

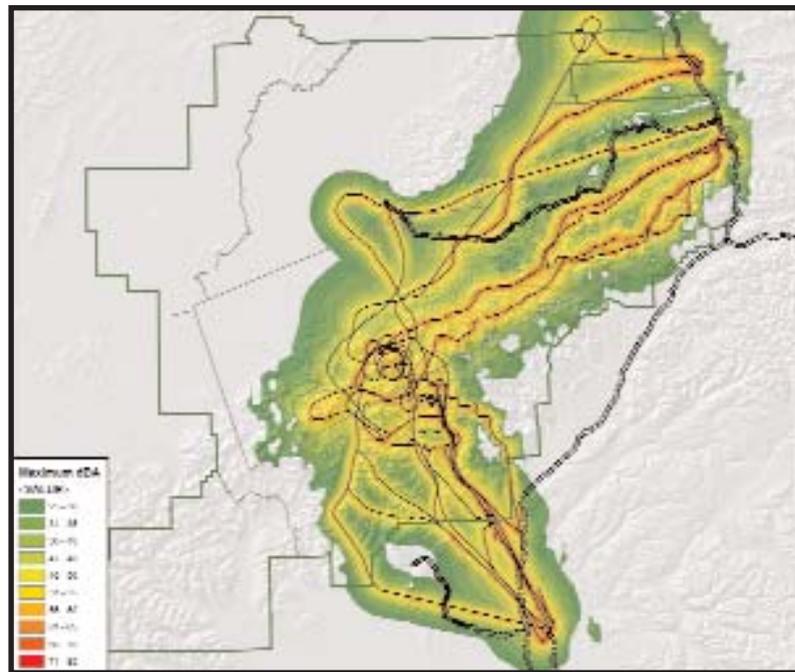
DENALI OVERFLIGHTS COUNCIL TO MEET IN DENALI ON SUNDAY - MONDAY SEPTEMBER 7- 8TH

Public meeting begins at Murie Science and Learning Center on Sunday - 1 PM

By Nancy Bale

As a member of the Overflights Advisory Council representing the local environmental community, I'd like to extend a personal invitation to all DCC members and concerned citizens to the third meeting of the Denali Overflights Advisory Council, to be held in Denali National Park and Preserve this September. The twelve members of the Advisory Council represent a broad variety of interests related to aircraft overflights and the park. Attending all or part of this meeting will provide an unmatched opportunity for area citizens to interact with members of the Council and other concerned stakeholders.

The Advisory Council was formed as a mandate of Denali's Backcountry Management Plan of 2006, an amendment to Denali's General Management Plan. The plan identified the dramatic increase in scenic overflights and concession-permitted airplane landings since the 1986 General Management Plan, and the consequent substantial changes in the natural sound environment.



Overflight sound levels modeled using the Noise Modeling Simulator (NMSim)
Amanda Peacock

Management Areas included Natural Sound Disturbance as a resource

The plan divided Denali National Park into several Management Areas based upon desired resource conditions for those areas. Management Areas differed on several indicators of impact, including for example number of human encounters, camping density, and natural sound disturbance. This identification of natural sounds as a resource was a key element of this backcountry plan and reflected the growing recognition by NPS managers that natural sounds are a legitimate resource requiring protection along with landscape and wildlife.

Management Area designations for the core 2 million acres of Denali Park mandated a high degree of resource protection by setting desired resource conditions consistent with its legislative designation as Wilderness. These desired future conditions included, for example, minimal encounters with humans and low natural sound disturbance. To measure sound disturbance,

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Friends and Members,

Thank you for your generous renewals during our spring fundraising drive. We are humbled by your faith in this organization and are committed to our mission of protecting the natural integrity of Denali National Park and surrounding communities.

Despite growing economic problems in our state and nation, Denali National Park is forging ahead with an optimistic agenda. The agenda includes continued work on roadside infrastructure, highlighted by the grand opening of the new, LEED certified Eielson Visitor Center this summer. In addition, an infusion of funds through the National Parks Centennial Act has enabled Denali to hire additional seasonal employees for interpretation, maintenance and enforcement. All seems well.

But, there are concerns. A recent court decision awarding well-deserved back pay to concession park bus drivers has necessitated some financial adjustments. The phasing out of chemical toilets has become a priority in view of the existing sewer lagoon capacity problems and the requirements of a newly designed system. The “temporary” commercial facility at Toklat Rest Stop, something never planned in any existing NEPA document, remains controversial. The location of communications infrastructure in the Wilderness backcountry should be a concern. NPS is considering regulations permitting loaded weapons in the park. Federal legislation has mandated an Alaska Railroad turnaround inside the park entrance area, but does the public understand why? And what about Enstar’s optimistic proposal for a bullet gas line right down the Parks Highway through Denali and our local community?

Growing pains? Yes, to be sure, but how many trends and concerns should we dismiss in the name of progress? What should be accepted as inevitable and what should be questioned? You, our members, may have entrusted this judgment to DCC, but as always we need and desire your suggestions.

We cannot give equal energy to all issues, but certain priorities demand our attention. Recently DCC made comments to the State of Alaska regarding lands that had been identified for conveyance to the Denali Borough as part of its legal land entitlement. We urged the state to retain sensitive lands in the northern part of the Nenana Canyon and around 8 Mile Lake to maintain their existing character and spare them from fragmentation and sale. We also commented in favor of keeping the current regulation requiring the unloading, dismantling and stowing of weapons within the boundaries of the park, unless being used by qualified subsistence users. We intend to write the Director of the National Park Service detailing our concerns regarding commercial activities at Toklat Rest Stop.

