

DCC NEWS

Denali Citizens Council

Since 1974, advocating for Denali's wildlife, wilderness and way of life

Mar-Apr 2015

ANNUAL MEETING TIME IS APPROACHING

Rivers are flowing, birds and seasonal residents are migrating back to Denali, and days are getting warmer and longer, which means it's time for DCC's members to mark their calendars for our Annual Meeting.

MONDAY JUNE 1, 2015

AT

THE MCKINLEY COMMUNITY CENTER
MP 230 PARKS HIGHWAY

6:00PM: JOIN NATURALIST AND DCC BOARD MEMBER NAN EAGLESON FOR A BIRD WALK

6:30-7:00PM: GATHER FOR AN APPETIZER POTLUCK AND SOCIALIZING. BRING AN APPETIZER TO SHARE IF YOU WISH

7:00PM: ACTIVITIES UPDATING MEMBERS ON THE LATEST NEWS AND ISSUES

ANNUAL BOARD ELECTION IS APPROACHING

This May, DCC will hold its annual election for the board of directors. There are four positions open, and three candidates: Sarah Bartholow, Nan Eagleson, and Hannah Ragland.

Write-ins for the fourth position are encouraged!

Online voting will begin in early May and extend to the Annual Meeting. Members in good standing will receive a code enabling them to vote. You may also vote at the Annual Meeting.

Results will be announced at the Annual Meeting.

KEEP AN EYE ON FACEBOOK AND LOOK FOR FLYERS AROUND THE COMMUNITY FOR UPDATES OR CHANGES.

WE LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING EVERYONE !

INSIDE

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FROM THE BOARD

by David Arnold

Like many regular visitors to the Park, my wife and I spend a good deal of time west of Savage River. We hike, bike, and when successful, take advantage of the Park Road Lottery system. We have done so for years. Until recently, riding the dusty or muddy road - depending on the atmosphere's most recent disposition - we'd curse the buses while being sprayed with mud and choked with dust. Apparently riding bikes on paved roads, although a bit more dangerous, does have its advantages. We always understood the need for access by purely mechanical means, although feeling pretty strongly there were simply too many buses that passed all too often. Apparently, unbeknownst to us, we had become elitists; or perhaps we always were.

During the infamous warm spell of January 2014 when temperatures in the Park exceeded freezing for nearly two weeks, with two consecutive 50+ degree days, I was injured falling on ice covered with a thin veneer of liquid water. Not only did I fall striking my hip and back on the ice so hard my head immediately ached, even though it never hit the ground, I did so twice within an hour's time.

Even though I had experienced a serious mobility-reducing injury in my 20s, nothing prepared me for the 18-month (and counting) period that followed that fall on the ice. I was examined by a number of physicians and specialists from Fairbanks to Starkville, Mississippi, with a stop in Missouri for good measure. I had multiple X-rays and MRIs, and was given so many different forms of medication I lost count; all to treat a condition that could not be diagnosed. There I was, basically immobile, and no one could tell me why. If I chose to walk, I would suffer great and immediate pain as a result.

Fast-forward from January 2014 to June 1, 2014. It was our wedding anniversary, and our tradition is to spend the day at Wonder Lake. And while I may have hurt so badly I could barely tolerate the pain after ingesting every medication I could find and duct-taping an icepack to my hip, I gritted my teeth and made the trip anyway. While the intense hip and back pain continued for another 7 months, my ability to mentally deal with it changed that day, because I was witnessing something I never thought I'd ever see again; the Park west of the Savage River. I am convinced that my improving mental attitude is what allowed me to begin recovering, and while I am still not 100% healed, I have made significant progress after both myself and my physicians thought that would never be the case.

I have thought a lot about June 1, 2014, over the past 9 months. I have walked, or ridden as the case may be, in the other person's nearly immobile hiking shoes. I thought I lost something exceptionally dear to me: this magnificent park.

No longer will I curse the buses as they pass. Instead I will remember that there are people on board that may not be able to appreciate the wonder of this great land any other way. I will always think we can get by with less, but I have lost my elitist attitude, and for a purely selfish reason. But that selfish reason has opened my eyes a bit, and as long as they are open, I know I will always be able to experience this precious park. 



Tourists leave a shuttle bus to enjoy an inspiring moment at Stony Hill. Folks of all ages and abilities can stand here.

Photo by Nancy Bale

THANK YOU MEMBERS AND DONORS

by Nancy Bale

In this issue of DCC News we're focusing on transportation and access issues, a timely subject as we move toward the summer season. Denali National Park continues to deal with the pressures of increased access, especially over the past 25 years as hotel construction and managed tourism have brought hundreds of thousands of people every year to the park entrance. Park managers have had to balance the importance of providing visitor experiences with the imperative of protecting resources, including landscapes, wildlife, air, water and natural soundscapes. We see the pressure increasing now, as the national economy recovers from the recession of 2007 and people are travelling more. The park itself appears to have arms wide open, and the message of the Park Centennial is to "Find Your Park." The recently-adopted Vehicle Management Plan would open the road to as many as 160 vehicles per day. A new concessioner will soon be chosen. What enhancements of commercial activities are coming?

In the pages to follow, we're providing a few insights into how Denali National Park is confronting the access pressures of the 21st century. There is a lot to commend about the way this park has been managed, and yet we're not completely confident that the goals voiced in previous planning documents can be upheld. One precious jewel, our park road, provides a low-speed, high-content trip through incomparable landscapes and habitats. Its very existence as a relatively narrow path that follows the contours of the land, has minimal pullouts and is spared high-profile infrastructure and signage, is a testimony to careful planning and strong advocacy through the years. The vision for this road, often called the Murie Vision, after acclaimed park advocate Adolph Murie, is even codified in building standards and maintenance practices. Nevertheless, as buses become heavier and more numerous, can the road itself maintain its essential character? As managers retire, advocates leave and new tourism operations take over, who will keep alive that strong memory of our roots and wilderness heart? 

