

Stampede Road and the Wolf Townships

"In the northeast portion of the area, near the existing headquarters, there are some 3 townships of state lands which are critical for sheep, caribou, and wolf habitat and should eventually become a part of the park...." U.S. Senate Report on ANILCA, 1979

"WHEREAS, the designation of a Stampede State Recreation Area provides an opportunity to maintain traditional uses on public lands adjacent to settlement lands... WHEREAS, the designation of a Stampede State Recreation Area would provide recreational opportunities for residents within the Borough and throughout the State... WHEREAS, the lands included in the proposed Stampede State Recreation Area are recognized by the state as unique and important for wildlife habitat and recreation...." Denali Borough Land Use Planning Commission, 2011



The deep notch in Denali National Park's northeastern corner is known informally as the Wolf Townships. It is critical winter habitat for the park's caribou and wolves. As general state land, it is designated in state plans for wildlife habitat and recreation. Nonetheless, development ideas flourish, and DCC has seen proposals for settlement, gas development, and transportation infrastructure within the past decade. While caribou hunting has not been allowed in over 30 years, the hunting and trapping of wolves in the Townships is a lightning rod of controversy which highlights the problem of achieving the ANILCA vision of protecting the entire Denali ecosystem without the Townships being inside park boundaries. There is no more important conservation issue for the Denali region than the fate of the Wolf Townships.

Create the Stampede State Recreation Area

Denali Citizens Council advocates a permanent resolution of the status of the Wolf Townships through the creation of a [Stampede State Recreation Area](#) managed by Alaska State Parks. This proposal has been strongly advanced in conjunction with the Denali Borough through bills introduced in three state legislative sessions, but it needs broader, statewide support to move forward. Designation as a State Recreation Area will likely take years of work. If successful, the area would obtain both a managing agency and a management plan, which would go far to protecting the important values of the Wolf Townships.

Develop a Management Plan for the Wolf Townships

In lieu of the immediate creation of the Stampede State Recreation Area, DCC is urging the state Division of Mining, Land, and Water to develop a more detailed management plan for the areas of the Wolf Townships designated for wildlife habitat and public recreation under the *Yukon Tanana Area Plan*. Such a management plan should address at minimum parking, camping, litter, and human waste; user conflicts; commercial use; maintenance of the Stampede Trail; user safety along the Stampede Trail (particularly for those traveling to the famous “Into the Wild” bus); and ATV trail development.

Prohibit Natural Gas Exploration in the Townships

[Natural gas exploration and development](#) in the Wolf Townships could irrevocably fragment critical wildlife habitat, carving this sensitive area up with roads, wellpads, pipelines, and compressor stations. In other places where gas development has taken place wildlife has been displaced by development or killed outright from accidental or intentional releases of toxic chemicals and contaminated water. Such a result would be catastrophic in the winter habitat for Denali National Park’s caribou and wolves. Natural gas development should be excluded from the Wolf Townships.

Close Habitat Areas to the Hunting and Trapping of Wolves

Between 2002 and 2010, the Wolf Townships west of the Savage River were closed to the hunting and trapping of wolves. The Board of Game did not renew the closure in 2010, as the Board became increasingly hostile to predators and restrictions on hunting. Natural predator-prey relationships are critical to achieving the ANILCA vision for protecting a naturally-functioning intact ecosystem in the northern Denali additions. DCC supports creation of a new Stampede Closed Area that will protect the natural integrity of the park by closing to hunting and trapping areas of the Wolf Townships frequently used by Denali wolves.

Let Go of Denali North Access

The Stampede Trail is a remnant of a failed road construction project that attempted to connect the former Stampede Mine (now inside Denali National Park) and the railroad at Lignite. The existence of this corridor and its associated RS2477 right-of-way has inspired public and private entities to pursue construction of a northern road or railroad access to Denali National Park and Kantishna through the Wolf Townships. Such a transportation corridor would fragment the wildlife habitat and wilderness of the Townships and national park, and would not be a service to park visitors who travel the park road to see wildlife (which is not particularly visible along the Stampede corridor in summer months). The State of Alaska’s *North Denali Access Reconnaissance Study* (2006) was the latest word on this project, and it recommended no further work because of the many questions that need to be answered and the costs involved in research and construction. DCC agrees that this proposal belongs on a shelf indefinitely.