This fall NPS will begin to prepare an EIS for vehicle management along the park road. This EIS comes along about eleven years after the Entrance Area and Road Corridor EIS of 1997, which set down the existing guidelines for management of tour and shuttle buses, seasonal limits, allocation between systems and development of infrastructure along the road. A new EIS could substantially change many of the stipulations of the 1997 EIS. Why now? We know that Denali is under pressure to favor allocation to tour buses and even to increase the number of permitted vehicles per summer. Anyone who has an interest in the future of access into the park should be following this EIS process closely. Scoping activities will begin on September third in Anchorage (see article in this *DCC News*).

We expect a great deal of our energy to be devoted toward ensuring that the public is involved in the development of any new transportation plan for Denali. We will continue to inform you and send alerts regarding opportunities to comment.

The DCC Board will be meeting in retreat sometime early this fall. Contact us if you would like to participate or suggest agenda items.

Sincerely,

Nancy Bale



Native Knowledge Network

FROM THE COMMUNITY ORGANIZER by Julia Potter

As usual, summer is a busy time in Denali National Park and Preserve although this year has seen a slight drop in visitors, most likely due to the rising cost of fuel. Whether the price increase in the VTS and tours at Denali has influenced visitors this summer I don't know. Tourism brings about an issue DCC has been following - the Park Road Capacity Study. Data gathered during this study will be used in development of the Denali Park Road Vehicle Management Plan EIS. The park road is a unique destination in and of itself. The Vehicle Management Plan will be one of the most important planning documents for Denali and the future of visitation given the pressures of the tourism industry.



Native Knowledge Network

Another issue that may be influenced by the pressures to increase tourism within Denali concerns the Denali Borough municipal land entitlements. Without proper land use planning or zoning in place, certain areas of land, if conveyed to the borough, could experience far-reaching negative impacts that could change the landscape and wildlife of the gateway to Denali.

While tourism brings in a big chunk of Alaska's revenues and is a renewable resource, without proper and thoughtful planning to protect the values and resources of both the park and the borough, the possibility of decreased tourism due to the possibility of a spoiled landscape, is a thought worth thinking about. We can't just give in to the demands of tourism without sacrificing the things that make this area so beautiful and unique - proper planning for the future can provide a mechanism to protect those values and resources we all love and wish to retain.

THANK YOU

NEW AND RENEWING MEMBERS SINCE OUR LAST NEWSLETTER

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OVERFLIGHTS COUNCIL TO MEET IN DENALI

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sound monitoring stations were set up under the Backcountry Plan, and measured non-natural sound intrusions in three ways - maximum decibels, maximum number of sound intrusions per day and maximum percent audible per hour. Sound monitoring is conducted on an ongoing basis and data collection is already showing some impacts.

Council still in data gathering phase

The Advisory Council was established to advise the Secretary of the Interior “on matters relating to mitigation of impacts from aircraft overflights at Denali National Park and Preserve,” by developing “voluntary measures for assuring the safety of passengers, pilots, and mountaineers and for achieving desired future resource conditions at Denali National Park and Preserve.” The Council is still gathering information on the history of flight in Denali, the structure of the sound monitoring plan at Denali, and other policy matters relating to protection of park resources.

The September meeting will provide opportunities for Council members to get out into the field to visit a sound monitoring station, learn more about the sound monitoring plan and do some attended listening. Opportunities for locals to attend the meeting and provide comments will be frequent throughout the two-day meeting. For local citizens who have a great deal of experience in the park, over the years, this meeting will provide an unmatched opportunity to provide testimony.

We hope to see you there. If you have any questions, contact Julia Potter at 683-3396 or myself, Nancy Bale at 907-277-3825. Below is a list of our members. The entire Council is expected to have a six-year term, and individual members’ terms are staggered throughout that time. 



Native Knowledge Network

Denali National Park and Preserve Aircraft Overflights Advisory Council Member Contact Information:

Nancy Bale

Local environmental community

Erika Bennett

Alaska Airmen’s Association

Dan Billman

Federal Aviation Administration

Tim Cudney

Commercial aviation other than air taxi/scenic air tour operators

Nan Eagleson

Backcountry users other than climbers

Joan Frankevich

Statewide and national environmental community

Tom George

General aviation users of park airspace

Sally Gibert

State of Alaska

Brian Okonek

Local landowners

Suzanne Rust

Pilots who use Denali

Charlie Sassara

Mountaineering and mountain climbing community

Lt. Col. Scott Babos

U.S. Airforce

The Murie Science and Learning Center presents:

The Denali Park Road Capacity Study

- a panel discussion

with

Dr. Robert Manning, professor and director of the Park Studies Laboratory at the University of Vermont and is the principal investigator on the visitor survey portion of the road capacity study;

Dr. Max Donath is a professor and the director of the Intelligent Transportation Systems Institute at the University of Minnesota and the principal investigator for the traffic model portion of the study;

Dr. Rick Mace is a biologist for Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks and is the principal investigator for the wildlife movement part of the study.

Also joining the panel are **Dr. Philip Hooge**, Assistant Superintendent for Resources, Learning and Science and **Laura Phillips**, Ecologist with the National Park Service.

September 9th at 7:30 p.m.
Murie Science and Learning Center
Mile 1.2 Denali Park Road

Studies of visitor experience and wildlife movements in relation to the Park Road were conducted as part of the Denali Park Road Capacity Study. The principal investigators working on various aspects of this study will give short presentations about their research and be available to answer questions.



photo courtesy of Kim Turnbull

SCOPING TO BEGIN FOR LONG-AWAITED TRANSPORTATION EIS AT DENALI

from NPS

The National Park Service intends to prepare an EIS to develop and implement a plan to manage vehicles along the Denali park road, including carrying capacity (the maximum number of vehicles that can be accommodated on the Denali park road May-September).

The goal of the plan is to provide a high-quality experience for visitors while protecting wilderness resource values, scenic values, wildlife, and other park resources, and maintaining the unique character of the park road.

Comments concerning the scope of this project should be received on or before September 30, 2008. We will hold public scoping meetings in September. All meetings will be from 6pm to 8pm with a presentation at 6:30pm. Members of the public are invited to share their ideas and concerns with park staff.

