Science and Learning, Paul Anderson, Superintendent, Blanca Stransky, Chief of Interpretation, Mike Tranel, Chief of Planning, Julie Wilkerson, Chief of Administration, Elwood Lynn, Assistant Superintendent for Operations, Donna Sisson, Chief of Concessions, Hollis Twitchell, Chief of Subsistence and Cultural Resources, and Pete Armington, Chief Ranger. NPS Photo

park's visitor center; the park and its employees played an active role in the program as organizers, presenters, and participants.²¹⁴ In the years since 2001, Winterfest has remained an active, popular event; though specific events have changed from year to year, events have remained focused on the area between McKinley Village and Healy, though some attendees hail from Anchorage, Fairbanks, and elsewhere. Winterfests are held between late February and mid-March; most recently, the gathering has proven so popular that events are held over a four-day period, beginning on Thursday. The NPS, in most cases, has served as Winterfest's publicist, and park employees have helped organize the weekend's various events.²¹⁵

Operational Realities: Staff, Budgets, and Seasonal Road Access Issues

During the late 1980s and early 1990s (see Chapter 9), Russell Berry served as the Denali Superintendent. In late 1994, Berry left Alaska for the superintendency of Cape Hatteras National Seashore in North Carolina, and Steve Martin—then the superintendent for Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve—was asked to take over the reins at Denali in an acting capacity. Martin became the superintendent proper the following

March, and he remained on the job until early January 2002, when he moved to Wyoming and became the Grand Teton National Park superintendent. Throughout this period, Denali had also had a deputy superintendent: Linda Toms (later Linda Buswell) beginning in late 1989, and Diane Chung commencing in July 2000, about a year after Buswell's retirement. After Martin's transfer, Chung briefly assumed the helm until the arrival of the new superintendent, Paul Anderson, who was selected at the end of January 2002. Anderson, a 23-year NPS veteran who had served for the past nine years as Alaska's Deputy Regional Director, served as Denali's superintendent until late 2007, when he was succeeded by Elwood Lynn in an acting capacity.²¹⁶ Sharing park management responsibilities in recent years have been two new assistant superintendents: Philip Hooge, who transferred to the park from the U.S. Geological Survey's Glacier Bay Field Station in May 2003, and longtime maintenance chief Elwood Lynn, who held his new position from April 2004 until he became the park's acting superintendent.²¹⁷

Since the mid-1990s, park visitation has increased about 25 percent (from approximately 341,400

Each year the seasonal NPS staff is welcomed with an orientation program and lunch, shown here being held in the Headquarters Historic District in 2006. That year the park officially employed 110 permanents and 208 seasonals. NPS Photo



in 1996 to 425,846 in 2006). The park's annual base budget, during the past decade, has also changed in fairly modest increments in recent years; the inflation-adjusted base budget rose approximately 25 percent between 1996 and 2005.²¹⁸ Given these budgetary changes, park officials have been able to hire additional staff. In 1996, the park had a workforce of 77 permanent positions, plus another 113 seasonal positions; by 2004, the number of permanent employees on the park payroll had risen to 105, plus another 194 seasonals; and by 2006 the staff total stood at 110 permanents and 208 seasonals.²¹⁹ Contributing greatly to the park's overall vitality have been the efforts of a dedicated corps of volunteers. In 1996, 68 volunteers contributed 19,717 hours to the park, but by 2004 the number of so-called VIPs (Volunteers in Parks) had climbed to 306 and they had donated 27,136 hours of effort to all phases of park operations, primarily in kennel care, vegetation reseeding, maintenance work and mountaineering.²²⁰

As noted above, as well as in Chapter 9, the problem of managing the park road during the summer season has been a continuing challenge in recent years. Vexing problems have also been a longtime pattern as they pertain to road management during the so-called shoulder seasons. Each spring, NPS officials are asked—within a narrow, challenging time frame—to clear the park road of snow and prepare it for the upcoming summer season, and each fall, the agency needs to provide access to private vehicular traf-

fic while simultaneously protecting park resources. To improve spring road management, agency officials experimented with new road-clearing methods, and to better manage fall vehicular traffic, park staff tried out new management methods. These experiments have continued to the present day.

As noted in Chapter 9, the NPS during the 1983-1985 period tried to improve the spring road-opening process in two ways: by purchasing a "ripper" attachment for the park's D-7 Caterpillar, and by constructing an insulated underdrain system in the Mile 4 area. Both methods, however, proved imperfect: the former because it damaged the paved road surface, and the latter because it was unable to mitigate the Mile 4 aufeis problem. Between the mid-1980s and the early 1990s, road crews prevented ice buildup by periodically going over problem areas with a road grader that had a ripper attached. But beginning in 1992, that option was no longer available, and for the next decade midwinter ice buildup re-emerged as a major if intermittent problem, one that had to be taken care of during spring road opening. Significant ice problems during the winters of 1996, 1999, and 2001, however, forced park staff to re-examine the situation. An Outside study of the problem, drafted in 2002 and published in 2003, recommended the importation of snowmaking equipment, to be used as necessary during October through December.²²¹ The park's maintenance division, however, rejected that idea on both economic and envi-

ronmental grounds; instead, it asked for authority to manage midwinter ice buildup as it had prior to 1992. Park officials granted that request, and since the winter of 2002-03, park road crews have again worked to prevent midwinter ice buildup. Employing this technique has increased operator safety, and has lessened the amount of time and effort needed to remove aufeis during spring road opening.²²²

Major changes have also come to those who visit the park during the fall shoulder season. As mentioned in Chapter 9, the rising popularity of fall visitation—brought on by the beautiful fall colors, the increased level of animal activity, and the lack of summertime traffic restrictions—forced the NPS in 1990 to adopt a lottery system. Each year, for a four-day period in September, the entire park road was open to motor vehicles; those able to drive the road, however, had to be one of the lucky 1,200 people—300 each day for each of the four days—selected in the lottery. (Before that four-day period, motorists could not drive farther west than the Savage River check station; after those four days, motorists were free to drive as far west as Teklanika until snow closed the park road.) By the mid-1990s, the lottery was a well-established, popular way to provide public access to portions of the park that would otherwise be closed to the motoring public.

Beginning in 1995, NPS officials—recognizing the increasing popularity of the fall road lottery and evidently feeling that the four-day event was hav-

ing no lasting harm on the park's wildlife—decided to allow an additional 100 people each day to drive the park road. This change increased, if slightly, the possibility of success for each lottery application. Those improved chances, however, soon faded away as the lottery became ever more popular; while perhaps 4,000 people sent in applications in 1995, that number climbed to more than 10,000 in 2000.²²³

After 2000, the number of fall lottery applications continued to rise, and by 2003 the agency received about 18,000 entries. This volume meant that the chance of an applicant gaining one of the coveted slots was less than 1 in 11. Managing that volume, moreover, was turning into a bureaucratic headache; while the costs of operating the lottery system had once been fairly nominal, dealing with 18,000 applications—plus on-the-ground costs for rangers and other park personnel during the four-day lottery period—now cost an estimated \$80,000 to \$90,000. Given those costs, and the ever-tightening budget with which the park had to operate, officials reluctantly decided that new funds were necessary. In May 2004, therefore, the agency announced that beginning that summer, all applicants for that fall's road lottery would need to pay a nonrefundable \$10 fee, and those who were selected for the lottery would be obligated to pay an additional \$35, of which \$10 would pay for the park's entrance fee. Members of the public, not surprisingly, were disappointed at the agency's move. And as a result, only about 5,900 people



