

WE CELEBRATE THE LIFE AND WORK OF GORDON HABER

by Nancy Bale

On Saturday, November 7, a group of local, regional and national citizens gathered in Anchorage at Campbell Creek Science Center to remember Dr. Gordon Haber. Haber, an independent wolf biologist who studied and advocated for Denali's wolves over more than 40 years, died in a tragic plane crash on the East Fork River at Denali Park, October 14, 2009. A diverse group of attendees – professors, former NPS employees, environmental advocates, pilots, writers, longtime friends from the Denali community and elsewhere – bespoke the breadth of Gordon's influence. Gordon's 90-year-old mother and his sister and her family, were there. They'd made the long trek from Florida and had traveled to Denali to see friends and places that had been important to him.

Organizers of the memorial event included Priscilla Feral, Director of the national nonprofit Friends of Animals, the group that provided funding for Gordon's wolf research efforts. The Campbell Creek Science Center, nestled in the trees at the base of the Chugach Range and removed from the downtown hustle and bustle of Anchorage, provided a fitting location. A light dusting of snow had recently fallen.

Photographer and longtime friend Johnny Johnson provided photographs remembering Gordon's career at the park. Rick Steiner, UAA professor and friend, presided over the event. Several speakers gave their unique memories of Gordon. Especially poignant was a recording made by Barbara Brease of Gordon's voice on her telephone answering machine detailing his observation of a wolf family helping its pups cross a river.



Gordon Haber in 1969 on the East Fork River.

Photo courtesy of Johnny Johnson

We were thankful to hear Ms. Feral commit to the work of gathering up and indexing Gordon's voluminous notes from both his Anchorage and Denali homes. Gordon's many projects included continuing advocacy to protect adequately the range of Denali's wolf families on state lands outside the park. Members of the group urged everyone to advocate strongly for reinstatement and expansion of no hunting/trapping buffers around Denali National Park, due to sunset this coming spring.

We all acknowledged the huge hole that has been left in advocacy for Denali Park's wolf families. Read a personal remembrance of Gordon by Steve Jones in this newsletter on page 4, and more articles on pertinent issues throughout the newsletter. To experience Gordon's advocacy in his own words and pictures, visit www.alaskawolves.org 

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FROM THE BOARD

The change of season in the fall is so dramatic and seems to happen so quickly. A dump of snow makes a quick end to the summer. The buzz and excitement in Glitter Gulch turn into boarded-up windows almost overnight. I have no time to regret all the things I didn't get to do over summer because there are things that have to get done in the fall. Some things are just easier without a blanket of snow on the ground. Mushing dogs, thankfully, is much easier with a blanket of snow. It's nice to have dogs to balance out life. Just as I am getting ready for the pace of life to slow down and take time off work, the dogs are getting ramped up to put in their 40 hours a week.

Like many people, I never intended to "move" to Alaska when I first came up here. The chance to spend a winter mushing sled dogs with my girlfriend, Bridget, was too good to pass up. Five years later, I am still friends with the first handful of people I met when I came to the park. The rich life that Alaska and Denali offer has made leaving here seem silly. And now, as I start to call this place home, I appreciate more and more the work that DCC does, and I am happy to have found a place here.

Because most of the land around where I live is publicly owned, DCC plays an important role in making sure that our local voices are taken into account when decisions regarding its use and management are made. I try to make the distinction that these lands are not owned by the National Park Service or Alaska DNR, but by the people of Alaska and the United States. I see DCC as an organization that helps us exercise this ownership.

Bridget and I spend a lot of our winter traveling along the old Stampede Road with our dogs. This beautiful piece of land is a part of Denali National Park in many ways. Wildlife doesn't know where the boundaries lie, and it seems hikers don't either. It is an important place for DCC, as we work to protect the greater Denali ecosystem. I think it is important to preserve this special place, so anyone lucky enough to stumble across it in 5, 25, or 50 years will find some of the same opportunities to explore here that I have.

People in this area have been thinking for a long time about what to do with the Stampede, and that question has been discussed at the "Stampede Summits." By and large, the community here wants to "keep it like it is," with easy access to recreational opportunities. But the pressure and opportunity for development from Outside are always present, and increased tourism would drastically change the character of the area. Whether it is building a new road to Kantishna, or improving the road to provide access to a hotel or more tours, the possibilities are out there. The impact would chase wildlife away, degrade the experience of being out there, and push the wild lands farther from our back door.

We have the opportunity now to choose how we want to manage the Stampede Corridor, before someone else makes that decision for us. Creating the Stampede State Recreation Area will both address the need for care and management now, as well as establish recreational use as the area's primary value. Through the state's Advisory Committee, local users will guide how the area is managed.

Eight Mile Lake sees the most damage from lack of management and facilities. Hikers, bikers, and anyone out looking for a view find the end of the gravel road a beautiful place to hang out. But with no trails, toilets or trash cans, that area suffers. Leaving it out of the Recreation Area could make the situation there worse.

I believe that creating the SRA gives us the best chance to preserve the Stampede as it is now, into the future, both in its character and its recreational and subsistence opportunities. It is not too much to ask the State to recognize that this already is a recreation area and to manage it as such. In doing so, I think we are deciding what we want this area to be and working to make it happen. 



Jared's dog Wickwire on the Stampede Trail. Easy access to recreational opportunities, such as mushing, is one of many reasons to create the Stampede State Recreation Area.

Photo courtesy of Jared Zimmerman

Jared Zimmerman

FROM THE COMMUNITY ORGANIZER by Julia Potter

This fall has brought about more than the anticipated spectacular colors and bright blue skies. I always anticipate the coming of winter - my favorite time of year - but I did not anticipate the beginning of new relationships. A very special one was with my Dad.

As a kid growing up in northern New Jersey, I spent a lot of time playing outdoors in the woods and swamps, ice skating and sledding in winter, or playing baseball with my siblings (six of them) and my parents. As a family we frequented many parks for the usual Sunday family drive. On those occasions I always enjoyed hanging out with my Dad. We seemed inseparable. As happens with many families, my parents divorced. Mom moved to Florida and within a few years Dad remarried. Since that time we have not had many opportunities to visit or just hang out like we did when I was a kid.

Since I moved to Alaska I've been hounding my family that they really need to experience Alaska for themselves. I get the usual excuses and of course the same old, "when are you coming to visit" routine. Funny how it's so much easier for those of us here to fly "outside." Needless to say, none of us are getting any younger and I think this concept has settled into my Dad's brain. So this year he kept telling me he was really wanting to come visit me in Alaska. Of course I'm thinking it will never happen. Boy was I wrong.

Through phone calls and email we determined that September was the perfect time for a visit. I would have the ability to take time off from work and the weather would be nice, and it would also be a little quiet since most of the tourists would have been here and gone by then. So, on September 11, my Dad arrived in Fairbanks. To say he was excited is an understatement. He just couldn't believe he was really in Alaska. He immediately called his wife, Annette, to tell her he was here and of course what the temperature was - a lovely 50 degrees.

