

DCC FORUM SEES 'ANIMOSITY', 'HEAD-KNOCKING' BETWEEN STATE AND FEDS ON WILDLIFE ISSUES

by Cass Ray

A tale of two governments and two very different mandates'

There is a “high degree of animosity” between the federal and state governments on wildlife management issues and plenty of “federal-state head-knocking...going on right now,” David James, Regional Supervisor for the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), told DCC members and guests at a June 29 forum at the Denali Education Center’s Sheldon Center. “The politics are extreme right now,” agreed one of the other two panelists, Wade Willis, director of the Science Now Project and a former biologist for ADF&G.

It is getting harder for the federal and state governments to work together, said James, citing a past “simpler time”—“life was good”—and noting issues now are “way more complicated.” Simply put, he noted, the federal and state governments have “two very different mandates.” Representing what he called the “perspective of the conservation community,” Willis predicted “strong politics” and “grumbling” about the federal government allegedly “moving in on state rights.” “Everybody buckle your seatbelts,” advised James, predicting wildlife management issues dividing the federal and state governments are headed for court.

Wolf buffers eliminated; grizzly killed at Tattler Creek

The June 29 forum, co-sponsored by DCC and the Denali Education Center, came less than four months after the state Board of Game (BOG) voted 4-3 to eliminate the wolf buffer zones on state lands. The National Park Service and DCC were among those who proposed to BOG not only that the buffers be retained but that the buffer in the Wolf



DCC President Nancy Bale introduces the panel at the June forum, "Protecting Denali's Wildlife at the Boundaries."

DCC photo

Townships be enlarged. For an entire decade, that buffer had protected from hunting and trapping Denali wolves that wandered out of the park. The first small, 19-square-mile buffer was established by BOG in 2000. Each of the next two years saw that buffer enlarged, and a second buffer added. Two years later BOG decreased the size of the second buffer. Failing renewal, both buffers would sunset in 2010.

The forum also followed, by barely a month, the shooting to death of a grizzly by a park visitor at Tattler Creek, a site commonly accessed from the park road 37.5 miles into Denali. It was believed to be the first time a visitor had shot and killed a bear in the “old park” portion of Denali, which until thirty years ago was called Mount McKinley National Park. The incident came only a few months after it became legal to carry loaded firearms,

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FROM THE BOARD

Dear Friends and Members,

It's September and there are sure signs of autumn. Businesses are winding down their hectic summer activities. The colors have peaked and dimmed. Hunters have appeared at the trailheads. Some folks are leaving, others turning to plans for winter. Through the seasonal changes we at DCC remain busy and committed to a sustainable future for the Denali region.

In my mind, that future involves:

- Action to maintain the true meaning of Wilderness in Denali National Park.
- Advocacy for thoughtful and careful resource development in the Denali Borough, that recognizes the value of sensitive state lands near the boundary of the park, and the importance of clean air and water.
- Cooperation between federal and state agencies on important issues near the boundaries of Denali, recognizing that we all act in common and are more similar than we are different.
- Organizing for more proactive management to ensure a sustainable future for the Stampede Townships.
- More actual involvement of local people in local venues, including local advisory committees, commissions and the borough government itself and impromptu citizen groups.

Much has been accomplished by concerned citizens over the past decade. The Kantishna railroad, an impractical, dangerous project, never happened. North Access into Denali was thwarted, but pressures remain. Wildlife protection at the boundaries of the park had its ups and downs and remains a hot topic. The Stampede State Recreation Area has been proposed, but needs advocates. Energy development projects are mostly potential, but information and advocacy at the local level remain imperative. Park plans and EIS processes, notably the Backcountry Management Plan, have had our vigorous involvement and influence. All of you who helped, you know who you are....the list is too long to thank here.....but you have my permanent gratitude!

Just about ten years ago, on October 24, 2000, I was elected President of Denali Citizens Council. It has been a great ride, and I still intend to be active in the organization. However, as of our fall retreat, scheduled now for late November – early December 2010, I will not be a candidate for President of DCC. I live in Anchorage and DCC needs leadership at the local level. There are ways I can be helpful as a Board member here in Anchorage through my involvement with agencies and committees here. But, after ten years, it's time to step down and give someone else the steering duties. Our Board of Directors is composed of eight committed and interested citizens, six of whom make their full-time homes at the gateway to Denali.

There are things I wish I'd done, but I have a lot of happy memories of our efforts, getting the DCC News to be a more regular publication, encouraging our web and email presence, and being involved in some great events and campaigns. We've been able to hire a Community Organizer, at least part time, and the benefits of that face in the community are too numerous to list here. I've gotten to know wonderful folks both at the local level and within the state and federal agencies.

I have been frustrated at times - I'll be the first to admit that. For someone who has lived and/or worked at Denali for decades, I've seen changes that were just plain hard to take. Yes, Adolph Murie, as much as we celebrate and laud his achievements, might be disappointed at what we have managed to accomplish.

However, even when we feel ignored or ineffectual, our activism is important. And there are many successes, both past and present. I know you're out there, Denali advocates. Please stay active, participate in government, committees, telephone trees and email networks to help the next generation of DCC leaders do their work. We cannot do it without you.

