

HJR

479

HOUSE COMMITTEE REPORT

(9)

Date referred: 1/25/88

FURTHER REFERRALS:

DATE: 2-10-88

The Resources Committer has considered HJR 49

Relating to the development of a visitors' center and facilities on the southside of the Alaska Range.

RECOMMENDS:

- replace with _____ the same title
- attached amendment(s) a new title
- do pass
- do not pass
- no recommendation
- individual recommendations
- additional referral to the _____ Committee

ADOPTS: _____ letter of intent

ATTACHES NEW FISCAL NOTE(S):

- fiscal impact same as previous fiscal note published _____
- zero fiscal note same as previous zero fiscal note published _____
- zero with analysis

SIGNING DO PASS:

Jan Galt

Mike Yavane

Edelheid Herrman

Heidi Gaudre

David

Mike

SIGNING OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS:

Dick Stanley 1/10 Rec

Jan Galt

Chairman's signature

FISCAL NOTE

REQUEST:

Revision Date: 1/13/88
Tide: Development of Visitors Center
at South Denali
Sponsor: Rep. Pearce
Requestor: House Resources

Agency Affected: Department of Natural Resources
BRU: Parks Management
Components: _____

EXPENDITURES/REVENUES: (Thousands of Dollars)

OPERATING	FY 88	FY 89	FY 90	FY 91	FY 92	FY 93
PERSONAL SERVICES						
TRAVEL						
CONTRACTUAL						
SUPPLIES						
EQUIPMENT						
LAND & STRUCTURES						
GRANTS, CLAIMS						
MISCELLANEOUS						
TOTAL OPERATING	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-
CAPITAL						
REVENUE						

FUNDING: (Thousands of Dollars)

GENERAL FUND						
FEDERAL FUNDS						
OTHER						
TOTAL	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-

POSITIONS:

FULL-TIME						
PART-TIME						
TEMPORARY						

ANALYSIS : (Attach a separate page if necessary)

Prepared by: Lawrence Ostrovsky
Division: Commissioner's Office

Phone: 465-2400
Date: 1-27-88

Approved by Commissioner: *L. Pearce*
Agency: Department of Natural Resources

Date: 1-27-88

Distribution (by preparer):

- Legislative Finance
- Legislative Sponsor
- Requestor
- Office of Management and Budget
- Impacted Agency(ies)

STATE OF ALASKA

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

STEVE COWPER, GOVERNOR

400 WILLOUGHBY AVE.
JUNEAU, ALASKA 99801-1796
PHONE: (907) 465-2400

February 8, 1988

The Honorable Sam Cotten
Chairman House Resource Committee
P.O. Box V
Juneau, Alaska 99811

Dear Representative Cotten:

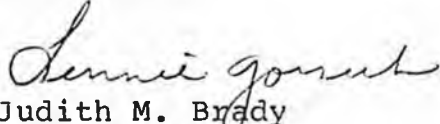
SUBJECT: HJR 49

POSITION: The Department of Natural Resources supports HJR 49.

BACKGROUND: HJR 49 resolves that the Alaska Legislature support joint state, federal, and private participation in cooperative planning and development of a South Denali visitors' complex.

RECOMMENDATION: Currently there are no funds available in the state budget for a joint state/federal planning and development effort. However, the Department supports the goals and intent of the resolution and looks forward to working with the legislature and federal government in exploring further the feasibility of a South Denali project.

Sincerely,


for
Judith M. Brady
Commissioner


Alaska State Legislature House of Representatives

6035 TANAINA DRIVE
ANCHORAGE, ALASKA 99502
(907) 243-8110

REPRESENTATIVE DRUE PEARCE
DISTRICT 9, SEAT A
MINORITY WHIP

WHILE IN JUNEAU
POST OFFICE BOX V
JUNEAU, ALASKA 99811
(907) 465-4993

MEMORANDUM

TO: All Members of House Resources
FROM: Representative Drue Pearce 
DATE: February 10, 1988
RE: HJR 49

At a time when all of us are casting about for ways to stimulate the economic growth of Alaska, I believe that your support of the development of a visitor center and related visitor facilities on the south side of the Alaska Range sends a positive message.

This resolution supports the acceleration of a growing section of Alaska's economy -- the tourist industry.

In a recent survey of potential visitors to Alaska, the question was asked about what they would most like to do or see on a visit to Alaska. Viewing Mount McKinley received the highest rating.

The development of a major visitors' destination on the south side of the Alaska Range has been discussed for many years. Over the years, the the National Park Service, the Alaska Department of Natural Resources and the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities have studied the issue. Proposals made by the three entities have received mixed reviews. There has been considerable sentiment that the state and the National Park Service should hear more public input concerning the possible location of a visitors' center and that private land should be considered. HJR 49 covers those issues.

Your support of HJR 49 is support of the visitor industry, small businesses, and Alaska's economic well-being.

SUMMARY

SOUTH DENALI PROJECT

Background - The South Denali project is intended to accomplish the planning and public proceedings necessary to provide a sound basis for initiating the development of a visitor center and related visitor facilities on the south side of the Alaska Range. The location of the complex would be selected to provide an excellent view of Mt. McKinley and opportunity for enjoying the recreation activities in the surrounding state and national parklands. Total project cost is estimated at \$400,000 - \$200,000 from the State and \$200,000 from the National Park Service.

Accomplishments

- Step 1 Update the Denali State Park Master Plan, determine criteria for the location of the visitor complex, identify and prioritize alternative sites, consult with the Denali State Park Citizens' Advisory Board, and hold public meetings on this process. (Step 1 is currently underway using \$100,000 advanced by the National Park Service to contract with a private planning consultant.)
- Step 2 Study priority sites more thoroughly: conduct subsurface tests, analyze environmental and socioeconomic impacts of the development, conduct public hearings.
- Step 3 Prepare an overall site plan for the visitor complex. (If private property is involved, coordinate with private owners.)
- Step 4 Prepare sample documents for state concessions contracts for the development.

At the conclusion of this project, the Denali State Park will have an updated master plan, and the State and the National Park Service should have sufficient information and public input so they can agree on a site and an overall site plan for the proposed visitor complex. At that point the National Park Service would be able to proceed to request federal development funds for the visitor center, and the State could engage private parties to provide commercial facilities and services for the complex.

Potential Benefits - The project will accelerate a growing sector of the economy. Viewing Mount McKinley has been rated as Alaska's top tourist attraction. With year-round road access, the complex will contribute to the development of winter and shoulder season tourism. Jobs will be generated by the planning, engineering and construction as well as the ongoing operation of the complex. Federal financial investment in Alaska will be extended through the operation of the visitor center. In addition, the project will have spill-over benefits for numerous businesses oriented towards recreation and tourist traffic in the region.

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Denali State Park Citizens' Advisory Board
SR Box 6706
Wasilla, Alaska 99687
January 14, 1988

The Honorable Steve Cowper
Governor, State of Alaska
Pouch A
Juneau, Alaska 99811

Dear Governor Cowper:

We, the Denali State Park Citizens' Advisory Board, would like to bring a matter of great concern to your immediate attention - proposed funding (\$200,000) for completing the planning phase for Denali State Park. This funding has somehow been deleted from the Administration's proposed budget for the upcoming session.

Initially, it was our understanding that the Administration was supportive of these efforts because it would lead to an updated comprehensive master plan for the park which would enable Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation (DPOR) to establish solid management decisions for Denali State Park - for resource management and protection as well as recreation and economic development (outdoor enthusiasts and tourists alike).