- * Anchorage – September 3, 2008, J.Z. Loussac Library, Wilda Marston Theater
- * Susitna Valley – September 4, 2008, Talkeetna Ranger Station
- * Denali Park – September 10, 2008, Murie Science and Learning Center
- * Fairbanks – September 11, 2008, Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center



A busy day for buses and visitors at Polychrome Rest Stop. Will pressure from the tourism industry increase the number of buses seen along the park road and at rest stops or will the upcoming EIS for vehicle management show that the above scene is not considered a high-quality visitor experience and reduces the scenic values and the unique character of the park road?
photo courtesy of Kim Turnbull

UPCOMING EIS COULD PROFOUNDLY CHANGE THE DENALI PARK TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

By Nancy Bale

We are in the midst of scoping activities for the upcoming Park Road Vehicle Management EIS (environmental impact statement). This EIS will utilize data from the recently completed Park Road Capacity Study, a multi-year scientific study of vehicle impacts on park resources and visitor experience.

Is there a need to change Denali's transportation system?

Why would Denali's managers seek to change its transportation system now, you may ask? After all, it has been little more than a decade since the Entrance Area and Road Corridor EIS of 1997. This EIS, years in the developing, created sweeping policy regarding infrastructure development at Denali's entrance and along the narrow non-Wilderness road corridor throughout the park to Wonder Lake. It set limits on total summer traffic and allocations of traffic between Tundra Wilderness Tour and Visitor Transportation buses (shuttle). It established the Denali Natural History Tour (DNHT) as a legitimate activity and even excluded its numbers from the vehicle limits. It was in this EIS that the upper limit of 10,512 vehicles was codified. Why then, should the park embark on the expensive, time-consuming process of planning for vehicle management now?

Park plans mandated a scientific study of vehicle impacts

One source of this new effort lies in the Entrance Area and Road Corridor EIS itself. Although it established limits, it also mandated a process, called VERP (visitor experience, resource protection), through which NPS would study the effects of traffic on park resources and visitor experience. Collection of additional data through VERP was expected to help NPS to make adjustments in the system as needed. The recently completed Road Capacity Study is a VERP study. The current seasonal limit on traffic, 10,512 vehicles, has been called "unscientific." NPS has defended the Road Capacity Study as a way to attempt to come up with a more scientific approach to the carrying capacity of the road.

Tourism industry approached NPS to change the allocation

Another source of this new effort lies in Alaska Tourism Industry Association (ATIA) pressure on NPS to allocate more tour buses. In 2004 ATIA formed the Denali Access Committee (DAC). The committee met over a period of several months to discuss the problem that the Tundra Wilderness Tour allocation was reaching its legal limit, and to try to tweak the allocation at the park in order to continue to satisfy demand. NPS basically promised that it would do an environmental compliance document to address this issue, after completing the Road Capacity Study. Meanwhile, NPS has been allocating more buses to tour from the "annual bus" allocation to assist tourism marketing efforts in Denali.

DCC encourages ALL members and concerned citizens to get involved

We encourage all concerned citizens to become involved in the scoping process and development of alternatives for management of vehicles along the park road. See facing page for dates, times and places. You may also send your ideas by email to Superintendent Paul Anderson. As far as we know EVERYTHING is on the table in this new plan, including:

- ☞ Possible reallocation of numbers between Tundra Wilderness Tour and Visitor Transportation buses
- ☞ Possible changes to the Denali Natural History Tour allocations
- ☞ Possible changes to photography permits
- ☞ Timing changes and bus schedules
- ☞ Allocation of tour buses to Eielson Visitor Center
- ☞ Commercial activities along the park road
- ☞ Even more profound management changes to the entire system

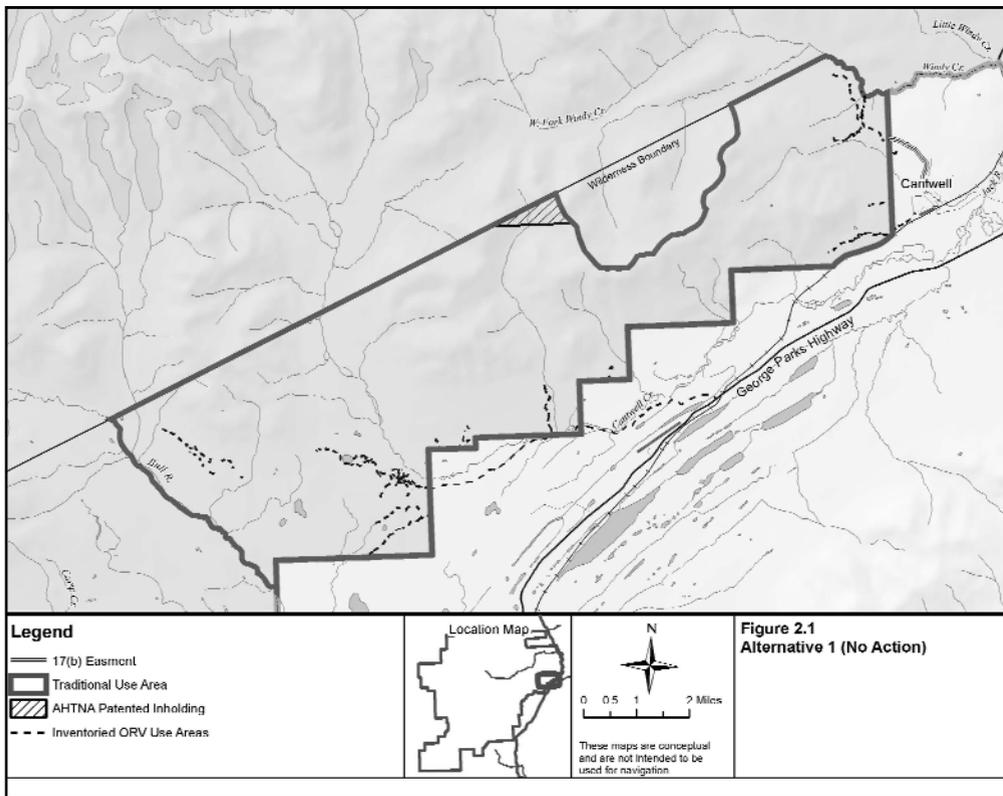
For Denali area participants, an important panel discussion will be held on September 9th at the Murie Science and Learning Center at 7:30 PM, during which data from the Park Road Capacity Study will be presented and discussed. Results from this study will have a strong bearing on how the EIS evolves. Please attend this forum if you can, along with one of the scoping sessions. ☞

