

## HARRY KARSTENS WILDLIFE PROTECTION INITIATIVE

### DENALI RANGERS USE CREATIVE THINKING IN UTILIZING RESOURCES AND MANPOWER TO ACCOMPLISH WILDLIFE PROTECTION PATROLS

by Julia Potter

In January, I met with Chief Park Ranger Pete Armington, Resource Management Specialist and Wilderness Coordinator Joe Van Horn, Backcountry Patrol Ranger Scott Pariseau and North District Ranger Richard Moore to discuss a recent poaching case and learn more about the Harry Karstens Wildlife Protection Initiative program implemented in 2007.

Harry Karstens was the first Superintendent of Mount McKinley Park (now known as Denali National Park and Preserve) from 1921 to 1928. He was also the guide and climbing leader of the first complete ascent of Mt. McKinley in 1913.

#### Poaching Brings Severe Penalties

In September 2006, a park pilot observed hunters with a moose down inside Denali National Park & Preserve. The site was north of the Stampede Road corridor in the NW corner of the park. The two local hunters had killed a young bull moose and illegally driven two ATV's across approximately two miles of tundra. Both were charged under Title 36 CFR with the illegal taking of wildlife and off-road travel.

The case went to trial in federal court in Fairbanks on August 23, 2007 and both defendants were found guilty. Following a sentencing hearing on November 1, 2007 the defendants were placed on two years' probation, and both lost their hunting privileges for one year. Both were fined \$2000 and ordered to pay \$2,160 in restitution each. The moose was given away per established Alaska State Trooper procedures.

It is interesting to note that in a pre-trial motion, defense counsel sought dismissal based on lack of mens rea, or crimi-



Bull Moose in Denali - one of many species protected in Denali National Park & Preserve  
NPS Photo - Steve Buskirk

nal intent. In ruling for the government, the Magistrate judge found that criminal intent, including knowledge of the defendants' location in the park, is not required in order to support a finding of guilt on both counts. One of the defendants did have a GPS unit, however stated he only intended to use it if they got lost. Since this case, other poaching cases are pending prosecution and an off-road violation is under investigation.

#### Patrolling Six Million Acres

The rangers at Denali have a tough job protecting wildlife in such an immense and vast area. With shortages in funding, the rangers don't always have the personnel or the equipment necessary to successfully patrol potentially problematic areas. Sometimes it's pure luck to "be in the right place at the right time" stated Armington, to spot a potential violation. This has brought about the Harry Karstens Wildlife Protection Initiative program - how best to utilize personnel and other available resources.

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## Is DCC's VISION UNATTAINABLE? A MEMBER SPEAKS

Denali Citizens Council received this letter from a member stating his views about Denali National Park and DCC's Vision for Denali, which was published in our December 2007 *DCC News*. As we always encourage our members to let us know what they think, we appreciate receiving this point of view. If you have any comments please write to us.

January 6, 2008

Dear DCC,

*I hope Willie Karidis finds something to be optimistic about after his journey to retrace Charles Sheldon's footsteps. After reading the article about his upcoming adventure, I turned to page 2 of the DCC newsletter to see a list of your "Vision for Denali." Until I read the paragraph at the top of the page, I thought it was an attempt at sarcastic humor. Unfortunately, I see little reason for hope in Denali's future, and have come to the conclusion that the park is dying a slow death.*

*This fall, after 15 years absence from Denali, my wife and I returned from a trip to Kantishna, saddened and pessimistic about what you refer to as the "vitality and health" of Denali Park. I felt I had just spent four days visiting a terminally ill friend infected by a virus of corporate greed that will ultimately transform the park into a sterile clone of what it once was. The "physicians" overseeing park management, the NPS, appear to be controlled by the tour companies and are incapable of caring for their patient.*

*On our drive west, we saw little in the way of wildlife, although we left early and stopped frequently to glass the rivers and hills. Even the sheep were absent from their usual haunts. I was appalled at what we did see. There was questionable road construction at Igloo Creek, the circus that is a rest stop at Toklat River, and what appeared to be a World War Two bunker being constructed at Eielson. Just when we thought the park couldn't get more disappointing, we came upon a screaming brush cutting machine working the road's edge west of Eielson. What happened to the solitary employee that once did the job with hand tools and a minimal carbon footprint?*

*Kantishna was no better. The so called eco-lodges send out a seemingly endless fleet of buses and vans disgorging their passengers that, over the years, have created well-worn trails (No trails in Denali? Another joke). Near the Roadhouse, music blared from speakers, and generators that supplied power to lights and amplifiers for the yearly bluegrass festival with, what appeared to be, little concern for park rules. Soon, I was told, "subsistence" hunters would line up to blast the park's moose that have little fear of people.*

*When I ask visitors to Alaska about their trip, they tell me that Denali Park was the low point of their vacation, and a major disappointment, especially with the lack of wildlife sightings. I'm aware other factors can decide a person's Denali experience, but after visiting the park and seeing the changes for myself (mostly negative), I think I have to agree with their assessments. Denali just seems tired, abused, and worn out.*

*I'll continue to support DCC for all your effort and hard work, but I'm afraid your "Vision for Denali" is an unattainable dream that has already become a nightmare.*

Sincerely,

Tom Klein  
Talkeetna



Native Knowledge Network

# DOES DCC'S VISION NEED REVISION? SEND YOUR IDEAS

Dear Friends and Members,

In March 2001, DCC convened the Denali Summit, inviting a number of conservation-minded friends to discuss the future of Denali National Park and Preserve, and to identify the most important issues before us. Based on DCC's history at Denali and on ideas put forth at this meeting, we developed our Vision for Denali. We reprinted this vision in the December issue of *DCC News*. It is compiled on our website at <http://www.denalicitizens.org/vision.html>. To see a copy of our vision, email us at [mail@denalicitizens.org](mailto:mail@denalicitizens.org).

