

Comments



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

REGION 10
1200 Sixth Avenue
Seattle, Washington 98101

July 15, 2005

Reply To
Attn Of: ETPA-088

Ref: 99-077-NPS

Paul Anderson, Superintendent
Denali National Park and Preserve
Post Office Box 9
Denali Park, AK 99755

Dear Mr. Anderson:

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has reviewed the Revised Draft Environmental Impact Statement (RDEIS) for the **Denali National Park and Preserve Backcountry Management Plan** (CEQ#20050165), Denali Park, Alaska. The review was conducted in accordance with EPA responsibilities under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Section 309 of the Clean Air Act. This section of the Clean Air Act directs EPA to specifically review and comment in writing on the environmental impacts associated with all major federal actions. Our review considers not only the impact to the environment but also the adequacy of the NEPA document itself.

EPA commends the National Park Service (NPS) for revising the Management Plan in response to public comments on the original draft EIS published in February 2003. The primary change in the RDEIS is from a management approach based on zoning to one based on desired future social and resource conditions in discrete management areas.

The RDEIS proposes five action alternatives that fall along a spectrum. Under Alternative 1 (or no action), the NPS would continue current management as guided by the 1986 General Management and 1997 Backcountry Management plans, which would result in increased visitor use and motorized access with no new services to meet increased levels of use. As a result of this, there would be moderate to major impacts to various park resources, particularly natural soundscape and wilderness resources. Alternative 2 would limit recreation opportunities to those that depend on wilderness and non-motorized forms of access. This option would limit the range of recreational opportunities but would provide moderate to major benefits for wilderness and natural soundscape resources. Alternative 3 would provide for a diversity of wilderness recreational activities and limited motorized access, resulting in moderate benefits to the diversity of recreational opportunities and to both wilderness and natural soundscape resources. Minor impacts to wildlife, subsistence and vegetation resources would be anticipated.

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Alternative 4, the preferred alternative, would provide for growth in a variety of recreational activities for visitors needing services, assistance, or short time-commitments while still providing some opportunities for wilderness-dependent activities. Actions in this alternative would result in moderate adverse impacts to permafrost soils, wildlife, vegetation and subsistence resources. Because this alternative provides little mitigation for past actions, there would likely be cumulative major adverse impacts to resources such as wilderness and natural soundscapes. In Alternative 5, the proposal is to allow substantial increases in use levels and motorized access parkwide, with particular concentrations to the south side of the Alaska Range. These actions would cause major impacts to vegetation, subsistence resources, and opportunities, and moderate to major impacts to wildlife, wilderness, and natural soundscapes. Without mitigation plans for past actions, alternative 5 would also result in adverse impacts to many park resources, wilderness and soundscapes in particular.

In our comments on the original draft EIS in 2003, EPA expressed concerns about the potential impact of snowmobile use on the environment in Denali National Park because of indications that snowmobile use in the park was likely to increase rapidly and because such use would have the greatest potential to cause significant environmental impacts to park resources compared with other proposed uses. EPA remains concerned that increased snowmobile usage will adversely affect wildlife, soils, vegetation, wetlands, water and air quality, and natural soundscapes. While EPA understands and supports the need to provide access for subsistence uses, we believe that snowmobile access to backcountry for recreational use may put natural resources that are important for Denali's intended uses at risk.

We are also concerned about risks and uncertainties associated with the proposed adaptive management approach. The standards and monitoring as described in the RDEIS may not be sufficient to protect important park resources. EPA recommends that the final EIS (FEIS) include more robust, quantitative standards that measure impacts to resources, a more complete description of the monitoring plan, and a description of how the monitoring information will be used to modify land management.

In addition, we are concerned about trail construction and development in the park because of potential impacts to vegetation, soils, and wildlife, as well as their ability to attract heavy use of the park, which may include off-road vehicles.

Based on these concerns and insufficient information available in the RDEIS, we have assigned a rating of EC-2 (Environmental Concerns, Insufficient Information) to the RDEIS. A summary of our comments will be published in the Federal Register. A copy of the EPA rating system used in conducting our review is enclosed for your reference.

We appreciate the opportunity to review the RDEIS. If you would like to discuss issues related to our review, please contact Mr. Theogene Mbaliye at (206) 553-6322 or mbabaliye.theogene@epa.gov

Sincerely,

Response to Comments

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Christine B. Reichgott, Manager
NEPA Review Unit

cc:
EPA Alaska Operations Office

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Comments

EPA Comments on the Revised Denali National Park and Preserve Backcountry Management Plan and Draft EIS

Adaptive Management approach

The NPS indicates that the proposed backcountry management plan would be implemented using adaptive management. EPA supports the use of this strategy when clear threshold values for descriptions and standards to guide future decisions are available. Ideally, the proposed plan would not only identify the thresholds, but also would discuss and identify management alternatives and mitigation that would be implemented should a threshold value be exceeded. Many of the proposed descriptions and standards for measuring the degree of impacts (i.e., low, medium, and high) are qualitative and therefore have the potential to be subjective. The RDEIS describes monitoring that relies primarily on surveys of backcountry visitors. Also, the descriptions and standards provided in the RDEIS are primarily related to impacts on the human park experience; appropriate descriptions and standards are needed for impacts to wildlife and other natural resources. EPA is concerned that significant impacts to backcountry natural resources could occur and remain undetected until damage is done. EPA recommends that the final EIS (FEIS) include more robust, quantitative standards that measure impacts to wildlife and other important natural resources. We also recommend that the FEIS include a description of the monitoring plan, how it will be funded, and how the monitoring information will be used to modify land management.

Snowmobile access and policies

EPA understands the challenges of managing areas for multiple uses. The challenge is further complicated when multiple laws and definitions apply. There appears to be some possible confusion or conflict in how the RDEIS describes definitions and policies related to regulations that affect snowmobile usage at Denali. For example, in response to comments, the RDEIS states that in the absence of a definition for “traditional activities”, there would be no immediate distinction among the activities for which snowmachines are used for access. However, the definition given in a 2000 Final Rule does define “traditional activities.” That rule states that no snowmachine use within the Old Park is authorized (section 1110(a) of 43 CFR 36.11(C)). Of importance to this proposed plan is the statement that, “NPS intends to define traditional activities and apply such definitions to other park areas, including the remainder of Denali National Park and Preserve, in subsequent processes, such as future rulemakings to implement backcountry management plans for some of the national parks in Alaska.” At that time, NPS further concluded that any snowmachine use in the Old Park would be detrimental to the resource values of the area, and that even only a few snowmachines would cause detriment to the special resource values of the Old Park, wilderness and wildlife values in particular. It would seem that these conclusions would also apply to the park additions and preserve, especially if some of these lands are to retain the features that would qualify them to be designated as wilderness areas in the future.