CANTWELL ORV TRAIL CLOSURES

ACCESS VS. RESOURCE PROTECTION CREATES TENSION by Julia Potter

Two recent events in the Cantwell area have sparked tensions in a continuing dilemma over access versus resource protection within the Denali National Park & Preserve additions.

The National Park Service (NPS) issued a 120-day trail closure while awaiting new regulations to go into effect. The new regulations, brought about by the Environmental Assessment (EA) for Cantwell Subsistence Off-Road Vehicle (ORV) Management, close all but four established trails in the Cantwell area and the Cantwell Creek flood plain. They will also limit the types of ORV's allowed on trails managed by NPS. A meeting in Cantwell on August 1, 2008, with representatives of NPS, Cantwell subsistence users and Cantwell residents, to discuss the trail closure and new regulations, was yet another sore spot in a long history of haggling over access for subsistence purposes.



Map from Cantwell Subsistence ORV Management EA showing Traditional Use Area and trails previously open to Cantwell subsistence users. *Map courtesy of NPS*

Adding to the bitterness felt by Cantwell residents is an incident, which occurred in July, of NPS trail workers trespassing on private property and creating minor damage while putting up signs to denote that the NPS trail is closed. The crew left the NPS trail and got ORV's stuck on a connector trail which is private property. According to Philip Hooge, Assistant Superintendent, the crew should not have been on that trail and should not have been using ORV's. The private property owner does not want to make a big deal out of the incident and most likely will not press charges of trespassing. The park has apologized to the property owner and offered to repair the damage and make restitution. Cantwell residents are not happy with the park getting off so lightly. NPS is very diligent with trespassing incidents, in many cases proceeding with prosecution. Some

residents feel that the NPS should be fined just as they (the residents) would be if they were trespassing in Denali Park. The Superintendent, according to an Associated Press article, sees the trespass incident and subsistence access into the park as "completely separate."

Previous to the EA for Cantwell ORV Management, there were no consistent plans, qualified subsistence users went off trail for retrieval of game and there were more trails being used for subsistence purposes (see above map). Cantwell residents feel that access is being whittled away, a little at a time, first with trail numbers decreased and/or closed, the new regulations not allowing subsistence users the ability to go off the trail to retrieve game with an ORV and restricting the type of ORV's allowed. Harvest limits can also be implemented to protect natural and healthy populations of moose and caribou.

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CANTWELL ORV *continued from previous page*

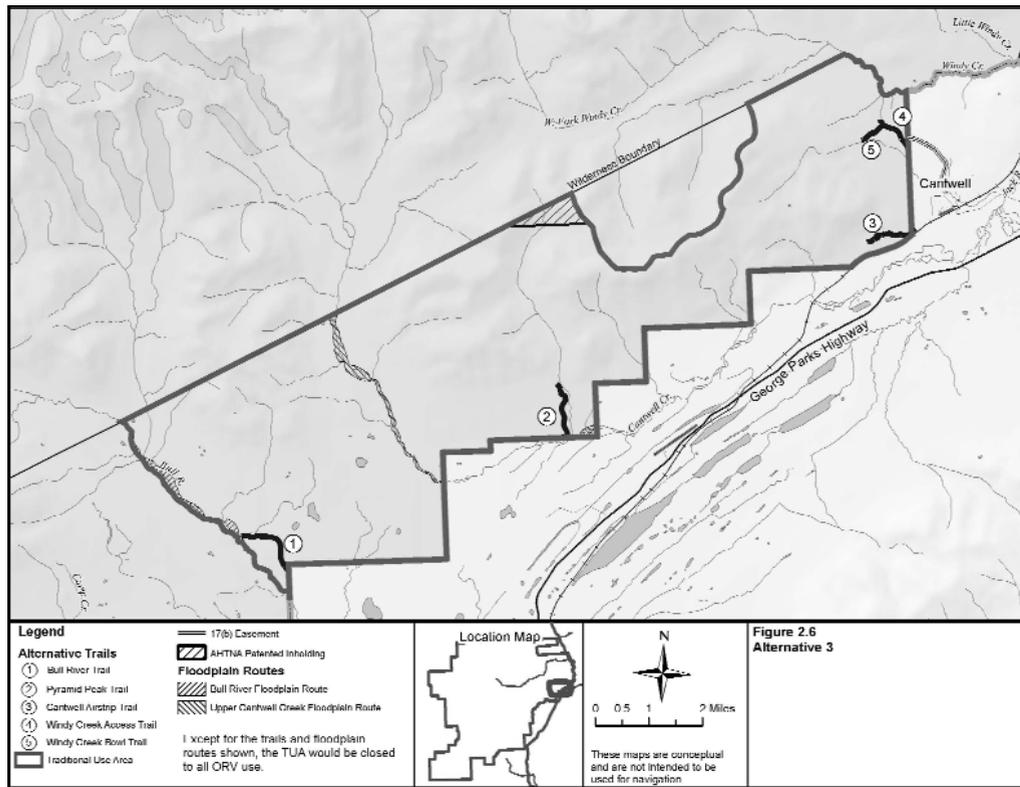
This long, on-going battle between resource protection and access with ORV's began with the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) in 1980. Both ANILCA and the General Management Plan (GMP) of 1986 do not recognize ORV's as being traditionally used for subsistence purposes although ANILCA provides that appropriate use for subsistence purposes of snowmachines, motorboats, and other means of surface transportation *traditionally employed* for such purposes by local rural residents shall be permitted, subject to reasonable regulations. The GMP did leave open the possibility that a determination for ORV use for subsistence purposes could be made in the future.