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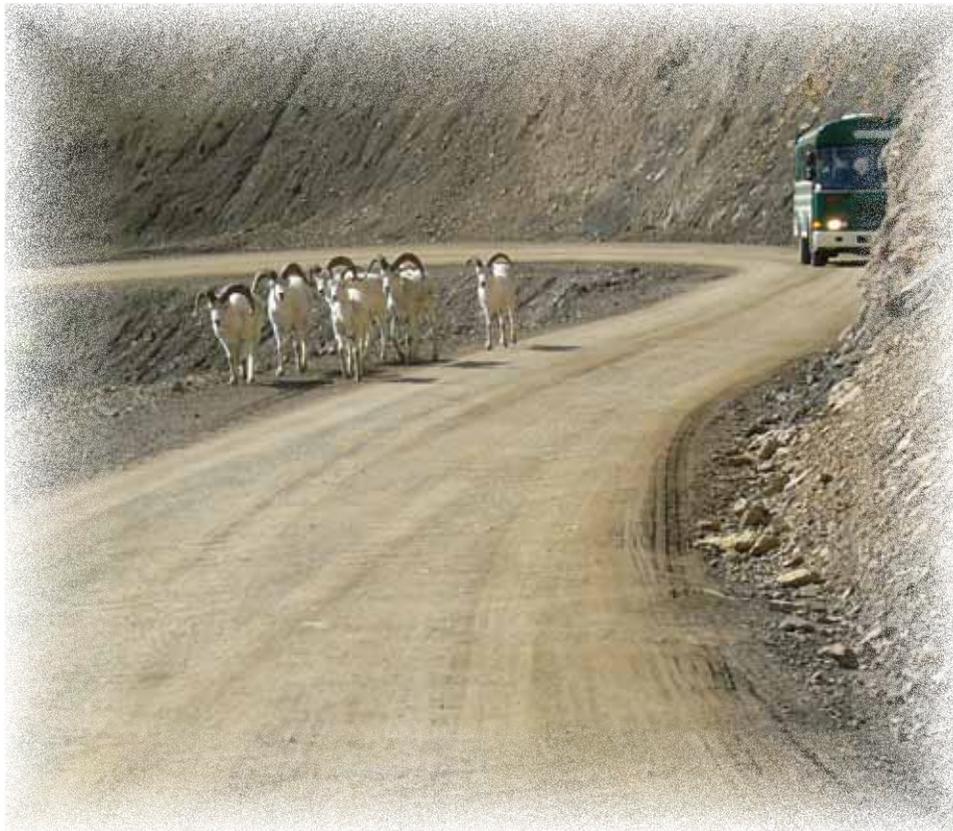


Photo by Nancy Bale

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CONCERNED VISITOR SUGGESTS A REVISED VISION FOR DENALI PARK ROAD

by Charlie Bird with an introduction by Nancy Bale

Last fall, DCC member and long-time Denali Park advocate Charlie Bird sent us a copy of a letter he wrote to Denali Park Superintendent Striker, describing a bus traffic encounter. The encounter illustrated the conflict between Denali Park's mandate to provide for visitor enjoyment and its mandate to protect park resources (in this case wildlife living next to and using the park road). The letter poses the question, "Is Denali Park bending incrementally to pressures for access that overemphasize the visitor experience mandate, leading to a diminution of the resource protection mandate?" We invite your reactions to Charlie's letter, a slightly updated copy of which appears below.

Write to us at mail@denalicitizens.org.

September 15, 2014

Dear Superintendent Striker,

Last month, I had the privilege of staying in the East Fork Cabin with my wife, Charlotte, while she was artist-in-residence. Thank you for your support of the artist-in-residence program. I also am happy to report independently of Charlotte that every National Park Service staff member we encountered during that special time was friendly, supportive and a credit to the NPS.

I also want to inform you about an incident during our stay that was disturbing at the time and that has changed my views of a long-standing issue: management of the park road.

When I first came into Denali in 1974, the opening of the George Parks Highway had made it possible to drive a car to Denali from both Fairbanks and Anchorage. The NPS had instituted a road closure and a bus transportation system to prevent the inevitable impairment of park resources that would occur with unlimited private vehicle access. Ever since, the road has had a complex and contentious political history. We have observed changes in road management almost annually since 1978.

I know that every access decision becomes embroiled in local and national politics. In principle I support public access both because it is the right thing for national parks and because only through access can parks sustain their essential political constituency. But I have also observed that people can love their parks to death.

On August 27, early in the afternoon, Charlotte and I were driving near the top of Sable Pass, intending to park where legal and hike on the shoulder of Cathedral Mountain. A tour bus was stopped near the top of the pass, and we could see that a sow bear with yearling cubs was on the road in front of the bus. The bears were not disturbed by the bus; to the contrary, one cub was trying to dig rocks out of the road with a claw and the sow was shuffling around with no concerns whatever. We watched for several minutes. Three more buses arrived: another brown tour and two green shuttles. The second brown bus pulled past us, pulled even with the stopped brown bus, and then cut in front of the stopped bus, visibly putting pressure on the bears to move. From our vantage point, it appeared that the second bus came within one foot of the sow. The green buses then took turns leapfrogging the brown buses. We were not able to observe how close those buses came to the bears. Apparently this leapfrogging process was a way for customers on all the buses to get at least some view of the bears.

Naturally, with bears in the vicinity of the intended start of our hike and following a bus melee into Igloo Canyon, we turned around and did a different hike. The conduct of at least some of the bus drivers disrespected the bears and taught disrespectful behavior to four busloads of park visitors. It's fair to classify the behavior of the first leapfrogger as harassment of park wildlife.

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CONCERNED VISITOR SEEKS NEW VISION

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This incident meant more to me than an observation of probable violation of regulations. The road management plan treats a trip by a tour or shuttle bus as equivalent to a trip by a van or other smaller vehicle. Visualizing the typical wildlife sighting as a bus or two stopped on the road while customers watch animals many yards away, I accepted that this treatment may be reasonable despite the obvious size differences. But this incident taught me that when animals are on or near the road, vehicle size makes a huge difference, as does the behavior of drivers who try to get their customers into the viewing action.

I do not want to generalize excessively from one observation. I discussed the incident with several friends at the East End. From their anecdotal information, driving a bus to within a foot of a bear is unusual, but leapfrogging that pressures animals on or very near the road is not. I urge you to consider whether standards and regulations need to be revised to prevent a form of wildlife harassment that was not discussed in the road management plan.

In 40 years, I have observed exactly two visionary changes at Denali implemented by the NPS. The first was closing the road at Savage and creating a visitor transportation system. The second was developing the Murie Science and Learning Center. At least relating to access and visitation, all other important decisions have been incremental compromises. Many of the compromises have ceded sustaining Organic Act values to the for-profit sector, initially to the concessioner and in this century to a combination of the concessioner and the cruise-tour industry.

