

STAMPEDE SUMMIT 3 MOVES THE CONVERSATION FORWARD

GOVERNMENT & BUSINESS REPS, SCIENTISTS, STAKEHOLDERS & LOCAL CITIZENS SHARE CONCERNS

by Charlie Loeb

What should be the future of the Wolf (Stampede) Townships and the Stampede Trail? Is it worth continuing to press for the passage of legislation to designate the Stampede State Recreation Area (Stampede SRA)? What has changed on the Stampede in the seven years since the last Stampede Summit? Are there new or different problems? Are there other management solutions that have not been contemplated during the push for establishment of the SRA?

These are some of the important questions that the Denali Citizens Council intended to address through the Stampede Summit 3, held on August 11 at the Tri-Valley Community Center in Healy. More than 60 concerned residents, business owners, Denali Borough officials, state agency representatives and others came together to share information and contemplate the future of the Stampede. This gathering followed well after the two earlier Stampede Summits, held in 2004 and 2005, during which support for the SRA crystallized locally.

Much has happened in the years since our first two summits. Most importantly, legislation for the SRA has been introduced in each of the last two legislatures, spearheaded by the Denali Borough and the offices of Senator Joe Thomas and Representative David Guttenberg. Unfortunately, the bills have not advanced very far, gaining at most one committee hearing a session.

However, the failure to choose a land management solution has not stopped the land management challenges.

Just since 2005:

1. Commercial off-road vehicle tourism developed both along the Stampede Trail and between Otto Lake and Dry Creek.
2. The State of Alaska Board of Game allowed the expiration of the Stampede Closed Area, or wolf buffer, west of the Savage River.
3. The State of Alaska awarded a license to explore for natural gas to the Usibelli Coal Mine, covering the eastern portion of the townships.
4. Road and railroad project proposals virtually disappeared after Frank Murkowski's gubernatorial administration and the completion of the North Denali Access Reconnaissance Study in 2006, but the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) is still thinking about an access corridor.
5. The Denali Borough is moving to actively manage its municipal land entitlements in the eastern townships.
6. A draft Yukon Tanana Area Plan (or YTAP) - which will replace the Tanana Basin Area Plan - was released in June 2012, offering the chance to be more explicit about the goals and management of the Wolf Townships.

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The DCC Board of Directors appreciates the participation of everyone who took time out of a busy summer to contribute to the Stampede Summit 3.

The efforts of panelists and audience members made the event very fruitful, and led to a much-enhanced understanding of current activities and issues in the Stampede.

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DENALI CELEBRATES THE LIFE OF TOM MEIER, THE 'TRUE EPITOME OF THE SPIRIT OF ADOLPH MURIE'

by Cass Ray

'Denali Has Lost a Champion'

To Denali's extended family, August dealt serious blows, with the unexpected death of Tom Meier, the wildlife biologist who championed the park's wolves, among the most-studied canines on the planet, and with, less than two weeks later, the first known bear mauling fatality in the 95-year history of the park.

Meier's unexpected death in mid-August, at age 61, followed by two years the unexpected death of his colleague, Phil Brease, the park geologist, while leading students on a hike in Healy, also at age 61. Meier's death followed by nearly three years the death, in a tragic plane crash on the East Fork of the Toklat River, of Gordon Haber, the independent wolf biologist who studied and advocated for Denali's wolves for more than forty years.

Only a few weeks ago, a colleague introduced Meier to a new summer intern by confiding, in a stage whisper, that Meier was "easily one of the very nicest guys in the entire park" - and surely that opinion would be disputed by no one attending the celebration of Meier's life on August 27 at the Denali Visitor Center's Karstens Theater. Meier was a gentleman and a gentle man, in every sense of both terms. At that celebration of his life, another term applied to Meier by one speaker, mindful of the lamented late wolf buffers championed by Meier, was "buffer": "He was our buffer - in every sense of the word." NPS' failed proposal two and a half years ago that the buffer protecting Denali wolves from hunting and trapping in the Wolf Townships not only be retained but also enlarged by 64 percent was "based on the data" and 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," Meier told a wildlife forum hosted by DCC and the Denali Education Center in June 2010.



