

AN INVITATION TO DENALI CITIZENS COUNCIL ANNUAL MEETING JULY 19TH

JOIN DCC AND WILLIE KARIDIS FOR WILDERNESS OF DENALI 100

by Julia Potter

Join Willie Karidis, Executive Director of the Denali Education Center, at the Annual DCC Meeting, as he shares his winter journey from January 21 through March 21 on the Toklat River in a presentation titled “Wilderness of Denali 100.” Hoping to gain a first hand insight into the life of Charles Sheldon, the inspiration for this trip, Karidis discovers a rich connection to the meaning of wilderness and common themes we share.

Charles Sheldon spent the winter of 1907-1908 in the heart of the Alaska Range, on the banks of the upper Toklat River. His experience ultimately led to a vision for the creation of Mt. McKinley National Park, now known as Denali National Park and Preserve. Karidis’ presentation is sure to inspire a commitment to maintain the wilderness of Denali which Sheldon envisioned 100 years ago.



Willie Karidis, Executive Director of the Denali Education Center
Photo courtesy of Willie Karidis



Denali's winter wilderness Photo courtesy of Willie Karidis

Our evening on July 19th at the McKinley Village Community Center begins with a dessert buffet at 6:30 p.m. followed by a review of the past year with DCC President Nancy Bale at 7:00 p.m. Willie Karidis’ presentation begins at 7:30 p.m.

This year’s annual meeting will also include the election of our board of directors. Ballots are being mailed to members and the elected board will be announced at the meeting.

Make plans to attend an evening of delicious desserts, hear what DCC has accomplished this past year, enjoy an inspirational presentation and find out who these prints belong to.



Photo courtesy of Willie Karidis

See you there! 

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Friends and Members,

In our last newsletter we published your comments and suggestions on DCC's Vision Statement. You agreed that although trends are disheartening, DCC should maintain a strong, idealistic Vision that reflects conservation values within the park and in its surrounding communities. Values for preservation of wildlife and habitat will dominate in the National Park, while conservation values supporting a balance of uses and long term planning will dominate on municipal and state lands surrounding the park. We are diligently working on a new Vision statement that more accurately defines DCC's unique goals for the Denali region. With any luck, we will have it ready by our Annual Meeting, Saturday July 19th.

The precarious balance between building constituency and protecting wild lands

Over the past three decades, visitation to Denali has increased fourfold. Hotels and businesses have created an urban, "built environment" in the Nenana Canyon, drawing folks from around the world to this densely packed staging area. Tourism providers tout their "right" to see and visit a public national park.

These people could become a strong constituency for preserving National Parks. However, unmanaged proliferation of hotels and visitor services presents a problem for the preservation of Denali's authentic wilderness character. How soon will visitation begin to impair park values? Can 600,000 visit per year? How will Denali Park retain that "authentic experience with the land" that creates a constituency for conservation? This will be the key question for the next 10-20 years.

As Charlie Bird stated in the Mar-Apr DCC News, *"Denali is at the bleeding edge of the 21st Century's challenge to wild public lands. The land will stay neither wild nor public unless it has a constituency to preserve it. Building constituency requires authentic experience with the land. Every authentic experience leaves a footprint. Preservation and constituency vibrate in constant tension."*

In my opinion, the constituency for conservation, over the next decades, must be composed of people who not only appreciate Denali National Park because they have visited it, but who appreciate the park because it exists, as a haven for wild ecosystems, vast landscapes and natural sounds. This constituency will not demand access as a pre-requisite for their support. They will instead appreciate that the existence of unimpaired natural landscapes requires that we control our human appetites. There will be no other way to maintain this park's premier status.

We at DCC have continuously stressed the "National Park difference." We argue that national parks should look and feel different from surrounding federal, state and municipal lands. This "difference" requires a strong attachment to maintaining wild landscapes and ecosystems. This "difference" can only be maintained through proactive management in the face of aggressive, insistent players and their demands for open access. The world is watching. Can we accomplish this?



Native Knowledge Network

Nancy Bale

FROM THE COMMUNITY ORGANIZER

by Julia Potter

The wildlife at Denali National Park and Preserve is awakening from winter's sleep, taking advantage of summer's short season to fatten up before winter is upon us again. A trip into the park in early May revealed snow covered tundra, still frozen rivers and majestic views. There have been sightings of a Grizzly sow and two cubs at Savage River, a cow moose and calves near headquarters, wolves along the roadside and snowshoe hares in dizzying abundance. Although the porcupine was spotted along the Denali Highway near Cantwell, I couldn't resist placing his (her?) photo here since it is somewhat rare to see one not scurrying away through the underbrush.



Photo courtesy of Ron Fisher

As the rivers slowly thaw and the many migrating birds begin to make their way to Denali, it's a great time to get out for a hike in the park. Check out some of the ranger programs or stop by the Murie Science and Learning Center to participate in one of the many fine programs from Alaska Geographic. Denali has so much to offer for visitors and year round residents like me. It's also a great way to stay informed first hand about the many issues facing Denali.

Along with spring comes our annual spring membership renewal and recruitment. Denali Citizens Council appreciates your membership donations which help to support our programs and our Community Organizer position. I also want to thank the family and friends of Steven Earl Barb for their donations in his memory. Their generosity to DCC and their love for Steven is overwhelming. Thank you!

Coming up in July is the DCC Annual Membership Meeting. This year seats on our board are up for election and you will be receiving ballots shortly. Be sure to vote or if you are interested in serving on our board or volunteering give me a call. ☎

THANK YOU
NEW AND RENEWING MEMBERS
SINCE OUR LAST NEWSLETTER

<p>MAJOR DONORS</p> <p>Jeff Forsythe Charlie & Mary Loeb</p> <p>SUMMIT</p> <p>Mark & Patti Jordan Cass Ray Lowell Thomas</p> <p>NORTH PEAK</p> <p>Shelia & Jim Craig Sharyn Gerhardt Jon & Karin Nierenberg Bill Watkins</p>	<p>TUNDRA</p> <p>Mindy & Mike Lindgren Judy Starkey Saylor & Chuck Saylor Mike Tranel Mary Zalar</p> <p>TAIGA</p> <p>William Butler Mike Crofoot Joanne Groves Phyllis Hassinger Frank Keim Kirsty Knittel Charles Lennox Mark Lovegreen</p>
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Donations in Memory of Steven Earl Barb

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SHOULD CONCEALED HANDGUNS BE ALLOWED ON PARK BUSES?