I now believe not only that the ratchet of incremental compromises must stop, but that the time has come for the NPS to develop a vision of what Denali Park visitation and access ought to be regardless of whether people in Washington think that funding the vision is likely. Even an unfunded visionary plan would provide principles and goals that could guide short-term decisions. Prospects for funding may change quickly. For example, imagine what could have been done if portions of a visionary plan were "shovel-ready" in January 2009. A visionary plan can provide a foundation for the travel and tour industry to begin adapting to principles based on the Organic Act purpose of national parks instead of the NPS bending the purpose to adapt to industry.



Thank you for taking the time to consider my recent experience and my views. I intend to provide this letter to others who care about Denali. I mean no disrespect; I think my perspective belongs in the public forums about road management and the future of the concession.

Very truly yours,
Charles A. Bird

Photos courtesy of Kim Turnbull

DENALI'S LONG RANGE TRANSPORTATION PLAN: A WORK IN PROGRESS

by Sarah Bartholow

Every year, the NPS examines all aspects of the visitor experience, and transportation is a major factor in this examination. DCC is committed to following NPS' management of transportation in the park, and we'd like to bring our members up to speed on initial developments of Denali's Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). To give our members a picture of the LRTP and what it means for the park, I spent time interviewing Denali's outdoor recreation planner, Molly McKinley, who is an active member of the LRTP team. Through my conversations with Molly, I learned that the LRTP is truly in its formative stages. Long-term plans deserve long-term investments and examination. I'm sharing some of my conversation with Molly, in hopes that the community will have a better understanding of this project. ~ SB



Biking the park road

Photo courtesy of Molly McKinley

SB: Lets start with breaking down the goal of the Long Range Transportation Plan in a few ways, and then dive into the details.

MM: The goal of the park's Long Range Transportation Plan is to keep Denali's valued resources (natural resources, cultural resources, wilderness, subsistence resources, etc.) intact while providing for visitor experiences that permit connection with those resources through access provided by a holistic transportation system. A holistic transportation system incorporates connectivity between places, multiple modes of travel, different abilities and interests of visitors, while monitoring and adapting to changes to the climate and environment. The audience (park employees and visitors alike) deserve readily available access to information about the system and can be assured that the system is sensibly designed.

SB: So what does that look like in simpler terms?

MM: The LRTP is being developed by the park to establish a vision for what transportation assets, facilities, opportunities, access, etc., are going to look like in 20 years. Federal legislation known as MAP 21 is the impetus for these plans, and identifying & prioritizing existing assets and future transportation needs in LRTPs could be tied to future funding opportunities that best serve the park and its visitors. The idea behind MAP 21 is that the federal government wants agencies to think ahead about transportation systems; so as both to avoid maintenance shortcomings and to anticipate necessary changes.

SB: Got it?! Ok, let's dive deeper. Where did the idea for a park-wide long range transportation plan come from?

MM: When you start to do your homework, you'll find various types of LRTPs. Recently, the federal government has tasked its agencies to develop LRTPs nationwide. Multi-agency plans have developed to tackle transportation assets across Alaska's federal lands (see more detail in the Alaska Federal Lands LRTP <http://www.akfedlandslrtp.org/lrtp.html>). Honing in on the regional level, Alaska National Parks successfully drafted an LRTP (<http://www.akfedlandslrtp.org/lrtp.html>). Some national parklands in the lower 48 have begun work on unit level LRTPs (esp. Rocky Mountain National Park and Golden Gate National Recreation Area). These LRTPs are in various stages of development and Denali feels that it can leverage a) the success of the Alaska regional-level plan, b) the best practices of other park plans, and c) the unique transportation system models that already exist in Denali to develop a plan that will allow it to make sound decisions for its future, as well as vie for future funding to maintain excellent transportation assets that the park and its visitors rely on.

Keep in mind that you might also hear about state-level LRTPs, through agencies such as the Alaska Department of Transportation. Though the Denali-specific LRTP does not fully examine the detailed intricacies of how visitors arrive to the national park (by plane, train, or automobile), the plan will be cognizant of the myriad of options available to visitors and how those external systems interact with transportation needs within the park itself.

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DENALI'S LRTP: A WORK IN PROGRESS

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SB: So, we understand now what an LRTP is good for and the various types of plans in effect at the state and federal level. What is taking shape here in Denali?

MM: My current title is Outdoor Recreation Planner. In a four-year term position, I'm focused on the LRTP Project Delivery Team and work in park planning, which is just one of a few teams in the broader External Affairs Team. The LRTP Team is a group that collaborates with various entities involved in the project such as the Federal Highways Administration (FHWA), NPS Alaska Region Transportation Coordinators, NEPA specialists, and other park-based working groups. Ultimately, I report to the all people who value national parks, as the vision statement of the LRTP is to be closely tied to that of Denali National Park.



Teklanika Rest Stop can be very busy.

Photo by Kim Turnbull

SB: What kind of transportation is included in a Long Range Transportation Plan?

MM: It goes beyond the basics of planes, trains, and automobiles. The key phrase is transportation assets. Not only does the plan consider the modes of transportation in Denali—particularly but not limited to the bus system operated by park concessioners - it also includes automobiles, buses, airplanes, boats as well as bicycles and our own two feet. Furthermore, the plan attempts to answer these questions:

- Where do these transportation assets take us? To facilities such as pull-outs, parking lots, airstrips, docks, visitor centers and quiet places.
- How do we get there? Roads, tracks, airspace, and waterways.
- Why are we going? To visit, perform maintenance work, enforce the law, seek solace, and have adventures.
- What do we need to get there? Fuel, financial resources, schedules, energy, vacation time, and the invitation to explore.



In Denali Park, road-related infrastructure is kept to a minimum, enabling visitors to focus on landscapes and wildlife.

Photo by Kim Turnbull

SB: When will this project be completed?

MM: The Denali LRTP is a fact-finding mission. The timeline for a living document is about 18 months. From there, a gap analysis will be possible, allowing the park to see what more needs to be studied to help make the plan a robust model for parks around the country and guide us to the best transportation plan needed to support the needs of Denali's visitors in the decades to come. 

A Haiku

Protect Denali
That people love to visit
For now and future.

~ Molly McKinley

MANAGING SOCIAL TRAILS IN DENALI REMAINS A DIFFICULT CHALLENGE

by Nancy Bale

As visitation has increased in Denali National Park over the past two decades, the National Park Service has amended its General Management Plan (GMP, 1986) three times in order to accommodate the changes. The first major planning effort came in 1997 with the Entrance Area and Road Corridor DCP/EIS. This extensive plan identified infrastructure, including trails, to be developed both in the busier sections of the park near the train depot and Parks Highway, and inside the core park at Toklat and Eielson. For the most part, trails and rest stops constructed over the past fifteen years have found their origin in this plan. Much of the existing transportation allocations, including the current limit on vehicles of 10,512, can be traced to this plan. Then, in 2006, the second major planning effort was finalized, the Backcountry Management Plan, which established indicators and standards for protecting Denali's backcountry resources. The group size for hiking in the backcountry (maximum of 12) was established in this plan, along with standards for encounter rates, trail and campsite disturbance, litter and camping density.

