



# Visitor Contact Station to Tanalian Trail System Pedestrian Access Trail

## *Environmental Assessment*

*July 2022*





As the nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural and cultural resources. This includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interests of all. The department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in island territories under U.S. administration.

## **NOTE TO REVIEWERS**

If you wish to comment on this document, you may mail comments to:

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You may also comment for this project online at <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/VCAccessTrail>.

Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, be aware that your entire comment – including your personal identifying information – may be made publicly available at any time. You can ask us to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, but we cannot guarantee that we would be able to do so.

## **ON THE COVER**

Segment of proposed trail route, Lake Clark National Park, Alaska.  
J. Rogers-NPS Photo

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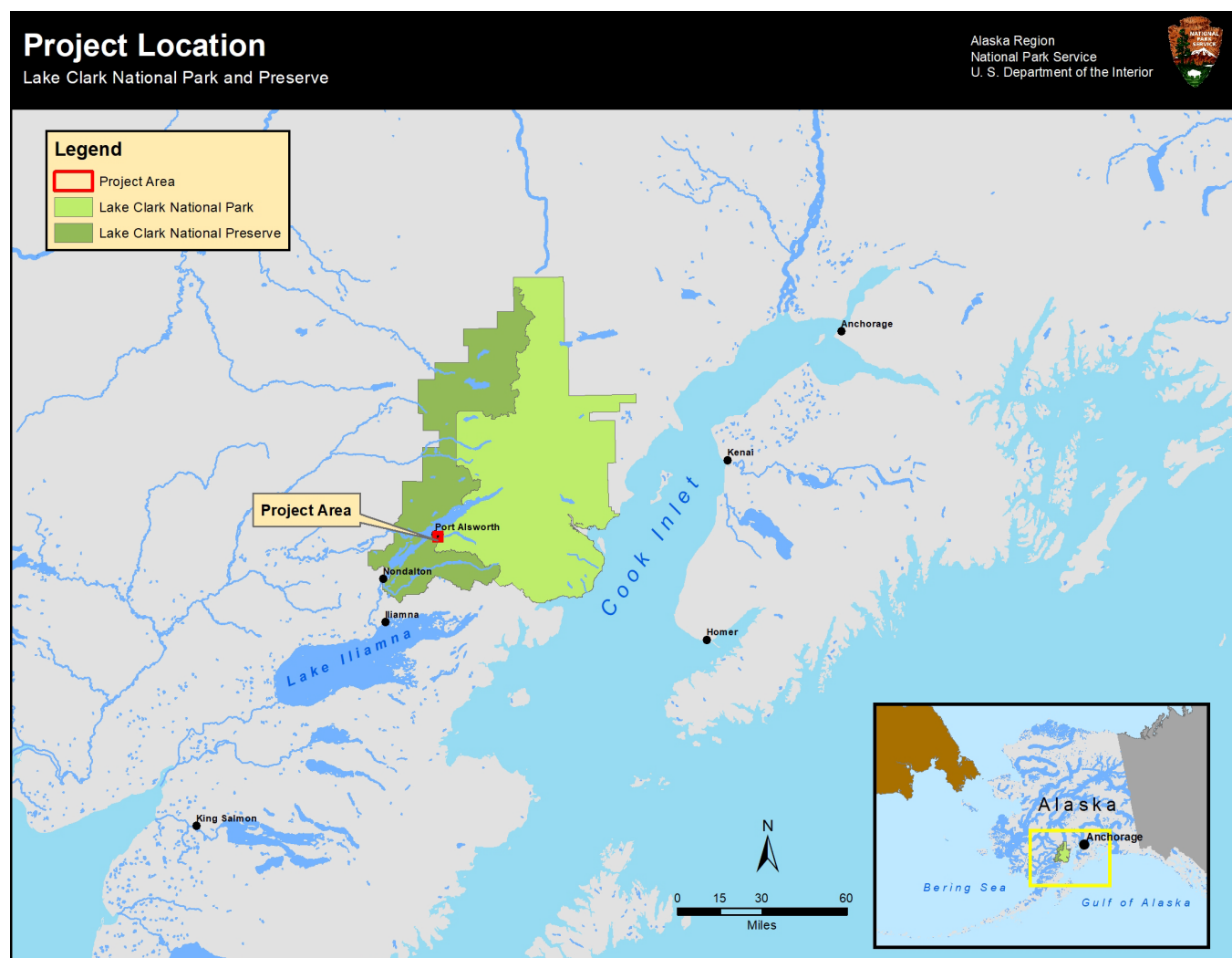
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# 1 Introduction

The Lake Clark National Park and Preserve (Lake Clark) is proposing additions to the Tanalian Trail System in this Tanalian Trail System Pedestrian Access Trail Environmental Assessment (EA). This environmental assessment (EA) includes the required content under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The EA discloses the purpose and need for action, the current and future condition of the environment if no action is taken, action alternatives, issues, and impacts that may result from the action alternative.

## 2 Project Location

The proposed project is located within the Lake and Peninsula Borough of the State of Alaska. The proposed project occurs on National Park Service (NPS) managed land southeast of Port Alsworth, Alaska (figure 1).



