

LEGISLATIVE RIDER ALLOWS LOADED GUNS IN DENALI

PLAN TO ATTEND THE **DCC ANNUAL MEETING, JULY 11, 2009** TO LEARN MORE

by Nancy Bale

A short amendment inserted by Sen. Tom Coburn into unrelated federal legislation will allow visitors to carry loaded firearms into the core two-million-acre portion of Denali National Park next year. The passage of this “guns in parks” rider was a surprise to most of us, and happened over a short period of time, between May 12, 2009, when the rider was introduced, and May 22nd, when the Credit Card Accountability, Responsibility and Disclosure Act (HR 627) was signed by President Obama. His signing speech touted its beneficial effects on credit card holders, but said nothing of the poison pill embedded in the bill. Loaded guns (pistols, rifles, concealed or open) would now be allowed in Denali National Park. Period.

Thus ended a struggle that gained momentum last fall when the Bush Administration, on December 5, 2008, promulgated a new regulation for national parks, one that would permit concealed weapons in national parks, consistent with state law on surrounding lands. On January 6, 2009, the Association of National Park Rangers, the Coalition of the National Park Service Retirees and the National Parks Conservation Association filed a lawsuit against the Department of the Interior in US District Court, opposing the rule. The Court, on March 19, overturned the rule for not having performed adequate analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). This was not, however, to be an end to the issue. The legislative rider allowing loaded guns in the parks passed overwhelmingly just two months later, and allowed more than the Bush rule, permitting open carry of any weapons category allowed on surrounding state land. In Alaska, this is virtually any firearm.

The implications of this new gun legislation for Denali National Park will be the main topic at our Annual Meeting on Saturday, July 11, 2009, at the Sheldon Center, McKinley Village. We’ll begin at 6:30 PM with a dessert potluck, then a review of the year by President Nancy Bale. We’ll present a brief overview of the “guns in parks” issue before introducing Denali National Park Chief Ranger Pete Armington, who will discuss administrative and law enforcement implications of this rule for Denali. Mark your calendars for this interesting and informative event! Non-members welcome.

DCC ANNUAL MEETING
JULY 11, 2009
6:30 P.M.
SHELDON CENTER, MCKINLEY VILLAGE
DESSERT POTLUCK
GUEST SPEAKER: PETE ARMINGTON,
DENALI NATIONAL PARK CHIEF RANGER

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FROM THE BOARD

For all of our members not fortunate enough to be here to welcome spring to Denali, it can be reliably reported that the season is off to a terrific start. Already Denali has enjoyed at least two days whose weather was so spectacular that surely no other venue in the entire northern hemisphere could claim better weather. As these words are written, at the beginning of the second full week of May, there are plenty of other signs of spring. Two days ago no fewer than eleven grizzlies were observed on the park road, and community betterment projects are beating wildflowers to the surface: it must be spring if folks are assigned a mile of the Parks Highway to clear of litter, and if a Saturday morning pancake feed fundraiser for improvements to the McKinley Park playground is scheduled; both of those efforts, and so many more, are headed up by community dynamos Martha and David Tomeo.

Many of us find it tough to argue with Wallace Stegner's famous assertion that our national parks are "America's best idea," and many of us have fond memories of our "first parks," of our first experiences in these special places. From many other parks we also recall experiences that were sublime, maybe even life-changing, or, well, otherwise memorable. My own "first park," probably, when I was very young, was Big Bend; that camping trip was with the family of friends, brothers Larry, Randy, and Gary. If that lineup evokes the likes of Huey, Dewey, and Louie, or Moe, Larry, and Curly, or Jesse, Frank, and some other member of the infamous James Gang, the allusion may not be unintentional. From that adventure, less may be remembered of the singular glories of Big Bend than of the cactus spine that immediately was imbedded in my finger and then, for the duration of the trip, transferred to my tongue, when teeth were called upon to act as pliers and extract it. Suffice to say Moe, Larry, and Curly proved not remarkably empathetic, and that Big Bend adventure probably seemed significantly longer than it was.