Best,



FROM THE COMMUNITY ORGANIZER by Julia Potter

Greetings Denali advocates. For those of you who missed our spring membership drive, we'll soon be sending out the fall member renewal mailing. **And NOW you can join easily and quickly online!** Just go to <http://www.denalicitizens.org>. Click on the *Donate* button at the bottom of the front page, and voila, secure online donations. To learn more about our membership levels, click on the *Join DCC* tab and donate from there. We are very excited to provide this new opportunity for you to give. The benefits of membership will still include that paper copy of the newsletter, invitations to our events, and the member updates you have come to expect. All those benefits of membership are not free, of course, and are not even inexpensive.

Here are a few of our expenses from the last year, 2009: telecommunications \$1325; newsletter \$2000; postage \$1345; and office utilities a whopping \$1300. DCC also incurs expenses for events such as the June forum "Protecting Denali's Wildlife at the Boundaries" and the Annual Membership Meeting, office supplies and equipment, membership dues to other organizations and community service (sending local students to the AYEA Conservation & Civics Summit). The list goes on. Our largest expense is me - DCC's Community Organizer. I am also a member of DCC. Of course we cannot forget the volunteer time provided by our Board of Directors. Even though this time is not an expense to DCC, there is value in the time they commit.

If you haven't renewed your membership please consider doing so. Every donation we receive, no matter how small, makes a big difference. I'm looking forward to receiving your donation! We cannot do it without you.

THANK YOU

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DCC JUNE WILDLIFE FORUM *continued from page 1*

open or concealed, in the national park, and came on only the second weekend of the new season that shuttle buses carried visitors deep into the park. The bear was killed by a backpacker from North Pole, AK; he was not charged in the incident, and his name and that of the woman accompanying him were not released by the park service. The man reported that when the grizzly charged his companion, he fired his 45-caliber semi-automatic pistol seven to nine times. The grizzly, soon located by park personnel near the site of the incident, proved to be a 434-pound older boar. The man claimed he shot the bear to defend the life of his companion—and a statement issued by the park reported “the investigation found no evidence to contradict this assertion.” While the man, carrying a licensed firearm, did violate federal regulations against firing weapons and killing wildlife in a national park, and while no federal law allows the use of firearms in defense of life in national parks, state law does allow such killing of wildlife in defense of human life. Hence, “the actions in this incident likely would have been a legitimate defense of life under state law,” noted the park’s statement, and “the park will not pursue criminal prosecution.”

‘Animals don’t know the boundary’

Wildlife management has been an issue for Denali and its environs since long before DCC was founded, 36 years ago, Nancy Bale, DCC president, noted in introducing the forum. “We’re here because the animals don’t know the boundary,” she added, citing park wolves that regularly follow migrating herds of caribou into the Wolf Townships outside the northeast portion of the park. Denali’s is “an ecosystem that spans boundaries,” noted Bale.

The three speakers at the June 29 forum were:

--Tom Meier, wildlife biologist who has monitored Denali wolves for 24 years. Holder of an M. S. in zoology from the University of Minnesota and co-author of *The Wolves of Denali*, Meier has worked in wolf research and depredation control and monitoring for 34 years, in Alaska, Minnesota, Montana, Idaho, Wisconsin, and Israel.

--David James, Supervisor for Region 3 of ADF&G, headquartered in Fairbanks, for 10 years. An Alaska resident for 39 years, James has a M. S. in wildlife management from the University of Alaska Fairbanks, and had his first position at ADF&G 35 years ago.

--Wade Willis, founder of the Science Now Project, a non-profit public relations and education group. Science Now’s mission is to empower the public, press, and conservation community to play an effective role in developing wildlife management policy in the state and to promote cooperation between diverse user groups. An Alaska resident for 20 years, Willis has a B. S. in zoology from Colorado State University and has worked as a biologist for ADF&G and for the federal Fish and Wildlife Service.

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The panelists from left to right: David James, Supervisor for Region 3, Alaska Department of Fish & Game; Tom Meier, wildlife biologist with the National Park Service; and Wade Willis, founder of the Science Now Project.

DCC photo



DCC JUNE WILDLIFE FORUM *continued from previous page*

'One of the best places in the world to see wolves'

Denali is "one of the best places in the world to see wolves in the wild," probably second only to Yellowstone, noted Meier, the first of the three panelists to address the audience of 45 DCC members and guests. Meier presented the PowerPoint slide show that he and Philip Hooge, Denali's assistant superintendent for resources, science, and learning, offered to BOG in late February. As many as 20,000 to 30,000 park visitors observe wolves along the park road every summer, noted Meier. Indeed, the "primary motivation" for most park visitors "is to view wildlife." With three specific park packs providing most of the wolf sightings in Denali, most wolf observations in recent years have been west of Toklat, 53.5 miles into the park.

Unfortunately, noted Meier, "the lack of fear of humans that makes these wolves easily viewed by visitors also makes them especially vulnerable to being shot or trapped when they venture outside park boundaries." A slide illustrating 22 years of travel by the park's radio-collared wolves showed that those living near the park road "have a history of traveling to the north and northeast, particularly in winter when caribou often move into the Stampede flats."

Noting the total number of park wolves north of the Alaska Range stood at fewer than 70 (at least until all the spring pups were accounted for), Meier said that number represents the fewest wolves in the park at any time in the past 23 years—and probably the fewest ever. Only three of the park's dozen packs are believed to have more than five wolves each—and two packs in the northeast portion of the park and Stampede area "appeared to have died out entirely." In the six years ending last year, noted a slide, the killing of park wolves increased and was more concentrated "in an area just northeast of the park and in the Stampede corridor that forms a notch in the northeast part of the park." A couple of years ago, recalled Meier, at least four park wolves were observed or reported to be toting broken snares.