The annual fall road opening to lottery winners provides an opportunity for motorists to drive the park road in their personal vehicles, stopping whenever they wish to view something interesting. The lottery's success depends on favorable weather conditions. NPS Photo

sent in applications in July 2004—about one-third the number that had applied the previous year.²²⁴ In the short time since the new, fee-based system was instituted, the number of applicants has risen; the number of 2006 applications, for example, was 6,885.²²⁵

Notes - Chapter 10

- ¹ Denali Task Force, *Denali Task Force Report; Findings and Recommendations for the National Park Service Advisory Board*, October 25, 1994, 6-7.
- ² NPS, *Draft Development Concept Plan Environmental Impact Statement, Entrance Area and Road Corridor, DENA* (Denver, the author, June 1996), 25-28.
- ³ *Ibid.*, iii-iv, 29-98; *Anchorage Daily News*, June 18, 1996, A-1.
- ⁴ NPS, *Final Development Concept Plan [and] Abbreviated Final Environmental Impact Statement, Entrance Area and Road Corridor, DENA* (Denver, the author, December 1996), i; *Anchorage Daily News*, August 3, 1996, D-4.
- ⁵ NPS, *Final Development Concept Plan*, December 1996, 23-56.
- ⁶ NPS, *Entrance Area and Road Corridor Development Concept Plan, DENA* (Denver, the author), May 1997; Katherine M. Heinrich, "NPS Finalizes Denali Plans," *National Parks* 71 (May/June 1997), 21-22.
- ⁷ SAR, 1996, 2; SAR 1997, 1; SAR, 1998, 1.
- ⁸ "Denali Hotel Shut," *Travel Agent* 302 (January 22, 2001), 2; "Denali Park to Close," *Travel Agent* 303 (March 12, 2001), 86; Jerry Brown, "Hotel is History," *TravelAge West* 36 (April 16, 2001), 54.
- ⁹ The 22-year-old, 5,000-square-foot auditorium was placed on a truck and moved to the junction of the Parks Highway and Stampede Road, two miles north of Healy. It now serves as the main church building for the In His Shadow Ministries. *Anchorage Daily News*, August 2, 2002, B-3.
- ¹⁰ SAR, 2002, 15; SAR, 2003, 7. Joe Durrenberger email, August 2, 2006; Steve Carwile interview, July 26, 2006; Randy Thompson email, November 20, 2006. Three railroad cars were moved to a site near the Parks Highway-Otto Lake Road intersection, near Healy's golf course. Two others were relocated to a railroad museum in Nenana, and two more became part of a bed-and-breakfast in Fairbanks.
- ¹¹ NPS, "Environmental Assessment for Location of Visitor Facilities in the Entrance Area of Denali National Park" (DENA press release), December 6, 2001; Scott N. Reiland, testimony in House Hearing on "Federal Government Competition with Small Business," Serial No. 107-19, July 18, 2001, 144-48.
- ¹² SAR, 2002, 7, 15; Public Law 106-113, Appendix C (NPS), signed November 29, 1999, in *U.S. Statutes at Large* 113 (1999), p. 1501A-143.
- ¹³ SAR, 2002, 7, 15.
- ¹⁴ NPS, "Finding of No Significant Impact, Construction of New Visitor Facilities in the Entrance Area, DENA," January 31, 2002, Steve Carwile files.
- ¹⁵ The mercantile building, built in 1958 (see Chapter 7), had served for many years as a combined store and service station, but by the early 1990s at least one service station was in business in "Glitter Gulch" less than two miles away. The park concessioner, as a result, converted the entire building into a store. Steve Carwile interview, June 26, 2006.
- ¹⁶ SAR, 2002, 15. The park post office had been located in the Denali Park railroad station prior to its move to the double-wide trailer. Steve Carwile interview, July 27, 2006.
- ¹⁷ SAR, 2002, 15; SAR, 2003, 7, 19; Paul Anderson email, January 23, 2007.
- ¹⁸ SAR, 2002, 15; NPS, "National Park Service to Dedicate New Murie Science and Learning Center," *AK2Day* (AKRO electronic newsletter), August 12, 2004; Paul Anderson email, January 23, 2007.
- ¹⁹ NPS, "New Facilities and Visitor Services in Denali Opening in May," *AK2Day*, May 5, 2005; "Focus on the Parks," *Arrowhead* (NPS newsletter), Vol. 12 (Spring 2005), 2; Steve Carwile interview, July 26, 2006; "Park to Celebrate Completion of New Visitor Facilities with Special Activities" (DENA Press Release), August 9, 2005. Earlier plans for an art gallery at the new visitor center complex have not yet been fulfilled.
- ²⁰ Drawing DENA-14001-2, TIC Aperture Card Collection; SAR, 1995, 8, 11.
- ²¹ NPS, "Eielson EA Out for Comment," *AK2Day*, April 11, 2004; NPS, "Comment Period Extended for Environmental Assessment for the Construction of a New Eielson Visitor Center and a Permanent Toklat Rest Stop," *AK2Day*, April 26, 2004.
- ²² *Anchorage Daily News*, September 22, 2004, B-1; NPS, "New Facilities and Visitor Services in Denali Opening in May," *AK2Day*, May 5, 2005; Mary Tidlow email, July 26, 2006.
- ²³ *AK2Day*, issues of April 11 and April 26, 2004 (see above); Steve Carwile interview, July 27, 2006; Mike Tranel and Mary Tidlow emails, August 24, 2007. At the Toklat site, the DCP envisioned a permanent structure with a partially-covered deck, but given the imminent demolition of the Eielson structures, the agency opted for the immediacy of a tent structure. "SSTs", an acronym for "sweet smelling toilets," were a significant improvement over chemical toilets. They were first used in Alaska at the Veterans' War Memorial (at Mile 147.5 of the Parks Highway) and have since been installed at several Denali locations.
- ²⁴ Steve Carwile interview, May 3, 2007.
- ²⁵ Mike Tranel interview, October 25, 2006; *Alaska House Bill History, 1997-1998*, for HJR 68 (p. 281). HJR 68, on June 9, 1998, became Legislative Resolve No. 85 for the Twentieth Alaska Legislature.

²⁶ H.R. 830 (February 5, 2007), and S. 1808 (July 17, 2007), in 110th Congress; see <http://thomas.loc.gov>; Steve Carwile interview, November 16, 2007.

²⁷ Congress passed the NPS Concessions Management Improvement Act of 1998, which was Title IV of the National Parks Omnibus Management Act of 1998 (S. 1693). President Clinton signed the bill into law (Public Law 105-391) on November 13, 1998.

²⁸ Mary Wysong review comments, March 13, 2007; Kevin Apgar comments, April 12, 2007; Richard G. Ring (Associate Director, Park Operations and Education) to RD/AR, June 28, 2001; NPS, *Amendment Number Six, Concession Contract Number CC-9100-1-002 (DENA001-81), ARAMARK Sports and Entertainment Services, Inc., DENA*, October 1, 2001; both in AKRO Concessions Division files. Also *Federal Register* 66 (October 1, 2001), 49975.

