



A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Dear Friends of Gates of the Arctic,

The National Park Service is continuing development of a general management plan (GMP) amendment for Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve. This plan will provide direction for managing the park and preserve over the next 15 to 20 years.

As part of the general management planning process, we invited comments on the preliminary alternatives that were developed last summer. Many of you read newsletter #2 in the fall of 2010, attended a public meeting during the fall or winter, or wrote a letter to share your opinions on the preliminary alternatives. In this newsletter, a summary of the comments that you shared is provided, along with a description of how your ideas are being incorporated into the draft alternatives.

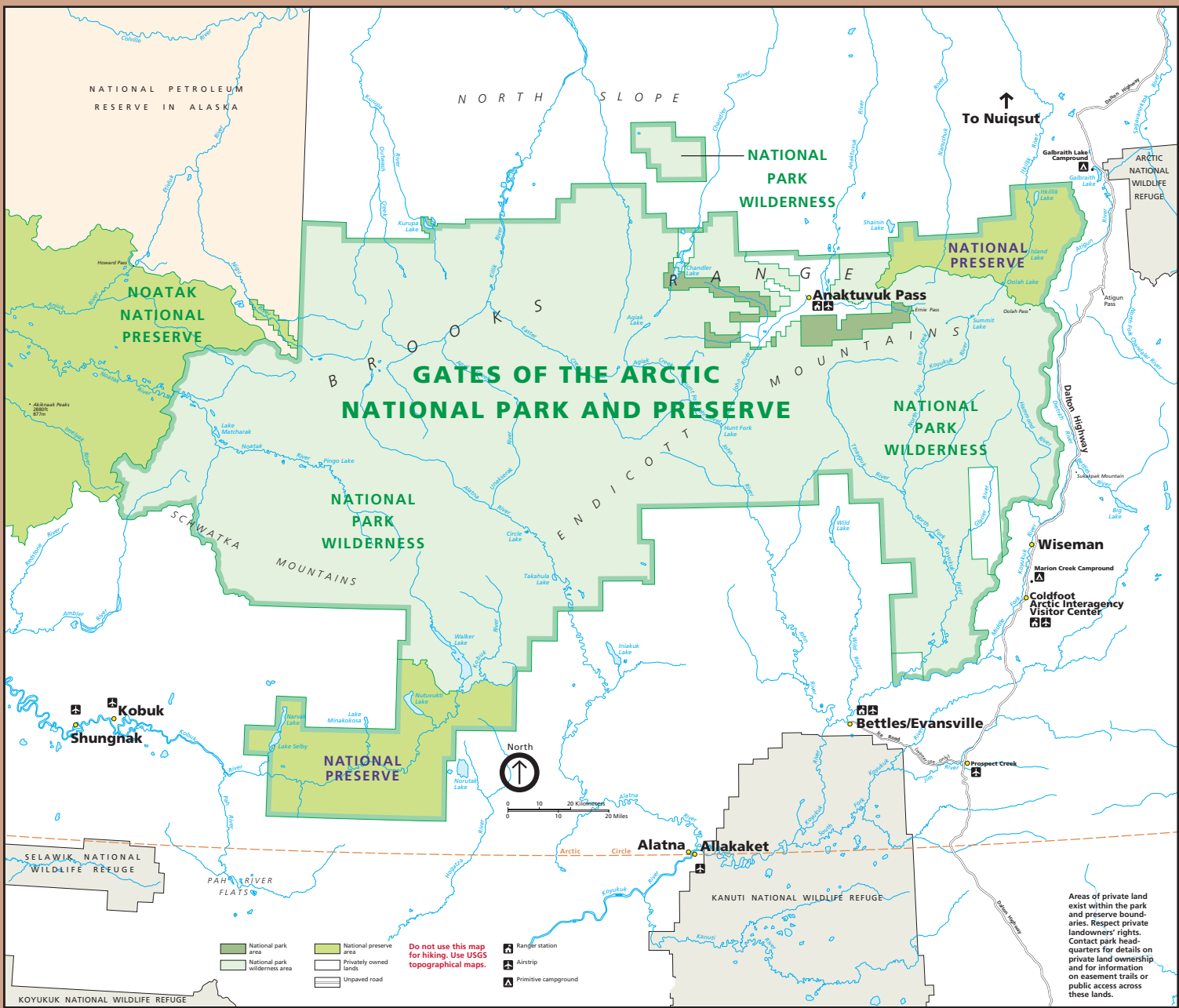
In addition, this newsletter provides some information on the wilderness study that is part of our planning efforts. We describe the components and process for this wilderness study, and have included maps that show you where the wilderness study options are located. Like the preliminary GMP alternatives, the wilderness study is in draft form.

