

Dry Bay Off Highway Vehicle Use

Glacier Bay National Park & Preserve

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Environmental Assessment

Purpose:

The National Park Service (NPS) will prepare an Environmental Assessment for the Dry Bay area of Glacier Bay National Preserve to address Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) use for commercial fishing, access to permitted cabins, subsistence, and recreational activities while minimizing and correcting damage to wetland, stream, and wildlife habitat. Alternatives will be evaluated for managing off-highway vehicle use at Dry Bay.

Section 205 of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980 (ANILCA) authorizes the use of motorized vehicles in the Preserve in support of commercial fishing. Other motor vehicle uses may also be authorized by ANILCA Titles VIII (subsistence) and XI (special access) and by park regulations. Currently OHVs are used in support of commercial fishing, access to permitted cabins, subsistence, recreation, and in conjunction with hunting, trapping, guiding, and sport fishing activities that occur in the Preserve.

What is the situation at Dry Bay?

OHV use in Dry Bay has existed since the mid-1900's. The use was primarily to support and service the commercial salmon fishery that existed in the area and continues to exist today. Initially, heavy trucks were used to transport fish and fishing equipment back and forth between the various fishing sites on the Alsek and East Alsek Rivers, the beach, and the Dry Bay airstrip. In the past decades use of smaller, more economical all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) has resulted in a network of smaller width tracks. For commercial fishing purposes the Park Compendium states that "off-road vehicles are allowed with a permit only on the existing trails shown on the map in Appendix C and on existing trails to and from gill net sites."

Additional activities in the Dry Bay area include access to permitted cabins, sport and subsistence hunting and fishing, trapping, operation of three commercial lodges catering to recreational users, and boat take out for the popular Alsek/Tatshenshini River trip.

Why is a change needed?

There are often multiple and redundant OHV tracks leading to the same destinations in Dry Bay. OHV routes receiving higher levels of use are often in poor condition. Over time, OHV use has degraded some sensitive habitats by damaging vegetation, compacting soils, channeling water leading to erosion, degrading water quality, and altering hydrological regimes. Wildlife use patterns and bird nesting sites may be altered by some OHV routes.

OHV use for commercial fishing is currently regulated through the compendium. A permanent authorization is needed. Use of

OHV's for activities other than commercial fishing can be authorized by the designation of OHV routes (36 CFR 4.10) An action is needed to authorize OHV use other than those used in conjunction with commercial fishing.

What are some possible solutions to this problem?

Factors to consider in resolving this problem include protecting wildlife, habitat, and the environmental processes that make Dry Bay such a special place. The solutions should accommodate the needs of those working, living, and recreating in Dry Bay now, and in the future. Your input in creating practical solutions to the OHV use issues that exist in Dry Bay are key to this process. Here are few examples:

- Identify and/or designate OHV routes.
- Re-route or eliminate routes that are causing serious or irreparable environmental damage.

- Reinforce or harden sections of routes to minimize long-term damage in wet or sensitive areas such as salmon streams or water crossings.
- Construct bridge crossings or embankments that protect streams.
- Eliminate redundant or minimally used routes