Easements and land exchanges

The RDEIS states that implementation of the proposed plan will require easements on private lands and a land exchange with the state of Alaska. EPA recommends the final EIS

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EPA-1

The final backcountry management plan (BCMP) adds additional monitoring requirements for major wildlife species. These requirements would trigger management action in response to statistically significant changes in wildlife populations, demographics, or distribution if those changes could be correlated to changes in visitor use or differences in management area regimes. Otherwise, the plan provides very robust quantifiable standards for changes in 10 indicator categories. Although characterized in Table 2-1 as high, medium, or low levels of impact, Tables 2-2 to 2-9 further explain these characterizations with specific standards. Indicators for trail and campsite disturbance, natural sound disturbance, and wildlife disturbance provide meaningful direction for monitoring the impacts of recreational use on key park natural resources. Visitor surveys for other indicators would be scientifically constructed and implemented and should provide valid information for monitoring impacts on wilderness resource values. Because this is a General Management Plan document, it focuses on general goal-setting and management strategy. It provides sufficient guidance from which to develop an implementation-level monitoring plan.

EPA-2

The Environmental Assessment for the 2000 regulation that prohibited snowmachine use in the Old Park was careful to distinguish the unique resources of the Old Park. The resources of the park additions and preserve are similar to but not identical to Old Park resources. The standards expressed in the BCMP provide appropriate protection for the resources of the 1980 additions while still allowing for special uses authorized by ANILCA. The National Park Service does not believe the level of use allowed for would preclude the designation of these areas as wilderness.

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include information about the status of easement agreements and land acquisition, and show resulting alterations in park boundary locations

Tribal consultations

The RDEIS describes the process used to inform Native tribal governments and invite government-to-government consultation. However, we did not see any information that described the outcome of consultation nor how the RDEIS addressed any concerns that were raised. Information in the RDEIS indicates that throughout the park, there are many cultural sites with resources (archeological and historic) associated with native tribes. It is possible that the proposed management plan could have impacts on native cultures, their places, economy, and other resources. EPA recommends that the FEIS include information about the process that was used to consult with native tribal governments and outcome of such consultation.

3

Trail construction and improvement

The RDEIS states that park management promotes a “trail-less” philosophy at Denali. However, the RDEIS states that there are several unplanned social and constructed trails (p. 200). EPA understands that trails are constructed as needed to protect park resources. Since user-created trails generally follow corridors with more moderate, convenient terrain, proliferation and increased usage of trails could result in significant impacts to park resources, critical areas such as riparian zones and wetlands, and cultural sites. Trails typically attract greater numbers of people and off-road vehicles than off-trail areas. As described in the RDEIS, trails can have direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts on a variety of park resources. Trails have direct impacts on vegetation and soil due to trampling, compaction, and erosion. Depending on the species, heavily used trails can cause significant impacts on wildlife habitat, behavior, and nutrition. Various recreational activities using trails are also known to cause wildlife displacement. There is also evidence that trails and pack animals may serve as sources and vectors for the spread of invasive weeds. Where trails and camp sites occur, for example, vegetation could be lost or changed in structure. EPA recommends that impacts be avoided and minimized in NPS’s programs for trail planning, siting, management, and monitoring.

4

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EPA-3

Government-to-government consultation with Native tribal governments did not result in any substantive comments on the original or revised draft BCMPs. The Denali Subsistence Resources Commission, which has many Native members, did provide comments that influenced the modified preferred alternative. Please see the responses to the motions of the Denali Subsistence Resources Commission.

EPA-4

Construction of trails would include the planning, siting, management, and monitoring components recommended by EPA to minimize impacts. In all cases, the new trails would replace existing social trails where most of the adverse impacts stated in the comment have already occurred, so the constructed trails would mitigate some aspects of past overuse.

Comments

STATE OF ALASKA

ANILCA IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM

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July 14, 2005

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Dear Mr. Anderson:

The State of Alaska reviewed the April 2005 Denali National Park and Preserve Revised Draft Backcountry Management Plan, General Management Plan Amendment, and Environmental Impact Statement. The following comments represent the consolidated views of the State's resource agencies.

GENERAL COMMENTS

The State commends the National Park Service for issuing a revised draft plan. The revised document offers far more clarity than the initial draft plan and gives readers a much better sense of what to expect from the various alternatives and how implementation will unfold. Even though we have remaining important concerns, we nonetheless recognize the numerous substantial revisions that more closely conform to the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) and implementing regulations. We note in particular the effort to develop standards and indicators that facilitate management transparency and improved public involvement. Some of these standards and indicators need refinement; but we support the overall effort to develop and evolve this methodology.

While the State does not normally take positions on specific alternatives and cannot endorse the Preferred Alternative in its entirety, this alternative as a whole is preferable to alternatives 2 and 3 in attempting to balance many competing uses in the Denali backcountry. We recommend against selection of Alternatives 2 or 3, which are far more restrictive than what Congress intended. Also, regardless of alternative, we continue to oppose the eminent or future extension of the restrictive "Old Park" definition of "traditional" to the ANILCA park and preserve additions. This definition would remove Section 1110(a) protections from a variety of long-standing uses and activities that pre-date designation.

WILDERNESS MANAGEMENT

The State strongly objects to any proposals that extend formal Wilderness Act management requirements to areas outside designated Wilderness. The State recognizes that protecting

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wilderness values is an important management objective of the plan. ANILCA includes recognition of wilderness values generally, and Section 202(3) explicitly includes wilderness recreational activities as a specific purpose of Denali Park and Preserve. Nonetheless, only the original, pre-ANILCA portion of the Park is congressionally designated Wilderness. Therefore, only the Old Park should be managed in accordance with the Wilderness Act, as amended by ANILCA.

Under Section 1317(c) of ANILCA, the wilderness suitability review undertaken after the passage of ANILCA shall not *“be construed as affecting the administration of any unit of the National Park System or National Wildlife Refuges System in accordance with this Act or other applicable provisions of law unless and until Congress provides otherwise by taking action on any Presidential recommendation made pursuant to subsection (b) of this section.”* In the legislative history of ANILCA, Senate Energy Report 96-413 provides additional insight into this provision:

The Committee Amendment directs the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a wilderness review of those lands within National Parks, Monuments, and Wildlife Refuges not designated as Wilderness by this Act. This review shall be made pursuant to the Wilderness Act and completed within 5 years.

The Committee expects that the affected units will be managed and administered in accordance with the provisions of this Act and applicable law during the study period.

Therefore, Congress did not intend for the Service to manage these areas as designated Wilderness until Congress acts to designate.

