

Denali

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Denali National Park and Preserve



Denali Park Road Planning Workbook

Winter 2010



Message from the Superintendent

Dear Friends,

Denali National Park and Preserve is vast wild landscape 6 million acres in size. One lone road snakes into the heart of the park,

a portal through which hundreds of thousands of visitors pass each year to experience this slice of America's wilderness heritage.

What one can experience on a trip out the Park Road can be awe-inspiring—from the views of Mount McKinley looming large on the horizon to hillsides awash with brilliant purple wildflowers to the sight of a mother grizzly and her cubs snoozing on the tundra on a warm summer's day. But there remains the question of how many people can take advantage of such opportunities at any one time before the experiences are diminished and wildlife is adversely affected.

With visitation steadily growing, the park is approaching the core season vehicle limit of 10,512 set by park managers in the 1986 *General Management Plan*. Whereas the vehicle limit is clearly measureable, it is less clear that a numerical limit alone is enough to adequately protect park resources and provide for a high quality visitor experience. Other factors come into play, such as visitor perceptions of crowding at wildlife stops and rest stops; interactions between busses and wildlife; and wildlife movements in the Park Road corridor.

The National Park Service is currently creating an Environmental Impact Statement for a Vehicle Management Plan. A significant part of the task

at hand is determining the true carrying capacity of the Park Road. By identifying desired future conditions and employing more sophisticated science and modeling techniques, park managers will be better able to identify the impacts of specific activities and adjust Park Road use accordingly.

Before we proceed further with the Plan, we would like your specific comments and ideas on the work accomplished thus far. A full public review of these preliminary concepts will help in the development of detailed alternatives. It will also help to ensure that no reasonable concept is overlooked.

Ultimately, the carrying capacity of the Park Road will be expressed in a measureable way. It will, however, take into account a range of variables related to visitors and the resource. With your help, the Vehicle Management Plan will reflect insights that will help to ensure the Park Road experience continues to offer visitors of diverse needs, wants, and desires opportunities to come to know this wild place and its inhabitants.

Sincerely,

Paul R. Anderson
Superintendent

For more on the park planning process, please visit www.nps.gov/dena/parkmgmt/planning

This workbook is organized into the following sections:

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The Purpose of this Planning Workbook

This workbook contains the key building blocks of the Denali Park Road Vehicle Management Plan. Background information and preliminary concepts are presented for your consideration to assist us with determining the most effective approach to managing vehicles along the Denali Park Road. This workbook represents many hours spent in deliberation since 2008 by the planning team, park staff, state and federal agencies, stakeholders, and interested members of the public. The purpose of this workbook is twofold: (1) to provide a project update and (2) to offer an opportunity to review and comment on the included proposals found on pages 10 - 29.

We want to hear from you. Public involvement is an integral part of this planning effort. Included in this workbook is a worksheet and mail-back comment form to gather your ideas and concerns on different ways of managing the transportation system and other vehicles on the Park Road.

The National Park Service (NPS) planning team has begun to develop preliminary management concepts; however, further discussion and analysis are needed before they can be fully developed into alternatives. We will use your comments on the concepts in this workbook to develop draft alternatives. A full range of reasonable draft alternatives will then be fully analyzed and formally reviewed by the public in the Draft Denali Park Road Vehicle Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement scheduled for release in 2011.

How to Comment

You may provide input on the proposed concepts included in the workbook by doing one or more of the following:

- Fill out the comment form included at the back of this workbook and mail it or fax it to the addresses shown in the box to the right.
- Write a letter and submit it through - www.parkplanning.nps.gov
- Attend a public workshop in January or February, 2010. Visit the park's website for specific dates and locations - www.nps.gov/dena/parkmgmt/planning

COMMENTS ARE DUE MARCH 1, 2010.



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Denali National Park and Preserve

For more information about the Denali Park Road Vehicle Management Plan, contact the Denali Planning Office:

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www.nps.gov/dena/parkmgmt/roadvehmgteis.htm

We request that public comments be submitted at:

www.parkplanning.nps.gov

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

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



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BACKGROUND

Managing User Capacity

Managing visitor use in national parks is inherently complex and depends not only on the number of visitors, but also on where they go, what they do and the “footprints” they leave behind. It is a dynamic process of planning for and managing the various characteristics of visitor use and park areas and employing a variety of management strategies and tools to sustain desired conditions.

This planning and management process serves as the means to address user capacity. By law, General Management Plans for national park units are required to identify and address implementation commitments for user capacity consistent with the values for which the area was established. User capacity is an expression of an area’s ability to provide for appropriate visitor use while sustaining desired resource conditions and visitor experiences. This may be further described as the type and amounts of visitor use and/or a description of acceptable impacts.

The decision making process for defining user capacity can be summarized by the following major planning and management steps (see Figure 1):

1. Determining WHY an area was established as a national park.
2. Determining WHAT desired conditions for resources, visitor experiences, and types/ levels of development should exist within the park.
3. Further articulating desired conditions by identifying indicators and standards that help direct management actions and serve as long-term measures of success at achieving desired conditions.
4. Determining HOW the park will be managed to achieve the desired conditions by defining and implementing visitor use management strategies and actions.
5. Monitoring existing conditions using indicators and standards.
6. Adjusting management actions to maintain desired conditions.

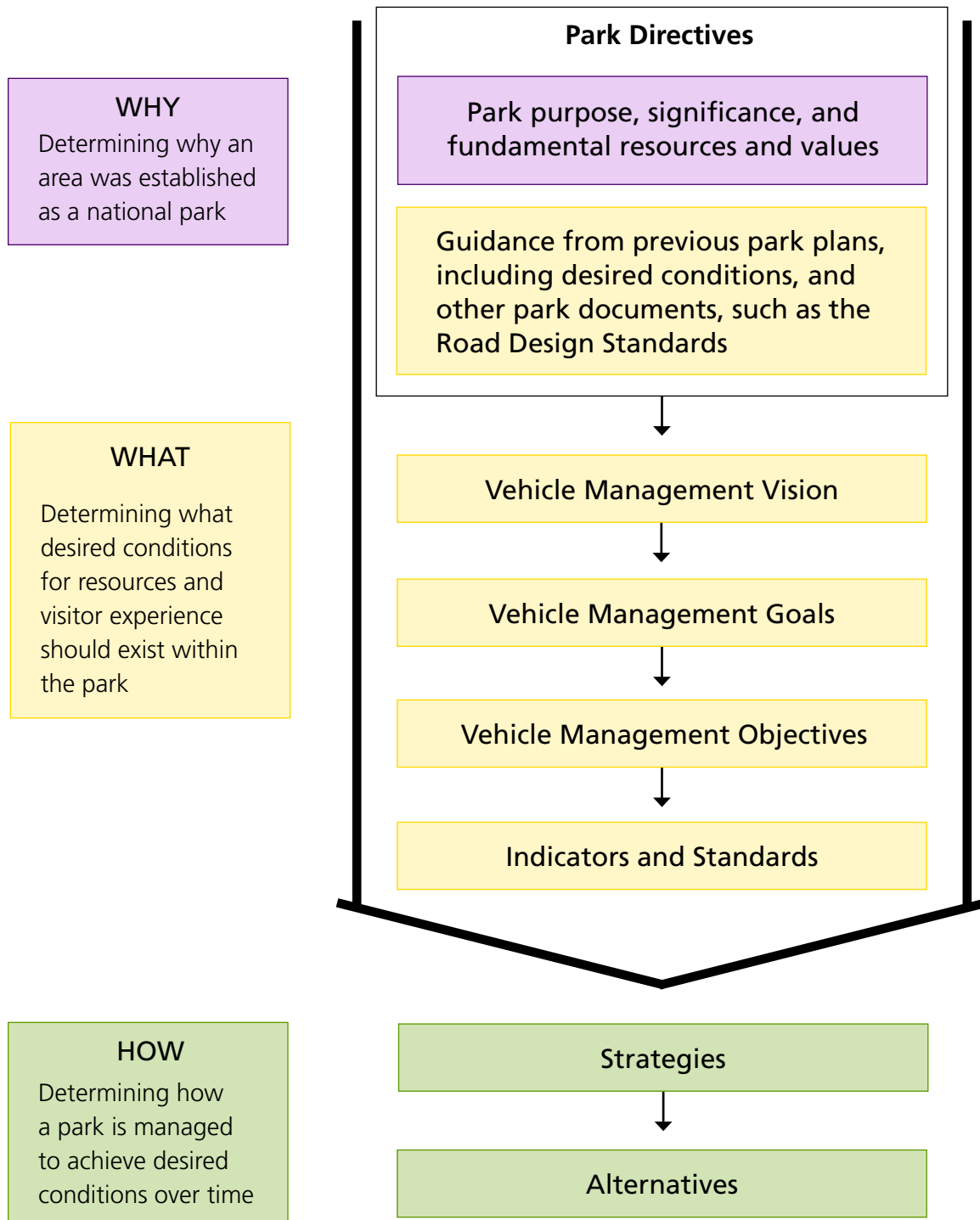
Desired conditions speak to the park’s natural and cultural resource conditions and visitor experiences that the National Park Service aspires to achieve and maintain over time.