**Figure 1. Location of Lake Clark National Park and Preserve and Project Area Within Alaska.**

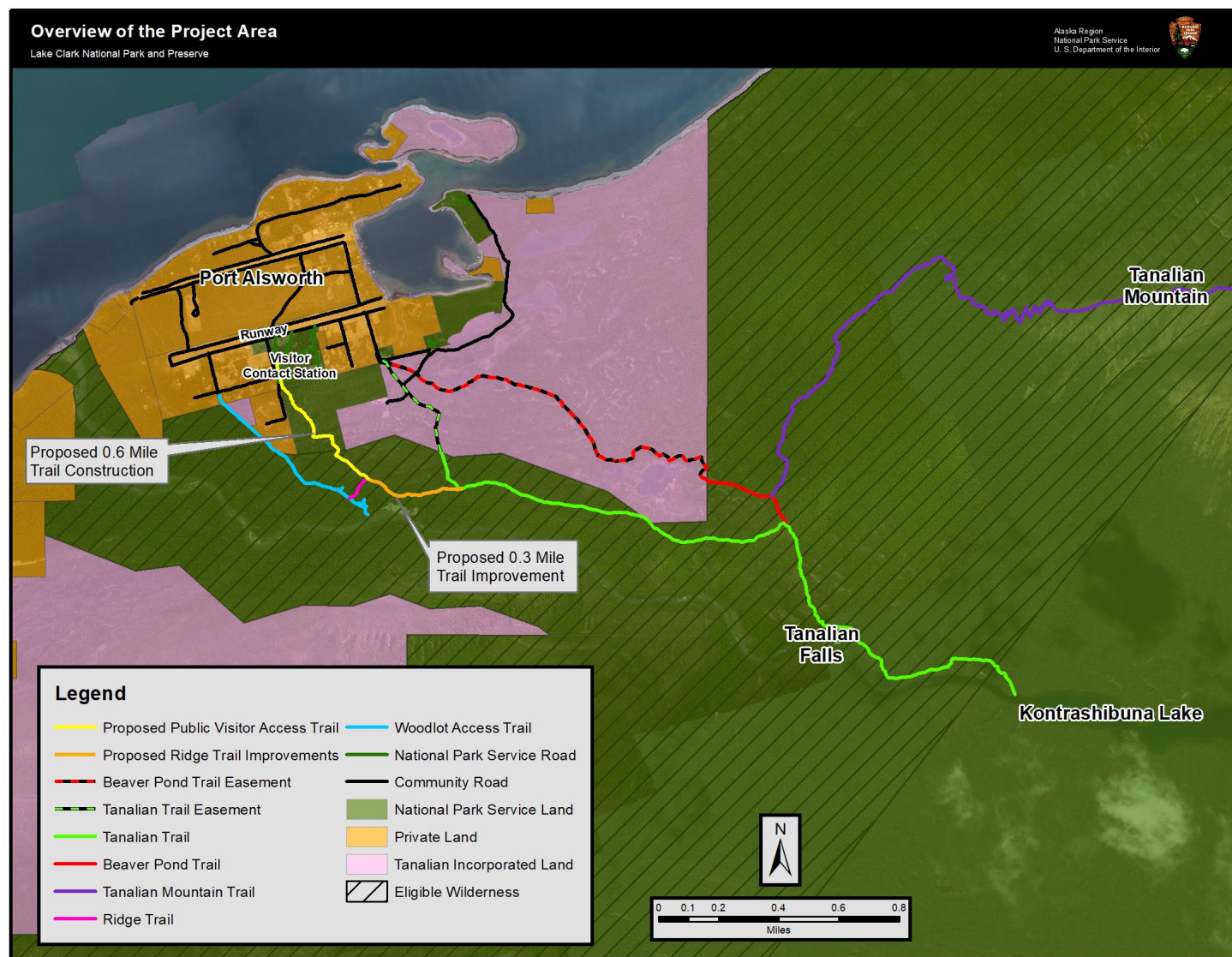


### 3 Background

The existing Tanalian Trail System (figure 2) begins and extends to the east of Port Alsworth, Alaska and initially crosses non-NPS lands. The trails in the system provide access to Lake Clark's Tanalian Falls, Tanalian Mountain, and Kontrashibuna Lake, which are popular destinations for park visitors and local community members. To access the trailhead outside of the park, a person must travel along an active runway and community roads managed by the Port Alsworth Improvement Corporation. The trailhead and lower 0.4 miles of the Tanalian Trail and 1.4 miles of the Beaver Pond Trail are on easements through Tanalian Incorporated lands (figures 2 and 3). The trail easements were defined in a settlement agreement between Tanalian Incorporated and the NPS in 2012. The agreement granted the NPS two 25-foot-wide easements that follow existing trails. These trails are the Tanalian Trail and the Beaver Pond Trail. Within the easements, both trails are bisected by an access road to an active gravel pit.