Many years later, Easter vacation during senior year in college meant a return to Big Bend, canoeing the mighty Rio Grande. Everything was spectacular—no cactus spines this time—until rapids that clearly should not have been braved *were* braved, and sharp boulders left large holes in the bottom of the canoe. Dutifully burying what we couldn't carry, we determined to hike out of the canyon and toward nominal civilization—until our route ended on a sheer cliff facing a nest of privacy-preferring rattlesnakes. Returning to the Rio Grande, we barely had unearthed our gear when what should appear on the river but eighteen canoes and thirty-six Boy Scouts from Nederland, Texas—eager to make a rescue (unanticipated though it was). Through the next few days on the river, it was hard not to imagine the Scout leaders offering object lessons regarding wrecked canoes and longer-haired, shirtless, cut-offs-clad college boys sporting brightly-hued bandana headbands. I'm always grateful to be able to provide fodder for years' worth of cautionary chalk talks.

Through the years I lived in New Mexico, no family or friends visited without also visiting nearby Bandelier National Monument and its fantastic archeological sites that include ancestral pueblo villages representing more than 10,000 years of human history. So many weeks and long weekends were spent backpacking in the Pecos Wilderness that I pondered whether I could pitch my tent somewhere just outside the Wilderness and commute back and forth to work in Santa Fe each day; my "college car," a '63 Volkswagen Beetle, probably with its original tires, seemed less enthusiastic. Still unforgettable were Christmases spent camping deep in the Pecos Wilderness, always awaking on Christmas Morn to find, circling the tent, the footprints of so many different kinds of critters—just as in those magical children's fables of Christmas Eve.

Then, nearly every summer for nearly twenty years, came camping and hiking in Shenandoah National Park, including the 105 miles of the Appalachian Trail that are inside the park. Two seasons in Shenandoah meant living in a cabin without heat, without even a fireplace—which didn't matter until, one night just before Halloween, seven inches of new snow cooled things off and shut down the park. The black bear determined to live under the cabin didn't seem to generate much heat for the cabin. In interior temperatures barely above freezing, it was worth reminding myself that it was a privilege to occupy a cabin built for the White House physician. A report on a backpacking overnight two years ago to the floor of the Grand Canyon (was there ever a sight more welcome, more delightful, than the Phantom Ranch Canteen?) during which a skunk twice tried to share my sleeping bag (yet another wonderful thing about Denali: no skunks—or, for that matter, rattlesnakes) will wait for another time.

So many national parks, so many special places, so many experiences and memories. Our own Denali boasts some of the most spectacular scenery and resources on the planet. There remains so much to learn about this amazing place and all the issues it faces. We all look forward to continuing tackling the steep Denali learning curve. 🐉

Cass Ray

FROM THE COMMUNITY ORGANIZER by Julia Potter



Alaska Native Knowledge Network

Another summer season is upon us. Businesses in the entrance area of the park are awakening from their winter slumber, more recreational vehicles are seen on the Parks Highway, community projects are getting underway (554 pancakes - you go Cass!), and wildlife is being spotted to the delight of many.

I recently took a trip to Toklat rest stop. What a great way to start off the season with an early-season ride into the park. The day started with the unexpected sighting of a grizzly bear on the Parks Highway. On my way up the park road, near headquarters, I was treated to twin moose I had seen last year. How wonderful to see them still together. The park is always so beautiful early in the day. Before I reached the Savage River checkpoint, a grizzly was on the road inspecting the few vehicles present. How thrilling to have a bear walk right up to your window wondering just what you are, then walk away with disinterest. I did have to wonder if he was feeling stressed as he walked around each vehicle several times before he finally departed or if he was just curious.

With a crisp blue sky, Denali was in clear view. An awesome sight regardless of how many times you see it. However, it doesn't thrill me quite as much as spotting arctic ground squirrels, seeing Dall's sheep high on a hillside, watching a ptarmigan at the road's edge or looking up to see a golden eagle soaring over the landscape. The wildlife will continue to excite me. Knowing they have a protected home in which to live instills a feeling of peace, a feeling of joy I can't describe. It also reminds me of why I do what I do for Denali Citizens Council and why I am willing to volunteer my time for the surrounding community. Sometimes we need little reminders.

I'm looking forward to tackling the many issues facing Denali and the surrounding community this summer season. I'm also looking forward to keeping our members informed through our bi-monthly newsletter and member updates. Please give me a call or send me a note if you would like to be more involved. I would enjoy hearing from you.

SPRING MEMBERSHIP DRIVE UNDERWAY

Recently, DCC mailed out letters to members with renewal dates from January through June. As a small organization, we send reminders twice a year. Our next membership drive will be this coming fall for members with renewal dates of July through December. These dates are for the current year.

Denali Citizens Council appreciates the generosity our members have shown over the past 35 years.

If you have any questions about your membership please contact our Community Organizer, Julia Potter, at mail@denalicitizens.org or 907-683-3396.