An **indicator** is a measurable variable that can be used to direct management actions and track changes in conditions, related to human activity, so that progress towards desired conditions can be assessed.

A **standard** is the management decision about the minimum acceptable condition for an indicator.

Figure 1. Overview of Planning Process for the Denali Park Road Vehicle Management Plan

The plan's foundation is based on documents that describe why the park was established and what conditions should exist in the park. Increasingly specific guidance for desired resource and visitor experience conditions are articulated in the plan's vision, goals, and objectives.





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Why Denali Was Established as a National Park

In 1917 Congress established Mount McKinley National Park as a “game refuge” to “set apart as a public park for the benefit and enjoyment of the people ... for recreation purposes by the public and for the preservation of animals, birds, and fish and for the preservation of the natural curiosities and scenic beauties thereof...”

In 1980 Congress passed the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), which enlarged and renamed the park Denali National Park and Preserve and provided specific purposes for these new additions:

- To protect and interpret the entire mountain massif and the additional scenic mountain peaks and formations.
- To protect habitat for, and populations of fish and wildlife, including, but not limited to, brown/grizzly bears, moose, caribou, Dall sheep, wolves, swans and other waterfowl.
- To provide continued opportunities, including reasonable access, for mountain climbing, mountaineering, and other wilderness recreational activities.

ANILCA also included designation of the “Denali Wilderness of approximately one million nine hundred thousand acres” under the Wilderness Act which includes 99% of the former Mt. McKinley National Park.

Denali’s fundamental resources and values tier from the park’s purpose and further articulate those resources and values that Congress identified specifically for the park. They represent the systems,

processes, experiences, scenery, sounds, and other features that are key to achieving the park’s purposes and maintaining its significance. These fundamental resources and values are synthesized as follows:

1. Wildlife populations, wildlife habitat, and the processes and components of the park’s natural ecosystem
2. Wilderness character, wilderness resource values, and wilderness recreation opportunities
3. Scenic and geologic values of Mount McKinley and the surrounding mountain landscape
4. Visitor enjoyment and inspiration from observing wildlife in its natural habitat and other natural features

Denali has other important resources and values that are not primary to the park’s purpose and significance, but are important for both park management and visitors. These are resources and values that Denali possesses and has a legal mandate to protect. They include:

1. Historic, archaeological, and ethnographic resources
2. Paleontological resources
3. Air quality
4. Subsistence resources and opportunities
5. Scientific research, education, and interpretation about natural ecosystems and geologic features and processes

History of Determining Desired Conditions and Vehicle Use on the Denali Park Road

Desired Conditions and Management Zoning

Desired conditions for the park's natural and cultural resources emerge directly from the values on which the park was established. They are embedded in core park management documents that have been through a well-vetted public process and set direction for current and future management actions.

Management zoning is one method used by the National Park Service to identify and describe desired resource and visitor experience conditions to be achieved and maintained in the different areas of a park. The *1986 Denali General Management Plan (1986 GMP)* established four major zones within the park: natural zone, historic zone, park development zone, and special use zone. The Park Road corridor was placed in the Park Development Zone where lands "are managed to accommodate major development and intensive use."

The *1997 Entrance Area and Road Corridor Development Concept Plan (EARDCP)* amended the *1986 GMP* by further defining the Park Development Zone into the following sub-zones (see Figure 2):

- **Motorized Sightseeing Sub-Zone 2: Park Road from George Parks Highway to Headquarters**

This sub-zone is designated for access to developed and administrative areas and may include some commercial traffic. Another primary activity is wildlife and scenery viewing that is generally dependent on a vehicle.
- **Motorized Sightseeing Sub-Zone 3: Headquarters to Savage River Bridge**

The primary activity of this sub-zone is wildlife and scenery viewing that is generally dependent on a vehicle. Commercial vehicles are restricted in these areas.
- **Wildlife Viewing Sub-Zone 1: Savage River Bridge to Teklanika River Bridge**

This sub-zone includes part of the gravel section of the Park Road on which the primary purposes include wildlife and scenery viewing. Visitors travel on one of the bus systems and private vehicles are restricted. The only facilities present

include the Park Road and generally one rest area for every hour of travel. Visitors can expect a greater level of traffic in this sub-zone than in wildlife viewing sub-zone 2.

- **Wildlife Viewing Sub-Zone 2: Teklanika River Bridge to former park boundary north of Wonder Lake**

This sub-zone includes the gravel section of the Park Road on which greater restrictions (rules of the road) apply. Buses are given the right-of-way and the primary purposes include wildlife and scenery viewing. Visitors must use one of the bus systems and private vehicles are restricted. The only facilities include the Park Road, one or two visitor contact stations, and generally one rest area for every hour of travel. Visitors can expect a lower level of traffic than in wildlife viewing sub-zone 1.

Vehicle Use on the Denali Park Road

The seasonal limit of 10,512 vehicles allowed beyond mile 15 on the Denali Park Road was established through a public planning process for the *1986 GMP*. A specified limit was the best means available at that time to manage the impacts of traffic on resource conditions and visitor experience.

The *1997 EARDCP* retained the seasonal 10,512 vehicle limit and established daily limits for the tour and transit components of the system.

While the overarching goal of the limits was to protect wildlife viewing opportunities and wildlife health and habitat, the limits were not connected to more refined desired conditions in a logical framework that could be measured and monitored over time.

In addition to setting limits, the *1997 EARDCP* also committed the park to move toward identifying user capacity through a more refined approach by setting indicators and standards for desired conditions. To that end, the park embarked on the Road Study project in 2006 to better understand the impacts of traffic on park resources and visitor experience in order to develop indicators.

The Denali Park Road Vehicle Management Plan will use the results of the Road Study to more fully articulate desired conditions for the Park Road by establishing indicators and standards for resource conditions and visitor experience.



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CURRENT PLANNING EFFORT

Over the next two years, the Denali Park Road Vehicle Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement will be developed. A full range of reasonable approaches to managing vehicles on the Park Road will be considered and analyzed.

The planning process represents an intensive effort involving subject matter experts on transportation, visitor use, and resource management; park managers; stakeholders; local, state and federal governments; and interested members of the public.

What Will the Plan Accomplish?

The plan will establish the vision, goals, objectives, and strategies for managing vehicles along the Denali Park Road, including user capacity, in order to best manage demand while preserving visitor experiences and park resources and values.

How Will the Plan Be Used?

The Denali Park Road Vehicle Management Plan will guide decision making and management of vehicles on the Park Road for the next 15 to 20 years. However, the process does not end with publishing the final plan. When managers consider work and funding priorities, they will look to the Vehicle Management Plan and assess what needs to be done to achieve and maintain the specified desired conditions. To this end, NPS staff will continue to monitor conditions along the Park Road and determine whether or not the desired conditions are being achieved and maintained, adjusting management strategies as necessary and keeping the public informed along the way.

What We Heard in Project Scoping

Over the course of the last year – through a public involvement process that included meetings and opportunities to submit written comments – park staff and the public have defined the range of needs and concerns to be addressed in planning for vehicle management along the Park Road. They include the following:

- Maintain flexibility in the transportation system to best manage changing needs and demands of visitors, operators, and park resources
- Protect park resources
- Manage non-system vehicle use (e.g. NPS, inholders, professional photographers, and Teklanika campers) to maximize opportunities for public use
- Improve visitor exposure to key park messages
- Provide visitors with the freedom to choose experiences that address personal interests
- Make the transportation system more understandable and easier to use
- Provide adequate information so visitors can make informed decisions
- Minimize displacement of visitors for economic reasons

A copy of the full summary of scoping comments can be found at -

www.nps.gov/dena/parkmgmnt/roadvehmgteis.htm

PROPOSALS

Proposed Changes to Management Zoning and Desired Conditions

Park managers are considering changes to the Denali Park Road sub-zones and associated desired conditions in order to clarify management vision and intent, reaffirm the *2007 Road Design Standards*, and support the Park Road's 2009 Determination of Eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places. The proposed changes (see Figure 3) are as follows:

1. Creation of Wildlife Viewing Sub-Zone 3: Eielson Visitor Center to the Wonder Lake junction

This sub-zone includes the gravel Park Road that is maintained to a narrower width on which greater vehicle restrictions (rules of the road) continue to apply. Visitors must use one of the bus systems and private vehicles are restricted. Buses are given the right-of-way. The primary purpose of this road segment is for a more wild and remote type of visitor experience along

the road corridor to view wildlife and scenery. Travel to this section of the road requires a significant time commitment by visitors. Those who make the trip will experience a more quiet and contemplative setting and fewer encounters with other vehicles along this section of road than in wildlife viewing sub-zone 2. Park facilities are highly limited to minimize any additional footprint on the landscape and no visitor contact stations will be provided along this section of road.