²⁹ David A. Watts to Stephen P. Martin, October 4, 1999, and Director, NPS to Michael C. Kelly, March 17, 2000, both from DENA Concessions Division files; Wysong review comments, March 13, 2007.

³⁰ ANILCA (P.L. 96-487), Sec. 1307(b); *United States Statutes at Large* 94 (December 2, 1980), 2480.

³¹ Mary Wysong and Kevin Apgar (DENA) chapter review notes, March 13, 2007 and April 12, 2007, respectively.

³² Marcia Blaszk (Acting RD/AR) to Director, NPS, July 11, 2002, in AKRO Concessions files; NPS, "Denali National Park Announces Selection of Concessioner Proposal for Transportation and Other Services" (DENA Press Release), July 30, 2002; *Anchorage Daily News*, August 1, 2002, B-1. The announcement stated that the contract—to an entity officially known as the Doyon/Aramark Denali National Park Concession Joint Venture—would begin in October 2002, but the interested parties needed time to review details of the contract and Congress had a designated 60-day notification period. The final contract was awarded on May 12, 2003, with a contract termination date of December 31, 2012. Robert L. Arnberger (RD/AR) to Ori Williams, May 12, 2003, in AKRO Concessions files.

³³ In 1996, the first Alaska Native corporation had obtained an NPS concessions contract when Goldbelt Inc. (the Juneau-based village corporation) had purchased the Glacier Bay concessions contract. Cook Inlet Region, Inc. (CIRI) also expressed an interest in the contract but decided to not submit a bid. Kevin Apgar interview, November 22, 2006.

³⁴ *Ibid*; NPS, *Prospectus; A Concession Business Opportunity for Transportation and Other Services, DENA (Solicitation DENA001-02* (Anchorage, the author, February 15, 2002), 10-11, in AKRO Concessions files; Kevin Apgar, review comments, April 12, 2007.

³⁵ NPS, *Prospectus*, 15.

³⁶ NPS, *Monthly Public Use Reports (Form 10-157)*, various years, see the agency's Public Use Statistics Office website (<http://www2.nature.nps.gov>). The total passenger traffic for 2005 (about 220,500) was significantly higher than the historical norm.

³⁷ See, for example, Alaska Department of Commerce and Economic Development, *Alaska Economic Performance Report*, issues of 2002 (pp. 19-20) and 2005 (pp. 63-64).

³⁸ NPS, *Prospectus*, 15; Pricewaterhouse Coopers, LLP, *National Park Service, Financial Feasibility Analysis, DENA* (February 14, 2002), 6, in AKRO Concessions Division files.

³⁹ *Anchorage Daily News*, January 12, 1995, B-1 and May 14, 1995, M-1; Stephen Monteiro, "Back on the Bus," *Backpacker* 23 (April 1995), 18.

⁴⁰ *Anchorage Daily News*, November 27, 1996, A-1 and January 2, 1997, B-2; April 20, 2004, B-1; NPS, "New and Increased Fees to Take Effect at Denali National Park" (DENA Press Release), April 19, 2004; *AK2Day* (AKRO electronic newsletter), September 16, 2005; Kris Fister email, August 6, 2006. The Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act was Title VIII of the Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 108-447), which passed Congress on November 20, 2004 and was signed by President George W. Bush on December 8.

⁴¹ "Shuttle Bus Fees" section of park website (<http://www.nps.gov/dena/home/visitorinfo/bus/fees.html>). As noted on an website calculating inflation over the years (<http://eh.net/hmit/ppowerusd>), inflation rose 28.2% from 1995 to 2006; thus both the Wonder Lake and Fish Creek/Eielson trips cost less in 2006 (in terms of purchasing power) than in 1995.

⁴² *Anchorage Daily News*, July 10, 1989, B-1 and July 4, 1998, C-3.

⁴³ *Anchorage Daily News*, July 15, 1999, A-1; July 16, 1999, B-3; July 17, 1999, A-1; July 22, 1999, B-1; the Association's website (www.dnpro.com); Mary Wysong interview, November 22, 2006.

⁴⁴ The McNamara-O'Hara Service Contract Act of 1965 (P.L. 89-246) became law when President Johnson signed H.R. 10238 on October 22, 1965; it was the result of the efforts of Sen. Patrick V. McNamara and Rep. James G. O'Hara (both D-Mich). The law (*U.S. Code* 41, pp. 351-57) has since been amended.

⁴⁵ Kevin Apgar interview, March 26, 2007.

⁴⁶ *Anchorage Daily News*, June 4, 1995, B-1.

⁴⁷ *Anchorage Daily News*, August 11, 1995, B-1; *Congressional Record* 141 (August 9, 1995), 22853-54.

⁴⁸ H.R. 3019, which included the budget of several federal departments, was signed by President Clinton on April 26, 1996 after which it became Public Law 104-134.