Although these plans have helped to protect resources, we are concerned that, incrementally, park resources are at risk in the 21st century. We have three reasons for concern:

1. Increased visitation challenges established park protection policies,
2. Pressure from the tourism industry and powerful political players resists any limits on access, and
3. Replacement and retirement of staff remove historic memory and ties to past protective policies.

Trails policy in Denali is a key example of the interplay of these forces. Since the General Management Plan, the park has held to a policy of "no formal trails" for the core wilderness park. However, even as early as the 1980s, planners recognized that certain areas would receive concentrated uses and therefore would require designated trails. Formal trails would, in many cases, have to be constructed and maintained to direct travelers away from dispersed hiking and along pre-determined routes. These trails are described in the GMP, Entrance Area and Road Corridor Plan, and in the Backcountry Management Plan.

Denali's "formalized trails," approved in existing management plans, accept the fact of increased visitation

Most of Denali's formalized trails are in the entrance area of the park, where a great deal of the park visitation is concentrated, especially near the train depot and Parks Highway.

Entrance area formal trails include: The Mt. Healy Overlook trail, Triple Lakes Trail, Riley Creek and Morino Loop trails, Horseshoe Lake trail, loop trails near Savage River, and the ADA-compliant footpath from the Nenana Canyon hotel area to the Denali Visitor Center and train depot (not yet built).

Park interior formal trails include: The formalized trails outside of the Entrance Area are mostly associated with pullouts or rest stops. Most of the trails have now been built, although the rehabilitation and construction activities associated with completing the formal trail from Eielson Visitor Center to Gorge Creek have just been finalized through an Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact. Other formal trails along the park road corridor include the Thorofare Ridge trail at Eielson, a loop trail at the Primrose pullout, and the McKinley Bar and North End trails at Wonder Lake

Formal trails planned but not yet built include: An 8-mile Nenana River trail from McKinley Village to the Entrance Area of the park, that could be bicycle accessible, a possible formal trail from the west end of the Thorofare bluff down to the River, a loop from the Water Tower west of Wonder Lake Campground to the bench west of Wonder Lake, and formalizing a trail system in Kantishna.

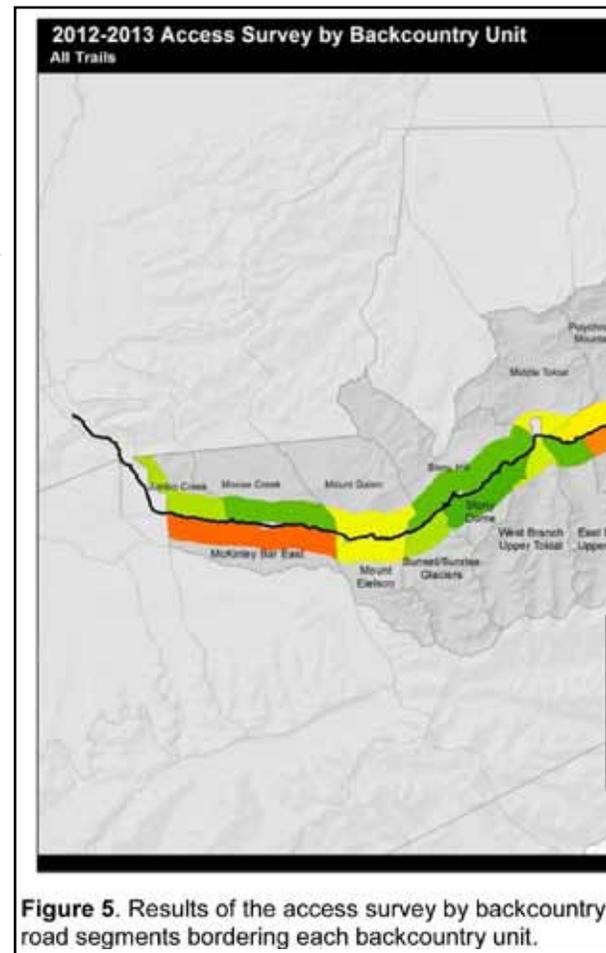
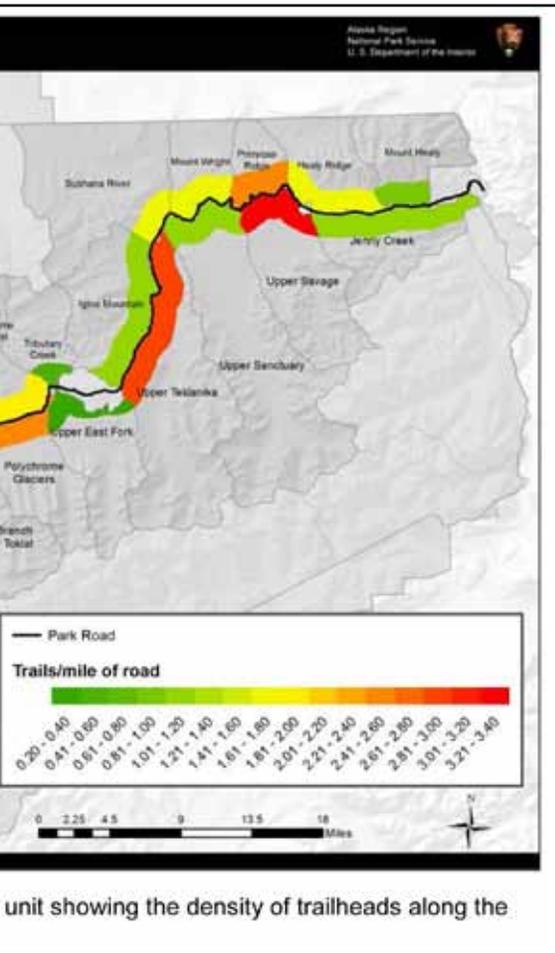


Figure 5. Results of the access survey by backcountry road segments bordering each backcountry unit.