Native Knowledge Network

by Joan Frankevich

That's exactly what will happen if a new regulation proposed by the Bush Administration is passed. The National Rifle Association is pushing for this change that would allow loaded, concealed weapons anywhere in national parks – including on Denali park buses.

The current regulations, first written in 1936 and updated under the Reagan Administration, allow guns to be transported through the park as long as they are unloaded and stowed. Additionally, in all of the 1980 Denali park and preserve additions, firearms are allowed without restriction. These regulations have worked well for years—and have helped ensure that national parks are among the safest places in the country while preventing the unlawful killing of wildlife. The NRA is attempting to fix a problem that simply does not exist. According to NPS, the probability of becoming a victim of a violent crime in a national park is 1 in 708,333 – which is less likely than being struck by lightning during one's lifetime.

DCC believes the existing firearm regulations work well and should remain in place. For information on the proposed changes see <http://www.doi.gov/issues/firearms.html>. You can submit comments at <http://www.regulations.gov> or via regular mail to: Public Comments Processing, Attn: 1024-AD70; Division of Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 222; Arlington, VA 22203. Be sure to identify your comment by the number 1024-AD70.

The deadline for public comment on the proposed change to firearm regulations is June 30. ☞

Denali Citizens Council received the letter below, which was submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, commenting on the proposed change of allowing concealed weapons in national parks:

June 6, 2008

Dear Sir/Madame:

I am a member of the Coalition of National Park Retirees and the Association of National Park Rangers, a current faculty member of the Eppley Institute for Parks and Public Lands (Indiana University), and an adjunct faculty member of Northern Arizona University. I retired from the National Park Service following a 31-year career in visitor and resource protection as a commissioned law enforcement ranger. I have 35 years of experience in the parks and public lands arena.

I am writing to express my opposition regarding the proposed changes to regulations (1024-AD70) that would allow the carrying of loaded firearms in units of the National Park Service. My years of experience have shown me that the current regulations work and that there is no reason to change them.

During my field career I received few if any complaints from gun owners when I asked them to unload and make inaccessible their firearms while in NPS areas. They readily complied. The NRA and some easily misled lawmakers seem to have tried to find an issue where none exists. Perhaps the real agenda is to further the current administration's desire to de-nationalize the National Park Service - an action that would seem unwise in the face of the over-whelming support that the American public gives to the NPS.

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*The Constitution of the United States recognizes the supremacy of federal law and regulation, and there is no legal requirement to make national parks look and feel like their surrounding states. Nor do they need to look like BLM or USFS lands. 16 U.S.C. 1a-1 declares that the units of the National Park System are “united through their inter-related purposes and resources into one national park system as cumulative expressions of a single national heritage.” Congress and the courts have long advanced the concept that the National Park System is to be managed as something quite different than other federal public lands. This concept has been upheld by the courts in numerous cases, including *NRA v. Potter* and *SUWA v. Dabney*.*

I have seen firsthand the over reactions of visitors to perceived threats by wildlife. I have talked to a frightened man who was convinced that the croaking of a raven in the bushes was actually the sound of much larger creature stalking him on a high use trail. My co-workers tell of the urban visitor they found in the trees screaming “Moose! Moose!” as a tired elk did nothing but graze nearby. I have watched visitors cover at the sight of snakes and alligators as those critters try to do nothing but avoid the visitor’s presence and get out of their way. I am concerned about the safety of the public, the employees, the wildlife and the gun carrying visitor when they attempt to “protect” themselves from a perceived threat that they have so little knowledge of. The job of the NPS is to protect the resources under its care while helping the public safely interact with them. That equation has worked successfully for years in part due to the long-established legal concept that these areas are strict sanctuaries for the wildlife therein. I believe that they should also be sanctuaries for the visitor who seeks spiritual renewal and a connection to their natural and cultural heritage when they enter these places.

Today I read in the AZ Daily Sun of a visitor who defied the prohibition of loaded firearms as he entered Grand Canyon National Park. As he showed his fellow van passengers his loaded .22 caliber handgun (for what reason we can only guess), he accidentally shot himself in the leg. His wound was described as life-threatening, but the rangers saved his life, after first securing the firearm. A .22 caliber handgun will have little effect on a charging bear, lion or elk. But at close range in a van full of innocents, and in the hands of a reckless owner it can cause great damage. Are you feeling more secure?

South of Flagstaff on USFS lands, a legally armed man was hiking a few years ago when he encountered a homeless man with two dogs that he perceived as threatening. He fired warning shots at the dogs before firing fatal shots into the dog owner. He is now serving time in the penitentiary. Are you feeling more secure?

I have encountered numerous armed visitors to parks who are so intoxicated or under the influence of drugs that they cannot pass a standard sobriety test, let alone exhibit proper judgment regarding the use of a firearm. Are you feeling more secure?

The bottom line is that some visitors arrive at the park gate with all of the baggage of their anger, stress and in some cases criminal intent that they brought from wherever they came. More readily available guns in parks may well lead to more gun violence among these visitors. The potential for lethal force is obviously greater when firearms are immediately available as a means to resolve the inevitable tensions that come when visitors are crowded into unfamiliar environments. Let’s think long and hard about this before making changes based on what seems to be the NRA’s need to poke their finger in the eye of the NPS.

By any measure national parks continue to be among the safest places in the country. Why would anyone want to take this status away from these places where the public comes to recreate, learn and gain inspiration? Congress, please spend your time fixing that which is broken (and there are plenty of examples in our National Parks), rather than that which is not.