- ⁴⁹ SAR, 1996, 3-4; Butch Street (DSC) to author, email, April 12, 2006; Street to author, telephone call, April 13, 2006.
- ⁵⁰ SAR, 1996, 2-3; *Anchorage Daily News*, January 18, 1997, B-3; January 21, 1997, A-1; NPS, *North Access Route Feasibility Study*, DENA (Denver, Denver Service Center, April 1997), 7-9; M. Katherine Heinrich, "NPS Finalizes Denali Plans," *National Parks* 71 (May/June 1997), 21-22. Kantishna Holdings, Inc. felt that a railroad could be built for \$136.1 million; the Alaska Railroad estimated a \$227.5 million price tag, and the BRW consulting company, given the results of its 1994 study, provided a construction estimate of \$213.6 million.
- ⁵¹ *Anchorage Daily News*, October 9, 1996, B-2.
- ⁵² *Alaska House Bill History, 1997-1998*, for HJR 28 (p. 262); *Alaska Senate Bill History, 1997-1998*, for SJR 25 (p. 212). SJR 25 became Legislative Resolve No. 26 for the Twentieth Alaska Legislature.
- ⁵³ *Anchorage Daily News*, October 30, 1997, A-1, A-4; "U.S.-Alaska Study on Cost of Denali Road: A Million a Mile," *Travel Weekly* 57 (January 15, 1998), 80.
- ⁵⁴ *Anchorage Daily News*, May 23, 1998, A-1; 105th Congress, 1st Session, H.R. 2400; Public Law 105-178 (TEA-21), Section 1602, Item 1494.
- ⁵⁵ Denali Borough Assembly, *Minutes of Regular Meeting*, June 11, 2000, p. 4.
- ⁵⁶ *Alaska House Bill History, 1997-1998*, for HB 386 (pp. 191-92); *Anchorage Daily News*, May 1, 2001, A-1; NPS, "Northern Access to DENA" briefing statement, March 30, 2001, in DENA Public Affairs Office files.
- ⁵⁷ This work took place prior to the state legislature's action because, according to Denali Borough Assembly chair Scott Stowell, Senator Murkowski was impatient that work had not yet begun. Murkowski also assured borough officials that additional funds could be procured if necessary. Mike Tranel interview, October 13, 2006; Steve Carwile to Steve Martin, et al., email, July 21, 2000.
- ⁵⁸ *Alaska Senate Bill History, 2001-2002*, for SB 3 (p. 2) and SB 29 (pp. 18-20).
- ⁵⁹ *Alaska House Bill History, 2001-2002*, for HB 244 (pp. 181-82); *Alaska House Journal* 22:1 (2001), p. 959; *Anchorage Daily News*, May 1, 2001, A-1.
- ⁶⁰ *Alaska House Bill History, 2001-2002*, for HB 244 (pp. 182-83); *Alaska House Journal* 22:1 (2001), pp. 1908-10, 1988-89; *Anchorage Daily News*, May 1, 2001, A-1; May 24, 2001, B-6; July 6, 2001, B-1; July 9, 2001, B-4; January 15, 2002, B-4.
- ⁶¹ In the early fall of 2000, the Borough Assembly had passed a resolution which had paved the way toward the state's action. "North Denali Access Route Planning/Reconnaissance" page on the Denali Borough website (www.denaliborough.govoffice.com); *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, January 9, 2003, B-1, B-2; NPS, "Northern Access Issue into DENA" (briefing statement), November 2000, in DENA Public Affairs Office files.
- ⁶² Denali Borough, *North Denali Access Route Planning/Reconnaissance Study, Phase I Report*, April 1, 2003; *AK2Day* (NPS newsletter), January 4, 2005; *Anchorage Daily News*, January 16, 2005, B-3.
- ⁶³ *Anchorage Daily News*, February 28, 2006, B-4; Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, *Final North Denali Access Route Reconnaissance Study, Findings and Recommendations Report*, August 2006.
- ⁶⁴ *Anchorage Daily News*, November 22, 2005, B-1, B-3; December 23, 2005, B-4; February 28, 2006, B-4; Alaska Legislature, "Project Detail by Agency – FY 2006 Capital Budget" (chart), p. 132, via <http://www.gov.state.ak.us/omb/Archive/Index.htm>.
- ⁶⁵ *Anchorage Daily News*, February 28, 2006, B-4; Alaska Legislature, "Project Detail by Agency – FY 2007 Capital Budget" (chart), p. 117, via <http://www.gov.state.ak.us/omb/Archive/Index.htm>.
- ⁶⁶ Steve Carwile to author, email, September 21, 2006.
- ⁶⁷ *Anchorage Daily News*, January 20, 2007, B-1.
- ⁶⁸ 106th Congress, 2nd Session, *Senate Report 106-312* for H.R. 4578 (June 22, 2000), p. 37.
- ⁶⁹ *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, January 9, 2003, B-1, B-2; *AK2Day*, May 28, 2003; *Anchorage Daily News*, June 8, 2003, B-5; Denali Borough, *North Denali Access Route, Phase I Report*, April 1, 2003; NPS and Alaska DNR, *Draft North Access Visitor Facilities Study*, April 2004; NPS and Alaska DNR, *North Access Visitor Facilities Study*, August 2004.
- ⁷⁰ *Anchorage Daily News*, May 17, 2001, B-6; November 22, 2005, B-1, B-3; "America's 15 Most Endangered Wildlands," *Wilderness Society's Quarterly Newsletter* 2 (Summer 2000), 3; Kate Himot, "Ten Most Endangered," *National Parks* 75 (May-June 2001), 24.
- ⁷¹ *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, January 9, 2003, B-1, B-2.
- ⁷² Norris, *Alaska Subsistence*, 124, 127.
- ⁷³ *Anchorage Daily News*, November 11, 1998, B-1; Steve Carwile interview, October 19, 2006.
- ⁷⁴ *Anchorage Daily News*, November 14, 1996, B-1, B-3; *Federal Register* 64 (November 12, 1999), 61567.
- ⁷⁵ *Anchorage Daily News*, November 11, 1998, B-1.
- ⁷⁶ *Ibid.*; *Anchorage Daily News*, November 30, 1998, B-4.
- ⁷⁷ Stephen P. Martin to Sandy Kogl, May 16, 1996, in Carwile files; Steve Carwile interview, October 19, 2006; Chip Dennerlein, "Regional Report, Alaska," *National Parks* 72 (November/December 1998), 18.
- ⁷⁸ *Anchorage Daily News*, November 11, 1998, B-1; Joe Gauna, "Denali Wilderness Zone Should Stay Open to Motorized Recreation Says Alaska Senator," *Alaska Snow Rider* 9 (October 1998), 1. In that article, Gauna

quoted Sen. Murkowski as saying that “he will be with us in our fight to keep the Denali National Park wilderness zone open to snowmobiling, as ANILCA says it SHALL be.”

⁷⁹ Federal regulations (specifically portions of the *Code of Federal Regulations*, volume 43, section 36.11) stated that a park superintendent could make a temporary closure (for one year or less), while long-term closures required the issuance of a rule in the *Federal Register*.

⁸⁰ “Snowmachine Proposal Extends Riding Prohibition in Wilderness Core of Denali National Park” (DENA Press Release), November 10, 1998, in DENA Box 1, HFC; *Anchorage Daily News*, November 11, 1998, B-1.

⁸¹ *Anchorage Daily News*, November 11, 1998, B-1; November 25, 1998, D-2; November 26, 1998, D-1; November 30, 1998, B-4; December 2, 1998, B-7; *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, November 22, 1998, A-4; November 23, 1998, A-1, A-7.

⁸² *Anchorage Daily News*, December 29, 1998, B-1; December 30, 1998, B-6; Steve Carwile interview, October 19, 2006.

⁸³ *Alaska House Bill History, 1999-2000*, 298; *Senate Bill History, 1999-2000*, 214-15. Senate Joint Resolution 5, after passage, became Legislative Resolve 3 for the 21st Alaska Legislature.

⁸⁴ *Anchorage Daily News*, December 29, 1998, B-1; December 30, 1998, B-6.

⁸⁵ *Anchorage Daily News*, February 5, 1999, A-1; “Snowmachines Banned in Denali Park Areas,” *Alaska Magazine* 65 (May-June 1999), 17; Dean Littlepage, “Good Fight: A Snow Job in Denali Wilderness, Advocates and Snowmobilers Battle Over Trackless Alaska Lands,” *Backpacker* 28 (February 2000), p. 15.

⁸⁶ *Anchorage Daily News*, February 24, 1999, B-1; April 9, 1999, B-1; *Wall Street Journal*, May 13, 1999, B-1.

⁸⁷ Chip Dennerlein, “Alaska Regional Report,” *National Parks* 73 (July-August 1999), 18.

⁸⁸ NPS, *Denali National Park and Preserve, Briefing Presentation: Proposed Special Regulation Package*, July 1999, DENA Public Information Office files; “Core of Denali Would Remain Closed to Snowmobiles Under NPS Regulation Proposal” (DENA Press Release), November 9, 1999, in DENA Box 1, HFC; *Anchorage Daily News*, November 10, 1999, B-1; *Federal Register* 64 (November 12, 1999), 61563-72. Martin’s decision was illegal because it violated both ANILCA (based on the lack of a “traditional activities” definition) and the National Environmental Policy Act.

⁸⁹ NPS, *Environmental Assessment for Permanent Closure of the Former Mount McKinley National Park to Snowmobile Use*, November 9, 1999, 2; *Anchorage Daily News*, November 23, 1999, B-1.

⁹⁰ *Federal Supplement, 2nd Series*, Vol. 79 (November 8, 1999), pp. 1119, 1146.

⁹¹ *Anchorage Daily News*, November 20, 1999, A-1; Case No. A99-59 CV (JWS), in 1999 *U.S. Dist. Lexis*, 21148.