The park service's proposal last spring to BOG that the buffer zone protecting park wolves from hunting and trapping in the Wolf Townships be enlarged by 64 percent was "based on the data," noted Meier, and included only a finite area that clearly would contribute to the survival of park wolves. That proposed enlargement would have created a "nearly four-fold increase in the level of protection of two of the three most visible and most vulnerable wolf packs in the park."

Is trapping outside the Park 'detrimental to viewing' wolves?

That "trapping and hunting [are] detrimental to viewing" wolves seems "reasonable speculation," but the state "couldn't see any data that demonstrated that," countered James, the evening's second speaker. On wildlife management issues, he said, ADF&G remains non-judgmental unless and until there is solid biological data. The potential effect of collaring wolves on viewing opportunities for park visitors is something in which ADF&G is interested, commented James.

Elimination of the buffer zones probably would take effect the second week in August, predicted James, noting all relevant legal questions should be settled by then. Meier had noted that BOG also approved a six-year moratorium on consideration of re-establishing buffer zones in the Denali area, but that that moratorium is not believed to be binding, and James agreed that moratorium is not set in stone. Willis, the third speaker, noted the moratorium was an effort to preclude the public from proposing reinstatement of the buffer zones and predicted that if the moratorium were challenged in court, the moratorium "wouldn't fly."

Willis agreed with James that wildlife management issues dividing the federal and state governments, and particularly "intensive management," will have their time in court. The goal of intensive management, noted Willis, is maintaining a "perpetual high number of ungulates"—moose and caribou—often at the expense of their key predators—wolves and bears. James had noted that predator control—which he called "managing on a sustained yield basis"—is exercised in 10 percent of this region of the state, and Willis countered that "science will show that maybe predator control is not the way" to address these wildlife management issues.

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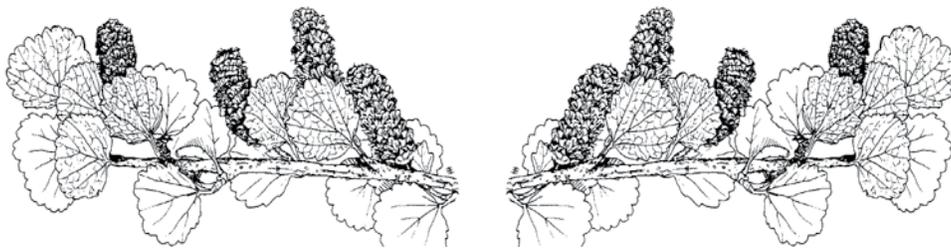
For many residents of this state, the goal is optimal harvest of ungulates, noted Willis, while the often contrasting mandate for the federal government and many conservationists is management for a diversity of wildlife, certainly including the predators of those very ungulates. The “crux of the problem,” said Willis, is the balance of science and politics in the two governments’ approaches to serving their respective mandates. BOG is a political body, rather than a scientific body, commented Willis, and the challenge comes when “the state won’t take the time to do the science.” Science, he said, should be the “number one goal,” with wildlife “managed in the most scientific manner possible.” Reflecting upon BOG’s elimination of the wolf buffers, Willis commented that only 10 percent of proposals brought by the public are approved by BOG.

‘It’s values, it’s values, it’s values’

In the brief question-and-answer period that followed the three speakers’ presentations, James characterized debate over the wolf buffers by asserting, “It’s values, it’s values, it’s values” and commented that “viewing certainly has a place in wildlife management” and that well-intentioned people certainly can disagree on such critical issues. Recalling arguments before BOG, Meier noted that park management had thought that enabling tens of thousands of park visitors to observe wolves would prove a more “compelling” pro-buffer position than the decrease in the wolf population; “I was there and it really backfired,” remembered Bale. One voice in the BOG debate wondered why anyone would want to observe “mangy dogs.”

Jean Balay, DCC board member, asked James what would happen if the number of predators diminished to alarming lows. In that case, would there be, she asked, a kind of reciprocal intensive management, with predators protected? The state could ratchet back hunting seasons, responded James. If it wanted, he said, the state could set out to exterminate all wolves, but “we don’t run any species into extinction.”

DCC remains disappointed and concerned by BOG’s elimination of the wolf buffers, as well as by the killing of the park grizzly, and we look forward to closely monitoring the federal and state governments’ handling of the many critical wildlife management issues affecting Denali and its environs.



Alaskan Native Knowledge Network

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BEAR TRAGEDY AND BEAR TRIUMPHS

by Charlie Loeb

The shooting of a grizzly bear by a hiker in Denali this May was a terrible tragedy that stands in sharp contrast to the National Park Service's remarkable success in managing bear-human conflict at Denali over the past 25-30 years. The Denali Citizens Council would like to take this sad opportunity to review the other side of the story, untold in news media, about this success story. (For more details of the bear shooting, see separate article on DCC's June 29 forum on the federal and state governments' respective takes on wildlife management issues.)

Bear-Human Conflict Plan has a long history in Denali

As visitation to Denali began growing in the 1970s, so did problems with bears. By the early 1980s, the number of reported incidents since 1949 in which a bear injured a park visitor or employee had risen to nearly a dozen, including 3 incidents in 1980 alone. The National Park Service, aware of the long-term bear problems in parks such as Yosemite and Yellowstone, took an aggressive and pro-active stance to prevent bears from becoming conditioned to human food and to educate park visitors how to behave in ways that would avoid triggering aggressive bear responses. Initiated in 1978 and updated periodically, the Bear-Human Conflict Management Plan prescribed measures that park managers felt would reduce interactions between bears and people.