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THE CHALLENGE OF SOCIAL TRAILS *continued from previous page*



Formal trails not planned but later added include: The Savage Alpine trail, a 3.7 mile route from Savage River over a ridge and down to the park corridor, approved by EA in 2009, and ADA-accessible trails added to the Mt. Vista Rest Stop, approved through an EA in 2006, are both significant departures from planning laid down in the Entrance Area and Road Corridor DCP. These occurred as the result of changes in visitation and mindset that departed from previous policy. Granted, these projects were submitted to NEPA compliance and they are both very well executed and enjoyed by many. However, they indicate the ever-present potential for incremental change in the face of access pressure. How will managers prevent this incremental creep from eventually producing a major change in the character of the park?

Areas currently identified for “no formal trails” are at risk through social trail formation

In 2012 and 2013, the National Park Service conducted a study of social trail formation along the entire park road corridor. The report, entitled *Informal Trail Status along the Denali National Park Road Corridor 2012-2013*, by Dan Abbe, Rob Burrows and Karen Milone, was published in 2014, and is available at the following link, <http://www.nature.nps.gov/publications/nrpm/>. The report identified 119 informal trails, or ITs, on the north side of the road, and 204 ITs on the south side. Twelve specific areas were prioritized for management actions. The map on this page (from the report) shows density of social trails per mile along the park road.

Increased park visitation is an important factor in social trail formation. The study noted that although the number of backcountry overnight trips has decreased over the past decade, day hiking in Denali has increased. The report identified three sources of day-hike pressure; independent day hikes, non-commercial guided hikes through Discovery Hikes and MSLC, and commercially guided

hikes.

Management concern occurs when social trail impacts such as destruction of the vegetative mat, erosion, trenching, widening and presence of duplicate trails become noticeable and irreversible. Areas of special concern, according to the report, include Gorge Creek (where rehabilitation activities will commence this summer), Polychrome (associated with its long use as a rest stop), Grassy Pass (associated with its popularity for access to Muldrow Glacier, identified in park planning documents for formalization), Cathedral Mountain, Thorofare Ridge, Tattler Creek, Cabin Creek, Primrose, Thorofare Cabin trail, Upper West Toklat, Upper Stony Creek, and Lower Stony Creek. Many of these areas have been popular hiking destinations for years. If dispersed access in these areas is not possible, NPS could be forced to choose between formalization and closure of trails.

Management of access is the current tool for maintaining “informal trails”

Currently, access management tools include hiker education (which includes training bus drivers not to recommend hiking in heavily impacted areas), temporal closures, required or voluntary registration for day hiking, regulation of number of visitors in certain areas of the park, management of commercial activity, or permanent closures.

We’re expecting a trails planning document in the not-too-distant future that may address formalization of a few of the most damaged trails. Although we understand that some trails may require it in order to remain open, we are concerned about incremental advancement of “built” and “formalized” trails in a park that is famous for its “no formal trails” policy. We hope that, to the greatest extent possible, NPS will have the courage to limit access where social trail formation involves resource impacts, in light of the fact that the backcountry of the core park is designated Wilderness. We look forward to joining the discussion on this sensitive topic.

DENALI TRANSPORTATION PLAN MOVES CLOSER TO FULL IMPLEMENTATION

by Hannah Ragland

On February 21, 2015, DCC board members met with members of the Denali National Park administration team, including Superintendent Don Striker to discuss various park topics, including the implementation of the Denali Vehicle Management Plan (VMP). Other NPS attendees were Dave Schirokauer, Chief of Resources, Nancy Holman, Chief of Interpretation, and Eric Smith, Assistant Superintendent of Operations. The meeting included discussion of topics, ranging from staffing changes to wildlife management to changes in transportation management. We appreciate the opportunity to meet with NPS management regularly, as it helps us to anticipate actions in the near future, and ask questions or voice concerns about topics near and dear to the DCC board and our members. We are still waiting for Winter Plowing statistics promised at the meeting, but have reviewed Road Ecology reports, presented here along with our review of the new Prospectus, which announces commercial management of transportation and other services in the next 10 years.

GPS units on buses discontinued; monitoring shows agreement with some standards

According to information provided at this meeting, and monitoring reports posted online, the Vehicle Management Plan will continue to be implemented, with one substantial change. Primarily, GPS units on buses and other vehicles, which were intended to allow detailed information about traffic, will be discontinued because of operational errors, which led to inconsistencies in data collected. Rather than installing GPS units on buses, NPS will be installing additional traffic counters along the road, and will use the traffic counters and employee and volunteer data to determine whether standards are being met for vehicle traffic.

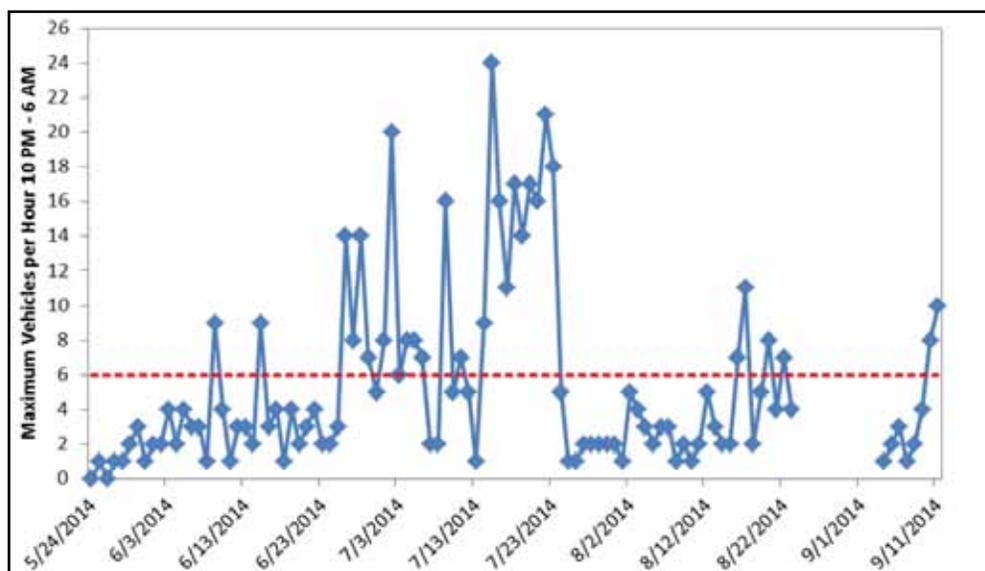
The Ride, Observe And Record (ROAR) program will continue to be used to collect data regarding bus traffic in the park. These volunteer observations will provide data that, in part, would have been provided by GPS units on buses and other vehicles.

Overall, bus traffic has met monitoring standards in four out of six areas. Standards met include number of vehicles at wildlife stops, number of vehicles parked at rest stops, number of vehicles in designated viewsheds, and hiker wait time. Standards that have not been fully met include a ten-minute “sheep gap” per hour, to allow for sheep crossing of the road, as well as nighttime traffic standards.