The excitement never abated. We spent a day out on the Denali Highway looking at the mountains and scenery. We drove down the Parks Highway to Broad Pass where Denali was as majestic as ever along with its companions. Turning around to head north all of the mountains along the Denali Highway were also boasting their grandeur. The look on my Dad's face said so much more than words - excitement, awe, unbelievable, will someone please pinch me to let me know I'm not dreaming - kind of look.

His next treat came when we spent a day in Denali. I had to make a delivery of books to the Toklat Rest Stop so we took the Alaska Geographic truck into the park. What a day! The landscapes along the road had him gaping. He was speechless. Then we spotted Dall sheep on a steep hillside followed up by two very large rams at Polychrome in close proximity to the road. Next was a small band of caribou - a large male with several females and calves. I spotted a grizzly sow and cub. She was digging for squirrels and we were invisible. A fox trotting along the roadside totally ignored our presence. We stopped at Eielson for lunch and enjoyed the new building and exhibits. We decided to head back east. Dad spotted another grizzly on the Tek - he was so thrilled to have spotted wildlife.

As is typical of a day driving the park road, we were both feeling tired and road weary when at Igloo a few folks were stopped on the road. My Dad is telling me we don't have to stop when one of the onlookers came up to me and whispered, "two lynx." I got excited! "Dad. Lynx?" We parked. What an experience. Two lynx were napping under a spruce tree. I was probably more excited than Dad. Not far down the road was a very large moose bull and a female. An onlooker told us that the big bull had just chased off a younger competitor. Dad was thrilled.

It was an awesome week hanging out like we did when I was a kid. Reconnecting. Exploring. Enjoying each other's company. Making a new beginning. The best part of his visit - my seeing him excited and so thrilled by the trip of a lifetime. For Dad it was seeing me still excited about Alaska, excited about his Alaska experience and reconnecting with his daughter.

Life is good. Share it with those you love. 

THANK YOU

NEW AND RENEWING MEMBERS
SINCE OUR LAST NEWSLETTER

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Kathryn Fuller
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Diane Tracy & Juliann Schamel

A TRIBUTE TO GORDON HABER 1943-2009

by Steve Jones

We will all notice his absence; some of us will miss him for his efforts toward protecting wolves, some of us because he was a dear friend.

Wednesday afternoon I received a call telling me Gordie and Dan were overdue on their flight plan. Thursday afternoon I heard that the plane had been found. I called another of Gordie's friends in Anchorage, Johnny Johnson, to see what he knew. At that point things didn't look good, but you never know. Later I heard there were human remains in the wreckage. I went to Gordie's cabin with a couple rangers to see if we could find information about next of kin. Typical of Gordie, the place was locked up tight. Not long after that I got word Dan was alive and the remains were indeed Gordie's. Thus the fate of my friend Gordon Haber was sealed.

He died doing what he loved doing and in a manner he had expressed a desire for to at least three people. As my daughter said the next day on her Facebook page: "Gordon! The wolves and my family will miss you."

Gordie (only a couple of us still get away with using that name) and I go back to the 60's when he and George Perkins were Eielson rangers. In 1969 Gordie spent the winter, based at Sanctuary cabin, using a snow machine to travel back and forth. He had started what would be a lifelong pursuit of wolves in Denali Park. We spent most weekends at my cabin on the east end that winter and formed a lasting friendship. The next fall he helped me haul furniture to my new cabin in the McKinley Village area, just in time so we could have the first of several Thanksgivings, playing broom hockey on the lake, and eating way too much food. I helped him work on his cabin on numerous occasions, as he helped me. He was a perfectionist and at the same time one of the messiest people I know. I've had to scoot sideways through stacks of boxes and papers to get into his apartment in Anchorage and then move more so I could crash on his couch.

I knew Gordon in a way most people didn't know existed. We chased girls in the early years, sat around drinking beer and talked sports and other unimportant topics, that kind of guy stuff. He enjoyed being a part of or receiving some really good practical jokes, ask Johnny Johnson about male night at an Anchorage strip joint. Sure we also talked about wolves, shared stories and encounters, cussed the Park Service and Fish and Game, shared views and opinions on environmental and development issues. Shared a concern about the park and the area around the park. We were often in disagreement; he was a radical, I a moderate. I always respected his uncompromising position on issues he held dear, offering support at times. On more than one occasion I was asked to come to meetings by the presenter so I could ask Gordon to sit down and let someone else talk when he went on and on. With the Internet, I received many draft papers to read and offer an opinion about. He has some amazing photos of wolves, doing wolf things. He was often misunderstood on his views, probably having trouble expressing himself on personal issues, beliefs and environmental issues in the same time and space. He cared about his image and how others saw him. In the book *Forever on the Mountain* Gordie was concerned that the author present him in a positive manner, which he did.

The past few years we talked, usually a couple times a week, about many things, had dinners at my place or sat on the bluff in front of his cabin on warm sunny days and had a beer talking about the future. I will miss those times. ☺



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RECENT DECREASE, BY A THIRD, IN THE OVERALL NUMBER OF DENALI WOLVES SPARKS DISCUSSION

NUMBER OF PARK WOLVES KILLED OUTSIDE DENALI BY HUNTERS AND TRAPPERS INCREASES

by Cass Ray

Managers at Denali National Park are not fretting over the recent decrease, by more than a third, in the number of park wolves, but are concerned about the recent increase in the number of park wolves killed outside the park by hunters and trappers. Ninety-nine park wolves were counted in April 2008, but only 65 were located in the most recent survey, in April 2009, and the Park Service allows that it would wax concerned if that number did not increase soon. A total of 25 wolves now are collared by the park's wildlife biologists; the membership in the park's 15 packs ranges from 1 to 14 wolves.

The highest count of Denali wolves in recent years came in 1991, with 134 wolves; the lowest recent count was only four years before, in 1987, with 53 wolves. As recently as 2006, only three years ago, the count was 116 wolves, not far from being double the 65 counted last April. The loss of 34 park wolves from April 2008 to April 2009 is believed chiefly to be the result of at least three packs leaving the park or dying off, some due to starvation, with another pack the victim of trapping outside the park.

For example, the Toklat or East Fork pack is believed to be down 5 wolves, to a total of about 11, as a result of pack dispersal and/or being killed by other wolves or via trapping or hunting outside the park. And the Stampede alpha male, at 130 pounds probably the second largest wolf ever collared by the park, died last winter, believed by park biologists to be the victim of other wolves. Agreeing with what he called that "leading guess" was Gordon Haber, the independent wolf biologist who studied Denali packs for 43 years before dying in a plane accident in the park October 14, while observing the Toklat pack near the East Fork of the Toklat River (see separate articles). On his website Haber cited the "heavy competition between resident and migratory wolves for wintering caribou in that general area," adding that "at least 2 to 3" members of the Toklat Springs pack had been "trespassing near the mortality site, just outside the Stampede territory."