2. The areas included in Wildlife Viewing Sub-Zone 2 would continue for the Park Road from Teklanika River Bridge to Eielson Visitor Center and from the Wonder Lake junction to the Old Park Boundary.



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Figure 2. Current Denali Park Road Management Zones

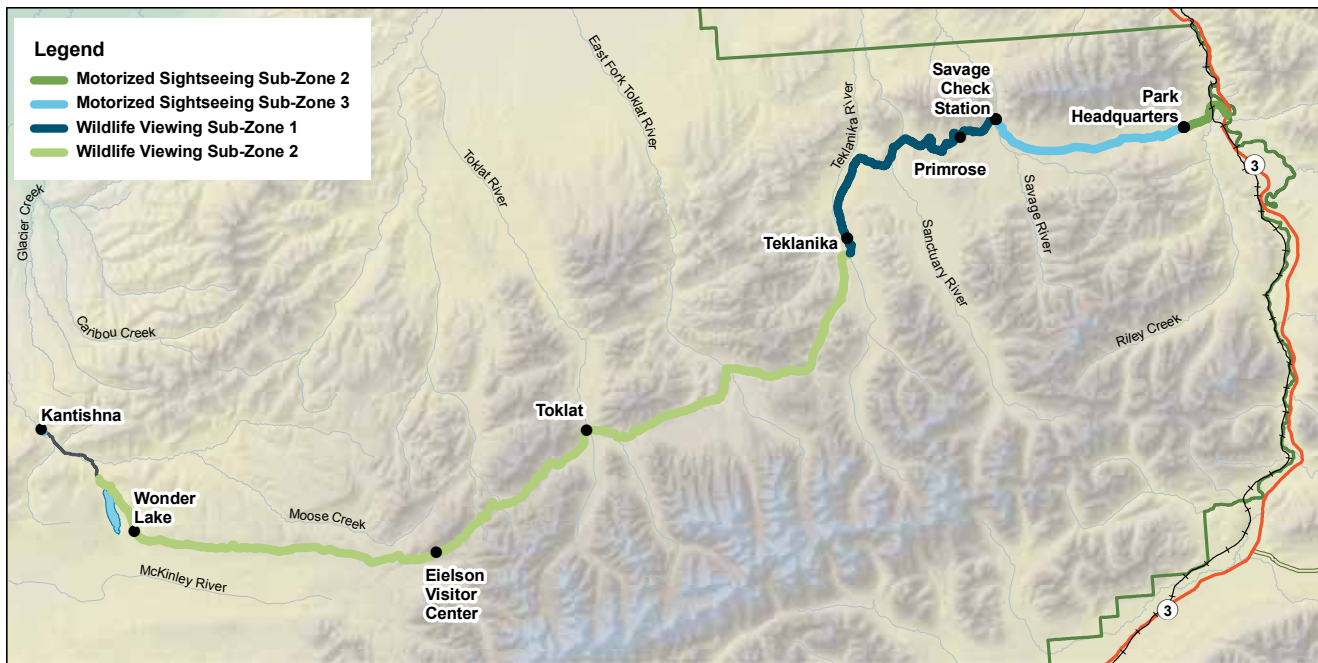
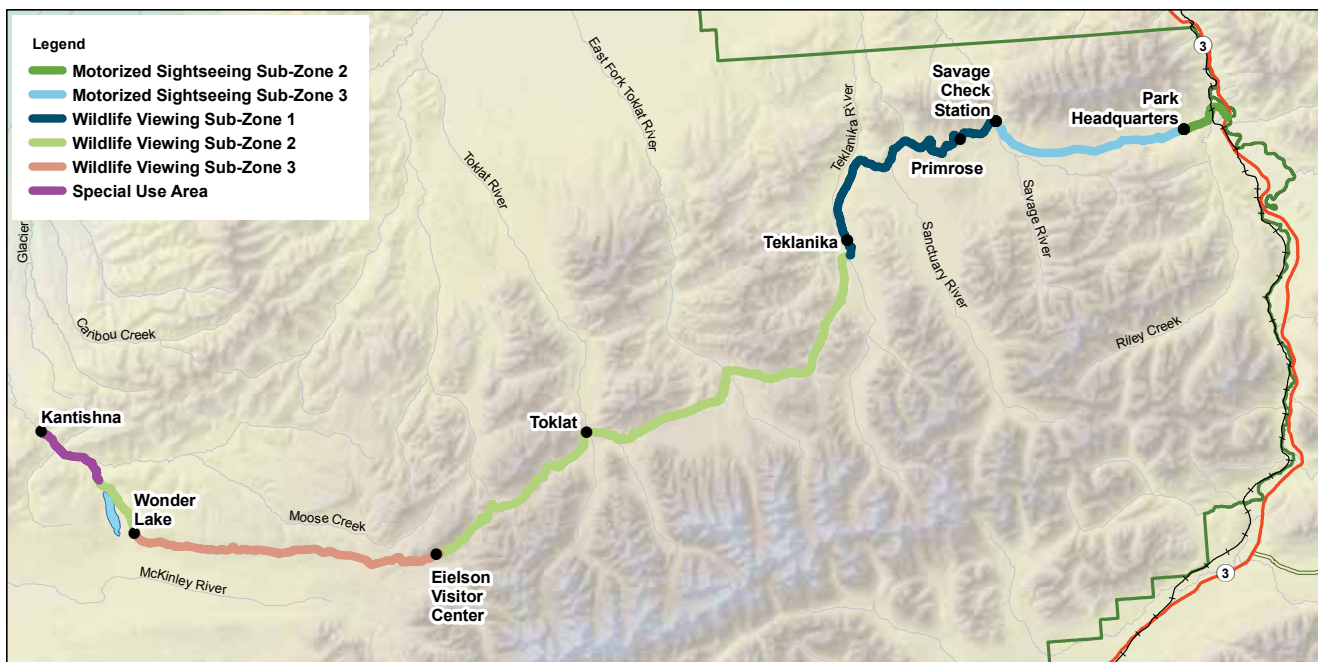


Figure 3. Proposed Changes to Denali Park Road Management Zones



Proposed Vision for the Denali Park Road Transportation System

The Denali Park Road transportation system provides access to one of the premier wilderness areas in the world and enables visitors to view wildlife in their natural habitat. The system facilitates wilderness recreational opportunities and supports freedom of discovery, a sense of adventure, and a connection to nature. It serves as a model for visitor access management in a world-class natural resources area.

Above all, the Denali Park transportation system is managed to protect and preserve the park's fundamental resources and the unique character of its wilderness road for current and future generations.

Proposed Goals and Objectives

The goals and objectives further articulate what will be accomplished with the park's transportation system. The goals provide specific descriptions of what will be achieved, and the objectives list more specific outcomes of the goal.

Goal 1: Protect the exceptional condition of the park's resources and values through informed, proactive and transparent management.

Objectives:

- Manage the transportation system to ensure protection of wildlife populations, wildlife habitat, and the processes and components of the park's natural ecosystem.
 - Manage the transportation system to ensure protection of wilderness character, wilderness resource values, and wilderness recreational opportunities.
 - Continue to protect and promote the historic character of the Park Road and related elements of the cultural landscape.
-

Goal 2: Provide high-quality and appropriate visitor opportunities on the bus.

Objectives:

- Ensure a transportation system that provides the park's interpretive themes and messages to all visitors as a means to encourage public understanding and support of park resources and values.

- Ensure a transportation system that provides high-quality opportunity for scenic viewing and wildlife viewing in a wilderness context.
 - Provide a bus environment that enables visitors to engage with the park resources and values in a meaningful way.
-

Goal 3: Provide access to recreational and educational opportunities along the Park Road.

