



We Need Your Help

You can make an important contribution to the future of Denali National Park and Preserve by becoming involved in the Denali Park Road Vehicle Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

The National Park Service (NPS) intends to prepare an EIS to develop and implement a plan to manage vehicles along the Denali park road, including carrying capacity (the maximum number of vehicles that can be accommodated on the Denali park road May-September).

The goal of the plan is to provide a high quality experience for visitors while protecting wilderness resource values, scenic values, wildlife, other park resources, and maintaining the unique character of the park road.

What Will The EIS Do?

A reasonable range of alternatives will be developed for consideration in the EIS that are responsive to significant issues identified through agency and public involvement. The EIS will evaluate a No Action alternative of maintaining the existing vehicle management system on the Denali park road including current bus schedules, vehicle allocation, and carrying capacity. Action alternatives will consider potential changes to transportation system components including:

- carrying capacity for vehicles on the park road (how many vehicles can travel the park road while protecting park resource values and providing opportunities for a high quality visitor experience?)



Denali established one of the first visitor transportation systems in the national park system and it set the standard for transportation systems in the other park units.

- bus scheduling and spacing (how will the buses be scheduled and how will they behave on the park road?)
- tour services, potential for specialized tours such as family friendly or birding tours, alternative destinations along the road, wildlife viewing opportunities
- educational opportunities and interpretive services, such as podcasts, contact with rangers, etc.

We will also consider size, type and quality of the buses and their amenities (seating, windows, communications on the bus and between buses, accessibility, space for backpacks and bicycles, etc.)

Why Do We Need To Do This Now?

The primary features of Denali National Park are the opportunity to view wildlife in a pristine setting, Mount McKinley, the highest peak on the North American continent,

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Background



The EIS will comprehensively evaluate the existing visitor transportation system to determine its effectiveness in protecting park resources and providing for visitor access and enjoyment.

Before 1972, Denali visitation was relatively low since travelers arrived either by train or by an arduous overland route on the unimproved Denali Highway. In 1972 park visitation doubled in direct response to the opening of the George Parks Highway, which created a direct corridor from Anchorage and Fairbanks to the park. Anticipating this increase, park managers implemented a mandatory visitor transportation system that same year to minimize disturbances to wildlife and scenery. This was one of the first mandatory visitor transportation systems in the National Park System. The bus tours offered by the park concessioner had been taking visitors out the park road since the mid-1920s.

The new system allowed only visitors with overnight or other special use permits to drive their vehicles beyond the Savage River at Mile 15. Everyone else had to turn around or take a bus. The purpose of limiting vehicles past mile 15 was to protect wildlife viewing opportunities, wildlife health and habitat, and the wilderness character of the park road. Similar to today, visitors could take a narrated bus tour or take a shuttle bus which allowed riders to get on and off. Over the next 12 years visitor use grew to a total of 394,426 annual recreational visits, about 9 times the amount that arrived the year before the highway opened.

To better manage the park experience in light of increased pressures, the 1986 General Management Plan (GMP) for the park established a limit of 10,512 motor vehicle trips on the park road during the core season from Memorial Day weekend to after Labor Day.

For many years, the established transportation system has been an effective mechanism to manage vehicle use while providing for quality visitor opportunities along the park road. However, consistent growth in Alaska tourism during the last decade has correlated to a direct increase in annual park visitation. Denali is now one of the most visited subarctic national parks in the world, with the vast majority of visitation focused along the 90-mile park road. Park visitation is approaching 500,000, with 90 percent arriving during the summer season. With the sustained growth in Alaska's tourism industry, Denali continues to be a featured part of travelers' itineraries.

In 2006, the park began a multidisciplinary road study designed to develop a greater understanding of the impacts of traffic volume and traffic patterns on the physical, biological, and social environment of the park. The study was comprised of three components.

1) **Natural Resource Studies.** The movement of grizzly bears and Dall's sheep was documented using GPS collars. Location information and movement paths of collared animals were modeled with habitat and traffic data to determine possible relationships between vehicles on the park road and wildlife behavior.

2) **Social Science Studies.** Researchers administered surveys to visitors to identify and assess key elements of the visitor experience on the Denali Park Road.

3) **Logistical Studies.** Researchers used GPS data collected from vehicles driving the park road in 2006, 2007 and 2008 to create a traffic model capable of simulating location and vehicle specific driving behaviors.

Much of the information from the three studies will be combined into a comprehensive model of park road traffic that can predict the effects of changes in traffic volume and timing on visitor experience and wildlife movements. The EIS will utilize results from this model to determine best management practices for vehicle schedules and carrying capacity on the park road.



The goal of the road study is to provide park managers with a tool to make the most well-informed decisions about the future of traffic on the road.

The Planning Process Is a Public Process

During the formal planning process there are two opportunities when the planning team will seek the broadest possible public participation: first during the initial “scoping” stages of the project (July–September 2008) and second upon the release of a draft EIS (Spring 2010).

Scoping comments will be most useful if submitted by September 30, 2008. The primary goal of scoping is to identify issues and determine the range of alternatives to be addressed. The public is asked to submit comments, concerns, and suggestions relating to the goal of the plan. The most useful scoping comments should address the following:

- Alternative approaches and ideas for accomplishing project goals
- The range of environmental and socio-economic issues that need to be considered
- Other potential projects that might affect or be affected by this project
- Information that needs to be considered (such as related research) and why it should be included
- Information on how you use the park and how a project might affect that use
- Your concerns about conditions or activities in the park (related to the planning project) and suggestions for improvement



Alternatives in the EIS will address vehicle crowding on the park road and at rest stops.



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Contact Information

We request that comments be submitted at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov>

Select Denali National Park and Preserve and scroll down to the Denali Park Road Vehicle Management Plan.

Denali Park Planning
Miriam Valentine
P.O. Box 588
Talkeetna, AK 99676

For more information, please visit our website at <http://www.nps.gov/dena/park-mgmt/roadvehmgteis.htm>

Public Meeting Schedule

Comments concerning the scope of this project should be received on or before September 30, 2008. To facilitate this comment process, we will hold public scoping meetings during the month of September. All meetings will be from 6pm to 8pm with a presentation at 6:30pm. Members of the public are invited to share their ideas and concerns with park staff.

Anchorage – September 3, 2008, J.Z. Loussac Library, Wilda Marston Theater

Susitna Valley – September 4, 2008, Talkeetna Ranger Station

Denali Park – September 10, 2008, Murie Science and Learning Center

Fairbanks – September 11, 2008, Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center



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EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA



We Need Your Help (continued)

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and vast areas of undisturbed wilderness. Denali National Park contains one of the most intact predator-prey ecosystems in the world as well as one of the best opportunities in North America to view wildlife in its natural setting. The park was established in 1917 as a game refuge; conserving wildlife and protecting opportunities to view wildlife remain its most important values. We need to make sure that Denali's transportation system protects these important values.

There is a growing demand for the park road experience and trends indicate that visitation to Alaska and the Denali area will continue to increase. By evaluating the park road capacity now, we will be able to more effectively handle the projected growth rate in the future. The changes we've seen in visitor demographics, interests, and needs warrant a more thorough analysis of the park road

experience. The shuttle bus part of the transportation system has been in place since 1972. We must ask ourselves: Are we providing the best transportation system possible — one that provides the highest quality visitor experience and protects park resources? It is time to take a harder look at that question.