Since the establishment of the Board, three years ago, we have dealt with the issue of potential major commercial development in the Park. From our inception, we have stated that we feel it is imperative to have an updated solid comprehensive management plan for the park before anything - either of conservation or commercial orientation happens in the Park. The Director has supported our efforts to update the comprehensive plan.

We have requested and supported a complete updating of the plan for Denali State Park for three years. This planning effort would enable the state to plan and develop the park in an orderly manner taking into consideration all factors and facets - environmental concerns, recreation and economic development, and resource management and protection.

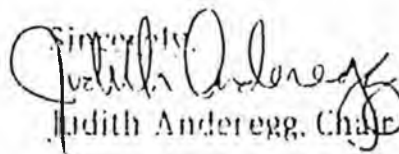
National Park Service has had an interest in development of a visitor center for Denali State Park for sometime, hoping it would alleviate some of their overcrowding on the North Side and allow more people to enjoy the Mountain. This past summer, they came forth with \$100,000 to begin the effort to update Denali State Park's comprehensive master plan with the

understanding that the State would support a \$200,000 appropriation this next session to continue the effort next summer.

At our meeting on January 12, we were informed as a Board that the \$200,000 request was no longer in the Administration's budget. We also received a copy of the January 4 letter from National Park Service to you stating that they could not continue their effort in Denali State Park if the state would not make a financial commitment. Further, it is the understanding of the Board that several legislators have come forth and stated that they would support the effort, if the Administration would take the lead.

Everyone seems to feel that Denali State Park has great potential - environmentalists, recreational enthusiasts, tourists, hunters, park managers, and commercial interests. The Board's concern is that whatever happens to the Park is well balanced and well planned. Without state support for the planning effort, this can not happen. We will lose what federal funds have been made available and continue to have no state funds. We can not afford to allow such a magnificent park to be developed without adequate planning and foresight. If tourism is the state's new economic hope, then surely Denali State Park needs to be considered. We would appreciate your attention to this matter and your consideration of reinstating the \$200,000 request for Denali State Park.

We look forward to your thoughts on this matter. We would appreciate hearing why it was deleted and if there is anything that we can help to provide information that would cause you to reconsider the budget request. Thank you for your consideration and attention.


Sincerely,
Judith Anderegg, Chair

cc: Judy Brady, Commissioner, DERR
Neil Johannsen, Director, DPOR
Mat-Su Delegation - Senators Jay Kerttula and Mike Szymanski
Representatives Ron Larson and Curt Menard
Ric Davidge, Development Services Director, Mat-Su Borough

Senator Artiss Sturgulewski



United States Department of the Interior
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE



IN REPLY REFER TO:

ALASKA REGIONAL OFFICE
2525 Gambell Street, Room 107
Anchorage, Alaska 99503-2892

A22 (ARO-SA)

4 - JAN 1988

Honorable Steve Cowper
Governor of Alaska
Box A
Juneau, Alaska 99811

Dear Governor Cowper:

We were disappointed to learn that the Department of Natural Resource's budget request for \$200,000 for the South Denali Project was deleted from the budget that you transmitted to the Legislature.

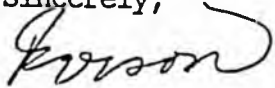
For several years we have been working with the Alaska Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation on this project. We are currently in the midst of a cooperative planning process, using a private contractor, that will update the Denali State Park Plan and determine components and alternative sites for the visitor complexes. NPS has committed \$100,000 to this planning and is seeking an additional \$100,000 in federal funding. This funding was to be matched by \$200,000 from the state. The total expenditure of \$400,000, half state and half federal, was to have taken us to the point where the state could contract with a private sector developer to build a resort/lodge and the National Park Service could request funding for the development of a visitor center focusing on Mt. McKinley and the Alaska Range.

In addition to the money already expended, both the state and federal governments have already invested substantial amounts of staff time in preparing this project. It would be extremely difficult to get the project back on track if it were derailed by lack of state funds at this time.

We have committed planning funds, have worked long and patiently with state personnel, and we hope to invest in the development of a Mt. McKinley visitor center that will be a major attraction for people coming to Alaska, as well as residents. However, we cannot continue this program without a state financial commitment. Unless there are state funds, we will be forced to cancel our financial investments in the project.

We hope state funds can be made available, to permit continuation of the project. For a relatively small investment, the state can expect very substantial returns, from a perpetual resource. For lack of such investment, a great deal would be lost.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Ervson".

Regional Director

cc:

Commissioner Brady

Mike Abbott, Resource Development Council

STEVE COWPER
GOVERNOR



STATE OF ALASKA
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
JUNEAU

January 20, 1988

Mr. Boyd Evison
Regional Director
U.S Department of the Interior
National Park Service
2525 Gambell Street, Room 107
Anchorage, AK 99503-2892

Dear Mr. Evison:

Governor Cowper asked me to respond to your January 4 letter regarding the South Denali Project.

Since we first began discussing this project with you and your staff, we consistently stated that we would not be able to make any financial commitments given our current revenue situation. We have been supportive of the project and have done what we could with your staff given our limited staff and resources.

During preparation of our budget, which we just submitted to the Legislature, we received in excess of \$800 million in requests to fund various projects and programs throughout the state. The majority of these requests were for essential services such as improvements to health facilities, ports, road maintenance, sewer and water construction and maintenance programs, and education facilities, just to name a few.

Based on current revenue projections, we believe that we will only be able to fund one-tenth of these projects. Many essential programs cannot be funded and projects that are partially completed will not be finished.

The South Denali Project is a good project which deserves support. We appreciate your commitment and efforts on

Mr. Evison

-2-

January 20, 1988

this project. Unfortunately, the reality for the state is that we simply do not have the funds to commit to this project at this time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rod Swope", with a stylized flourish extending from the end of the name.

Rod Swope
Special Staff Assistant
to the Governor

cc: Commissioner Judith Brady
Mike Abbott, Resource Development Council

SCOPE OF SERVICES
UPDATE OF MASTER PLAN FOR DENALI STATE PARK
INCLUDING AN
ANALYSIS OF AND ALTERNATIVES FOR A VISITORS DESTINATION COMPLEX

I. Background

The concept of developing a major visitors' destination on the south side of the Alaska Range has been discussed and studied for many years. The South Denali Concept Proposal, 1986, (attachment 1) summarizes a series of state and federal studies conducted during the past 20 years. Public interest in a hotel and visitors' center oriented toward the region's dramatic views of Mount McKinley strongly influenced the creation of the Denali State Park by the 1970 Alaska state legislature. Subsequently the Tokositna site was studied, but these plans were dropped, largely because of widespread public outrage at the "domed city" concept.

In 1984, the National Park Service, Alaska Department of Natural Resources, and Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities entered a memorandum of agreement (attachment 2) to further study the proposal and to arrive at a joint decision regarding a site for the destination complex. During the summers of 1985 and 1986, state and federal staff compiled existing research and conducted field studies focussing on sites along Curry Ridge near the Parks Highway. The resulting concept proposal was reviewed by the public at a series of hearings in April 1986.

The proposal met with mixed reaction. There was considerable sentiment that the state and NPS should receive more public input on alternate sites, that private lands in the area should be considered as development sites and that the scale of the proposal was excessive. The Denali State Park Citizens Advisory Committee, a state appointed oversight group, supported the South Denali concept but recommended that the state park plan be updated and that alternatives be analyzed before further action was taken on the proposal.