Objectives:

- Provide freedom of movement.
 - Provide a system that is universally accessible and able to accommodate visitor needs and equipment.
-

Goal 4: Make the park transit/access system understandable and user-friendly.

Objectives:

- Clearly communicate information about the system through a variety of means.
 - Enable visitors to easily choose the experience that meets their needs within the limits of the system.
 - Ensure the transportation system provides the means for visitors to spend time at a NPS visitor center.
-

Goal 5: Provide a transportation system that meets visitor access needs.

Objectives:

- Optimize existing seating capacity within system design.
 - Maximize system flexibility to meet future visitor demand, while sustaining desired resource conditions and visitor experiences.
 - Provide stability and predictability in the system.
 - Develop a system that is affordable and offers opportunities for the full range of park visitors.
-

Goal 6: Provide for subsistence and inholder access.

Objectives:

- Provide legally required access to Kantishna inholdings.
- Provide legally required access to subsistence users.

Goal 7: Meet NPS operational requirements and needs.

Objectives:

- Provide access for daily operations.
- Provide access for contractors.
- Provide access for West District required occupants.

Goal 8: Optimize the environmental sustainability of the transportation system.

Objectives:

- Pursue technology and policy to reduce fuel consumption.
- Reduce operational inefficiencies.



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Potential Indicators

As part of visitor use management, indicators will be monitored to measure success in achieving and maintaining the park's desired conditions, along with the goals and objectives for the transportation system (see Figure 4). Listed below are potential indicators that would address desired conditions for natural resources, visitor experience, and management of the transportation system.

- **Natural resource condition**

Purpose: Changes in vehicle numbers and traffic behavior may affect natural resources, such as wildlife. To detect changes in the natural resources condition caused by traffic, NPS will monitor multiple species of wildlife. Any time a significant change is instigated in the transportation system multiple species of wildlife will be monitored in order to conduct a comparison between areas close to and far away from the road, and before and after the change is instigated, to see if there was an alteration in resource conditions after the change went into effect.

Examples of monitoring could include

distribution, movement, and/or demographics of Dall's sheep, grizzly bears, caribou, wolves, and moose. The purpose of the indicator is to ensure there is no degradation or change in natural resource conditions due to traffic patterns.

- **Sheep gap spacing**

Purpose: Studies have shown that Dall's sheep are vulnerable to the effects of increased traffic on the Park Road. This indicator seeks to ensure gaps in traffic that are sufficient for sheep to cross the road for feeding and migration.

- **Vehicles at a wildlife stop**

Purpose: Visitors participating in a social science study responded that the quality of their bus experience on the Park Road was degraded when too many vehicles were stopped in the same place to look at wildlife. This indicator seeks to ensure that the wildlife viewing experience on the Park Road is not degraded by vehicle crowding.

- **Vehicles in a viewscape**

Purpose: Visitors participating in a social science study responded that the quality of their experience was degraded when too many vehicles could be seen along the Park Road. This indicator seeks to ensure that the experience of wilderness on the Park Road is not degraded by vehicle crowding.

- **Vehicles at a rest area**

Purpose: Rest area facilities are designed to accommodate a specific number of vehicles and people, and exceeding this number can lead to safety issues and a crowded experience for visitors. This indicator seeks to maintain the number of vehicles at a rest area at or below design capacity in order to control crowding.

- **Vehicles at Eielson Visitor Center**

Purpose: Eielson Visitor Center facilities are designed to accommodate a specific number of vehicles and people and exceeding this number can lead to safety issues and a crowded experience for visitors. This indicator seeks to maintain the number of vehicles at Eielson Visitor Center at or below design capacity in order to control crowding.

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Potential Indicators

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- **Visitor satisfaction**

Purpose: Different factors within the transportation system contribute to overall visitor satisfaction with the Park Road experience. Visitor perceptions of the Park Road experience, as well as objective measures, will be monitored to determine if system changes are affecting visitor satisfaction.

Examples of factors that could contribute to overall visitor satisfaction include: wildlife and scenic viewing opportunities, quality of interpretive information, physical conditions of the bus and associated facilities along the road, ability to experience a sense of wildness, and the economic affordability and convenience of the transportation system and its associated activities. The purpose of the indicator is to ensure there is no degradation in visitor satisfaction from the current condition.

- **Delivery of park themes and key messages**

Purpose: Interpretive programs, including bus-based experiences provided by park partners, are opportunities to present park themes and key messages in a way that informs and inspires visitors. This indicator seeks to ensure that the required level of knowledge and skill is used to present information accurately and in a way that facilitates intellectual and/or emotional connections between the meaning of the resource and the interests of the audience.

- **Wait time for hikers**

Purpose: Visitors to Denali express that having to wait too long to be picked up by a bus along the Park Road is a deterrent to getting off the bus to engage in wilderness recreation such as hiking or backpacking. This indicator seeks to ensure the effectiveness of the transportation system at supporting wilderness recreation.

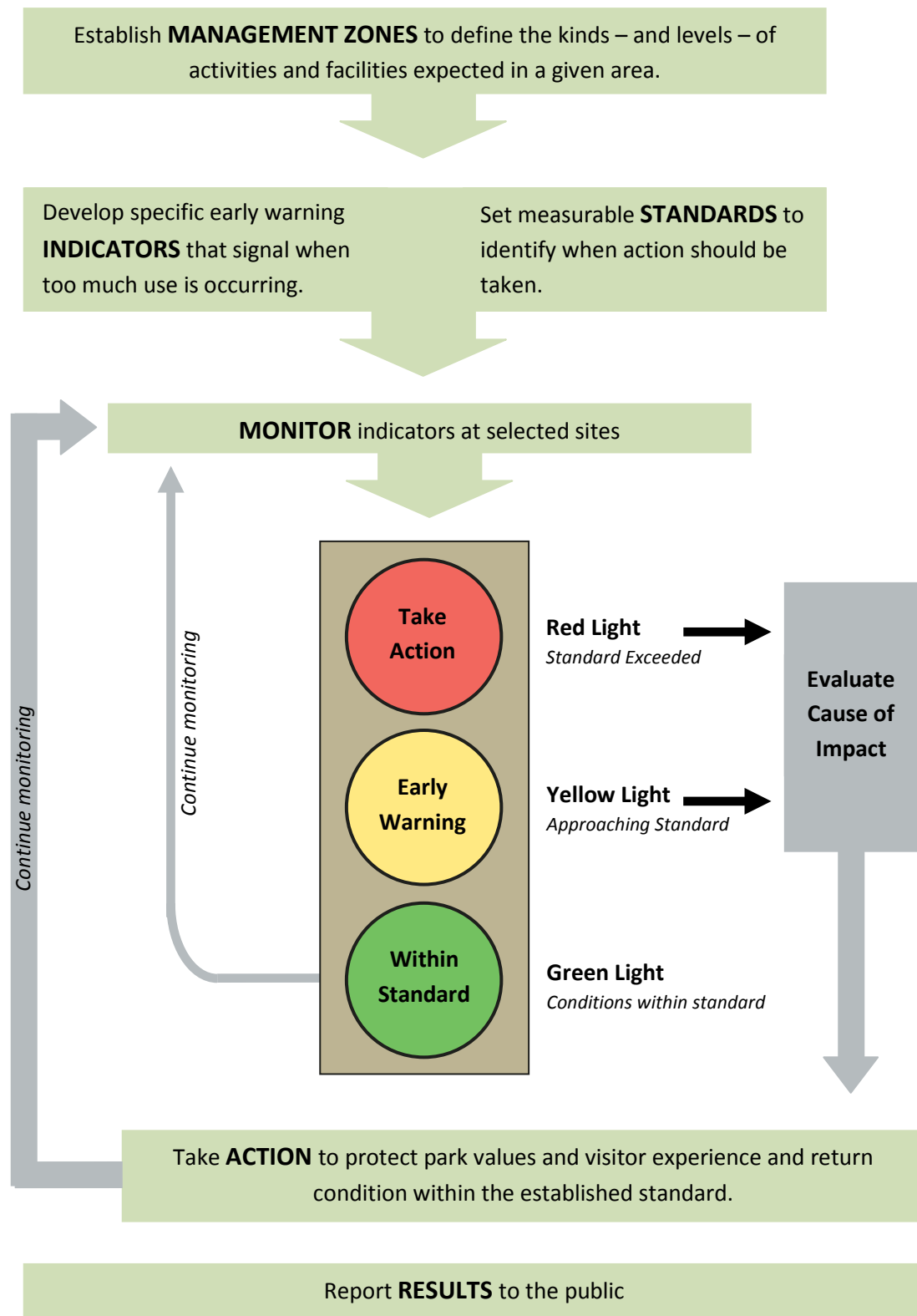
- **Predictability of the transportation system**

Purpose: Many visitors plan their Denali Park Road experience with the expectation that the bus will depart, reach key destinations, and end on time. Their experience is negatively affected when the bus is off schedule. This indicator seeks to ensure that the transportation system operates with the predictability expected by visitors.



