



**National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior**

**Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park
Interior Region 11 – Alaska**

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
Dyea Recreational Facility Improvements**

Recommended: **WILLIAM
JAYNES** Digitally signed by
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Date

Approved:

Jeff Mow
Acting Regional Director, Interior Region 11 – Alaska, National Park Service

Date

1. Introduction

In compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act, the National Park Service prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) to examine alternative actions and environmental impacts associated with the proposed project for recreational facility improvements in the Dyea area of Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park (KLGOR). The project is needed to address pedestrian access and safety concerns near the Chilkoot Trail trailhead and haphazard, unauthorized roadside parking within a State of Alaska road right-of-way.

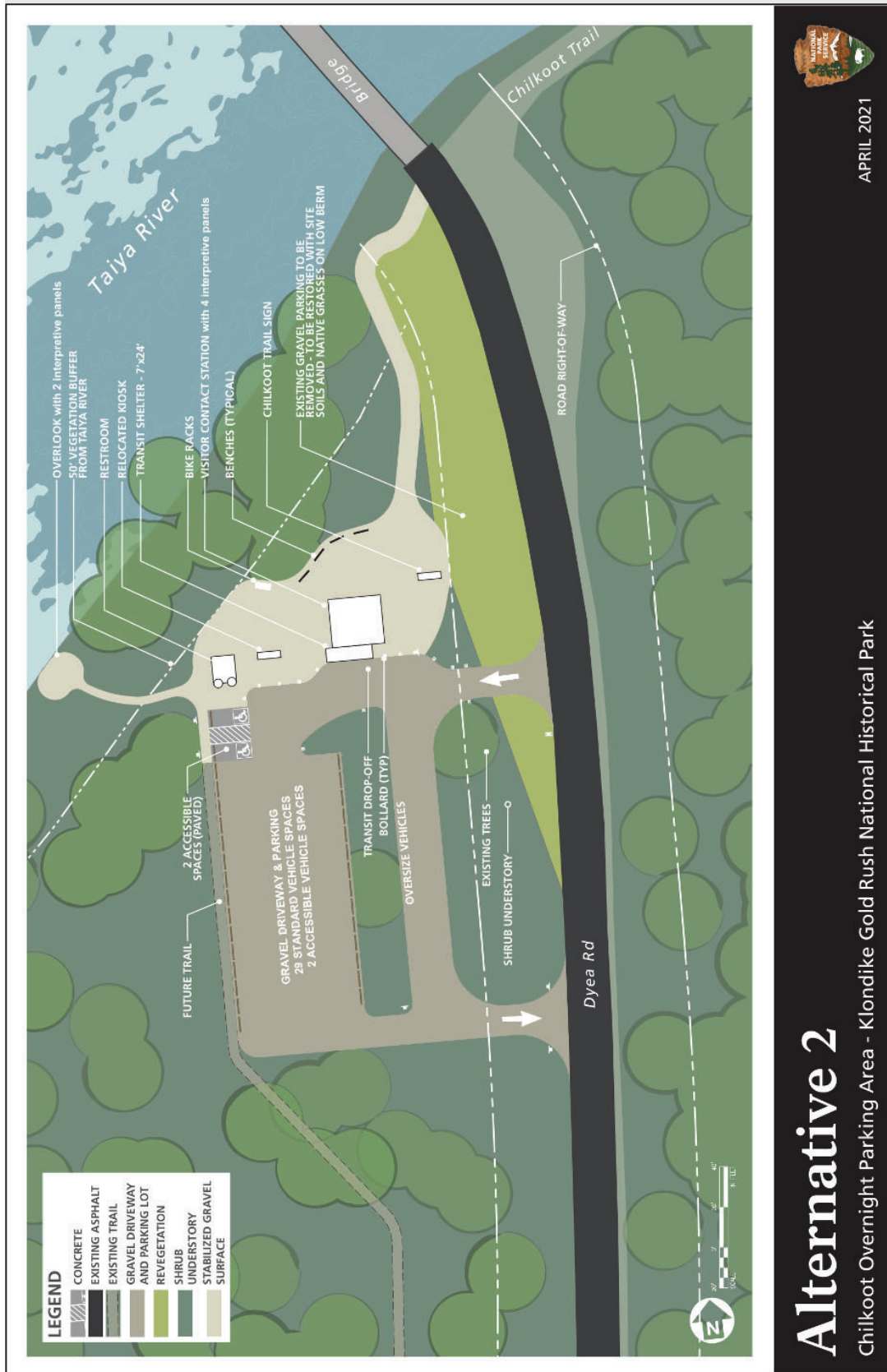
The statements and conclusions reached in this finding of no significant impact (FONSI) are based on documentation and analysis provided in the Environmental Assessment and associated decision file. To the extent necessary, relevant sections of the Environmental Assessment are incorporated by reference.