The Denali Backcountry Plan states on page 21 that the Service will manage the park additions and preserve *“to maintain the wilderness character and values of the land under other authorities until designation recommendations have been proposed and Congress has acted on these proposals.”* This intent appears to stem from the Service’s national 2001 Management Policies regarding management of suitable and proposed wilderness. This policy states the *“National Park Service will take no action that would diminish the wilderness suitability of an area possessing wilderness characteristics until the legislative process of wilderness designation has been completed. Until that time, management decisions pertaining to lands qualifying as wilderness will be made in expectation of eventual wilderness designation.”*¹ When these national policies were in draft form, the State commented by seeking greater recognition of the statutory ANILCA exceptions.² Given that more than half of the National Park System is located in Alaska, we further requested consideration of a separate policy for Alaska. Most of our comments were not addressed in the Final Policies, so discrepancies with ANILCA remain.

We also understand the National Park Service is revising the national policies. We again request the Service revisit these fundamental questions about the management of parklands outside designated wilderness in Alaska. In the meantime, for purposes of the Denali Backcountry Plan,

¹ 2001 NPS Management Policies Section 6.3.1 (cited on page 21 of the Backcountry Plan)

² State letter to Loren Fraser, National Park Service, Washington D.C. March 20, 2000

Response to Comments

SoA-1

The Department of Interior Solicitor provided the National Park Service with guidance regarding ANILCA 1317(c), which concluded that this clause neither required nor prohibited the NPS from managing lands outside of designated wilderness to maintain wilderness character and values. Quoting from letter by David Watts, Assistant Solicitor, to Vernon Wiggins, Co-chairman of the Alaska Land Use Council, on May 21, 1986:

“Accordingly, it is clear from the statute and its legislative history that the Department...is not required to manage these areas as wilderness areas prior to an Act by Congress designating them as such. This does not preclude, however, the Fish and Wildlife Service and National Park Service from managing them to maintain the wilderness character and values of the land under other Park and Refuge authorities until Congress has acted.”

The quotes from the Senate Committee report do not reflect on this fundamental interpretation. The National Park Service believes that Denali’s management history, public expectations, and ANILCA purposes, combined with management policies, all point to the conclusion that much of the park additions and preserve should be managed to maintain wilderness resource values and opportunities for wilderness recreation.

Comments

we request recognition that in cases where the national policies conflict with ANILCA, the statute prevails. We also seek satisfactory resolution of the following additional concerns.

2

Minimum Requirement/Minimum Tool: Administrative Activities

The common management proposal to implement the “*minimum requirement/minimum tool*” analysis throughout the “*entire park and preserve backcountry*” (page 58) is the foremost manifestation of our concern about wilderness management. This Wilderness Act process even extends to those lands that were not recommended for wilderness designation in 1988. As proposed, this process applies to all administrative and scientific activities, including management actions conducted by the State of Alaska. We do not object to the Service voluntarily applying this process to its own management activities. However, the State strongly objects to being required to follow this process outside designated wilderness as it could impact the State’s ability to fulfill its authorities and responsibilities, particularly for management of fish and wildlife. The latter state responsibilities are specifically acknowledged and protected in Section 1314 of ANILCA.

3

The relationship of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) and the National Park Service is spelled out in the Master Memorandum of Understanding (MMOU). Service concerns with state management activities affecting fish and wildlife should be addressed within the context of this agreement, not through a separate, potentially burdensome, authorization process. As noted above, the State recognizes the presence of wilderness resources and values and is prepared to consider these and other park purposes through normal implementation of the MMOU. The MMOU calls for “notification” to the Service of state activities. In practice, ADF&G staff members are expected to contact the park *before* the activity takes place to insure opportunity for Service input.

Other state management activities (e.g. fire management) are similarly covered by various government-to-government agreements and processes, which provide sufficient opportunity for consultation to insure that park purposes and values are recognized without this additional requirement. Our concerns apply to academic and private researchers as well. For these entities, we request the Service address protection of all park resources and values through existing research permit requirements, thus relieving the Service from separately imposing the “minimum requirement/minimum tool” for wilderness values on non-Service entities.

4

Minimum Requirement/Minimum Tool: Commercial Services

We also object to applying the minimum requirement/minimum tool analysis to commercial service providers as proposed on page 56. Under the new Concessions law, those operating under commercial use authorizations as well as concession operations will undergo a rigorous process to be allowed to operate in any National Park Service administered area. As with non-Service administrative activities, we request that the Service use existing commercial service authorization mechanisms to address the resources and values identified in this plan.

5

Broader Recognition of Recreational Activities

The specific purposes of Denali Park and Preserve as listed in ANILCA Section 202(3) include “to provide continued opportunities, including reasonable access, for mountain climbing, mountaineering, and other wilderness recreational activities.” [Emphasis added.] Yet the

Response to Comments

SoA-2

The BCMP clarifies in Chapter 1 the proper hierarchy of statutes and policies.

SoA-3

The text of the preferred alternative has been revised to clarify that the minimum requirement instruction applies to administrative actions of the National Park Service. Management actions of the State of Alaska Department of Fish and Game within the boundaries of Denali National Park and Preserve should follow the intent and process of the Master Memorandum of Understanding, which includes timely consultation before management actions are scheduled so that both agencies can agree on methodologies that minimize adverse impacts to park resources and values.

SoA-4

The minimum requirement/minimum tool test is incorporated into the existing research permit process, so the State of Alaska’s concern is already addressed for present and future research permit applications from academic and private researchers.

SoA-5

The intent of this section of the BCMP was to explain how criteria implementing provisions of concessions law and NPS Management Policies were derived for Denali. The reference to minimum requirement has been removed from this section.

Comments

Backcountry Plan sometimes appears to focus primarily on protection of “wilderness values” to the apparent exclusion of other important purposes and uses such as wildlife viewing and recreation. We have identified several locations where this issue can be addressed:

Page ii, Purpose and Need, first sentence: We request revision to insure the plan does not inadvertently imply that protecting physical wilderness characteristics is more important than providing for the recreational activities listed in the purposes of the unit.

Page 3, last paragraph, second sentence: Consistent with the above comments, we request revision to recognize the important historical human uses of the unit.

Page 57, first bullet, third point: “They provide education relevant to preservation of wildlife, wilderness, and other resources and values.”

APPLICABLE LAWS, REGULATIONS AND POLICIES

In this portion of Chapter 1, we request recognition or clarification of the following additional applicable authorities:

Page 19, Off-Road Vehicle Access: Also note that 36 CFR Part 13.46 allows the use of snowmobiles, motorboats, dog teams, and other means of surface transportation traditionally employed by local rural residents for subsistence. Other means of surface transportation may include the use of off-road vehicles for subsistence.