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Figure 4. Visitor Use Management Process



Proposed Strategies for All Concepts

For all the transportation system management concepts, the following strategies could be used to achieve the goals and objectives of the Vehicle Management Plan.

Resource Protection Strategies:

- Protect wildlife movement and critical migration patterns along the Park Road by preserving sufficient gaps between vehicles
- Implement adaptive management to detect changes and respond to impacts caused by vehicles on the Park Road

Adaptive management is a systematic process for improving management by learning from outcomes. It is most effective when it employs management programs that are designed to experimentally compare management practices.

- Use data from ongoing programs to monitor long-term change
- Differentiate impacts of climate change and/or other management actions from those associated with the transportation plan
- Identify and monitor key natural resources that need to be assessed long term to ensure no significant impact
- Evaluate physical resources (sound, dust) after significant transportation system changes are made
- Survey visitor perceptions of wilderness values along the Park Road
- Report research results annually to the public
- Comply with the *2007 Road Design Standards* (see - www.nps.gov/dena/whatsnew.htm)
- Maintain/protect the historical character of the Denali Park Road as identified in the determination of eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places

Visitor Experience Strategies:

- As a system priority, ensure the transit service meets the needs of visitors wanting a wilderness recreation experience
- Ensure a portion of the transportation system (buses and scheduling) will be ADA accessible
- Limit the number of vehicles at wildlife stops, in viewsheds, and at rest areas
- Increase the quality of interpretation for key park themes and messages
- Improve the quality and understanding of wildlife and scenic viewing opportunities
- Ensure visitors can sit comfortably and hear adequately on all buses
- Enhance wildlife and scenic viewing experiences on premium tours through appropriate improvements, including vehicle comfort, amenities, and use of technology
- Seek to use quieter technology such as hybrid buses



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- Support option for tour passengers to choose to leave a tour for a day hike and use transit system to return to the entrance area
- Educate and inform visitors with planning and real time system status and tips
- Use external storage capacity for gear on transit system and/or develop 'clam shell' system
- Increase accommodation for bikes on buses
- Ensure that every bus presents the opportunity to visit the Denali Visitor Center or the Eielson Visitor Center
- Create a new management sub-zone for the Eielson to Wonder Lake section to reaffirm the Park Road as a key cultural resource
- Develop introductory tours with off-the-bus experiences that are offered in the Entrance Area from mile 0 – mile 17 along the Park Road
- Continue educational programs currently delivered from mile 15 – mile 90 by National Park Service staff and/or Murie Science and Learning Center partners

Operational strategies for the transportation system:

- Standardize bus driver training for all transportation providers, including Kantishna business owners providing transportation for their guests and Kantishna type III contract holders
- Ensure transportation system equipment meets current safety standards
- Maintain and refine road protocol (rules of the road) to meet priorities for visitor safety and visitor experience
- Implement fuel saving policies whenever possible
- Pursue alternative energy vehicles for all uses on the Park Road



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Potential Transportation System Management Concepts

The following pages contain descriptions of the current transportation system and three new concepts for transportation systems that could be implemented to achieve the park's desired conditions and goals and objectives for the transportation system and related visitor experience. Each system uses these general definitions:

Transit: A bus service with the primary purpose of providing access for off-the-bus wilderness recreation. The transit system would serve the needs of visitors at a level similar to, or better than, the current system.

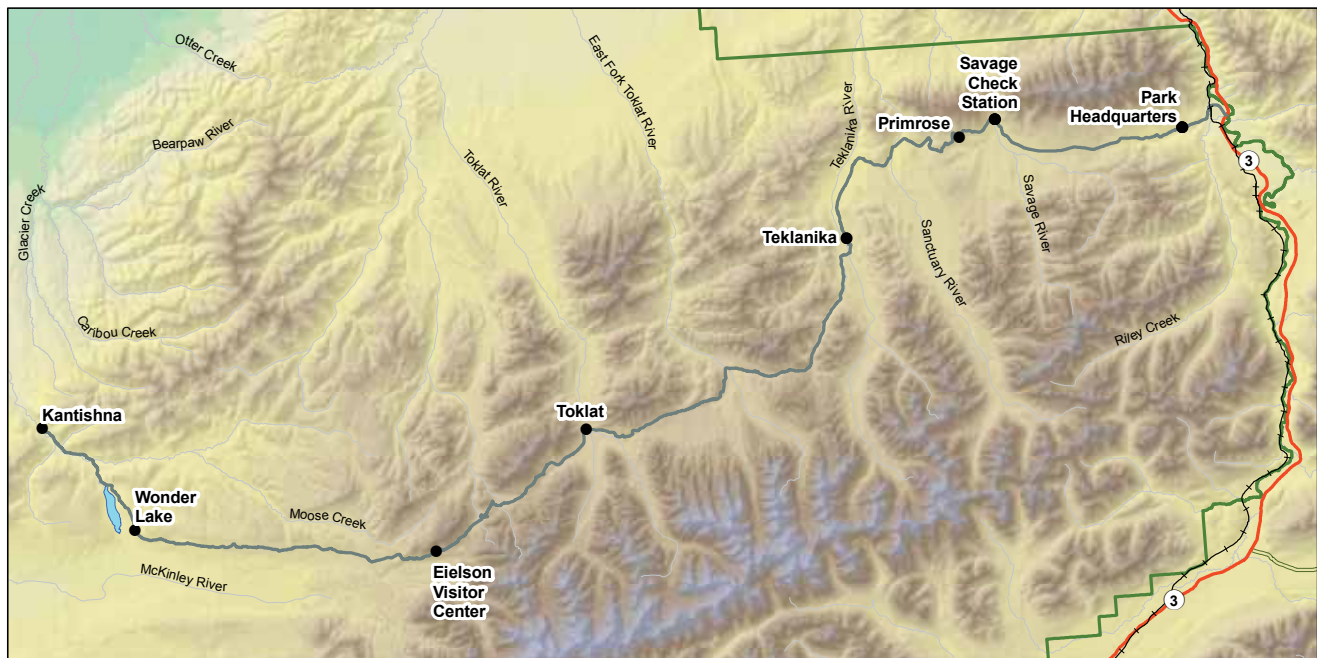
Economy Tour: A bus service that provides a modest tour experience.

Premium Tour: A bus service that provides a high quality, value-added tour experience that includes an interpretive program providing either a general overview of the park or focusing on a specific topic.

Specialized Tour: A bus service that provides a high quality, value-added tour experience that includes a subject-matter expert guide and/or an off-the-bus activity, and includes an interpretive program focusing on a specific topic.

The map below (Figure 5) can be referenced when reading the descriptions of the current system and potential concepts to find where the transit and tour destinations of the various systems are located along the Park Road.

Figure 5. Map of Major Locations Along the Denali Park Road



Management Concept A: The Existing Condition

Overview

This concept represents the current transportation system which provides three types of service operated under a single concession contract: transit, premium tours, and specialized tours. No tour or transit bus makes a scheduled stop at the Denali Visitor Center (DVC), but “all drivers are required to introduce the DVC and encourage visitors to visit the DVC campus” per the current concession contract.

Description of System Services (see Figure 6)

- Transit

Transit services originate at the Wilderness Access Center and are provided through the Visitor Transportation System. Destinations of buses in this system are Toklat, Eielson Visitor Center, Wonder Lake, and Kantishna, with scheduled stops at Savage Campground, Sanctuary Campground, Teklanika Campground, Teklanika Rest Stop, and Igloo Campground. Visitors are free to disembark from the bus at any point and reboard another transit bus westbound as far as their ticketed destination or any destination eastbound.

Visitors obtain information through a mix of on-demand narration (driver will answer questions when asked) and driver-determined narration. The system is currently used as a low cost tour by a majority of riders.

- Economy Tour

Currently there is no dedicated economy tour. Many visitors use the existing transit system for this purpose.

- Premium Tour

One premium tour, the Tundra Wilderness Tour, is offered and includes a hotel pick-up and a box lunch. It turns around at Toklat Rest Stop or Stony Overlook and does not visit a visitor center.

The driver narrates a general park tour.