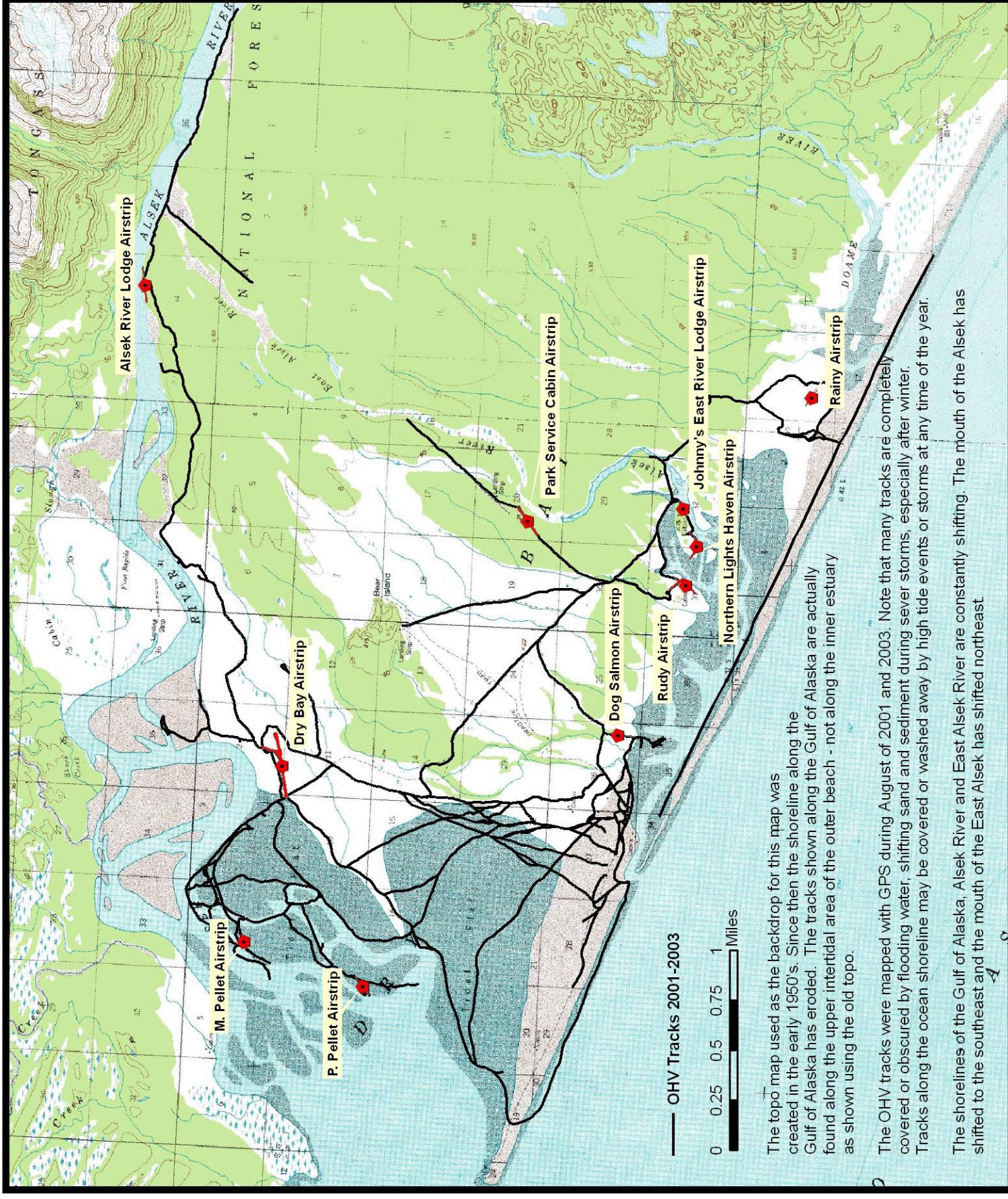
What part can I play?

Whether you are a commercial fisherman, subsistence user, lodge owner, hunter, sport fisherman, air taxi owner, river runner, or interested member of the public, you have a stake in how OHV use is managed in Dry Bay. The NPS needs your input to determine what routes should be designated or eliminated for OHV use, how to best repair and protect problem areas on routes, and identify other strategies on how to manage OHV use and protect resources. The NPS will be gathering additional data to help determine alternatives. The NPS will be conducting public scoping meetings in Dry Bay on June 1 and in Yakutat on June 2, 2006. Scoping comments should be

submitted to the NPS postmarked no later than June 30, 2006.

Please send your comments to:

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The topographic map used as the backdrop for this map was created in the early 1950's. Since then the shoreline along the Gulf of Alaska has eroded. The tracks shown along the Gulf of Alaska are actually found along the upper intertidal area of the outer beach - not along the inner estuary as shown using the old topo.

The OHV tracks were mapped with GPS during August of 2001 and 2003. Note that many tracks are completely covered or obscured by flooding water, shifting sand and sediment during severe storms, especially after winter. Tracks along the ocean shoreline may be covered or washed away by high tide events or storms at any time of the year.

The shorelines of the Gulf of Alaska, Alsek River and East Alsek River are constantly shifting. The mouth of the Alsek has shifted to the southeast and the mouth of the East Alsek has shifted northeast.