A number of years have gone by, now, and perhaps our Vision has grown stale and outmoded (see letter on facing page). Is our Vision for Denali overly idealistic? Have things already gotten out of hand? Would we be perpetuating a myth to continue with the 2001 Vision? Maybe we need to be more practical, accepting certain changes with open arms or at the very least acknowledging them. Maybe we need to retrench to a reasonable position, something that is defensible **and** achievable. Big questions, but worth asking.

## For instance:

**Will Denali remain "the special place"?** *Will "being special" mean being able to buy a field guide or pair of binoculars at Toklat, flightsee and land wherever you want, build out all available private lands in Kantishna, camp and snowmachine wherever you like and shoot ten wolves for "subsistence"? Or . . . will it be something else?*

**Will Kantishna remain a "wilderness destination, with emphasis on quiet recreation"?** *What about bringing your four-wheeler to zoom around on the "established roads"? And one-day bus tours? Defensible? Inevitable?*

**Will "the local community embrace the significance and values of the national park and advocate for sustainable planning"?** *Or will we be mired in dissention and laissez-faire gridlock?*

**Will there be a "quality Southside destination"?** *Will there be trails management, protection of natural quiet, maintenance of Denali State park's intrinsic values? Or will there be a Bill of Rights dominance of mechanized interests and maximum build-out on inholdings?*

Can our Vision survive the pressures? The jury is definitely still **out**. Your ideas and passion are needed now more than ever. What should our Vision be, going into 2008?

Send us your ideas on DCC's Vision through email at [mail@denalicitizens.org](mailto:mail@denalicitizens.org), or leave a message at 907-683-3396. We'll print your ideas, and we'll talk about our Vision at the Annual Meeting in Denali this coming July.

Sincerely,

*Nancy Bale*



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## FROM THE COMMUNITY ORGANIZER

by Julia Potter

Winter had settled in nicely with periods of chilling cold and fierce winds, clear star lit nights with beautiful displays of the Aurora Borealis. While the cold and wind may keep some indoors, I love to bundle up to enjoy the sight of trees covered in sparkling snow, caribou grazing through Broad Pass and the Cantwell area, moose wondering in search of a tasty willow, and of course that wonderful quiet and stillness only winter can offer. Of course spring will be here sooner than I realize.

With spring around the corner it, it reminds me that this year most of the seats on the DCC Board of Directors are up for election and the current board will be nominating board members. This is an excellent opportunity to get involved with DCC on a more intimate level. You need not live in the Denali area. Our board meetings are held via teleconference and the board gets together twice a year, once for our Annual General Membership Meeting in July and then for a Board Retreat to discuss our goals for the coming year and to prioritize issues. And with the internet most communications are via email at your convenience. You can be as involved as you want to be - more is better - but it's up to you and the time you have available. Having new board members gives DCC fresh insight to the many issues we face. If you're interested or would like more information about becoming a board member we would love to hear from you. Please give us a call or write to us. 

<p><b>THANK YOU</b>  <b>NEW AND RENEWING MEMBERS SINCE OUR LAST NEWSLETTER</b>  <b>MAJOR DONORS</b></p>	
<p>Brock Family Fund  Susan Cleverdon  Dee Frankforth  &amp; Peter Scholes</p>	<p>Carol Melamed</p>
<p>David Schirokauer  Paul Shearer  Suwinski Family  Foundation</p>	
<p><b>SUMMIT</b></p>	<p><b>TAIGA/TUNDRA</b></p>
<p>Steve Carwile &amp; Heidi Barker  Allen Cornelison  Kirk &amp; Gabrielle Hoessle  Carol McIntyre &amp; Ray Hander  Lenore Roberts</p>	<p>George Fleharty  Carol Harding  Carol Hoelscher  Liz Hutson  Ray Kreig  Neal Laugman  Kathryn McKinney</p>
<p>Tom &amp; Jane Meacham  Linda Mellman  Daryl Miller  Elton Parks  Jack &amp; Karen Reiss  River White</p>	
<p><b>NORTH PEAK</b></p>	<p><b>SPECIAL THANK YOU</b></p>
<p>Ruth Botzow  Joan Frankevich  Kristen &amp; Bill Friesen  Christine &amp; William Karidis  Kurt Sahl &amp; Kathy Mertens</p>	<p>The Alaska Conservation Foundation</p>

## WILDLIFE PROTECTION INITIATIVE *continued from page 1*

### **Personnel**

One of the biggest problems with protecting wildlife is that the Alaska hunting season coincides with the end of tourist season in August and September. This puts a strain on personnel resources and makes it difficult to dedicate rangers to deal with both tourists in the frontcountry and patrol the backcountry. According to Armington, the rangers potentially available for hunting patrol activities number 15. Not all of these are Law Enforcement (LE) rangers. LE rangers are permanent employees subject to furlough, meaning they work generally about eight months a year, depending on the budget in a given year. In the South District they have two mountaineering rangers who are also LE and are used after the end of July for backcountry and wildlife protection patrols. In the North District, the Backcountry Information Center (BIC) is staffed with six non-LE seasonal rangers. They are used as “eyes and ears” in the backcountry during hunting season. However, their primary mission is to staff the BIC. Generally there isn’t more than one two-person team from the BIC actually out in the field at any one time during hunting season. There are two permanent full-time LE rangers and five permanent subject-to-furlough LE rangers in the North District. Only one, Ranger Pariseau, is a dedicated backcountry ranger. The other six positions are committed to the frontcountry areas of the park. These positions can be utilized in the backcountry during winter, spring and post Road Lottery in the fall. During non-peak times, they try to maintain a minimum emergency response capability in the frontcountry. Armington hopes that he will be able to add two permanent subject to furlough LE positions in the North District this fiscal year. One would be dedicated to the backcountry, while the other would be a frontcountry headquarters-based position.