⁹² *Anchorage Daily News*, November 23, 1999, B-1.

⁹³ *Anchorage Daily News*, December 5, 1999, B-1; December 10, 1999, A-1.

⁹⁴ Margaret Myre’s March 2000 statement that the park remained closed to snowmachines because of “a series of 12-month prohibitions” is incorrect. See Myre, “Limits on Snowmachines Favored,” *Travel Weekly* 59 (March 30, 2000), 22.

⁹⁵ *Anchorage Daily News*, December 18, 1999, C-9. Martin’s announcement, at the beginning of the 1999-2000 winter recreation season, was followed by a similar announcement the following spring. Ever since that time, park press releases have provided similar guidance to snowmachine riders at the beginning and end of each season. Kris Fister to author, email, October 11, 2006.

⁹⁶ *Anchorage Daily News*, December 18, 1999, C-9.

⁹⁷ Steve Carwile interview, October 19, 2006.

⁹⁸ *Anchorage Daily News*, January 12, 2000, B-3; *Federal Register* 65 (January 19, 2000), 2920.

⁹⁹ Myre, “Limits on Snowmachines Favored,” 22; William A. Updike, “Letters Call for Snowmachine Ban in Denali,” *National Parks* 74 (May-June 2000), 52; “Snowmobile Enthusiasts Seek to Open Denali’s Wild Heart to Harmful Recreation” (NPCA Press Release), April 5, 2000, in DENA Box 1, HFC; Mike Tranel, review comment, June 22, 2007. The State of Alaska, however, apparently did not support the proposed rule. As noted in the *Anchorage Daily News* for March 12, 2000, p. A-12, Sean Parnell, who was a State Senate Finance Committee co-chair, stated that “statehood defense is an extraordinarily important issue right now” and further noted that snowmachine access to Denali National Park was one of the major elements in that fight.

¹⁰⁰ NPS, *Statement of Finding: Permanent Closure of the Former Mt. McKinley National Park Area of Denali National Park and Preserve to the Use of Snowmachines*, June, 2000, 3, 23. This document, along with an accompanying final rule (*Federal Register* 65 [June 19, 2000], 37863-79), provided a definition of “traditional activity.” That definition differed “in two main ways” (p. 37866) from what the NPS had propounded in November 1999.

¹⁰¹ Elizabeth G. Daerr, “Park Service to Issue Rules on Off-Road Vehicles,” *National Parks* 74 (May-June 2000), 12; Elizabeth G. Daerr, “Regional Report on NPCA’s Work in the Parks,” *National Parks* 74 (July-August 2000), 20; *Federal Register* 65 (June 19, 2000), 37863-79.

¹⁰² *Anchorage Daily News*, April 27, 2006, B-1; Peter Armington (Chief Ranger, DENA), email to author, October 11, 2006.

¹⁰³ Elizabeth G. Daerr, "Regional Report," *National Parks* 75 (January-February 2001), 26. The "snowmachine industry," in this context, consisted of the Alaska State Snowmobile Association and the International Snowmobile Manufacturers Association.

¹⁰⁴ *South Florida Sun-Sentinel*, April 11, 2001, 1-A. Horn, at the time, was described as "a Washington lawyer with close ties to the Interior Department." See Daerr, "Regional Report," 26.

¹⁰⁵ *Anchorage Daily News*, April 22, 2001, B-1.

¹⁰⁶ *Chicago Tribune*, June 1, 2001, 8; *Anchorage Daily News*, June 5, 2001, B-4.

¹⁰⁷ *Anchorage Daily News*, May 15, 2002, B-1; May 18, 2002, A-3; 107th Congress, 2nd Session, H.R. 4677 (May 7, 2002). The *Daily News* originally reported that Young's bill would "open up most of the area inside the original park boundaries," but three days later, Young's spokesperson noted that the bill would "open only a small area of the old park to snowmobiles."

¹⁰⁸ *Anchorage Daily News*, June 19, 2002, B-6; 107th Congress, 2nd Session, S. 2589 (June 5, 2002); "Regional Report," *National Parks* 76 (September-October 2002), 11.

¹⁰⁹ *Washington Post*, January 16, 2003, A-1.

¹¹⁰ Littlepage, "Good Fight," 15; Mike Tranel interview, October 19, 2006.

¹¹¹ *Anchorage Daily News*, October 15, 1999, C-1; NPS, *DENA Draft Backcountry Management Plan, General Management Plan Amendment, Environmental Impact Statement* (Denali Park, Alaska, the author, February 2003), 57, 94, 109. The primary demarcations in the draft plan, as noted in the section below, were three management zones known as "backcountry areas," "primitive areas," and "natural areas," but designations of snowmachine access did not correspond to these zone designations.

¹¹² NPS, *DENA Revised Draft Backcountry Management Plan General Management Plan Amendment, Environmental Impact Statement* (Denali Park, Alaska, the author, April 2005), 431-32, 436-37; Mike Tranel interview, October 19, 2006.

¹¹³ NPS, *DENA Draft Backcountry Management Plan...* (February 2003), 209-10, 225-26; *Anchorage Daily News*, January 6, 2005, B-1.

¹¹⁴ NPS, *DENA Revised Draft Backcountry Management Plan...* (April 2005), 41, 71, 101, 183, 187-88.

¹¹⁵ Eleanor Huffines, "Alaska," *America's Wilderness* (Wilderness Society newsletter), 7 (Summer 2005), 4; Paul Anderson, review comments, March 2007.

¹¹⁶ The plan noted (on pp. 44 and 64) that Area A comprised 6 percent of the entire park and preserve, which constituted 9.2 percent of NPS land outside of the Old Park.

¹¹⁷ NPS, *DENA Final Backcountry Management Plan...* (January 2006), 46, 157-58; *Federal Register* 71 (March 14, 2006), 13160-61.

¹¹⁸ See the final regulations for the new NPS areas, as noted in *Federal Register* 46 (June 17, 1981), 31860.

¹¹⁹ NPS, *DENA General Management Plan* (November 1986), 37, 45, 195; Hollis Twitchell interview, January 12, 2007.

¹²⁰ Hollis Twitchell interview, January 12, 2007; Norris, *Alaska Subsistence*, 184, 205, 233 (endnote 15).

¹²¹ NPS, *Subsistence Management Plan*, DENA (revised August 18, 2000), chapter 5, page 5-6; Twitchell interview.

¹²² Don Callaway, interview with the author, November 8, 2006; Steve Carwile interview, December 1, 2006; Twitchell interview.

¹²³ Steve Carwile interview, December 1, 2006; William E. Simeone, *Wild Resource Harvests and Uses by Residents of Cantwell, Alaska 2000*, Technical Paper Number 272 (Juneau, ADF&G Division of Subsistence, September 2002), 15, 19.

¹²⁴ Twitchell interview; Paul Anderson interview, April 12, 2007.

¹²⁵ Twitchell interview.

¹²⁶ SAR, 2003, 9; Peter Armington, emails to the author, November 16 and December 12, 2006. The trio was brought before the U.S. Attorney's Office in Fairbanks; two paid \$1,000 fines, while the third paid a \$250 fine.

¹²⁷ Paul Anderson to the author, review comments, April 16, 2007.