II. Overall Project Program

State and federal governments have agreed on the following basic goals for the South Denali Project:

III. Purposes of this Phase

The basic purposes of the scope of services for the current project are as follows:

- A. To prepare a regional overview of public recreational opportunities and activity in the planning region. (Defined as shown on the attached map.)
- B. To prepare an update of the 1975 master plan for Denali State Park.
- C. Within the context of the regional overview and the State Park plan to evaluate alternatives for a visitors' destination complex.
- D. To involve the Denali State Park Citizens Advisory Board and the public in this planning process.

IV. SCOPE OF SERVICES

The contractor shall provide all manpower, transportation, equipment, and supplies necessary to perform the following services complete and in conformity with all requirements contained in this work directive. All of the work shall be conducted or supervised by planners, landscape architects, engineers or biologists licensed (where applicable) in the state of Alaska. A project planner, architect, landscape architect, or project engineer shall be assigned by the contractor to manage and coordinate the work. Any land disturbing field work will have prior approval by the Area Superintendent, Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation, if it involves state park lands, and by the superintendent of Denali National Park and Preserve, if it involves national park lands.

A. Regional Overview

1. Outdoor Recreational Opportunities - Assess and describe public recreational values and opportunities in the planning region. Consider the role of the Denali State Park and potential visitors' center in relation to the railbelt region.
2. Public use - Assess and describe current patterns of public recreational land use in the planning region. Identify recent trends and changes in use and estimate probable trends. Note recreational locations and opportunities that are over crowded, under used and unused.

patterns of tourism and recreational traffic using the Parks Highway and the Alaska railroad. Evaluate the complex as an attraction for additional tourism outside Alaska.

5. Recommendations - Prepare recommendations to park managers on the following subjects. Where possible utilize schematic diagrams to help illustrate recommendations.
 - a. Park management policies to protect park resources and to respond to current and projected recreational use and demand.
 - b. Changes, closures, or new development of trails, campgrounds, public use cabins, informational and interpretive facilities, and/or other public recreational facilities that are needed and appropriate in the planning region. Prepare schematic bubble diagrams to represent changes or new development within the park.
 - c. The components of a visitors destination complex, including desirable level of development and recommended criteria for site selection for the complex. A matrix with weighted values may be developed to help clarify site selection criteria and their relative priority.
 - d. The nature and type of additional private recreational services and facilities that would enhance and complement the existing range of public and private recreational opportunities and be appropriate for a concession or permit from state and federal land managers.
 - e. Measures which would encourage extension of greater public recreational use into the spring, fall, and winter months.

C. Evaluation of Alternatives for visitors' Destination Complex.

1. In accordance with site selection criteria, identify and evaluate three alternative sites and probable development of foot prints of the complex. Use the largest scale maps available (where applicable the 20' contour maps from DOTPF). At least one of these sites shall

F. Field Inspections and Reviews

At the initiation of the project there shall be one fixed wing overflight of the planning area. The overflight shall include state and federal personnel who will share their knowledge of the area with the contractor. During the summer of 1988 the National Park Service will provide a helicopter trip to assist the consultant in field inspection of sites. The evaluation of alternative sites in relation to the adopted criteria shall be based on this inspection, existing aerial photography, topographic maps and other considerations.

G. Schedule/Public Meetings

It is intended that the fall and winter of 1987 and 1988 be used to complete research and data collection for the study, together with preparation of preliminary drafts and maps of this material. The spring and summer of 1988 shall be used to apply site selection criteria and complete planning recommendations. During the fall and early winter, at the initiation of the contract work there will be a series of meetings with the State park and NPS personnel to obtain information about Denali State Park and State park planning and management practices and to obtain information about previous work on South Denali Planning. Frequent (at least monthly) contact with state and federal personnel is expected to review progress, obtain data and discuss policy choices.

The consultant shall attend meetings with the public and the Denali State Park Advisory Board as follows:

November, 1987 - Meeting at Susitna Valley School with Advisory Board and public to review the regional overview, describe the project and ask for advice about issues, resources and other considerations.

February, 1988 - Meeting at Susitna Valley School with Advisory Board and public to present the assessment of resources, needs, impacts, opportunities, etc. (B. 1. - 4.) and to ask for advice about site selection criteria and components of development.

June, 1988 - Meeting at Susitna Valley School with Advisory Board and public to present master plan update recommendations (B. 5. a. - c.) and to review and revise site selection criteria. (Draft criteria to be distributed to Board prior to meeting.)

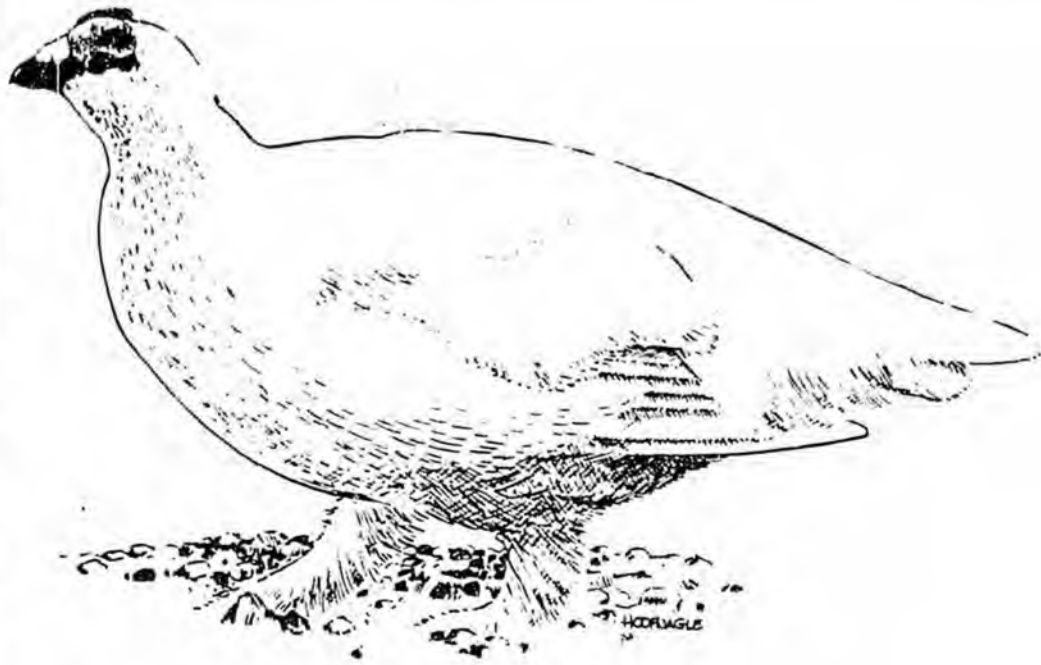
SOUTH DENALI



A CONCEPT PROPOSAL FOR
DEVELOPING A MAJOR VISITOR
DESTINATION IN DENALI STATE
PARK ON THE SOUTH SIDE OF THE
ALASKA RANGE

ANCHORAGE

Prepared Cooperatively by the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation and
the National Park Service, Alaska Region



CONCEPT SUMMARY

The concept of developing a major visitor destination on the south side of the Alaska Range has been discussed and studied for many years. Views of Mt. McKinley and its companion peaks are spectacular in this area and are highlighted by the great glaciers which flow down the south side of the range. The dramatic sculptured landscape offers scenery and recreational opportunities that could attract worldwide tourism visitation and expand outdoor recreation opportunities for Alaskans as well.