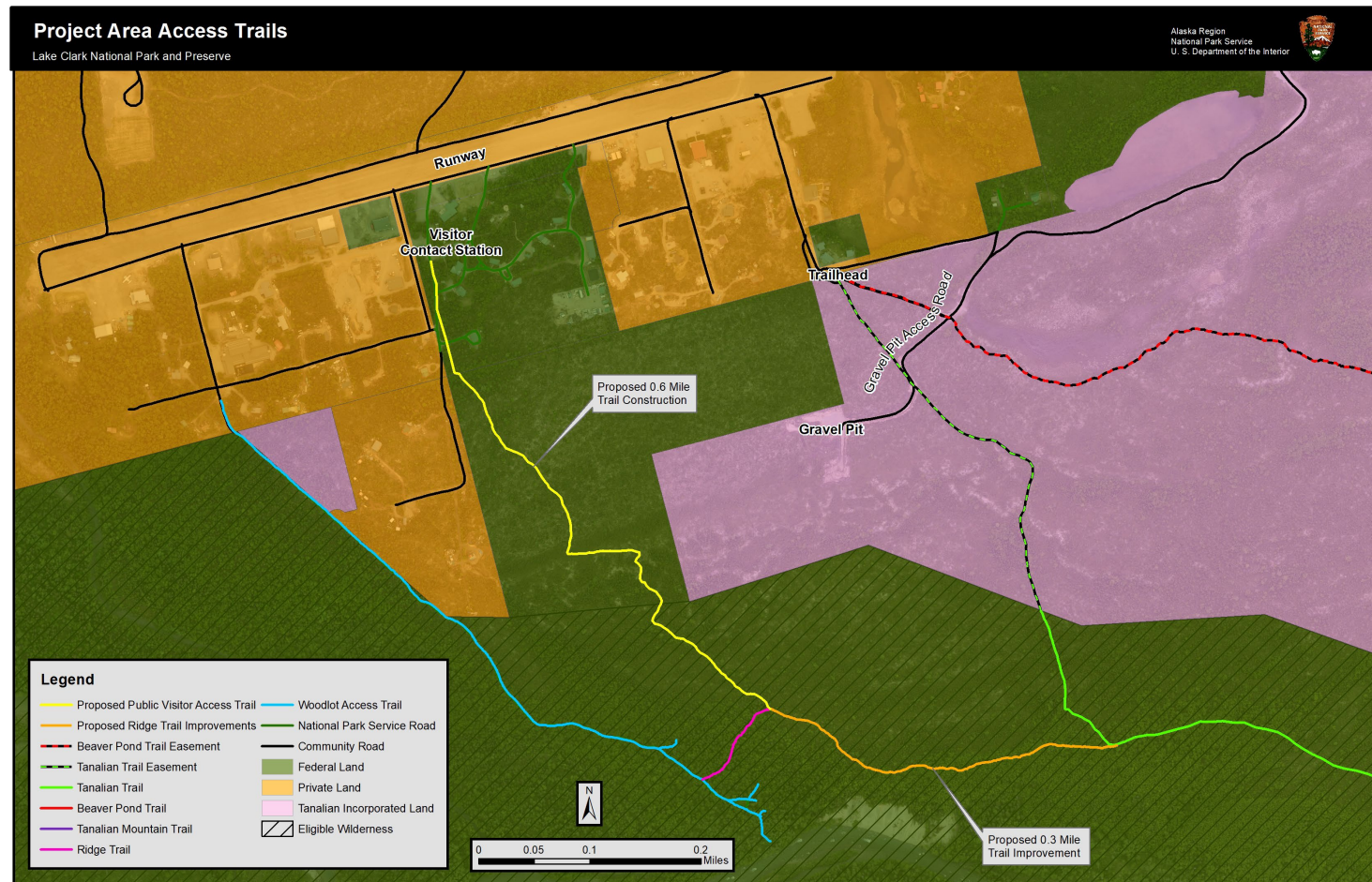
Most visitors access the Tanalian Trail System via the Tanalian Trail, a multi-use trail that allows off-road vehicle (ORV) use to the park boundary. This trail includes multiple steep sections where erosion issues require frequent maintenance and is challenging for pedestrians and the routing is defined by the 25-foot-wide easement. The Beaver Pond Trail is also multi-use but its location, design, and lower use levels mitigate maintenance issues. Both the Beaver Pond Trail and Tanalian trail are bisected by the gravel pit access road. This creates a safety hazard for users on both trails.

The Woodlot Access Trail is a multi-use trail open to ORV use that is used by local residents to access the Tanalian River and subsistence wood cutting areas. The trail begins at the end of a community road and then straddles NPS and private lands for 0.25 miles. To reach the Tanalian Trail System from the Woodlot Access Trail, one connects to the Ridge Trail (figure 3) at its western terminus. The western section of the Ridge Trail is steep, with soils that are prone to erosion.



**Figure 2. Overview of Tanalian Trail System and Proposed Location of Visitor Contact Station to Tanalian Trail System Access Trail in Lake Clark National Park and Preserve**





**Figure 3. Existing and Proposed Tanalian Trail System Access Trails in Lake Clark National Park and Preserve**



## 4 Purpose and Need

The purpose of this action is to provide direct pedestrian access to the Tanalian Trail System over NPS lands, and avoid an active runway, community roads, and multiple-use trails through private lands in Port Alsworth (figure 2). The Tanalian Trail System is presently accessed via community roads and several multiple-use trails, with trailheads that begin on private land. Two of these trails occupy easements through Tanalian Incorporated land. The proposed changes are needed to address conflicting uses, user safety, and trail maintenance issues affecting the existing trails. The trail system provides access to Tanalian Falls, Tanalian Mountain, and Kontrashibuna Lake which are all located in Lake Clark, and provide hiking, camping, other recreational opportunities and subsistence hunting and gathering. The proposed changes to the Tanalian Trail System is consistent with the Lake Clark National Park General Management Plan Amendment (GMP-A) (NPS 2014) which , calles for more opportunities for trails and visitors and specifically improved accessibility of the Port Alsworth trails.

## 5 Proposed Action

The NPS proposes to develop a new 0.6 mile trail on parklands from the NPS Visitor Contact Station, and widen a separate 0.3 mile section of the existing Ridge trail. Both trails would connect the Visitor Contact Station to the Tanalian Trail System in Lake Clark using strictly NPS lands.

## 6 Public Involvement

Lake Clark is seeking public review and input for a 15-day public comment period, beginning on April 21, 2022. The EA can be accessed via the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) site at <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/VCAccessTrail>. A news release announcing the availability of the EA document will be sent via email to local social media channels: Nondalton List, Port Alsworth's List, and Iliamna Lake Bulletin. Commercial Use Authorization holders of Lake Clark will also be notified by email. News releases will provide details on accessing the EA electronically or by hard copy and provide means by which comments may be submitted.