Your comments on this draft plan / wilderness study effort are always welcome and are important throughout the planning process. You can submit comments on our website at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/gaar>, send us an email at GAAR_planning@nps.gov, or mail us a letter at

Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve
GMP Amendment
Fairbanks Administrative Center
4175 Geist Road
Fairbanks, AK 99709.

I truly appreciate your interest in the management of Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve, and look forward to your continued involvement in this important planning process.

Sincerely,
Greg Dudgeon
Superintendent, Gates of the Arctic
National Park and Preserve





Public Scoping And Public Comments

Public Scoping Meetings for the General Management Plan

The National Park Service (NPS) held eight public meetings between October 2010 and February 2011. Two public meetings were held in late October 2010 in Anchorage and Fairbanks, and a total of 17 people attended these meetings. Six village public meetings were held between November 2010 and early February 2011. These meetings took place in Bettles, Anaktuvuk Pass, Alatna, Allakaket, Shungnak, and Kobuk. Public meetings were not held in Nuiqsut and Wiseman due to travel constraints. A total of 24 people attended the village meetings. At each of these meetings, NPS staff explained the GMP alternatives, followed by a discussion period to answer questions and provide an opportunity for the public to share their comments and ideas.

In addition to the public scoping meetings, the National Park Service received a total of 45 comments through various methods—23 letters via U.S. mail, 8 letters via the Web e-mail form in PEPC (Planning, Environment, and Public Comment), and 14 e-mails via the park e-mail system.

Comments came from a wide range of stakeholders, including local residents and subsistence users, corporations, organizations, and agencies with economic or recreational interests in the park, as well as other private citizens who have visited in the past.

Below, the main topics and issues commented on are discussed, including a brief summary of changes we anticipate including in the draft general plan that address the public comments. Additionally, the range of alternatives have been decreased from four to three and the number of management zones from five to three, based in large part on your feedback.

The Ultimate Wilderness Park

Many of the commenters articulated a desire to maximize all elements of wilderness character in the majority of the park. A significant amount of concern was expressed over the idea of providing increased access and infrastructure based on the belief that remoteness and the lack of facilities within the park is what makes Gates of the Arctic special, unique, and valuable. As a result of these comments, one of the GMP alternatives was modified so that it reflects a greater degree of wilderness protection through a broader use of the “wildest” management zone option. This alternative is linked with a proposal for wilderness designation that includes all eligible lands (see Option 1 in the “Wilderness Study” section in this newsletter).

Increased Visitor Opportunities

Commenters held different opinions on how to manage this extraordinary wilderness. To some, it is important to provide visitor contact opportunities in order to communicate important resource protection information such as Leave No Trace practices; backcountry orientations; and brief, informative, educational encounters with park staff. Commercial service activities, which were identified by one commenter as a primary means for accessing the park, were supported. As a result of these comments, one GMP alternative was modified to reflect a greater degree of visitor opportunities through broader use of opportunity-based management zones. This alternative is linked with a smaller area proposed for wilderness designation (see Option 2 in the “Wilderness Study” section in this newsletter).