Tom Meier, spring 2012

photo courtesy of NPS

'Consummate Professional' with 'Incredible Street Cred'

Meier was, it was noted at the celebration of his life, the "true epitome of the spirit of Adolph Murie." With more than 35 years as a wildlife biologist, and plenty of experience as a trapper and hunter, Meier had "incredible street cred," noted one speaker. Meier was hailed as the "consummate professional" - despite his unabashed discomfort with "the rules that often are pervasive" in federal government. Meier, who demonstrated a true passion for his work, died "doing exactly what he wanted to do, but before he finished what he hoped to do."

Meier began studying wolves in 1976 and, after pursuing research in Minnesota and Wisconsin, arrived in Denali 10 years later. He left the park in 1993, to pursue additional education, and from 1996 to 2004 worked with the federal Fish and Wildlife Service on reintroducing wolves in Montana. Meier returned to Denali in 2004 to lead the biological program and conduct predator-prey research. His resume also included work with wolves in Idaho and Israel.

Meier's "breadth and depth of experience with wolves in the Lower 48, as well as his experience with wolves in Denali over many, many years, made him a distinguished and well-respected international expert," offered Paul Anderson, the park superintendent who is about to retire after 11 years in Denali and 42 years with NPS. With his "extensive scientific knowledge, quiet common sense, and thoughtful approach to his profession," Meier, an "invaluable asset to the Denali management team," was, added Anderson, the "perfect person to lead the Denali wildlife biology program and to maintain and enhance the second longest continuous predator-prey relationship database in the world."

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Meier always was able to “deal calmly, deliberately, and effectively with the emotional arguments surrounding wolves, predator control, and wildlife viewing.” Also cited by Anderson were Meier’s “long-term participation and leadership on the NPS Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee, establishing protocols, reviewing research proposals, and ensuring compliance with the laws governing use of animals in research.” Concluded the superintendent, “Tom set a very high standard to which all of us might aspire in our work.”

The Legacy of a ‘Unique Perspective’

Meier “devoted his life’s work to understanding wolves and the predator-prey relationship,” offered Sue Masica, the NPS regional director, adding, “Denali has lost a champion.” Calling Meier an “incredible park employee and person,” Philip Hooge, assistant superintendent, Center for Resources, Science, and Learning, added, “Tom has left a legacy here, not only because of his immense contributions to what we know about wolves in Denali and his leadership in resource protection, but for his ability to work with a range of agencies and independent researchers, even those who are in direct conflict with NPS and its mission.” For Carl Roland, plant ecologist, Meier was a “stand-up human being in all respects: nothing false, just a genuine and true good guy...friend, supervisor, and role model.” Cited by Roland was Meier’s “unique perspective on events both large and small.”

Through the years, more than one colleague recognized that Meier physically resembled the species he championed - with that silver beard and halo of hair of the same hue. Meier was, noted one speaker at the celebration of his life, “kind of a friendly recluse” - who once, visibly shocked, very nearly fell out of his chair when his cellphone rang. Meier’s “good, Midwestern dry and wry sense of humor” was cited by Jennifer Barnes, the regional fire ecologist, who sent her condolences to the park, noting “how much he was a part of the Resources team and Denali Park, and a dear friend to many.” Similarly, Meier’s “everlasting wit and honest approach to life,” along with “too many wonderful Tom experiences to single much out,” were cited by Guy Adema, natural resource team manager in Anchorage who, as a physical scientist and glaciologist in Denali, worked with Meier for years. At the celebration, Meier was remembered as someone who “valued, above all else, civil conversation.”

Meier also was recalled as a “man without an ego,” a “damn good guy to have as a supervisor,” and a “compassionate and generous leader” - the planet “would be a far better place if there were more people like Tom.” Everyone gathered in the Karstens Theater was, noted one speaker, “better off for having known Tom.” Several colleagues referred to Meier as their mentor; one called him “my psychologist” and “older brother” - “who never held it against me.”

