



P.O. Box 78, Denali Park, AK 99755

January 22, 2000

Superintendent
ATTN: Ken Kehrer, Jr.
Denali National Park
P.O. Box 9
Denali Park, AK 99755

Subject: Proposed Access and Other Regulations for Denali National Park & Preserve
Proposed in the November 12, 1999 Federal Register

Dear Superintendent Martin,

The Denali Citizens Council is disappointed that the proposed access regulations published in the *Federal Register* on November 12, 1999 (Volume 64, pages 61563 to 61572) fail to incorporate current access policies published in existing park management plans and environmental impact statements. We request that specific management policies related to access be incorporated into the regulations. Our recommendations are discussed below.

The Denali Citizens Council supports the permanent ban on snowmachines in the old Mount McKinley portion of the park. This ban conforms with existing policy, regulations, and laws. The legal use of mechanized equipment for winter recreation by the general public never occurred in the former Mount McKinley Park, which was formed in 1917. The park was specifically closed to public recreational snowmachine use by a nationwide regulation in 1972. This regulation is still in effect and has not been revoked, repealed, or superseded by new laws. In addition, this area has been designated by Congress as a wilderness area and federal laws and regulations (36 CFR 2.18 and EO 11644) prohibit snowmachine use.

There is some vague language in the 1980 Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) about snowmachine use for traditional activities in conservation units, but there are no traditional activities addressed by this act which occurred in the former Mount McKinley National Park. Although ANILCA fails to clearly define traditional activities, we find that the definition in the proposed regulations conforms with ANILCA as used in Section 1110(a) of the Act and the regulations found in 43 CFR 36.11. We also agree that no traditional activities under ANILCA occurred in the former Mount McKinley National Park, as stated by the National Park Service at the public hearings, and we believe that this determination should be part of the regulatory record.

We support proposed regulation 36 CFR 13.63(h)(5) which gives the superintendent the authority to determine when there is adequate snowcover for authorized snowmachine use in areas outside of the closed areas. This authority is necessary in order to protect park resources from potential damage related to snowmachine use.

We also support the inclusion of seasonal vehicle limits for the park road in the regulations, but we recommend reducing some of the overall limits and incorporating the daily limits published in the *Final Entrance Area and Road Corridor Development Concept Plan (DCP) and Environmental Impact Statement*. We request that the 10,512 limit be reduced to an even 10,000 in order to better protect wildlife and the visitor experience. The reduction is in keeping with the recommendation in the DCP that the numbers be adjusted if necessary following additional information on wildlife behavior and visitor satisfaction. The 10,512 limit is so exact that it implies that the number was scientifically derived, but it was actually created by taking the 1984 vehicle numbers and increasing them by 20 percent. This number was then published in the 1986 *General Management Plan (GMP)*. At the time the GMP was published, it was felt that the park could sustain an increase over the 1984 numbers, but the exact limit was unknown. A 20 percent increase was chosen as a reasonable estimate of the maximum capacity the park could sustain without substantial harm. By 1999, the number of vehicles had reached approximately 15 percent above the 1984 numbers and the impacts of this increase are much better understood. Information from studies, such as the *Park Road Use/Wildlife Observations and Monitoring*, dated November 1999 and *Visitor Satisfaction with Transportation Services and Wildlife Viewing Opportunities in Denali National Park and Preserve*, dated May 1998, indicate that increase traffic could affect wildlife behavior and reduce visitor satisfaction. Also, information from park bus drivers indicate that dust, traffic congestion, wildlife disturbance, and other problems have escalated with increasing traffic. An increase above 1999 levels is not justified and would adversely affect wildlife behavior and decrease the quality of the visitor experience. We recommend establishing the limit at an even 10,000 vehicles per season because it exemplifies the somewhat arbitrary nature of this limit and will prevent an increase in damage to the park.

DCC strongly recommends including daily limits for buses listed in the DCP be included in the regulations. These limits are as follows:

Bus Category	Daily Limit
Denali Natural History Tour (DNHT)	20
Tundra Wildlife Tour (TWT)	30
Visitor Transportation System (VTS)	36

Traffic impacts cannot be controlled unless daily limits are also applied. Denali Natural History Tour (DNHT) numbers have skyrocketed since the inception of the tour in the late 1980s. Passenger numbers have climbed from 1,342 in 1990 to 85,524 in 1999. The DNHTs travel to milepost 17 and are not included in the total vehicle allotment for the road. Since 1994, DNHT ridership has increased by 84%, whereas overall bus ridership has only increased 19%. The report titled *Visitor Satisfaction with Transportation*

Services and Wildlife Viewing Opportunities in Denali National Park and Preserve indicates that visitor satisfaction is lowest in the DNHT compared to the other categories of buses and wildlife sightings have declined. The number and frequency of DNHT buses should be regulated to minimize adverse impacts to wildlife and preserve a quality visitor experience of the park.

The concessionaire is currently allotted 30 buses per day for the Tundra Wildlife Tour (TWT) with no specified schedule with the concessionaire management plan. It is not uncommon for 20 or more buses to be sent out within a one-hour period, including buses servicing the private lodges at the end of the park road in Kantishna. We believe that a limit must be set for the total number of buses allowed per season, per day and per hour along each portion of the Denali Park Road.

DCC also believes that the proposed Kantishna limits are also too high. The proposed regulations would allow 1,360 vehicle round trips for Kantishna inholders. This number constitutes about 13 percent of the total traffic on the road. The regulations would also leave this limit as flexible. DCC recommends the limit be fixed at 1,000 per season. Leaving the limit open sends a message to developers that they can continue to expand development in the Kantishna area at the expense of the public. Tour and shuttle buses would have to be reduced if Kantishna traffic were allowed to increase. This shift in the composition of traffic has numerous environmental and social impacts that were not addressed in the Road Corridor DCP/EIS. Although ANILCA allows for access to inholdings, it can be limited by reasonable regulations, such as the existing allocation system designed to accommodate the rights of all Park users.

DCC recommends the inclusion of a ban on day trips to Kantishna for business vehicles transporting visitors to inholdings. The use of day trips to Kantishna is a violation of the Park Concessions Act. The park concessionaire is the only business authorized to provide day tours in the park.

DCC supports the seasonal closure to the discharge of firearms on public lands in developed areas of Kantishna during the tourist season.

DCC supports inclusion of the park superintendent's site-specific wildlife habitat closure procedures that are employed during breeding, nesting, denning, and other sensitive periods. The authority to close area to protect wildlife resources is a basic management tool necessary for the preservation of natural ecosystems. This authority through regulation should be maintained by the NPS.

Sincerely,

Henry Friedman
President, Denali Citizens Council