### **Logistics of Getting to the Backcountry**

While funding is in short supply for personnel, it is also short in the area of equipment. The logistics of getting from the frontcountry to the far reaches of the backcountry can be tough and trying. Given the terrain of the park, which traverses taiga, tundra, mountain ranges, lakes, rivers and glaciers, the rangers can’t just hop on a vehicle or walk to areas to patrol for potential violations. The park currently has two fixed wing aircraft, but they have had problems in the past of not having a pilot available. Many times they can’t get to certain portions of the park in a timely manner when notified of a potential violation. Even with aircraft, they can’t always land, depending upon the terrain. Depending upon the location, they may be able to land nearby, then continue via raft along a river, then complete the route by hiking to the intended destination.

On occasion the rangers have had access to a helicopter. This is the most effective method for getting to a location when a potential violation may be occurring, as it offers the means of a quick response. It gives them the immediate ability to stop or prevent a wildlife or ORV violation. While they can rent a helicopter, the decision must be made whether to rent it for a day or a week and how to best utilize the resource. It’s a hit or miss opportunity. The down side to helicopters is the expense of operation.

### **The Current Hot Spots of Activity**

Since implementing the Harry Karstens Wildlife Protection Initiative, the rangers spent time last year exploring areas of the park which had not been visited in years due to the lack of personnel and funding. Through their focused efforts they have mapped hunting camps outside of the park which are within close proximity to the park boundary and have been in use for several hunting seasons. They have mapped numerous airstrips along the boundary areas as well as commonly used landing areas in the backcountry. Also mapped are trails which once were outside the park boundary, many which now extend into the park. They have also identified five problematic areas where access is easy for hunters and recreation users.

**NW Preserve:** This area is located northwest of the Kantishna River, which is the border between the core Wilderness area and the preserve addition, and along the Muddy River to the NW boundary of the park. It is logistically difficult for rangers to reach but provides easy access due to the extensive number of lakes large enough for float planes. It also offers access via the Kantishna River, which extends far to the north outside the park boundary.

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## WILDLIFE PROTECTION INITIATIVE *continued from page 5*

**Stampede:** The Stampede area has long presented problems due to its proximity to established trails such as Rock Creek Trail, Stampede Trail and the Rex Trail. These trails have been in use for decades by local residents. This area sees heavy hunting use and the trails offer easy access for ORV use. In the past, use was most concentrated near the Savage River and Fish Creek but now with the larger, more powerful ATV's, use has extended to the Teklanika and Sushana Rivers and beyond. At least 16 hunting camps have been mapped in this area, outside of the park, but all within close proximity to the park boundary.



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**Cantwell:** The Cantwell area offers problems involving not just hunters but recreational snowmachine use during the winter months along Broad Pass. With the Parks Highway providing an easy route for urban residents looking for remote areas in which to recreate, the Broad Pass area offers unlimited snow, hills and fun for snowmachiners. It also keeps the rangers busy as many users are unaware of the park boundary in this area. The rangers have increased patrols in this area to educate users about the boundary, public safety, impact on wildlife and the regulations regarding snowmachine use in the park additions. Generally they can make contact in the parking areas before users head out. Use in this area has increased over the last few years.

**South Slope:** Even glaciers don't hinder access. This area near the Kanikula Glacier and the Tokositna River sees heavy activity from aircraft. Due to its proximity to Talkeetna, access is easier than it appears with the ability to land on glaciers. Again ranger access is limited due to the lack of available resources. This area sees activity not just during the heavy tourist season but also during spring when hunting season opens for bear. This is one area which has been neglected by the rangers in past years due to funding.

**SW Preserve:** The distance of this area from the core park makes the logistics of patrolling this area tough for rangers. This is big country - quite deceiving when you see it on a map of just how large it really is. The SW Preserve encompasses the Kichatna Mountains and the Yentna River drainage. Since this is the Preserve, it is open to hunting, but the backcountry plan allows only two commercial guides to operate in this area. It is quite easy to cross into the Wilderness core park from the Preserve.

### **Actions, Results and Continuing Issues**

With the Harry Karstens Wildlife Protection Initiative in place, the rangers have taken action by focusing on the five areas as described above. Since they do not always have the staff for backcountry patrols, they are renewing relationships with Alaska State Troopers and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. These partnerships may give the rangers more powers outside the park boundaries. It also gives them more eyes and ears to observe violations. They are beginning to use aircraft more extensively now that they have a pilot available. The rangers are also encouraging the documenting of observations and have increased hunting information on the park website.

Airstrips and commonly used landing areas have been extensively mapped and documented. The database allows the rangers to record information such as the size of an airstrip, type of aircraft which could be used to access the area, if the airstrip is in active use, as well as information about the type of airstrip - if its a gravel bar they can document if it were to wash away and then be created in another location. Taking photos gives them "point in time" documentation. Hunting camps are also well documented, which gives rangers information about frequency of use, number of users, etc. The rangers try to maintain contact with the users of the camps, which has helped to raise awareness with hunters. As with recreational users, contact is an important way to prevent violations and educate the public about the park regulations.

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## WILDLIFE PROTECTION INITIATIVE *continued from page 6*

Since the primary purpose of the park is to protect wildlife and habitat, the ranger staff will stay focused on the protection initiative and work towards being more consistent in their patrolling efforts. The addition of two LE rangers will help towards that goal. The rangers would also like to implement a program to use volunteers to be their “eyes and ears” to document and observe in the backcountry. Although volunteers cannot stop a potential violation, they can contact LE rangers to respond to a given situation. Using volunteers in remote backcountry areas would give the rangers insight as to whether or not an area is being accessed by boat, aircraft or ORV.

