

Wildlife Habitat

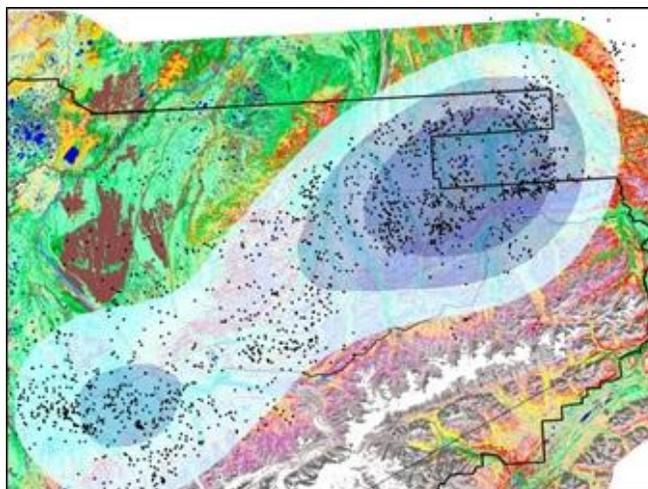
"The prime resource for which the north addition is established is the critical range necessary to support populations of moose, wolf, and caribou as part of an integral ecosystem. Public enjoyment of these outstanding wildlife values would thus continue to be assured." Senate Report on the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, 1979

In 1980, the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) added 4 million acres to then-Mt. McKinley National Park. The additions north of the Alaska Range were intended to accomplish a visionary goal: protect an intact naturally-functioning ecosystem including the wide range of the Denali caribou herd. Management directed at achieving natural conditions runs into problems at the park boundaries – where State of Alaska management regimes take over – and even within the boundaries where other park purposes create potential conflicts. Approximately 1.3 million acres of the park additions were designated as National Preserves where hunting and trapping would be allowed under state game management rules, as long as that management does not conflict with park purposes. Subsistence hunting and trapping by qualified subsistence users was allowed in certain areas of the park and preserve additions where that use had been deemed traditional. The use of off-road vehicles for subsistence activities was later authorized in a designated area near the village of Cantwell. This mixture of hunting and off-road vehicle use with more traditional national park purposes is unique to the large national parks of Alaska where residents depend on public lands for wild food and other renewable resources.



Protect Ecosystem Integrity in the Wolf Townships

A key area of wildlife management controversy is the Wolf Townships, an area of state land at the northeast corner of Denali National Park, enclosed on three sides by the park. This area is critically important as winter range for Denali Park caribou (the map on the right shows caribou concentration in the Wolf Townships in winter, shown in blue). Wolves from inside the national park follow the caribou. After ANILCA, the National Park Service prioritized the inclusion of the Wolf Townships in the national park through land trade, but the townships have remained state lands and are likely to remain so in the future. DCC no longer works toward inclusion of the Wolf Townships in the park, but we support the underlying goal of the land trade – the protection of the natural



NPS Graphic, Winter Radio-Collared Caribou Locations 1986-1998

integrity of the greater Denali ecosystem. We were encouraged when the State of Alaska, in the recent *Yukon Tanana Area Plan* revision, confirmed the primary importance of the Wolf Townships for wildlife habitat and dispersed recreation. DCC agrees with these designations. We have an ongoing relationship with state agencies responsible for land management in the Wolf Townships to promote protective land management policies, avoid land disposals, and manage recreation sustainably.

Protect Denali Wolves at the Boundaries of the Park

Beginning in the mid-1990s, the Alaska Board of Game, mindful of the importance of the Wolf Townships to park wolves, enacted a few small “buffer zones,” areas where no hunting or trapping of wolves was allowed on state lands adjacent to Denali National Park. The most recent zone, which incorporated a Parks Highway Closed Area east of the park and a Stampede Closed Area in the Wolf Townships west of the Savage River, was a workable solution that lasted 8 years. In 2010, the Alaska Board of Game allowed the buffer zone to expire and rejected proposals to expand it. DCC believes natural predator-prey relationships are critical to achieving the ANILCA vision for the northern Denali additions, and supports creation of a new Stampede Closed Area that would protect the natural integrity of the park by closing to hunting and trapping areas of the Wolf Townships frequently used by Denali wolves.

Improve State Wildlife and ORV Management

Although Denali National Park and Preserve is large, park animals venture outside the park onto state lands in the Wolf Townships, the Yanert Valley and the Cantwell area. All of these areas have easy access from state highways and developed communities. Animals protected by park policies promoting natural diversity walk across an unseen line onto state lands managed for abundance of prey for human hunters. In addition, access to hunting by off-road vehicles is poorly regulated, a situation that has created irreparable damage to some areas in the Denali Borough. DCC opposes abundance management as it is carried out by the Alaska Board of Game. DCC advocates for state policies that may promote hunting but are not devoted to maximizing hunter access at the expense of healthy wildlife populations and habitats. DCC encourages enhanced trail management and off-road vehicle regulation by all state agencies to avoid irreparable habitat damage.

Override State Predator Management Policies in Denali National Preserve

Hunting is allowed in the Denali Preserves, subject to regulation by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G). Because ADF&G presently favors policies aimed at reducing predator populations, wildlife management practices that are antithetical to the purposes of Denali are at risk for being introduced into the Preserves. These practices have so far been avoided through the use of NPS Compendium restrictions. DCC supports the recently-announced efforts of NPS to prohibit several anti-predator practices, among them the hunting of bears in dens by flashlight, the taking of brown bears over bait, long hunting seasons for wolves, and hunting black bear cubs.

Raise Awareness of the Importance of Climate Change to the Regional Ecosystem

The consequences of climate change are being experienced disproportionately in the arctic and subarctic regions. Profound changes are being felt in and around Denali National Park, including the rapid melting of glaciers in the Alaska Range, the rapid melting of permafrost in the Wolf Townships, the advance of tree line, and more subtle changes within the food chain and vegetative mat. DCC feels that awareness of these affects is essential in the development of appropriate long-term habitat and wildlife management policies.