Alaskan artist Sydney Laurence painted his most famous scenes of Mt. McKinley from the south side. In the 1920s, the Alaska Railroad built a hotel and scheduled an overnight stop at Curry Station. A bridge and trail led to a lookout on top of Curry Ridge. Over the past 20 years, potential South Denali development sites have been studied by state and federal agencies and have been the subject of environmental and economic investigations and public meetings. The resulting public interest influenced creation of the 282,000-acre Denali State Park (expanded to 324,240 acres in 1976) by the 1970 Alaska Legislature.

After reviewing these studies, the participants focused their analyses on alternatives within the most promising zone for site selection. The Curry Ridge area offers an excellent combination of public benefits, at a comparatively low cost, with minimal environmental impact. Within this focus area, an array of alternatives for both location and type of development exist.

The outstanding features offered by the Curry Ridge area are:

View — Curry Ridge is the first place where a traveler heading north along the Parks Highway enters the environment of the Alaska Range. Hillside benches have spectacular views of Mt. McKinley and the Alaska Range. The ridge top offers the sense of space and isolation of a remote Alaska location. Some points afford a 360 degree panorama of the mountains of southcentral Alaska.

Access — Potential sites would be within a short distance of the year-round Parks Highway. A hiking trail from the Alaska Railroad can be developed by recreating the historic footbridge and trail to Curry Lookout. Located approximately 140 miles from Anchorage and 220 miles from Fairbanks, Curry Ridge is a convenient, desirably spaced stopover along an established tour route.

Outdoor Recreation — The varied ecosystems in the Curry Ridge vicinity (riverine, forest, sub-alpine and alpine) offer a wide range of outdoor recreation possibilities. Fishing, boating and camping would be possible on nearby rivers and lakes. The wooded hillsides and ridge top provide a variety of opportunities including: hiking, cross-country skiing, wildlife and wildflower viewing.

Unique Destination Point — As a development within a park, South Denali must have distinctive qualities which protect and enhance the visitor experience of natural Alaska. It should be a place where people feel close to nature and enjoy the natural world. With appropriate design and operational controls, the development can provide a unique and memorable experience leaving the visitor with a sense of having experienced the spacious vistas and remoteness of Alaska.

BACKGROUND: LOCATIONS CONSIDERED IN PREVIOUS STUDIES

Indian Ridge Site (Chulitna Pass)

Cresap, McCormick, and Paget, *A Program for Increasing the Contribution of Tourism to the Alaskan Economy*, prepared for State of Alaska, Department of Economic Development, Travel Division and U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration, December, 1968.

This study discussed the need and defined the planning considerations for a hotel complex on the south side of the Alaska Range. The site selected was in the vicinity of Chulitna Pass looking across the Chulitna River up the Eldridge Glacier to Mt. McKinley, 42 miles away. A 300-room lodge/hotel was to be located at the 1,700-foot level one mile east of the Parks Highway (approximately Mile Post 164-165) and 5½ miles from the railroad. Although other sites also met location criteria, the team selected Chulitna Pass area. They recommended control of the land by a government agency and development of a variety of facilities catering to various types of visitors, saying, "If visitor travel is to continue to increase in proportion to Alaska's potential, a major hotel must be built in the vicinity of Mt. McKinley."

After construction of a road, this site would have convenient access to the railroad and the highway. The location is a north-facing slope which could be cold. Winds through the pass and severe weather could limit the season. Some think this viewshed is not as dramatic as other locations.

South Curry Ridge Site

U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *Lodging for Mount McKinley National Park-Present and Projected Requirements and its Relationship to Park Visitation, Possible Park Enlargement, and Alaska Tourism*, April 4, 1969.

This study selected south Curry Ridge because it "provides a superlative platform for viewing and interpreting the climactic section of the Alaska Range". It outlined a major park-oriented tourism complex with a hotel/lodge of 125 rooms in the first phase. This site is within the zone proposed for site selection in this brochure.

U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *Draft General Management Plan, Denali National Park and Preserve*, March 1985.

This study recommends a south Curry Ridge site and a location to be decided by a joint state and federal group.

Byers Lake Site

State of Alaska, Department of Highways, *Environmental Impact/Section 4f Statement*, September 1973.

State of Alaska, Division of Parks, *Development Prospectus, Denali State Park*, May 1974.

State of Alaska, Division of Parks, *Denali State Park, a Master Plan*, 1975.

The Environmental Impact Statement and Development Prospectus were prepared to solicit proposals for development of a service complex by a concessionaire in the Byers Lake area (Parks Highway, approximately Mile Post 147). This complex was to include a lodge, ski area, park headquarters and visitor center.

The Denali State Park Master Plan further discussed this site. The site has easy access, a nice view of Mt. McKinley, and topography conducive to a recreational development. The area can support a variety of activities including camping, hiking, boating, fish and skiing. Currently, this area includes a 66-unit campground, 15 picnic sites, boat launch and a small boat-in campground. Potential negative aspects of developing this site include the anticipated change in future use patterns, proximity to the lake and associated utilities, and location of a sewage treatment plant. As a recreation area for boating and camping, Byers Lake provides a valuable component in the overall recreational opportunities of the Curry Ridge area.

Tokositna Site

State of Alaska, Division of Parks and U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *Environmental Investigation and Site Analysis - Tokositna, Denali State Park*, July 1980, and 14 other study reports.

The Tokositna area has a long history of interest. The concept of a facility in the area was proposed in 1951 by Dr. Bradford Washburn, the scientist who first mapped Mt. McKinley. This concept was supported in 1969 in the Mount McKinley National Park Master Plan and in 1975 in the Denali State Park Master Plan. In 1976 Denali State Park was expanded to include the Tokositna area. In 1978, money was appropriated by the State Legislature to evaluate the feasibility of developing a visitor facility.

The Tokositna study site is approximately 15 miles west of the Parks Highway near Long Point. This site has superlative views up the Tokositna Glacier of Mt. McKinley, 35 miles away. It lends itself to numerous other recreational opportunities including float trips, hiking, fishing, skiing, wildlife viewing and glacier exploration.