Hikers in Denali are not the only ones to visit Eielson. Thanks to the Bear-Human Conflict Plan, visitors are educated on how to behave if they encounter a bear.

photographer unknown

To the current generation of Denali employees and visitors, these measures are so commonplace that we take them for granted. Among them are requirements to carry bear-resistant food containers (BRFCs) in the backcountry, bear-proof garbage containers throughout the park, and the saturation of park visitors with instructions on how to behave if they encounter a bear (don't run, wave your hands in the air, etc.). The NPS employs wildlife technicians every summer to monitor problem bears and situations. If a bear shows signs of aggression toward people, signs of habituation, or an attraction to human food, the plan prescribes more vigorous responses by NPS, including tagging of the bear for monitoring, hazing with firecrackers and rubber bullets, and the like. Advanced responses to recalcitrant bears have included relocation or removal from the park, although as the preventive measures have become ingrained the more drastic actions are only rarely needed.

Despite provisions for the hands-on management of bears, the program's emphasis is on educating people. The theory - born out be experience - is that if we can be responsible with our food and garbage, and if we respect the bears' concerns for their cubs, natural food sources, and personal space, we can coexist peacefully to the benefit of all.

The Plan has been successful

How successful has this program been? After the peak of three human injuries in 1980, the number of such incidents began diminishing. There were another half dozen incidents the entire rest of the 1980s, only one in the 1990s, and only three in the 2000s. Denali remains proud of its record that not a single person has ever been killed by a bear in the park, and the last injury was in May 2005, more than five years ago. Another gauge: in the years from 1949 to 1989, NPS destroyed

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BEAR TRAGEDY AND BEAR TRIUMPHS *continued from previous page*

24 problem bears, relocated 29 (plus three cubs with their mothers), and moved three to captive facilities outside the park. By comparison, in the 20+ years between 1990 and today, only eight bears have been destroyed, one relocated, and one moved to a captive facility outside the park. Although the first period represents a longer duration, on average that is 1.4 major interventions a year compared to only 0.5 interventions per year more recently. Despite large increases in frontcountry and backcountry visitation since the mid-1980s, there are fewer problems with bears. The bears living near the road have become habituated to people as a neutral presence in their lives, neither food nor threat, which enables tens of thousands of park visitors to see them each summer. At Denali, we have proven that people can coexist with bears if we exercise a little responsibility, awareness, understanding, and respect.

Legalized carry of guns will complicate this previously very successful program

The recent legalization of the carrying of loaded firearms at Denali (like all national parks) threatens to undo this success story, unraveling the tacit agreement we humans have reached with the park bears. Many of us who have hiked extensively in the Denali backcountry have had similar experiences to the hikers involved in the shooting incident. In fact, each summer NPS receives a few reports of visitors being charged or otherwise approached by a bear. At Denali, history has shown that the people-habituated bears that live near the park road almost never attack people even when they act with apparent aggression. In general, charges represent some other behavior – perhaps an effort to intimidate and scare away (which generally works!), a test to see if the person is “prey” by provoking a flight response, or something else known only to the bears. While behavior patterns observed at Denali may not apply elsewhere in Alaska where bears have had different experiences with people, in Denali we have shown that conflicts with bears can be successfully resolved without a gun.

DCC'S REDESIGNED WEBSITE HAS CURRENT DENALI NEWS

by Charlie Loeb

Have you visited the new DCC website yet?

If not, click <http://www.denalicitizens.org> to take a look and check out some of the useful features. We will highlight some of them in the newsletter each month. This month's picks:

Denali in the Media

Go to the Denali News page, and take a look at the Denali in the Media sidebar. For those who really want to keep up on news from the Denali area, this tool is invaluable. It displays the results of a Yahoo Pipe that combines several web news searches to bring you what's current in the media world related to Denali National Park and the Denali Borough. You won't miss a story if you check in regularly, or just add the feed to your own newsreader if you use one. The Yahoo Pipe and its searches will be refined over time to make the results ever more relevant and useful.

Just for Fun - Weather & Webcams

Planning a trip into the park or down the Parks Highway? Look under the Resources menu for the Weather & Webcams page, a one-stop-shop for weather forecasts north and south of the Alaska Range as well as the opportunity to peer through various area webcams to see what conditions are like right now at Wonder Lake, Talkeetna, Antler Creek, and Broad Pass. Use this page to decide whether you want to hike Primrose Ridge or Kesugi Ridge today, or for fair warning before heading out on the road or the highway.

We hope these are helpful to some of you. Let us know by clicking the *Contact Us* tab on the website and using the form to provide feedback and suggestions. And, don't forget, you can donate to DCC online using our website.

DCC ANNUAL MEETING SPEAKER CHRIS ROSE: RAILBELT ENERGY CHOICES SHOULD INCLUDE RENEWABLES

by Nancy Bale

This year, the DCC Annual Meeting moved to Healy from our more common venue of McKinley Village. We'd like to thank Patsy Nordmark at Nord Haven Motel, whose meeting room was spacious and welcoming. And thanks, also, to Chris Rose, who traveled from Anchorage to give us a thorough, passionate review of alternative energy options for Alaska's railbelt.