Long-awaited prospectus opens bidding on future transportation and other services in Denali

On April 9, 2015 the National Park Service announced that it would be soliciting proposals to provide commercial services in Denali National Park. This largely includes services currently provided by Doyon-Aramark Joint Venture (JV). Services are anticipated to begin on January 1, 2016, and would continue for ten years. Although transportation service along the Denali Park Road is a major focus of the prospectus, other services include management of the Morino Grill, Riley Creek Mercantile, and the Wilderness Access Center.

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The goal for overnight vehicles is six per hour. This limit was exceeded passing the Teklanika gate on multiple occasions. The dashed line represents the goal for overnight traffic outlined in the Vehicle Management Plan. Chart by NPS, accessed at <http://www.nps.gov/dena/learn/nature/roadeology.htm>.

TRANSPORTATION AND CONCESSION CONTRACT *continued from previous page*

The current concession contract with JV also includes management of Riley Creek and Savage River campgrounds. The new prospectus moves campgrounds at Sanctuary River, Igloo Creek and the Teklanika River from NPS management into concessionaire management. The prospectus also outlines expectations for repair and construction of concessioner facilities. This includes a 2,500 square foot food and beverage storage facility, a 20 x 60 foot addition to the Bus Barn, and the installation of automated bus washing systems.

The Operational Plan attached to the prospectus (Exhibit B) outlines the concessioner requirements for transit, as well as “short” (as far as Teklanika Rest Stop) and “long” tours (as far as Kantishna). Primrose Ridge and Stony Overlook would continue to be possible stops on the tours (along with Teklanika, Toklat, Eielson and Kantishna), and visitors could be provided with food and beverages at any of these stops. Previously, although the current contract has allowed food stops at Stony and Toklat, drivers often discouraged eating off of the bus at stops in order to minimize the potential for litter and for wildlife to become habituated to food.

The Final VMP suggested that fuel efficiency, comfort, quieter buses, family-friendly opportunities, flexibility, and better access to information about visitor opportunities...would be pursued through the concessions prospectus.” The Final VMP also suggested that the concept of separating the transportation operations from the reservation system was also supposed to be analyzed during the prospectus development. It’s unclear which, if any, of these topics are addressed in the prospectus.

DCC was unable to locate information in the prospectus about the fate of camper buses, or how the concessioner would be required to provide storage (except that future bus purchases would need to have NPS-approved storage options). This topic remains a concern for many of our members, as it remains unclear how access to camping opportunities (and adequate storage) will be ensured by the new transportation plan and concession contract. For this summer, according to Striker, camper buses will be retained.

Daily bus limit leaves tour and transit allocations to concessioner

The prospectus unveils the concessioner’s daily limit of 91 buses per day, out of the total of 160 vehicles per day established by the Vehicle Management Plan. Up to two of these buses can be used for commercial charters, but no specific limits are in place to otherwise allocate between tour and transit buses. Under the current contract, the number of JV buses is capped at a total of 86 buses per day (36 transit buses, 30 “Tundra Wilderness Tour” buses, and 20 “Denali Natural History Tour” buses). We found no information in the prospectus on how other vehicle traffic would be treated, except a note that “The Concessioner must manage all concession vehicles traveling on the restricted section of the park road to meet the desired VMP indicators and standards.”

The long-standing seasonal allocation of 3,394 transit buses and 2,089 buses for longer tours has been eliminated. There has long been concern that commercial pressure for increased tours will crowd out the more affordable transit system. Tours are often pre-purchased in large quantities, then resold as part of cruise ship packages at inflated prices. NPS management has repeatedly assured DCC and other concerned members of the public that maintaining a maximum hiker wait time standard (capping how long hikers must wait to catch a bus beyond Mile 20 of the Denali Park Road) will be adequate to protect independent and non-commercial traveler opportunities. DCC will investigate ways to review concessioner reports to ensure that access to Denali’s transit system is not diminished.

Incorporation of winter motorized use to Mountain Vista cloudy

As part of the prospectus, a number of services are listed as ‘required’ (transportation, some retail, food and beverage, ATM service, camping, laundry and showers, RV/Trailer dump station, towing, Alaska Railroad baggage storage and Wi-Fi). Other uses that could be included in the bid application are recognized as ‘authorized’ (winter transportation, limited garage services, special events, equipment rental, as well as other retail and ATM services). Of some concern, the Winter Road Plowing Environmental Assessment is only authorized for 3-5 years (beginning spring of 2014). Allowing ‘authorized’ bidding for this temporary use before it is established permanently is perplexing and will require further investigation.

DCC will continue to follow topics related to transportation, including implementation of the Denali Vehicle Management Plan and winter road plowing endeavors. Please do not hesitate to contact us for more information or to report problems accessing your park.

Hannah Ragland can be contacted at hannah@denalicitizens.org 

A STUDY OF ROADS, IN QUOTATIONS

by Erica Watson

Roads are complicated. Even those roads whose travelers aren't documented and surveyed, whose surfaces aren't monitored for dust and noise levels, are metaphorically loaded. Think "a road less traveled." Like a trail, once a road leads to a place, it's harder to imagine an alternate route there. Two roads may diverge, but what of the space between them, or to the sides? Or of the woods themselves? A road may make some things clearer while hiding what surrounds it. "There is more to getting to where you're going than just knowing there's a road," Joan Lowery Nixon wrote in a book I vaguely remember reading as a kid, which is somewhat about a train journey and also about orphans growing up in the 1850s, when the railroad defined the route West.

Roads and railroads share the history of snaking across the continent, reduced to lines on maps and transforming the places they reached. This is often called progress. Wendell Berry, though, conceived of that transformation as a kind of violence, writing, "The road is a word, conceived elsewhere and laid across the country in the wound prepared for it: a word made concrete and thrust among us." He prefers paths: "The difference between a path and a road is not only the obvious one. A path is little more than a habit that comes with knowledge of a place. It is a sort of ritual of familiarity. As a form, it is a form of contact with a known landscape. It is not destructive. It is the perfect adaptation, through experience and familiarity, of movement to place; it obeys the natural contours; such obstacles as it meets it goes around."