## 7 Issues

### Issues Selected for Detailed Analysis

The following issues are evaluated for each alternative:

**Recreation and Visitor Use:** The current trails accessing the Tanalian Trail System require park visitors to use both community roads and trails that occupy easements crossing private lands. The trail easements are bisected by an access road to a gravel pit used by heavy equipment. The Tanalian Trail and Woodlot Access Trail are open to pedestrian and ORV use. The use of heavy equipment and ORV's creates safety concerns, user group conflicts, and maintenance issues for staff. The

proposed trail would only occupy NPS land and would be developed for pedestrian use and ease of maintenance.

**Vegetation and Soils:** The proposed trail segment would directly remove approximately 0.3 acres of vegetation and modify soils within the proposed trail route. The improvements to the Ridge Trail would remove 0.1 acres of vegetation. A total of approximately 0.4 acres of vegetation would be removed for the proposed trail and trail improvements. Impacts could include a reduction in plant cover, simplification of the vegetation structure, compaction of soils, and alteration of the habitat for plant growth.

**Wilderness:** A portion of the proposed project area is located in eligible wilderness. Trail development and increased visitation could impact the wilderness character, including natural, solitude, and undeveloped qualities.

### **Issues Considered but Dismissed from detailed analysis**

The following issues were identified, considered, and dismissed from further analysis for the following reasons:

- It was determined that the environmental impacts were not of critical importance; and
- the potential impacts to these resources were not significant; and
- a detailed analysis of these impacts was not necessary to make a reasoned choice between alternatives.

**Air Quality, Climate Change, Subsistence, Water Resources, Wildlife, Viewshed (Natural, Aesthetic, and Scenic Values), and Natural Soundscape:** The proposed action would not result in substantial changes to these resources. The proposed disturbance area is small, and the actions and subsequent use would not generate emissions to degrade air quality or contribute to climate change. Effects to subsistence use of the proposed trail corridor is expected to be negligible due to the short proposed trail length (0.6 miles) although access for subsistence activities along the trail system would be improved. Refer to Appendix A for a detailed analysis on Section 810(a) subsistence. Water resources would not be affected by the proposed project or future trail use, as trail design would ensure proper drainage. The wildlife habitat type is common; alteration of an estimated linear 0.4 acres of habitat and associated displacement of wildlife would have a minimal impact on local wildlife populations due to its relatively small size, short construction period, and development on private lands on adjacent parcels to the proposed trail. The mixed forest overstory and shrub understory are moderately dense and would remain intact, limiting potential impacts to the viewshed. Outside of the 5 month period of construction, the expected increase in human use of the trail would likely not change the natural soundscape. There are no wild and scenic rivers, ecologically critical areas, wetlands or floodplains in the project area.

**Cultural Resources:** The Lake Clark archeologist conducted Phase 1 archeological testing along the alignment of the proposed new trail in the summer of 2020 and consulted with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), per Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (Rogers 2020). A condition assessment and pedestrian reconnaissance survey were conducted along the

entire length of the proposed trail. No evidence of cultural remains was uncovered during the pedestrian reconnaissance or the excavations, and it is unlikely that cultural resources would be disturbed by the trail-building activities. Concurrence of “No Historic Properties Affected” for this project was received from the SHPO on 1/5/2021. During project implementation, if tread work exposes cultural resources, work would be stopped, the park archeologist will be notified immediately, and archeological testing would be conducted.

**Floodplains and Wetlands:** The proposed trail is located in the uplands and would occur outside areas identified as wetlands or floodplains by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service National Wetland Inventory data. This assessment was confirmed through site visits.

**Threatened and Endangered Species:** No federally designated threatened or endangered species are known to occur within the project area.

## 8 Alternatives

This section describes a No Action alternative and the action alternative.

### Alternative 1: No Action

Under the No Action alternative, the NPS would not build the 0.6 mile trail connecting the Visitor Contact Station to the Tanalian Trail System and would not improve 0.3 miles of existing trail. Access to the trail system would require using community roads and existing trails occupying easements through private lands. Conflicting uses, user safety, and trail maintenance issues would continue on the existing trails.

### Alternative 2: Construct a Trail from Visitor Contact Station to Tanalian Trail System (Proposed Action and Preferred Alternative)

Develop up to 0.6 miles of new trail and widen 0.3 miles of the Ridge Trail on NPS lands (see figures 2 and 3). This would provide pedestrian access from the NPS Visitor Contact Station to the Tanalian Trail System that includes Tanalian Mountain, Tanalian Falls, and Kontrashibuna Lake.

The proposed trail tread would be 5-foot wide with a 2-foot wide brushed area on each side removing undergrowth to facilitate hiking (total width of 9 feet). Approximately 30 inches of soil would be removed and replaced with a combination of suitable soil, geotextile, and stone to create a durable tread. All soil and stone will be locally sourced, and any trail building equipment used would be cleaned to minimize the risk of introducing exotic plant species. The proposed alignment follows a sustainable grade with a designed 400-foot diagonal section traversing the steepest grade of the trail. Routing would maintain a vegetative buffer to minimize the visual effects to private lands. Erosion control features, such as waterbars, would be used in areas where grade and terrain dictate.

A 0.3 mile section of the Ridge Trail would be widened by up to 3-feet bringing the tread to a 5-foot width. Undergrowth would be brushed 2-feet on each side of the trail bringing the total width to 9

feet. Vegetation would be removed to widen the tread area, but the existing soil would remain in place.