Solitude and Quietness

Two common topics of comment were: (1) opportunity for solitude, and (2) natural soundscapes. Many respondents weighed in on the issue of group size limits, mainly in favor of limits. The most frequent suggestion was to maintain the current size limit of 7 people per backpacking group and 10 per river trip. Other commenters recommended even lower numbers. A local village requested limiting group size to 5, citing concerns that large groups could create disruptive noise levels, which could interfere with subsistence activities and disperse game animals. A discouragement of motorized vehicles and overflights, particularly by helicopters, was also reiterated in many comments. As a result of these comments, the group size limits currently in place are proposed to remain in the alternatives set forth in the draft general management plan.

Subsistence

Both recreational visitors and subsistence users requested protection for subsistence use within the park and preserve. Adaptive management was encouraged, with a proposed idea to limit or exclude visitors within certain time/space boundaries as determined by caribou migrations.

Proposing New Designated Wilderness

We received a wide range of comments on designated wilderness in Gate of the Arctic. The outcome of these revisions (see next page) reflect public comments on how much wilderness should be proposed, and where. The revisions are very similar to the wilderness proposals from the late 1980s.

A Study Of The Options For Wilderness At Gates Of The Arctic

Wilderness Study

Gates of the Arctic includes approximately 7 million acres of wilderness designated under the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) in 1980. Section 1317 of ANILCA requires review of all areas in the National Park System in Alaska that are not already designated wilderness to determine their suitability or unsuitability for preservation as wilderness. This phase of the review was completed for Gates of the Arctic in 1986 when approximately 1 million acres were identified by the National Park Service as eligible for wilderness designation. The lands determined in 1986 to meet the criteria of Section 3(d) of the 1964 Wilderness Act were further studied in a 1988 planning effort that was never completed. The National Park Service is now completing the wilderness study called for in Section 1317 of ANILCA during this general management plan amendment/EIS.

The current wilderness study focuses only on the remaining eligible lands; these exist in the two preserve units, the Eastern Unit (Itkillik River) and the Western Unit (Kobuk River). In addition to the no action alternative, under which none of the eligible lands would be proposed for wilderness designation, the NPS planning team has developed two options for proposing wilderness in the preserve units. The options differ in the configuration and amounts of proposed wilderness (see Wilderness Study Options, next page).



Right-of-Way

ANILCA included a provision for access for surface transportation across the Western Unit (Kobuk River) of Gates of the Arctic. A proposal for wilderness in the Western Unit would be subject to a right-of-way across the preserve as provided for under section 201 (4) (b)-(e) of ANILCA. Whether such a right-of-way will be exercised remains uncertain. If a right-of-way is exercised, whether it will affect potential Preserve wilderness would depend on the location, width and other parameters for the right-of-way.