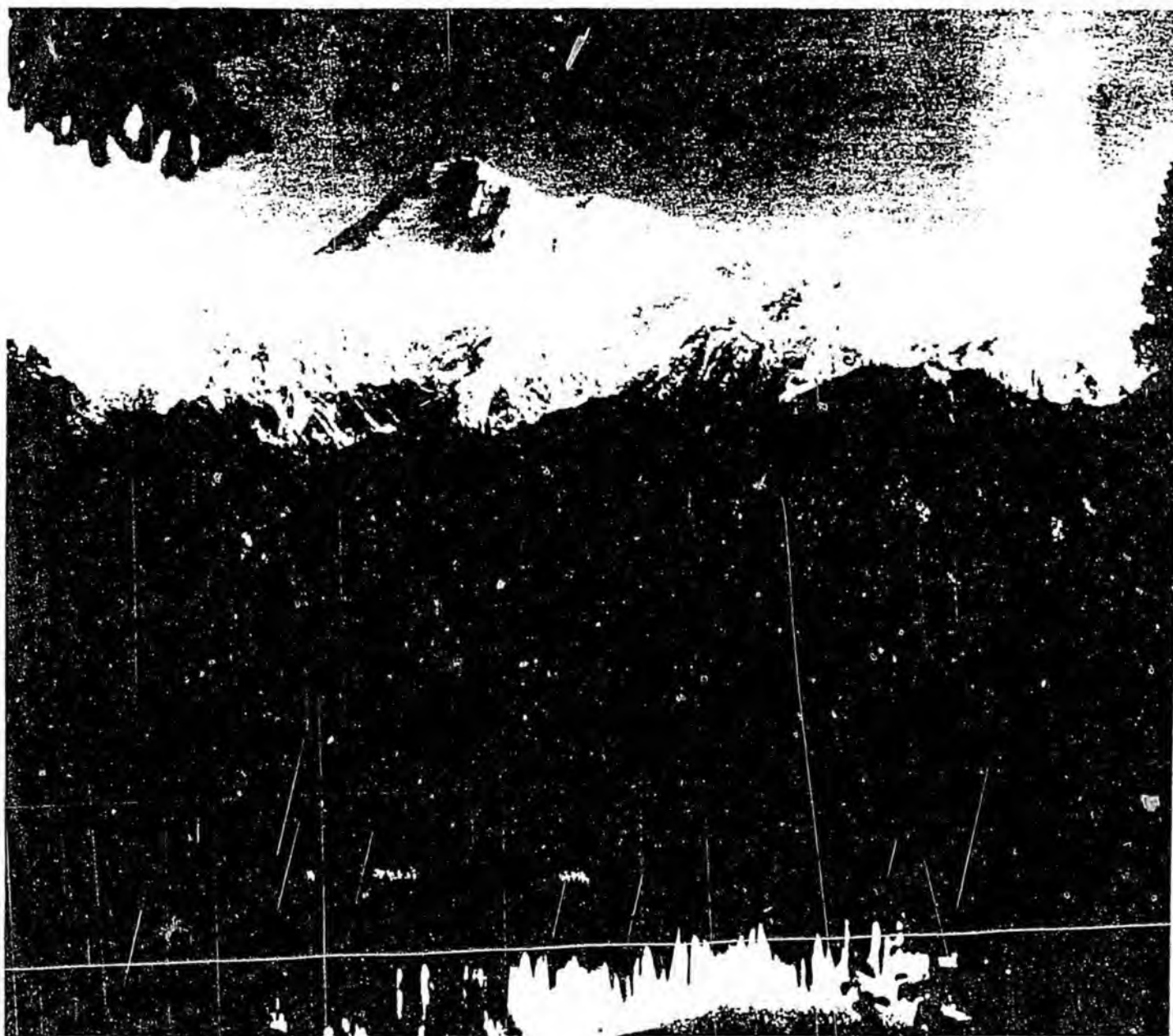
Problems with the site include its remote location, cost of access, land use conflicts and weather. Studies recommend two possible routes of access. One would require building an entirely new 14-mile road, the other upgrading 22 miles of the existing Petersville Road (Mile Post 114.8 Parks Highway) and constructing 12 additional miles to the site. Currently, the road construction costs would be prohibitive.

Three public meetings were held in January 1979. Miners expressed concern that upgrading the Petersville Road would have adverse effects on their mining operations in Cache Creek. Other local residents felt a new road would impact their rural lifestyles. The variety of mixed land uses in the Peters Hills and Dutch Hills, particularly mining activity, might conflict with a large increase in visitor use. The Tokositna site is on a north-facing slope and would be cold, windy and sunless during parts of the year.

Alder Point Area

National Park Service Rangers, Denali State Park Rangers, and local residents, *Memorandum, Development Alternatives, South Denali*, April 17, 1985.

This site was never seriously considered as a major development site but was discussed as a main vantage point. It is located in the mountains and has superlative views of Mt. McKinley. Though the costs of road or tram access would be prohibitive, Alder Point may be a feasible destination for hiking.



GOALS

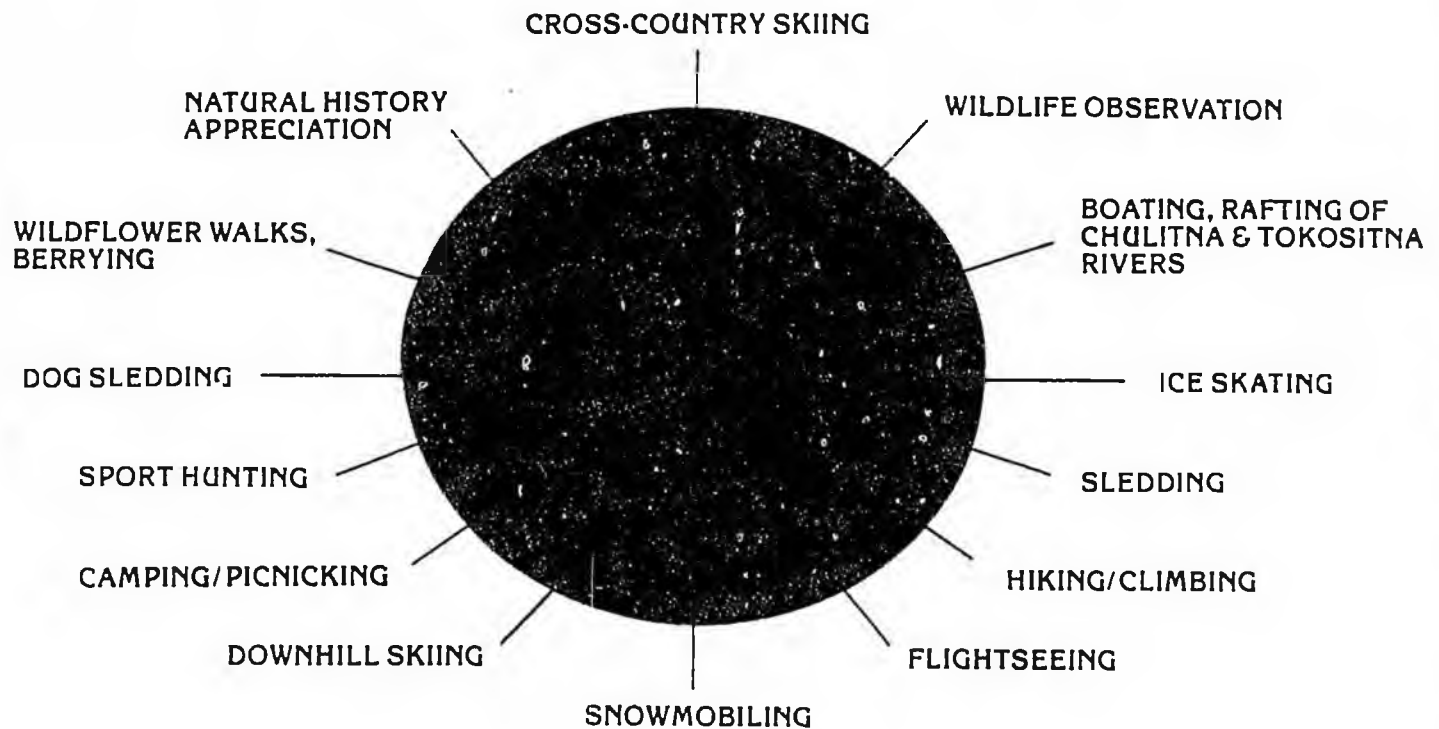
1. To provide for public use and enjoyment of state and federal park lands in the South Denali region
 - To establish a visitor destination in a location with a prime view of Mt. McKinley
 - To enhance outdoor recreation opportunities in the surrounding region
 - To provide the public with information about the geology and natural and cultural history of the Alaska Range, Mt. McKinley and the Denali region
 - To integrate planning of the South Denali destination with updating of plans for Denali State Park, Denali National Park and Preserve, and the surrounding area
 - To develop facilities which are compatible in architecture, design and use with the natural beauty of the setting; to create a unique visitor's attraction
2. To manage and protect area resources
 - To develop in a manner which complements and protects the site's natural character
 - To minimize impacts to wildlife populations
 - To provide additional outdoor recreation opportunities and management facilities in Denali State Park
 - To complement and guide development within and adjacent to Denali State Park
 - To offer an alternative to visiting the park facilities on the north side of the Alaska Range
3. To develop and diversify the state's economy
 - To encourage the expansion of the Anchorage-Fairbanks tour business
 - To extend the length of the tourism season
 - To provide additional sources of state revenues and private sector jobs
 - To encourage government/private partnership in tourism development
 - To benefit the local economy and minimize impacts on local lifestyles