Besides starvation, other natural causes of death among the park's wolves include the rare disease and avalanches, the latter of which have claimed at least three park wolves through the years. There also is concern about the lice potentially spread to the park population by wolves migrating into the park.

Percentage of wolf deaths due to "human-caused mortality" nearly doubles

Meanwhile, the percentage of Denali's collared wolves whose deaths can be attributed to "human-caused mortality," i.e. trapping and hunting outside the park, has nearly doubled. Thirty percent of the collared park wolves that died between 2003 and 2009 were victims of trapping and hunting, compared with only 17 percent between 1986 and 2002. Park biologists know of no recent trapping or shooting of park wolves outside the park, including in the state-sanctioned "closed areas" (often called the "buffer zones") just outside Denali, but Haber, on his website, continued sounding the alarm, noting that, among others, the male and female of the Margaret pack were "ranging together" in the "same dangerous trapping-hunting area," outside the northeast park boundary. It also is believed that no wolves were shot during the Kantishna subsistence hunt in September, during which each moose hunter legally is entitled to shoot as many as 10 wolves.

Competing packs long have been reported to be the key cause of death among park wolves, yet between 2003 and 2009, only 28 percent of those deaths were caused by other wolves, compared with 30 percent caused by humans. (That 28 percent killed by other wolves is down from the 42 percent killed by other wolves between 1986 and 2002. Of all of Denali's collared wolves killed between 2003 and 2009, 3 percent were the victims of subsistence trapping and hunting, legal in certain areas of the park additions, nearly double the 1.7 percent for subsistence kills between 1986 and 2002.)

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RECENT DECREASE OF DENALI WOLVES *continued from previous page*

General agreement that wolf numbers in themselves mean little

On shuttle buses into the park last summer, often, when drivers mentioned that the park's wolf population recently had dropped by more than a third, park visitors, and even some park employees, practically gasped. In contrast, park biologists are less concerned about the actual number of park wolves, given that the park's ungulate population—moose, caribou, and Dall sheep—is incapable of supporting significantly more wolves.

For his part, Haber, in an e-mail interview for this article four days before the plane accident, “questioned the emphasis on numbers of wolves” and called “park wolf ‘population’ estimates. . . worthless.” “I question the value of Denali wolf ‘population’ estimates and related averages (e.g., of pups per group), given that the park-preserve bounds only a small portion of the actual, i.e., biological, population,” noted Haber’s most recent research report, submitted to the Park Service last May, to which he referred in that interview on October 10. The “biological population to which Denali wolves belong” encompasses a “much larger area, probably extending all the way to the Arctic Ocean,” Haber noted in “Wolf Foraging and Related Social Variations in Denali National Park,” a paper published in December 2007 in *Alaska Park Science*, to which he also referred on October 10. “Management emphasis,” he contended, “should shift to groups, naturally short-lived as well as persistent.”

Faced with arguments that wolf control would not have permanent effects on park packs because wolves eventually would return, Haber trotted out a favorite analogy. If a football team’s first string were fired and replaced, over some years, by rookies, true, the team would boast as many players as before, but it hardly could be expected to play as well. Similarly, Haber was quoted as concluding, “We would still have the same number of furry canids running around the country, but would they really be wolves?” “Endangerment can happen via diminished numbers of individuals but also by diminishing the numbers of individuals and groups behaving in ways consistent with the species’ natural direction of evolution,” Haber noted on his website. “[T]he biology of organisms, societies, and systems is described...not just by the number of individuals present or how fast they bounce back from losses. The number of individuals present at any given time, i.e., abundance is...for wolves, not a very sensitive manifestation.”

“Wolf numbers often rebound from public hunting, trapping, and heavier agency killing, at least in the short term, without reflecting anything obvious to most observers about other impacts,” noted Haber’s website; nonetheless, “there is evidence of lingering impacts...on the social structure and other behavior, hunting patterns, distribution...genetic variations, and mortality patterns of survivors and recolonizers.”

“Don’t get me wrong,” Haber concluded in that interview on October 10, “there are major wolf problems at Denali that are urgently in need of attention, but a population perspective is not the way to think about or try to address them.”

The park considers supporting renewing or extending the buffer zones

The state-sanctioned “closed areas” (often called the “buffer zones”), first adopted, in a much smaller version, by the Board of Game (BOG) nearly 10 years ago, are considered very effective, with no trappers believed to be working inside those areas. As far as the park is concerned, the purpose of the closed areas is to protect wolves so that park visitors have the opportunity to observe that species. The closed areas presently include an area of about 8 miles by 12 miles in the Wolf Townships and an area averaging a mile wide that stretches from the southeast corner of the Stampede Corridor south along the Nenana River and Parks Highway almost to the Nenana River Bridge near Panorama Mountain.



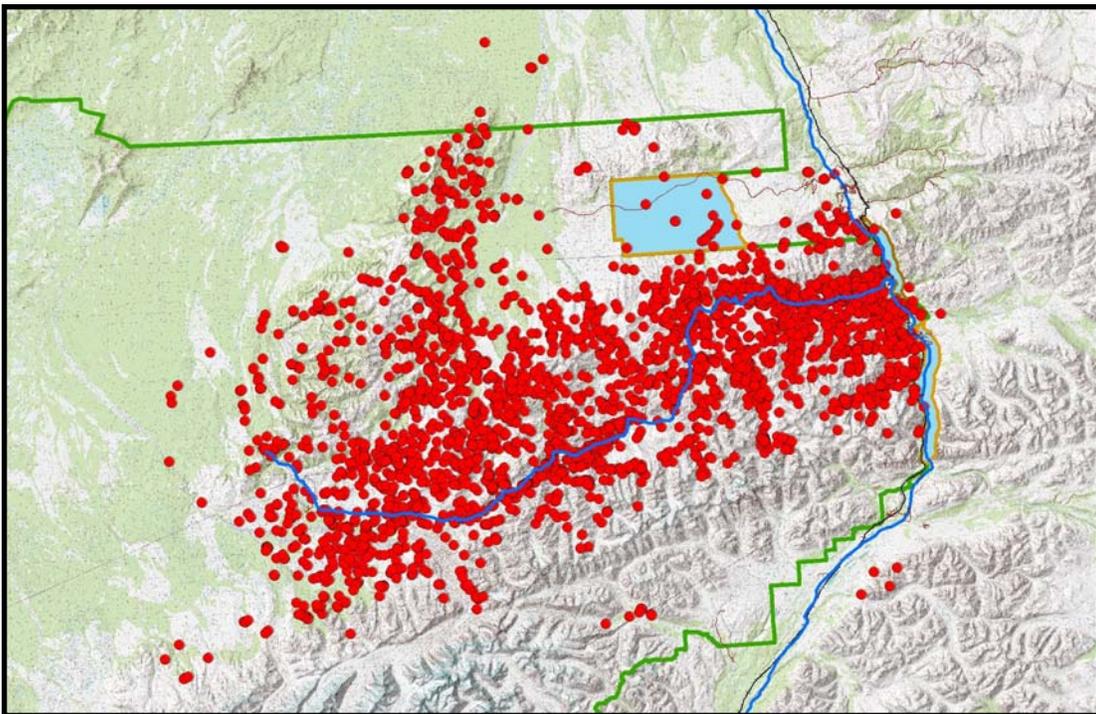
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RECENT DECREASE OF DENALI WOLVES *continued from previous page*