Mr. Kim Watson

ACCESS TO DENALI IS MORE EXPENSIVE FOR ALL BUS RIDES

PROBLEM OF AFFORDABILITY IS SIGNIFICANT FOR THE PARK'S PUBLIC SHUTTLE SYSTEM

by Cass Ray

With fuel prices at record highs, and Alaska and the Denali area enduring some of the highest costs in the nation, those devoted to ensuring that the park beyond the Savage River Check Station is affordable for families and young people may be forgiven for fretting over the future of the prices of the park's shuttles and tours.

Some shuttle prices have increased 30% in past five years

Already, this summer, a shuttle to the new visitor center at Eielson costs a family of two adults and two children \$87.50, and the twelve-hour Kantishna Experience tour sets that family of four back a whopping \$417. Four years ago, the last summer before the old Eielson Visitor Center was demolished, an adult's shuttle ticket to Eielson cost \$23; this summer it goes for \$29.25, an increase of 27%. While the cost to hop a shuttle to Polychrome and Toklat this summer is up only 25 cents (1%), the past five years have seen the price rise 30%, from \$17.50 to \$22.75. Similarly, this summer a ticket for the camper bus, long beloved by those hoisting backpacks and sleeping bags, is up only a half dollar (less than 2%), but the past five years have seen a 30% jump, from \$22.50 to \$29.25. To see Wonder Lake this summer will cost a visitor a \$40 shuttle ticket, up 29% from the \$31 that it cost five years ago.



Tour buses on the Park Road. Prices for tours are up an average of 9% from last year. Photo courtesy of Kim Turnbull

Tour bus prices show similar increases

The prices of the three tours offered by the park's concessioner are up an average of nearly 9% from last year. At \$93.50 this summer, the price of the Tundra Wilderness Tour (TWT) is up nearly 12% from last year, and up nearly 33% from the \$70.50 of 2003. (In an Associated Press travel article that ran in newspapers all over the country last winter, the writer called the \$93.50 TWT "reasonably priced" and counseled park visitors to "opt for longer tours if you have time. You'll go deeper into Denali on the six-to-eight-hour Tundra Wilderness Tour than on the three-to-four-hour Natural History Tour. A third Denali bus tour, the Kantishna Experience, is even longer at 12 hours.")

Similarly, at \$55.95, the price of the Denali Natural History Tour (DNHT) is up 7% from last year, and up a whopping 57% from the \$35.75 of only five years ago. (While the annual increases in the price of the TWT the past five years have swung from 2% to nearly 12%, with stops along the way at

another 2%, 9%, and nearly 4%, they've seemed almost consistent compared to the hikes in the price of the DNHT, which jumped from a hike of 2%, in 2004, to one of a full 30%, the very next year.)

The third tour, the Kantishna Experience (KE), in only its second year, at \$139 is up \$10, or nearly 8%, from last summer's \$129. (Incidentally, the KE enjoyed by that family of four would prove a touch pricier if booked through at least one travel website, which offers the tour, otherwise selling for \$139, for \$169, including the park's \$10 entrance fee; "rates do not include taxes or fees and are subject to change without notice." Similarly, while the website posted by Doyon/ARAMARK Joint Venture (JV), the park's concessioner, advertises a \$69.50 KE rate for children age 14 and under, the travel website cited above bumps it up to \$89. JV's prices for children's bus tickets generally are half the cost of adults', rounded to the nearest 25 cents.)

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ACCESS TO DENALI IS MORE EXPENSIVE

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Department of Labor decision increasing concession wages has been a factor

The Park's contract with JV stipulates that the Consumer Price Index (CPI) that is applied to rates each year be based on prices in the Anchorage area. But many of the recent increases, including 5% of this summer's hike in tour fees and 15% of the increase in shuttle fees last summer, are a result of the much-discussed decision two years ago by the U. S. Department of Labor. In late June 2006, notes an official briefing from the park, the Department's Employment Standards Administration, Wage and Hour Division, issued a "final determination" that the McNamara-O'Hara Service Contract Act of 1965 applied to the transportation concession contract between Denali and JV; two weeks later a letter from the park service "directed the concessioner to comply." The wage rates dictated by that determination were, it was noted, "considerably higher than the previous rate for many of the positions involved in the Denali concession contract." JV paid wages and fringe benefits retroactive to mid-2006 and upped current wages; the "direct cost" of implementing the decision for last year was said to be \$1.1 million. In the same year, about \$400,000 was paid retroactively for 2006.

In mid-July of last year, via a contract amendment, the park service agreed to "offset" JV's costs from 2006 and 2007 by temporarily reducing the franchise fee and **applying a rate increase for the shuttle system.** JV's franchise fee was said to have been reduced by about \$1.3 million (while still producing \$1.8 million), and the shuttle rate increase to have generated about \$250,000. ("In order to lessen the impact on the park," Washington's fund of 20% concession franchise fees provided Denali with \$800,000.)

Affordability of the "public shuttle system" could become problematic for NPS

The cost of shuttle runs to Toklat/Polychrome, Wonder Lake, Kantishna, Fish Creek (the Fish Creek turnaround, at the foot of Stony Dome, subbed for the Eielson Visitor Center as a destination during the three years that Eielson was re-constructed), even the camper bus (whose rates were the same as Eielson/Fish Creek for all the years since 2003) increased at least 18%, and, in the case of Wonder Lake, nearly 20% last summer.

Specifically how escalating fuel costs will affect the prices of shuttle and tour bus tickets and, hence, the affordability for families and young people of venturing past the Savage River Check Station—for that matter, how fuel costs will affect overall park visitation numbers—will be worth following. However, before fuel costs began rising so dramatically, an upward trend in the number of total bus seats sold was reflected in recent park stats. The 296,674 shuttle and tour bus seats filled last summer meant an increase of 3%, or ,259 seats, over the year before (following two years of small increases of nearly 1% and nearly 2%), and a climb of nearly 6%, or 16,665 seats, over three years before. **☞**



Shuttle and tour buses at Polychrome. Will affordability affect families and young people wishing to venture beyond Savage River Check Station?
Photo courtesy of Kim Turnbull

If you have comments about the rising fees or other issues with the Visitor Transportation System in Denali please send your comments to Julia Potter, Community Organizer, Denali Citizens Council, P.O. Box 78, Denali Park, AK 99755 or e-mail to: mail@denalicitizens.org.