2. Selected Alternative and Rationale for the Decision

Based on the analysis presented in the Environmental Assessment, the National Park Service (NPS) selected the preferred alternative, Alternative 2. Alternative 2 will create an improved sense of arrival for the Chilkoot Trail by constructing a new 0.7-acre visitor service area south of the Taiya River bridge and west of Dyea Road (Figure 1). A new parking lot will provide parking for private and commercial day use visitors, and overnight parking for permitted trail hikers. The parking lot will include spaces for 29 standard vehicles and two vehicle spaces constructed to accessibility standards. Two oversized commercial vehicle spaces will be located in a travel lane separated from the rest of the parking lot. A transportation shuttle drop-off and pick-up area with adjacent weather shelter will be created along the entrance driveway.

In addition to the parking lot, the Chilkoot Trail arrival site will include a pedestrian area with visitor services. The pedestrian area will include a new river overlook feature with views of the historic landscape and two interpretive panels. Additional features will be a new restroom (vault toilets), relocated trash bins, a relocated orientation kiosk, and a new covered gathering space for visitor contacts adjacent or proximal to the transportation station. The iconic Chilkoot Trail sign will be placed in the pedestrian area near the Dyea Road right-of-way, and new location signs will be placed at the road shoulder near the parking area entrance and exit driveways. The pedestrian area will include benches and a bike rack and a path from the pedestrian area to the Chilkoot Trail trailhead. Areas not used for visitor services will be revegetated with native plants.

Figure 1. Alternative 2: Chilkoot Trail Arrival Site



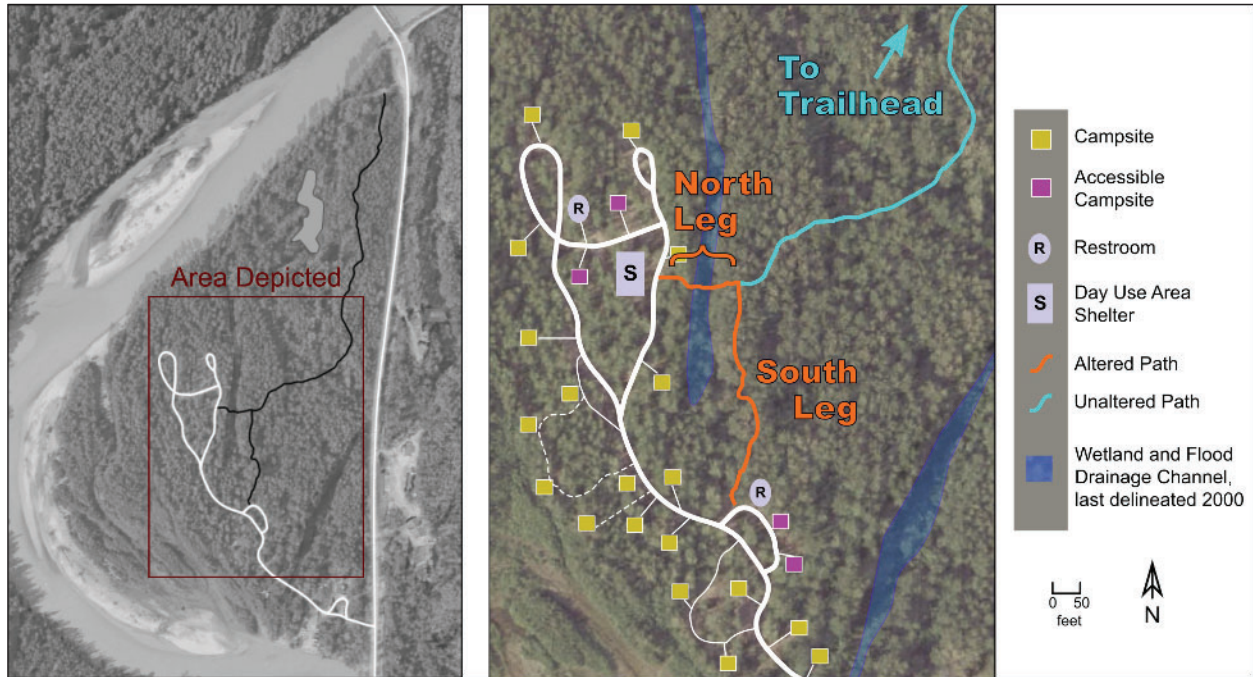
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Alternative 2