Page 20, Closures and Public Use Limits, 36 CFR § 1.5: Revise to clarify that NPS regulations at 36 CFR Part 13.30 supercede the closure regulations at 36 CFR Part 1.5 for Alaskan park units.

Pages 21-22, Wilderness Management: Per our general comments, please clarify that when the national policies conflict with ANILCA, the statute prevails.

Pages 22-23, Guided Activities and Commercial Services. Recognize that ANILCA Section 1307 allows the continuation of existing visitor services and provides a preference for selecting visitor services, except guided sport fishing and hunting.

Page 23, Facilities. Also note that ANILCA Sections 1306 and 1310 allow administrative sites and facilities for administrative, navigation, or research purposes.

Page 25, Easement and Boundary Changes. Also note ANILCA Sections 103(b) and 1302 (including the 1302 amendment), address easement and boundary changes for most conservation system units in Alaska, including units managed by the National Park Service.

OTHER PAGE SPECIFIC COMMENTS

Page 27, Off-Road Vehicle Use. We disagree with the assertion that off-road vehicles (ORVs) are not authorized for subsistence purposes under Section 811 of ANILCA because they were not traditionally employed for subsistence purposes. Under Service

Response to Comments

SoA-6

The plan objectives have been clarified to include “protect and provide opportunities for wilderness recreational activities in the backcountry, including reasonable access.”

SoA-7

The Purpose and Need section of the Revised Draft plan contains many references to the important human uses of the unit. See, for example, p.7 and p.8 under Park Purpose, p.10 under Park Significance, and p.11 under Objectives, all of which are reiterated in the *Final EIS*. The statement on p.3 adequately reflects the point that NPS wanted to make regarding one of the key guiding principles for development of the *Revised Draft EIS*.

SoA-8

The language in this section is intended to provide the minimum condition necessary to meet the criteria specified in policy. While the National Park Service agrees that commercially guided activities should also seek to provide education about the broad array of park resources and values, the justification for having the activity in the backcountry is dependent upon education related specifically to wilderness resource values in keeping with the emphasis of the plan.

SoA-9

Language was added to chapter 1 as requested.

SoA-10

The NPS does not agree with this assertion. A memorandum from Deputy Regional Solicitor Dennis J. Hopewell on October 18, 2002, supported the NPS interpretation that 36 CFR 13.30 closure regulations apply only where specifically referenced in Part 13. The text in this section is consistent with that interpretation.

SoA-11

The general discussion of the hierarchy of statutes, regulation, and policy on pp.11-12 of the *Revised Draft EIS*, which is reiterated in the *Final EIS*, provides clarification for the public on this point.

Comments

regulations at 36 CFR 13.46, such subsistence use of ORVs is allowed unless closed through the regulatory process detailed in 13.46(a) through 13.46(c). Denali National Park and Preserve is currently evaluating eligible subsistence users traditional use of off-road vehicles in Cantwell and within the park in the Cantwell area. A finding that ORVs were traditionally employed is pending. It is therefore inaccurate for the Service to state that off-road vehicles are not authorized in the park or preserve.

Page 42, Table 2-1: Management Area Descriptions, Backcountry Hiker Management Area. Based on inquiries, we understand that the “No camping” provision in this proposal is intended to prevent people from camping directly on specified trails, rather than a nondescript area closure within the vicinity of the trails. In order for this provision to be meaningful to the public and enforceable by the Service, both the trail locations and portions affected need to be specifically defined. We do not support any closures that are not properly identified.

Page 46, Table 2-5: Natural Sound Disturbance. The text within the table and the notes that accompany this table fail to address the issue of noise generated from legal access methods provided through law and regulation. This text leads the reader to assume that motorized noise is automatically inappropriate within Denali backcountry, a conclusion that would not be consistent with ANILCA’s protections of motorized access. We request explanation in the table or “Notes” to recognize that legal motorized access and its associated sounds are not inherently inconsistent with management of the Denali backcountry. We also request inclusion of some descriptive narrative that better conveys a recognizable sound intensity represented by various decibel levels. For example, it would be helpful to associate decibel level ranges with the “three-part scale” referenced on page 137. In addition, the presentation would be more neutral if the Service replaced the term “noise” with “sound.”

Page 47, Table 2-6: Encounters with People. We recognize the Service’s efforts to better define encounter rates, and we appreciate Service recognition that the standards may need to be refined after 5 years. In the meantime we question whether the quantified encounter rates reasonably reflect the accompanying qualitative descriptions. In Corridors rated “Very High,” for example, encountering 10 or fewer parties a day does not seem to match up with “*may always be in sight and sound of other parties.*” At the other end of the spectrum in the “Very Low” encounter rate category, it seems unwise to state that “*Visitors can expect to encounter no other parties in these areas....*” A more realistic statement might be: “*Visitors are unlikely to encounter parties in these areas....*” Our concerns about encounter rates were first articulated in our letter of April 12, 2004. These standards are not yet adequate to support regulatory closures or restrictions under Section 1110(a).

Page 50, Access, General Guidance. We are aware that the Service has compiled a substantial amount of information for this plan related to historical activities and access. Based on our understanding of the methodology, we are concerned that the data may be limited in scope and incomplete. The State has long held that a documented understanding of pre-ANILCA public use is essential to properly identify and manage access for “traditional activities” under Section 1110(a) and “means of surface transportation traditionally employed” under Section 811. When the original GMPs were completed by the Service and subsequently approved by the Alaska Land Use Council, it was understood by all state and federal participants that the Service did not

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SoA-12

Language was added to chapter 1 as requested.

SoA-13

Language was added to chapter 1 as requested.

SoA-14

Language was added to chapter 1 as requested.

SoA-15

At the time the *Revised Draft EIS* was written, the text was correct. A new finding that concluded ORVs were traditionally employed in parts of the park additions near Cantwell has since been published. Information in chapter 1 has been updated accordingly.

SoA-16

Management area designations reference specific trails identified in chapter 3, which include both a width and a length. The management area designation applies only to the trail surface itself.

SoA-17

It is important to recognize that allowed uses can and do cause adverse impacts to park resources. Much as hiking can cause trampling and erosion to plants and soils, the use of motorized equipment for access to traditional activities causes noise impacts to the natural sound environment. It is important for the BCMP to acknowledge these adverse impacts and seek to minimize them while allowing for legal use of the area. Congress recognized this fact by providing for reasonable regulation to “protect the natural and other values of conservation system units,” and went further to provide for closure to special access if it would be detrimental to the resource values of the unit (ANILCA Section 1110(a)).

SoA-18

Clarifications have been made in Table 2-6 to address these concerns.

