



National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Wrangell-St. Elias National Park  
and Preserve  
PO Box 439  
Copper Center, AK 99573

EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA

The Nabesna Road Motorized Trail EIS Newsletter is a publication to support and encourage public participation in the NEPA process.

**Editor**  
Bruce Rogers

**Contributors**  
Bruce Rogers

**Comments? Write to:**  
Bruce Rogers  
Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve  
PO Box 439  
Copper Center, AK 99573



Copper Lake trail.

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# ORV Planning Newsletter

## Scoping Comment Summary and Modified Alternatives for the Nabesna EIS

This newsletter is intended to inform and update interested public regarding progress on the Nabesna Off-Road Vehicle Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The EIS is being written

**The purpose of this third newsletter is to update interested parties regarding the planning process.**

as one of the conditions of a settlement agreement resulting from a 2006 lawsuit filed against the National Park Service. The lawsuit challenged NPS issuance of permits for recreational Off Road Vehicle (ORV) use on nine trails in the Nabesna District of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve (WRST). A Notice of Intent was published in the Federal Register in December of 2007 and this officially started the public scoping process.

As part of public scoping, the NPS held five public meetings in the spring of 2008, published two newsletters, and met with numerous stakeholders. The scoping process and comments received from the public are summarized in a scoping report



Early summer along the Nabesna road.

that can still be found on the park’s website at [www.nps.gov/wrst/parkmgmt/planning.htm](http://www.nps.gov/wrst/parkmgmt/planning.htm). Based on the issues identified during scoping and public comments received, NPS developed a set of draft alternatives. These alternatives were distributed for public review and comment in December of 2008. We received 30 comments on the draft alternative package. Sportsman’s groups or individuals contributed most of the comments (13), followed by local rural residents (7), environmental groups (3), the State of Alaska (1), and others (6). A table outlining

the summary of those comments received is located at the bottom of page 2.

The NPS used public comments to modify the alternatives presented in the draft alternative review package. The modified alternatives will be analyzed within the Draft EIS, which is now tentatively scheduled for release and public review in March of 2010. At that time there will be more opportunity for public review and comment.



# Scope of EIS to Include Subsistence ORV Use

Based on public comment and the need to address resource impacts resulting from ORV use by all user groups, NPS has decided to expand the scope of the EIS to include subsistence ORV use on the nine trails in question. NPS will analyze, within the Draft EIS, alternatives that include monitoring of resource conditions associated with the nine trails; with reasonable regulation of subsistence ORV use if resource conditions degrade. Following is a quick description of the modified alternatives that will be analyzed in the Draft EIS:

**Alternative 1:**  
No Action, recreational ORV use would not be permitted on the most degraded trails (Suslota, Tanada Lake, Copper Lake); no change to subsistence ORV use; no trail improvements.

**Alternative 2:**  
Recreational ORV use would be permitted on all nine trails; no change to subsistence ORV use; no trail improvements.

**Alternative 3:**  
Recreational ORV use would not be permitted on any of the nine trails; few trail improvements would be done; subsistence ORV use would continue to occur but resource impacts would be monitored. If monitoring shows over time that resource impacts are increasing, management action would be taken.

**Alternative 4:**  
All nine trails would be improved to at least a maintainable condition through trail hardening, tread improvement, or constructed re-routes. After improvements

are done, recreational ORV use would be permitted on trails in the preserve (Suslota, Caribou Creek, Lost Creek, Trail Creek, Soda Lake, Reeve’s Field) but not on trails in the park (Tanada Lake, Copper Lake, and Boomerang). Until improvements are done, recreational ORV use would only be permitted on trails in fair or better condition (Lost Creek and Trail Creek). Until improvements are done, subsistence ORV use would continue but would be subject to monitoring and management action if resource impacts increase.