NPS has gone through a lengthy process to document subsistence use of ORV's in the Cantwell area, collecting data between 1992 and 2005, on the areas traditionally used for subsistence purposes within the park additions and traditionally employed vehicles for subsistence purposes. The process of determining traditionally employed ORV use began in 1992 with a letter from eight Cantwell residents requesting that the Park Service revisit this issue. The determination that ORV's were traditionally employed by local residents in Cantwell for subsistence purposes was made in 2005.

The preferred alternative in the EA, which will become regulation with some modifications, is an attempt to balance resource protection and still provide for reasonable access into the park additions for subsistence purposes with ORV's.

Denali Citizens Council has been concerned with this issue regarding resource protection and how the NPS will meet the challenge of protecting the resource while still allowing reasonable access for subsistence purposes. The next few years, following the official implementation of the new regulations, will be important for monitoring trail use, maintaining trails and mitigating damage. It will also be a time to see if fewer trails result in higher impacts due to ORV use being limited to a smaller area and if the local population increases over the years, how that might impact the NPS managed trails.

More detailed information on the Cantwell Subsistence ORV Management EA is available on the Denali National Park & Preserve website at: <http://www.nps.gov/dena/parkmgmt/subsistenceplan/htm>. The Finding of No Significant Impact, which includes the modifications to the selected preferred alternative for ORV use for subsistence purposes and public comments made during the EA process, is also available at this address. 



Map depicting TUA near Cantwell and the NPS managed trails open for subsistence use, with the exception of the Bull River (from the preferred alternative in the Cantwell ORV Management EA). Map courtesy of NPS.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM DCC'S ANNUAL MEETING

NANCY ARRIVES IN THE NICK OF TIME, NEW BOARD MEMBERS ELECTED, & WILLIE KARIDIS PRESENTS *WILDERNESS OF DENALI 100*



Native Knowledge Network

This year's Denali Citizens Council annual meeting held on July 19th at the McKinley Village Community Center proves that no matter how well you plan an event something will inevitably happen to test your patience yet in the end it all works out just fine. President Nancy Bale was scheduled to arrive around 4:00 p.m., however she was bumped off her flight returning from Illinois after visiting family, and rerouted the long way back. She had to scramble to pick up last-minute items in Anchorage and then make the long drive to Denali. This meant Julia had to scramble. Thanks goodness for our board members pitching in to get the room set up and for Willie Karidis setting up early with a projection screen, and bringing other items we didn't have time to get. Nancy made it by 6:30 p.m. - and the meeting proceeded as planned.

It was a great turn-out of about 30 people and there were lots and lots of cookies and other delicious treats as well as great discussions among the attendees.

At this year's meeting, a new board was elected. All of those on the ballot were voted in by our members. (Thanks to all of you who voted.) Our board is now eight members strong with: Jean Balay, Nancy Bale, Anne Beaulaurier, Nan Eagleson, Joan Frankevich, Jenna Hamm, Cass Ray and Jared Zimmerman.

Nancy gave a brief overview of the past year with a primary focus on Denali Borough's municipal land entitlements, followed by a wonderful presentation, *Wilderness of Denali 100*, by Willie Karidis . . .

WILDERNESS OF DENALI 100

WILLIE KARIDIS TALKS ABOUT HIS WINTER JOURNEY INTO DENALI AT DCC ANNUAL MEETING by Cass Ray

Wilderness "helps you see the simplicity, the basic core of life, and opens the door to see absolute truths clearly," Willie Karidis told his audience of nearly three dozen at the Denali Citizens Council's annual meeting July 19. It was, Karidis confided to the gathering at the McKinley Village Community Center, the first time he had presented his *Wilderness of Denali 100* program "in front of friends." Karidis' PowerPoint program highlighted his "61 days in the backcountry" at the Toklat River, 53.5 miles into the park, January 21 through March 21. It was "such an inspiration to be out there every day," he noted. "I felt so privileged, I just felt so thankful."

Karidis has been executive director of the Denali Education Center since 1992, three years after the founding of the non-profit organization (originally named the Denali Foundation). His two months in the backcountry last winter marked the "culmination of a dream of 22 years." That dream took root the first time that Karidis, at that time, he recalled, a bartender at the McKinley Chalets, read *The Wilderness of Denali* by Charles Sheldon. Sheldon was, as Karidis notes on his *Wilderness of Denali 100* blog, one of the primary founders of the original Mt. McKinley National Park. "I thought, wouldn't it be great to be in Denali, at the exact same time and in the exact same places Sheldon was 100 years earlier," Karidis reports on his blog. "That 22 years went by quick, a lot has changed, but my desire for the trip has never wavered." Through the years he has acquired, Karidis confessed to his DCC audience, a "passion for Charles Sheldon."

Last September Karidis drove most of his gear and dried food to Toklat. Dozens of items of "clothes, supplies, living stuff" are listed on his blog; the more colorful among them include three caribou hides for the tent floor, a three-gallon bucket for washing clothes, three leather journals and four all-weather research journals (the belt of his backpack included a custom-made pocket affording "easy access" to his journals), "firewood, lots," "first-aid kit, extensive," "bunny boots, size 11, game-time decision whether I bring these or not," "wool sweater, black Army issue, same one Magneto wore in the X-Men movie!," Brazilian wooden spoons—"my musical instruments!"—and, of course, "duct tape, one roll." His satellite phone (two solar panels, set up outside the Pearson cabin, charged the battery) and the blog (<http://www.wildernessofdenali100.blogspot.com>) assembled, from their regular conversations, by his wife, Christine, were ways "for Christine to be connected to the trip."

