

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

RECORD OF DECISION

FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT
DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT PLAN

Brooks River Area
Katmai National Park and Preserve
Alaska

The Department of the Interior, National Park Service, has prepared this Record of Decision on the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Development Concept Plan for Brooks River Area, Katmai National Park and Preserve, Alaska. This Record of Decision is a statement of the decision made, the background of the project, other alternatives considered, the basis for the decision, the environmentally preferable alternative, measures to minimize environmental harm, and public involvement in the decision making process.

DECISION (SELECTED ACTION)

The National Park Service will implement the proposed action--Beaver Pond Terrace (Alternative 5) as described in the Final Environmental Impact Statement. Implementation of this action will be phased as funding becomes available.

The National Park Service will manage visitor use and the area's resources in order to preserve the natural, scenic, and cultural values of the area. The Brooks River Area will have a wilderness-like setting, it will retain a unique cultural resource heritage, and it will have a diverse array of recreational opportunities, especially for brown bear viewing.

All facilities, except for the Dumpling Mountain trail, and visitor use in the area north of Brooks River will be relocated to lessen impact on prime bear habitat, to help reduce human/bear encounters, and lessen impact on nationally significant archeological sites and potentially significant ethnographic sites. The area north of the river will be designated a people-free zone. Except for the trail, this area will be restored to as nearly natural conditions as is reasonable.

Brooks Camp will be relocated on the Beaver Pond terrace and will consist of a lodge/dining facility and associated overnight cabins, a hostel, a campground, staff facilities, and interpretive facilities. These facilities will be designed and sited to minimize impacts on the cultural and natural environment (especially wildlife), during construction and operation. The lodge and other facilities will be simple and functional reflecting the best of traditional, wilderness backcountry accommodation designs.

Because of the high bear concentrations and spawning salmon at certain times of the year, the National Park Service will establish temporary closures for certain reaches of Brooks River during periods of very high bear use. These temporary closures will be based on bear management criteria which are updated on a regular basis. Such actions will reduce the number of human/bear encounters along the river, and decrease food conditioning and habituation in the local bear population.

Visitor use levels will be limited during peak periods in the Brooks River area and the visitor experience carefully managed to protect those resources that contribute to the quality of experience. The total number of people in the Brooks River area will be limited to 260 in July and 220 in September.

An integrated set of programs and facilities will be planned and developed to bring the human history of the region to life along with the story of the local environment. The interpretive program will include activities in the King Salmon gateway area and at Brooks River area.

Cultural and natural interpretive facilities and exhibits, such as reconstruction of a barabara replica, archeological excavation sites, ethnographic displays and work areas, flora and fauna exhibits, bear and salmon life cycle stories, and geology will be planned and developed.

To better disperse visitor use in the entire Naknek drainage and surrounding region, primary visitor orientation will be at the gateway community of King Salmon, where a full description of the region's resource-based recreation will be offered.

The role of partnerships will be emphasized to implement the DCP, for example, public-private partnerships for developing needed facilities and managing visitors. Facilities and programs historically provided by the National Park Service may be provided by other parties under NPS guidance.

BACKGROUND OF THE PROJECT

The need for a development concept plan that dealt with management issues in the Brooks River area was described and called for in the park's 1986 *General Management Plan*. The Brooks River area is internationally recognized for outstanding wildlife and fish resources. Each July, approximately 100,000 or more red salmon return from the sea to spawn in the Brooks River and in tributaries to Lake Brooks. A smaller run of several hundred coho salmon also make the run in late summer. The salmon migration attracts approximately 40 - 60 brown bears, who arrive to fish for the salmon in the river, particularly as they attempt to jump Brooks Falls. Brooks Camp is situated in prime bear habitat where Brooks River flows into Naknek Lake. A critical resource management issue in the Brooks River area is how to control the growing numbers of anglers, photographers, and bear viewers without severely impacting the natural dynamics of the local brown bear population, or degrading the visitor experience.

In 1991 the Brooks River area, a total of 494 incidents involving undesirable bear or human behavior were recorded for the 128 days between the first and last incidents, which averages out

to four incidents per day. The reduction of human/bear encounters in the area is a major safety concern of park management.

In addition to being built in prime bear habitat, Brooks Camp was built over nationally significant archeological resources, some of which contain human burials, and potentially significant ethnographical resources. Operation and maintenance of concessioner and NPS facilities continues to cause resource degradation of these sites. At present, any maintenance proposal requiring ground disturbance must be assessed by an archeologist and a cultural anthropologist for impacts and design of a mitigation strategy.

OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

Five other alternatives to the selected action were considered. Under the no-action alternative, existing conditions would be perpetuated and only modest changes in development and operations at Brooks Camp would occur. Most resource concerns would remain; no significant actions would occur to improve resource management or park and concession operations in the area.

Under alternative 1, the minimum requirements alternative, actions would be those that would be minimally necessary to keep Brooks Camp in place and have its operations comply with all laws, regulations, policies, and approved management plans. By retaining development on the peninsula of land north of the river mouth the ongoing impacts on bears, prime bear habitat, and nationally significant cultural resources are perpetuated. Development and actions would be carried out that would ameliorate some of those concerns, and still provide for the continuation of the Brooks Camp experience. In order to maintain the experience of a remote wilderness fish camp, the number of day users would be limited.