- Specialized Tours

Two specialized tours are offered. The Kantishna Experience involves an interpretive program delivered by a driver and a ranger, and includes two off-the-bus activities as well as a stop at Eielson Visitor Center and a box lunch. The Denali Natural History Tour includes two off-the-bus interpretive programs and a snack. Both specialized tours pick-up at local hotels.

Affordability

Affordability is maintained through differential pricing based on the type of experience chosen and the destination. Increases in the price of tickets are directly proportional to the Consumer Price Index of the previous year.



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Management Concept B: Diversity of Opportunities

Overview

Compared to the existing condition, this concept would increase the range of visitor experiences and transportation options. This system would provide four distinct levels of service operated under concession contract(s) and be designed to easily adapt to changing visitor needs and demographics. Educational and interpretive experiences would be highlighted through customized tours that reach different destinations in the park based on tour themes. Specialized tours would offer an off-the-bus experience at destinations along the length of the Park Road.

The system would more discretely separate tour and transit functions by adding an economy tour. The economy tour buses would better maximize visitor use over the current system by being able to fill all seats on the bus rather than leaving seats empty to pick up transit users. Separating out economy tour riders would also increase freedom of movement for visitors utilizing the transit system.

Description of System Services (see Figure 6)

- Transit

Transit services would originate at the Wilderness Access Center. Users would be accommodated on a dedicated bus system but might need multiple buses to reach their desired destination. Destinations of transit buses would be Teklanika, Toklat, Eielson Visitor Center, Wonder Lake, and Kantishna. Visitors would be free to disembark from the bus at any point and reboard another transit bus westbound as far as their ticketed destination or any destination eastbound.

Narration would be on-demand (driver would respond to visitor questions in a knowledgeable manner, but not be required to provide narration). Transit users could obtain interpretive media on their own (rental, purchase, download).

To encourage freedom of discovery, anyone could ride the transit system eastbound to return to the Wilderness Access Center.

- Economy Tour

The economy tour would originate at the Wilderness Access Center. Users would remain with the same bus for the entire trip unless they chose to return on a transit bus. Destinations of economy tours would be Teklanika, Eielson Visitor Center, and Wonder Lake.

The driver would deliver a narrated general park tour. Passengers could supplement their tour by obtaining interpretive media on their own.

- Premium Tour

The premium tour would be a start-to-finish product with hotel pick-up, meal, and other value-added amenities (ex: video camera on bus). Destinations of the premium tour would be Toklat, Eielson Visitor Center, and Wonder Lake.

The interpretive program would be led by a driver/naturalist.

- Specialized Tour

Specialized tours would offer a premium tour experience led by a driver/naturalist and/or subject matter expert and focused on specific topics of interest (ex: geology, Kantishna history, etc), and could also include the addition of an off-the-bus activity at a location along the Park Road. These tours could have a focus to serve special interest groups such as birders or families. Destinations of concessioner-run Specialized Tours would include Teklanika and Kantishna, although other destinations could be included that do not have facilities and formal bus stops. The Teklanika tour would include a stop at a visitor center.

Affordability

Affordability would be maintained through differential pricing based on the type of experience chosen and the destination.

Key Differences from the Existing Condition

The transit service would be formally separated from the economy tour service. The two services would be similarly priced but the economy tour service would be easier and more convenient for the visitor wanting a bus tour of the Park Road. The transit service would have additional seating availability allowing better service for hikers and campers.

Additional destinations would be offered for the premium tour with the addition of an Eielson Visitor Center Tour and a Wonder Lake Tour.

Specialized tours similar to those offered currently would still be offered; the exception being the shorter tour would go to Teklanika rather than Primrose. Additional specialized tours would be developed.

Management Concept C: Experience Key Park Destinations

Overview

Compared to the existing condition, this concept would provide greater accessibility to key park destinations for all visitors.

This concept would provide three levels of service and would highlight simplicity by offering a single style of premium tour product to four destinations: Teklanika, Toklat, Eielson, and Wonder Lake.

Specialized tours would include an off-the-bus experience at some point along the Park Road between mile 0 – mile 17.

Transit would be provided as a separate system providing access along the length of the Park Road.

Description of System Services (see Figure 6)

- Transit

Transit service would originate at the Wilderness Access Center, and users would be able to travel to a destination with one bus. Destinations would be Toklat, Eielson Visitor Center, Wonder Lake, and Kantishna.

Narration would be on-demand (driver would answer questions in a knowledgeable manner when asked).

- Economy Tour

Similar to the current condition, there would not be a dedicated economy tour. It would be anticipated that visitors would use the existing transit system for this purpose.

- Premium Tour

The premium tour would be a start-to-finish product with hotel pick-up, meal, and other value-added amenities (ex: video camera on bus). Visitors would choose between destinations of Teklanika, Toklat, Eielson Visitor Center, and Wonder Lake.

Drivers would deliver interpretive programs on general park topics. The tours would also include contact with a ranger outside of a visitor center.

- Specialized tours

The only specialized tours would be introductory tours with off-the-bus experiences offered in the Entrance Area from mile 0 – mile 17 along the Park Road.

Affordability

Affordability would be maintained through differential pricing based on the type of experience chosen and the destination.

Key Differences from the Existing Condition

Additional destinations would be offered for the premium tour with the addition of Teklanika, Eielson Visitor Center, and Wonder Lake tours.

Specialized tours currently offered, the Denali Natural History Tour and the Kantishna Experience, would no longer be offered. A concession-operated introductory/orientation tour would be developed within the first 17 miles of the Park Road.



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Management Concept D: All Services in One Bus

Overview

Compared to the existing condition, this concept would promote greater choice in scheduling. It necessitates that all visitors travelling the Park Road ride a bus on which a premium tour is conducted by a trained interpreter.

This concept would provide two distinct services (premium tour and transit) on one bus with services reaching Teklanika, Toklat, Eielson, Wonder Lake, and Kantishna.

Space for transit riders would be reserved on every bus.

Description of System Services (see Figure 6)

- Transit

All buses would provide transit service by having a minimal number of stand-by seats on every bus reserved for this use; transit riders would be able to purchase the tour amenities (lunch, guidebook, etc.) at an additional cost. Users would be able to travel to a destination with one bus, but at some point must disembark and use a separate bus to return. All buses within the system would pick up hikers provided there is room on the bus.

All transit riders would receive the same driver-led interpretive program as the premium tours.

- Economy Tour

There would not be a separate economy tour. However, lower cost bus seats on tours of the park would be available with reservations within 48 hours of departure or on standby. Visitors wanting this option would need to be flexible in their departure time; however they would receive all the amenities of the premium tour.

- Premium Tour

A premium tour experience would be offered on every bus and would include value added amenities (lunch, guide book, etc). Users could travel to a destination on one bus (though transit riders would be required to use a different bus for their return trip).

Interpretive program would be driver-led and could include specialized topics.

All trips would originate from the Wilderness Access Center. All park destinations would be served, but a greater number of buses would serve the section east of Eielson.

- Specialized Tour

The only specialized tours would be introductory tours with off-the-bus experiences offered in the Entrance Area from mile 0 – mile 17 along the Park Road.

Affordability

Affordability would be maintained through a differential pricing structure based on when a ticket was purchased and the destination. Tickets would be full price for advanced reservation with prices decreasing closer to the date of departure, resulting in standby tickets being the lowest cost option. Low cost transit tickets would be available for advanced purchase.

Key Differences from the Existing Condition

There would no longer be separate buses for tours and for transit, everyone would ride the same bus.

All buses would be able to pick up hikers, provided there is room on the bus.

