

Chapter 3: Affected Environment

ERRATA

Chapter 3, Affected Environment, remains the same as it was presented in the *Revised Draft EIS* with the following minor changes. The changes are presented with insertions indicated by underlined text and deletions indicated by strikethrough.

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Natural Soundscapes

In addition to natural sounds, there are significant human-generated sounds such as aircraft and surface vehicles that are intrusions upon the natural soundscape. Because of the wilderness character of the Denali backcountry, many of the human-made sounds qualify as noise under the definition provided by Directors Order #47, which reads, “noise is generally defined as an unwanted or undesired sound, often unpleasant in quality, intensity or repetition.” Noise may often be the byproduct of desirable or legally authorized activities or machines, but it is still ~~requires~~ subject to management to protect park resources.

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Wilderness Suitability and Proposal

Section 1317(a) of ANILCA required the Secretary of Interior to conduct a wilderness suitability review for the park additions and preserve, which was included in the 1986 *General Management Plan*. The review concluded that approximately 3.73 million additional acres of the nondesignated lands in the park and preserve were suitable for wilderness designation. An area within the Kantishna Hills was determined to be unsuitable for designation as wilderness because of persistent disturbance caused by past mining activity, although since that determination all mining has ceased, many private inholdings have been acquired, and much of this land has been restored, so these lands now share similar values as the rest of the park additions. Various alternatives for additional wilderness designation were subsequently evaluated in an Environmental Impact Statement (NPS 1988) to assist in fulfilling ANILCA 1317(b), which required the President to recommend wilderness designations to Congress in accordance with the process outlined in sections 3(c) and 3(d) of the Wilderness Act. Of the 3.73 million acres of suitable lands, the preferred alternative proposed 2.25 million acres to be recommended for wilderness designation. However, the Secretary of the Interior did not forward the recommendation to the President, so the process prescribed by ANILCA 1317(b) and the Wilderness Act 3(c) and 3(d) was not completed. ~~Pending action by the Secretary of the Interior, President, and Congress, the wilderness values of the recommended lands will continue to be preserved under NPS policy.~~ (See Map 3-1).

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Subsistence

Subsistence community use profile studies were conducted for Cantwell, ~~and~~ Nikolai, ~~and~~ Telida in the early 1980s (Stratton and Georgette 1984; Stokes 1984), and Lake Minchumina in the mid-1970s (Bishop 1978). Cantwell's subsistence harvest assessment data was updated in a 2000 study, and Nikolai's harvest assessment was updated in 2003. Initial harvest assessment surveys were conducted for Telida in 2000 and Lake Minchumina in 2003.

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Subsistence

The National Park Service is engaged in a variety of subsistence-~~related~~ program activities beyond the ~~harvest-management~~ of fish and wildlife harvest. These include timber cutting and use, shelters and cabins, trapping and trapline management, eligibility and resident zones, access, acquisition of user data, and resolution of user conflicts and possible closures, and undertaking research on fish, wildlife, subsistence uses, and local traditional knowledge. As identified in Denali's 1986 General Management Plan subsistence section, the park has – in cooperation with the Denali Subsistence Resource Commission, Federal Regional Advisory Councils, State of Alaska, Local Advisory Committees, and the public – prepared a Subsistence Management Plan intended to address major topics related to subsistence management. Comments from other federal agencies and Native groups with park-related resource management concerns were solicited. After consultation and review, the Subsistence Management Plan was approved by the Park Superintendent and Denali Subsistence Resource Commission in 2000 (NPS 2000i).

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Climbing and Mountaineering

Besides Mount McKinley and Mount Foraker, attempted ascents on peaks within the Alaska Range and the boundaries of the park and preserve include: Mount Hunter (14,573 feet.), Mount Silverthrone (13,220 feet.), Mount Huntington (12,240 feet.), Mount Crosson (12,800 feet.), Peak 11,300', and Moose's Tooth (10,335 feet.) (NPS 2000d and f). Because registration is voluntary unless mountaineers are ascending Mount McKinley or Mount Foraker, or if their travel includes the Old Park, data are ~~likely~~ incomplete. However, table 3-11 3-18 still shows a rapid increase in visitor use of Alaska Range destinations from 1997 through 2004.

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Caches

Caches that support climbing and mountaineering activities are allowed in the park additions and preserve subject to the rules provided at 36 CFR 13.22. They are particularly important for expeditions attempting the northern climbing routes on Mount McKinley. The National Park Service authorizes a concessioner to deliver the

caches by dog team. Typically, freight hauling occurs during February and March, and the concessionaire remains in the park for between 7 and 44 days while shuttling freight from the Kantishna airstrip to the cache sites near McGonagall Pass. The weight of freight being transported averages about 4,000 pounds (Jones and Stokes 2000). Unattended property is generally prohibited in the Denali backcountry by 36 CFR 13.63(c).

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Off-Road Vehicles

The use of ORVs in the backcountry is prohibited throughout the national park and preserve consistent with existing regulations. The only exceptions are for specific permitted access to some inholdings in the Kantishna Hills to meet the requirement of ANILCA 1110(b) and subsistence access on constructed mining access routes in the Kantishna Hills. There is also access along the state right-of-way in the Dunkle Hills. In addition, NPS has determined that ORVs were traditionally employed for subsistence purposes in the Cantwell area under ANILCA 811(b) and is presently developing a management plan for this use.

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Military Overflights

The Air Force's Susitna Military Operating Area (MOA) lies partly over the southern park and preserve. The "floor" is set at 10,000 feet above mean sea level (MSL) or 5,000 feet AGL, whichever is higher. Overflights can occur between 7 a.m. and 10 p.m. (Captain Gary L. Rolf, pers. comm.). ~~The military conducts an average of 3 flights per day (primarily by F-15s) in the Susitna MOA and an average of 8-12 flights per day (U.S. Department of Defense 1995).~~ The Final Environmental Impact Statement for Alaska Military Operations Areas (U.S. Air Force) predicted 3,600 hours per year of use in the Susitna MOA based on 15 sorties per day and 240 days per year. In a recent sample year, the military used the MOA for only 926 hours, much less than anticipated by the EIS (Colonel Jerry I. Siegel, pers. comm.)

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Backcountry Facilities

Relative to its size, Denali National Park and Preserve has very few facilities. There are ~~no~~ few maintained trails or designated campsites, ~~or~~ and no public use cabins in the backcountry. The majority of facilities in Denali National Park and Preserve are located near the park entrance and along the 92-mile park road (Map 3-2: Cities, Towns, and Boroughs), aside from a ranger station in Talkeetna. The park entrance is located at the intersection of the George Parks Highway and the park road. Many of the park facilities are designed to support the park's visitor transportation and tour bus system that operates during the peak visitor use season between May and September.