Chilkoot Overnight Parking Area - Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park

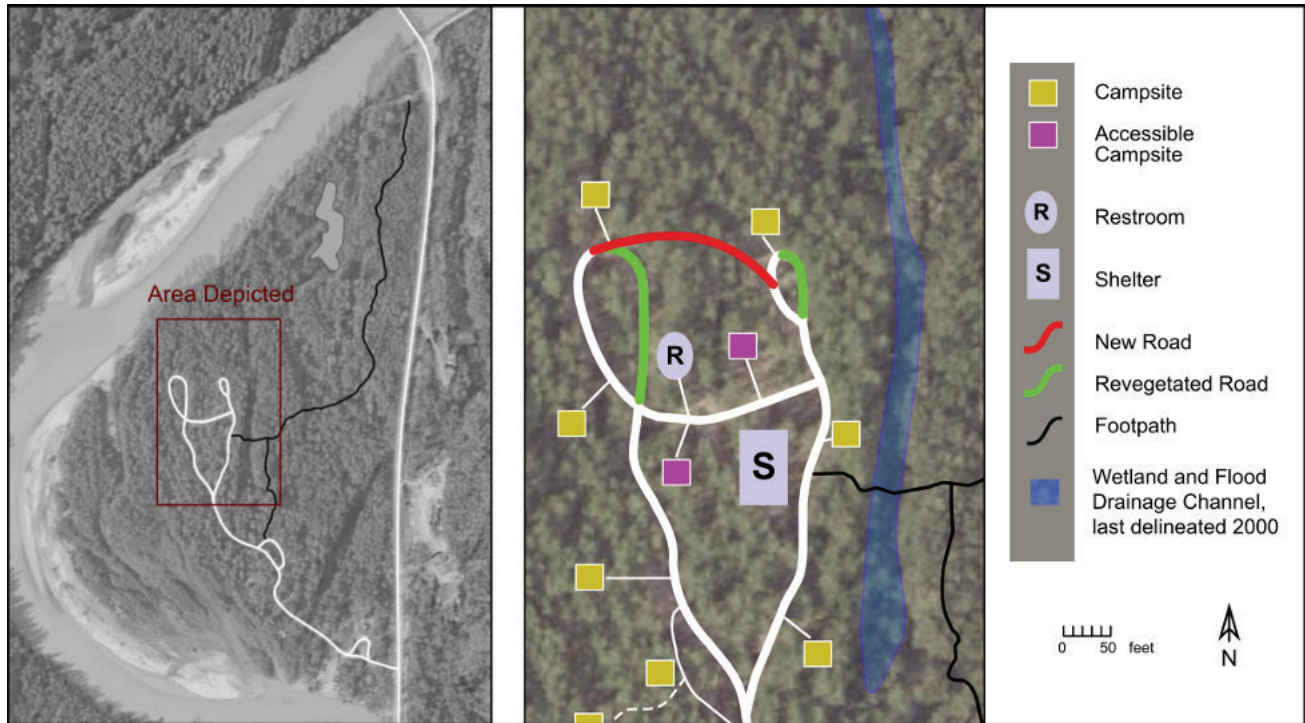
The existing footpath leading from the campground to the new Chilkoot Trail arrival area near the Taiya River bridge will be altered to create an ADA/ABA (Americans with Disabilities Act/Architectural Barriers Act) accessible loop connecting the two areas of the campground that contain accessible campsites. This path will be about 570 feet long and will include widening the existing trail, installing a footbridge, importing fill material, and creating a firm and stable surface using compacted gravel. Beyond the newly created ADA/ABA accessible loop, the remaining portion of the footpath from the loop to the new parking lot will not change (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Alternative 2: Footpath



At the NPS campground, a new road segment connecting the two terminal loops of the campground road will be constructed and redundant sections of the loops will be revegetated with native plants (Figure 3). The existing overnight parking area at the campground entrance will become a day-use area.