¹²⁸ Don Callaway interview, November 8, 2006; Paul Anderson interview, April 12, 2007; Anderson review comments, April 16, 2007. Specific definitions came from the 1986 GMP (p. 195); from *U.S. House Report 96-97* (p. 280); and *U.S. Senate Report 96-413* (p. 269).

¹²⁹ NPS, *A Compilation and Review of Information Pertaining to Use of ORVs as Access for Subsistence Purposes in the Cantwell area by Federally Qualified Subsistence Users; A Report to the Superintendent, DENA*, July 9, 2005, pp. 6, 55, 106; Twitchell interview.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ NPS, *Cantwell Subsistence Traditionally Employed ORV Determination, Final Determination, DENA*, July 22, 2005; *Anchorage Daily News*, August 1, 2005, B-7.

¹³² Paul Anderson, review comments, April 16, 2007. These criteria included 1) an established traditional pattern of ORV use for subsistence access that occurred within the evaluated area in what is now Denali National Park and Preserve prior to 1978, 2) a consistent pattern of use by successive generations excluding

generations beyond the control of the community or area, and 3) a significant community practice and pattern of subsistence ORV use (rather than individual practice) recurring in specific seasons for many years.

¹³³ NPS, *Cantwell Subsistence ORV Management Preliminary Alternatives Newsletter*, DENA, March 2006 [p. 3]; SAR, 2005, 21; NPS, "National Park Service to Hold Public Hearing on Proposed Temporary Closure..." (DENA Press Release), July 23, 2005. As noted above, two of the three sanctioned ORV routes had been identified in late 1994, but the Cantwell Creek trail had not.

¹³⁴ NPS, *Environmental Assessment, Cantwell Subsistence Off-Road Vehicle Management*, DENA, *Internal Review Draft* (Anchorage?, the author, August 2006), 29-30.

¹³⁵ NPS, "National Park Service to Issue Subsistence Permits and Hold Public Hearing" (DENA Press Release), July 19, 2006.

¹³⁶ AK2Day, July 11, 2007; Mike Tranel email, August 24, 2007; NPS, *Finding of No Significant Impact, Cantwell Subsistence Off-Road Vehicle Management Environmental Assessment*, DENA, September 18, 2007; Steve Carwile interview, November 16, 2007.

¹³⁷ NPS, *Commercial Visitor Service Directory, Alaska Region*, various issues, 1993 to 1996. The IBP, initiated in 1996, was similar to the Commercial Use License (see Chapter 9), which had been in use since 1981.

¹³⁸ Robert K. Yearout (WASO) to Regional Director, Alaska Region, June 11, 1997, in "C3823 IBP Converted to CP (Air Taxi Operation DENA)" file, AKRO Concessions files; *Christian Science Monitor*, September 8, 1997, 4.

¹³⁹ *Anchorage Daily News*, October 15, 1999, C-1; *Federal Register* 64 (September 13, 1999), 49503.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*; Littlepage, "Good Fight," 15; *Federal Register* 64 (September 13, 1999), 49503; NPS, "Planning for the Backcountry of Denali National Park and Preserve, Invitation to Public Open Houses" (DENA Press Release), ca. September 1999; Mike Tranel interview, October 19, 2006.

¹⁴¹ NPS, "NPS Seeking Ideas on Managing the Backcountry of Denali National Park and Preserve" (DENA press release), January 2001; *Anchorage Daily News*, February 27, 2001, B-1; Elizabeth G. Daerr, "Regional Report on NPCA's Work in the Parks," *National Parks* 75 (May-June 2001), p. 20. The park newsletter, the *Denali Dispatch*, had been published since the mid-1990s.

¹⁴² *Anchorage Daily News*, January 18, 2002, B-3; May 15, 2002, B-1; *Federal Register* 68 (February 25, 2003), 8782-83.

¹⁴³ The quote is from park superintendent Paul Anderson from the *Anchorage Daily News*, June 15, 2005, B-3.

¹⁴⁴ NPS, *DENA Draft Backcountry Management Plan, General Management Plan Amendment, Environmental Impact Statement* (February 2003), 56, 94.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 56-61.

¹⁴⁶ *Federal Register* 68 (February 25, 2003), 8783; *Federal Register* 68 (May 2, 2003), 23485; *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, April 23, 2003, A-1, A-11.

¹⁴⁷ *Anchorage Daily News*, June 8, 2003, B-3.

¹⁴⁸ As noted in the revised draft plan, 8,301 of the 9,341 responses were form letters. The "vast majority" of these came from devotees of either the Wilderness Society or the National Parks Conservation Association; another 300 "addressed only aircraft issues" and were generated by members of the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association. NPS, *DENA Revised Draft Backcountry Management Plan...* (April 2005), 1, 431-32, 436-41. AOPA members sent in about 400 form letters—not 8,000, as noted in the *Anchorage Daily News*, June 15, 2005, B-3.

¹⁴⁹ *Federal Register* 69 (July 27, 2004), 44678, and *Federal Register* 70 (April 26, 2005), 21440-41.

¹⁵⁰ NPS, *DENA Draft Backcountry Management Plan...* (February 2003), 57, 105; NPS, *DENA Revised Draft Backcountry Management Plan...* (April 2005), 193, 442-68; Mike Tranel interview, October 19, 2006.

¹⁵¹ *Federal Register* 70 (April 26, 2005), 21440-41; NPS, "DENA Releases Revised Draft Backcountry Management Plan" (DENA Press Release), April 25, 2005. Page 2 of the newly-released plan (NPS, *DENA Revised Draft Backcountry Management Plan...*, April 2005) gave a detailed description of the differences between the February 2003 draft and the April 2005 revision.

¹⁵² NPS, *DENA Revised Draft Backcountry Management Plan...* (April 2005), 41-42, 70-74, 101, 511-15. Two of the 46 Old Park backcountry units—those which surrounded Mount McKinley and Mount Foraker, respectively—also included a small amount of New Park acreage.

¹⁵³ NPS, "DENA Releases Revised Draft Backcountry Management Plan" (DENA Press Release), April 25, 2005; *Federal Register* 70 (April 26, 2005), 21440-41; *Federal Register* 70 (May 31, 2005), 30969-70; *Federal Register* 70 (June 28, 2005), 37108.

¹⁵⁴ NPS, *Final Backcountry Management Plan, General Management Plan Amendment, Environmental Impact Statement*, DENA (January 2006), 2, 179.

¹⁵⁵ *Federal Register* 71 (January 19, 2006), 3118-19; NPS, "DENA Releases Final Backcountry Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement" (DENA press release), January 18, 2006, in DENA Public Affairs files.

¹⁵⁶ Mike Tranel interview, October 19, 2006.

