



Brooks River Visitor Access Environmental Impact Statement

Public Scoping: Access Design Concepts

This is the second newsletter concerning the Brooks River Visitor Access Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

The National Park Service (NPS) is preparing a plan to reconsider access to the Brooks River area. The NPS is evaluating a replacement of the current floating bridge and associated trails to improve visitor access at the Brooks River area of Katmai National Park and Preserve. This bridge replacement would support the same pedestrian and small vehicle traffic that currently utilizes the existing floating bridge. The NPS is also considering relocating the existing NPS barge landing and access road away from the Brooks River. These access improvements are being evaluated under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) through preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

Scoping is a process intended to reach out to all interested parties early in the development of an EIS to identify areas of concern associated with the proposed project. Scoping provides opportunities for people to express their views and concerns. The process is designed to help ensure that all substantial issues are fully addressed during the course of the EIS.

Park managers estimate that annual Brooks Camp visitation currently exceeds 10,000 visitors annually, with arrival by floatplane or by boat. Existing facilities at Brooks Camp on the north side of the Brooks River include the Brooks Lodge and cabins, visitor center, auditorium, ranger station, park and concession employee housing, maintenance facilities, and a campground. Three bear viewing platforms and the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes Road are located on the opposite (south) side of the Brooks River.

To access all facilities, visitors, park staff, and concessionaire employees currently



One conceptual design for the proposed river crossing is a short-span pile supported wood frame bridge (view to the north)

rely on a seasonally-installed, pontoon-style floating bridge to cross the Brooks River. The floating bridge is located near the river mouth, and is annually installed in the spring and removed in the fall.

The area around the Brooks River is part of the Brooks River Archeological District National Historic Landmark, one of the most significant archeological sites in Alaska.

The Brooks River is part of the Naknek Lake drainage, which includes pristine sockeye (red) salmon spawning and rearing habitat that support some of the largest runs of sockeye salmon in the world.

The river corridor has been a favored resource site of indigenous people for thousands of years due to its abundance of returning salmon during the summer. Both banks of the river have abundant archaeological resources that date back to prehistoric times of the first human inhabitants of the region. The descendants of the early inhabitants of the Brooks River continued to fish at Brooks Camp until the early 1950s.

The Brooks River is an important foraging location for brown bears, who gather seasonally to feed on nutrient-rich spawning salmon. The seasonal gathering of bears, 40-70 at peak times, provides world-class wildlife viewing opportunities. The Brooks River also provides world-class recreational fishing opportunities.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

This EIS will further the implementation of the 1996 Brooks River Area Development Concept Plan (DCP) and EIS. The DCP calls for phased relocation of facilities and park operations from the north side of the Brooks River at Naknek Lake to the south side of the river. The major objectives identified for relocation of park facilities and operations in the DCP are: the protection of extensive cultural resources, improving visitor experience, relocating Brooks Camp facilities away from the north side of the river and Brooks Lake thereby reducing the development footprint in those areas.

In recent years, as funding has allowed, the NPS has taken steps to address the objective of relocating park facilities and operations to the south side of the river including:

- Completion of elevated pedestrian walkways and bear viewing platforms near Brooks River Falls and the lower Brooks River.
- Consolidation of maintenance facilities, generators, utilities, and fuel tanks at the Valley Road Administrative Area.
- Proposed replacement and relocation of four Brooks Camp North seasonal tent frame units with two cabins to the Valley Road Administrative Area.

In addition to evaluating bridge design concepts, this EIS will re-evaluate floatplane and barge access locations described in the 1996 DCP.

WHY IS A NEW BRIDGE NEEDED?

A new bridge and boardwalk would:

Improve safety and access for visitors and staff. A new bridge and elevated walkway would enable visitors, park staff, and concession employees to safely travel between the north and south sides of the Brooks River. The existing floating bridge and bridge access trails are located within prime bear feeding habitat. During the peak bear use periods of late June through July and September, brown bear activity near the floating bridge can intermittently delay river crossings, at times for prolonged periods. The NPS has allocated considerable time and personnel to manage pedestrian flow relative to bear activity near the bridge. The existing bridge also requires annual installation and removal, frequent maintenance and repair (including bear-caused damage), riverbank erosion control, and annual bank stabilization repairs due to storm damage and high water events.