NPS would contract crews to complete work. The lower 0.45 mile of proposed trail is in ineligible wilderness<sup>1</sup> (NPS 1984) while the upper 0.15 mile section is in eligible wilderness. The entire 0.3-mile segment of the Ridge Trail proposed for improvements is within eligible wilderness. In ineligible wilderness, crews would use a mini excavator or skid steer device to limit the disturbance during trail construction. Chainsaws would be used to complete the initial brushing of the trail route. Treadwork and compaction would be completed with shovels, McLeod tools, or other hand tools. In eligible wilderness, only shovels, hands saws, McLeod tools, or other necessary hand tools would be used for trail construction and improvements. Work would take place in summer and the total ground disturbance for all work would be approximately 0.4 acres to establish and improve the trail. During project implementation, if tread work exposes cultural resources, work will be stopped, the park archeologist will be notified immediately, and additional archeological testing will be conducted.

The existing trails would continue to be open for use by pedestrians and ORVs where authorized.

## **9 Affected Environment**

### **Recreation and Visitor Use**

The Tanalian Trail System is located southeast of Port Alsworth on the southern shore of Lake Clark. The area is only accessible via watercraft or floatplanes. With the Tanalian Trail System's developed trails providing access to scenic locations such as Tanalian Falls, Tanalian Mountain, and Kontrashibuna Lake and with facilities available in Port Alsworth, the area has become a popular destination. Recreation and visitor use in this area is high. Between June and October 2021, trail counters documented 1987, 2869, 1697 visits to Kontrashibuna Lake, Tanalian Falls, and Tanalian Mountain, respectively. Trail use is expected to increase as the community grows and park visitation increases. Camping, hiking, fishing, and berry-picking are common recreation activities.

### **Vegetation and Soils**

The proposed project area is composed primarily of mixed-spruce forest (NPS 1998). Over 90 percent of the area is classified as forested, with a small percentage classified as lowland birch-ericaceous shrub (NPS 1998). The primary tree species in the mixed forest include white spruce

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<sup>1</sup> The 1984 LACL General Management Plan included a Wilderness Review per ANILCA Section 1317(a) that applied criteria to all lands within the unit to determine if they were suitable or not for wilderness designation. That assessment found the majority of lands to be suitable (now called eligible) for wilderness designation, and determined the rest of the lands as unsuitable (now called ineligible) for wilderness designation based on criteria like land status and level of existing developments and resource impacts. The Alaska Region uses the categories of designated, eligible, and ineligible to describe the status of park/wilderness lands.



(*Picea glauca*), black spruce (*Picea mariana*), and paper birch (*Betula papyrifera*). Willows (*Salix spp*) are the primary shrub species in the area.

The understory consists of dwarf birch (*Betula nana*), Labrador tea (*Rhododendron tomentosum*) and seedlings of the dominant tree species. Ground cover is dominated by tundra matting, forest/leaf litter with scattered grass, forbs, and mosses.

The area's physiography includes the transition from lowland to upland, with 31 percent and 69 percent of the area classified as such, respectively (NPS 2011a). Soil texture is uniform in the area and classified as ashy-loamy-rocky (NPS 2011b).

## **Wilderness**

A portion of the proposed project area is located in an area eligible for wilderness designation. The undeveloped nature has, however, been altered by the development of Port Alsworth and Tanalian Trail System. Finding solitude and opportunities for unconfined recreation are limited by the high visitation to the area but can be found with increased distance from Port Alsworth. On public lands in the project area, few management actions have been implemented to manipulate the natural system.

# **10 Impact Analysis**

## **Alternative 1: No Action**

### **Effects on Recreation and Visitor Use**

Recreation and visitor use would remain unchanged; access to the Tanalian Trail System would continue to be via community roads and existing trails, both located outside of NPS lands. Under this alternative, conflicts and safety concerns would continue as pedestrians, ORVs, and motor vehicles use the same roads and trails. Pedestrians would also need to travel along an active runway to access the park's trail system. Maintenance issues would continue on steep, erosion prone sections of existing trails.

### **Effects on Vegetation and Soils**

Vegetation and soils would not be impacted under this alternative. No trail would be developed, and the area would remain naturally vegetated. Steep areas on existing trails would continue to be eroded.

### **Effect on Wilderness**

The wilderness character of the area would remain unchanged. No trail would be developed, but Port Alsworth and the existing trails in the area would continue to diminish the undeveloped nature of the area. The attraction of the Visitor Contact Station and Tanalian Trail System would continue to result in high human use and continue to have localized effects on solitude.

## **Cumulative Impacts on Recreation and Visitor Use, Vegetation and Soils, and Wilderness**

With few direct or indirect impacts to recreation and visitor use and vegetation and soils, Alternative 1 would have little contribution to cumulative effects on these resources.

Visitation and local use of the Tanalian Trail System would continue to increase, as accessible recreational opportunities are localized around Port Alsworth. Growth of Port Alsworth would likely continue, resulting in more vehicle traffic on community roads. With growth and development, the need for gravel for construction and road maintenance will increase. This increased need would increase traffic of heavy equipment on the roads, especially those accessing the gravel pit. Increased visitation and the draw of scenic destinations on the Tanalian Trail System would result in more trail use, limiting the opportunities for solitude in wilderness. Higher visitor/trail use combined with higher vehicle traffic would result in more user conflicts and safety risks. Overall, increased trail use by pedestrians and ORVs would result in additional maintenance needs. Trail maintenance needs would be exacerbated by multiple steep, highly erodible sections on existing trails. Relocation of these sections would not be possible given the constraints of easements and adjacent private lands.

There are no other specific ongoing or planned actions that contribute impacts on these resources in the planning area. Lake Clark has a tentative plan to construct housing facilities which would be located in the Port Alsworth area, but that proposal will not affect the resources analyzed here because of the proximity of the housing facility to the trails.