**Alternative 5:**  
All trails (except Suslota) would be improved to at least a maintainable condition. After improvements are done, recreational ORV use would be permitted on all improved trails. Until improvements are done, rec-

(continued on next page)

| Summary of Comments Received on Draft Alternatives  | # of comments |
|---|---------------|
| Supports draft Alternative 2 (all trails open to recreational ORV use), opposes closing any trails to ORVs  | 8             |
| Supports draft Alternative 3, no recreational ORV use on any trail  | 5             |
| Opposes restrictions to subsistence ORV use presented in draft Alternative 4  | 3             |
| Opposes temporary closure concept presented in draft Alternative 4  | 3             |
| Supports user fees if used directly on trails and if applied to all users   | 3             |
| In general, supports trail improvements, including improved trail marking, re-routing around wet areas, and other trail improvements to allow access to ALL users.  | 5             |
| In general, supports non-motorized routes/trails  | 4             |
| Alternatives as presented inadequately address subsistence ORV use; support reasonable regulation of subsistence ORV use; if used, restrictions should be applied equitably to all user groups in order to address impacts. | 9             |
| Impacts are insignificant or small relative to the size of the park/preserve  | 7             |
| ORVs cause damage that adversely affect the quality of non-motorized recreational experience; impacts to park resources are occurring.  | 5             |
| Consider effect of improved trails on hunting pressure, particularly for Dall sheep.  | 2             |
| EIS needs to consider all impacts to subsistence users and subsistence resources.   | 1             |
| Need increased enforcement and monitoring after implementation  | 3             |

## Scope of EIS

(continued from previous page)

reational ORV use would only be permitted on trails in fair or better condition. Until improvements are done, subsistence ORV use would continue but would be subject to monitoring and management action if resource impacts increase.

The monitoring described above for alternatives 3, 4, and 5 would consist of permanent transects established on degraded trail segments where resource impacts are occurring. They will measure trail width, trail depth, vegetation cover, presence or absence of soil erosion, and cross sections at stream crossings. The monitoring is designed to show, over time, whether the trail footprint is expanding and whether impacts

within the trail footprint are increasing or decreasing. If monitoring shows that resource impacts on a particular trail segment or trail are increasing over time with only subsistence ORV use occurring, the following management actions would be considered and would be targeted at the specific trail or trail segment:

1. Maintenance targeted at the specific impact (for example, hardening a stream crossing).
2. Decrease use on problem trails by limiting users seasonally (for example, close the trail to all motorized use except during the hunting season).
3. Trail closure for resource protection.

Trail improvements, monitoring, and management actions in alternatives 3, 4 and 5 are targeted at correcting or improving resource impacts associated with the nine trails and will not limit subsistence off-trail use as long as that use is not creating additional resource impacts.



Mud bogs along trails can cause trail braiding and impacts to wetlands, soils, and vegetation.


## Where do we go from here?

NPS briefed the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park Subsistence Resource Commission and the Southcentral and Eastern Interior federal subsistence regional advisory councils in March, 2009. This newsletter is being distributed to inform interested parties regarding the change in scope of the project. NPS is currently in the process of entering into a contract for the writing of the Draft EIS, with an internal review draft scheduled for September of 2009 and public review Draft EIS scheduled for March of 2010. Once the Draft EIS is released, the public will have 60 days to comment. During that time, NPS will hold public meetings to facilitate public comment.

If you wish to comment on the expansion of the scope of the project, you can do so in any of the following ways:

1. E-mail your comment to [bruce\\_rogers@nps.gov](mailto:bruce_rogers@nps.gov).
2. Write to Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve, ATTN: Bruce Rogers, P.O. Box 439, Copper Center, Alaska, 99573.
3. Call Bruce Rogers, project manager, at 907-822-7276.





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The history of off-road vehicle (ORV) use in the Nabesna District predates the establishment of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. It commenced after the World War II era when surplus military vehicles were used by hunters, miners, and others for personal use and access to remote areas. Several of the trails in question started out as winter trails, used under frozen conditions and never intended for summertime use.

**Address**  
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PO Box 439  
Copper Center, AK 99573

**Phone**  
907-822-7276

**E-mail**  
[Bruce\\_rogers@nps.gov](mailto:Bruce_rogers@nps.gov)

The National Park Service cares for the special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.