DENALI BOROUGH GAS DEVELOPMENT CONTROVERSY HAS NO CLEAR END

BOROUGH ASSEMBLY GUTS ORDINANCE 05-21, BALKS AT PASSING A RESOLUTION ADVOCATING LIMITS; STATE OF ALASKA WILL NOT COMMIT TO A CERTAIN DATE FOR FINAL BEST INTEREST FINDING

by Nancy Bale

Local Alaska gas development was controversial from the beginning

In 2003, when Usibelli Coal Mine, Inc. first applied for shallow gas leases on 46,000 acres near Healy, shallow gas (or coalbed methane) drilling was a hot topic. Evergreen Resources, a Colorado based drilling company, held leases in the Mat-Su Valley and planned to develop, despite a loud outcry from locals. The Mat-Su controversy uncovered citizens' concerns about the process and impacts of gas drilling in and around communities. It prompted the Mat-Su Borough Assembly to pass a regulatory ordinance in 2004 and the State of Alaska Division of Oil and Gas to publish enforceable standards governing shallow gas development in the Mat-Su Valley. In fact, the shallow gas program did not survive beyond mid 2004, when the State Legislature dropped it in favor of a more rigorous process. Eventually Evergreen relinquished their leases.

After the demise of the shallow gas program, Usibelli reapplied to explore for gas in fall 2004 under the new program, which required a competitive bid and a Best Interest Finding. In January 2005, the state began a long process of collecting public comments and information on Usibelli's request, including scoping, then preparation of a Preliminary Finding. On Aug. 31, 2005 the state published the Preliminary Best Interest Finding, potentially opening 208,000 acres to exploration and possible development. Comments on this Preliminary BIF were due in October 2005. The state indicated that a Final Finding could be available as early as December 2005.

Denali Borough Assembly fails to submit comments, later acts to limit gas development

The Denali Borough Assembly failed to submit substantive comments by the deadline, and although they later attempted to have the state re-open the comment period, the state refused to do so. In an effort to show support for its citizens, the Assembly passed Ordinance 05-21 in 2006, prohibiting gas development on lands west of the Parks Highway and giving landowners the right to refuse to negotiate with the developer.

State of Alaska faults Borough Ordinance, applies unrelenting pressure

Both Usibelli and the State of Alaska warned the borough that this Ordinance violated the state's subsurface primacy. While surface owners could demand mitigation and compensation for entry onto their property, neither they nor their government, the Assembly was told, could refuse entry. Steady pressure from the state, including veiled threats of legal action, finally resulted in the virtual repeal of Ordinance 05-21 by Ordinance 08-07 on May 14, 2008. The protections remaining were setbacks. DCC urged the Assembly to pass a resolution supporting the "no-development" spirit of Ordinance 05-21. It looked as if a resolution might pass at the May Assembly meeting, but it failed in a close vote, 4-3. At the June Assembly meeting, Clay Walker presented a new resolution, with clearer language and the same intent, but it failed to get enough votes to be introduced. This long, sad history leaves the Denali Borough government, the local voice of the people, with little standing on the subject of gas development near Healy.

DCC remains optimistic regarding ultimate outcome

The Denali Citizens Council does not favor prohibition of gas development in the entire Denali Borough. Instead, we support limits that protect sensitive lands and the orderly evolution of this community. The benefits of employment and local revenue remain possible under a limited gas development scenario. Although we are disappointed the Borough Assembly has so utterly ignored the opinions of many borough citizens, we remain optimistic about the final outcome. Our next steps are:

1. Encouraging the State of Alaska to issue a Final BIF as soon as possible.
2. Addressing and possibly appealing any deficiencies noted in the Final BIF.
3. Providing information to the community on landowner rights and responsibilities.
4. Keeping you up to date with email updates on this issue. 

"The revenue stream to the state from the proposed exploration license and any downstream production is not expected to significantly impact the overall oil and gas revenue of the state of Alaska. The best interests of local residents is therefore of critical importance to the best interest decision." From page 1-11 of Preliminary Best Interest Finding

WACAP STUDY FINDS POLLUTANTS IN ALASKAN NATIONAL PARK LAKES

STUDY FINDS THAT NORTHERN PARKS HAVE HIGHEST COUNTS

by Nancy Bale

A six year study measuring the concentrations of several pollutants in western national parks has produced sobering results in some of Alaska's National Park units. The Western Airborne Contaminants Assessment Project (WACAP) is a cooperative effort among several federal agencies and the Universities of Oregon and Washington.

Scientists collected samples from fish, conifer needles, lichen, lake sediments, water, air and snow in Denali National Park, Noatak National Preserve and Gates of the Arctic National Park (less comprehensive monitoring was performed in some other Alaskan parks). Concentrations of a number of known toxins were measured using these samples. The purpose of the study, which also sampled a few lower 48 parks, was fourfold:

- Determine if contaminants are present in western national parks
- If present, determine where contaminants are accumulating (geographically and by elevation)
- If present, determine which contaminants pose a potential ecological threat
- Determine which indicators appear to be the most useful to address contamination
- Determine the sources for contaminants measured at the national park sites

Alaska's parks are so remote that the discovery of potentially dangerous concentrations of dieldrin (an insecticide now banned in the USA) and mercury (an airborne contaminant from burning coal) indicate that these chemicals likely traveled from distant sites. Study results showed that no region worldwide is immune to the affects of polluting activities by humans. Some of the concentrations found in fish in Noatak Preserve and Gates of the Arctic Park reached levels that triggered advisories on how much of those fish should be eaten. McLeod Lake, in Denali Wilderness west of the Muddy River, provided one of the sample sites in Denali. Mercury concentrations in whitefish from that Lake did not exceed currently established standards for human health, but did go way past what a Belted Kingfisher should consume. Much more data are available on the web at http://www.nature.nps.gov:80/air/Studies/air_toxics/wacap.cfm 

PARKS BYWAY COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

DRAFT PLAN AVAILABLE FOR PUBLIC REVIEW

by Julia Potter

After nearly two and a half years, with residents from local areas of Trapper Creek, Byers Creek, Cantwell and Healy, and the help of Penny Bauder, planner with Alaska State Parks, the draft plan for the George Parks Scenic Byway is complete. Local residents from both Denali and Mat-Su Boroughs came together to create the Parks Byway Community Partnership to craft the plan. Meetings were held in Trapper Creek, Cantwell and Healy in early June to provide comments for the final plan due out later this summer. Public comments are due July 3, 2008.