## **Alternative 2: Construct Visitor Contact Station to Tanalian Trail System Access Trail (Proposed Action and Preferred Alternative)**

### **Effects on Recreation and Visitor Use**

The 0.6 mile of new trail would provide direct pedestrian trail access from the Visitor Contact Station to the Tanalian Trail System. Visitors and local residents seeking access to the Tanalian Trail System would use a pedestrian-only trail without ORVs and not be required to use community roads with high vehicle traffic, increasing safety and diminishing user conflicts. Trail design and construction would facilitate hiking while reducing the frequency and difficulties of maintenance required. With pedestrian use directed to the Visitor Contact Station to access the Tanalian Trail System, existing trailheads originating outside of the park would see reduced use by pedestrians. Visitors would be more likely to interact with NPS staff at the Visitor Contact Station where they could receive safety and other park information.

The trail construction would take place over periods in the summers of 2022 and 2023. The total estimated duration of the work is 5 months, with 1 and 4 months of work being completed in 2022 and 2023, respectively. Construction of a segment of trail would use motorized equipment such as a mini excavator or skid steer device to turn over the vegetated layer of soil and chainsaws to initially brush the trail. During construction, there would be noise heard from motorized equipment on the existing Tanalian Trail and at the Visitor Contact Station. The noise created during construction will not differ from the noises of construction, maintenance, or aviation use that are common within the

community during summer. For safety reasons, the area encompassing the new trail and the Ridge Trail will be closed to the public during construction and improvement. During this period, alternative trails will be used to access the Tanalian Trail System. The closure will be restricted to 2 periods over the summer of 2022 and 2023, with signage posted notifying the public of the closure due to construction activity at the Visitor Contact Station and trailheads and on the park website and social media outlets.

## **Effects on Vegetation and Soils**

Trail construction and improvement would require the removal of the tundra matting along the designed route, with trees and shrubs trimmed or removed if necessary to provide a 5-foot wide trail and a 2-foot buffer along each side of the trail. The ground cover from a 5-foot wide area would be removed, resulting in a total cleared area of approximately 0.3 acres, with an additional 0.1 acres removed to widen the Ridge Trail. The locally sourced materials used to form the trail tread would be compacted and this compaction would continue over time with use. Introduction of exotic plant species would be minimized through the use of locally sourced materials. Shrubs and trees trimmed would include species common to the area such as dwarf birch, willow, black spruce, and paper birch.

## **Effect on Wilderness**

The constructed trail would adversely affect wilderness character by diminishing the undeveloped quality through the construction of 0.15 mile of new trail and improvement to 0.3 miles of the Ridge Trail. Increases in visitor use could reduce the opportunity for solitude on the trail but improved trail access could increase the opportunity to access untrailed areas beyond the trails system where primitive and unconfined recreation opportunities exist. A Minimum Requirements Analysis (MRA) was developed for this project and signed by the park superintendent on March 22, 2022 (NPS 2022). Per the MRA, no prohibited uses are proposed in eligible wilderness as part of this project. All trail construction and improvements in eligible wilderness will be completed using hand tools.

## **Cumulative Impacts on Recreation and Visitor Use, Vegetation and Soils, and Wilderness**

With construction of the 0.6 mile trail, access to the Tanalian Trail System would begin at the Park Visitor Contact Station and connect directly to popular destinations in Lake Clark. Direct trail access would eliminate the need to use and cross community roads to access trailheads on private lands. Increasing visitation, recreation, and community growth would likely put more vehicles and people on roads and trails. The new pedestrian trail would improve visitor safety by limiting use of community roads, trails bisected by roads, and the active runway. Reduced pedestrian use of these areas would lessen the likelihood of user conflicts on the multiple use segments. With pedestrian use redistributed to the newly constructed trail, trail maintenance would be reduced. The greatest use would occur on a properly designed and constructed trail, with less use on existing, difficult to maintain trails. The reduction in use of existing trails would lessen trail damage and lengthen intervals between maintenance. The direct impact on 0.4 acres of both vegetation and soils to

construct the 0.6 mile trail and improve 0.3 miles of the Ridge Trail would have a small effect as the landcover types in the area are the most common in the Lake Clark basin.

Wilderness character, primarily the undeveloped quality, would be adversely affected by construction of the 0.15 mile of new trail and the 0.3 miles improvement of the Ridge Trail in eligible wilderness. Given the current level of development in the project area, this small additional development would likely be outweighed by the improved visitor experience from a dedicated pedestrian trail. Localized adverse impacts to solitude would continue to occur in eligible wilderness, but improved trail access would allow better access beyond the Tanalian Trail System where primitive and unconfined recreation can occur.

There are no other specific ongoing or planned actions that contribute impacts on these resources in the planning area. Lake Clark has a tentative plan to construct housing facilities which would be located in the Port Alsworth area, but that proposal will not affect the resources analyzed here because of the proximity of the housing facility to the proposed trail improvements.

Impact Topic	Alternative 1: No Action	Alternative 2: Construct Visitor Contact Station to Tanalian Trail System Access Trail (Proposed Action and Preferred Alternative)
<b>Recreation and Visitor Use</b>	Visitor and local resident use would continue via existing trails. Trail access would require using roads and the primary trail would remain multiple-use. User conflicts and safety concerns will remain with mixed traffic. Trail maintenance issues would continue.	A 0.6 mile pedestrian trail combined with 0.3 miles of trail improvement would connect the Park Visitor Contact Station to the Tanalian Trail System. Direct pedestrian access to the trail system would reduce user conflicts and enhance safety by decreasing pedestrian use of community roads and multiple-use trails. Trail maintenance would be reduced through better design and dispersed use.
<b>Vegetation and Soils</b>	Vegetation and soils would not be impacted by trail construction and improvement. Impacts due to erosion on steep sections of existing trails would continue.	A 0.4 acre area of vegetation and soils would be cleared to construct the new trail and widen the Ridge Trail. Additional soil compaction would occur with use over time.