THANK YOU

NEW AND RENEWING MEMBERS
SINCE OUR LAST NEWSLETTER

SUMMIT

Chuck & Mona Bale
Carol McIntyre & Ray Hander

TUNDRA

Andrea Blakesley

TAIGA

Frank Keim
Barbara O'Donnell



Alaska Native Knowledge Network

CROWD MEETS GVEA CHIEF TO DISCUSS PROPOSED HEALY #2 RESTART

TRI-VALLEY COMMUNITY CENTER FILLS WITH LOCALS FOR TWO-HOUR MEETING

By Cass Ray

Elephants are not among Denali's thirty-nine species of mammals, but at the community forum on the proposed restart of Healy Coal Plant #2 on May 14, a proverbial elephant was in the room—and Golden Valley Electric Association's president and CEO wasted no time in acknowledging it. Brian Newton, Golden Valley Electric Association (GVEA) president and chief executive officer, opened his thirty-five-minute presentation before a large crowd at Healy's Tri-Valley Community Center by noting that two days before, the Homer Electric Association (HEA) board of directors had voted to “pull out” of the proposed restart of Healy Coal Plant #2. HEA had been negotiating to purchase 50 percent of the power proposed to be generated by the restarted plant. The HEA directors voted 8 to 1 to “transition our cooperative away from involvement” in the plant. (See separate article on the April 29 letter to GVEA from attorneys for Trustees for Alaska and the Sierra Club Environmental Law Program.) In the wake of HEA's abandonment of the project, Newton said, GVEA now would have to renegotiate its purchase of the plant from the Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority (AIDEA).

Partway through the hour-and-five-minute question-and-answer session that followed Newton's opening presentation, a woman in the audience asked Newton's opinion of why HEA wanted out of the plant restart deal, and Newton replied that “the tide has changed on the board, and they don't want to participate,” adding that newly elected members of the HEA board “don't like coal.” When a man in the audience asked if HEA's move was possibly a “strategy,” Newton said he did not think it was a negotiating strategy. He noted HEA now would depend wholly on natural gas for its generation of power. The same man asked Newton if some of the energy that now would not be purchased by HEA could be shared with villages so desperate, increasingly, for power, and Newton replied that could not happen, because power distribution lines basically are along the rail belt, and villages have no lines—let alone that distribution costs \$300,000 per mile.



A large crowd, including staffers for Rep. David Guttenberg (on right), listens as Brian Newton speaks about the proposed restart of Healy Coal Plant #2.
DCC Photo

NPS supports the restart (?)

Responding to a question from a woman in the audience, Newton said Denali National Park had given “thumbs up” to the proposed restart, but that when Kate Lamal, GVEA vice president of power supply, visited National Park Service officials in Denver, she found their reaction to be only “luke warm”—and that assessment of their response was, Newton said, “optimistic.” The first member of the audience to comment during the question-and-answer session vowed to “let bygones be bygones” if GVEA restarted and operated the plant, which he called a “clean and economical” way to generate power.

Besides Newton and Lamal, other GVEA officials attending the forum in Healy included Mike Wright, vice president, transmission and distribution; Tom Hartnell, vice president, administrative services; Dave Hoffman, plant manager; and Bill Nordmark, chairman of the board of directors. The large audience also included several representatives of Usibelli Coal Mine, including Joe Usibelli Jr., president of the corporation, who was among those who commented; Usibelli would sell coal to the restarted plant. Also attending were three members of the DCC board, its community organizer, and a number of DCC members.

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PROPOSED HEALY #2 RESTART *continued from previous page*

Concerns expressed on environmental compliance and permitting

A DCC board member asked Newton about the letter to GVEA from the attorneys for Trustees for Alaska and the Sierra Club Environmental Law Program, which “cautioned” the utility to comply with specific, strict requirements of the federal Clean Air Act before “irretrievably committing further resources” to the restart of the plant. If GVEA did not pursue new permits, as the April 29 letter urged, would not GVEA risk finding itself caught up in even more lengthy, costly litigation, Newton was asked. His response was that GVEA was “not going to get caught [up]” or “cut corners” and that GVEA “probably disagrees” with environmentalists’ insistence that the proposed restart falls under the provisions of the Clean Air Act’s Prevention of Significant Deterioration (PSD) review. Securing a PSD permit ensures that the restarted plant’s emis-



Brian Newton, GVEA president & CEO, listens as DCC board member Anne Beaulaurier asks about the Trustees for Alaska letter sent to GVEA regarding new permit requirements. *DCC Photo*

sions “will be limited to a level consistent with application of ‘best available control technology’” and will not “cause or contribute to violation of any air quality standards,” noted the April 29 letter. Still, when a DCC board member referred to Healy Coal Plant #2’s “stale” permits and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)—the plant’s original EIS dates from sixteen years ago, 1993—Newton likened energy plants to cars that are not required to meet “brand new” standards.

