



# United States Department of the Interior

## National Park Service

Lake Clark National Park and Preserve

Admin/HQ Office

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L30 (LACL)

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Dear Commenter:

After reading your comments to the Environmental Assessment for the Silver Salmon Creek/Sucker Bay land exchange, I felt a personal response was necessary on some points. I very clearly understand the concern this potential exchange invokes in you and others with a connection to the area and knowledge of the history of CIRI and the Native village's dispute over land selections.

I must recognize we all are connected to these lands; they help define us as Americans. They are our common connection. Because of those broader interests, I am making an effort to comply with Senator Steven's and other conferees' Congressional expectations, issued in a statement prepared for the President clarifying provisions of the FY05 Omnibus Appropriations Act. That statement recognized other interests and directed that the National Park Service resolve, through some permissible means, the continued operation of the Silver Salmon Creek camp.

Federal law and the park's General Management Plan (GMP) authorize, even encourage, land exchanges that advance agency conservation mandates. A land exchange is the most appropriate manner for addressing this camp, but such a land exchange must pass many tests and I have personally demanded that it be overwhelmingly in the broader public's interest, environmentally and financially. This means that any potential exchange must safeguard resources and the financial interests of the national public. It must further my ability to meet overarching legislative conservation mandates.

I have reviewed the laws and legislative intent that direct my activities and the many management documents that have been developed to provide further guidance in circumstances such as this. I will paraphrase a few portions that have helped me understand our past decisions and those presented for me to make as I manage this park.

- ANILCA section 906(o) directs the disposition of Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) land selections that are not conveyed to Native corporations. It states, "at such time as the entitlement of any Native Corporation to land under the Alaska Claims Settlement Act is satisfied, any land within a conservation unit selected by such Native Corporation shall, to the extent that such land is excess of its entitlement, become part of such unit and administered accordingly."

While the Appendix C litigation was pursued, the NPS followed this direction recognizing that the ANCSA acreage entitlements were not yet satisfied. Following the court's decision and affirmation on appeal, and the Bureau of Land Management's rejection of the land selections in the Appendix C area, I undertook efforts to remove the camp until the Congressional direction I cited earlier directed me to follow a different course. The most appropriate direction is a lawful land exchange that protects park resources and the public interest.



- ANILCA section 1302 provides authorities for land acquisition, by purchase, donation, exchange or otherwise.
- The GMP further directs a land protection strategy that prioritizes the remainder of the shoreline of Lake Clark. It directs the NPS to “examine a full range of options for protection, management, and use of existing nonfederal lands. Exchange will be given highest priority for Native allotment lands if suitable exchange lands can be found.” With regard to the Lake Clark shoreline, “the NPS will develop a strategy that will seek first to eliminate development...”.

This direction recognizes the park’s keynote species, Red Salmon and their critical spawning habitat for which we are very specifically charged to protect in the park’s enabling legislation. Recent studies confirm that many returning Red Salmon are beach spawners, making protection of the Lake Clark shoreline even more important.

- The GMP recognized selections on the Cook Inlet coast were pending and sought to give specific direction for management of this region as well. It stated, “ the NPS will offer to enter into cooperative agreements with CIRI, the State of Alaska and the Kenai Borough. The purpose of the agreements will be to plan for the protection, management, development and use of the area as a potential eastern gateway to the park ...”.
- The park’s GMP management concept relies on the private sector and Native Corporations to provide a variety of services and accommodations for appropriate visitor uses in the park and preserve.

It is important to note in 1979, that the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, United States Senate, also recognized land use potentials for Lake Clark after it was designated a National Monument and while it was being considered for park status. The Committee said, “Lake Clark National Park/Preserve has some of the best potential for recreation in the State, because of its easy access from Anchorage. The designation as wilderness of the mountainous core area and some of the key lowland areas ensures that there will be a balance between higher density recreation on the fringes of the area and high quality wilderness public use in the heart of the park and preserve.” The Silver Salmon Creek area was not ultimately designated Wilderness, recognizing its current development, considerable private in-holdings and neighboring Native corporation lands. Following a legal means to evaluate a non-profit visitor use camp operation is not incompatible with the Congress’ understanding of area uses at that time, nor is it necessarily incompatible today.

As a law enforcement professional I know that achieving appropriate balance is often very difficult, but I will do my very best to assure in the evaluation of this exchange that we select the alternative that achieves the best conservation value for the park as a whole. Thank you very much for your input.

Sincerely,



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cc: Marcia Blaszk, Regional Director, Alaska