Impact Topic	Alternative 1: No Action	Alternative 2: Construct Visitor Contact Station to Tanalian Trail System Access Trail (Proposed Action and Preferred Alternative)
Wilderness	Presence of Port Alsworth and the existing trails would continue to diminish the undeveloped quality of the area. Use of the existing trails would continue to have localized effects on solitude.	Presence of Port Alsworth and the existing trails would continue to diminish the undeveloped quality of the area. The additional 0.15 miles of trail would add to the developed area in eligible wilderness. Increases in visitors on the new trail would reduce opportunities for solitude, but access to areas beyond the trail system would improve and provide opportunities for primitive, unconfined recreation.

**Table 1. Summary of Direct Impacts**

## 11 Consultation and Coordination

### Preparer

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Kevin Downs, Lake Clark National Park and Preserve Chief of Facility Management

Liza Rupp, Lake Clark National Park and Preserve Cultural Resources Program Manager and Subsistence Coordinator

Warren Hill, Lake Clark National Park and Preserve Maintenance and Trail Program Lead

### Tribal and Alaska Native Corporation Consultation

The project area is near Kijik Corporation lands. The NPS consulted with the Kijik Corporation in person on *November 23, 2021*. Based on this meeting, NPS concluded that the Kijik Corporation had no concerns related to the project. The NPS will continue to inform the Kijik Corporation on project updates and will provide them with the EA during the EA public comment period.

## USFWS Section 7

Informal consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service through the Information for Planning and Consultation Online System was initiated **February 3, 2022** to determine if threatened and endangered species occur within the proposed project area. No listed species were identified, therefore no adverse effects to listed species or critical habitat would be result from the project.

## 12 References

National Park Service. 2022. Minimum Requirements Decision Guide Workbook– Visitor Contact Station Access Trail. National Park Service. Anchorage, Alaska.

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# **Appendix A: ANILCA Section 810(A) Subsistence – Summary Evaluation and Findings Visitor Contact Station to Tanalian Trail System Access Trail Lake Clark National Park and Preserve**

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

This evaluation was prepared to comply with Title VIII, Section 810 of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA). It summarizes the evaluation of potential restrictions to subsistence uses that could result from the construction of the 0.6 mile Visitor Contact Station to Tanalian Trail System Access Trail. The NPS proposes this action to provide direct pedestrian access to trails used for recreational use while minimizing adverse impacts to the resources and values for which the Park and Preserve were established.

## **II. LAKE CLARK NATIONAL PARK AND PRESERVE**

The purposes for which Lake Clark National Park and Preserve were created are found in the language of the 1980 Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA, Pub. L. 96-487). As a unit of the National Park System, Lake Clark National Park and Preserve shall be administered to:

- protect the watershed necessary for the perpetuation of the red salmon fishery in Bristol Bay;
- maintain unimpaired the scenic beauty and quality of portions of the Alaska Range and Aleutian Range, including active volcanoes, glaciers, wild rivers, lakes, waterfalls, and alpine meadows in their natural state; and
- protect habitat for and populations of fish and wildlife including but not limited to caribou, Dall sheep, brown/grizzly bears, bald eagles, and peregrine falcons.

## **III. THE EVALUATION PROCESS**

Section 810(a) of ANILCA states: “In determining whether to withdraw, reserve, lease, or otherwise permit the use, occupancy, or disposition of public lands . . . the head of the Federal agency . . . over such lands . . . shall evaluate the effect of such use, occupancy, or disposition on subsistence uses and needs, the availability of other lands for the purposes sought to be achieved, and other alternatives which would reduce or eliminate the use, occupancy, or disposition of public lands needed for subsistence purposes. No such withdrawal, reservation, lease, permit, or other use, occupancy or disposition of such lands which would significantly restrict subsistence uses shall be affected until the head of such Federal agency:

1. gives notice to the appropriate State agency and the appropriate local committees and regional councils established pursuant to Section 805;
2. gives notice of, and holds, a hearing in the vicinity of the area involved; and
3. determines that (A) such a significant restriction of subsistence uses is necessary, consistent with sound management principles for the utilization of the public lands, (B) the proposed activity would involve the minimal amount of public lands necessary to accomplish the purposes of such use, occupancy, or other disposition, and (C) reasonable steps would be taken to minimize adverse impacts upon subsistence uses and resources resulting from such actions.”

#### **IV. PROPOSED ACTION ON FEDERAL LAND**

Lake Clark proposes to construct up to 0.6 miles and improve 0.3 miles of trail on NPS lands. This would provide pedestrian access from the NPS Visitor Contact Station to the Tanalian Trail System including Tanalian Mountain, Tanalian Falls, and Kontrashibuna Lake. The proposed trail would be 5-foot wide with a 2-foot wide brushed area on each side removing undergrowth to facilitate hiking (total width of 9 feet). Approximately 30 inches of soil will be removed and replaced with a combination of suitable soil, geotextile, and stone to create a durable tread. The proposed alignment follows a sustainable grade with a designed 400-foot diagonal section traversing the steepest grade of the trail. Routing would maintain a vegetative buffer to minimize the visual effects to private lands. Erosion control features, such as waterbars, would be used in areas where grade and terrain dictate. The *Description of Alternatives* section of the EA describes each alternative being considered in detail. The following is a brief summary:

Under the *No Action Alternative*, the NPS would not build the 0.6-mile trail connecting the Visitor Contact Station to the Tanalian Trail System. Access to the trail system would require using community roads and existing trails occupying easements through private lands.