### Winter patrols enforce provisions of Backcountry Plan

During January, rangers made contact with three trappers on snowmachines heading out from the boundary in the Stampede area south along the Savage River. After contact, the rangers followed the tracks and found three snares just outside the posted boundary signs. On the same weekend, the same rangers made a snowmachine patrol out of the Broad Pass area south of Cantwell. They intercepted three recreational snowmachiners right at the Wilderness boundary in the Bull River and prevented them from going into the wilderness.

“These contacts have significant value in terms of sending the message we’re out there” says Armington. “The District Ranger and field staff are very much aware of my direction during the off-season to keep a minimum emergency response capability in the frontcountry and maximize the degree to which rangers are in the backcountry and ‘ranging’. Plans are underway for overnight snowmachine and dog sled patrols in backcountry areas such as areas south of Cantwell.”

For more information about hunting regulations, maps, and GPS coordinates, as well as information on reporting hunting violations, visit the Denali National Park & Preserve website at: <http://www.nps.gov/dens/parkmgmt/hunting-information.htm>. From the website’s home page you can also find this information by typing “hunting” in the search box. 

## SOUTH DENALI LODGE PROPOSED

### APPLICATION FOR CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT TO BUILD WITHIN DENALI STATE PARK

by Julia Potter

A developer, proposing to build a 60-room lodge complete with restaurant, bar, gift shop, spa, outdoor hot tub pool, and an 80-seat theater on six acres of property which is a private in-holding, has applied for a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) with Mat-Su Borough. This is required by the Denali State Park Special Land Use District (SPUD). The lodge would be located at Mile 135.5 inside Denali State Park between the new South Denali Visitor Center and Denali (Mt. McKinley).

A Conditional Use Permit is a public process with the application being reviewed first by the staff of the Borough Planning and Land Use Department. Comments received will influence the Borough Staff Report that provides guidance to the Planning Commission. The staff report will summarize the issue and make a recommendation to the Planning Commission. The decision to approve, deny or approve with restrictions rests with the Planning Commission.

The developer intends to make this a year-round destination. Nearby existing activities include helicopter flightseeing and snowmachining, as well as hiking and variety of water related activities.

Comments can be made to the Borough Planning and Land Use Department until February 22, 2008. Comments received up to March 4, 2008 will be included in the Planning Commission packet. Send comments to Susan Lee, Mat-Su Borough Planning Division, 350 East Dahlia Avenue, Palmer, AK 99645, [slee@matsugov.us](mailto:slee@matsugov.us), fax 907-745-9876. Comments should also be sent to James King, State Parks Director at [james.king@alaska.gov](mailto:james.king@alaska.gov) and to Bill Kiger, State Parks at [bill.kiger@alaska.gov](mailto:bill.kiger@alaska.gov). For additional information on the project plans visit the Mat-Su website at [www.matsugov.us](http://www.matsugov.us). 

# MEETING HELD TO DISCUSS GAME PROPOSALS AND ANTLERLESS HUNT

## MIDDLE NENANA FISH & GAME ADVISORY COMMITTEE WORKS TO RESOLVE CONFLICT

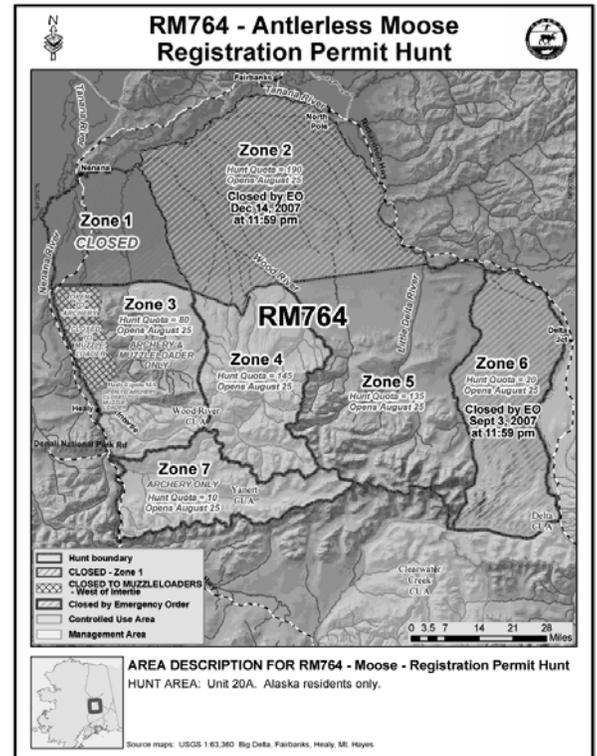
by Nan Eagleson

The Middle Nenana Fish and Game Advisory Committee held a lengthy meeting on February 4th to review Region III (Interior Region) game proposals for the Alaska Board of Game Spring 2008 meeting, and to vote on proposals involving the antlerless moose hunt in Unit 20A. Unit 20A is a large swath of land in Interior Alaska composed of seven zones (see map at right) which basically are bordered by the Parks Highway on the west, the community of Delta on the east, Fairbanks to the north and the headwaters of the Nenana River to the south. Each zone has a different allocation for hunting, and several zones are managed as Controlled Use Areas which prohibit motorized access for hunting.

State Fish and Game has biological concerns for the moose population in 20A because of comparably low twinning rates, high browse removal, low birth rates for yearlings, late age at first twinning and a number of biological concerns that lead them to believe there are too many moose for the habitat. In response to this and to carry out the legislative mandate of Intensive Game Management, they proposed the antlerless moose hunts to increase the harvest of moose in certain areas and reduce the total moose numbers to what they believe to be the carrying capacity of the habitat. By far the most contentious issue the Advisory Committee and local citizens have dealt with for the past several years has been the antlerless hunt. Many people, particularly those who live and hunt in the Ferry, Clear and Anderson areas have opposed the antlerless hunt primarily because of the increased hunting pressure brought to these areas. The concentrated use along the trail systems in these areas by hunters with a variety of motorized vehicles has contributed to habitat destruction and conflict between local and non-local users, compromised the quality of the hunt, and developed genuine concern that over-harvesting of moose in these accessible areas has led to a drastic decline in moose numbers.