The closed areas “sunset” in 2010, meaning that if they are to be retained, official action must be taken by the BOG. With the BOG accepting, until December 4, proposals on renewing or extending the closed areas, with those proposals to be discussed at the BOG’s meeting in February or March, and the deadline for comments set February 12, the park presently is considering supporting renewing the current closed areas or extending them. Among the key factors being considered by the Park Service are these three:

1. The concern, per se, is not that the hunting and trapping of Denali wolves just outside the park decreases the number of wolves, but that such human-caused mortality disrupts packs that often make appearances on the park road and thus deprives park visitors of the opportunity to observe wolves.
2. Extending the closed areas would be expected to spare the lives of some wolves, with fewer vacancies in park packs thus created, attracting fewer wolves that could carry the lice plaguing some wolves.
3. If trapping that near the park boundary is allowed to continue, there is the potential for another snare-sporting wolf to appear on the park road, as happened in spring 2008.



Wolf radio locations, mainly from September through April, from 2003 to 2009, of the five wolf packs that are most commonly seen along the park road. The Wolf Buffer Zones (indicated in blue) are also shown in the Wolf Townships and along the George Parks Highway. Map courtesy of Tom Meier, NPS Biologist

It was nine years ago, in November 2000, that the BOG established a small, 19-square-mile closed area in the Wolf Townships; it was reaffirmed by the BOG in May 2001. In the fall of 2002, the BOG decided to expand the closed area to include all of the Wolf Townships as far east as the Savage River and to add a second closed area, stretching along the Nenana River and Parks Highway, with the intertie line the eastern boundary. In the spring of 2004 the BOG decided to retain basically the same closed areas.

DCC recognizes that it is essential to maintain a healthy wolf population in Denali and supports renewing or extending the closed areas just outside the park. **SD**

WOLF PROTECTION OUTSIDE DENALI - A SHORT HISTORY

1939-2009 In 1939, Adolph Murie begins his pioneering research on Denali Park wolves, culminating in his classic study, "The Wolves of Mt. McKinley," in 1944. In the late 1960s Gordon Haber begins his 40+ year career studying park wolf families, first as an employee, later as an independent. In 1986 L. David Mech begins a long-running wolf research project in Denali. Use of telemetry collars begins during this period. Mech and colleagues publish "The Wolves of Denali" in 1998. Over the years, the practice of collaring, though controversial, leads to important knowledge of wolf movements.

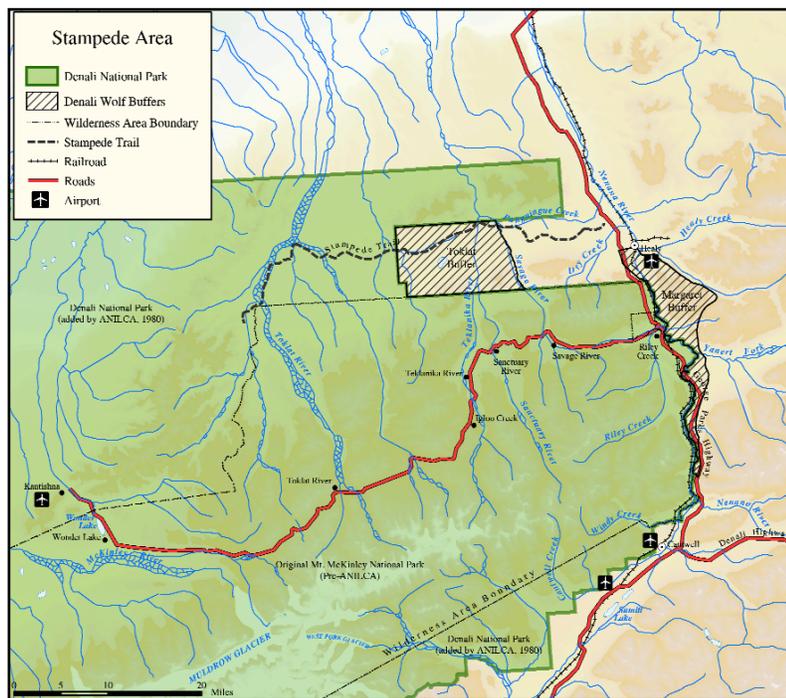
1986 The **General Management Plan** for recently enlarged and renamed Denali National Park identifies the Wolf Townships north of Denali as important habitat for Denali Park wolves, and states (page 98), "*The National Park Service will seek a land exchange with the state of Alaska to place the 'wolf townships' inside the northeast park boundary. These lands were recognized by Congress as important habitat for park caribou and wolf populations, and they are also used by park bears and moose. Acquisition of these townships is needed to protect the natural ranges of these populations from incompatible development and sport hunting.*" The exchange was even recommended in an early version of the Tanana Basin Area Plan, the state of Alaska's major planning document for that area. Although inclusion of these townships within Denali National Park no longer seems to be a priority for the National Park Service, they continue to be recognized as vital to park wolves and caribou, especially in the winter.

1992 The Alaska Board of Game considers establishing a 600 square mile no-harvest wolf buffer around Denali Park but rescinds this action when plans to engage in predator control elsewhere in the state are tabled.

2000 Continued pressure is placed on the Board of Game by statewide and national conservation organizations to establish wolf buffer zones around Denali's borders. At its March 2000 meeting, the BOG establishes a Citizens Advisory Committee to examine the issue and report back in the fall. The group, composed of Marty Caress, Carl Jack, George Matz, Justin Ripley, Kneeland Taylor, Mike Tinker and Lori Quackenbush, meets three times and cannot reach consensus. Three of the members, Matz, Taylor and Ripley, recommend a large buffer zone. At the November 2000 meeting, the BOG establishes only a very small, 19 square mile buffer zone within the western wolf townships.

2001 In May 2001, the BOG enlarges the small buffer approved in the fall to one covering all lands west of the Savage River and south of the Stampede Road. Conservation organizations continue to advocate for extension of buffer zones to more effectively cover the ranges of well known and observed Denali Park packs, including Toklat, Savage and Mt. Margaret families.

2002 At its October 2002 meeting, the Board of Game enlarges the Stampede closure and adds some areas east of the Parks Highway to the buffer zones around Denali, to protect some part of the Mt. Margaret wolf family range outside the park. The eastern boundary is made to coincide with the route of the Fairbanks-Anchorage electric intertie in this area.