The GVEA president and CEO denied that Healy Coal Plant #2 had been “moth-balled,” and said that through the ten years that the plant has remained idle, it has been kept warm. It would take eighteen to twenty-four months to “fix deficiencies,” Newton said, adding, “We will not sacrifice safety.”

Among those plant deficiencies that would have to be addressed are the plant’s control system, which is completely obsolete, Newton reported. The coal handling system would have to be updated so it could move three times as much coal as before. Newton predicted the fuel feed system would prove to be the most expensive of the plant’s systems that would have to be replaced. Asked what would become of Healy Coal Plant #2 if the proposed restart did not return the plant to productivity, if it would be “torn down and sold to the Koreans,” Newton said that if the plant once again proved less than “commercially viable,” it would be dismantled.

Referring to both Healy plants, Newton said, “Today both units [would] burn cleaner than Healy #1 did ten years ago.” He said that at Healy Coal Plant #2, more than seventy percent of nitrogen oxides would be removed from emissions, as would more than ninety percent of sulfur dioxides and more than ninety-nine percent of particulate matters. When a woman in the audience asked about the plant’s carbon dioxide emissions, Newton said that presently there are no regulations regarding carbon dioxide emissions, and no proven technology to capture and sequester them. When another woman in the audience said that already the air in Healy is “hard to breathe” sometimes, Lamal replied that testing of the air in Healy during the plant’s original start-up ten years ago indicated no negative effects on human life. Restarting the plant would mean no additional problem with acid rain, said Lamal. Coal ash would be stored in a silo and then used in mine reclamation, the two GVEA officials said. When Lamal said the current sludge pond is not lined, Usibelli employees disagreed. Restarting the plant would triple the amount of coal presently used, Newton said, from about 200,000 tons to about 600,000 tons, annually.

When two Healy residents voiced concern about the restarted plant’s potential for excessive noise, based on their experience ten years ago—“noise 24/7” was cited by one of the two—Newton’s response was, “I don’t know. We’ll do the best we can...We’ll try.” Newton conceded that during the plant’s original start-up there were problems with vibration and noise, but that modifications were made. One of those two Healy residents said she did not recall noise mitigation as part of her experience during the original start-up of the plant, and wondered aloud if, in the event that noise at the restarted plant could not be remedied, the community would be “stuck” with a loud plant.

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PROPOSED HEALY #2 RESTART *continued from previous page*

Among the questions posed by Newton's opening PowerPoint presentation was, "Why HCCP [Healy Clean Coal Plant] now?" The answer included, "first and foremost," that the restarted plant would "lower your electric bill." Other reasons included that coal remains a fuel source that is among the least expensive and most stable in price, that restarting the plant would cost less than half of what building a new plant would cost, and that the restart would create jobs. Newton predicted fifty new jobs during the eighteen to twenty-four months of preparation of the restarted plant, and fifteen to twenty new jobs after that. (He said Healy Coal Plant #1 currently employs thirty-four.) Among the benefits of restarting the plant that were cited were reducing dependence on oil, lowering and stabilizing electric rates, and, especially, ending costly litigation with AIDEA. The plant, said Newton, has "been sitting long enough."

If restarted, Healy Coal Plant #2 would be run by a new cooperative named Tri-Valley Electric, a wholly-owned subsidiary of GVEA, whose management and board of directors would operate both plants. Responding to a question about that arrangement, Newton said it would result in savings of \$2 - \$4 million annually. The finances for purchasing and restarting the plant, at least before the HEA board voted to abandon the project, would include a purchase loan of \$50 million, at five percent interest for twenty-five years, and a restart loan of \$45 million, at six and a half percent interest, also for twenty-five years. Interest and principal payments would be deferred until January 1, 2014. 