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have a sufficient knowledge base to include the access plan required by Section 1301(b)(4). Therefore, National Park Service Regional Director Boyd Evison made a commitment to conduct comprehensive studies of pre-ANILCA access and activities in cooperation with the State. The ADF&G, with cooperation from the Service, completed a successful study of pre-ANILCA activities for the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. We request an opportunity to review the objectives and methodology of the current data gathering effort. The Backcountry Plan is essentially designed to conclude the required Section 1301(b)(4) element of the original GMP, and therefore must be based on complete and accurate information.

Page 50, Access, General Guidance, second paragraph. We recommend separating the excellent “tools” discussion from the general access section. While all of the tools have some possible application to access, a number of them also apply to other subjects (e.g. human waste disposal) unrelated to access. 19

Pages 51-52, Registration and Permit Systems. We request clarification that mandatory registration and public use permit requirements can only be implemented through regulation. We do not support mandatory registration if the sole purpose is to gather public use data – especially in the park additions – when less burdensome methods are available through commercial use providers, survey cards, and/or periodic sampling studies. We support use of less restrictive measures to meet identified standards before implementing registration or permit systems. 20

Page 54, Group Size. We request the plan clarify that rulemaking pursuant to ANILCA Section 1110(a) is necessary to implement group size limits for non-commercial activities. 21

Pages 59-60, Adaptive Management. To explain the implementation of “ongoing monitoring” and adaptive management, we recommend the Service develop a step-down comprehensive monitoring plan to supplement tables 2-2 through 2-9 in Chapter 2. The monitoring plan should be made available for public review. In the meantime, we request the final backcountry plan outline the general purpose and content of the monitoring plan, including: 22

- a statement of objectives for both overall and site specific monitoring,
- what characteristics the Service intends to monitor,
- sampling strategies, techniques or procedures for data analysis, and
- criteria used to develop conclusions.

Page 60, Adaptive Management, second paragraph, fourth bullet. We recommend this bullet be revised so that there is no misunderstanding that a process is required to implement such closures. Any closures under the annual backcountry operational management plan must also undergo the closure procedures under 43 CFR Part 36.11 for ANILCA Section 1110(a) access, 36 CFR Part 13.46 for subsistence access, and 36 CFR Part 13.30 for other activities. 23

Pages 61-62 and page 66, Access under Alternatives 2 and 3. We strongly object to extending application of the Old Denali Park definition of “traditional activities” (36 CFR Part 13.63(h)) to any ANILCA designated unit or addition. We also object to any efforts to legislatively exempt the “Old Park” from the access provisions of ANILCA Section 1110(a) – as proposed under Alternative 3. See also first comment for page 50.

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SoA-19

The National Park Service agrees that many of the access management tools could be used to address topics that are not directly access-related. However, listing the tools was not necessary in order for the National Park Service to employ any of the authorities or methods described. The list is important in this context only as an articulation of the NPS access management strategy for the Denali backcountry, which is a central point of concern for the plan. Separating the “tools” discussion would require some changes in the list and dilute the desired emphasis on access. Listing the tools in this section in no way compromises the ability of the National Park Service to use the tools appropriately in other contexts.

SoA-20

The modified preferred alternative includes an Implementation section that identifies required regulations, including regulations for any new registration or permit requirements.

SoA-21

Table 2-13 has been added to address implementation requirements, including the identification of necessary regulatory changes.

SoA-22

A Monitoring Plan that includes the elements listed will be an important component of plan implementation. The National Park Service is committed to involving the public in development of the monitoring plan. It is one item identified specifically for consideration by the Backcountry Implementation Citizens Advisory Committee, which will serve as the chartered Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) group to advise the National Park Service on various aspects of the plan implementation.

SoA-23

Appropriate regulations and procedures for closures are thoroughly addressed in chapter 1. Text in the adaptive management section indicates regulation could be required for implementing portions of the backcountry operational management plan.

Comments

Pages 72 and 76, Access, Alternatives 4 and 5. Unlike Alternatives 2 and 3, there is no language stating that “access will be managed using the tools identified under Actions Common to All Action Alternatives.” Since the tools are listed as common to all alternatives, we assume this omission is an oversight in the text that can easily be clarified in the final plan. We also request clarification that any future access closures proposed in response to the changes in desired future conditions will be implemented through separate rulemaking.

Page 72, Access, second paragraph. We do not see a sufficient need for broadly applied registration requirements for overnight use in the park additions and winter day use east of the Kahiltna Glacier. Compliance would be burdensome and other, less restrictive methods are available for data gathering.

Pages 80-81, Shelters and cabins. In the section Alternatives Considered But Rejected, we take issue with several aspects of this discussion. First, the majority of the planning area is outside designated wilderness; thus the reference to “within wilderness areas” is misleading at best, and furthers our concern that the park is attempting to manage the entire backcountry the same as designated wilderness. Second, contrary to the text, ANILCA Section 1303(3) does provide for the construction of cabins for public use on all parklands, regardless of their status as designated wilderness, even though we recognize the park is not required to do so. Furthermore, the purpose is not limited to public safety. Third, the discussion does not recognize the State’s original request in our previous comments for consideration of such public use cabins.

Page 82, Summary Table of Alternatives. The text describing the size of the areas in Alternatives 3 and 4 have been noted incorrectly. Alternative 3 should read “...the areas would be the minimum necessary to provide these experiences based on present demand...” and Alternative 4 should read “The areas would be of sufficient size to accommodate anticipated growth in the next 20 years...”

Page 105, Map of proposed land exchange. The State conceptually supports consideration of the proposed land exchange involving the boundary between the state and parklands in the vicinity of the Tokositna and Coffee rivers. It is not a high priority for the State in light of other exchange activity elsewhere in the state; therefore we would need substantial Service assistance to facilitate the public involvement and other statutory requirements associated with implementing any land exchange.

Chapter 3

Pages 121-132, Wildlife. Section 1314 of ANILCA confirms that the State of Alaska retains authority to manage fish and wildlife on public lands. Clarification of this role and a commitment to cooperate in related matters is addressed in the Master Memorandum of Understanding between the Service and ADF&G. We request that the respective roles of the Service and State, and a Service commitment to cooperation, be fully recognized in the text. We also recommend the Service provide a copy of the Master Memorandum of Understanding as an appendix in the final plan.

Response to Comments

SoA-24

The suggested clarification was made in the modified preferred alternative.