His "food list," "based on 1.5 pounds of food per day," included, for breakfast, oatmeal (17 pounds of it), cane sugar, dried fruit, powdered milk, coffee, and tea. Lunch featured trail mix (18 pounds of it), more dried fruit, and "assorted power bars." Dinner included cous cous, pasta, instant rice, mashed potato flakes, moose meat, smoked salmon, buffalo steaks, cheese, salt, garlic, pepper, cocoa, olive oil (one and a quarter gallons of it), "Usinger sausage from Milwaukee," and TVP—"textured veg-

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WILDERNESS OF DENALI 100 *continued from previous page*

etable protein, yummm!” Among the reading material that Karidis took along were the Bible, the Qur’an, Sheldon’s *Wilderness of Denali*, Gandhi’s autobiography, the Dalai Lama’s *Little Book of Wisdom*, the Bill of Rights, and the Declaration of Independence.

The January day that he headed west on the park road was “the most glorious day ever,” except for, Karidis joked, maybe the day he and friends spotted an albino squirrel. On the first day of his journey, a ski from park headquarters to the interpretive cabin east of the Savage River, he was accompanied by Christine. Or at least they tried to ski—the last three miles there was no snow on the park road, meaning they were treated to having to drag his loaded sled, all nine feet of it. That first day’s ski/hike from park headquarters to the Savage cabin stretched to nine hours. The next day Christine headed east and Karidis set out alone but soon was joined, for a while, by park mushers Carmen Adamyk, Sarah Histan, and Aric “Krusty” Baldwin. As Baldwin’s dog team pulled the skier and his sled up Sable Pass, it wasn’t long, Karidis recalled ruefully, before he grew weary of “taking face plants.” It took Karidis five days to get to the Toklat River, 53.5 miles into the park. A wolf’s howl alerted him that the canines were aware of his presence, that they knew he was joining them in their wilderness.

Three miles north of the Toklat River bridge is “Cabin Woods,” where Sheldon built his cabin 100 years ago, and there Karidis found wolf tracks aplenty, “coming from all angles.” The plan was for Karidis to spend most of his 60 or 70 nights in the backcountry in his Arctic Oven, a tent with headroom and a wood-burning stove. At Cabin Woods, he “stomped out a spot” for his Arctic Oven and then spent the night in the ranger cabin at Toklat. He soon realized, however, that “I can’t do this, I just can’t do it,” that it would be a “selfish move on my part to disrupt the wolves” at Cabin Woods, and that “it wouldn’t be safe for them.” “Plan B” meant staying in the cabin built in 1927 a bit south of the ranger cabin by Grant Pearson and other rangers. Karidis set up the Arctic Oven in an area where he “wouldn’t be as invasive” for the wolves. The Arctic Oven’s wood stove could hold a fire for six hours, allowing him to sleep comfortably through the night. He felt “at home,” and the wilderness “treated me kindly.” His “cold-camping” adventures, in his North Face tent, proved “interesting,” Karidis allowed, to appreciative laughter from his audience, and “turned out to be *very* cold.” It proved to be “just a lot more fun when you have a wood-burning stove inside your tent.”

Among the “research and daily projects” cited on his blog are observation and journal recording of birds, Dall sheep, and other wildlife, daily minimum and maximum temperatures, and snow depth “in both open tundra and protected spruce forest;” there also was soundscape monitoring, satellite monitoring at 11 p.m. each night, and “trash removal from the Toklat River bar.” Of particular interest to Karidis’ DCC audience were his photos recreating Sheldon’s, from exactly 100 years before; Karidis’ aim was to shoot those pictures from exactly the same spots where Sheldon stood.

Each Thursday in the wilderness was heartily anticipated, as that was the day Karidis melted snow on the cabin’s cook stove and bathed. Adopted each day was a “mantra-of-the-day;” one day it was, “Slow, steady, and purposeful.” Karidis felt he was “learning a new culture through immersion,” not unlike a sojourn in, say, France. The personality of the Toklat River changed constantly; “it was fun,” Karidis noted, “to watch it every day.” The wind, which often proved formidable, was something Karidis “embraced;” “the wind was my friend.” One of the highlights of his presentation was a short video showing him retrieving water from below the ice at the Toklat River bridge—amid serious blusters. Laughing at a slide of himself, barely detectable behind leather mask, goggles, and Tootsie Roll Pop, he exulted, “I was really, really happy.”

Overall, Karidis reported, he was “stunned” that he observed so little wildlife. Still, there were the three Dall sheep ewes who seemed to want to ask him, “What are you doing up here?” And, among other encounters, he inadvertently interrupted some wolves’ pursuit of nine Dall sheep. Those wolves left all sorts of marks, “scent markings”—“maybe just to let me know.” Once, he observed nine wolves and another time, six. At Polychrome Pass he counted the tracks of fourteen individual wolves. Stumbling upon “Snowshoe Hare City”—“It was crazy!”—he observed 70 hares in a single day. The degree to which the hares had foraged in the area was “stunningly impressive.” Tracks in the snow indicated wolves had ventured from burrow to burrow, inserting their noses, in hopes of locating easy sustenance.

Mid-March temperatures were “getting really warm,” as warm as 45 degrees, and Karidis was increasingly concerned about those temperatures’ effect on snow conditions and on his ability to ski back out of the park. He decided to leave nine days early and began walking out. When he encountered the park crew clearing the ice and snow from the park road, the choices were, he recalled, “to walk two more days or go to the restaurant [where his wife works], have a beer and food, and see Christine.” It did not prove to be, he reported, a tough choice, and he hitched a ride with the road crew back to the frontcountry. Karidis’ blog reports “the longest shower of my life” soon remedied “what you might describe,” despite all those Thursday baths—but, after all, after 61 days in the backcountry—“as a very distinct, wilderness scent.” 

