



## *Summary of Listening Sessions in 2018*

In June and July 2018, Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve (Wrangell-St. Elias) held a series of nine listening sessions in five neighboring communities: Copper Center, Slana, Chitina, McCarthy, and Kennecott. The goal of these meetings was for Superintendent Ben Bobowski to listen and engage with local communities and stakeholders to hear about their values and interests regarding management of the park. Sixty-one individuals attended these sessions and more than two hundred comments were recorded. The nine listening sessions are a part of an ongoing effort to listen to people interested in providing input to park management at Wrangell-St. Elias.

The park would like to thank everyone who took the time to participate, and for their meaningful comments and ideas. People shared their thoughts on challenges the park faces, these interactions help the park define issues that could be addressed in future planning. We also discussed what is currently working well and should not change. Four primary themes emerged from the comments received. A brief summary of those themes and a

park commitment statement in response is shared below:

- 1) **Communication:** The park needs to improve and expand communications with the public. Wrangell-St. Elias is a large, complex landscape. This landscape is an important part of peoples' lives and many want to do the right thing but it is often hard to understand all of the complex rules and regulations. Open, transparent, two-way communication is a valuable tool and Wrangell-St. Elias will work toward improving this. Park visitors also want to see better materials for planning trips into the park.
  - ***Park Commitment:*** Wrangell-St. Elias is committed to improving the ways we communicate with community members, near and far. We will strive to improve the communication of complex rules and work on how we share critical information regarding topics such as available access, regulations and public safety. We are also committed to improving ways for the public to provide meaningful, timely feedback to park staff on a regular basis.
- 2) **Working together:** Many commenters expressed a desire to work more closely with the park on a range of shared interests. Ideas such as starting a "Friends of the Park" group, the park hosting a public forum for aviation interests, and the park forming community working groups around contentious issues were shared at the listening sessions. Some participants desired "guidelines" rather than new rules to maintain flexibility and address issues locally.
  - ***Park Commitment:*** Wrangell-St. Elias is committed to finding innovative ways to work more closely with our stakeholders to solve emerging issues together before they become problems. Proposals for new park rules will be thoughtful to prevent unintended consequences and provide consistency across the landscape.

- 3) Access: Wrangell-St. Elias is at the heart of the Copper River basin, it evokes a sense of home for many, and is a “bucket-list” destination for visitors from around the world. Access – to resources, homes and homelands, and incredible recreation opportunities – is vitally important. Commenters mentioned things like access off the Richardson Highway and to the Copper River, access through 17B easements, and the importance of airstrips as conduits into the park. People expressed a desire for new day-use opportunities, short trails and more options for those with limited mobility.
- *Park Commitment*: Wrangell-St. Elias is committed to improving access to park lands for a variety of user groups through improved communication about the existing opportunities as well as developing new ones. Wrangell-St. Elias is committed to keeping an open mind about new opportunities in the context of the values and purposes for which the park was created. The park is developing partnerships and projects focused on exploring day-use recreational opportunities and options to improve subsistence access.
- 4) Wrangell-St. Elias is loved by many: Those who live here and those that visit both care deeply about this park. It can offer inspiration, reflection, and ultimate adventure. It provides a sense of place for generations of family members; it has history, offers subsistence, and gives valued quiet and solitude deep in the Alaskan wilderness.
- *Park Commitment*: Wrangell-St. Elias acknowledges that many people love this place for different reasons. The park is committed to providing diverse experiences for visitors and residents near and far that come to enjoy this special place. Wrangell-St. Elias will also work to ensure these experiences are available for future generations.

To view the list of comments received, and to submit your comments, please visit the park planning website, and navigate to the “documents list” tab: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/WRSTListens>.

The planning team will continue to build upon these themes as we visit more communities. In January through April 2019, listening sessions will be scheduled for the following communities: Chistochina, Fairbanks, Gakona, Glennallen, Kenny Lake, Mentasta, and Tazlina. A news release will announce the dates, times, and specific venue for the above mentioned listening sessions.

Consider attending one of the upcoming listening sessions to visit with the planning team and share your comments with Superintendent Ben Bobowski. To see all of the locations where listening sessions will be scheduled, visit this [online interactive map](#).

You can also e-mail comments and join the mailing list by sending a message to [WRST\\_planning@nps.gov](mailto:WRST_planning@nps.gov).

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