The George Parks Highway Scenic Byway covers miles 132-248 of the highway, from Denali State Park to Healy. Once the plan is finalized, the partnership is aiming for a National Byway designation. Alaska has 11 scenic byways, 2 of which are designated All-American Roads, the top scenic byway designation. The Parks Byway Community Partnership hope to gain this designation in the future.

To read the draft plan and to learn more about the Alaska scenic byways program, the National Scenic Byway Program and information on the All American Road status visit <http://www.dot.state.ak.us/stwdplng/scenic/organizer-info.shtml>. 

DENALI BOROUGH LAND SELECTIONS IN FINAL STAGE OF CONVEYANCE

PUBLIC COMMENT ON PRIORITY I SELECTIONS WILL BE DUE JULY 31, 2008
MORE THAN 22,000 ACRES COULD BE REMOVED FROM WILDLIFE HABITAT STATUS

by Nancy Bale

Mention “borough entitlements” to a Denali-area citizen and you are likely to experience some rolling of the eyes. This long standing land acquisition process has been a complex, even daunting task. Land planning for the Denali Borough, in general, has been fraught with controversy, and while progress has been made, public involvement has been uneven. In fact, resignations from the Planning Commission recently resulted in its duties being taken over by the Borough Assembly, an early demise for an institution just recently established as a free standing body.

Despite the real problem of public apathy or inattention (too busy!), important things are happening, and one of them is on the fast track right now - conveyance of top priority municipal entitlements to the Denali Borough. Why should this be important to DCC members? First some history.

History of state municipal entitlement involvement

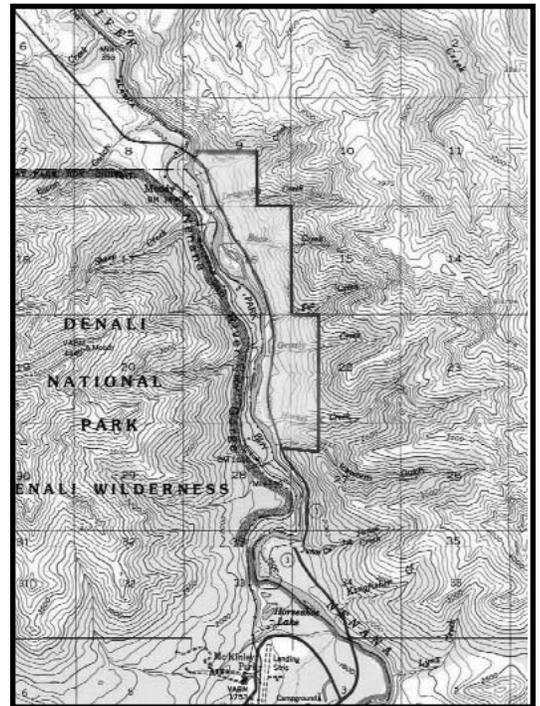
In 1992, three years after the Denali Borough was incorporated, it became eligible, under the Municipal Entitlement Act, to select 49,789 acres of state land for ownership. The purpose of the Municipal Entitlement Act was to provide lands to; 1) Create or expand a tax base, 2) Generate revenue through land sales and leases, 3) provide a land base that could be reserved for public areas or facilities and for community expansion. The state has already approved 20,485 acres for conveyance to the borough.

All state lands within borough boundaries had already been classified by the state in its Tanana Basin Area Plan. The state gave general classifications based on their best available knowledge and public input at the time (1991). The classifications included Wildlife Habitat, Minerals, Public Recreation, Agriculture and Settlement. The classification of lands as Wildlife Habitat made them unavailable for conveyance. When the Denali Borough selected lands for conveyance, many of them were classified as Wildlife Habitat. The state then performed a multi-year process of map development and internal review, which is now finished. Recently state representatives presented their Preliminary Decision to a few borough residents at a public meeting in Healy. They favored reclassification of 22,000 acres from Wildlife Habitat to Public Recreation, so that they may be conveyed to the Denali Borough. In all, the plan is to convey approximately 25,000 acres to the borough.

Why is this an important issue for local citizens ?

The acquisition of lands could provide some financial benefits to the Denali Borough. The Borough, still young compared with adjacent Fairbanks and Mat-Su boroughs, has limited opportunities to raise money for its very important functions of funding the local school and solid waste collection. Bed taxes from the numerous (mostly seasonal) tourism businesses provide by far the greatest percentage of funds. Severance taxes provide the remainder.

However, comprehensive planning for these lands is still at the earliest stages. Citizens have the right to know how, in fact, the borough plans to use these lands. It would appear that offering them for sale to the highest bidder (read developers) would provide the biggest short term benefit with the lowest cost. How do citizens know that this is not the plan? Would sale of these lands have long term benefits...or not?