Figure 3. Alternative 2: New Campground Road Segment



Rationale

Alternative 2 was selected because it best meets the project purpose to better provide visitor services in Dyea by developing a setting with a more clearly delineated arrival location at the historic Chilkoot Trail, including enhanced visitor orientation, public safety, and recreation opportunities.

The project will address haphazard, unauthorized roadside parking, pedestrian access, and safety concerns near the Chilkoot Trail trailhead. Overnight parking for permitted trail hikers will be closer to the trailhead. Changes to the campground road will provide better maneuverability for larger vehicles. Development of the footpath loop at the campground will expand pedestrian access opportunities and increase accessible trail options.

3. Finding of No Significant Impact

As described in the Environmental Assessment, the selected alternative has the potential for some impacts on wildlife, vegetation, and recreation, as well as soils, hydrology, wetlands, and floodplains, however no significant adverse impacts were identified.

Sensitive wildlife in the affected environment include Boreal toads, breeding birds, and river otters. The new parking lot is located roughly 300 feet from a productive Boreal toad breeding wetland. A buffer of approximately 330 feet (100 meters) around the breeding wetland has been identified as summer high-use toad habitat. About 0.1-acre of high toad use summer habitat will be eliminated by the parking lot. The parking lot will also create an area of about 0.5-acre with high potential for toad mortality and a barrier across toad dispersion from the breeding wetland. The campground and footpath alterations are outside the summer high-use toad habitat area and will not substantially affect overall toad habitat. The project will decrease the acreage available as productive toad habitat and elevate exposure of the toads to disturbance and mortality. However, this incremental decrease in acreage is relatively small compared to the 37-acre overall size of available Boreal toad habitat in the affected area. Construction activities will be timed for mid-July through September to minimize risk of direct damage to Boreal toads by prohibiting any activities within 600 feet of the breeding ponds while toads are dispersing from the nearby breeding wetland.

A high diversity of breeding birds use the affected area. Half of those species prefer interior habitat for nesting. The new parking lot will reduce the preferred interior habitat by less than 0.5-acre. The campground and footpath alterations will not substantially reduce or fragment interior habitat. Construction activities will not occur during mid-April to mid-July when breeding birds are present.

Rivers otters use the shore area near the new visitor services pedestrian area next to the parking lot. They are likely to be displaced from that area but otter home range territories are typically large compared to the small affected area. They quickly adapt to physical changes common to their riparian habitat, therefore there should be no negative impact to the local river otter population.

The area's vegetation will be altered to create the new trailhead facilities and campground area changes. To implement all components of the project, between approximately 12 and 15 large diameter trees will be removed. Less than one acre of understory vegetation will be cleared. The project includes revegetation with native plants at redundant campground roadbeds and at the new Chilkoot arrival parking and visitor services area. During and after construction, park staff will monitor and control against the introduction of invasive species.

A locally rare, sensitive violet was found in only one place within the affected area, in a location which would be eliminated by the new parking lot. The violets will be carefully removed and transplanted to at least two sites of similar habitat to maximize the potential to preserve the violet population. Two sensitive orchid species occur together in one patch that would be eliminated by the new parking lot. Orchid life cycles make attempting to transplant the orchids in this patch impractical. However, other patches of both species have been found within the affected area. These patches will be unimpacted by the new facilities, thus serving as seed sources and assuring that these species continue to be part of area plant communities.

The new Chilkoot Trail arrival facilities will replace approximately 0.7-acres of vegetation within the floodplain with a gravel surface, reducing erosional resistance during flooding. This will be partially offset by the revegetation of some areas near the parking lot which will restore limited resistance to flood velocity and erosion in this area. These changes to vegetation in the floodplain will not have a

measurable effect on overall flow velocity, volume, or geometry of the Taiya River nor will these changes reduce the ability of the river to occupy the floodplain.

The relocated overnight parking location within the 500-year floodplain will be less prone to flooding than the current parking site located within the 10-year floodplain. The trailhead itself is located in the floodplain and thus amenities such as the vault toilet, transportation shelter, and interpretive signs will be at a slight risk from flooding. A Floodplains Statement of Findings was determined unnecessary at the EA stage by the Water Resources Division of the NPS because the project will not result in measurable changes to the overall flow velocity or volume of the river, nor will the project cause a reduction in floodplain occupation or geometry.