ALTERNATIVES TO BE ANALYZED

During this initial planning stage, public comment on the following topics will be gathered to determine the scope and direction of future studies:

Outdoor recreation opportunities — Development in the Curry Ridge area should serve as a center for a wide range of outdoor recreational activities radiating throughout the area. Alaskan tourists and recreationists are increasingly looking for a diversity of outdoor activities. Shuttle bus service could connect the visitor with opportunities for river trips, flightseeing, hiking, fishing, wildlife and bird viewing. Cross-country skiing, dog sledding and other snow-related activities will also be analyzed.



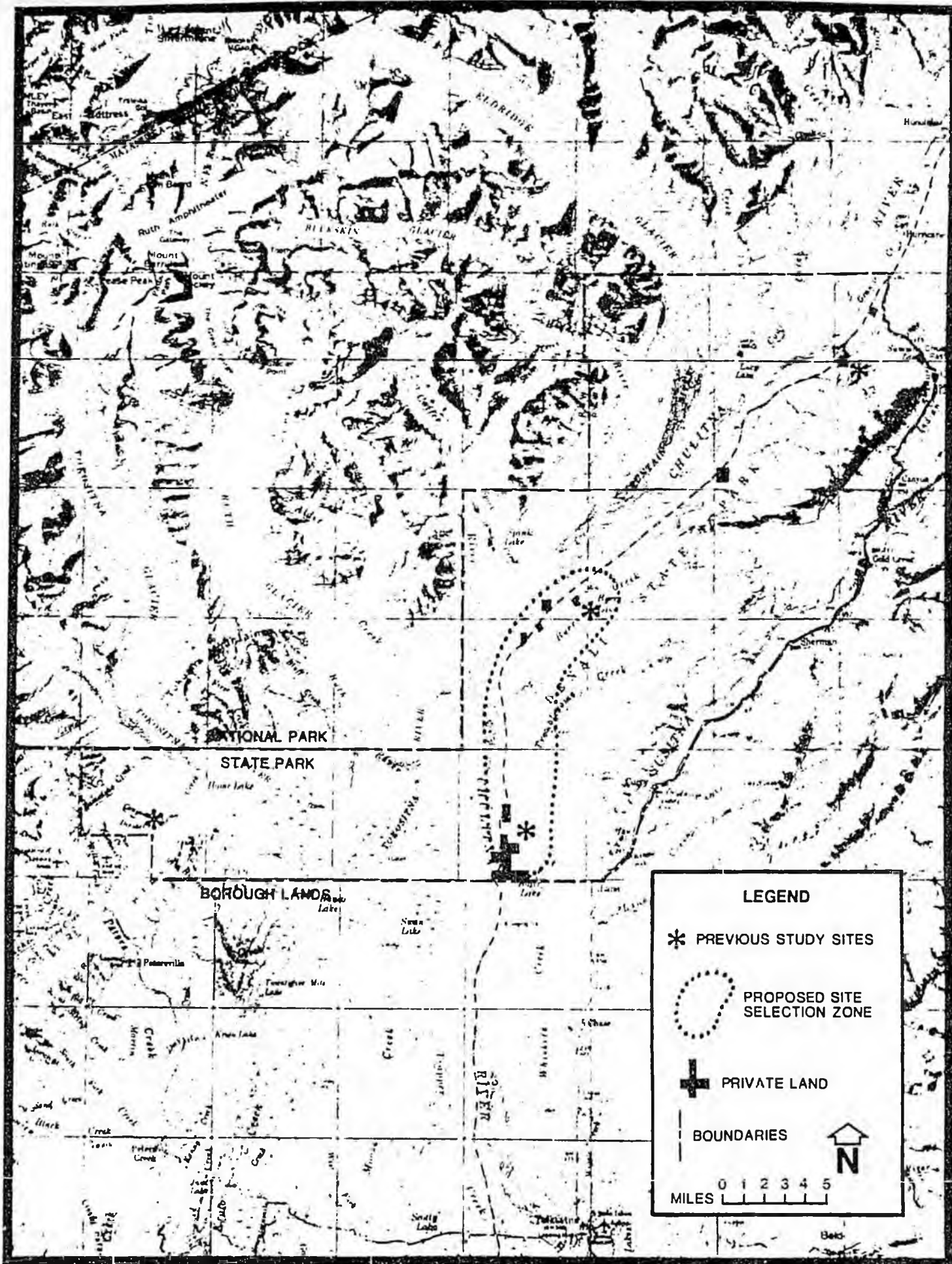
Facilities included — The types of services to be provided by the development include lodging, visitor information and interpretation, access and maintenance. These services indicate that the following developments should be included:

- Visitor center
- Lodge(s) and restaurant(s) (at one or more sites)
- Campgrounds
- Maintenance compound
- Parking lot(s)
- Tramway
- Youth hostel
- Trails
- Utilities

Site selection criteria:

- soils
- drainage
- view of Alaska Range
- wildlife habitat
- impacts to wildlife, plants, view

- weather conditions
- vegetation
- cost
- access
- diversity of recreation



LEGEND

- * PREVIOUS STUDY SITES
- PROPOSED SITE SELECTION ZONE
- ⊕ PRIVATE LAND
- BOUNDARIES

MILES 0 1 2 3 4 5

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PROCESS: PURPOSE OF THIS BROCHURE

The project will be planned and developed cooperatively, with roles and responsibilities as follows:

The State — Because the main development will be located within Denali State Park, the State Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation will serve as project lead and make final decisions regarding use of state lands.

The Federal Government — The visitor center would be a point of orientation for public use and enjoyment of the nearby national park lands as well as state park lands. The National Park Service will work with the state in the joint development and operation of South Denali.

Private Developers — Private sector participation is essential for the development of commercial components of the South Denali destination, primarily the lodge and related facilities and utilities.

The Public — South Denali represents a major use of public resources. The public will be asked to provide input and guidance by reviewing and commenting on the proposal. This brochure is the first step in public review. A second public review will occur next year when the draft environmental impact statement is complete and the proposed alternatives are defined.