LEGAL ARGUMENT FAVORS NEW REVIEW FOR HEALY CLEAN COAL PLANT RESTART

DETAILS OF THE ARGUMENT ARISE FROM CLEAN AIR ACT AND CASE LAW

by Cass Ray

Rather than "stick its head in the sand" and try to rely upon permits that are more than a decade old, Golden Valley Electric Association (GVEA) should "proceed with permitting" Healy Coal Plant #2 only under specific, strict requirements of the Clean Air Act and should "factor those requirements into the legal, economic, and scheduling considerations for restarting the plant," attorneys for a public interest environmental law firm in Anchorage and the Sierra Club Environmental Law Program wrote to GVEA on April 29. The coal-fired power plant "has been moth-balled for so long," noted the letter, that "regulatory changes have occurred, global climate change has become a significant issue facing Alaska and the world, and public concerns about this facility have multiplied."

Updated permitting should address the "adequate control" of "dangerous air emissions, including mercury and dozens of carcinogens," noted a press release issued by the authors of the letter the same day as the letter. The press release was titled, "Groups warn that Healy coal plant cannot operate without new Clean Air Act permit." "Prior to irretrievably committing further resources to its reactivation," the letter "recommended," GVEA should apply for new permits. Noting that Kate Lamal, GVEA's vice president for power supply, had stated that the plant's original permits remained in effect and would not require renewing, the press release argued that "this opinion is counter to the Clean Air Act" and that the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) would "almost certainly require a new permit."

The restart of the Healy plant would result in a "significant increase in actual emissions"—"indisputably 'significant'"—noted the letter, with those emissions easily exceeding the "significance thresholds" for Prevention of Significant Deterioration (PSD) review. The nitrogen oxide emissions attributed to Healy Coal Plant #2 by the Air Quality Operating Permit issued by the state Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), 1,010 tons per year, are, noted the letter, more than 25 times the 40 tons per year dictated by the significance threshold. The 248 tons per year attributed to sulphur dioxide emissions are more than six times—"well above"—the 40 tons per year significance threshold. The 577 tons per year attributed to carbon monoxide emissions are nearly six times the 100 tons per year significance threshold. The 58 tons per year attributed to particulate matter are more than twice the 25 tons per year significance threshold.

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NEW REVIEW FOR HEALY #2 *continued from previous page*

The six-page letter to Brian Newton, GVEA president and chief executive officer, was written by Brian Litmans and Sanjay Narayan. Litmans is a staff attorney for Trustees for Alaska, an Anchorage firm that describes itself as a “non-profit public interest law firm providing counsel to protect and sustain Alaska’s environment.” Narayan is with the Sierra Club Environmental Law Program. The letter to GVEA also was written on behalf of the DCC, National Parks Conservation Association, Northern Alaska Environmental Center, Sierra Club, Alaska Center for the Environment, Matanuska Electric Association Ratepayers Alliance, and Homer Electric Association (HEA) Member Forum. (HEA was in negotiations to purchase 50 percent of the power proposed to be generated by Healy Coal Plant #2, but, two days before GVEA’s May 14 community forum in Healy on the proposed restart (see separate article on that forum), the HEA board of directors voted 8 to 1 to “transition our cooperative away from involvement” in the plant. It was reported that at least two of HEA’s directors confirmed that the board’s intent was to put an end to HEA’s involvement with plans to restart the Healy plant. The single no vote in that 8 to 1 tally was reported to represent not support for the Healy restart but concern over canceling a request for proposals for a power supply study, which also was a part of the board’s motion. Purchasing power from the plant “adds up to a bad deal for HEA ratepayers,” the Trustees’ press release quoted Joel Cooper, spokesperson for the HEA Members Forum. Existing agreements mean HEA ratepayers “will already be saddled with up to \$47 million in costs to restart this experimental coal plant,” added Cooper, citing “additional costs to come into compliance with required air quality permits.”) Copies of the letter to GVEA were sent to the HEA board president; the Air Permit Program of the DEC in Juneau; the regional administrator of the EPA in Seattle; and the executive director of the Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority (AIDEA), from whom GVEA proposes to purchase the power plant.