Under alternative 2, the former proposal, Brooks Camp and all other facilities north of the river would be removed and replaced in kind on the terrace overlooking the Beaver Pond in a less sensitive area where human/bear conflicts would be minimized as would impacts on archeological and ethnographic resources. The facilities would remain small and congruent with the park's wilderness character. The lodge would offer a range of visitor accommodations at various prices. Suites, rooms, a hostel, a dormitory, and tent houses could be made available to the visiting public. After removal efforts, remediation, and revegetation are completed, the north side of the river to the base of Dumlupınar Mountain would be designated as a people-free area, returning the area's resources to a more natural state.

Under alternative 3, the Iliuk Moraine Terrace alternative, Brooks Camp and all other facilities north of the river would be removed and replaced in kind on the terrace overlooking Iliuk Moraine. The Iliuk Moraine terrace is in a less sensitive bear use area where human/bear conflicts would be minimized as would impacts on archeological resources. The facilities would remain small and still congruent with the park's wilderness character; however, this alternative, of all the alternatives, would provide for the largest number of day users. After removal efforts, remediation, and revegetation are completed, the north side of the river to the base of Dumlupınar

Mountain would be designated as a people-free area, returning the area's resources to their former wild state.

Under alternative 4, the day use area only alternative, all facilities north of the river would be removed and would not be replaced in the park. The Brooks River area would be managed as a day use area only with established limits on visitor numbers at peak bear use times. Overnight accommodations for those preparing to visit Brooks River would be provided by private enterprise in the King Salmon/Naknek area. Access to Brooks River would be by tour boat and float plane. A management support facility would be required for NPS and concessioner day use operations at the Brooks River area.

BASIS FOR DECISION

After evaluation of public comments on the alternatives presented in the draft EIS, the selected action best balances the statutory mission of the National Park Service to provide long term resource preservation while allowing for appropriate levels of visitor use. The National Park Service finds that unhurried, overnight stays in the Brooks Camp area are a desirable means of visitor enjoyment that can be provided at a reasonable cost. The selected action complies with provisions of the National Historic Preservation Act and Wilderness Acts, policies of the National Park Service, the area's purpose based on its enabling legislation, constraints imposed on the area's management under the same legislation, and the protection of significant park resources.

ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERABLE ALTERNATIVE

A Record of Decision must identify the environmentally preferable alternative, which is that alternative which causes the least damage to the biological environment, and that best protects, preserves, and enhances resources. With its emphasis on a minimum development footprint, the removal of all facilities north of the river, and no visitor overnight facilities, alternative 4 is the environmentally preferable alternative.

MEASURES TO MINIMIZE ENVIRONMENTAL HARM

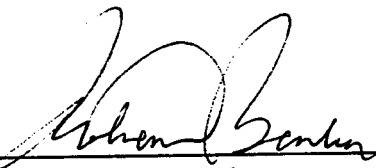
All practicable measures to avoid or minimize environmental impacts that could result from implementation of the selected action have been identified and incorporated into the selected action. These include relocation of all facilities and visitor use from the area north of Brooks River; relocated development will minimize, to the extent possible, impacts on bear habitat, other natural resources, and cultural resources; all development will be "light-on-the-land" and will utilize sustainable design and practices; limits on visitor use levels during peak visitation periods in the Brooks River area; the visitor experience will be carefully managed; on-site orientation with emphasis on bear safety and the cultural resources and story; bear viewing platforms will be designed and located to minimize impacts on bear habitat and behavior; increased practices and efforts to better disperse visitor use in the entire Naknek drainage and surrounding region with primary visitor orientation in the gateway community of King Salmon; and substantially increased emphasis on the role of partnerships to implement the Development Concept Plan.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Public comment has been requested, considered and incorporated into the planning process during four major planning stages, and has also been considered in numerous other ways. Initial public scoping meetings were held in July 1989, at Brooks Camp, in Katmai National Park and Preserve. Public comment was again requested on the alternatives workbook distributed in June 1991 and at public meetings on the workbook at Brooks Camps, King Salmon, and Anchorage. Public comment was requested on the draft EIS in April 1994 and at public meetings in King Salmon and Anchorage. Finally, public comment was requested on the Supplement to the draft EIS in July 1995 and at public meetings in King Salmon and Anchorage. Consultation was also completed with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Alaska State Historic Preservation Office, and Native organizations..

About 1,000 copies of the draft EIS and 1,000 copies of the supplement to the draft EIS were distributed. Written comments were accepted for 91 days on the draft EIS and 60 days on the supplement to the draft EIS. Seventy three comments on the draft EIS and 55 comments on the supplement to the draft EIS were recorded. Responses to substantive comments on the draft and supplement to the draft EIS were published in the final EIS, distributed in September 1996. All substantive comments were addressed by either providing clarification of information, modifying the text, or directly responding in the final EIS.

Recommended:  Date: 11-27-96
William Pierce
Superintendent, Katmai National Park and Preserve
National Park Service

Approved:  Date: 11/27/96
Robert D. Barbee
Field Director, Alaska Field Office
National Park Service