Alaska Wilderness Provisions

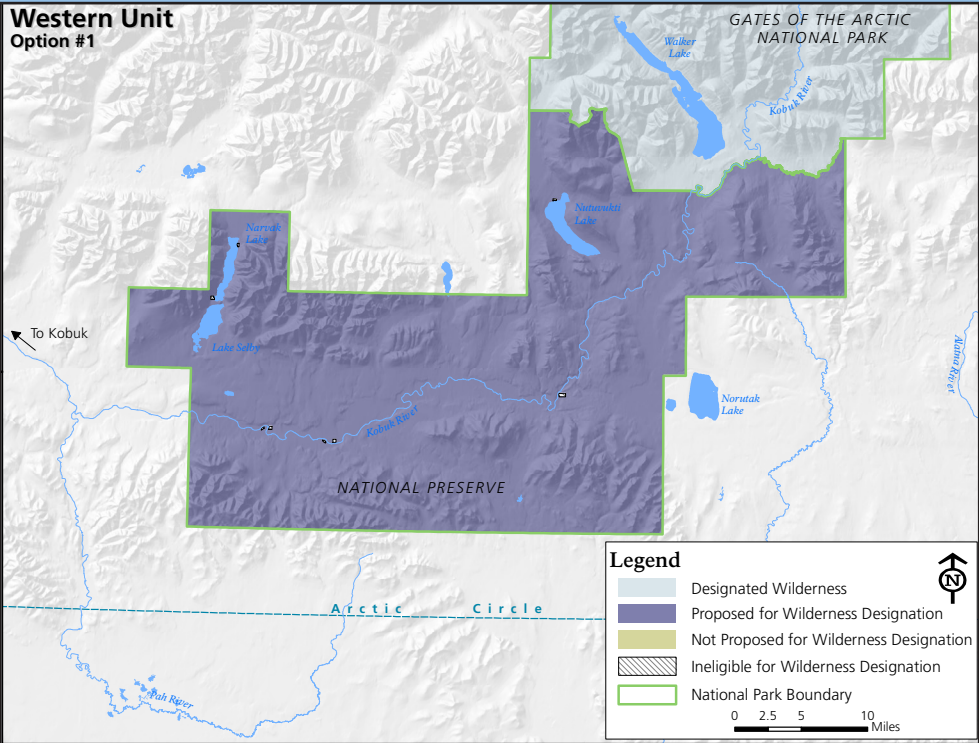
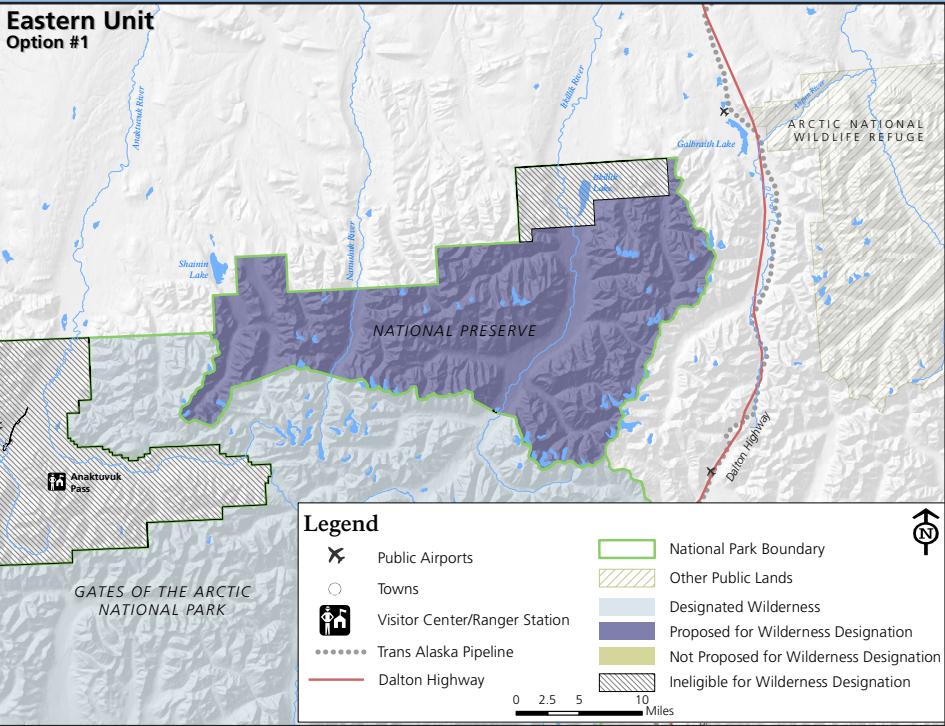
If the preserve units are designated as wilderness, subsistence use, sport hunting, fishing and trapping would continue. Wilderness is managed differently under ANILCA than wilderness areas in the rest of the United States. The following activities would also continue to be allowed if wilderness were designated:

- use of snowmachines, motorboats, airplanes, and nonmotorized surface transportation methods for traditional activities and village-to-village travel
- snowmachines, motorboats, and other means of surface transportation traditionally employed for subsistence purposes
- new public use cabins necessary for public health and safety
- use of temporary facilities related to the taking of fish and wildlife
- necessary and appropriate wilderness-related commercial services, including sport hunting
- air and water navigation aids, communication sites, and facilities for weather, climate and fisheries research and monitoring
- NPS administrative activities subject to the minimum requirements

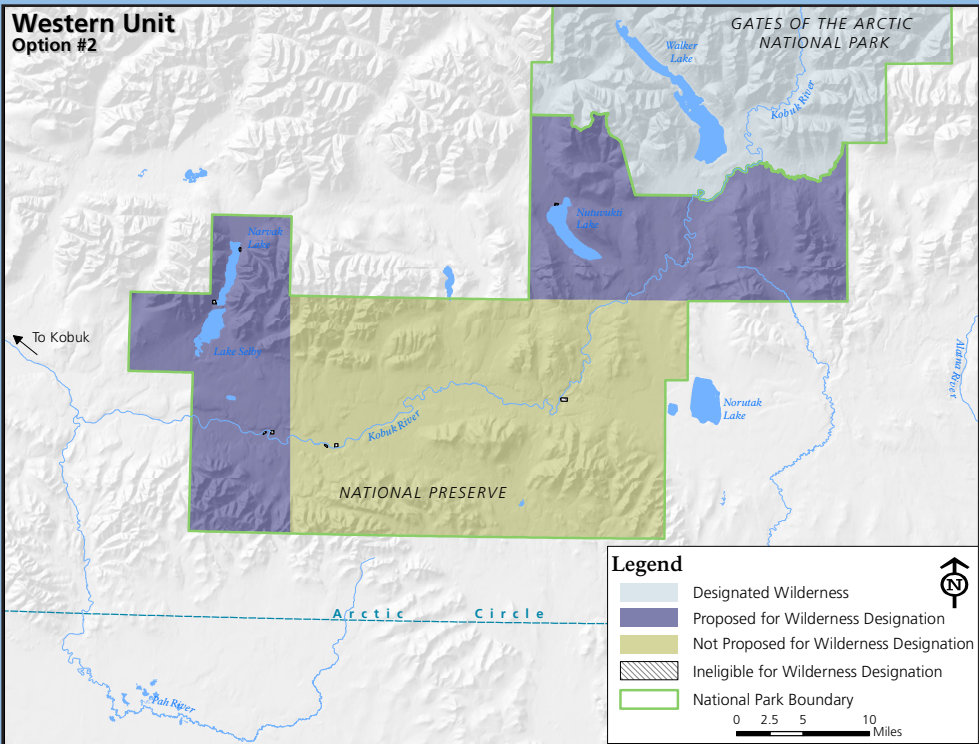
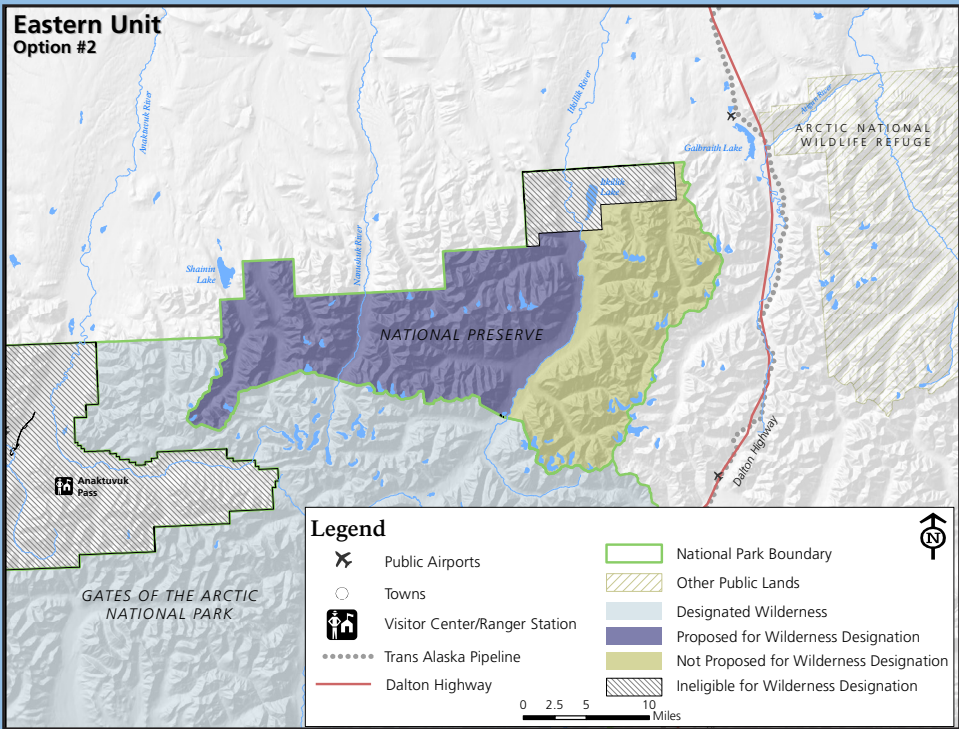