The July 24th meeting began with me giving a short review of DCC activities since the prior DCC Annual Meeting in July 2009. Of importance this year were efforts to gain further protection for Denali Park wolves on state lands west of Healy, thwarted by the Board of Game in February, and efforts to obtain a more locally and regionally protective approach to gas drilling in the Denali Borough. DCC has also, during the past year, supported the formation of a State Recreation Area on lands west of Healy, and we were successful in obtaining support from the Denali Borough Assembly for extending the area to include 8 Mile Lake. At the time of the Annual Meeting, DCC had a request to the State Division of Oil and Gas to reconsider its Final Best Interest Finding for Healy Gas Exploration. The request was, in fact, granted a few days later (see our website for more details).

Then, Charlie Loeb, DCC Board member, rolled out the new DCC website, using a digital projector and Nord Haven's wireless connection to "go live" for attendees. He clicked through the pages to demonstrate the up-to-date and relevant aspects of this site. Charlie worked long, productive hours on this site and the entire Board extends its gratitude to him for the work.

Renewable energy feature presentation

Chris Rose, Director of the Renewable Energy Alaska Project (REAP), then presented a well-researched program on the importance of and the growth of interest in alternative energy throughout Alaska. Denali Borough residents are not unfamiliar with alternative energy projects here. Local residents have used windmills and solar panels as part of their approach to home energy here for decades. However, Chris addressed the importance of increasing the renewable energy contribution to the larger energy mix in Alaska. His organization, the Renewable Energy Alaska Project, headquartered in Anchorage, has worked tirelessly to educate, advocate and make real progress on obtaining a larger role for renewables in Alaska. Its website, <http://alaskarenewableenergy.org/>, is updated frequently with nationwide news and information on educational events and research. I met Chris several years ago when he and others were seeking a better way to mitigate the impacts of gas development in the Mat-Su Borough. With this new project, Chris has continued to apply and extend the intelligence and abilities he demonstrated then.

What is renewable energy? Basically it is energy based on consistently available, non-depleting resources, and includes biomass, geothermal, wind, solar, tidal, and hydro-electric resources. Chris ticked off four advantages of renewable energy – it's stably priced (after construction, there are no fuel costs, simply periodic maintenance), it's clean, it's inexhaustible, and most communities have a local source. Under a renewable energy scenario, the gleaning of power from far-away plants,



Charlie Loeb (center), DCC board member, demonstrates the new DCC website for attendees. THANK YOU, CHARLIE!

DCC photo

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DCC ANNUAL MEETING *continued from previous page*

the construction of long-distance pipelines and the need for high voltage, long-distance transmission lines could be significantly reduced.

Chris reviewed some of the locations in Alaska where various renewables are available - our long coastline for tidal energy, areas where wind is available (including villages whose only alternative was expensive fuel oil), and both local and regional choices for hydro-electric power.

Chris explained that reliance on renewables must be paired with even greater attention to conservation and efficiency in building practices, our electric appliance (and vehicle) selections and our use patterns.



Chris Rose talks about wind energy during the Annual Meeting.

DCC photo

Many of us have already heard and supported these arguments, but I was heartened to learn what Chris' organization and others have already helped to accomplish. Below is some of the legislation that Chris and others have helped to pass in recent years:

- HB 306 – Set a goal of 25% reduction in energy consumption, per capita, by 2025, and a goal that 50% of Alaska's energy be supplied by renewables by 2025.
- SB 220 – Mandated that 25% of Alaska's public buildings be energy retrofitted by 2020 and sets up a \$250 million revolving loan fund to finance it.
- HB 152 – Established the Renewable Energy Grant Fund that will provide grants to eligible individual applicants who have good ideas for renewable energy projects.
- SB 289 – Added \$360 million to existing weatherization and rebate programs.

Large hydroelectric projects remain controversial

It was heartening to hear Chris describe a path to reducing the impact of fossil fuels and confronting the inevitable decline of oil and gas resources with positive alternatives. A lingering question for some observers, however, was this – how can we avoid the obvious impacts to natural systems of large hydro-electric projects, particularly Susitna, if they are touted as essential to meet the legislative goal of 50% renewables by 2025? Simply because they reduce our reliance on fossil fuels, large hydro projects have numerous resource and wild lands impacts of their own. We welcome being part of that discussion.

Even if you did not attend the Annual Meeting, you can benefit from the smart and innovative approach of Chris Rose's organization by bookmarking its website, <http://alaskarenewableenergy.org/>. It is a key resource for staying informed, learning of grant opportunities and educational forums, and being an advocate.

We had a low turnout for this meeting in late July, and we were left wondering how to do better, after having advertised extensively with member alerts and postcards to every zip code in Healy and Denali Park. Of course it is always hard to predict what other activities and projects compete on an individual day. Perhaps we at DCC should plan our Annual Meeting for earlier in the summer, when folks have not grown more tired and filled their calendars with obligations. We'd welcome input on how to do better. We strive to make these events educational and topical. Go to <http://www.denalicitizens.org/contact-us/>, fill out the form, and give us some ideas.