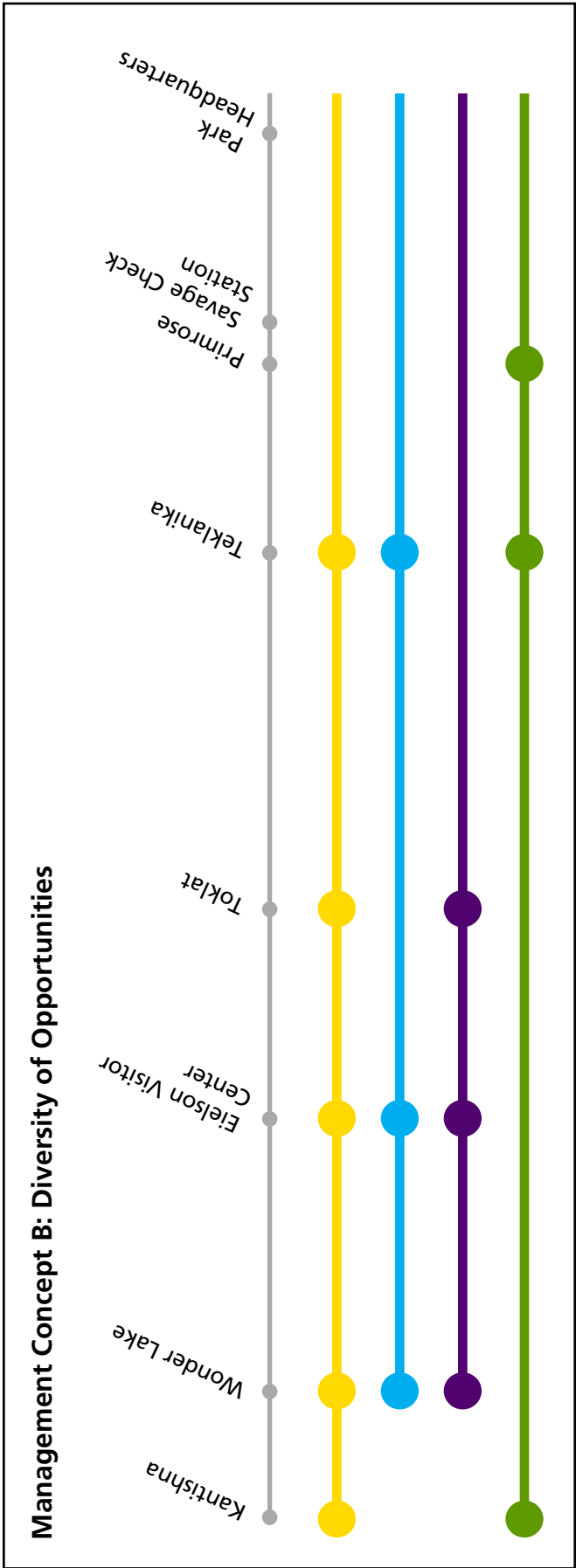
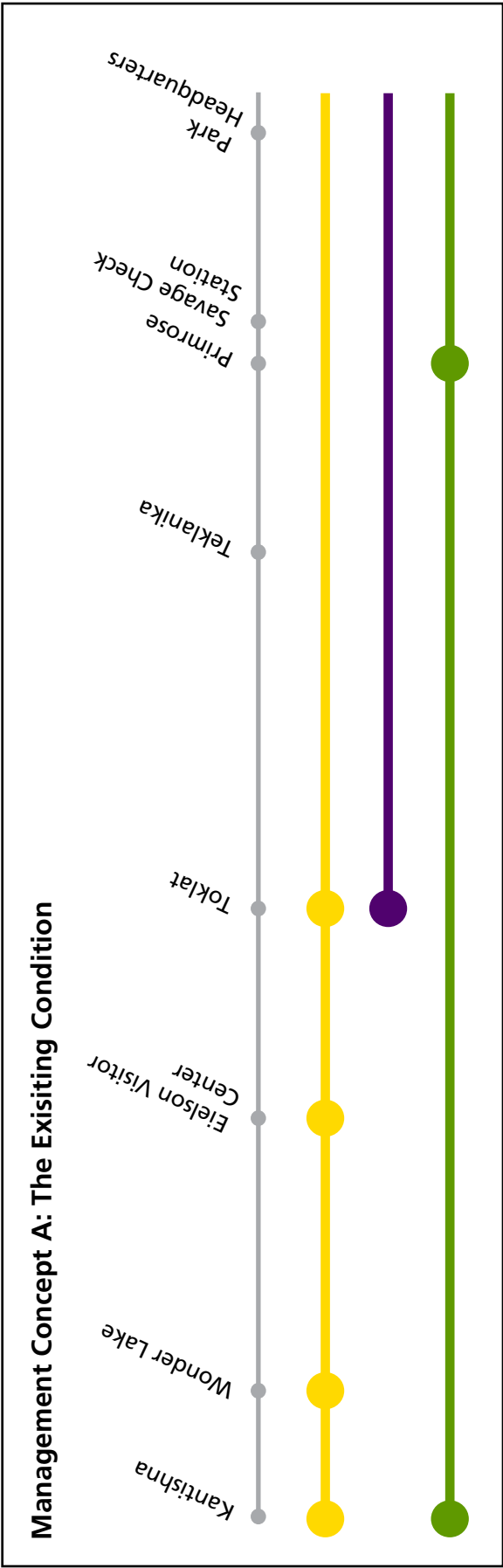
There would be premium tours available to all park destinations.

Specialized tours currently offered, the Denali Natural History Tour and the Kantishna Experience would no longer be offered. A concession-operated introductory/orientation tour would be developed within the first 17 miles of the Park Road.

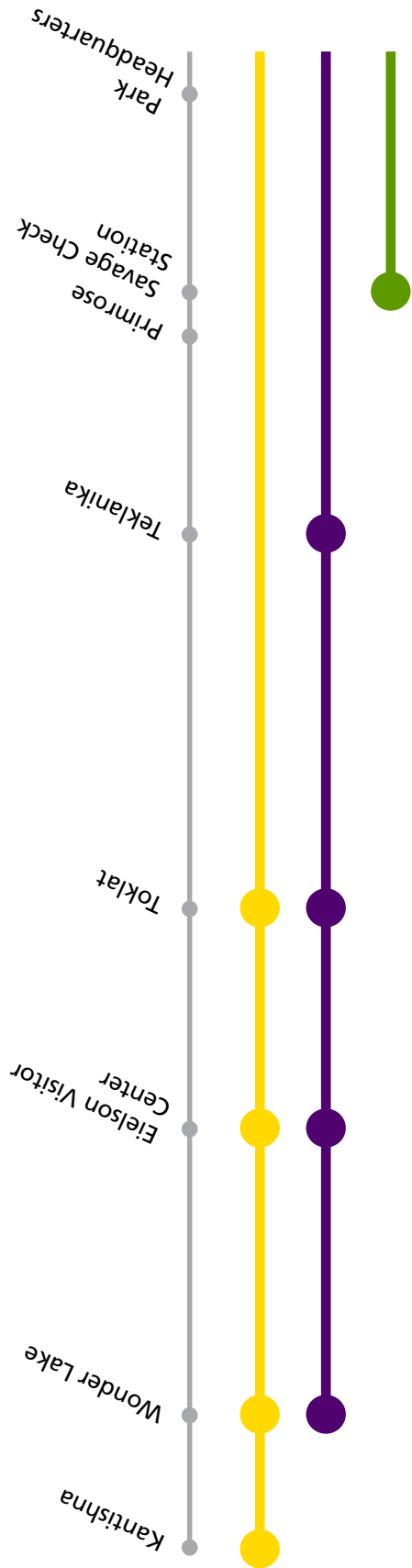


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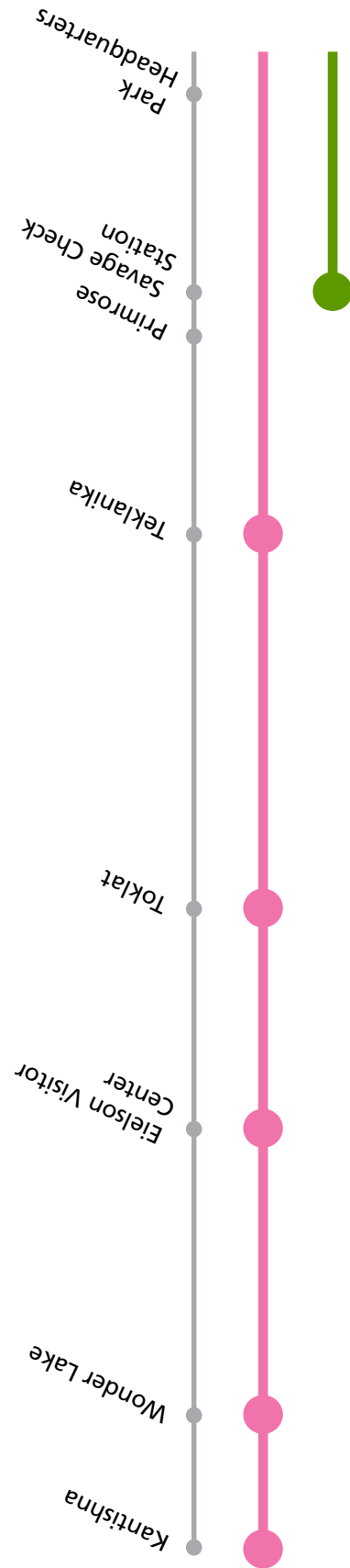
Figure 6. Comparison of Services, Routes and Destinations for Transportation System Management Concepts



Management Concept C: Experience Key Park Destinations



Management Concept D: All Services in One Bus



LEGEND

- Park Road and major locations
- Transit route and destinations
- Economy Tour route and destinations
- Premium Tour route and destinations
- Specialized Tour route and destinations
- Premium Tour with Transit Seats route and destination



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Potential Management Options for Other Vehicle Use

Yearly visitation to Denali has approached 450,000 in recent years and demand for experiences facilitated by the transportation system now exceeds available seats in some cases. With trends indicating that visitation will continue to increase in the years to come, the National Park Service is examining fair and equitable ways to provide a high quality experience along the Park Road to the most park visitors possible.