- ¹⁵⁷ The revised draft had espoused a five-tiered management system, but the NPS's preferred alternative recommended no acreage in Area E, its most restrictive classification.
- ¹⁵⁸ NPS, *DENA Revised Draft Backcountry Management Plan...* (April 2005), 41, 70, 101; NPS, *Final Backcountry Management Plan...* (January 2006), 2-3, 36, 44, 81. The Ruth Glacier Special Use Area, first propounded in the revised draft, remained unchanged in the final plan.
- ¹⁵⁹ NPS, "DENA Releases Final Backcountry Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement" (DENA press release), January 18, 2006; *Federal Register* 71 (March 14, 2006), 13160-61.
- ¹⁶⁰ NPS, *Commercial Services Directory, Alaska Region*, various annual issues, 1996 to 2006; NPS, *Final South Denali Implementation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement* (Denali Park, the author, April 2006), 317.
- ¹⁶¹ SAR, 1995, 2; Steve Carwile interview, October 25, 2006.
- ¹⁶² Mike Tranel interview, October 25, 2006.
- ¹⁶³ *Anchorage Daily News*, August 5, 1995, C-1; July 31, 1996, D-1, D-4; May 12, 1997, B-1, B-4; "Tourism," *Alaska Business Monthly* 12 (November 1996), 14. The lodge is actually 43 miles "as the crow flies" from Mount McKinley.
- ¹⁶⁴ SAR, 1995, 3; *Anchorage Daily News*, August 27, 1995, B-3.
- ¹⁶⁵ *Federal Register* 60 (October 25, 1995), 54705; *Federal Register* 61 (March 25, 1996), 12095-96; NPS, *Revised Draft, Development Concept Plan, Environmental Impact Statement, South Side Denali Alaska* (Denver, the author, March 1996), iv, 13, 31-36, 209-10.
- ¹⁶⁶ *Federal Register* 61 (March 25, 1996), 12095-96; *Federal Register* 61 (May 13, 1996), 22072; *New York Times*, April 28, 1996, V:3; Chip Dennerlein, "Regional Report," *National Parks* 70 (July-August 1996), 22; SAR, 1996, 1-2; *Anchorage Daily News*, November 4, 1996, B-1; December 1, 1996, WA 9.
- ¹⁶⁷ *Anchorage Daily News*, November 4, 1996, B-1; November 7, 1996, B-5; November 18, 1996, C-1; November 20, 1996, B-1, B-3.
- ¹⁶⁸ *Anchorage Daily News*, January 8, 1997, C-1.
- ¹⁶⁹ *Federal Register* 62 (January 23, 1997), 3521; NPS, *Development Concept Plan, South Side, Denali, Alaska* (Denver, the author, February 1997), iii-vii, 14-22; NPS, *Final Development Concept Plan, Environmental Impact Statement, South Side, Denali, Alaska* (Denver, the author, December 1996), v-vii, 35-42; Katherine M. Heinrich, "NPS Finalizes Denali Plans," *National Parks* 71 (May-June 1997), pp. 21-22.
- ¹⁷⁰ *Anchorage Daily News*, May 1, 1997, B-2; May 2, 1997, B-6.
- ¹⁷¹ *Anchorage Daily News*, April 22, 1999, F-1, F-4.
- ¹⁷² Matanuska-Susitna Borough, *Petersville Road Corridor Management Plan*, August 1998; see www.co.mat-su.ak.us/denali/documents/Petersville%20Road%20Corridor.pdf.
- ¹⁷³ *Anchorage Daily News*, January 21, 1999, B-1; March 30, 1999, B-1.
- ¹⁷⁴ *Anchorage Daily News*, December 14, 1999, B-1.
- ¹⁷⁵ *Anchorage Daily News*, May 19, 2003, B-1, B-7.
- ¹⁷⁶ *Federal Register* 69 (February 13, 2004), 7253-54; *Anchorage Daily News*, April 15, 2004, B-2; NPS, *Draft South Denali Implementation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement* (Denali Park, the author, September 2005), 221.
- ¹⁷⁷ *Anchorage Daily News*, April 15, 2004, B-1, B-2.
- ¹⁷⁸ *Anchorage Daily News*, April 13, 2005, G-4; NPS, *Draft South Denali Implementation Plan*, September 2005, 25-29, 247, Figure 2-10 and 2-11; *AK2Day*, September 14, 2005; *Federal Register* 70 (September 21, 2005), 55414-15.
- ¹⁷⁹ *Anchorage Daily News*, November 2, 2005, G-4; November 9, 2005, G-1; NPS, *Final South Denali Implementation Plan* (April 2006), 237, 245.
- ¹⁸⁰ *AK2Day*, May 1, 2006; NPS, *Final South Denali Implementation Plan* (April 2006), 26-30, 40-50 plus the "Summary of Changes" page before the executive summary.
- ¹⁸¹ *Federal Register* 71 (May 5, 2006), 26498; *Federal Register* 71 (June 13, 2006), 34159; *Federal Register* 71 (September 18, 2006), 54687-88.
- ¹⁸² Steve Carwile interview, October 31, 2006; NPS, *Final South Denali Implementation Plan* (April 2006), 300.
- ¹⁸³ *Anchorage Daily News*, October 10, 1999, F-1.
- ¹⁸⁴ *Anchorage Daily News*, September 30, 2001, J-1, J-4.
- ¹⁸⁵ *Anchorage Daily News*, July 5, 1996, E-1, E-2.
- ¹⁸⁶ Ginny Fay, "A History of Alaska's Mega Projects," unpub. mss., Alaska Conservation Alliance, June 2003, 17, in Denali Administrative History Collection; www.usibelli.com/chron.html.
- ¹⁸⁷ *Anchorage Daily News*, October 10, 1999, F-1; November 9, 2005, F-1, F-5.
- ¹⁸⁸ *Anchorage Daily News*, November 9, 2005, F-5.
- ¹⁸⁹ *Anchorage Daily News*, September 30, 2001, J-1, J-4.
- ¹⁹⁰ *Anchorage Daily News*, March 2, 2002, B-1.
- ¹⁹¹ Rebecca Adams, "Coal Takes Stronger Position in Nation's Energy Strategy," *CQ Weekly* 60 (June 1, 2002), 1440-47; 107th Congress, H.R. 4 EAS (April 25, 2002), Sec. 1237, in www.thomas.gov.
- ¹⁹² *Anchorage Daily News*, November 20, 2002, A-1; November 9, 2005, F-1, F-5.

¹⁹³ *Anchorage Daily News*, November 9, 2005, F-5. The bill, which became Public Law 109-58, was H.R. 6 in the 109th Congress; Sec. 412 noted the Healy power plant provision.

¹⁹⁴ 24th Alaska Legislature, SB 231, Section 62(f); *Anchorage Daily News*, October 18, 2005, D-1, D-4; May 6, 2006, D-1, D-4. The \$12.5 million expenditure had originally been included in HB 463, introduced on February 13, 2006 by Rep. Pete Kelly (R-Fairbanks).

¹⁹⁵ *Anchorage Daily News*, September 29, 2006, F-1; November 17, 2006, D-4; March 1, 2007, F-1.

¹⁹⁶ SAR, 1983, 1; SAR, 1986, 1; SAR, 1987, 5; *Anchorage Daily News*, September 29, 2002, H-2. The Harper Lodge was Princess Tours' first Alaska hotel.

¹⁹⁷ *Anchorage Daily News*, August 13, 1989, F-3; August 3, 1991, B-5; *The Milepost*, 1992, pp. 341-42.

According to *The Milepost*, the Denali River View Inn, Mount McKinley Motor Lodge, and Sourdough Cabins all opened for the first time in 1992.

¹⁹⁸ *The Milepost*, various years, 1981-1993.

¹⁹⁹ *The Milepost*, various years, 1994-2005.

