



# Brooks River Visitor Access EIS

## Public Scoping: Improving Visitor Access at Brooks River, Katmai National Park and Preserve

The National Park Service (NPS) is considering replacing the existing floating bridge and trails to improve visitor access at the Brooks River area of Katmai National Park and Preserve.

A new elevated bridge and boardwalk would provide for the continuation of floatplane access within the Brooks River area. Most visitors arrive via floatplanes that beach either on the shore of Naknek Lake or on adjacent Lake Brooks. To reach bear viewing platforms, the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes Road, Brooks Lodge or the campground, visitors must cross Brooks River on a floating bridge. During the peak bear use periods of late June through July and September, brown bear activity near the floating bridge intermittently delays river crossings, at times for prolonged periods.

The NPS is also considering the relocation of the existing barge landing and access road away from Brooks River. The relocation would reduce the number of bear-human interactions in that area, minimize NPS barge operation delays,



More than 10,000 people visit the Brooks River area each summer.

and improve visitor experience.

These proposals would facilitate dependable safe access across Brooks River and would advance the phased relocation of facilities and park operations from the north side of Brooks River at Naknek Lake to the south side of the river as called for in the 1996 Brooks River Area Development Concept Plan (DCP) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

By considering a bridge and elevated boardwalk and alternative location for the barge landing and access road, this plan would amend the access decision made in the DCP, which called for development of a floatplane dock, breakwater, and a one-mile access road on the south side of the Brooks River.

The NPS will evaluate the proposed

visitor access improvements through the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance process. The NEPA process is designed to involve the public and gather and analyze the best available information before the NPS makes a decision. Due to the scope of the proposed project, the NPS is in the process of developing an EIS.

### Brooks Camp

Situated near the mouth of the Brooks River along the shore of Naknek Lake, more than 10,000 visitors travel to Brooks Camp annually by floatplane or boat to view brown bears, enjoy world-class sport fishing, and acquire an understanding of the area's extensive human history.

Brooks Camp was originally established in the 1950s on the north side of the Brooks River to provide recreational



Brooks River area

# Brooks River Visitor Access Improvements EIS (continued)

fishing opportunities. Over the last several decades the NPS and Brooks Lodge have improved and expanded facilities at Brooks Camp to accommodate the increasing number of visitors interested in viewing and photographing brown bears along the Brooks River and touring the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes. The existing facilities at Brooks Camp include the Brooks Lodge and cabins, visitor center, auditorium, ranger station, park and concession employee housing, maintenance facilities, and a campground.

## Brooks River Floating Bridge

Brooks Camp is separated from three bear viewing platforms and the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes Road by the Brooks River. The river is an essential habitat for brown bears. Between 40 and 70 bears return to the river and feed on the migrating sockeye salmon each year. The river provides visitors an extraordinary opportunity to observe and photograph bears in their natural habitat.



During July and September, bears frequent Brooks River to feed on sockeye salmon.

In order to access the platforms and the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes, visitors, park staff, and concession employees rely on the existing floating bridge to cross the river. Destabilization of the floating bridge and its related infrastructure from natural erosion and other factors means that repairs and other maintenance activities are a constant requirement.

The floating bridge and access trails are located within a prime brown bear feeding area. Between June and September, bears are frequently observed swimming under the bridge or walking around the bridge on the access trails.

Bears also rest close by the bridge on the riverbanks. Due to these situations, the NPS allocates considerable time and personnel to monitor pedestrian flow and bear activity within the lower Brooks River area.

## Cultural Resources

The Brooks River area is part of the Brooks River Archeological District National Historic Landmark. The landmark has been determined to be nationally significant for its potential to yield scientific information regarding the prehistoric human occupation of Alaska. The landmark is comprised of surface and subsurface cultural remains of over 20 well-preserved archeological sites, dating from 2500 B.C. Descendants of Alaska Natives who fled Katmai during the 1912 Novarupta Eruption continued traditional harvest of salmon in Brooks River into the 1950's. They still practice the tradition of harvesting "red fish" in the fall. Red fish are spawned-out salmon which are favored by older people due to their reduced fat content.

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## Public Scoping

The NPS is requesting input from federal and state agencies, local governments, private organizations, recreational users, and the public to help identify the alternatives and issues associated with the proposed project.

NPS representatives will be available to discuss issues, resource concerns, and planning processes at public scoping meetings. Scoping meetings will be held in Anchorage and King Salmon during late summer or early fall of 2009. When public meetings have been scheduled, their dates, times, and locations will be announced in local media and posted on the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) system. Comments concerning the scope of the EIS should be received no later than 60 days after the last scoping meeting. The draft EIS is projected to be available to the public in the fall of 2010.

The EIS process consists of the following phases:

- Scoping – public comments are requested to help identify environmental issues and alternatives.
- Draft EIS – the NPS prepares a draft EIS containing a complete description of the affected environment, a reasonable range of alternatives, and an analysis of the impacts of each alternative. The public is then provided a 60-day period to comment on the EIS.
- Final EIS and Proposed Action – the NPS prepares a Final EIS and announces its Proposed Action based on the comments received on the Draft EIS.
- Record of Decision (ROD) – contains a summary description of all alternatives analyzed in the EIS, identification of the environmentally preferable alternative, a rationale for the decision, a description of mitigation and monitoring requirements, and a statement of whether all practical means to avoid or minimize environmental harm from the selected alternative have been adopted.

Public scoping comments may be submitted to the NPS using one of the following methods:

Electronic through the PEPC system:  
<http://www.parkplanning.nps.gov/KATM>.

Brooks River Visitor Access EIS  
Katmai National Park and Preserve  
P.O. Box 7  
King Salmon, AK 99613

Or by Fax 907-246-2116

Before including your address, phone number, email address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment – including your personal identifying information – may be publicly available at any time. While you can ask us to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.