GROUP MEETS TO DISCUSS TRANSPORTATION PROJECTS

SAFETY CONCERNS ALONG GEORGE PARKS HIGHWAY IN RELATION TO DENALI NATIONAL PARK BRING ADOT&PF, DENALI BOROUGH AND PARK SERVICE TOGETHER FOR DIALOGUE

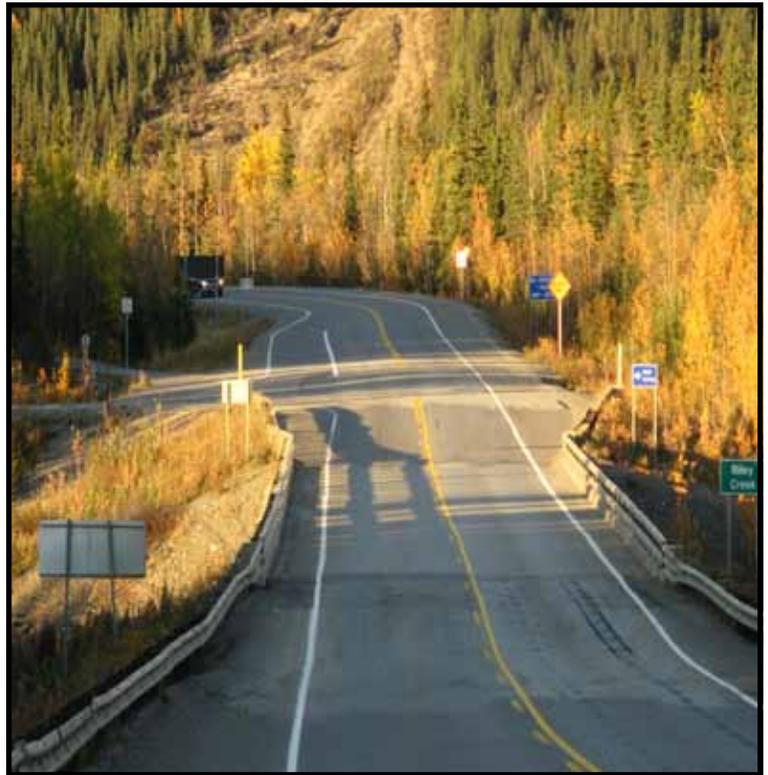
by Julia Potter

The completion of the George Parks Highway (Parks Highway) in 1972 provided an easier means of access to Denali National Park & Preserve for the independent traveler. Rather than accessing the park via the unpaved Denali Highway, which runs east to west between the Richardson Highway in Paxson and the Parks Highway in Cantwell, independent travelers can now drive from either Anchorage or Fairbanks directly to the Denali Park Road. Of course easier access means more independent travelers on the Parks Highway and more travelers on the highway causes increased safety concerns. Safety issues along the Parks Highway throughout Denali Borough have been brought up during borough assembly meetings by members of the community for many years. Several of these safety concerns are in areas where visitors to Denali National Park congregate for photo opportunities, park to access trails, or cross the highway. Recently, representatives from National Park Service (NPS), Denali Borough and Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (ADOT&PF) met to discuss some of these safety issues on the Parks Highway in relation to the Park.

Park entrance at milepost 238

The first area visited by the group was at the entrance to the Park and the Riley Creek Bridge at milepost 238. This area has several safety concerns. Vehicular traffic on the Parks Highway traveling north towards the park road has limited sight distance for vehicles turning left onto the park road. There is no left turn lane for vehicles accessing the park road. Pedestrians also frequent the Riley Creek Bridge for photos or to view wildlife. Parking is also an issue for recreational users of Riley Creek.

Funding from the State of Alaska is available to begin design of a replacement for the vehicular bridge at Riley Creek although construction funding is not yet available. It is possible that federal highway funds could be available for the portion of the bridge to incorporate a left turning lane into the park and/or an acceleration lane extending south. Funding may also be available for a pedestrian or multimodal bridge crossing to facilitate safer non-vehicular traffic. Dave Talerico, Denali Borough Mayor, provided the group with a concept graphic depicting what the borough would like to see at the park entrance. The concept shows an acceleration lane heading south on the highway from the park road and a left turn lane for vehicles accessing the Park from the south.



Approaching the entrance to Denali National Park and the Riley Creek Bridge from the south. A left turn lane onto the park road as well as an acceleration lane from the park road heading south are two improvements the group discussed.

DCC photo

Triple Lakes Trail milepost 231

Another area of concern is at milepost 231. This location has a small parking area for the Triple Lakes Trail. Just south is the Grizzly Bear Resort on the west and McKinley Village directly across the highway to the east. There is also a bridge across the Nenana River. Just north of the bridge there is the large Denali National Park entrance sign where many travelers stop

continued on next page

TRANSPORTATION PROJECTS *continued from previous page*

for photos. Not only is vehicular traffic an issue, but pedestrians crossing the road and the bridge is a serious safety concern.

It was noted by the group that there is adequate need and vertical relief to construct a pedestrian underpass between the commercial facilities on the west and east side of the road. Additional traffic control devices were discussed as other options for interim and long-term solutions. The number of pedestrians crossing the highway and crossing the bridge over the Nenana River has resulted in many near-misses; however, there are most likely no reported incidents or safety data to support improvements. The Denali Borough intends to submit a formal request to the State of Alaska for corrective action. This area has been one of the most discussed safety concerns within the Denali Borough on the Parks Highway.

Parking at the Triple Lakes Trail has also created safety concerns in this area. Elwood Lynn, Assistant Superintendent, DNP, guided the group to explain the NPS proposal to provide a safer off-highway parking area which would tie into the newly expanded Triple Lakes Trail. The area is to the north of the Nenana River and east of the Parks Highway. The area could also serve as a safer place for motorists to stop at the Denali National Park entrance sign without parking unsafely on the shoulder of the highway.