A footbridge will be constructed along the footpath loop near the campground to protect wetlands functions of water flow and flood drainage in a low area last delineated in 2000. At the Chilkoot Trail arrival site, vegetative buffering for nearby wetlands will be reduced and the increase of vehicles in the area could introduce contaminants such as petroleum products, particularly during construction. Best management practices to mitigate runoff will be required of contractors to minimize runoff.

The totality of the project components (the new arrival site parking and pedestrian areas, and changes to the campground road and footpath) will replace less than 2.0 acres of organic/native soils with packed gravel and/or mineral soil. Overall, the affected environment's hydrology, wetlands, floodplain, and soils functions will not be measurably altered.

The project will expand recreation opportunities for park visitors by improving orientation and providing for a sense of arrival at the historic Chilkoot Trail. The new facilities will change the setting in the immediate area, but with vegetative screening will not degrade the area's scenic beauty and opportunity for experiencing solitude and nature. The project will reduce haphazard parking practices and provide for better traffic flow for vehicles and pedestrians in both the parking area and campground.

Construction activities, dust, and noise may temporarily impact recreation. Once complete, changes to the arrival site and footpath will expand options for accessibility. Recreation levels in the area are likely to increase given trends in visitation and the expanded recreation opportunities.

Implementation of the project will not generate significant impacts on cultural resources, threatened or endangered species, archeology, wilderness, or subsistence resources. No highly uncertain or controversial impact, unique or unknown risks, significant cumulative effects, or elements of precedence were identified. Implementation of the NPS selected alternative will not violate any federal, state, or local environmental protection law.

4. Public Involvement/Agency Consultation

The production of the Environmental Assessment included two public participation events. A stakeholder engagement process took place during the summer of 2020, including a public comment opportunity available through the NPS Planning, Environment & Public Comment system (PEPC).

Thirteen submissions were analyzed and considered when developing the alternatives for the Environmental Assessment.

The Environmental Assessment included a public comment period through PEPC in June 2021 and a public meeting held at on park property on 15 June 2021. The public meeting was attended by 13 people. Eleven comments received through PEPC or the U.S. Postal Service were analyzed and considered when developing this FONSI.

The park consulted with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) regarding archeological resources in the area starting in 2019. The SHPO concurred with the park's finding of no adverse effect to historic properties on 12 April 2021.

The park began Tribal Consultation with the Chilkat Indian Village, Chilkoot Indian Association, and Skagway Traditional Council on 26 September 2019. Consultation concluded with the Skagway Traditional Council on 3 May 2021. Consultation with the Chilkat Indian Village and the Chilkoot Indian Association concluded on 1 July 2021.

The NPS received correspondence from Alaska Department of Fish and Game referencing the Environmental Assessment. This comment addressed fish habitat conditions at a nearby location unaffected by the project proposed in the EA. The NPS responded to these concerns outside of the Environmental Assessment process.

5. Conclusion

As described above, the selected alternative does not constitute an action meeting the criteria that normally requires preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS). The selected alternative will not have a significant effect on the human environment in accordance with Section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

Based on the foregoing, it has been determined that an EIS is not required for this project and, thus, will not be prepared.

Appendices:

Appendix A: Errata indicating text changes to Environmental Assessment

Appendix B: Response to substantive public comments provide during public comment period for the Environmental Assessment

Appendix C: Non-Impairment Finding

Appendix A: Errata Indicating Text Changes to EA

Page 30. Table 2: Summary of Impacts

In Table 2, under Vegetation Removal (Alternative 2) regarding campground new road, the EA states that 9-12 large diameter trees would be removed. The table should read that 3 large diameter trees would be removed. (This number was correctly written in the narrative of the EA, p.22)

In "Figure 6. Alternative 3: Arrival Site" the number of standard vehicle spaces is given as 28. The correct number of standard spaces is 26. (This number is correctly written as 26 in the narrative on page 9 and in "Table 1. Summary of Alternatives" on page 13)

Appendix B:

Response to Substantive Public Comments

In response to the environmental assessment, the National Park Service received 9 correspondences through the Planning, Environment & Public Comment (PEPC system) and 2 correspondences through the U.S. Postal Service. This appendix offers NPS responses to substantive comments received. The correspondences equated to 32 comments on 12 topics. Eight (8) topics relating to the Environmental Assessment are summarized below. Four (4) topics or reports not directly related to the EA are not included here but were distributed among park staff subject matter experts.