Through extensive efforts by citizens, the Advisory Committees and Fish and Game to resolve these social issues, a vote at the February 4th meeting closed the antlerless hunt in all but Zones 5 and 6 (on the Delta side of Unit 20A) and allowed for 20 permits to be issued in Nenana for local users in Zone 1. This will close all areas along the Parks Highway to the antlerless moose hunt. This proposal will be brought to the Board of Game at the spring meeting. The process was challenging but ultimately resolved much of the conflict over the antlerless hunt. Hopefully, citizens feel encouraged to participate in the process which effects policies in their local areas. It takes time and good-faith efforts to bring about change.

The Alaska Board of Game Spring Meeting is February 29 - March 10, 2008 in Fairbanks, AK. There are many proposals to be considered in addition to the antlerless moose hunt. Public comment, in combination with Advisory Committee comments and ADF&G staff presentations, provides the Board of Game with biological and socioeconomic data to form decisions. For information about the Board of Game, proposals and schedules, contact: Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Boards Support Division, P.O. Box 115526, Juneau, AK 99811-4110. Phone (907) 465-4110, Fax (907) 465-6094. The web address is <http://www.boards.adfg.state.ak.us>. 



Map of Game Management Unit 20A & Zones  
Alaska Department of Fish and Game

# GAS EXPLORATION AND BEST INTEREST FINDING DISCUSSED AT DENALI BOROUGH ASSEMBLY MEETING

**BOROUGH ORDINANCE MAY BE HOLDING UP FINAL BIF** by Julia Potter

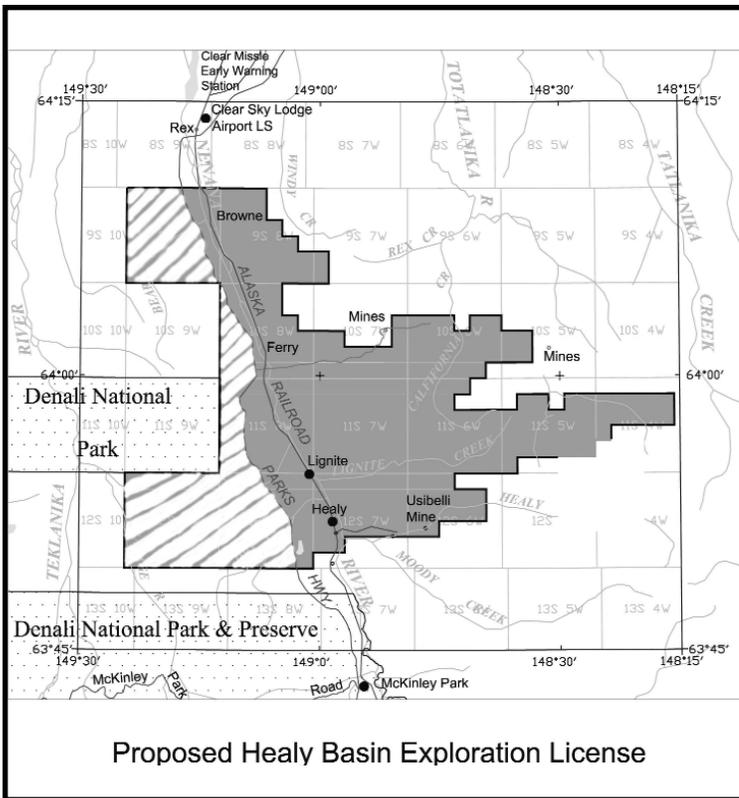
At the January 9, 2008 Denali Borough Assembly Meeting, Bruce Anders, DNR Division of Oil and Gas made an appearance to discuss the Healy Gas Best Interest Finding. Also making an appearance to discuss this issue was Mitch Usibelli representing Usibelli Coal Mine/Usibelli Energy, and James Gorski, Attorney for Denali Borough.

## History of Gas Exploration In Healy

Usibelli Coal Mine applied in 2004 for a gas only exploration license in the Healy Basin area. This area encompasses approximately 208,000 acres. The state conducted a Best Interest Finding (BIF) process in 2005 involving scoping, public meetings and a call for comments ending October 2005. A Preliminary BIF was issued August 31, 2005. Although DC and several individuals submitted comments on this BIF, the Denali Borough Assembly did not do so. However, in an effort to provide some protection to local residents and property owners, crafted Ordinance 05-21, which was adopted in March 2006. This ordinance seeks to exclude gas exploration in areas west of the Parks Highway. Usibelli and DNR have since questioned the legality of the ordinance and the borough's right to exclude certain portions of the borough from gas exploration.

## Current Status

During the January assembly meeting Mitch Usibelli gave the assembly members a brief history of the gas exploration licensing and leasing programs along with maps showing the proposed exploration area. He further stated that the legal issues have been lingering since 2006 and that the application for the exploration license is pending. Usibelli feels that the borough ordinance is holding up the process. Bruce Anders spoke to the assembly, explaining the Best Interest Finding process. Many on the assembly did not realize that by not providing comments to DNR during the Best Interest Finding process, they cannot now make comments and therefore will not be able to comment on the final document. Anders, when asked if he felt the State would initiate a lawsuit against the borough, did not answer directly but stated that litigation is expensive for both sides, the current DNR administration are "lovers not fighters," and would rather give the borough a chance to re-evaluate the ordinance. However, DNR has waited long enough and would rather not wait another four months, six months or a year before the borough decides what it is going to do regarding Ordinance 05-21. James Gorski, borough attorney, stated that paragraphs A and C are the problem areas. He could not directly state whether or not the ordinance is overstepping its authority, and suggested the borough not go the route of litigation.