Vehicular pullout at milepost 234

The final stop for the group was at a vehicular pullout at milepost 234. Trash and toilet activities have become problematic and the park service has been providing some maintenance services at the location on behalf of the State of Alaska. The park has offered to continue with a long-term maintenance agreement if there is willingness for ADOT&PF to upgrade the area with rest room facilities, interpretive signs and general upgrading of amenities. This is a common problem for many pullout areas within the Denali Borough as most do not have trash disposal or rest room facilities.

Funding appears to be the biggest hurdle to overcome for these projects. It is unknown if funding sources will be available from the State of Alaska, FWHA Title 16 funds and/or park service. While no decisions were made during this transportation interagency meeting, the participants indicated an interest in continuing discussions.

DCC is pleased to see that a dialogue has begun to address these safety issues. As the dialogue continues, we will keep our members posted on these important safety projects.



The Triple Lakes Trail parking area at right, the Nenana River bridge and entrances to Grizzly Bear Resort (right) and McKinley Village (left). This area has many safety concerns for both vehicular and pedestrian traffic.

DCC photo



The iconic Denali National Park entrance sign located at milepost 231 attracts many visitors for a photo opportunity and creates safety issues with the lack of proper parking off the highway.

DCC photo

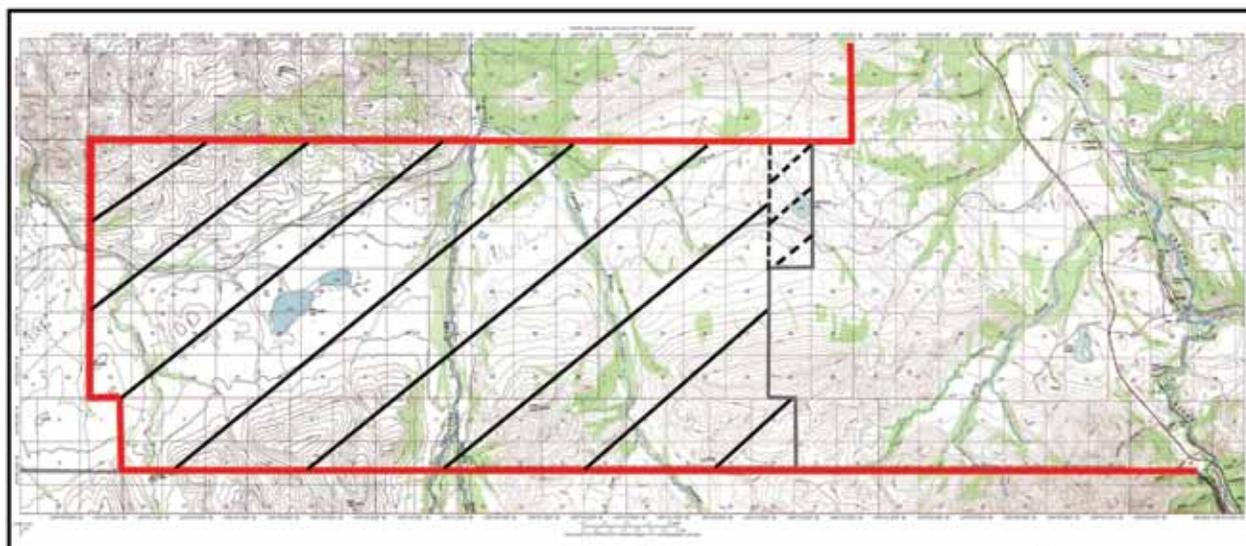
WILL THE THIRD TIME BE THE CHARM FOR STAMPEDE STATE RECREATION AREA?

by Hannah Ragland

As primaries have been held and state elections are on the horizon, DCC looks toward the upcoming legislative session, and the future for Stampede State Recreation Area (SRA) proposals. After the Denali Borough Assembly passed a resolution to support such a bill in 2007, bills have been introduced in the last two legislative sessions to create a Stampede SRA. A March 2009 DCC petition gathered over 100 signatures in support of this move, 50% of whom were Denali Borough residents, 90% of whom were Alaskan. Many signers expressed support of the inclusion of 8-Mile Lake. In 2010 the Denali Borough Assembly passed a resolution to support the addition of lands around 8-Mile Lake into the proposed SRA. Representative David Guttenberg and Senator Joe Thomas, both supporters of the Stampede SRA idea in the past, are up for re-election in the November election. Running against the incumbents are Dave Talerico, current Mayor of the Denali Borough, for House and Pete Higgins for Senate. DCC plans to work closely with our representative legislators to promote the introduction of Stampede SRA proposals in both the House and Senate, with the inclusion of Assembly-supported lands surrounding 8-Mile Lake.

As we gear up for the upcoming session, increased (or revived) participation is essential. Initiated and sustained by a grassroots effort, SRA designation has been pursued because of the opportunity it would provide to develop a long-term vision for the area that would guide development alternatives. With the recent sunset of the Denali Rail Bill (HB 244, see article on page 14), and the granting of a Request for Reconsideration of Healy Basin natural gas development (see article on page 14), Stampede area development remains a pressing issue. The Denali Borough Assembly will be considering legislative priorities at its October 13 meeting (at McKinley Village). Please consider attending to show support for the SRA proposal.

If you are interested in receiving special notices of issues related to the lands within the proposed SRA, including the 8-Mile Lake area (see map) please notify Hannah Ragland (hannah@denalicitizens.org).