EIELSON VISITOR CENTER GRAND OPENING AND DEDICATION CEREMONY

SHUTTLE RIDE, NEW LEED BUILDING AND DEDICATION MAKE A MEMORABLE DAY

by Julia Potter

The long-awaited grand opening of the new Eielson Visitor Center took place August 12, 2008 on one of the few clear and sunny days Denali has seen this summer. Invited guests arrived at the Visitor Center to board three VTS (shuttle) buses, one of them being a hybrid, for transport to Eielson located at mile 65 of the park road. After checking in and selecting our box lunches, we boarded our bus for the approximately 2-1/2-hour trip. Our group of about 30 included park rangers, representatives of Alaska Geographic, National Parks Conservation Association, Denali Citizens Council (Nancy Bale), Denali Chamber of Commerce (Julia Potter - one of my other hats), Denali Borough Assembly, and others. A nice group with whom to enjoy the park road. With Clay Walker as our driver, I knew we were in for a special day.

I had never been beyond the Toklat Rest Stop on the park road and was anxious to see the new Eielson building as well as the landscape and hopefully bears, which I had yet to see on previous trips into the park. Between the beginning of our ride and Toklat, the group was treated to a pair of grizzly cubs meandering down the middle of the road looking quite mischievous as only bear cubs can do and totally made my day. We spotted a large bull moose on a river bar and a few lone caribou. A wolf quickly disappearing into the brush had everyone excited - four of the big five already! Seeing a large grizzly napping, oblivious to the gawking bus riders gave me a better understanding of why tourists rate seeing a grizzly their number one priority. To top off the excitement of the wildlife spotting, we were treated to spectacular views of Denali (Mt. McKinley). The closer we drew to Eielson, the more spectacular the views of the grand mountain became. The addition of Clay's wonderful skills at spotting wildlife, his knowledge of the park, and reminders of why Denali is so important to protect, made me feel privileged to be able to experience the grand sights of Denali National Park & Preserve.



A breathtaking view of Denali as seen from Stony Hill on the park road heading to Eielson.
DCC Photo

History of Eielson Visitor Center

The Eielson Visitor Center has a long history, beginning as Camp Eielson, which was a concessioner and Armed Forces tent camp, from 1934 to 1950. In 1954 the camp was finally removed. Design for a new interpretive center and rest stop began in 1956 and construction started in 1958. The building was completed in 1959, after completion of the gravel Denali Highway in 1957, which allowed visitors to drive their cars to see the park and visitation increased dramatically. The new Eielson opened to the public in 1960 although the dedication was the following year in 1961.

With the completion of the George Parks Highway in 1972 visitation to Denali again surged and the Visitor Transportation System was implemented. The building was under 2000 square feet and by 1976 was determined to be too small for the increasing visitation and was doubled in size. 1978 brought about a sales area for the Alaska Natural History Association, now Alaska Geographic. At this time tour buses were visiting Eielson until 1981 when a fatal accident occurred which ended tour buses going this far on the park road. Now many tours turn around at the Toklat Rest Stop (Mile 54) or at Stony (Mile 62). In 1995 the interior was remodeled and finally after 44 years, with growing visitation and the harsh winters taking a toll on the structure replacement was inevitable.

continued on page 1.

EIELSON GRAND OPENING *continued from page 12*

New Building Incorporates Sustainability

As we arrived at the new building, the first thing we noticed was not the building but the surrounding hillsides and of course the magnificent mountain. The building has been built into a slope within the footprint of the previous structure. Surrounding the building, earth provides a blanket to reduce heating and cooling needs. The design and materials chosen were selected with sustainability in mind. Steel beams were salvaged and re-fabricated and vertical wooden staves were recycled for finish material on interior walls, thereby reducing landfill waste. The floor tiles are made from 100 percent post-consumer tire rubber, the information desk countertop is made from wheat straw and more than 50 percent of forest-based building materials came from certified, sustainable forests. Local and regional materials were also used when possible to reduce energy required for shipping.



Eielson Visitor Center's low profile blends into the surrounding landscape to appear less intrusive.
NPS Photo - Kent Miller



Lyle Laverty addresses guests during the dedication ceremony.

NPS photo - Kent Miller

Speakers included Sue Masica, NPS Alaska Region Director, Dan Wenk, NPS Deputy Director and Lyle Laverty, Department of the Interior Assistant Secretary for Fish, Wildlife and Parks. Giving the blessing was Mitch Demientieff, Chief, Nenana Native Council. Each of the guest speakers noted the importance of protecting our national parks for future generations and the significant role they play in our nation's heritage.

Skylights and a large south-facing window take advantage of the sun's light and heat. Other features include solar panels, a small turbine in a nearby stream produces electricity and a clean-burning propane generator provides the energy needs of the building. Fixtures in the restrooms and resident area incorporate low-flow faucets and shower heads, half and full flush toilets and waterless urinals. These sustainable efforts have made the building eligible for a platinum certification LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) rating - a first for a building built by NPS.

The interior of the building showcases many interpretive exhibits, with the main exhibit a model of Mt. McKinley (Denali) and the surrounding Alaska Range. Additional exhibits feature information on the wildlife and plants of the park, displays of historical photographs, "Seasons of Denali" quilt by local artist Ree Nancarrow and the Artist-in-Residence Gallery. Conspicuously missing is the bookstore sales area which has been relocated to the temporary facilities at the Toklat Rest Stop.