‘One Hell of a Lot of Fun’—and a ‘Rock’

Cited were the “quality of his work, his honesty, his practicality.” Also noted were Meier’s “integrity and professionalism - and sense of fun - one hell of a lot of fun.” Meier was, summed up one speaker, “our rock.”

Among the more than a dozen speakers at the celebration of Meier’s life were Anderson; Hooge; Adema; Pat Owen and Carol McIntyre, Meier’s fellow wildlife biologists; Denny Capps, Brease’s successor as park geologist; and Colin Malone, park pilot, who spent countless hours in the air with Meier. Meier’s survivors include his brother, Mike, and sister, Karlen Cochran.

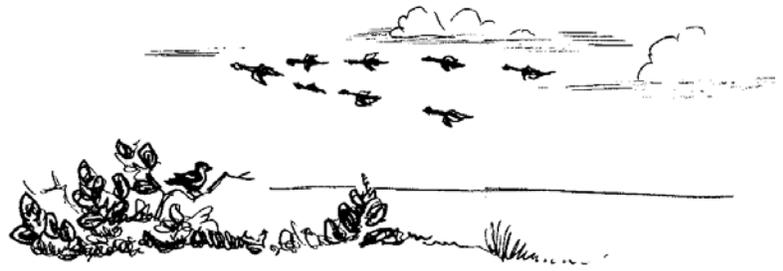
One of the speakers at the celebration of Meier’s life noted that Meier would live on in those whose lives he touched and in the howl of the wolf. The video and slide show that closed the celebration ended with footage of a wolf on the tundra, howling melodiously. 



Native Knowledge Network

THANK YOU, MEMBERS

Our gratitude for your generosity during the spring 2012 membership drive, both in your donations to the Gas Legal Fund and in your membership contributions. The fall DCC membership drive will be coming soon. You may contribute online at any time, directly from the front page of our website, <http://www.denalicitizens.org>.



Alaska Native Knowledge Network

THANK YOU, FUNDERS

Thank you to the Alaska Conservation Foundation for providing funds to employ an intern for six months to study the convoluted world of gas permitting and develop a Citizens' Guide. We have partnered with the National Parks Conservation Association to supervise this position. Learn more about Claire Pywell, whom we hired in May, on page 9 of this newsletter. In addition, we'd like to thank the Mountaineers Foundation for a grant to support Stampede Summit 3, another successful conference on the future of the Stampede (Wolf) Townships west of Healy. Read our cover article for details.

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WELCOMING DAVE SCHIROKAUER BACK TO DENALI

by Erica Watson

Editor's Note: The National Park Service is expecting a wave of retirements and new hires at Denali over the next year. DCC News will endeavor to introduce our readers to new NPS employees moving into key positions, as well as to give long-time departing employees a chance to reflect on changes at the park during their tenure and what they see as key issues for the future.

Dave Schirokauer has been back at Denali as the park's physical resource manager since January of 2012. He brings with him a great enthusiasm for the park and years of insights into Denali's history and ecology. He's had a few months to settle in by now, and was happy to answer a few questions about his view of the park and his work here so far.

DCC: You've lived and worked in the Denali community before. When was that?

DS: I worked here as an SCA interpreter, first in 1984. Prior to that I came up as a visitor and attended an evening interpretive program in a circus tent behind the park hotel. The next day the tent collapsed in a summer snow storm (no one was hurt). This evening program along with a tundra walk at Eielson led by Kim Heacox inspired me to become a "park ranger." I imprinted on the park and came back as a seasonal employee in various capacities until 1995. In 2003 I was invited back on a detail assignment while I was working at Point Reyes National Seashore. I didn't have to think very hard when offered the opportunity to come back as a program manager.

DCC: Where did you move from most recently?

DS: From Skagway, where I was the Natural Resource Program Manager at Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park.

DCC: What is your new position at Denali National Park? Tell us a bit about what that job will entail.

DS: I am the Physical and Social Science Program Manager. I oversee several science and resource specialists that focus on geology, glacier monitoring, soundscapes, air quality, wilderness character monitoring, and social science.