Map showing proposed boundaries of Stampede State Recreation Area. The hatched lines denote sections proposed for addition by a resolution of the Denali Borough Assembly in January 2010. We at DCC agree that including 8-Mile Lake in the proposed SRA is important.

Map courtesy of Nancy Bale

BRIEF NEWS & VIEWS

HB 244 (KANTISHNA RAILROAD BILL) SUNSETS

In this issue of *DCC News*, we bid adieu to HB 244. Those with long memories recall that in 2001, the Alaska legislature authorized conveyance of up to 3,500 acres of land to the Denali Borough for the purpose of providing a railroad and utility corridor from Healy to west to the Denali National Park boundary. The legislation specifically described this as a land grant to facilitate the development of a railroad by Kantishna Holdings, the brainchild of Joe Fields of Fairbanks. Fields had spent the better part of a decade promoting a privately-funded tourist railroad from Healy to Kantishna, and despite the fact he had no obvious experience, capital, or investors the legislature decided to support his endeavor.

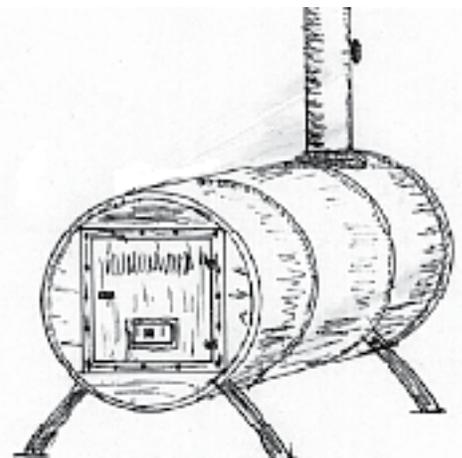
DCC and the Northern Alaska Environmental Center's Denali Watch program lobbied extensively against this poorly-conceived bill but were unsuccessful in derailing it even though we did secure Governor Tony Knowles' veto, which the legislature then overrode. The effort did produce a significant amendment however, the addition of Section 1(e) which read: "By September 1, 2010, the Denali Borough shall lease the land received under this section to a person for a railroad development project. Otherwise, on September 1, 2010, the title to the land granted under this section reverts to the state." The Borough never did pursue its title to the land and this statute proved to be the highwater mark for Fields' railroad project, which has since faded away. But with the passing of September 1 this year, HB 244 is finally undone.

HEALY GAS EXPLORATION FINDING UNDER RECONSIDERATION

As of this writing, the Commissioner of the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Tom Irwin, is reconsidering the Final Finding permitting Usibelli Coal Mine to explore for both shallow and deep gas reserves on 208,000 acres around Healy. Seven individuals and organizations brought forth requests for reconsideration to the Commissioner in July 2010, asking that he adjust the size of the area and the specific mitigations proposed in the Final Finding. No one asked that gas exploration be completely halted in the Borough. Specifically questioned were spatial setbacks around residential areas, water quality monitoring and mitigation, and inclusion of sensitive wildlife habitat and public recreation zones in the license area.

We just don't know how long this reconsideration will take and what will finally be determined. The Commissioner does not work under a set length of time for reconsideration. He is not required to change the Final Finding in any way. We are, of course, hopeful that he will limit the license area and strengthen the mitigations. Stay tuned to our website and member updates for further information on this issue.

We'd like to note that all of the granted requests for reconsideration were penned by local organizations and individuals. There was not an outside organization among them. The Commissioner must have noted this fact, and we are hopeful that he is impressed by the concern that LOCAL folks have expressed on this issue. We at DCC recognize the legitimate role that fossil fuels still play in the overall energy mix for Alaska. Although we advocate for an increased role for renewables, we understand that the contribution of fossil fuels cannot yet be eliminated. We would sincerely hope for a cooperative and collaborative solution to gas development in the Denali Borough.



Alaskan Native Knowledge Network

BRIEF NEWS & VIEWS

AIR PERMIT FOR HEALY CLEAN COAL PLANT UNDER CONSIDERATION BY THE EPA

In early August 2010, GVEA (Golden Valley Electric Association) received an Air Quality Permit from the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation for operation of HCCP (the currently non-operational Healy Clean Coal Plant, also called Healy 2), and the existing power plant, Healy 1. The Environmental Protection Agency has 45 days to review the permit and suggest changes. The EPA has disagreed on some of the stipulations for this permit, and its final decision may ask for changes in the permit. Its decision is expected on September 23, 2010. DCC has communicated with the EPA that we feel that Healy 2, closed for more than ten years, must go through a major review of its pollution control technology. GVEA has disagreed that this review is necessary. We await EPA's final decision on this and other matters surrounding air quality stipulations for this coal plant.

We at DCC have always held that no corners should be cut in regulating the air pollution from coal-fired power plants. Adherence to the strictest standards, even if it elevates cost and time-to-retrofit for Healy 2, is just the right thing to do. We are, in addition, concerned about other long-standing impacts of coal power generation, including ash disposal.

There may be a role for coal to play in the near future of America, and Alaska, but this role does not exempt coal suppliers from adequate regulation of their product. Such regulation is in the public interest and is just, plain common sense. In addition, the export of coal to distant countries that fail to regulate power plants adequately creates worldwide impacts.

DCC NEWS

Join Denali Citizens Council and receive a subscription to *DCC News* published six times a year. A form is provided on the back of this newsletter. Or join on the web:
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