In summary, purposes of this brochure are:

To inform — To introduce the concept of developing a major visitor destination in Denali State Park

To generate interest — To generate discussion and stimulate thinking and ideas from both governmental participants, private corporations and the public; to facilitate this process public workshops will be scheduled

To generate comment — To ask public assistance in identifying significant issues which should be analyzed and noting alternatives which should be considered or eliminated

To help define the scope of future studies — Public comment generated by this brochure will assist in defining the scope of forth-coming studies, including an environmental impact statement which will be prepared subject to federal appropriations

PROPOSED TIMETABLE

February to April 4, 1986

- Public workshops and comment on concept brochure

April 4 to June, 1986

- Consideration of public comments
- Consideration of scope of future slides
- Decision by Legislature to include study funds in FY'87 budget

July, 1986 to January, 1987

- Site analysis
- Analysis of economic feasibility and operations
- Preparation of concession contract guidelines
- Preparation of environmental studies

February to April, 1987

- Public review of draft report on alternative proposals and draft environmental impacts

May to June, 1987

- Analysis of public review on alternatives
- Revision and printing of report
- Preparation of draft concession contract terms

July, 1987

- State/federal decision on preferred alternative
- Competitive contracting process for concessions

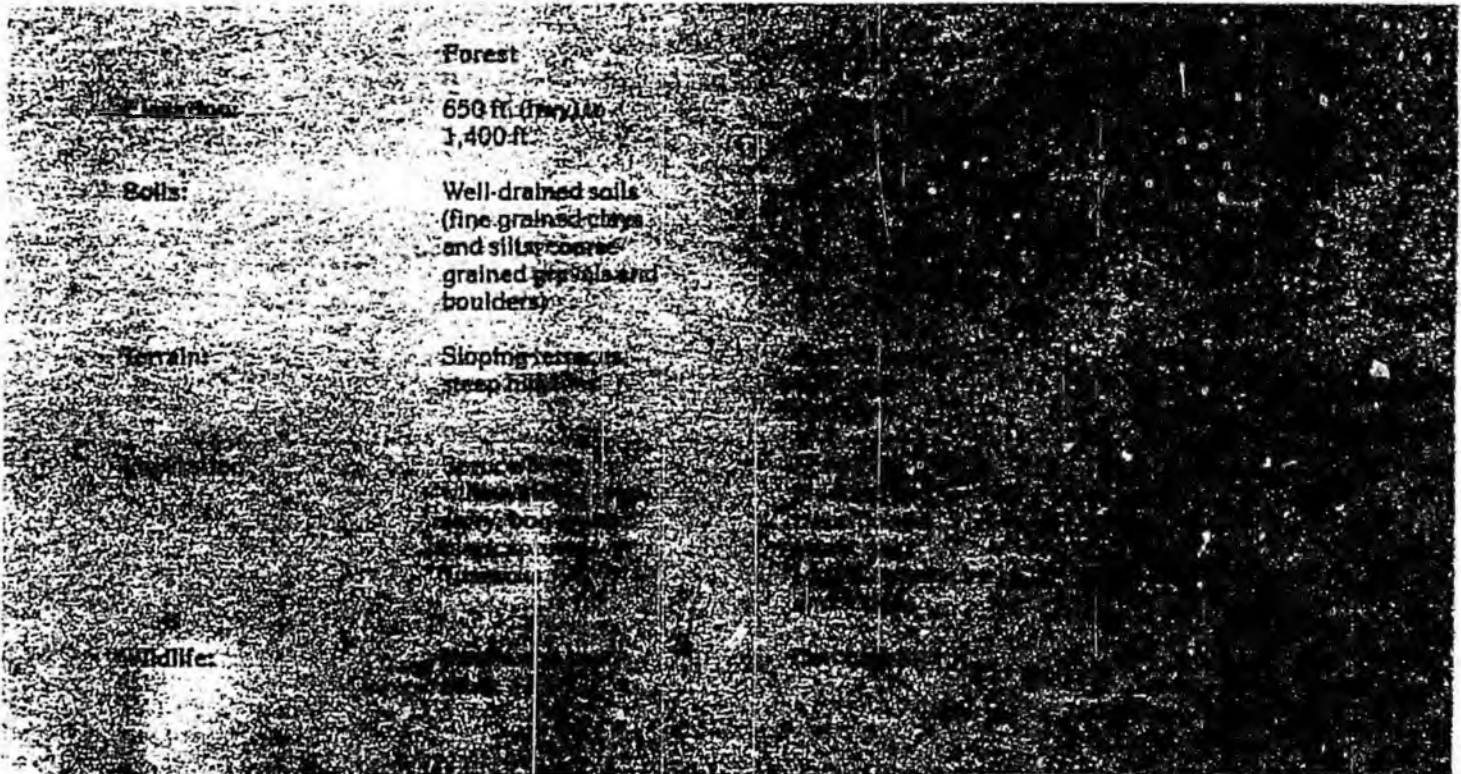
April, 1988

- Target date for start of development phase

ENVIRONMENT

The area proposed for further study includes several different ecosystems within the 1,000-foot rise covered in the distance of two or three miles between the highway and the ridge top. The terrain ranges from relatively level ground along the river and highway, to gradual slopes with occasional bench lands, to the steep hillside leading to the alpine ridge top. Treeline occurs at about 1,650 feet of elevation where the ridge levels to become an undulating hilltop plateau. Summit points in the central area of the ridge are between 2,500 and 2,900 feet of elevation.

Ecosystems roughly align with elevation:



Weather is moderated by the relatively warm coastal waters 100 miles to the south, and protected by the Alaska Range against the extreme cold of the Interior to the north. Snow accumulations, beginning in October, build to five or six feet by March. Snow usually melts during April and May, although snow patches above 2,500 feet often persist into July. Summer temperatures average from 44 to 68 degrees with occasional highs above 80, and more than 20 hours of mid-summer daylight. In winter, average temperatures range from zero to 40 above, though extremely cold days can reach minus 40 and lower.