DCC: What are some of the changes you've noticed since your return?

DS: What's even more striking than the changes is what has stayed the same. The sweet smell of the kennels building, the wildlife, the backcountry and the park road are the same as I remember them. The frontcountry development is all new, but I am glad the park now has a world-class visitor center and Science & Learning Center.

DCC: What are you most excited about working on in this new position?

DS: It's all pretty exciting! The intersection of Denali's unique management and its challenges with the highly dynamic ecosystems the park harbors offers many exciting opportunities for research, adaptive management and education. The fact that the park's boundary cannot be seen on a high-resolution satellite image is an important attribute that has always attracted me to Alaska and Denali. World-wide, most protected areas are surrounded by intensively managed or developed land; Denali's boundary is not developed, allowing broad-scale natural process to occur unimpeded by artificial boundaries.

DCC: What do you expect some of the challenges will be?

DS: Denali lies in a climatic zone where permafrost is changing, in some cases rapidly. I look forward to working with university-based investigators to develop an understanding of the permafrost processes in the region. Denali is the perfect natural lab to study the interaction between permafrost dynamics, climate change, fire regime, wildlife habitat and carbon balance. 🐾



Dave out in the weather

photo courtesy of Dave Schirokauer

STAMPEDE SUMMIT 3 CONTINUES THE CONVERSATION

continued from front page

Notable also since 2005 has been the emergence of the Friends of Stampede, an organization focused on the well-being of these lands. Friends of Stampede has undertaken several garbage cleanups, formally adopted the Stampede Road to Eightmile Lake, held informational gatherings, and organized recreational outings.

Diverse panelists cover a variety of topics

DCC board members organized panels designed to explore each of the areas of concern. In the morning, Hannah Ragland spoke for Friends of Stampede and Jared Zimmerman for Panguingue Creek Homeowners Association, articulating the interests of those groups. Tourism operators representing Earthsong Lodge, Denali ATV Adventures, Denali Jeep Safari, and Denali Tundra Tours discussed their use of the Stampede corridor and what their guests were seeking on the Stampede. David James from the Department of Alaska Fish and Game provided an overview of what is known about major wildlife species in the Stampede. Researchers from the National Park Service, University of Florida, University of Alaska – Fairbanks, and the National Ecological Observatory Network provided insights into ongoing and upcoming research on bears, wolves, coyotes, permafrost, and the changing tundra environment.

In the afternoon, DCC board member Nancy Bale gave a status overview of transportation corridor proposals for the

Stampede, highlighting the impact of the Alaska Department of Transportation (DOT)'s insistence on a 1,000' right-of-way to be included in any Stampede SRA legislation.

Claire Pywell, an intern working on gas issues for DCC and the National Parks Conservation Association, summarized the status of the gas exploration project and her efforts to create a citizens's guide to gas permitting. Both DOT and Usibelli Coal Mine had been invited but didn't participate.

Finally, the Director of Alaska State Parks, Ben Ellis, and state parks' northern region supervisor Brooks Ludwig spoke about the proposed Stampede SRA and how recreation areas are managed by the agency. Brandon McCutcheon, a planner with Division of Mining, Land, and Water, discussed the YTAP and the importance of getting a vision for Stampede articulated in the plan. Denali Borough Mayor Dave Talerico discussed the borough's ongoing support for the SRA and explained the borough's process for managing its municipal land entitlements.

Legislators send message of support for SRA

Legislators were invited to attend but were unable to do so, including Senator Joe Thomas, Representative David Guttenberg, and the new Senator for the Denali Borough, Lyman Hoffman. Representative Guttenberg and Senator Thomas had introduced the SRA bill to the legislature in the past sessions, and did provide Summit participants with a message of support, printed at the top of the next page.