Wolf (or Stampede) Townships, showing the extent of Denali wolf buffers at the end of the year 2002. Map compiled by Ecotrust

WOLF BUFFERS - A SHORT HISTORY

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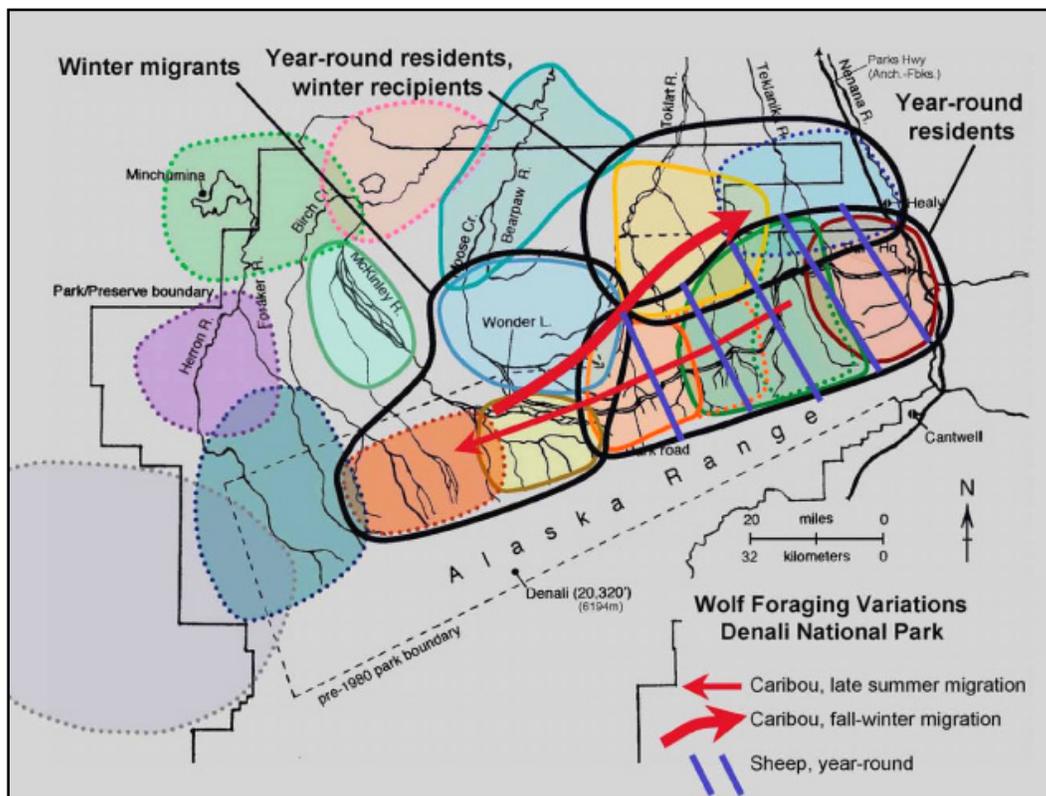
2002 In October 2002, independent wolf biologist Gordon Haber publishes a paper entitled “Delineating a Protective Buffer Zone for Eastern Denali Wolves.” The zone would include the entire extent of the Wolf (or Stampede) Townships and a large area north and east of the park.

In November 2002, Frank Murkowski is elected Governor of Alaska, replacing Tony Knowles. In succeeding years, the state of Alaska accelerates its programs of predator control for both wolves and bears, including aerial hunting of wolves. The climate remains hostile toward wolf buffer zones around Denali.

2004 At the March 2004 Alaska Board of Game meeting, the group considers eliminating the Denali wolf buffers. In the end, the Board of Game, which authorized a number of new predator control initiatives at this meeting, decides to make a gesture of balance by retaining the Denali wolf buffers, with a small decrease in the size of the eastern buffer zone. In addition, the BOG institutes a moratorium of six years on further discussion of wolf buffers. The Denali wolf buffer zones will sunset in 2010.

2006 Sarah Palin is elected Governor of Alaska. During her tenure wolf and bear predator control is expanded and bear baiting programs are initiated in Unit 16 just south of Denali National Park. Palin also authorizes shooting wolves from helicopters and institutes a bounty on wolves in certain areas.

2007 Independent biologist Gordon Haber’s paper, “Wolf Foraging and Related Social Variations in Denali National Park,” is published in *Alaska Park Science*, a compendium of research papers. In this article he makes the point that not only are the Wolf Townships important habitat for nearby wolf packs, but also for groups that migrate to the area from far west in the park. The map below makes this clear.



“Wolves respond to differing winter foraging circumstances across three large areas of Denali National Park. In the eastern area, they remain primarily within year-round territories where they are able to hunt sheep as well as moose after most caribou leave.

In the central area where there are no sheep and lower moose densities, they migrate northeastward with caribou, resulting in high competition and strife with the year-round northeastern residents and other migrant groups. Territories of 15 groups of wolves as of April 2006 are shown; the seven with dotted boundaries are somewhat speculative due to recent interruptions in radio-collar contact. The dotted green (Toklat/East Fork) and orange (Toklat West/Grant Creek) boundaries in the eastern area represent a contraction and expansion of territories following the trapping and shooting losses of the experienced Toklat adults in 2005.”

Gordon Haber

Map showing extraterritorial forays of wolves into the Wolf Townships, from “Wolf Foraging and Related Social Variations in Denali National Park,” by Gordon Haber.

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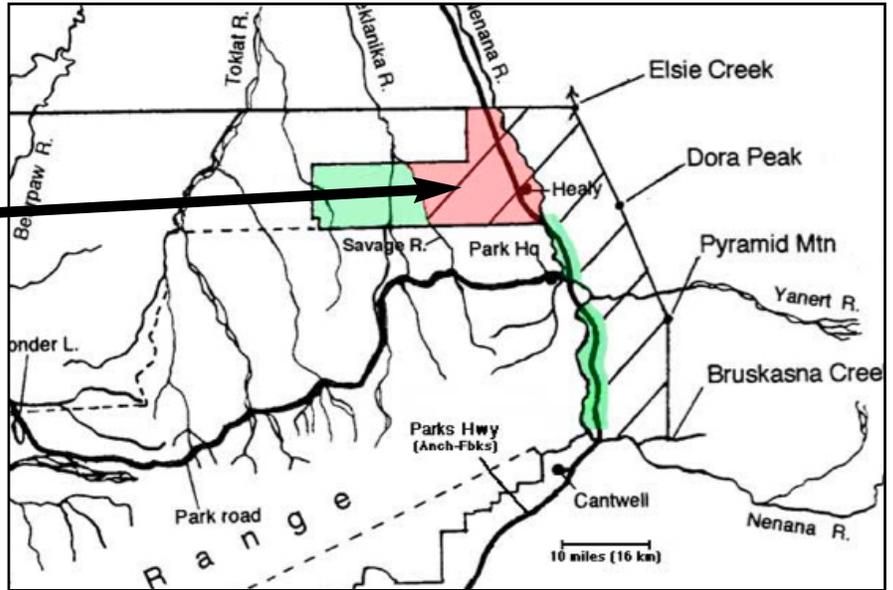
WOLF BUFFERS - A SHORT HISTORY

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2008 UAA Professor Rick Steiner and Gordon Haber propose legislation that would amend the current Intensive Management Law (passed in 1994) to require that any intensive management proposal be subject to rigorous scientific peer review and comment prior to adoption by the Board of Game. The Intensive Management Law gives priority to human consumption and under this law, wildlife is managed for abundance of prey species such as moose and caribou. This strategy contrasts with the National Park Service, whose strategy is to manage for natural and healthy wildlife populations.