Glitter gulch north? - The shaded area depicts state lands in the Nenana Canyon that have been selected for conveyance to the Denali Borough. DCC Maps created with TOPO

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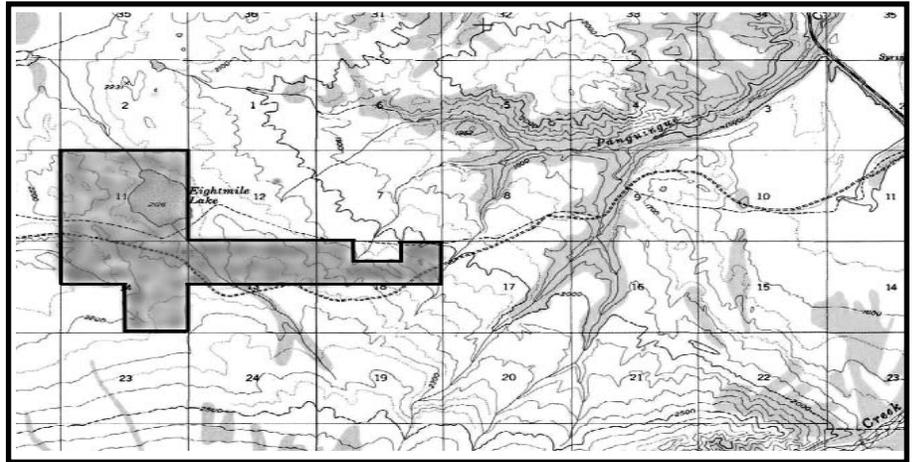
DENALI BOROUGH LAND SELECTIONS *continued from previous page*

Certain lands selected by the borough should remain in state ownership

Members of DCC support the orderly evolution of the community, including the conveyance of state lands to the borough. We also recognize the amenity value of certain key state lands that have been selected by the borough. We have written to the borough before about this issue. Their classification by the state as Wildlife Habitat is not trivial. Some of these lands are high value habitat! Some of them provide an important viewshed and sense of wilderness for park visitors. Retaining some of these lands in state ownership may better protect their amenity values. Which lands are these?

Selections east of the Parks Highway and south of Moody Bridge. This northern end of Nenana Canyon is currently undeveloped except for some small tourism amenities on gravel pads. The state opened for selection only lands east of the highway between Moody Bridge and Iceworm Gulch. Development would be severely limited by the steep grades of many sections along here. Encouragement of turning traffic in this region would render the highway even less safe than it already is. Retaining natural vegetation in the canyon will create a balance between a highly developed south end and a more natural north end, providing for an important viewshed to hikers and railroad passengers and maintaining wildlife corridors. Affected acreage: approx 800 acres.

Selections surrounding 8 Mile Lake. We support the retention of these lands by the state, ideally in a State Recreation Area- such use provides the best future for them. Many locals, in our Stampede Summits, have supported maintaining the important natural qualities of this area, recognizing that a few amenities may be necessary to manage increased use. Our Vision for lands West of Healy reflects what we have learned at the Stampede Summits and what we know about the high value of Stampede lands as habitat and for traditional recreational activities. The Denali Borough is not as experienced as the state in providing recreation management. Affected acreage: approx. 1120 acres.



Denali Borough selections at 8 Mile Lake and upper Stampede Road are shown on the map above. DCC favors retention in state ownership. DCC maps created with TOPO

It is interesting to note that the Alaska Department of Fish and Game recommended AGAINST the reclassification of both these selections, citing their high value as habitat and for public recreation. **20**

Comments are due on July 31, 2008

DCC intends to submit more detailed comments before the deadline. It is very important to review all the documents and maps if you are a local citizen. Your knowledge and experience is being sought. Do not let apathy prevent your involvement.

All plan documents and details are available on the web at the following link:
<http://www.dnr.state.ak.us/mlw/muni/index.htm>

A paper copy of the Preliminary Decision and maps is available at the DCC office (call first, 683-3396). You may request a paper copy of the plan from Merry Johnson at 1-907-269-8129

To speak with lead planner Monica Alvarez, call 269-8145

Comments are due by July 31, 2008 (5 PM) to Merry Johnson, 550 W. 7th Ave. Suite 1050, Anchorage Alaska 99501-3579, or merry.johnson@alaska.gov.

NPS ROAD CAPACITY STUDY VISITOR EXPERIENCE SURVEY

STUDY QUESTIONS DENALI PARK VISITORS ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCE ON THE PARK ROAD

by Julia Potter

The NPS Road Capacity Study, which began in 2006, continues to collect data on the many facets integrated into the study to determine the carrying capacity of the Denali Park Road. The current carrying capacity of 10,512 vehicles per year was established in 1986 in the General Management Plan. According to Philip Hooge, Assistant Superintendent for Resources, Learning and Science, this number has no defensible basis, it's an arbitrary number. It is based on the 1984 use levels allowing for a 20% increase in buses and a 45% decrease in private vehicles. The Road Capacity Study will hopefully provide a defensible vehicle limit based on the data collected as to the carrying capacity of the Park Road. DCC hopes the carrying capacity will be determined at the current level or lower. We are also interested in how the visitor experience will affect the number of vehicles on the park road.

During July and August 2007 a visitor survey was conducted by researchers from the University of Vermont. The first visitor survey in 2006, also by the researchers from the University of Vermont, was created to identify and assess key elements of visitor experience on the Denali Park Road. The researchers then used that information to create the 2007 visitor survey to quantify those experiences.

On April 15, 2008, Laura Phillips, Ecologist for the NPS Road Capacity Study, gave a presentation at the Murie Science and Learning Center titled "Buses, Bears and Binoculars," sponsored by Denali Education Center and Denali Citizens Council, on the results of this quantitative visitor survey. The presentation was interesting given the responses received from visitors completing the survey. The majority of those surveyed expressed similar opinions about which use levels were more acceptable on the Denali Park Road.

The survey was administered to visitors after they traveled the Denali Park Road. A total of 710 completed questionnaires were collected from riders on Camper, Visitor Transportation System (VTS), Tundra Wilderness Tour (TWT), Natural History Tour (NHT) and Lodge buses. The survey contained 15 questions, some of which related to simulated photos of buses traveling on the park road, at a rest stop and stopped for wildlife viewing to determine if and at what point visitors felt crowded by the number of buses shown.

Based on the visitors' actual experience, visitors completing the survey were asked which issues are problems on the Denali Park Road. These issues were split into the following four groups: Vehicles on the Road, Seeing Wildlife, The Buses, and Other. Some of the choices included too many buses on the Park Road, too many recreational or private vehicles on the road, not seeing enough wildlife, not seeing enough wildlife close to the road, and other similar questions about dust, number of people on the buses, noise created by visitors, bus noise, dirty windows, bus maintenance, lack of interpretative information provided on the bus, etc. Visitors were asked to score their responses by the extent of the problem (see Table 4 below.)