Once the demand for experiences facilitated by the transportation system exceeds the available seats, park managers will face difficult decisions, such as whether to allow one private vehicle to travel out the Park Road knowing that it displaces a bus that can carry more than 50 visitors into the park. This plan will outline strategies for fairly and equitably managing vehicles to allow for the greatest number of people to experience the park while still protecting park resources.

One strategy for accommodating more visitors along the Park Road is changing how the park manages access for vehicles outside of the public bus system, including the following:

- Access for daily NPS operations
- Access for West District NPS required occupants
- Access for contractors
- Access to Teklanika campground
- Access for professional photography and commercial filming
- Access for Artists in Residence
- Access to Kantishna inholdings

The table on the following pages shows options for potential changes in managing access for these types of activities in order to provide more visitor opportunities.



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Table 1. Potential Management Options for Other Vehicle Use

	Current Condition	Potential Changes in Management for Vehicles Outside the Public Bus System
Access for daily NPS operations	Counts against the limit of 1754 NPS vehicles.	Change work schedules to enhance carpooling. Move operations to off peak hours when appropriate.
Access for NPS West District required occupants	Counts against the limit of 1754 NPS vehicles.	Employees travel off peak hours. Adjust work schedules to minimize number of employee road trips. Require employee guests to utilize public bus system. Access only by employee shuttle system. Access only via public bus system.
Access for contractors	Oversize vehicles travel at night.	Vehicles travel off peak hours.
Access to Teklanika campground	Requires a minimum three night stay. Generally there are 1300-1350 permits given out per year.	Vehicles travel during off peak hours. Permits reduced by 50% of current level with a minimum three night stay. Phase in tent camping only. Campers use public bus system to access the campground.
Access for Professional Photography and Commercial Filming	Professional Photography and Commercial Filming programs are managed separately. There is a maximum limit of five road permits given out per day.	Manage programs separately as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional Photography program reduced to three permits per day from Savage to Toklat and two permits from Toklat to Kantishna. Commercial Filming program limited to three permits per day for the entire road. Programs combined and segmented into two permit zones (Savage to Toklat and Toklat to Kantishna) with a limit of two permits per day in each zone. Programs combined with a limit of two permits per day for the entire road. Professional Photography and Commercial Filming are provided with one dedicated vehicle within the transportation system each day. Professional Photographers access the park via the transportation system.

Potential Management Options for Other Vehicle Use- continued

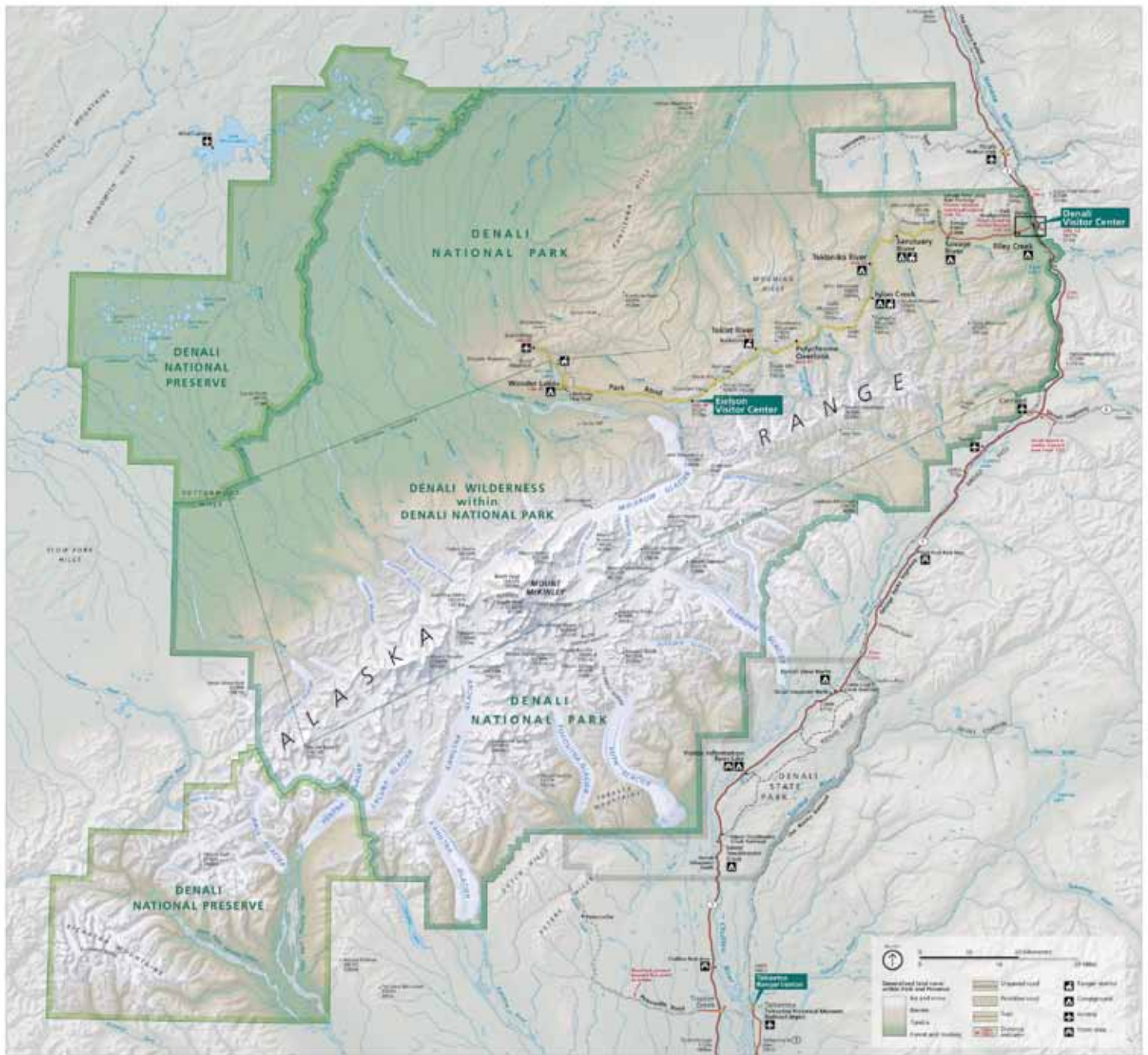
	Current Condition	Potential Changes in Management for Vehicles Outside the Public Bus System
Access for Artists in Residence Program	Generally six to eight permits are given out per year.	<p>Travel to the East Fork Cabin conducted during off peak hours. Vehicles must remain parked during stay and artists are required to use public bus system to move about park.</p> <p>Artist in Residence program blended with Professional Photography/Commercial Filming. Access is through permits from the professional photography and commercial filming vehicle pool.</p> <p>Access via the public bus system.</p>
Access to Kantishna Inholdings	<p>Kantishna inholding permits for vehicle use of the Park Road are based on the General Management Plan, 1997 Entrance Area and Road Corridor Plan, and Park Compendium.</p> <p>There were an average of 925 permits used seasonally by Kantishna inholders between 2007 and 2009.</p>	<p>Issue two concession contracts for transporting day use guests to Kantishna lodges. Transport of overnight guests remains as is.</p> <p>Issue one concession contract for transporting day use guests to Kantishna lodges, and issue four concession contracts for transporting overnight guests to Kantishna lodges.</p> <p>Issue one concession contract for transporting overnight guests to Kantishna lodges.</p> <p>Split inholder allocation between day trips and other uses, and have daily limit as well as seasonal limits for both.</p> <p>Day use visitors access Kantishna businesses only through public bus system.</p> <p>Expand public bus system to cover day trips and overnight trips to transport guests to Kantishna properties.</p>

NEXT STEPS

- Public review of the Planning Workbook January 1 – March 1, 2010
- Draft Plan written 2010
- Draft Plan out for Public Review Summer 2011
- Final Plan Summer 2012



NPS



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