The Healy Clean Coal Plant has been idle since 1999. For many years GVEA insisted that the plant could not be operated with existing clean coal technology. Recently, in a deal between AIDEA and GVEA, a deal that ended pending litigation between the two, GVEA agreed to buy and operate the plant. The recent loss of a power purchase agreement with Homer Electric Association has significantly altered the process. *DCC photo*

GVEA “can’t stick its head in the sand and ignore the requirements of the Clean Air Act,” Litmans noted in the press release. “The law ensures that facilities like this coal plant utilize the very best technology to protect public health and the environment.” Designated as a Class I airshed under the Clean Air Act, Denali National Park and Preserve, located only a few miles from the moth-balled coal-fired power plant, “currently has some of the best visibility and cleanest air in the country” and enjoys “the strongest federal clean-air protections possible” under the Clean Air Act, added the press release. Among those quoted in the two-page press release was Joan Frankevich, Alaska program manager at the National Parks Conservation Association and a DCC board member, who noted the national park is “one of America’s most iconic treasures” and reiterated that Denali is “protected by the strongest air quality standards our laws have to offer.” She urged GVEA to “protect visitor health, wildlife, plants, and other natural resources of the park” by ensuring that “any new pollution source,” including Healy Coal Plant #2, “be subject to the best pollution controls as required by the Clean Air Act.”

The stated purpose of the letter to GVEA was to “caution you and the other parties,” before they “commenced operations at Healy Coal Plant #2,” to “comply with the Prevention of Significant Deterioration provisions of the Clean Air Act.” “Prior to irretrievably committing further resources to its reactivation,” the letter “recommended,” GVEA should apply for a new permit. **END**

COMMUNITY TRANSPORTATION AT DENALI'S GATEWAY WOULD MEET AN IMPORTANT NEED

by Julia Potter

As the summer tourist season begins here at Denali National Park, year-round residents notice one big change after a winter of peace and quiet - more traffic on the George Parks Highway. It's most noticeable through one small stretch of the highway just outside the Denali National Park entrance in the area known locally as Glitter Gulch. The one-mile-long stretch of highway through Nenana Canyon, just north of the park entrance, becomes congested with commercial tour buses, Tundra Wilderness Tour and Natural History Tour buses for the park's transportation system, private recreational vehicles, private cars and trucks, commercial trucks, and a variety of courtesy vans for the various attractions and hotels. Add a multitude of walking tourists crossing the highway between hotels, restaurants and shopping to create a one-mile cluster of frustration, confusion, and chaos. With increased visitation each year, the congestion only gets worse.

Visitors who arrive at the gateway of Denali have a variety of transportation needs. Once inside the park, visitors need a way of getting around to all the attractions within the entrance area and along the park road. In addition, they need a way to go between the national park entrance area and the hotels, businesses and communities outside the park. Both of these transportation needs are only partially met by the current system.

Transportation within the park's entrance area is managed by the park's concessionaire

Once visitors arrive at the park entrance area, park shuttle buses provide transportation there. These shuttle services are part of the Visitor Transportation System (VTS), managed by Doyon/ARAMARK Joint Venture (JV), the park concessionaire. The Savage River shuttle stops at the Wilderness Access Center (WAC), Park Headquarters, Savage Campground and the Savage River parking lot. The Riley Creek Loop shuttle begins at Riley Creek Campground and includes stops at the WAC, Horseshoe Lake trail head and the Alaska Railroad Depot. The Dog Sled Demonstration shuttle departs from the Riley Creek Campground, stops at the WAC, the train depot and Park Headquarters.

Although the Wilderness Access Center functions as the park's transportation hub, confusion exists about just what options are available there. Visitors frequently stand outside the WAC asking which bus takes them to either a hotel, dog demonstration or to the golf course. The WAC does not provide a physical environment whereby the visitor can determine where to board the respective bus or van, nor can the visitor wait inside to see the bus or van arrive. There is nowhere to stand out of the rain or weather while waiting for one's bus. This situation detracts from visitor enjoyment.

Transportation between local areas outside the park and the park entrance is limited

Since most park visitors do not have their own transportation, the various hotels and attractions provide courtesy transportation between the park and the local community using shuttle vans or buses. This system leaves some park visitors underserved, if they are not staying at a place with courtesy service. In addition, park employees, local residents and RV users staying in Nenana Canyon have no public transportation options for access to the park. This gap in local transportation services within the Denali Borough has already been recognized and considered. The initial idea of community transportation for Denali Borough came about during the 2005 Denali Summit.

Then, in 2006, HDR Alaska, Inc. prepared a *Needs Assessment & Feasibility Study for a Community Transportation System* for Denali National Park and Preserve. The study, initiated by Charlie Loeb, looked at the congestion not only in the canyon area but in the entrance area of the park as well. The feasibility study suggested that the Riley Creek Loop shuttle be extended to serve the Nenana Canyon area. The study indicated that a private organization would be better suited than the park concessionaire to operate a community transportation system. The system could then extend into Healy and Cantwell, serving the overall Denali community.