²⁰⁰ "New Hotel Slated for Denali Park Entrance," *Alaska Business Monthly* 16 (September 2000), 7. The third large hotel was the 242-room Denali North Star Inn, which opened at the Healy turnoff in 1996. One year earlier, this "inn" had been housing Endicott Field (North Slope) oil workers; in 1994, its constituent parts had been brought to Healy to accommodate construction crews for the Healy Clean Coal Plant. Since 2005, the facility, called "The Princess Homestead" and owned by the Alaska Hotel Properties subsidiary of Princess Tours, has served as contract employee housing. *Anchorage Daily News*, July 5, 1996, E-2; September 30, 2001, J-1; *The Milepost*, 1996-97 edition, pp. 391, 442-43; Mary Wysong email, November 8, 2006; Jane Bryant email, November 29, 2006.

²⁰¹ On March 20, 1996, an early morning fire—caused by a faulty furnace—destroyed more than half of the Denali Princess Lodge (formerly known as Harper Lodge). Prospects for the tourist season, which was set to begin in just 55 days, seemed dim at first. But in the fire's wake a Princess Tours official, Tom Dow, stated that "We're shooting for being in full operation in the mid-May time frame." After an exhaustive, round-the-clock effort (and \$18-21 million in rebuilding expenses), the job was completed on time and the hotel was ready for the season's first tourists, who arrived on May 14. *Anchorage Daily News*, March 21, 1996, A-1; June 16, 1996, C-1, C-3; "Winter Fire Destroys Buildings," *Alaska Magazine* 62 (August 1996), 12; SAR, 1996, 4.

²⁰² Several years before construction commenced, there had been on-again, off-again plans for a large hotel in the area. In March 2000, CIRI and Doyon Ltd. announced plans to jointly open a 350 room hotel, and in August 2001, Holland America first released plans for a 300-room hotel on the property. *Anchorage Daily News*, March 31, 2000, B-6; August 16, 2001, A-1; October 27, 2005, F-1.

²⁰³ *Anchorage Daily News*, December 6, 2005, F-1; June 22, 2006, F-1; Charlie Loeb email, March 12, 2007.

²⁰⁴ *Anchorage Daily News*, June 13, 1999, B-1; Dan Randle, "Crisis of Confidence," *Alaska* 66 (August 2000), 26-29; Bruce Woods, "Undeniably Denali," *Alaska* 66 (December/January 2001), 6, 8. Three people, all in their 70s, have died while running the Nenana River over the years: a Massachusetts woman in 1990 and two Georgia women in 1999.

²⁰⁵ The first known, published use of the term was apparently in the mid-1990s, but some local residents used the name beginning in the late 1980s. *Anchorage Daily News*, August 4, 1996, A-6; Steve Carwile interview, November 3, 2006.

²⁰⁶ Robert M. Thorson, "Spoiled or Preserved? Edgartown's a Gem; Not So the Doorway to Denali," *Hartford Courant*, September 1, 2005, in *AK2Day*, September 15, 2005.

²⁰⁷ *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, July 17, 2000, A-1; *Anchorage Daily News*, August 5, 2005, H-5; *Juneau Empire*, June 19, 2006, A-3.

²⁰⁸ SAR, 1997, 1; 1998, 1; Charlie Loeb to author, email, November 6, 2006; Tim Woster to author, email, November 7, 2006.

²⁰⁹ "The TRAAK Board" was an acronym for the Governor's Trails and Recreational Access for Alaska Citizens' Advisory Board. This board was established by administrative order in February 1996. See <http://www.gov.state.ak.us/admin-orders/161.html>.

²¹⁰ Charlie Loeb email, November 6, 2006; Tim Woster email, November 7, 2006; *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, July 17, 2000, A-1, A-6.

²¹¹ *Anchorage Daily News*, November 20, 2000, A-1; Charlie Loeb email, November 6, 2006.

²¹² SAR, 2002, 8, 9; Charlie Loeb email, November 6, 2006; Tim Woster email, November 7, 2006; *Anchorage Daily News*, July 3, 2004, D-1.

²¹³ *Anchorage Daily News*, June 26, 2001, D-3; www.runwalkjog.com (Alaska running calendar) for 2006. As noted in Chapter 9, a half-marathon (the Pygmy Tundra Buffalo Run) had been held at the park since the mid-1970s, but that event had generally not been publicized outside of the park vicinity. Steve Carwile interview, November 6, 2006.

²¹⁴ *Anchorage Daily News*, February 18, 2001, K-3.

²¹⁵ *Anchorage Daily News*, March 14, 2002, B-3.

²¹⁶ DENA Press Release, January 28, 2002; Kris Fister email, November 17, 2006.

²¹⁷ SAR, 2003, 35; NPS, "New Assistant Superintendent Selected for DENA" (DENA Press Release, May 13, 2003) and "New Assistant Superintendent for Operations Selected" (DENA Press Release, April 22, 2004), in Public Information Officer's files, DENA.

²¹⁸ As noted in Appendix A, the park's base budget between 1996 and 2005 rose approximately 51 percent, from \$7.2 to \$10.8 million. About half of the budget increase, however, was consumed by inflation. See the "Purchasing Power of Money in the United States from 1774 to 2005" website: <http://www.measuringworth.com/calculators/ppowerus/>. In addition to the park base, additional funds come to the park through various project funds, recreational fee (formerly "fee demo") funds, concession franchise fees, special use permit funds, and various miscellaneous funds. Given these additional funding sources, the total park allocation in recent years has been approximately twice the level of base funding. So-called "fee demo" money was authorized under the Recreational Fee Demonstration Program that Congress had authorized in April 1996; these funds, beginning in December 2004, were managed under the provisions of the Federal Lands Recreation Fee Enhancement Act. *Anchorage Daily News*, December 14, 1998, B-1; Shane McGoldrick interview, November 16, 2006; Sec. 315 of Public Law 104-134, signed April 26, 1996; Title VIII of Public Law 108-447, signed December 8, 2004.

²¹⁹ SAR, 1996, 15; SAR, 2004, 42; Julie Wilkerson email, January 30, 2007.

²²⁰ SAR, 1996, 14; SAR, 2004, 9; *Anchorage Daily News*, August 8, 2004, D-3.

²²¹ Ted S. Vinson and David Lofgren, "Denali Park Access Road Icing Problems and Mitigation Options," in Marcia Phillips, Sarah M. Springman, and Lukas U. Arenson, ed., *Permafrost: Proceedings of the 8th International Conference on Permafrost, Zurich, Switzerland, 21-25 July 2003* (Lisse, Netherlands, A.A. Balkema, 2003), 1189-94.

²²² Brad Ebel email, August 29, 2006 and March 7, 2007.

²²³ Clare Schuster, telephone interview by Kristen Griffin, September 25, 2000; Clare (Schuster) Curtis email, October 20, 2006; *AK2Day*, May 11, 2004.

²²⁴ *AK2Day*, May 11, 2004; *Anchorage Daily News*, September 29, 2002, G-1; May 10, 2004, B-1, B-9; September 26, 2004, K-3; June 25, 2005, B-1.

²²⁵ Clare Curtis email, October 20, 2006. Oddly enough, the imposition of the registration fee did not necessarily diminish the number of "no-shows." Whereas about 15% of all applicants typically failed to appear at the Savage River check station during the 1995-2003 period, the number of September 2004 "no-shows" was 29.1%, followed by 24.5% in 2005. The percentage in 2006 dropped to 13.5% although, according to Curtis, "2006 isn't the best comparison year because of the exceptionally good weather."