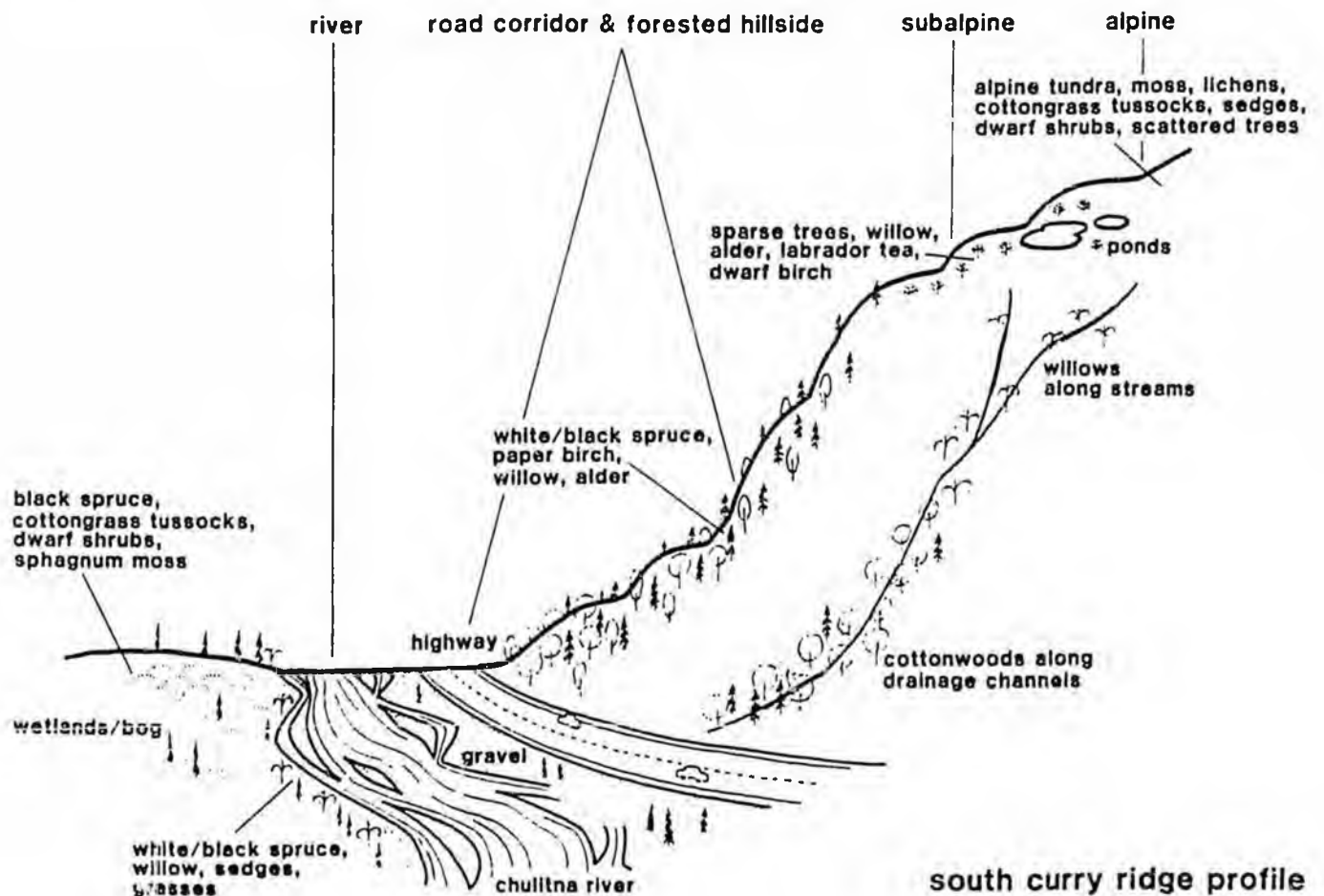
Through this brochure and the public workshops, agencies are seeking public comment on the issues to be considered in the preparation of an environmental impact statement. Initially, the following categories of consideration have been identified:

- Wildlife protection, prevention of bear/human conflict
- Water quality
- Viewshed
- Automobile and aircraft noise
- Climate, including cloud cover, wind, temperature, precipitation, avalanche potential, whiteout conditions
- Soils, particularly problems associated with glacial till
- Vegetation, particularly fragility of alpine vegetation
- Development of roadside inholdings
- Local economy and lifestyles

Site selection — The site selection zone extends from the Chulitna River to the ridge top near the southern end of Curry Ridge. Here there is a magnificent view of the Alaska Range across the Chulitna and Tokositna River valleys and the Ruth Glacier. In addition, the hillside and ridge are comparatively near to the Parks Highway, thus minimizing the distance and cost of access.

Terrain within this zone offers a choice of sites near the highway, on forested bench lands partially up the hillside, in sub-alpine zone and on the ridge top. The above listed facilities each have different locational requirements and could be arranged in several different configurations between the highway and the ridge top. Clearly, the maintenance compound should be in a convenient but hidden location near the highway, and the lodge and visitor center require sites with good views; but the combination or separation of various facilities, the choice of a hillside, sub-alpine or alpine location and the accommodation of parking require careful analysis. Public comment on the following and other considerations would be helpful:

1. The visitor center would probably be the major traffic generator in the development and should be readily accessible to all visitors at minimal cost. A prime view of the Alaska Range is essential, but should the center be located in the alpine zone in a sub-alpine zone or on a bench in the forested hillside? Should it stand alone within an easy hike of the lodge or be incorporated with the lodge in a single structure?
2. The lodge also will require a premiere view of the range. There will be two general types of clientele: tour travelers (mainly overnight visitors) and vacationers staying several days. Should the lodge be designed to cater to both types of visitors or planned as two separate facilities, one with a leisurely atmosphere for long-term visitors and the other with the familiar conveniences desired by overnights? Should these facilities be located in the alpine, sub-alpine or forested zones? To what extent should the lodge include related amenities such as shops, athletic facilities, convention facilities, etc.? Should the lodge be designed for expansion or should a fixed capacity be set?
3. Mode of access to various facilities will influence the visitors' convenience and enjoyment. If people drive private vehicles to the visitor center and the lodge, large parking areas must be provided, with consequent noise and activity incompatible with the goal of preserving the peace and natural quality of the environment. Alternatively, public parking could be provided near the base of the ridge and access to facilities above achieved either by a tram or a shuttle bus system. A tram offers the possibility of being a unique and attractive recreation opportunity in itself, with minimal environmental damage. However, prices must be affordable by the general public. If a tram is used, it would still be necessary to connect facilities with a low speed road limited to service and emergency vehicles.



ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS

Mt. McKinley, North America's tallest mountain, consistently ranks at the top of Alaska's attractions for visitors. Several recent factors contribute to the economic viability of the South Denali project:

1. Alaskan tourism has increased more than 25% in the past four years, with estimates of a 7% to 10% annual growth.
2. Cruise ships are now calling on southcentral ports of Anchorage, Whittier and Seward. This not only brings more visitors directly into the Anchorage-Fairbanks tour route, but also reduces by at least one day the time necessary to get into that route. Formerly, passengers disembarked at Haines or Skagway and traveled by bus to Anchorage.
3. The road into Denali National Park, a hundred miles north of the south Denali site, has reached its visitation capacity; additional traffic would diminish wildlife viewing opportunities. Necessary limitations will inhibit further hotel development in that region and encourage development elsewhere in locations with a good view of the mountain and access to park lands.

However, the main economic strength of the South Denali development stems from its attractiveness on its own merits. It will be:

- A unique "in park" facility, especially designed and developed to harmonize with its natural setting
- A central point in a range of surrounding outdoor recreational opportunities
- A site which can be accessible during the early spring and late fall seasons as well as the summer
- A center of information and interpretation of Mt. McKinley and the Alaska Range
- A destination with a magnificent view of Mt. McKinley

SOCIO/CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

Socio/economic impacts of the development will also be studied. This assessment will include impacts on local and regional economy, population, lifestyles and cultural resources.





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1981-1982

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1983-1984

DENNIS BRANDON
1984-1985

A.K. "KIRK" LANTERMAN
1985-1986

JOHN LITTE
1986-1987

A resolution of the Alaska Visitors Association

Whereas, the planning process for the concept of developing a major tourism destination on the south side of the Alaska Range has been ongoing since 1976; and

Whereas, three major goals have been identified including: to provide for public use and enjoyment of State and Federal park lands in the South Denali Region; to manage and protect area resources; and to develop and diversify the State's economy; and

Whereas, tourism is important to the economy of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough and to the State of Alaska; and

Whereas, private sector participation is essential for the successful development of commercial components of the South Denali concept; and

Whereas, the potential future social, cultural, and economic impacts on the local, state and regional levels will be analyzed to determine the costs and benefits of the South Denali projects; and

Whereas, the potential future environmental impacts of the project will be further analyzed in an Environmental Impact Statement jointly prepared by State and Federal agencies;

Now, therefore be it resolved, that the Alaska Visitors Association supports the South Denali concept for development of the Curry Ridge area within Denali State Park and supports private enterprise participation within this development.

*Passed and adopted in October of 1987 by the AVA Convention
in Anchorage, Alaska.*