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FRIENDS OF STAMPEDE HOSTS ADDITIONAL EVENTS

FRIDAY EVENING AND SUNDAY MORNING EVENTS EXPLORE SOME OF THE TOUGHER ISSUES

The Stampede Summit was flanked by events hosted by Friends of Stampede. On Friday night, August 10th, the Friends hosted a presentation by researchers with the National Environmental Observatory Network (NEON), who are hoping to install an observation station along the Stampede Road between the Panguingue subdivision and Eightmile Lake. The NEON researchers explained the purpose of the site in the context of a nationwide chain of observation stations, including several others in Alaska, and described the development footprint of the station.

Although the details of implementation and the final approvals for this project are still pending, the NEON presentation showed some effort to address local concerns, especially regarding long-term impacts of a ten-year presence at the site and how the project would source its power. To view a copy of the presentation on Friday night, visit the Friends of Stampede website at <http://stampedefriends.wordpress.com/>

On Sunday, August 12, the Friends of Stampede took a field trip along the Stampede Trail past Eightmile Lake to discuss trail issues with local experts and Stampede residents Gabe Travis and Christine Byl of Interior Trails. The group examined areas where the trail had been widened through attempts to go around wet spots, and areas where rough terrain on the trail itself was creating conflict among motorized users. 



Letter to participants in Stampede Summit 3:

First off, thank you to the Denali Citizens Council for hosting this event and the invitation to be here today. Unfortunately, we were not able to make it but our support remains steadfast for the Stampede Recreation Area. Thank you to every resident, department and organization in attendance and for your continued work on the Stampede Recreation Area.

The 27th Alaska State Legislature was very different from anything we have seen in a while. Both of us worked across party lines, with chairs of committees and departments, to try to come to a solution on the Stampede Recreation Area. In the House and Senate, we worked with our respective Resources Committee Chairs to address issues before they came up in hearings.

By the end of the session, it was clear there was hesitation to move this bill forward. Almost all land bills that come before the legislature encounter this same resistance, which can be overcome by increased awareness about what exactly this designation would and would not do. Committee Chairs felt that opposition by special interest groups brought concerns that needed to be addressed before this bill was ready to move.

This summit is a good start to better understanding the comments and concerns from departments as well as explore new alternatives such as the Yukon Tanana Area Plan.

Our job as legislators is only one piece of the puzzle and the need for collaboration will remain. We will continue to need your support in order to dispense accurate information and correct the concerns associated with land bills.

Thank you again for your attendance today. Our offices are ready to help in any way possible and look forward to hearing about the discussions from the summit. The residents of Denali have worked hard to establish the Stampede Recreation Area and we look forward to the day this project is finally realized.

Sincerely, *Representative David Guttenberg and Senator Joe Thomas*



Stampede Summit 3 - conclusions and next steps *continued from previous page*

The weekend was very busy for all involved. And the results? A tremendous amount of information was shared - a major goal of the summit. While the event was not designed to produce a consensus recommendation, some next steps were identified that could be pursued by interested groups or individuals. These include:

1. State and Borough-elected officials were very supportive of the Stampede SRA, and not discouraged despite its reception so far. They emphasized the need to anticipate objections and address them before the legislative session, and to educate key legislators ahead of time.
2. Comments on the draft Yukon Tanana Area Plan could lead to important recommendations from state planners, including support for a State Recreation Area.
3. Even in the absence of the legislation, it is possible for the Alaska Division of Mining, Land, and Water to complete a step-down management plan that would focus more attention on the particular needs of the Stampede area, and give considerably more detail than the broad-brush Area Plan. Obvious needs include addressing the increasing commercial use of the area as well as the ongoing problems with human waste, litter, safety and trail degradation.
4. There are good opportunities for volunteer groups and nonprofit organizations to assist the state by pursuing grants for projects that will help to manage trails, human waste and litter. The Friends of Stampede is beginning to position itself as the go-to group for these types of projects, and all those concerned about the Stampede are encouraged to become Friends.
5. Research projects underway now should provide some hard data about how park wildlife uses the Wolf Townships, and even how intensive management on the border could change the ecosystem. A key project to watch is that of NPS biologist Bridget Borg, whose research will shed light on the relationship between wolf harvest in the townships and wolf sightings along the Denali park road. The results could lend strength to the arguments for reestablishing the Stampede Closed Area (wolf buffer). 