Table 4. Please indicate the extent to which you think the following issues are problems on the Denali Park Road.

w. Degradation of the quality of the Denali Park Road

	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>
Camper Bus User	144	1.35
General Bus User	194	1.38
Tundra Wilderness Tour	171	1.43
Natural History Tour	90	1.20
Lodge Bus User	83	1.52

x. Degradation of the wilderness character of the Denali Park Road (e.g., by buildings and human presence)

	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>
Camper Bus User	144	1.43
General Bus User	192	1.35
Tundra Wilderness Tour	169	1.30
Natural History Tour	90	1.21
Lodge Bus User	83	1.38

Problem categories are: Not a problem = 1, small problem = 2, big problem = 3, or don't know.

The sample size or how many people responded = N and the average response = Mean.

Table courtesy of NPS

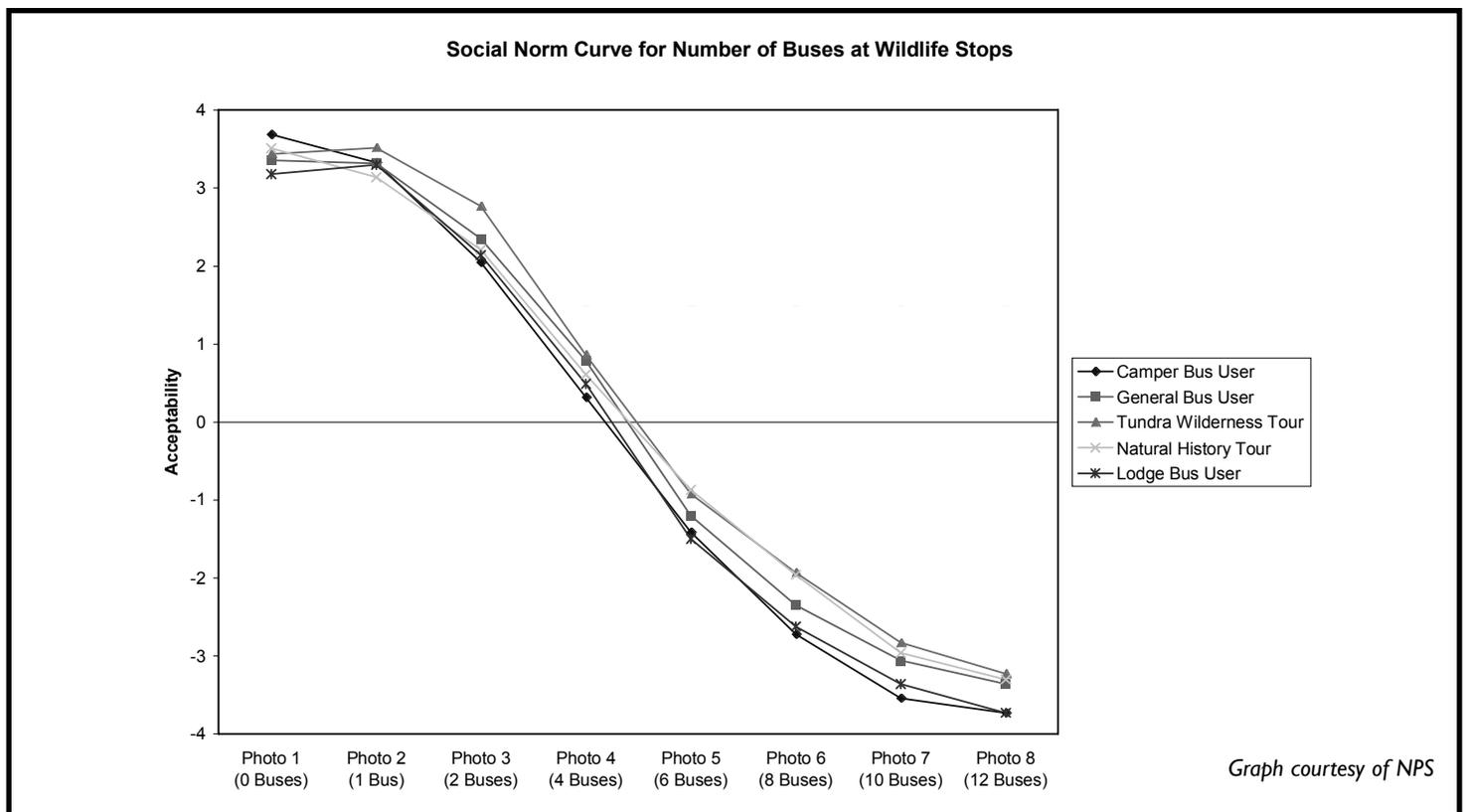
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ROAD CAPACITY STUDY VISITOR SURVEY

continued from previous page

Only a few issues came close to being a small problem which included too many buses on the park road, not seeing enough wildlife, not seeing enough wildlife close to the road, degradation of the Park Road, degradation of the wilderness character of the Park Road (as shown in Table 4), and dust along the road. Not having binoculars was rated by most as not a problem.

The questions presented by the simulated photos, asked visitors to rank acceptability for a variety of traffic scenarios. Acceptability was ranked from -4 as very unacceptable to +4 as very acceptable. Simulated photos showed buses on the park road, stopped at a rest stop or stopped for wildlife viewing. The photos showed from one to ten or more buses. Using a social norm curve to calculate acceptability, most visitors' acceptability went down after 3 to 5 buses on the road, stopped for wildlife or at rest stops. (See Social Norm Curve for Number of Buses at Wildlife Stops below.)



When it came to wildlife viewing, although many replied that not seeing enough wildlife close to the road was edging up toward being a small problem, most answered that a 25% chance of seeing a bear was acceptable. Visitors were also asked to what extent they felt they were traveling through wilderness while on the Park Road. Ranging from the choice of never feeling like traveling through wilderness (-2) to always felt like traveling through wilderness (+2), visitors responded from .70 (DNHT riders) to 1.25 (Lodge bus riders.)