2008 Steiner and Haber write to the Commissioner of the Department of Fish and Game Denby Lloyd, requesting an immediate closure of the area marked in pink on the map, to protect park wolves from continued trapping. The pink area is accessible to the Parks Highway and the community of Healy, increasing the vulnerability of wolves who travel there during winter.

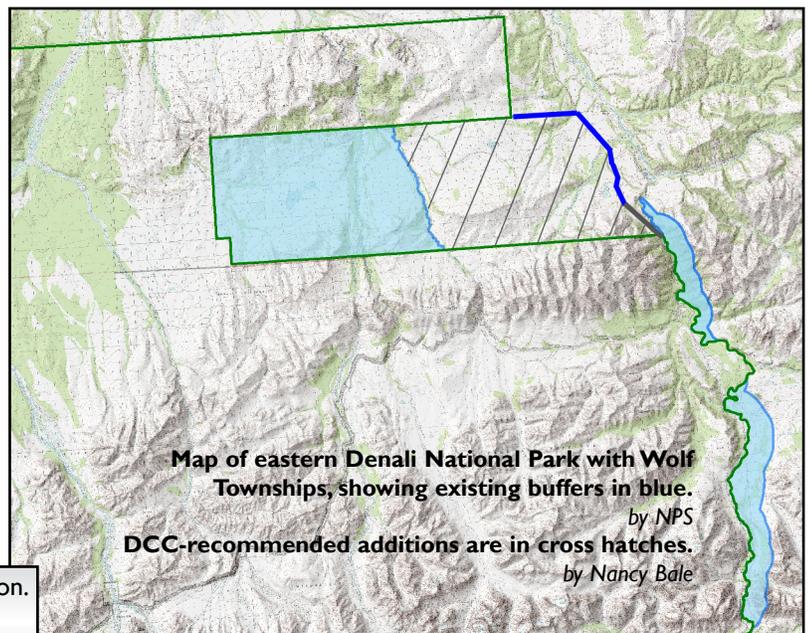
(To see the full letter, visit Haber's website, <http://www.alaskawolves.org>, and go to the October 29, 2008 entry in the Blog Archive.)



On the map above, existing no wolf hunting-trapping buffers are shown in green. *map by Gordon Haber, posted on www.alaskawolves.org*

2009 The Denali Citizens Council board meets over the weekend of November 14-15th. After considerable deliberation, we decide to write a proposal for the Spring 2010 Board of Game meeting, advocating retention of the existing no wolf hunting-trapping buffers (shown in blue below) and adding the remaining area of the Wolf Townships up to the Parks Highway (shown with cross hatches). This proposal will be filed with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game by the December 4, 2009 deadline and will be considered at the Spring 2010 Board of Game meeting. If no action is taken, all buffer zones will expire.

Nan Eagleson, DCC Board member and also a member of the Middle Nenana Fish and Game Advisory Committee, introduced the attached map and our proposal at the Nov. 16, 2009 AC meeting. There was active discussion at this meeting. In addition, DCC presented a petition with more than 80 signatures in support of retaining or expanding the buffer zones. The petition now has more than 90 signatures.



Map of eastern Denali National Park with Wolf Townships, showing existing buffers in blue.
by NPS
DCC-recommended additions are in cross hatches.
by Nancy Bale

Our petition supporting Denali wolf buffers is still in circulation. You may sign it at the link below.
<http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/Denaliwolfbuffers/>

CLIMATE CHANGE: HOW WILL IT AFFECT RESOURCES FOR SUBSISTENCE USERS AT DENALI?

EFFECTS OF GLOBAL WARMING ON DENALI'S PLANT AND ANIMAL RESOURCES ARE BECOMING APPARENT

by Julia Potter

Those of us living here near Denali were treated to exceptionally nice weather this summer and fall. Most days this summer were relatively rain-free and warm compared to past summers when we all wondered if it would ever quit raining. Fall continued to be warm with clear blue skies. When temperatures began to dip a little in September and snow fell, overall the weather was still beautiful and we kept wondering when the snow would really begin to fly and the normal chill of fall would settle in. Of course the climate in Denali varies greatly over its six million acres as the Alaska Range divides the park into two distinct climate regimes. Complex climate patterns exist in the park due to gradients of elevation and latitude and effects of local topography. There are also seasonal variations and other large-scale patterns. Climate determines the temperature and precipitation patterns for ecosystems and has a powerful influence on landscape and ecology. Most of us don't really think about the climate on a large scale - we're usually more concerned with today's weather and the activities we might take into consideration, or not.

As fall approaches many Alaskans look forward to the moose hunting season and picking berries. Others are preparing for winter by harvesting timber. For qualified subsistence users in Denali it also means the continuance of a lifestyle passed on from generation to generation as well as providing food and warmth for their families.

During the Denali Subsistence Resource Commission meeting held November 4 at the Murie Science and Learning Center, several commission members mentioned changes this fall which affected subsistence activities. Moose were not seen in certain areas, most likely staying at higher elevations, and fewer berries were found in areas frequented by subsistence users. It was also noted that shallow lakes in the Minchumina basin are drying up. Caribou populations are in decline and they are finding less lichen, a primary food source, as the tundra's vegetation changes and becomes shrubbier.

With warmer temperatures (Alaska temperatures have increased an average of 4 degrees F over the past few decades) plant communities may be modified as individual plant species respond differently to the changes in climate which in turn will also change animal distribution and habitat use. This may also affect the predator-prey relationships.

One of the concerns regarding climate change, noted during the meeting, is the flexibility of the federal regulations governing subsistence use to respond to weather and other conditions. With weather apparently affecting hunting seasons, how quickly can regulations change given the current two-year cycle during which proposals are submitted to the Federal Subsistence Board for review and possible adoption? The Denali Subsistence Resource Commission, in future meetings, will be considering the impacts to subsistence use caused by a changing climate as well as how to respond in a timely manner within the two-year proposal cycle.

While climate monitoring has been an ongoing project at Denali as part of the vital signs monitoring of the Central Alaska Network (CAKN), subsistence users within Denali see the effects of climate change from season to season and through the history of subsistence use as knowledge is passed from generation to generation. Their knowledge and input on the Denali Subsistence Resource Commission will be invaluable to ensure that the tradition of a lifestyle continues.