Topic 1: Parking Area

Multiple commenters wrote that there is not a need for additional parking near the Chilkoot Trailhead, with a few comments asking why the NPS believes that additional parking is needed and if the NPS can point to a demonstrated need for more parking. Multiple commenters noted that in their experience working and living in the area, they have not observed insufficient parking, particularly given the limits to trail permits issued on a daily basis (for overnight use of the Chilkoot Trail). Two commenters agreed that some additional parking is reasonable but that the extent of the proposed expansion is too much and that the NPS should consider a smaller development.

NPS Response: The NPS objective is to provide adequate parking to accommodate day use parking (currently impinging on the state road right-of-way), overnight trail hiker parking (currently located at the campground entrance), and oversized commercial vehicles (currently using the road shoulder with potential safety concerns). The size of the parking area is designed to be sufficient for peak congestion of overlapping users, rather than the typical, routine level of daily parking.

Topic 2: Boreal Toads

Multiple commenters wrote that the proximity of the proposed facilities to Boreal toad habitat is an unacceptable and unnecessary risk for the toad habitat, with a few commenters noting that the decision to permit construction in the area contrasts with past NPS decisions to avoid impacting toad habitat.

NPS Response: The NPS agrees that the Boreal toads are a special, sensitive population and constitute a wildlife population that must be protected. The NPS acknowledges that some impacts to toads are possible and this factored in moving the parking lot as far from the breeding wetland as possible and designing the parking lot to keep dispersion/migration routes to maturation/hibernation sites open. Construction activities will not be permitted within 600 feet of the breeding ponds while toads are dispersing from the nearby breeding wetland. NPS data from the Dyea area and the general

scientific body of knowledge regarding Boreal toads were consulted as part of the assessment of impacts analyzed in the EA.

Topic 3: Public and Local Involvement

Three respondents expressed issues with the public involvement process with one individual stating that the opportunities were not well publicized and that the period for comment should be extended and better publicized. Two commenters felt that local residents were left out of park management discussions and that they should be consulted more extensively about area projects.

NPS Response: A stakeholder engagement process (public comment opportunity) took place during the summer of 2020 to obtain public input through a press release and the NPS Planning, Environment & Public Comment (PEPC) web portal. Also, Park staff introduced and answered questions about the project at the Dyea Community Advisory Board meetings in fall 2019 and 2020. In 2021, the EA was announced through a press release to local media, on the park's web site and Facebook page, and through PEPC. The public comment period was open through PEPC or via the U.S. Postal Service in June 2021, and a public meeting was held on 15 June 2021. The NPS will continue its efforts to host community meetings about pending changes and to advertise involvement opportunities through the local media.

Topic 4: Physical Changes (Floodplains, Soils)

One commenter noted that removing vegetation could destabilize the floodplain and another commenter noted that the project is planned in a floodplain. Another comment was concerned with the increase in hardened surfaces in the area.

NPS Response: The project relocates some current recreational uses from areas more prone to flooding to areas with less frequent flood events. The quantity and location of vegetation to be removed, relative to the valley's geometry and areas where high velocity flows occur, will not destabilize the floodplain.

The project will increase the relative area of compacted, firm and stable surfaces in the area, but the level of change will not alter overall soil functions or permeability when viewed in a broader context. No pavement and no chemically hardened surfaces will be created. The abandoned road segments in the campground will be revegetated, thereby diminishing compacted surfaces in one part of the project area. The NPS allows construction of campgrounds, trails, and parking areas in floodplains.

Topic 5: Vegetation

Two comments noted that native vegetation species will be removed, including the removal of two orchid species that are not known to transplant successfully.

NPS Response: With the exception of the sensitive violet species, all other native species that will be removed, including the two species of orchids, are found in nearby areas and therefore their removal will not result in changes to the area's vegetation community. As the violets are locally rare, the NPS will transplant them to similar, proximal areas to maintain the violet population.

Topic 6: Wilderness

Two commenters expressed concerns that the project would result in changes to the area's wilderness experience and that the NPS is failing to protect wilderness.

NPS Response: The project area is not federally designated or eligible wilderness. The NPS does agree that the area is valued for its natural beauty and the new facilities are being developed with sensitivity to the area's character by protecting the natural and historic setting through site orientation and vegetative screening.