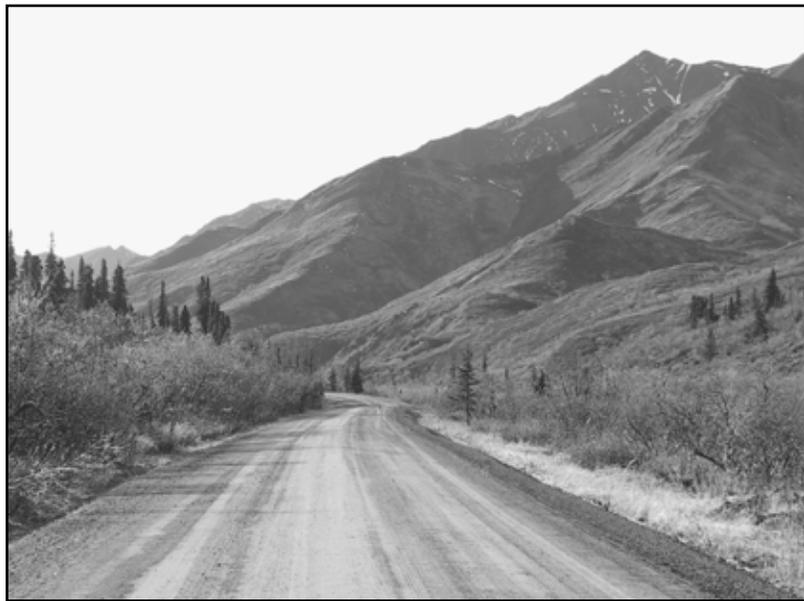


Photo by Erica Watson

Some roads, we might believe, strive towards pathness. We might devise studies to regulate and prove their path-ness. Some might question the studies.

Father Oleska wrote in 2002 about roads through the populated Alaskan wilderness, "To Europeans, a road is a social and economic pathway established

by humans for their convenience, prosperity and pleasure. They have every right to carve a road anytime, anywhere, as their needs and desires dictate. But for Native peoples, a road is a threat to the ecosystem that has nourished and sustained them for millennia. A road brings humans into an area they otherwise would not have had access to, and therefore noise, disruption and, potentially, the destruction of the plant and animal species...And if the animals leave, those who depend on their self-offering cannot survive there any longer either." This passage was quoted in a 2005 document written by Hollis Twitchell called "Native Peoples and Wilderness Values at Denali." Twitchell went on to use this view of roads to voice opposition to the then (and occasionally still) proposed North Access to Denali, where roads are especially complicated (and where all (proposed) roads lead to the same place).

I'll leave you with one last thought, only partially metaphorical, from Aldo Leopold, who said, "Recreational development is a job not of building roads into the lovely country, but of building receptivity into the still unlovely human mind." Perhaps we can get farther—or at least somewhere different—when all routes are not imagined as roads. 

AYEA CIVICS AND CONSERVATION SUMMIT 2015

by Kiana Carlson

Alaska Youth for Environmental Action (AYEA for short) is a non-profit program that brings teens from all across the state together so they can learn and take action on environmental issues that are affecting them. My name is Kiana, and I'm a freshman at Cantwell School. I'm interested in Alaska politics and public process. I participated in AYEAs Civics and Conservation Summit in March of this year.

It was so much fun! I didn't think I would enjoy the summit as much as I did. The first day I was there, I thought to myself that Thursday couldn't get here soon enough. However, when Thursday did come, I was so sad that the experience was

over. We did so many things including having a bonfire on the beach, taking a hike, and walking up 5 flights of stairs in the capitol building! The summit took place in none other than the state's capital, Juneau. We all flew in Sunday evening, did some introductions, and ate pizza. Monday is when we started to learn how bills are made into laws, more introductions, got into our bill groups, and to top it off we had s'mores on Douglas Island. Our focus bill groups were groups of 4 delegates and 1 youth trainer. We met and talked about our bills, what the bill was saying and what we liked and disliked about it. My bill was HB 58 which is about non-profit organizations and federally recognized tribes being able to take loans from the revolving loan fund to pay for energy saving items such as energy efficient windows, doors, or generators.

Tuesday was very memorable for everyone involved. This was the day that we all met Governor Bill Walker! AYEAs held this meeting with Gov. Walker because we wanted to inform him about our main topic of the summit: climate change. We shared our stories of how climate change is affecting us, told him about the petitions that AYEAs has gathered (over a thousand signed petitions were collected and delivered), and finally asked him to create a climate change task force. This task force would inform people of climate change and how it is affecting the world around us. It was a great meeting. He listened to what we had to say and took it into consideration. The second best thing that happened that day was our trip to Mendenhall Glacier. My favorite part of the trip was when I was a page on the house floor on Wednesday, where my Rep. David Talerico introduced me. It was a great experience, and I was sad when they said that it was time to go. Before leaving the capitol, we had to go on a scavenger hunt. It was really cool running around the capitol looking for items and learning who was important in Alaska's legislative history. The last day was a busy day. We met with our local legislators and talked to them about our focus bills. My group met with Sen. Click Bishop, Sen. John Coghill, Rep. David Talerico, Rep. David Guttenburg, and Rep. Adam Wool. They were all very successful meetings, and each side of the conversation was considerate of what the other had to say. For lunch we had a wild salmon BBQ where we presented awards and the theme of the BBQ. It was a very windy BBQ; at one point the tent blew over!

Overall the summit was very informative and fun. It taught me that you don't always have to talk to be heard and that everyone, whether a youth or adult, has the right to be heard. I would support anyone who wants to be part of any of AYEAs summits and/or meetings. They give so many opportunities to the youth to share their thoughts and opinions. I have made new friends and have respect for many more people now. If you care for your environment then definitely get involved with AYEAs, and if you already are then great! Caring about the environment means you might care about climate change or alternate energy resources. Remember, you don't have to be an environmentalist to care about the environment. ☞



AYEA students meet with Governor Bill Walker. Kiana is seated third from left at the table.

Photo courtesy of Alaska Youth for Environmental Action

Ed. note: DCC contributed a \$400 scholarship toward Kiana's attendance at the AYEAs Civics and Conservation Summit. If you know a youth who would enjoy this experience next year, let us know at mail@denalicitizens.org.

BRIEF NEWS AND VIEWS

ALASKA BOARD OF GAME REJECTS EMERGENCY PETITION FOR PROTECTION OF DENALI WOLVES

Our cover story in the last edition of DCC News described an Emergency Petition (EP) to the Alaska Board of Game (BoG). The petition, brought by the Alaska Wildlife Alliance and supported by DCC, the National Parks Conservation Association



and several individuals, would close a large area of state land surrounding the northeast corner of Denali National Park to the hunting/trapping of wolves. The EP was discussed by the BoG during its first day of deliberations in March, Friday the 13th. Although the petition clearly laid out why there is an emergency regarding wolf numbers in Denali and in state Game Management Unit (GMU) 20 adjacent to the park, the Board determined, unanimously, that no emergency actually existed, thereby refusing even to discuss the merits of the petition.