Protect natural and cultural resources. The Brooks River is an important feeding area for brown bears. Up to 70 bears return to the river to feed on the abundant sockeye salmon each year. The area is part of the Brooks River Archeological District National Historic Landmark. Improvements to visitor access would further protect natural and cultural resources.

Facilitate improved access to and within Brooks Camp. Providing dependable access across the Brooks River will

improve safety and facilitate foot traffic and small vehicle flow for access to current and future facilities on both sides of the river.

Advance the phased relocation of park facilities. To advance a phased relocation of facilities and operations from the north side to the south side of the river, and address DCP objectives, the NPS is evaluating proposed design concepts to the current floating bridge that might reduce ground-level bear-human interactions near the river and facilitate traffic flow across the river when bear activity is high.

BARGE LANDING

A new location for a NPS barge landing area is being proposed as part of this re-evaluation. Currently, barges land at the mouth of the Brooks River on the south side. Three new landing areas, all south of the current landing location along the shore of Naknek Lake, are being considered. These barge landing options would be located in less resource sensitive areas, away from bears and out of the view of visitors.

PREPARING THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

The EIS will identify potential impacts that the proposed Brooks River bridge and boardwalk project could have on the environment, as well as identify

measures to mitigate these impacts. The EIS will also contain an analysis of secondary and cumulative effects of the project alternatives. As the lead agency, the NPS is responsible for the development of the EIS, which includes:

- A process for public participation
- Identifying project issues and concerns
- Identifying the purpose and need for the proposed action
- Describing the affected environment
- Developing a range of alternatives
- Developing and evaluating the effects of a range of alternatives for the proposed project

The schedule for this EIS process is as follows:

Notice of Intent	March 2009
Scoping	Fall 2009
Draft EIS completed	Fall/Winter 2010
Public Comment on Draft EIS	Winter 2010
Final EIS	Fall 2011
Record of Decision	Winter 2011