For more information on climate change in Denali visit www1.nature.nps.gov/im/units/cakn/. To learn more about the Denali Subsistence Resource Commission and subsistence use in Denali National Park visit www.nps.gov/dena/park-mgmt/subsistence.htm. 

HEALY AND DENALI RESIDENTS GET ANOTHER CHANCE TO VOICE CONCERNS ABOUT HEALY COAL PLANT #2

STATE PLANS TO RENEW THE PLANT'S ORIGINAL AIR QUALITY PERMIT, RATHER THAN REQUIRE A NEW, UPDATED ONE

by Cass Ray

Healy and Denali area residents concerned about the proposed restart, after more than ten years, of Healy Coal Plant #2 were to have another opportunity to voice that concern from 6 to 8 p.m. Thursday, November 19 at the Tri-Valley Community Center in Healy, as the state Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) hosted a public hearing on its plans to renew the plant's air quality control operating permit.

Written comments on the DEC's plans to renew that permit will be accepted until December 4, and the DEC then will make public its "final decision to issue or deny the permit," read the October 20 public notice. Written comments should be submitted to Debra Dalcher, Operating Permits Supervisor, Department of Environmental Conservation, 619 E. Ship Creek, Ste. 249, Anchorage, AK 99501. The DEC is expected to issue its final decision thirty days after that deadline for public comment, noted Brian Newton, president and chief executive officer of Golden Valley Electric Association (GVEA), which proposes to purchase the long-mothballed power plant from the Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority (AIDEA).

"Based on review" of GVEA's application for renewal of its air quality control operating permit, "DEC drafted a preliminary permit decision for the Healy Power Plant," noted the DEC's public notice. The DEC "will proceed with ongoing...permitting," concluded the state agency's "issue statement" of October 12. In an August 20 letter to GVEA, the DEC noted GVEA had asked the DEC "to confirm GVEA's conclusion that the activities GVEA will conduct to bring [Healy Coal Plant #2] out of warm lay-up to fully operational condition will not trigger Prevention of Significant Deterioration (PSD) review," that is, that no new air quality permit is required. The DEC's letter concluded that "we concur" that GVEA's actions bringing the plant online "do not constitute a major modification" and that "resuming operation of [the plant] does not trigger" the reactivation policy of the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). "Therefore," added the letter, "we agree with your conclusion that no PSD permit is required."

Interviewed in early November, GVEA's Newton said he had received no notice of any lawsuits pending against the plant restart. Nonetheless, environmental groups in Fairbanks and Anchorage continue reviewing the plant's original air quality permits, issued sixteen years ago, and have not wavered in their conviction that GVEA should pursue new, updated permits, Jessie Peterson, local issues and energy coordinator for the Northern Alaska Environmental Center in Fairbanks, said in early November. Rather than try to rely upon such a "stale" air quality permit, GVEA should "proceed with permitting" the Healy plant only under specific, strict requirements of the Clean Air Act, attorneys for Trustees for Alaska, a public interest environmental law firm in Anchorage, and the Sierra Club Environmental Law Program "cautioned" the GVEA in a letter on April 29. The letter noted that in the nine years that the plant had been in warm shut-down, "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."

"Forfeit a Considerable Investment and Defy Common Sense"

The DEC's October 12 issue statement noted that, "having reviewed the history" of the moth-balled "waste coal-fired boiler," the DEC "concludes that despite the long delay in starting normal operations" at the plant, "neither GVEA nor AIDEA has ever had the intent of permanently shutting down this new plant." "Those parties' collective efforts both to keep the facility's permits current, and to maintain the plant in warm shut-down mode, reflect their quite understandable intention to eventually operate" the plant, added the issue statement. "The various positions taken by those two parties over the years can make the history" of the plant "complicated," it was noted, "but the collective intent of the two partners has always been to eventually operate the plant."

continued on next page

PLANS TO RENEW HEALY COAL PLANT'S ORIGINAL AIR QUALITY PERMIT *continued from previous page*

“Given the original cost of constructing the plant,” added the issue statement, “to abandon the intent to ever operate it would forfeit a considerable investment and defy common sense.” DEC “does not believe that either AIDEA or GVEA has ever abandoned the intent to operate the plant.” The April 29 letter to GVEA from Trustees for Alaska and the Sierra Club Environmental Law Program did not agree; “by all indications,” it noted, “the shutdown was intended to be permanent.” The letter quoted GVEA’s own Narrative Statement of Facts, “During the engineers’ testing of the technology, and as each major system was verified and brought on, it became clear to GVEA” that the new plant “had no chance of actual commercial operation using the experimental technology.” In 1998 and 1999, added the letter, GVEA “even requested that AIDEA declare” the plant’s technology “not commercially feasible.”

The DEC’s issue statement noted that “while it is tempting to regard” the plant’s air quality permit “as somehow being ‘stale,’ due to the long delay in plant start-up,” the federal regulations that deal with “stale” decisions “do not appear to apply.” The “long (and presumably unusual) delay between the construction” of the plant “and its proposed start-up does not appear to make the original PSD permitting decision stale in any regulatory sense.” At the May 14 community forum at the Tri-Valley Community Center on the proposed plant restart, when a DCC board member referred to the plant’s “stale” permits and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)—the plant’s original EIS dates from sixteen years ago, 1993—GVEA’s Newton likened energy plants to cars that are not required to meet “brand new” standards.

“Indisputably Significant” Increase in Emissions?

While the letter to GVEA from Trustees for Alaska and the Sierra Club Environmental Law Program argued that the restart of the plant would result in a “significant increase in actual emissions”—“indisputably significant,” the DEC’s issue statement posed a “threshold consideration”: “would any of the physical changes that GVEA proposes actually result in an increase in emissions” from the plant? The issue statement addressed that question: “It does not appear that the changes would result in increased emissions over what [the plant] would have been emitting had it been operating,” adding, “any expected increase in emissions will really be caused not by the physical plant work itself, but rather by the commencement of plant operations.” “None of the activities listed by GVEA appear to be physical changes that result in an increase in emissions,” concluded the issue statement, adding, “the increase in emissions is caused by ‘turning on’ a long dormant plant.”

Because the plant “is only now starting up full, normal operations,” noted the issue statement, “the appropriate baseline emissions level to use for purposes of evaluating the net emissions increase is zero.” Noting that one type of “major modification” that would trigger the need for a new permit would be a change at the plant that results “in a significant net emissions increase,” the issue statement added that because the plant “has never begun normal operations, we don’t have historical data to work from.” GVEA’s “recent claim” that the plant’s 90-day test period in 1999 “does reflect normal operation, and should provide the basis for extrapolated annual emissions, rings hollow given their past decisions,” said the DEC, noting “GVEA itself elected not to take over” the plant based on the results of that test run a full decade ago. GVEA has argued that “the permitted emission levels for both power plants are lower than the original permit for just the existing Healy power plant alone.”