This was a blow to the organizations and individuals who had exerted so much effort on the issue, including submission of more than 400 pages of written comments. A petition in support of the EP posted on the DCC website gathered more than 4000 signatures over a short time. Despite the Board of Game's reluctance to consider this issue, DCC will continue to bring it before state leaders, and we intend to support the introduction of a proposal at the 2016 Board of Game statewide regulations meeting next year. If not taken up then, we'll introduce a proposal at the 2017 Interior Region meeting. Meanwhile, the unofficial wolf count numbers for spring 2015 remain low, ~52 individuals. This trend of low wolf numbers exists inside Denali and in State GMU 20C, incorporating the park and state lands north

of the park. Wolf densities in the area are below the state-identified management goal of 11 wolves/1000 sq. mi.; however no action is being proposed by state managers to change regulations or management parameters to address this situation. ☞

MALE, COLLARED DENALI WOLF FOUND DEAD WITH SNARE AROUND HIS NECK

News of this incident came from park biologist Steve Arthur more than a month after the wolf had been discovered. His account follows:

"This was a young male from the East Fork pack. He was first captured and collared in March 2014 as a 10-month-old pup. Because he was a pup, and likely to disperse, we only put on a conventional VHF collar (not a GPS); thus, we only have locations from the monthly radiotracking flights. His home range was within the area used by the rest of the East Fork pack, and extended along the park road east from the Teklanika River, north through the Stampede corridor to the outermost foothills, and east up Healy and Moody Creeks. We obtained only two locations this winter. On Jan 20 he was with the pack just north of the park border in the headwaters of Dry Creek, and on Feb 14 he was at a recently-killed moose carcass near the Sanctuary River, 3 miles south of the Park Road. On both of those dates the wolf was located by radio signal only (one or more wolves were seen but the collar was not visible). On March 4 he was found again at the latter location, and his collar was transmitting in 'mortality' mode. We visited the site on March 12 and found the dead wolf with a snare on its neck. The collar had evidently prevented the snare from tightening enough to suffocate the wolf, and the wolf was able to break the snare free from its anchor wire. We sent the entire wolf to ADF&G's vet in Fairbanks for a necropsy. The necropsy results indicate that the snare had eventually severed a carotid artery, causing the wolf to die of blood loss.

"The East Fork pack was estimated to consist of 17 wolves in November 2014. So far this spring we have confirmed 14 wolves still present in that pack. Thus, 3 wolves are missing (including this young male), but whether the others died or dispersed is unknown.

"This is one of 7 collared wolves from the park that died during the past year. Causes of death of the other 6 were: 1 killed by wolves, 1 died of old age, 1 drowned, 1 starved, 1 legally shot outside the park (John Hansen Lake), and one cause of death unknown but no evidence of human involvement."

BRIEF NEWS AND VIEWS

SNOWMACHINES IN THE PARK ADDITIONS: NPS' NEXT BIG CHALLENGE

With the low snow accumulations occurring over much of the state this past winter, snowmachiners from the interior and southcentral flocked to Broad Pass earlier than normal, and drove into areas added to the park by ANILCA in 1980. In January, when the southern park additions opened to use of snowmachines for traditional activities, park rangers observed an unusually high number of snowmachiners in the pullouts along the George Parks Highway, where access is afforded to riders. Generally, Broad Pass and the Denali NP&P additions are late winter areas, but with the low snow depths statewide they ended up being some of the few road-accessible areas in the state with enough snow to accommodate riders. The northern additions of Denali National Park never officially opened during the winter of 2014-2015 due to low snow depths.

DCC continues to have concerns that the park additions of Denali NP&P, especially the southern portions, are not being adequately monitored for impacts of snowmachine use, given staffing levels and lack of a monitoring plan. Additionally, DCC believes Denali NP&P has not addressed the appropriateness of increased use of snowmachines in terms of the purpose or intent of the term 'traditional activities' as outlined in the Alaska National Lands Interest Conservation Act of 1980. Although the term is defined for the core wilderness park, where the definition excludes recreational snowmachining, it has never been defined for the additions. DCC will continue to track this issue and request that Denali NP&P refocus attention on the topic of recreational snowmachining in the park additions. ❧

CONTEMPORARY CONFLICTS FORUMS WRAP UP WITH THE SUBJECT OF CLIMATE CHANGE

An audience of nearly 40, including members of the staff of Denali National Park's Center for Resources, Science, and Learning, turned out for the fifth and final public forum sponsored by students at the Tri-Valley School Contemporary Conflicts class. The forums were held in the Tri-Valley Library at the school. A previous forum, on coal, was the subject of an article in last month's *DCC News*. Topics for the other forums included education and war. The forums have been successful, well-attended and topical. As the students themselves stated in their slide show, "We need to be skeptical, it's our job to question, if we don't question we aren't really in control. What if we hadn't questioned the norm in the past?" ❧

ANDERSON SCIENCE FAIR STUDENTS AWARDED DCC'S "BEST CONSERVATION" PRIZE

Denali Citizens Council board members and volunteers have enjoyed serving as judges at the annual Denali Borough School District Science Fair for several years. Like many other community organizations, we award a prize for the project which most coincides with the interests of that organization. Students from the three Denali Borough schools, as well as homeschool students from the borough, met on March 4 for this year's science fair. DCC's prize is for the best conservation project, and this year's undisputed winners were Nora and Kayla Irwin, fourth grade sisters from Anderson School. These young women presented a thorough and engaging research project about the effects of climate change on polar bear habitat. They answered our questions with an impressive confidence and depth of knowledge, and demonstrated that their research and interests extended far beyond what they'd presented on their poster board. Whether explaining the albedo effect or summarizing Al Gore's message in *An Inconvenient Truth*, they were comfortable talking about the complex interconnections of climate science and social and political behaviors. After chatting with them about their project, Sarah Bartholow, who judged along with Erica Watson, noted that Nora and Kayla "successfully bridged the gap between science and policy." Sarah works with polar bear biologists, and connected the girls to her colleagues in hopes that they will pass on interesting bear research. We look forward to what they put together for next year's Science Fair, and where their interests lead them in the future. ❧



Nora and Kayla Irwin with their project
Photo by Erica Watson

DCC NEWS

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Advocating for Denali's Wilderness, Wildlife and Way of life.

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