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COMMUNITY TRANSPORTATION *continued from previous page*

In addition to the feasibility study, Charlie Rutkowski, Assistant Director with Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA), visited Denali Borough to offer technical assistance on how to implement a community transportation system. Mr. Rutkowski's assistance was made possible by a grant through the Rural Transit Assistance Program. This program provides resources to help rural communities explore system start-up, coordination, Section 5311 formula funding (federal funds) and other tools designed with the needs of rural communities in mind. The feasibility study and the assistance provided by CTAA quite literally spelled out how to implement a community transportation system. So, why hasn't community transportation been started? The answer is simple. Money. Time. Public interest.

Implementation of a community transportation system faces significant barriers

Currently Doyon/ARAMARK Joint Venture (JV), as the concessionaire and manager of the Visitor Transportation System (VTS), operates the Riley Creek Loop. Both the NPS and Doyon/ARAMARK Joint Venture have expressed willingness to allocate Riley Creek Loop funds towards community transportation. However, the concessionaire has stated that it does not wish to extend the loop into the canyon or the community without having a method to pay for the extra miles driven (fuel and driver wages). The feasibility study suggested that NPS, local businesses, etc. form a confederation of participants to run the extended loop. This has met with some opposition from tour providers who want control over their guests. They already provide courtesy service; why pay someone else to do what they already provide?

A nonprofit corporation has been suggested as the best solution for management of a community transportation system. It would be eligible for both federal and state funding. Recently, two individuals with the Denali Chamber of Commerce expressed interest in pursuing the creation of a nonprofit corporation to begin a community transportation system for the Denali area. Unfortunately, they had difficulty getting the community and local government interested.

While many say they would love to see community transportation, few have yet shown enough interest to participate in making it happen. Will local community interest and involvement increase? Will the national park include community transportation options in its alternatives to the upcoming park vehicle management EIS? Time will tell. *SD*



Private recreational vehicles and cars, commercial tour buses and Visitor Transportation System (VTS) tour buses for the Tundra Wilderness Tour and the Natural History Tour for Denali National Park, and visitor pedestrian traffic create an atmosphere of frustration, confusion and chaos in the Nenana Canyon area just outside the entrance to the park. Community transportation could help relieve the confusing array of services, while providing access to currently underserved travelers at the gateway to Denali. *DCC Photos*



MOTOR VEHICLE POOL AT DENALI IMPLEMENTED TO MEET GREEN ENERGY CHALLENGE

by Cass Ray

In a move the park hopes will make significant progress toward enhancing its sustainability and reducing its carbon footprint, Denali National Park has implemented a motor vehicle pool at its headquarters area. It is hoped the motor pool will help the park meet its “Green Energy Challenge,” a pledge to “reduce our carbon footprint by five percent in two to four of the following categories: transportation, water, energy and heat.”

The motor pool’s goals of enhanced sustainability fall in the areas of both environmental issues and budgetary ones. It is hoped that park consumption of non-renewables, including fuel, oil, and tires, will be reduced, and that staff and materials will be transported in the most economical manner, via increased organization, car-pooling to and from duty stations, and the scheduling of vehicles whose size is most appropriate to the specific task. It is hoped that data collected from the motor pool’s reservation calendar spreadsheet may indicate that the park can reduce the number of vehicles that it leases from the General Services Administration (GSA).

While the park’s approximately 110 vehicles average a total of about 600,000 miles each year, some park vehicles are accruing significantly less mileage than others and are parked a significant portion of the workday. It is hoped that assigning them to the motor pool will mean more use for them, and that the collected data will identify any vehicles that no longer are necessary to the park’s fleet and that may be returned to the GSA.

The park divisions primarily served by the motor pool include the superintendent’s office, the Center for Resources, Science, and Learning, administration, concessions, planning, and interpretation, and the buildings chiefly served include headquarters, the Center for Resources, Science, and Learning, the Denali Visitor Center, the Murie Science and Learning Center, concessions, planning, and interpretation. Previously assigned to specific park divisions, the fifteen vehicles presently assigned to the headquarters motor pool and available for reservation by park employees are located in the area between the headquarters, concessions, and interpretation buildings; keys to each vehicle are secured in a lock box in a central location. Those fifteen vehicles are in four categories: sedans, including Honda Civic Hybrids; vans, including Chevrolet Uplanders; SUVs, including Ford Escape Hybrids; and pickups. Other vehicles still are assigned to specific divisions; they must be available for specific purposes twenty-four hours a day, or their purpose was deemed so specific to their divisions that their potential use by other divisions was determined not to be practical. Also, a few mini-motor pools remain, with those vehicles available for more general use following their regularly scheduled service to their assigned divisions.