Topic 7: Safety

The NPS received one comment that there is only a minimal safety concern as the Dyea area does not receive much traffic.

NPS Response: Dyea is subject to increased traffic due to improvements to the Dyea Road and increasing numbers of visitors expected after two low visitation years (2020 and 2021) during COVID-19 restrictions on travel. Existing conditions at peak times of use can lead to parking in the Alaska Department of Transportation right-of-way and along road shoulders, mixing of vehicles and pedestrians near the bridge, and pedestrian use of the road. The new parking lot and pedestrian visitor services area will remove these uses from the right-of-way and the roadside and provide safe areas for vehicles and pedestrians during typical and peak levels of traffic.

Topic 8: Management of National Parks

A few comments stated that the NPS should tend to maintenance backlogs and existing maintenance issues before considering additional construction.

NPS Response: The NPS acknowledges maintenance challenges exist in some park sites across the Service. Specific to Dyea, the NPS believes that removal of features no longer used or valuable (roadbeds to be abandoned in the campground) will address some existing maintenance concerns and will allow the NPS to focus on the new facilities. Park managers at KLGO anticipate that the new facilities will be adequately maintained and will not detract from maintenance of other parts of KLGO's historic structures or park resources. Park planning efforts considers the total costs of park maintenance for park facilities, which includes construction, routine maintenance, and long-term needs.

Appendix C: Non-Impairment Determination

A determination is made for each of the park resource-related impact topics carried forward and analyzed in the environmental assessment for the preferred alternative. The park's foundation statement (2009) was used as a basis for determining if a resource is:

Necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation or proclamation of the park, or

Key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or to opportunities for enjoyment of the park, or

Identified in the park's general management plan or other relevant NPS planning documents as being of significance.

Wildlife

The fundamental resources and values of Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park include the fauna of the Taiya and Skagway river valleys. Creation of the new facilities will reduce habitat for Boreal toads, birds, and mammals by altering parklands to create a 0.7-acre trailhead facility. An augmented footpath will pass through approximately 570 feet of habitat where a simpler footpath currently exists and may introduce additional human activity which may increase disturbance to wildlife. The schedule for construction will be timed to minimize risk of damage to Boreal toads; construction activities will not occur within 600 feet of identified breeding ponds while young toads are dispersing. Construction will be conducted outside of nesting season to reduce impacts to breeding birds. These strategically planned construction activities and the reduction in habitat relative to the size of park as a whole will not result in impairment of these park resources.

Vegetation

Similar to wildlife, the park's flora is a fundamental resource. Implementation of the selected alternative will remove vegetation and change human patterns in the area creating new susceptibilities to invasive exotic plants. Revegetation of abandoned road loops with native plants will reduce susceptibility to invasive exotic species. Following construction, revegetation and exotic plant control will occur in and around the new trailhead facility in order to best maintain native plant communities, to prevent erosion, and to maintain the area's aesthetics. The reduction in vegetation paired with plans for revegetation and control of invasive plants will not result in impairment to vegetation resources.

Soils and Hydrology, Wetlands, and Floodplains

The park has identified a broad fundamental resource that includes the physical and biological processes of the Northern Lynn Canal in addition to flora and fauna. The area's soils resources along

with the hydrology, wetlands functions, and the role of floodplains are all part of the natural processes that have shaped the area. Implementation of the selected alternative will remove organic soils and compact and harden mineral soils through the construction of a parking area, campground road, and altered footpath sections. The project will introduce new human-built features in the floodplain but will move some human activity (overnight parking) from the 10-year floodplain to the 500-year floodplain. Impacts to wetlands will be minimized by the use of helical piles to support the footbridge crossing a low wet drainage site on the accessible footpath campground loop. Approximately 0.7-acres of vegetation will be removed from the floodplain, reducing erosional resistance, but will be augmented elsewhere through revegetation efforts. None of the proposed actions will reduce the ability of the river to occupy the floodplain or alter the area's overall hydrologic function. Implementation of the preferred alternative will not halt the function of wetlands nor soils. The level of disturbance from the proposed action will not result in impairment to soils, hydrology, wetlands, or floodplains.

Conclusion

In conclusion, as guided by this analysis, good science and scholarship, advice from subject matter experts and others who have relevant knowledge and experience, and the results of public engagement, it is the Superintendent's professional judgement that the proposed action will not result in impacts to park resources and values that constitute impairment.