DCC PRESENTS ITS CASE IN SUPERIOR COURT

APPEAL OF ALASKA DECISION TO LICENSE GAS EXPLORATION AROUND HEALY ORIGINALLY FILED DEC. 2010

by Charlie Loeb & Nancy Bale

The Anchorage courtroom was packed with DCC supporters on July 2, 2012, as Judge Andrew Guidi heard oral arguments in DCC's case against the State of Alaska, Department of Natural Resources, over the Best Interest Finding for the Healy Basin Gas Only Exploration License. This case was precedent-setting for DCC; the organization has never filed a solo court challenge before, and undertook this one only very reluctantly.

Attorney Peter Van Tuyn, formerly of Trustees for Alaska and now in private practice, argued DCC's case. Essentially, in a Best Interest Finding process, the State of Alaska cannot make arbitrary decisions, but must be able to demonstrate a reasonable basis for its conclusions. In the Best Interest Finding on Healy gas, DNR failed this basic test by failing to explain both its economic rationale for the huge size of the lease area and for its scaled-back mitigation requirements and exceptions. Thus, Van Tuyn explained, the Best Interest Finding reflects the kind of arbitrary decision-making that Alaska courts have previously rejected. If DNR is able to issue a Best Interest Finding without rationally addressing public concerns, the required public involvement process in these decisions is essentially meaningless.

State attorney Rebecca Kruse responded for the defendant. She cast DCC's challenge as an attempt to substitute its own alternative for the decision of the state, which she stated would not be appropriate for the court to support. Attorney David Mayberry represented Usibelli Coal Mine with similar arguments, and added that a smaller lease area would not be economic for Usibelli. He did not, however, explain why Usibelli first sought an area just one-fifth the size of that which DNR ultimately awarded it. Judge Guidi asked Mr. Mayberry what support there was in the record before the Court for his assertion that a smaller license area was not economically feasible for Usibelli, and Mr. Mayberry did not point him to any such record reference.

The Judge indicated that he would take the matter under advisement before he issued a ruling, and also asked whether Usibelli had interests that would be compromised by waiting further for a ruling. Usibelli responded by stating that it was not planning any exploration activities until the legal cloud over the future of the project was lifted.

DCC has never opposed gas exploration in the Denali Borough in its entirety, but has sought both better mitigations for residents and landowners and a reduction in lease size to reduce conflicts with other land uses and to protect ecologically sensitive lands. DCC has repeatedly invited DNR and Usibelli Coal Mine to discuss whether there might be a mutually satisfactory solution that would allow gas exploration to move forward while relieving the concerns of local residents and protecting the Wolf Townships. This invitation remains open. We are hoping that the final resolution of this matter will reflect the state's own words, below.

"The revenue stream to the state from the proposed exploration license and any downstream production is not expected to significantly impact the overall oil and gas revenue of the state of Alaska. The best interests of local residents is therefore of critical importance to the best interest decision."

p. 1-11, Preliminary Finding Healy Basin Exploration License



We were heartened by the number of concerned citizens, including those depicted above, who came to hear oral arguments in Superior Court on July 2, 2012. *DCC photo*

DCC-NPCA INTERN WILL REVIEW GAS PERMITTING

TO DEVELOP A 'CITIZENS' GUIDE' TO GAS PERMITTING AND DEVELOPMENT

by Claire Pywell

Little did I know that my phone conversation with DCC's Nancy Bale would lead to the most exciting move of my life - from the suburbs of Washington, DC to the heart of Anchorage, Alaska! I'm grateful for this opportunity to dive right in as the Gas Permitting Intern for the Alaska Conservation Foundation, the Denali Citizens Council (DCC) and the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA). I recently graduated from the University of Maryland, College Park, with a B.S. in Environmental Science and Policy. The proximity to DC, combined with some dynamite political and earth science professors, solidified my interest in and commitment to environmental advocacy.