SoA-25

The State is correct that ANILCA Section 1303(3) provides the authority for the construction of new cabins if “the use is necessary to reasonably accommodate subsistence uses or is otherwise authorized by law.” Section 1315(d) limits that authority, however, in designated wilderness to cabins “necessary for the protection of the public health and safety.” As stated on page 441 of the *Revised Draft EIS*, public scoping did not identify this as an issue needing resolution in the plan. With regard to the 1980 ANILCA park and preserve additions, the National Park Service would be conservative about new cabin construction due to the purposes for the additions stated in Titles I and II of ANILCA, that include, among others: to preserve wilderness resource values and to provide opportunities for wilderness recreation activities. The National Park Service has evaluated over 99% of the 1980 additions as being suitable for wilderness designation and has the responsibility to preserve the congressional option to so designate. To help provide for wilderness recreation activities, the National Park Service agreed to partner with the State to construct six cabins along the southern border of Denali National Park, and would further encourage the State and other entities to take advantage of any similar perceived need adjacent to other parklands.

SoA-26

This typographic error was corrected in the tables in the *Final EIS*.

SoA-27

The Master Memorandum of Understanding clarifies the roles of the State of Alaska and NPS in fish and wildlife management. The Master Memorandum was included in the 1986 *General Management Plan* (GMP), which remains current for topics not addressed in this limited GMP amendment.

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Comments

Page 133, Natural Soundscapes, paragraph 5. Consistent with our comments on page 46, we are concerned by reference to the statement in Director’s Order #47 that “*noise is generally defined as an unwanted or undesired sound, often unpleasant in quality, intensity or repetition.*” We recognize that maintaining natural sound is an important goal for many visitors, but some human caused sound is necessary to conduct legally allowed activities. To address this concern, we request the next sentence in this paragraph be revised as follows: “Noise may often be the byproduct of desirable or legally authorized activities or machines, but it still subject to management to protect park resources.”

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Page 140, Backcountry Visitor Use, second paragraph. The State opposes extension of the backcountry unit and quota system outside the Old Park. The basis for the original system does not fit with the realities of backcountry use in the ANILCA additions and the access protections under Sections 811 and 1110(a).

Page 141, Wilderness Suitability and Proposal. Consistent with our general comments above about wilderness, we disagree that lands suitable for wilderness designation must be managed “as wilderness” under the 2001 NPS Management Policies.

Pages 143-146, Subsistence. This is a well-written and informative section and responds to most of our recommendations on the previous draft plan in 2003. However, we note several minor errors in the text. First, we recommend the Service amend the final sentence on page 144 to show that Telida was also among the communities covered in the Stokes 1984 publication. The ADF&G, Division of Subsistence also conducted research in other Parks Highway communities, both north and south of the park. We recommend citing the following study, which described subsistence activities in Lake Minchumina as of the mid-1970s in what was then the proposed north addition to the park:

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Bishop, Richard H., 1978. Subsistence Resource Use in the Proposed North Addition to Mt. McKinley National Park. Anthropology and Historic Preservation, Cooperative Park Studies Unit, Occasional Paper No. 17. University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Page 168, Backpacking, second paragraph. We continue to object to the annual compendium requirement that all users carry bear proof containers in most backcountry units in the Old Park, especially if no perishable food is being carried and the campers are well away from the park road or bear concentration areas. Not all areas of the Old Park have the same use patterns or bear concentration areas found in selected popular hiking areas adjacent to the park road. Instead, we recommend that food storage be addressed in the same manner as other park backcountry areas by keeping the focus on prohibiting animal attractants and enforcing existing state law (5 AAC 92.230 Feeding of Game), in combination with an education program and the continued availability of containers for loan from the park. This issue has been discussed outside the context of the backcountry management plan so we recommend some recognition that revised guidance may be developed separately in the future.

Page 178, Sport Hunting. This section incorrectly implies that all hunting on the preserve regulated by the State’s Board of Game is “sport” hunting. In fact, the state hunting regulations provide for general hunting (including subsistence) through resident and non-resident seasons.

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Response to Comments

SoA-28

This change was made on the chapter 3 Errata sheet. See also SOA-17.

SoA-29

These changes were made on the chapter 3 Errata sheet and on the Bibliography Errata sheet.

SoA-30

ANILCA Section 1313 specifically provides for the “taking of fish and wildlife for sport purposes and subsistence uses” within National Preserves. Non-subsistence fishing and hunting is regulated in the preserves under the State of Alaska’s general hunting regulations. As a result, whenever the plan refers to the ANILCA-authorized activity it refers to “sport hunting” or “sport fishing,” but whenever the reference is to the State’s regulation it refers to “general hunting.”

Comments

Further, rural and non-Alaska residents currently can hunt on preserve lands. We recommend use of the term “general hunting” when not specifically referring to subsistence.

Page 188, Snowmachines, first paragraph. We request clarification that, depending on the final alternative selected, the Service may not need to define “traditional activities” at this time. We also continue to request the document reflect Congressional intent to protect Alaskan activities occurring at the time of passage of ANILCA, recognizing that reasonable regulatory processes are available to protect park resources without unnecessary limitations on the types of activities.

Page 188, Off-Road Vehicles (ORVs). See comment regarding page 27. Under NPS regulations at 36 CFR 13.46, ORV use that was traditionally employed for subsistence purposes is allowed unless closed by regulation. 31

Page 205, Backcountry Management During Winter, first paragraph. The State maintains a longstanding objection to requiring camping permits in the winter and in remote areas where overcrowding, competition, or resource protection are not significant issues and when the minor benefits of permits are outweighed by the burdens imposed on the user. Congress intended that permits be avoided whenever possible. We request the Service delete this requirement during periods and in locations where visitor use is not impacting resources.

Chapter 4

Page 216, Assumptions, #10. We question the relevance of the statement that the majority of [snowmachine] use within park boundaries does not have characteristics that would meet the definition of “traditional activities” presently applied in the Old Park and therefore request its deletion. In light of the different conditions and historical use patterns between the “Old Park” and the ANILCA additions, this statement is presented without appropriate context and implies that these differences are automatically problematic. 32

Page 232, Trampling and Damage. We recommend the Service include more information from the study conducted by Ms. Kathryn Tietz regarding impacts of trampling on summer and winter vegetation in interior Alaska taiga ecosystems. Of all the studies cited in the text, this study has the greatest relevance to Denali National Park and Preserve ecosystems. 33

Page 258, Ungulates, second paragraph. The statements in the second paragraph attributed to Mr. Griesse are incomplete regarding ADF&G’s information on impacts to moose willow habitat in the Talkeetna Mountains. Further information from ADF&G reveals such information is anecdotal. 34

Page 274, Alternative 4 and **Page 277**, Alternative 5. Based on the cited examples, it appears overly simplistic to attribute minor to moderate adverse impacts to wildlife populations and habitats under Alternatives 4 and 5 strictly to increased snowmachine and motorboat use. Since Alternatives 4 and 5 increase overall recreation in the park, both motorized and non-motorized, we request a more comprehensive statement such as: “*there would generally be minor to moderate adverse impacts to wildlife populations and habitats under Alternative 4 because of impacts from increased recreation use, both motorized and non-motorized.*” 35

Response to Comments

SoA-31

See response above. Clarifications as to the status of ORV use for subsistence use at Denali were made on the chapter 3 Errata sheet.