Dedication Ceremony

After a quick tour of the building it was time for the dedication ceremony. Superintendent Paul Anderson began the ceremony giving thanks to the many individuals responsible for the design and construction of the building along with a presentation of awards. Guest

speakers included Sue Masica, NPS Alaska Region Director, Dan Wenk, NPS Deputy Director and Lyle Laverty, Department of the Interior Assistant Secretary for Fish, Wildlife and Parks. Giving the blessing was Mitch Demientieff, Chief, Nenana Native Council. Each of the guest speakers noted the importance of protecting our national parks for future generations and the significant role they play in our nation's heritage.

Following the dedication, we had one last look around and boarded the buses for the trip back. It was almost disappointing to leave, knowing our journey had been too brief to soak up the immense landscape. But that disappointment soon turned to excitement as we made the "big five" with the sighting of Dall sheep high on a steep hillside and the bonus of seeing a young wolf pup exploring its habitat. A reminder that Denali National Park & Preserve is a unique place and that we all have a responsibility to ensure future generations the ability to experience the wonderful, awe inspiring beauty of Denali. **END**

IN MEMORY OF STEVEN EARL BARB

Steven E. Barb, age 52, died unexpectedly Sunday, February 17, 2008, at his home near Otto Lake, Alaska.

He was born May 11, 1955, in Wichita, Kansas to Earl Clair and Martha (Goheen) Barb. He graduated from Northside High School in Muncie, Indiana in 1973. He attended Wabash College and the University of Alaska, Fairbanks.

He moved to McKinley Park, Alaska (now Denali National Park) in 1976 and lived in the Otto Lake area near Healy, Alaska for almost 30 years in a home he built himself. Steve worked out of the Laborers Union on the Alaska Pipeline and other local construction projects for many years. He owned and operated Healy Drilling for several years. In 2007 he obtained his CDL and drove semi trucks around the western US for six months. During this time he bought property in western Texas for a future winter home.

Steve's interests were many. He owned a sled dog team and completed the 1,000-mile Yukon Quest Sled Dog Race from Whitehorse, Yukon Territory to Fairbanks, AK in 1989. He learned to sail while in high school and later bought a 38-foot sail boat, the EMAR, on Bainbridge Island, WA. After a year of repair he sailed it to Alameda, CA and the next year to Mexico and spent several winters sailing along the Pacific Coast. He loved motorcycles and bought one in Minneapolis on the internet and rode it back to Alaska and later outside to see the Indianapolis 500 with family. He loved flying and dreamed of owning his own plane. He enjoyed music and taught himself to perform on several instruments. He was a renaissance man who could do almost anything after reading and studying the subject.

His survivors knew him as "Unc" and include his parents in Muncie IN, brother Stuart (wife Paula), Elkhart, IN; sisters Linda (husband David Hinshaw) Barb, Sheridan, IN and Carolyn (husband Neal) Sadler, Wheaton, IL; nieces Jennifer (husband Tim) Atkins, Perrysburg, OH and Deborah Sadler, Wheaton, IL; nephews Matthew (wife Cathy Chung), Ft. Wayne, IN, Adam (wife Jessica) Barb, Durham, NC and Nathan Sadler, Rancho Cordova, CA, three grandnephews and one grandniece, and many friends in the Healy and Otto Lake area.

A memorial service was held at 11am on April 12th at St. Andrew Presbyterian Church, 2700 W. Moore Road, Muncie, Indiana. A memorial service was also held at Valley View Memorial Cemetery near Healy on August 12th, followed by a potluck at Otto Lake. The weather was lovely - broken clouds alternating with beams of sunlight, the sounds of birds and wind, then a full fledged thunderstorm as Otto Lake guests were finishing a salmon dinner. Memorial contributions can be made to Denali Citizens Council, P.O. Box 78, Denali Park, Alaska 99755. ☞



DONATIONS IN MEMORY OF STEVEN EARL BARB

Florence Anderson
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Pam & Jim Wingate
Marjorie Zeigler

BRIEF NEWS & VIEWS

Healy Gas Exploration Final Best Interest Finding delayed until 2009

I recently spoke with Jonne Slemons, Petroleum Land Manager at the Division of Oil and Gas, and current lead on the Healy application, asking her when the Final Best Interest Finding on Healy Gas Exploration might be released. As DCC members recall, the Preliminary BIF came out in August 2005, three years ago. It identified an area of approximately 208,000 acres that the state of Alaska might permit Usibelli Coal Mine, Inc. to explore for both shallow and conventional gas.

Ms. Slemons stated that there was no mandated timeline on the Healy application request. She noted that the state was busy with several time sensitive projects and would not be able to complete the Healy BIF until the first quarter of 2009. It was disappointing to realize that the Denali Borough and its citizens will have to endure at least 5 more months of uncertainty regarding this project, especially when conflicting uses and priorities exist for some of the lands in question.

Mat-Su Borough developing ordinance to address conventional gas operations

The Mat-Su Borough Assembly recently took action to develop an ordinance controlling conventional gas drilling. Existing borough law regulates only coal bed methane, or shallow gas, development. Alaskans remember that the Mat-Su Valley was first in the state to develop significant local regulation of gas development in 2004, when Evergreen Resources planned widespread drilling there.

After the State of Alaska's shallow gas program was abolished in 2004, the drilling application process changed. Applicants were required to go through a conventional gas exploration best interest finding process. Under the new system, both conventional and shallow gas wells could be drilled under the same exploration license. The Mat-Su Borough recognized that regulations addressing **both** types of gas exploration activities would be necessary. Although the state has stringent regulations on gas development, they do not cover all exigencies that might occur, especially in residential areas.

The new Mat-Su ordinance is still in draft form, but includes setbacks, a "gas inspector" position (a sort of ombudsman), adequate noticing of well drilling activities, a \$50,000 bond per well and no wells within 200 feet of a freshwater well. Noise standards would be enforced.

The Denali Borough should heed the Mat-Su Borough's efforts to regulate gas development, since the Healy Gas exploration would enable Usibelli, Inc. to drill for shallow and conventional gas. As of this writing the Denali Borough Assembly has minimal gas development regulation on the books.

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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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