GVEA plans to close its purchase deal with AIDEA in November and, if the DEC’s final decision is to renew the original air quality permit, expects to have the plant online by the first quarter of 2011, said Newton. The DEC’s issue statement noted that in May GVEA estimated that making the plant operational would require “costs of \$1.125 million to \$1.275 million” and “seven to ten months.” In early November Newton estimated that having the plant online would save GVEA customers about \$2 million per month. AIDEA has agreed to sell the plant to GVEA for \$50 million, financed over thirty years at 5 percent interest. AIDEA also has agreed to lend GVEA \$45 million to get the plant running, a 25-year note at 6.5 percent interest; AIDEA gives GVEA until 2014 to get the plant operating.

Healy Coal Plant #2 is only a few short miles from the Class I airshed enjoyed by Denali National Park and Preserve, and DCC is disappointed by the DEC’s preliminary decision to renew the coal-fired power plant’s original air quality control operating permit. DCC continues to feel any restart of the plant should be subject to the strictest, most specific, most up-to-date requirements of the Clean Air Act. We look forward to continuing monitoring these very important decisions. **END**

MIDDLE NENANA FISH & GAME ADVISORY COMMITTEE DISCUSSES SOCIAL IMPACTS OF INTENSIVE GAME MANAGEMENT IN UNIT 20A

REAUTHORIZATION OF ANTLERLESS MOOSE HUNT AND WOLF BUFFER ZONE ARE BIG ISSUES FOR MIDDLE NENANA F&G ADVISORY COMMITTEE

by Nan Eagleson

The Middle Nenana Fish and Game Advisory Committee had their first fall meeting in Anderson, Alaska on October 19. The purpose of the meeting was to review the fall hunting season, upcoming issues, and to discuss proposals for the Alaska Board of Game Spring 2010 meeting for the Interior region. The AK Board of Game calls for proposed changes in the regulations pertaining to hunting, trapping, and the use of game in the Interior region to be considered at the Spring meeting and all proposals must be submitted by December 4, 2009. The reauthorization of antlerless moose hunts will be a big issue, as will the consideration for retaining the Wolf Buffer Zones on state lands abutting Denali National Park and Preserve. Any Alaskan resident can submit a proposal and forms are available from any Boards Support office or from the website: www.boards.adfg.state.ak.us.



Antlerless moose hunt in Game Unit 20A must be reauthorized each year by the F&G Advisory Committee.

Photo courtesy of Julia Potter

Because the meeting in October happened to be on Alaska Day, which is a holiday for State employees, the area biologist did not attend and fall harvest numbers were not available. However, the AC did discuss the hunting season from a social, rather than biological, point of view and there seems strong consensus that the antlerless moose hunt has contributed to the overall demise of the quality of the hunting experience for everyone. The increase in both the numbers and types of hunters has placed increased pressure on local areas and hunters. State statute requires that all antlerless moose hunts be reauthorized annually, so this will be addressed again this year. The antlerless moose hunt has been a very contentious issue in years past and likely will be again this year. Once this year's fall harvest numbers are available the discussion of antlerless moose hunts will likely, once again, dominate the meetings. Because of the mandate of Intensive Game Management in this State, high moose harvest objectives are maintained which undermines the natural balance of predator/prey relations and the carrying capacity of the ecosystem. It justifies the use of predator "control" in certain areas of the State and skews the numbers in favor of artificially high ungulate populations for hunters. Anyone who lives along the Parks Highway on the west side of Game Management Unit 20A noticed an increase in the number of vehicles (trucks) with trailers (and horse trailers in the non-motorized hunting areas) with an overall increase in hunters everywhere. The ability to address Intensive Game Management in this State is beyond the jurisdiction of the Advisory Committees but every resident of Alaska who cares about healthy wildlife populations should lobby his or her representatives on this issue. Until balanced representation on the Board of Game occurs, which would imply real change in leadership in State government that appoints the Board, the management of our wildlife resources will remain imbalanced.

Another issue coming up for debate is the reauthorization of the Wolf Buffer Zone around a tiny section along the northern and eastern boundary of the Park. It would be helpful if concerned residents participated in this discussion by letting the State F&G know how you feel. There are people from all over the world who come here to see a live wolf. Park wolves, particularly those most often seen along the park road, are vulnerable to hunting and trapping pressures right along the Park boundary. To continue the Wolf Buffer Zone makes sense to protect these wolves, and to increase the buffer zone to include areas east of the Savage River, where many of the wolves get shot and trapped, would be even better. 

BRIEF NEWS AND VIEWS

RESOURCE STEWARDSHIP STRATEGY FOR DENALI

Denali National Park & Preserve has recently completed its Resource Stewardship Strategy 2008-2027 (RSS) document. This planning document serves as a bridge between the qualitative statements of desired conditions established in the General Management Plan and the measurable goals and implementation actions determined through park strategic planning. The RSS contains comprehensive strategies and associated projects to assure that the NPS is attaining and maintaining the desired condition for all park resources and values. The fundamental resources and values for Denali are those that Congress identified specifically for the park through its enabling legislation including the Mt. McKinley National Park Act of 1917 and the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980.

The Resource Stewardship Strategy will provide strategic guidance for the research, resource management and resource education programs of the NPS and Denali National Park and Preserve. The plan comes about through a Director's order mandating the RSS to replace the Resource Management Plan at parks nationwide. Denali is the second unit in the national park system to complete a RSS. The 252-page document can be viewed online at www.nps.gov/dena/parkmgmt/research.htm. Also available is an expanded summary which includes an overview of resources and values, as well as their associated projects. ☞

INCREASED FUNDING FOR NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM

The National Park Service (NPS) received \$2.7 billion in funding for 2010 in a bill recently signed by President Obama. The Interior and Environmental Appropriations bill increases NPS funding by roughly \$218 million above the 2009 level.

Highlights from the bill include:

- ☞ NPS Operations received approximately \$130 million above last year's funding level, which fulfills the President's pledge to increase park operations \$100 million above inflation.
- ☞ The NPS portion of the Land and Water Conservation Fund - a fund used to purchase critical lands now on the market for conservation and public recreation - received \$126.26 million. This is an increase of \$61 million over last year's level and \$28 million above the President's request.
- ☞ Public-Private Partnerships, previously known as the Centennial Challenge, was funded at \$15 million.
- ☞ Most importantly, the NPS is better able to hire more rangers, fill out the authorized boundaries of many parks, enhance its ability to address the impacts of climate change on our national parks, and preserve nationally significant ecosystems.

This bill demonstrates a concerted effort by Congress and the Administration to restore our national treasures in time for the 2016 centennial of the National Park Service. ☞

DCC NEWS

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JOIN US

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

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

Your contribution is tax deductible	Name(s) _____
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___ Other (amt: \$ _____)	

If you have a different address in winter/summer, please include both addresses. Make checks payable to Denali Citizens Council and send to the address below. Members receive our newsletter and other print material and email updates.

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