SoA-32

This statement was necessary in order to analyze the impacts of defining “traditional activities” as presented in Alternatives 2 and 3, which would define the term with the same language used for the Old Park. The implications of the statement only apply to the impact analysis for those two alternatives.

SoA-33

For winter trampling, the study by Kathryn Tietz (Tietz 1996) is important because it was conducted in Alaska. However, the usefulness of the study is limited because no measurements of the vegetation that was actually subjected to snowmachine traffic were taken prior to applying the use. The assessment that there was no damage was based on an extrapolation from surrounding vegetation. No measurements were taken to see if the compacted snow observed in the experimental treatment trails remained on the vegetation longer than the snow that was adjacent to the trail. Also, no soil temperature data were collected. The results of this work are not sufficient to say conclusively that the impacts observed in other areas would not also occur in Alaska.

For summer trampling, the National Park Service has conducted research at Denali that is the most relevant to the ecosystems in the park. This research is cited in the Vegetation section of Chapter 4: Environmental Consequences.

SoA-34

The information attributed to Herman Griesse is appropriately cited as personal communication, not as a scientific study. These observations from a professional biologist are only one source of many that describe potential impacts on wildlife from snowmachine use.

SoA-35

The concluding analysis for wildlife impacts for the modified preferred alternative in the *Final EIS*, which closely follows Alternative 4, was modified to make it clear that non-motorized recreational activities have some effect on wildlife as well. However, most of the serious concerns cited in the text are related to motorized access.

Comments

Page 281, Natural Soundscapes. Consistent with previous comments, we request this section also recognize that much of the “noise” generated within the park is from legally authorized access methods under the provisions of ANILCA.

Pages 309-331, Wilderness Resources. See general comments above about wilderness management. In particular we reiterate our concern that the document appears to be using national policies to “trump” the statutory provisions of ANILCA.

Pages 332-355, Subsistence Resources and Opportunities. The Methodology section on page 332 states that, “This analysis assumes that adverse impacts to subsistence resources and opportunities from subsistence uses are negligible because subsistence use is very low, especially compared to recreational use of the park.” However, the next 20+ pages detail an array of “major adverse effects,” “moderate adverse effects,” and “adverse effects” that are projected for each of the five alternatives. Similarly, Table 2-11 (page 95) summarizing the projected environmental consequences of each planning alternative, states that the Preferred Alternative “would create unfavorable conditions for subsistence wildlife populations and increase conflicts between recreational and subsistence users.” The cumulative impacts of all alternatives on subsistence are projected to be “major.” Based on the detailed and candid assessment presented concerning the potential adverse effects to subsistence for each alternative, we respectfully disagree that the potential for adverse effects is “negligible.” We request the final plan address this discrepancy.

In addition, we recommend the plan be explicit in explaining how the Service will mitigate or avoid adverse effects and cumulative effects on subsistence. For example, Cantwell residents need to know how the Service will address continuing increases in recreational use in areas they have used and continue to use for hunting and trapping in the park additions.

Page 348, continuing paragraph about Kantishna. We strongly object to the suggestion that the Service may expand the current firearm closure period in the Kantishna area. The State opposes restrictions on valid subsistence uses that favor expanding seasonal visitor uses. As stated in our comments on the original Kantishna firearm restrictions (January 2000 letter to then Superintendent Steve Martin), the Service must “*guard against management decisions which treat legally-authorized subsistence uses secondarily to non-consumptive uses.*” Although only a small number of qualified local rural residents currently subsistence hunt in the Kantishna area, the area is open for subsistence uses and could be used more frequently in the future. Qualified local rural residents should not continue to see their opportunities to legally conduct subsistence activities in the park additions and preserve reduced in favor of further accommodating recreational users. Extending the firearm closure period would be another incremental step toward effectively eliminating subsistence uses altogether in portions of the park additions in order to accommodate seasonal visitors and recreational users. The State recognizes public safety issues in its hunting regulations that prohibit shooting across and from highways, etc. Any additional firearm restrictions that respond to public safety concerns must be substantiated and must be the minimum necessary.

Response to Comments

SoA-36

The text in this section introduces the topic for purposes of analysis and in no way implies that “noise” in the park is illegal. This topic has been explored elsewhere in the plan (see, for example, chapter 3 Errata sheet and SoA-17).

SoA-37

This statement reflected the impact only of subsistence uses on other subsistence uses. The text is still clear that major adverse cumulative affects to subsistence resources and opportunities have occurred and would still occur under the preferred alternative of the *Revised Draft EIS* and the modified preferred alternative of the *Final EIS*.

SoA-38

The modified preferred alternative contains two specific management area changes designed to mitigate impacts to subsistence use: reducing the intensity of visitor impacts in the Kantishna Hills and the southern park additions east of Bull River. The new standards for encounter rates, natural sound disturbance, and other indicators in these areas should trigger management action that would prevent further deterioration in subsistence resources and opportunities. In addition, the Broad Pass visitor contact station would be used to convey information to non-subsistence users about how and where to travel to avoid adversely affecting subsistence users in the Cantwell area, where the most severe impacts occur.

SoA-39

In the analysis of impacts from the modified preferred alternative, the text is clarified to indicate that an extension of the firearms closure would be a risk in allowing the level of visitor use and facility development identified in the modified preferred alternative, but not a certainty. Visitor safety remains an important NPS concern, and the presence of private land in the Kantishna area reduces the ability of the National Park Service to control visitor use levels in the road-accessible portions of Kantishna.

Comments

Page 397, Recreational Opportunity, first full paragraph, third sentence. We recommend the Service delete this sentence because not all “recreational use” would be prohibited and because Section 1110(a) is a minimum guarantee, not a limiting condition.

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Page 401, Recreational Opportunity, first full paragraph, third sentence. Comment for page 397, above, applies to this page as well.

Chapter 5

Pages 420-425, Consultation and Coordination. We note that the plan and particularly this section, does not describe the hearing and participation requirements found in ANILCA Section 1301(d). This section of ANILCA allows various state and federal agencies, native corporations, and interested stakeholders to participate in development, preparation, and revision of conservation system unit plans. We recommend the Service include recognition of Section 1301(d) in the text of the final plan, including the commitment in the General Management Plan (page 155) that such consultation extends to subsequent step down plans.