Map showing proposed Healy Basin exploration license area with portions excluded west of the Parks Highway, as detailed in both Ordinance 05-21 and newly introduced Ordinance 08-07

*continued on page 10*

## **GAS EXPLORATION AND FINAL BEST INTEREST FINDING** *continued from page 9*

The Best Interest Finding process was questioned by both assembly members and the public. Many seemed to have some animosity towards DNR. Anders explained the role of DNR and the BIF stating that DNR is not on one side or the other. DNR's role is to determine what is in the best interest of the State. He suggested that the assembly carefully review the document and referred to several sections which the borough should examine. He did point out that in the preliminary BIF document, Chapter 7 has similar language regarding setbacks for drill pads and compressors as in the borough ordinance. He noted that Denali Citizens Council had made many compelling and concise comments during the BIF process.

### **Denali Citizens Council's Comments to Borough Assembly**

In our comments to the borough assembly, we also included a copy of our comments to DNR made during the Preliminary BIF. In these comments we urged the State of Alaska to limit the license area, leaving out certain areas. These areas, mostly west of the Nenana River, have greater value for recreation, habitat and community development. In addition, we described the many uncertainties and serious impacts associated with shallow gas development.

No final BIF has been formulated in more than two years. In the Preliminary BIF, DNR stated that the best interest of local residents would be critical to its decision. We are hopeful that this concern for local citizens will be reflected in their final decision. To the Denali Citizens Council there is no impediment to DNR issuing a final BIF as soon as practicable. Our solution was for DNR to limit the exploration license to areas east of the Nenana River. The area remaining for exploration would be more than half of what had originally been sought. Ordinance 05-21 while eliminating areas west of the Parks Highway, leaves yet more open area for exploration.

Although we do not know the exact shape DNR's final decision will take, we feel that our comments and suggestions were compelling and reasonable.

### **New Gas Exploration Ordinance Discussed at February Assembly Meeting**

At this meeting, held in Cantwell, Ordinance 08-07 entitled Gas Exploration and Development Regulations was introduced, but discussion was postponed until the next meeting. This ordinance retains the full extent of Prohibited Areas in Section a (as in Ordinance 05-21) but deletes Section C, Surface Use Agreements. This change was made by ordinance author David Evans in an attempt to correct legal problems with Ordinance 05-21. DCC applauds Evans' maintaining all the Prohibited Areas that were in Ordinance 05-21.

DCC's position on the proposed Ordinance 08-07 is it must be heard in several communities, particularly Healy, where the most impacts from it may be felt. The affected people have spoken on this issue before, and must have an opportunity to speak again. The borough needs to accompany any new ordinance on gas development with a resolution stating it continues to advocate no gas development west of the Parks Highway (see map accompanying this article.)

We also urge the State of Alaska to issue a Final Best Interest Finding on Healy Gas Exploration License without delay. This process has been "on hold" for more than two years. Substantive comments have been submitted. A decision can and should be made, in order to give the citizens of the borough some notion of how the state views their future. If a Final BIF is not forthcoming soon, the public comment process should be re-opened. ♪



*Native Knowledge Network*

# SURVEY AT DENALI COMPLETED

## A LOOK AT HOW VISITORS VIEW DENALI NATIONAL PARK by Cass Ray

We continue this article from our Oct-Nov 2007 *DCC News* on the survey conducted by the Park Studies Unit, College of Natural Resources at the University of Idaho.

### Visit Duration

While 72% of the visitor groups spent two or three days in the area, 61% spent fewer than 10 hours actually in the park. Denali visitors' average lengths of stay of 3.5 days in the area and 8.4 hours actually in the park were compared with Yellowstone's 3.9 days and 9.8 hours, Yosemite's 4.1 days and 7.4 hours, and Katmai's 4.5 days and 5.4 hours. Eighty-five percent of Denali's visitors toured the visitor center, 52% used the train depot and 51% visited the Wilderness Access Center, the boarding site for the green shuttle buses of the Visitor Transportation System (VTS). (total percentages did not equal 100 due to rounding).

### Fees and Services

The park entrance fee of \$10 per person or \$20 per family was considered "about right" by 88% of the 772 visitor groups answering the question - and two percent more said it was "too low" than said it was "too high" (seven to five percent). The "value for the entrance fee paid" was rated "good" or "very good" by 78 % of the 759 visitor groups answering the question; 21% rated it "average", and fewer than two percent rated that value as "poor" or "very poor." (Here, as elsewhere, total percentages did not equal 100 due to rounding.)

With the park considering continuing locating a bookstore at the Toklat River, after the opening of the new Eielson Visitor Center in June, only 40% of the 789 visitor groups responding to the question reported availing themselves of "visitor center sales items." By comparison, Golden Spike National Historic Site's percentage was a whopping 69, Katmai's was 34, and Yosemite's 15. Eighty-four percent of 298 Denali visitor groups answering the question rated the "quality of bookstore sales items" as "good" or "very good;" fewer than three percent rated the quality "poor" or "very poor."



Dog Demo - The kennels received largest percentage of "good" and "very good" ratings

NPS Photo

Eighty-four percent of the 309 visitor groups answering the question rated the quality of the VTS shuttles as "good" or "very good;" only four percent rated the quality as "poor" or "very poor." Ninety-two percent rated the Tundra Wilderness Tour (TWT) "good" or "very good," and 86% gave those highest ratings to the Denali Natural History Tour (DNHT); only two percent rated the TWT "poor" or "very poor" - and none of the 118 visitor groups answering the question gave the lowest ratings to the DNHT. Of those who made their bus reservation in person, 79% rated the "efficiency of service" as "good" or "very good."