Under *Alternative 2, Construct Visitor Contact Station to Tanalian Trail System Access Trail (Proposed Action and Preferred Alternative)* the NPS would develop up to 0.6 miles and improve 0.3 miles of trail on NPS lands. This would provide pedestrian access from the NPS Visitor Contact Station to the Tanalian Trail System including Tanalian Mountain, Tanalian Falls, and Kontrashibuna Lake.

#### **V. THE AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT RELATIVE TO SUBSISTENCE USE**

Local rural residents continue to engage in, and depend on, resources from Lake Clark for personal consumption, cultural identity, and to maintain a subsistence way of life.

In accordance with regulations in 36 CFR Part 13, residents of the NPS designated resident zone communities of Iliamna, Lime Village, Newhalen, Nondalton, Pedro Bay, Port Alsworth, and people who reside inside the boundaries of the park are qualified to engage in subsistence activities in Lake Clark under Federal subsistence regulations. Local rural residents who do not live in these communities but who have customarily and traditionally engaged in subsistence activities within Lake Clark may continue to do so with a subsistence use permit issued by the park superintendent.



Current subsistence use in the area is moderate, with most activity conducted by residents living in the Port Alsworth. Hunting and trapping occurs in the area during designated seasons. Harvest of firewood is common, due to the proximity to Port Alsworth. Berry-picking use is also low but includes harvest of blueberries (*Vaccinium corymbosum*), low bush cranberries (*Vaccinium vitis-idaea*), highbush cranberries (*Viburnum edule*), and American red currants (*Ribes triste*). The presence of private lands in the area influences where subsistence activities occur.

## **VI. SUBSISTENCE USES AND NEEDS EVALUATION**

To determine the potential impacts on subsistence activities from constructing the trail, three evaluation criteria were analyzed relative to existing subsistence resources:

1. The potential to reduce subsistence fish and wildlife populations by (a) reductions in number, (b) redistribution of subsistence resources, or (c) habitat losses;
2. The potential effect on subsistence fisher or hunter access;
3. The potential to increase fisher or hunter competition for subsistence resources.

### **1. The potential to reduce populations**

In all the alternatives considered in this analysis, there is minimal potential to reduce numbers of or redistribute fish and wildlife populations or reduce habitat for subsistence fish and wildlife populations. The proposed trail will disturb soils and destroy some shrubs and other vegetation that provide habitat for small mammals, birds, and insects. While the soil disturbances and removal of vegetation may impact the relative abundance of certain plants along the trail, the effects will be limited and not result in a significant loss of habitat. In addition, these developments are not expected to reduce or redistribute wildlife populations in the project area.

### **2. Restriction of Access**

***Alternative 1 (No Action Alternative).*** The trail will not be constructed. Access to subsistence resources would continue to be by the existing trails.

***Alternative 2 Construct Visitor Contact Station to Tanalian Trail System Access Trail (Proposed Action and Preferred Alternative).*** The NPS will construct 0.6 miles of trail connecting the Visitor Contact Station to the Tanalian Trail System and improve 0.3 miles of trail on NPS lands. This would enhance subsistence user access to the Tanalian Trail System and resources on Tanalian Mountain and along Kontrashibuna Lake.

### **3. Increase in Competition**

***Alternative 1 (No Action Alternative).*** The no action alternative will preserve the status quo and not change current trail access. Alternative 1 will not result in any increase in competition between subsistence and other users for subsistence resources.

***Alternatives 2 Construct Visitor Contact Station to Tanalian Trail System Access Trail (Proposed Action and Preferred Alternative).*** The constructed trail proposed in Alternative 2 may result in a nominal increase in competition during the summer months between local subsistence users and people utilizing the trail for recreational purposes. This would include subsistence berry picking and to a limited extent, hunting. Competition for hunters will be minimized by the fact that there are limited opportunities for subsistence hunting near the trail system during the summer months when the peak recreational use will occur. During this period, wildlife resources increase in number beyond the trail system where subsistence users are less likely to encounter recreational users. The area where most subsistence hunters using the trail system would focus hunting efforts is designated Park, so competition with non-subsistence hunters is not an issue.

Additionally, provisions in ANILCA Section 802(2) and NPS regulations mandate that if and when it is necessary to restrict the taking of fish or wildlife on NPS lands, subsistence users will have priority over other user groups. Implementation of this subsistence preference would reduce or eliminate any increased competition that might result from increased visitation by recreationists, sport hunters or anglers. In addition, the superintendent may enact closures and/or restrictions if necessary to protect subsistence opportunities or to assure the continued viability of a particular fish or wildlife population.

## **VII. AVAILABILITY OF OTHER LANDS**

Lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management share common boundaries with Lake Clark and are the closest federal public lands to the proposal area where Title VIII subsistence occurs. There are other lands inside and outside Lake Clark boundaries where local rural residents may harvest subsistence resources including state, tribal and private lands and lands belonging to Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) corporations.

## **VIII. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED**

This analysis has evaluated two alternatives: Alternative 1, to maintain the status quo, or a no action alternative, and Alternative 2, the proposed action and preferred alternative to construct 0.6 miles and improve 0.3 miles of trail to connect the Visitor Contact Station to the Tanalian Trail System.

## **IX. FINDINGS**

This analysis concludes that the proposed action described in Alternative 2 would not result in a significant restriction of subsistence uses.

## **REFERENCES**

Branson, John B. 1998. A 20<sup>th</sup> Century Portrait of Lake Clark Alaska 1900-2000. National Park Service