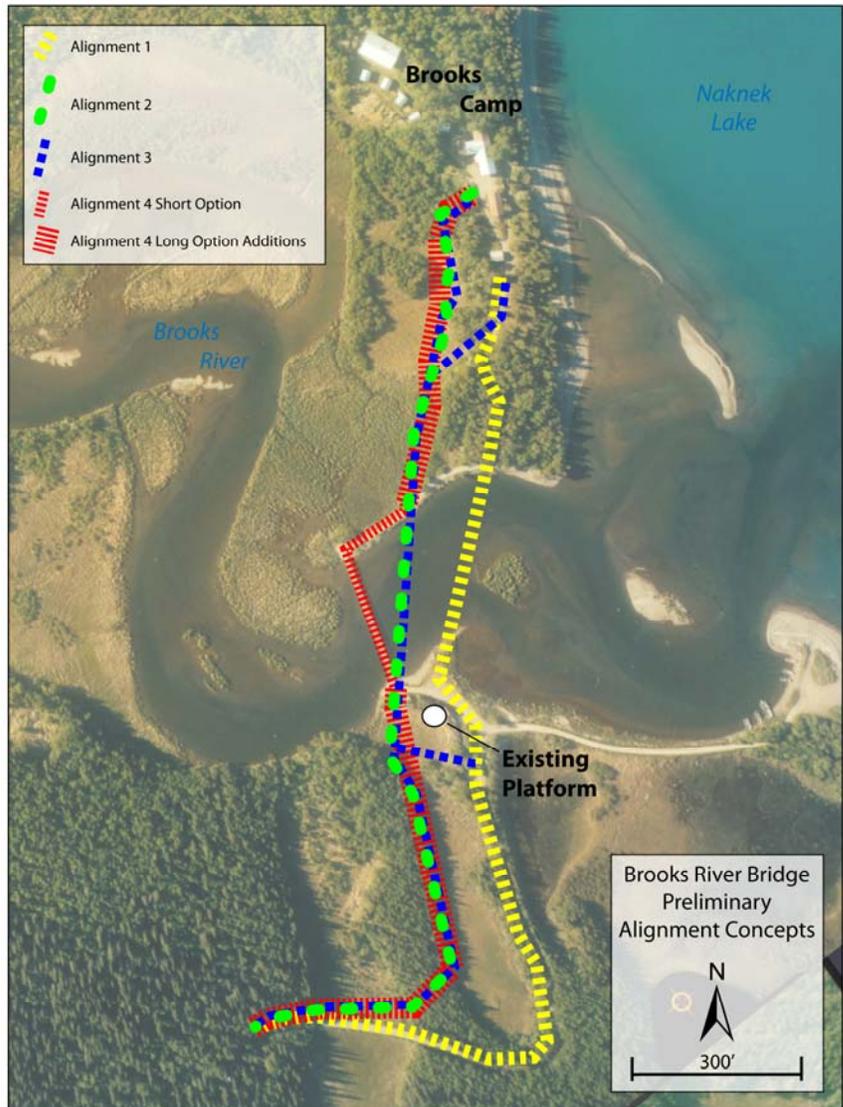
Brooks River area

In addition to a No Action alternative, four alignment concepts are currently proposed (identified as 1-4 in the figure to the right). The alignment concepts include segments on the north side of the river, the river crossing, and the south side of the river. Some design concepts also include proposed viewing nodes along the north boardwalk. All designs are intended to accommodate foot traffic and small utility vehicles. Different combinations of the alignment concept segments may be considered. Other alignment concepts could be identified during the EIS scoping process.

Three different alignment concepts have been proposed for the north boardwalk, which could provide access from the Brooks Lodge area directly to the elevated bridge.

Three different bridge design concepts have also been proposed, which could provide a protected river crossing for people, while allowing bears and fish to pass underneath. Three different bridge structural types have been proposed: (1) a short-span pile-supported wood frame bridge comparable in structure and materials to the existing boardwalks and platforms, (2) a mid-span wood truss bridge that includes multiple spans to cross the river, or (3) a free-span cable-stayed (suspension) bridge. These bridge design concepts are illustrated in photos in this newsletter.

Two different alignment concepts have been proposed for the south boardwalk. Both could provide elevated access from the bridge to the current Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes tour bus parking location, which is in close proximity to the Brooks Falls trailhead.



Preliminary alignment concepts for Brooks River crossing



A mid-span wood truss bridge design concept



A free-span cable-stayed (suspension) bridge design concept



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Public scoping comments can be submitted to the NPS using one of the following methods:

- Electronically through the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) system:
<http://www.parkplanning.nps.gov/KATM>
- Mail comments to:
Brooks River Visitor Access EIS
Katmai National Park and Preserve
P.O. Box 7
King Salmon, AK 99613
- Fax comments to: (907) 246-2116

Please use any of these methods to be retained on or added to the project mailing list.

Written scoping comments can be submitted until November 30, 2009.

Comments received after this time will be considered but will not be included in the scoping report. Comments will be reviewed and incorporated into the Brooks River Visitor Access EIS. A summary of scoping comments will be provided in the next newsletter.

Before including your address, phone number, email address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment – including your personal identifying information – may be publicly available at any time. While you can ask us to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

Scoping Meeting Dates and Locations

Anchorage Public Scoping Meeting

Monday, September 28, 2009
7:00 – 9:00 pm

BLM Campbell Creek Science Center
5600 Science Center Drive
Anchorage, Alaska

King Salmon Public Scoping Meeting

Tuesday, September 29, 2009
7:00 – 9:00 pm

COMSERFAC complex
King Salmon, Alaska

OTHER OPPORTUNITIES TO PARTICIPATE

Public involvement will continue through the project. The goal is to receive public and agency comments, identify key issues of concern, and improve project design and analysis. Additional newsletters will be distributed during the project to provide updates on key developments.

Once the Brooks River Visitor Access EIS is complete, the document will be released to the public for a 60-day comment period. The Draft EIS is expected to be available to the public in the fall/winter of 2010. During the review period, NPS will conduct public meetings to accept comments on the Draft EIS. Public testimony, written comments, and electronic comments will be accepted during the review period.

Both public scoping meetings will have the same format:

- Open House (7:00 to 7:30 pm)
- Formal presentation about the project (7:30 to 8:00 pm)
- Public questions and comment opportunity (8:00 to 9:00 pm)