### Overall Quality

Ninety-three percent rated the overall quality of the park's services, facilities, and recreational opportunities "very good" (63%) or "good" (30%); fewer than two percent rated it "poor" or "very poor." The park facilities enjoying the largest percentages of "good" and "very good" quality ratings were the sled dog kennels (95%, but with only 184 respondents), Denali Visitor Center (93%, with 620 mentions), Wilderness Access Center (89%, with 379 mentions), and Murie Science and Learning Center (88%, but with only 92 mentions). Of fourteen facilities, the Morino Grill, located next to the bookstore in the Denali Visitor Center Plaza, received the smallest percentage of "good" and "very good" ratings, with 68%, with 107 mentions (by comparison, the Savage River parking areas and McKinley Mercantile at the Riley Creek Campground received 72% and 71%, respectively); the grill also received the largest percentage of "poor" and "very poor" ratings, 13%. Area activities receiving the largest percentage of "good" and "very good" ratings were "airplane landings on glaciers," 95% (38 mentions), guided hikes and talks, 94% (92 mentions), and "ranger-led programs/walks/talks," 94% (146 mentions). Twenty-one percent of Denali visitors reported attending a "ranger-led program;" Katmai reported a similar 22%, and Yosemite, only 8%. 

# PLANNING - WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

## A PLANNING HANDBOOK WRITTEN FOR DENALI BOROUGH RESIDENTS

by Chuck Saylor

We continue with the final chapters of Chuck's handbook on planning. These final chapters look at the topics of zoning, and subdivisions and platting.

### Chapter 6 Zoning (The Nastiest Word of All - After Taxes)

Even though most of us detest the idea of zoning, it must eventually come to pass. As population increases and a diversified economic base expands, the need to "zone" for land use will become evident. Most of the land in Denali Borough is currently zoned as unrestricted. The pioneering spirit of many of the residents demands that the unrestricted classification remain in place. But can that actually happen?

Since we as part of the whole of this borough are actually in charge of our own destiny, perhaps we can make it happen. As long as the property we currently own remains in our possession or in the ownership of our direct descendants, why can't its status remain unchanged? It's simply a "grandfather clause." We can do it how we want if we can generate a consensus of the majority. We could do the same for taxes so our parents on fixed incomes and with medical problems don't lose their homes.

Zoning is a very real issue. Also a very necessary issue. There are many positive effects of proper zoning. It promotes, if not ensures, public health and safety, and considerably fewer nuisances (a lot of nimbly things), helps raise property values in order to raise more taxes, and promotes "proper" land use and the "normal" uniform regulations.

The terms "proper" and "normal" are relative to our individual experiences. That matter of perception that equates to attitude. "Normal" people might not choose to live in Alaska. They may prefer to wallow in the social jungle of big cities. That's my perception, so it may not actually be the truth. The whole purpose of this handbook is to present my philosophical issues that can be discussed and turned into law (or at least policy).

Except for Anderson, which has the authority to zone its own land and be in charge of its own future, the borough government has the authority to zone all other land within borough boundaries for specific land uses. If the zoning is determined **after** needed public services are sited on the master plan, there should be little problem now or in the future.

If smaller local communities organize their own governmental body and gain status under state directives, they can be granted the right to zone their own lands. Covenants can be put in place by a vote of the people within their community boundaries if that is their wish. It gives you more say in local issues rather than all the higher level oversight.

The borough government is good for us, as long as we participate just a little. The borough can't raise the sails, stoke the boiler, tend the lines, and stand all the watches. The communities in the borough need to help carry the load and assist in the navigation through borough issues.

In the "Alaska Planning Commission Handbook," on page 50, is the following statement\*:

"Each community has the right and responsibility to determine its own character and as long as that determination (does) not disturb the orderly growth of the region and the nation, it is the valid use of the police power."

*continued on page 13*

## PLANNING HANDBOOK *continued from page 12*

Since this is Denali Borough and not New York City or Washington, D.C., we need to consider zoning categories that fit within our borough government. No consultant from outside can do that satisfactorily for us. As a matter of fact, neither can anyone from Anchorage or Fairbanks. Take a close look at the situation they face now. I don't know about your thoughts but we don't need to travel the same road they did. We are a young borough with most of our growth still ahead of us. We need to be directing the traffic.



*Native Knowledge Network*

\*Statement by Justice Sutherland in the Village of Euclid v. Amber Realty

### Chapter 7 Subdivisions and Platting

An idea came to me, so I'll try to get it down before it dies of loneliness. As a general rule, I think most of us believe that subdivision codes, regulations and standards need to be written by lawyers. At the very least, it seems that attorneys are needed to interpret all the rules. It seems to give undue power to people who are just like us.

If we have purchased a home or if we've lived in a subdivision or an apartment complex, then we can tell some horror stories. Stories that made us chose to live somewhere else for a variety of reasons. These facts would logically conclude that we all have personal experiences, ones that make as masters of story telling. So let's all tell our stories, combine them together and make a subdivision plan that fits Denali Borough. One that incorporates our likes and eliminates our dislikes to the degree that is practical.