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Appendices

Pages 492-510, Appendix C: ANILCA Section 810(a) Summary of Evaluation and Findings: This analysis reiterates information presented elsewhere in the plan, and appropriately indicates how some potential impacts to subsistence could be avoided or mitigated. However, we recommend the authors review the information in the 810 analysis with the “Affected Environment” and “Environmental Consequences” sections to ensure that consistent information is being presented throughout the plan. See also our comments regarding pages 332-355.

Page 516-519, Appendix E. It appears the Service created the Minimum Requirement Procedure in the plan for use specifically in Denali National Park and Preserve. Consistent with our May 5, 2004 comments to the Arthur Carhart Center regarding the national, interagency “Minimum Requirement Decision Guide,” Denali’s proposed process does not reasonably recognize the obvious statutory exceptions to the Wilderness Act found in ANILCA. For example, question #4 on page 516 should specifically mention ANILCA as a source of special statutory guidance that may allow a specific activity that would not normally be allowed in designated Wilderness. Also, this question should more appropriately be placed as the first or second question in the Procedure prompts.

42

Page 543, Bibliography. “Haynes, Simeone, and Andersen” is the correct spelling of the authors’ names in this citation.

Thank you for the opportunity to review this revised draft. If you have any questions, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Sally Gibert
ANILCA Program Coordinator

Response to Comments

SoA-40

The sentence was edited in the analysis of the modified preferred alternative to indicate an exclusion of “non-consumptive” uses rather than “recreational activities.” These sentences are part of an analysis of impacts to recreational opportunities from Alternatives 4, 5, and the modified preferred alternative. This statement is an important qualifier to the previous sentence, which indicates that there would be ongoing opportunities to use snowmachines for access to traditional activities. The provisions of the modified preferred alternative do not necessarily protect recreational snowmachine access. If the term “traditional activities” were ever defined similar to the way it is defined in the Old Park, existing NPS regulations would in fact prohibit recreational use of snowmachines without a special regulation to protect such use.

SoA-41

Although Section 1301(d) of ANILCA was not specifically cited in chapter 5, the National Park Service exceeded all the requirements in this section. This plan does not amend p.155 (appendix A) of the GMP, which remains in effect.

SoA-42

The text in chapter 2 has been clarified to indicate that the minimum requirement tool presented in appendix E is an example of the type of tool that could be utilized by the National Park Service, not necessarily the worksheet that would always be used. The National Park Service expects the questionnaire to evolve over time and respond to particular needs in Alaska wilderness areas and Denali in particular.

Comments

Formal action on the Revised Draft Denali Backcountry Management Plan from the June 28, 2005 Denali Subsistence Resource Commission Meeting

Motion: by Vernon Carlson to make subsistence a priority over other backcountry uses in the backcountry plan. Percy Duyck seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously 1

Justification: Rather than single out particular areas that are important to subsistence, subsistence should be made a priority throughout the ANILCA additions because subsistence use areas can change, and because this way no one's prime use area will be excluded.

Motion: by Ray Collins that the following points be recognized in the Backcountry Management Plan: 2

1. Identify management zones that specifically recognize subsistence as a purpose/priority in those areas. These management zones should be applied to areas presently used, and adapted to should changes in subsistence use patterns occur in the future.
2. The plan should contain more specific guidance on the management of conflicts between subsistence and recreational use.

Jeralyn Hath seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

Motion: by Ray Collins requesting that the NPS hold a formal discussion on the management of conflicts between subsistence and recreational uses of park lands, and to draft guidelines to aid in decision making when those conflicts occur. Percy Duyck seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

Response to Comments

SRC-1

ANILCA Section 202(3)(a) specifies that subsistence uses by local residents "shall be permitted in the additions to the park where such uses are traditional," and Section 810 requires certain criteria to be met before a Federal agency takes an action that would "significantly restrict subsistence uses." However, there is no legal provision that would allow for subsistence to be prioritized above non-consumptive uses.

SRC-2

The modified preferred alternative does not prioritize subsistence use in any management area. However, to reduce future conflicts between subsistence and other uses the southern Kantishna Hills and the Broad Pass area east of the Bull River were designated Management Area B to keep recreational visitor impacts low and relatively dispersed compared to Management Area A. Keeping visitor intensity low should minimize the number of conflicts. When conflicts do occur, the National Park Service would utilize the tools described under the Access section of chapter 2. See also SoA-38.

Comments



DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
PACIFIC AIR FORCES

Superintendent
Attn: Denali Backcountry Management Plan
P.O. Box 9
Denali Park, AK 99755

Colonel Jerry I. Siegel
Commander, 611 Air Operations Group
9480 Pease Avenue, Ste 102
Elmendorf AFB, AK 99506-2100

Dear Mr. Anderson,

As the airspace director for the Air Force in Alaska, we are sensitive to land management issues involving activity below the Alaskan military training airspace. The southern section of Denali National Park lies under a portion of Suisna Military Operations Area (MOA), classified by the FAA as Special Use Airspace.

First, let me congratulate you, your park planning staff and the regional Park Service staff for their continued close cooperative work, both with this project and the 11th Air Force Resource Protection Council (RPC). Particularly, we thank Mr. Tranel and Mr. Loeb for keeping our staff informed as this project has developed over the past 20+ months. We are writing to comment favorably to the draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). We want to make one suggestion. The draft makes reference in several places to forming a working group for achieving desired conditions in the park as affected by aircraft. You could delete the "military" reference in these locations for the following reason. The 1997 Alaska MOA EIS Record of Decision formed the RPC to address inter-agency issues such as this. That consultation process is established and working very well. In fact we think it is a national model. So to put it succinctly, we are already there. There is no need to invite additional military participation. Duplication would only serve to confuse resource managers.

Two corrections or clarifications need to be addressed. In Chapter 3, Transportation & Access section (page 230), Suisna MOA use is mentioned. We assume the data comes from the MOA EIS. In fact we have found that our use is much less than predicted. If you assume 1hr per sortie, the EIS predicted about 3,600 hrs per year (based on 15 sorties/day and 240 days/yr). Last year we used the MOA only 926 hours (75% less). The same paragraph lists the MOA as an "operating" area. It's actually spelled as an "operations" area.

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Response to Comments

USAF-1

This information is included in the chapter 3 Errata sheet.

Comments

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. As you might expect, my staff and their families and friends take great delight in having such a treasure so close to Anchorage and Fairbanks. The park is a national asset in whose stewardship we take honor in being partly responsible.

Sincerely,


JERRY I. SIEGEL, Colonel, USAF

cc:
11 AF/CV
611 ASG/CC
NPS AK Region, Judith Gottlieb

Response to Comments