Growing up outside of Boston, Massachusetts, I rarely went camping, hiking or fishing as a kid. But after my first backpacking trip at age 14 in the wilds of British Columbia, I was converted - it became important for me to better understand ecology and nature's cycles, along with political provisions designed to protect those unique and vulnerable lands. I studied wetlands ecology, forestry, environmental law-making, international climate negotiation, and more at the University of Maryland and abroad in New Zealand. My interest in energy development began during a research assignment at NPCA's Headquarters in 2011, my work requiring me to learn about the threats posed to public lands in western states via solar, wind, gas and oil energy production.



NPCA Program Manager Joan Frankevich, Gas Permitting Intern Claire Pywell, and DCC board member Nancy Bale are enjoying our collaboration. *DCC photo*

And the learning continues! I am excited to develop a Citizens' Guide to Gas License Permitting in Alaska, which I will be doing through January 2013. This Guide is designed to help both citizens and conservation groups better understand and navigate the permitting process, demystifying the stages in the gas leasing process that allow for public involvement - from seismic testing and water use to siting and size decisions. The project will expand beyond the Healy Basin's proposed exploration and development to the rest of the state, ideally addressing the permitting stages associated with impacts of concern. I welcome input from you; please contact me with any concerns or requests for important inclusions during the drafting of the project at (907) 277-6722 x202, or at cpywell@npca.org.

✉



Claire presented an interesting and insightful review of gas development impacts at the Stampede Summit 3.

DCC photo

THANK YOU, PAUL ANDERSON

Paul, we hear you are retiring as of September 30, 2012, after 42 years with NPS and 11 at Denali. During your tenure here you showed a great appreciation for what makes Denali truly unique and special among national parks, a palpable awareness of your immense responsibility as steward of the park's resources, and astounding energy in tackling issues big and small. Being Superintendent at Denali is not an easy job, requiring the constant juggling of local, state, and national interests. Although we at DCC did not always agree with the actions you ultimately took, we very much appreciated your accessibility and willingness to discuss the tough issues and listen to our, at times, divergent opinions. We hope your retirement gives you the opportunity to enjoy all the things you put on hold during your busy career.

The photo to the right was taken at our Spring Dinner in 2002, your first appearance before DCC, where you invoked a key phrase: "No place in the world stays special by accident."



DCC COMMENTS ON FINAL DENALI VEHICLE MANAGEMENT PLAN EIS

On July 2, 2012, the long-awaited Final Denali Vehicle Management Plan (VMP) was released to the public. Comment on the Draft Plan had largely favored retaining a hard limit on vehicle traffic at Denali, rather than relying solely on adaptive management to set yearly caps. In an effort to respond, NPS introduced, in the Final Plan, a new alternative, D (NPS preferred), which contained a "maximum daily capacity," 160 vehicles past Savage River. Although we at DCC supported a limit, we had not envisioned a limit that, if fully realized, could lead to over 17,000 vehicles per season at Denali (more than a 60% increase over the current seasonal limit of 10,512 vehicles). We were told that the 160 daily vehicle limit represented a scientifically defensible cap, but that the Final Plan's adaptive management program would be the key factor in holding traffic to levels that would not damage resources.

Alternative D (NPS Preferred) aligned with the spirit of Alternative B in the Draft Plan, to "optimize access," by eliminating, for example, a dedicated Camper Bus, instead making provisions for campers and backpackers to take any Transit bus. It also used components from Alternative C of the Draft Plan by establishing Wildlife Viewing Subzone 3 between Eielson and Wonder Lake, intended to be a more primitive section of the road with more restrictive adaptive management standards. In addition, the Final Plan, while requiring concession contracts for day tours to Kantishna, placed no limit on their numbers, as in Alternative C of the Draft Plan. Despite tipping its hat to "hard limits" in the Final, NPS held steadfastly to the concept that adaptive management through indicators and standards would best protect park resources, despite valid public concerns about that method.