As you write your story down, consider all the issues you would want to look at. Here is a list of some things to consider:

- ❧ Lot size. This should be dictated by service availability like sewer, water, etc. Since these services are not currently available, then wells and septic systems will be needed. Lot size must surely increase if any degree of health is to be maintained. Not just our health but that of our environment.
- ❧ Privacy. Would you like to have natural buffers not only to maintain your privacy but to retain the very essence of this land? Would buffering and screening requirements reduce noise, wind effects, dust, etc.? It's your story, include it as you see fit.
- ❧ Access via one-way streets with entrance and exit at different locations to serve entire subdivisions. Perhaps all streets should be two-way with multiple entrances and exits. Any curb-side parking space or all parking on each lot's driveway? Should roads be gravel or asphalt? Is drainage an issue?
- ❧ Amenities. Would you like the children to have a playground area? A developer could be required to provide play areas of specific size and type if that's what we want. It's a cost of doing business. Of course the cost will be added to each individual home. But it could be enough benefit to justify the small increase. Perhaps one for every six homes or maybe every 20. Maybe a covered and screened BBQ facility large enough to serve a dozen families. What do you think could work and what else might there be? A heated and lighted school bus shelter might be nice. It's your dream, if you can think of anything else, write it down.
- ❧ Lighting. Do we want or need street lighting? During winter season it could really be nice for children going to and from school bus stops. Lighting can provide some degree of safety and convenience.

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## PLANNING HANDBOOK *continued from page 13*

- ☞ Trails/walkways, what do you think? Sidewalks, bike paths, access to recreational trails may be very important or may not. How about snowmachines, ATV's? It might be nice if we can access the trail system from any garage.
- ☞ Open space. Should it be included in a subdivision? How about an extra lot at the entrance for a small gas station or store? Maybe a park with picnic facilities and a soccer field. There is no limit to what we can come up with!
- ☞ Size of homes. Should this even be a consideration? How about multiple level vs. single level? Can they be compatible if lot size must have a larger minimum size?

All of these things and many more will determine the design requirements for any subdivision in Denali Borough. After all, we are in charge of developing these design elements and standards. This is our borough, not New York or Chicago.

There are other issues that can be designed into subdivision regulations and standards such as adequate fire breaks, emergency vehicle access, street maintenance, snow plowing and removal. We can develop standards for subdivisions at various levels. Perhaps a quarter-acre lot is large enough if all services are provided by a municipality. I personally shudder to think we will have that type of dense development. I believe that ultimate land use planning projected well into the future will preclude the need for any such development practices.

Write your story, send it to the borough so your representative can start putting together subdivision and platting requirements that fit this borough. It doesn't mean one whit as to whether our plan agrees with the designs and regulations of any other place on this earth. This is, in fact, our home, not theirs.

Our input is extremely important. No one person can know all things (least of all me!). In order for things to happen like we want them to, we must make some personal effort to make our thoughts known. None of us can do much alone but together we are a force to be reckoned with. Let's not lose our land to eminent domain or any other regulatory taking process. We can add our two-cents to the comprehensive plan now, during its draft and review process. It's on the borough website. RSVP!! ☞

## FIRST MEETING OF DENALI OVERFLIGHTS ADVISORY COUNCIL CONVENED



*Native Knowledge Network*

by Nancy Bale

The federally chartered, twelve-member Denali Overflights Advisory Council convened its first meeting on February 7th at Lake Lucille Inn in Wasilla. The Advisory Council was tasked by the Denali Backcountry Management Plan with developing “voluntary measures for assuring the safety of passengers, pilots, and mountaineers and for achieving desired future resource conditions at Denali.” In view of the tremendous increase in air traffic over Denali in the past three decades, this task will be complex. The intention of the National Park Service had been that the Council represent the full spectrum of interests concerned about air traffic over Denali National Park and Preserve.

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## OVERFLIGHTS ADVISORY COUNCIL

*continued from page 14*

The meeting began at 12 noon with lunch and introductions. At 1 pm the group moved from lunch tables to a panel across the room. Mike Tranel, NPS planner, called the meeting to order and moved the agenda along. Members of the public included representatives of several Denali air services, at least one lodge owner who expressed a desire to include air operations as part of his business, and a private citizen with interests in maintaining the intrinsic values of Denali State Park.

The Council spent much of this first meeting discussing how it will run meetings and make decisions. The group will make its recommendations largely through consensus. The recommendations will not be binding per se, but will serve as guidelines for voluntary compliance by individuals, operators and businesses. Deliberations of the Council and other information will be available on a dedicated website sometime soon. Members of the Council heard presentations by the National Park Service on the backcountry plan and the park's soundscape monitoring program. Members asked a number of questions regarding details of the plan, scientific basis of standards and implementation strategies. Presentations at the next meeting will include further detail on park soundscape monitoring and safety.

Because Mike Tranel will be moving to Washington, D.C. to become Desk Officer for Denali at the National Park Service, Miriam Valentine will take over as designated federal officer for the Council's future meetings. She will help facilitate meetings, gather information, prepare agendas and run the website. In addition, the Council elected, by consensus, an interim Presiding Officer, Sally Gibert, representative of the State of Alaska.

Each meeting will provide opportunities for public comment. Each member of the Council will be responsible for networking with members of his/her constituency. I'm looking forward to the next meeting, on April 10, 2008 in Talkeetna. On recommendation of member Joan Frankevich, the Council will hold a longer meeting, approximately six hours in length, at that time. According to the charter, the Council will require approximately six years to complete its work, meeting two to four times a year. Remember, all meetings of the Council are open to the public. Stay tuned to *DCC News* and member updates for more information on our deliberations. Call me anytime with questions (907-277-3825). 

# DCC NEWS

Join Denali Citizens Council and receive a subscription to *DCC News*, published six times a year. A form is provided on the back of this newsletter. Or join on the web, [www.denalicitizens.org](http://www.denalicitizens.org)

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*Don't miss an issue of DCC News. Write to us at [mail@denalicitizens.org](mailto:mail@denalicitizens.org), or call us at 907-683-3396 and let us know your new address.*

## JOIN US

Denali Citizens Council is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization. Our mission is to protect the natural integrity of Denali National Park and to promote a sustainable future for lands surrounding the Park.

Please join by filling out this form and mailing it to the address below.

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