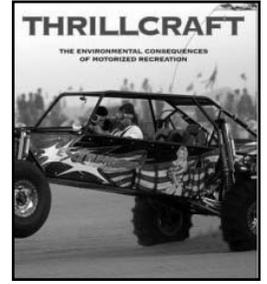
Additional information is available on the Denali Park website at <http://www.nps.gov/dena/nature-science/denali-park-road-capacity-study.htm> including the complete 2007 visitor survey questionnaire. For more information on the data and results of the 2007 visitor experience survey contact Laura Phillips via e-mail at: laura_phillips@nps.gov. Watch for member updates on the next presentation for this important study.

THRILLCRAFT: THE ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES OF MOTORIZED RECREATION

Book Review

by Roger Kaye

Here's an oversize, thick book filled with big color photos of natural landscapes, from Alaska to Florida, but quite unlike those that might grace your coffee table. Its pictures are disgusting and offensive—and intended to motivate you to support initiatives to rein in the damage being done by ATVs, dirt bikes, monster trucks, jet skies, and other such machines, collectively termed thrillcraft.



While there have been many exposés of the environmental impacts of motorized “wreckreation,” *Thrillcraft* is both the most vivid and most comprehensive treatment of this growing national issue. Editor George Wuethner has put together chapters by activists, policy experts, economists, and environmental and social scientists that go beyond describing the abuse being wrought upon our public lands.

The book is filled with facts you can use to refute the arguments of off-roaders and the powerful industry lobbyists seeking to motorize, commercialize, and privatize outdoor recreation. No, the damage isn't caused by “just a few bad apples,” it's the cumulative effect of increasing numbers of people who use these vehicles for the purpose for which there were designed, promoted, and marketed. Just look at the ads. And no, agency efforts to mitigate, to expand and harden ATV trails (at great public expense), and to educate and regulate users haven't reduced the overall degradation; they've accommodated it. Riders are regular folks being discriminated against by environmental elitists? The demographic research refutes it, as well as the claim that off-roading is a family activity—95 percent of ATVers are male.

The book points out that the way we use public lands for recreation teaches attitudes about our relationship to and responsibility toward the natural world. Traditional backcountry activities - hiking, birding, hunting, and fishing - convey a sense of appreciation for and connection to nature. Contrast that with the message of domination crafted and widely promoted by the thrillcraft industry. Consider their ads - the thrilling pictures, and the slogans: “Don't just hit the trail, pound it mercilessly.” (Bombardier); “It frees the beast within you.” (Polaris); “The Goodyear Mud Runner” (Goodyear); “Brute. As in beats up stuff.” (Kawasaki).

At a time when it's ever-more important to rethink our relationship to our increasingly stressed biosphere, thrillcraft culture may be having as a direct effect on the young minds it appeals to as it does on the landscapes it trammels.

Thrillcraft provides examples of places where efforts to either ban or restrict motorized abuse have been successful. But the book argues that if future generations are entitled to the same quality of public lands we inherited, nothing less than a complete ban on off-roading through them is what's ultimately needed. And, it says, it's attainable. **✪**

Chelsea Green Pub. 312 pp., \$60.00 (available on the Internet for \$38.00)



Native Knowledge Network

BRIEF NEWS & VIEWS

NEW NPS ALASKA REGIONAL DIRECTOR

Sue Masica will be the new Regional Director of National Park Service sites in Alaska replacing Marcia Blaszak who recently retired. Masica, as the National Park Service's chief of staff since 2006, served as senior advisor to Director Mary Bomar and other park service executives. She previously served as the Service's Associate Director for Park Planning, Facilities, and Lands. In this position, Masica was responsible for the formulation, justification, and execution of NPS infrastructure programs for construction, deferred maintenance, asset management, land acquisition, roadways, and planning. As the Associate Director for Administration Masica was in charge of the Service's budget, training, personnel, contracting and other support functions.

Prior to joining the NPS, Masica worked for 10 years on the staff of the United States Senate Committee on Appropriations as staff director of the Subcommittee on the Department of Interior and Related Agencies.

Masica earned a Master of Public Affairs degree from the University of Texas and a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from Austin College.

The Alaska Region is one of seven regions in the national park system encompassing 16 park units, 54.7 million acres, 1,000 employees during the summer, and an annual budget of nearly \$100 million.

Healy Clean Coal Plant to be revived? Enstar bullet line past Denali?

The statewide looming power crisis has spawned a number of proposals. One of them has been a restart of the Healy Clean Coal Plant (Healy 2) by Homer Electric Association. This plant, built in the 90's with clean energy funds and bonded by the state of Alaska is actually owned by the Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority (AIDEA). AIDEA and Golden Valley Electric Association, the proposed operator for Healy 2, disagreed on its readiness for operation with clean coal technology, and they have been in court for several years, trying to sort out their differences. Homer Electric's 2006 proposal to get the plant restarted and begin to purchase power in 2014 seemed optimistic. After getting a closer look at the project, HEA proposed bringing back GVEA's involvement. The current situation: Golden Valley is looking at the numbers, to see if they can afford to restart and operate the plant. Because it has been idle since 2000, the plant will likely need to go through new environmental compliance.

Enstar Natural Gas Company, well known on the Kenai Peninsula, has proposed a \$3 billion "bullet line" to connect gas fields owned by Anadarko in the North Slope foothills with the

DCC NEWS

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southcentral grid in the Palmer/Wasilla area. They have promised that Fairbanks would get a drink of the gas, but they have also made an agreement with Agrium on the Kenai Peninsula guaranteeing them a drink. How will this be funded and how will it pass the environmental compliance? Both questions beg for an answer. If built, it would be a large local project along the Parks Highway through Denali National Park. We all know and see every day the land through which this pipeline and its assorted infrastructure would run. Is there a mitigation plan? Will local homes have access to the gas? We are ready for more information from Enstar. ☞



DCC News

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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.

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