Wilderness Study Options

Under Option 1, all eligible lands of the two preserve units would be proposed for wilderness: about 90% (~298,000 acres) of the Itkillik unit, and over 99% (~616,000 acres) of the Kobuk unit.



Under Option 2, approximately 53% (~174,500 acres) of the eligible lands in the Itkillik unit, and approximately 46% (~285,000 acres) of the Kobuk unit would be proposed for wilderness designation.



Next Steps For The Wilderness Study

No decision has yet been reached on which of these proposals would be included in the NPS preferred alternative. The above wilderness study options will be incorporated into the action alternatives of the draft general management plan amendment / wilderness study / environmental impact statement now being prepared by the NPS planning team. Public comment on the draft plan will be considered, and a final plan prepared. A record of decision will document the findings and conclusion of the wilderness study.

If the decision is made to propose wilderness, it would be forwarded to the Secretary of the Interior who is responsible for recommending to the President to consider and forward to Congress. Ultimately Congress would need to enact legislation to include any of the President’s wilderness recommendation within the National Wilderness Preservation System.



GATES OF THE ARCTIC NATIONAL PARK AND PRESERVE
GMP AMENDMENT
FAIRBANKS ADMINISTRATIVE CENTER
4175 GEIST ROAD
FAIRBANKS, AK 99709-9990
OFFICIAL BUSINESS
PENALTY FOR PRIVATE USE \$300



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve
Alaska



Caribou photo by Carl Johnson

Planning Timetable			
NPS Planning Activity		Dates	Public Involvement Opportunities
STEP 1	Set the Stage for Planning	Fall 2009 to Spring 2010	Public meetings were held near the park and in Fairbanks and Anchorage to discuss planning issues.
STEP 2	Develop Alternative Management Concepts	Spring to Fall 2010	Public meetings were held near the park and in Fairbanks and Anchorage to discuss alternatives for management, zoning, and other topics.
STEP 3 (WE ARE HERE)	Develop Preliminary Alternatives	Winter 2011 to Fall 2011	Newsletter # 3 – Wilderness Study Update and Public Scoping Summary.
STEP 4	Prepare Draft General Management Plan Amendment/Wilderness Study/ Environmental Impact Statement	Winter 2011 to Summer 2012	Provide written comments on the draft document. Attend public meetings and provide comments.
STEP 5	Revise and Prepare Final General Management Plan Amendment/Wilderness Study/Environmental Impact Statement	Summer 2012 to Winter 2013	Review final plan.
STEP 6	Finalize and Implement the Approved Plan	Winter 2013 and Beyond	Stay involved throughout implementation of the approved plan. Let the park know what you think.