DCC was disappointed with the Final Denali Vehicle Management Plan. Our detailed recommendations for better ways to protect the availability and affordability of the Transit service went largely unheeded and unaddressed in the Final Plan. In addition, the inevitable impacts to infrastructure of the VMP, especially to Teklanika Rest Stop, went unaddressed in any substantive way. We were disappointed that the Final Plan placed no limit on the day tour concessions in Kantishna. And, we felt that those day tours should remain within the 1360 vehicle cap currently in place on traffic to Kantishna.

Perhaps our greatest objection to the Final Plan, however, was the 160 vehicle daily cap. Even though it would include ALL vehicles that travel past Savage River, it is simply too large and not well-vetted enough to drop suddenly into a Final Plan, after no appearance in any prior version of the VMP. We asked NPS to consider a lower daily cap of 145 vehicles, and not to place any cap into regulation until after analysis and additional public process. This process could explore various approaches to a limit, including different limits on different portions of the park road and different limits at different times of the summer. Our detailed comments can be viewed on the web at the following link:

<http://www.denalicitizens.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/DCC-Comments-on-Final-Vehicle-Management-Plan-7-20-12.pdf>

Because NPS accepted public comments on the Final Plan, not typically done, the agency has spent some time analyzing them, and the Record of Decision on the Final Plan is still being developed. We appreciate that NPS appears to be taking seriously ours and others' concerns regarding the Final Plan. We've been told a Record of Decision could emerge sometime toward the end of the month of September 2012. 🐾

EVA CREEK WIND PROJECT READY FOR TESTING

On August 29th, Golden Valley Electric Association officials and others gathered at the Eva Creek wind project site near Healy to dedicate this 12-turbine project. The 24-megawatt project will soon go through testing and may be functional by October 2012, according to the utility.

The project, laudable on many levels, has not been without its impacts and controversies, especially with Ferry residents whose lives have been profoundly affected by the construction hubbub, and will in the future bear the consequences of the changes begun there. Kris Capps summarized the concerns of local residents in her Fairbanks Daily News Miner article, "Eva Creek Wind Farm project transforms small Interior Alaska community."

Ferry will be much quieter after the construction camp departs and only a few maintenance staff remain. However, there can be little doubt that the region has forever changed. On the positive side, the project represents an important advance toward the goal of increasing renewable energy resources in Alaska. ☞

FIRST FATAL WILDLIFE ATTACK IN PARK'S HISTORY UNDERSCORES NEED FOR HIKER AWARENESS

What is believed to be the first fatal wildlife attack on a human in the 95-year history of Denali National Park and Preserve has underscored the need for hikers to maintain awareness and to calmly but quickly back away from wildlife they encounter. Richard White, age 49, of San Diego, California, a PhD with a 21-month-old daughter and reported to have many years of backpacking experience, including in Alaska and in brown bear country, was killed on August 24 by a large male grizzly while hiking on the Toklat River, in Backcountry Unit 10, about three miles south of the Toklat Rest Area. It was the third afternoon of his five-night backpack. The next day, the bear that attacked the hiker was killed, with one shot directly to the head. A necropsy performed by one of the park's wildlife biologists and a state trooper confirmed that the bear that was killed was the bear that attacked the hiker. The park reported it was confident that no other bears gained a food reward from the victim, so no other bears were expected to be destroyed.

Twenty-six photos in the hiker's camera, which was recovered at the scene of the incident, were taken over eight minutes, with the last five photos taken over 13 seconds. The sequence and time stamps on the photos may indicate that the hiker moved or changed position to gain a better angle for his photos, but did not try to move away from the grizzly. The 95-year history of the park has seen more than 20 close bear-human encounters, reported the park, which has documented those incidents the past 63 years. One of the most serious previous incidents appears to have been 45 years ago, near Toklat, when a seasonal ranger approached a sow and two cubs and was mauled. ☞



From Barb Brease (after touring the site): "Despite being fairly familiar with the scope of the project on paper, I was still 'blown away' by the massive footprint of the wind farm and the actual size of the towers themselves. The little dirt road to the site has been turned into a highway... a wild place industrialized. Ahh, the downside of wind energy; better than gas drilling but quite an impact on the landscape." photo by Barb Brease

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