Each of the approximately 110 vehicles leased by the park from the GSA costs the park an average of about \$4,000 each year. Sedans and compact vans cost less than this average, while heavy trucks can cost as much as \$10,000 each year. Seven years ago the federal Office of the Inspector General (OIG) audited motor fleet practices throughout the federal Department of the Interior, of which the National Park Service, and Denali, are a part, and issued specific directions to reduce the number of vehicles used and the cost of those fleets. Denali’s vehicle use is above the levels established by the OIG, pegged to use in 2003, and means annual fines of \$25,000. Last year the 113 vehicles leased by the park from the GSA, and driven about 665,000 miles, cost a total of about \$539,000, or more than eighty cents per mile. Most of the more than 100 vehicles leased from the GSA each year are driven less than six months of the year.

This year the park is attempting more creative use of the Visitor Transportation System (VTS) shuttle buses, having some employees ride the shuttles, rather than use park vehicles, to access their duty stations, thus freeing up some vehicles for other uses. The park long has encouraged its employees to consider bicycles as a mode of transportation in certain parts of the park, and it is hoped that more of the VTS buses can be equipped with bicycle racks, to accommodate park employees using two-wheeled transportation. It also is hoped that the motor pool, with its goals of enhancing sustainability and reducing carbon footprints, will provide the impetus for more park employees to consider car-pooling between home and the park. 

BRIEF NEWS AND VIEWS

NEW SPECIAL ASSISTANT TO THE SECRETARY OF INTERIOR APPOINTED

On May 7, 2009 Interior Secretary Ken Salazar appointed Pat Pourchot as his Special Assistant for Alaska Affairs. Pourchot's office will be in Anchorage, from which he will work closely with Interior senior management in Alaska and in Washington, DC. Pourchot has a strong background in public lands management and advocacy, having spent several years at BLM, the Department of the Interior, the Alaska Federation of Natives and one of the Alaska Native Regional corporations. He worked in state government as a legislator, then for Gov. Tony Knowles as legislative director, then Commissioner of DNR. Pat's most recent employment has been as a senior policy representative for Audubon Alaska. One of Pat Pourchot's important Washington contacts will be Kim Elton, former Juneau legislator, appointed by President Obama in March as Director of Alaska Affairs in the Department of the Interior. The Department of the Interior manages not only National Park lands in Alaska, but lands under the Bureau of Land Management, the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

NORTHERN ALASKA ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER CHOOSES NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Northern Alaska Environmental Center in Fairbanks has selected a new Executive Director, Karen Max Kelly. According to Dan Adams, Interim Executive Director, a recent newsletter introduced Kelly, stating "She is a former 20-year resident of Fairbanks and holds both a BS in Anthropology and an MS in Botany from the University of Alaska, Fairbanks. Karen's broad experience in the nonprofit sector includes work as a fundraiser, board member, board chair, and political activist in Juneau...the NAEC team welcomes her June 1st arrival and start date."

DENALI NATIONAL PARK GETS \$16 MILLION IN STIMULUS FUNDS

In the recent allocation of stimulus funds under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, Denali National Park has been favored with 16 million dollars for various "shovel ready" projects. The National Parks in Alaska, as a whole, received \$21,866,000. Denali's projects will include a large allocation to replace the waste water treatment facility at the entrance area. Other projects include trail rehabilitation, mine reclamation and replacement of chemical toilets with pit toilets. Replacement of chemical toilets with pit toilets was given a high priority in a recent Environmental Assessment that proposed removing all remaining chemical toilets from Denali rest stops as soon as possible to reduce the burden of chemical waste on the existing waste treatment facility. The new waste treatment facility will be configured to dump the treated effluent into the Nenana River. Nearby hotels have waste water treatment facilities that dump effluent into the river. Total impact upon the Nenana River from these collective systems has never been studied.

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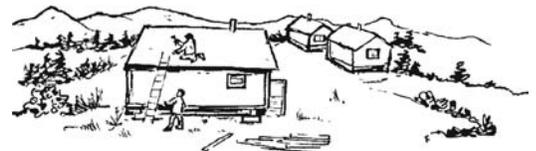
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Denali Citizens Council is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization. Our mission is to protect the natural integrity of Denali National Park and to promote a sustainable future for lands surrounding the Park. Please join by filling out this form and mailing it to the address below.

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