

SJR

44

FISCAL NOTE

STATE OF ALASKA
1992 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

BILL NO. HCS CS SJR 44 (ITT)

Revision Date: 24-Apr-92 Department Affected: Natural Resources
 Title: Support Kantishna Area BRU: Land Management
Tourism Development Components: Land Management
 Sponsor: Senator Craft
 Requestor: House International Trade & Tourism COMPONENT SERIAL NO. 431

EXPENDITURES/REVENUES: (Thousands of Dollars)

OPERATING	FY 93	FY 94	FY 95	FY 96	FY 97	FY 98
PERSONAL SERVICES						
TRAVEL						
CONTRACTUAL						
SUPPLIES						
EQUIPMENT						
LAND&STRUCTURES						
GRANTS,CLAIMS						
MISCELLANEOUS						
TOTAL OPERATING	**	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

CAPITAL						
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REVENUE						
Funding Source:	N/A					

FUNDING: (Thousands of Dollars)

GENERAL FUND	**					
FEDERAL FUNDS						
OTHER						
Funding Source:						
TOTAL	**	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

POSITIONS:

FULL-TIME	0.0					
PART-TIME	0.0					
TEMPORARY	0.0					

Estimate of Current year impact:

ANALYSIS: (Attach a separate page if necessary)

** The costs for DNR associated with developing new access to Kantishna depend on the methods used to obtain access routes. Possibilities include an RS 2477 assertion; a right-of-way under Title II of ANILCA; land trades or purchases; some combination of methods.

Prepared by: Ron Swanson Phone: 762-2692
 Division: Land Management Date: 24-Apr-92

Approved by Commissioner: Harold C. Heinze Date: 24-Apr-92
 Agency: Department of Natural Resources

Distribution (by preparer) : Legislative Finance, legislative Sponsor, Requestor, OMB, & Impacted Agency(ies).

FISCAL NOTE

STATE OF ALASKA
1992 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

BILL NO. HCS CS SJR 44 (TT)

Revision Date: 04/24/92

Title: "Supporting increased access...area at Kantishna"

Sponsor: Senators Craft, Shultz, Halford, etc.

Requestor: _____

Department Affected: Office of the Governor

BRU: Executive Operations

Component: Executive Office

COMPONENT SERIAL NO.

0	0	0	6
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Expenditures/Revenues: (Thousands of Dollars)

OPERATING	FY 93	FY 94	FY 95	FY 96	FY 97	FY 98
PERSONAL SERVICES	0	0	0	0	0	0
TRAVEL	0	0	0	0	0	0
CONTRACTUAL	0	0	0	0	0	0
SUPPLIES	0	0	0	0	0	0
EQUIPMENT	0	0	0	0	0	0
LAND & STRUCTURES	0	0	0	0	0	0
GRANTS, CLAIMS	0	0	0	0	0	0
MISCELLANEOUS	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL OPERATING	0	0	0	0	0	0

CAPITAL	0	0	0	0	0	0
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REVENUE FUND SOURCE:	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
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FUNDING: (Thousands of Dollars)

GENERAL FUND	0	0	0	0	0	0
FEDERAL FUNDS	0	0	0	0	0	0
OTHER FUND SOURCE:	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	0	0	0	0	0	0

POSITIONS:

FULL-TIME	0	0	0	0	0	0
PART-TIME	0	0	0	0	0	0
TEMPORARY	0	0	0	0	0	0

Estimate of current year impact: none

ANALYSIS: (Attach a separate page if necessary.)

No fiscal impact

Prepared by: Michael A. Nizich, Director

Division: Division of Administrative Services

Phone: 465-3616

Date: 4/24/92

Approved by Commissioner: D. Max Hodel, Chief of Staff

Agency: Office of the Governor

Date: 4/24/92

Distribution (by preparer): Leg. Fin., Legislative Sponsor, Requestor, OMB/DBR, Gov. Legis. Ofc., & Impacted Agency(ies).

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

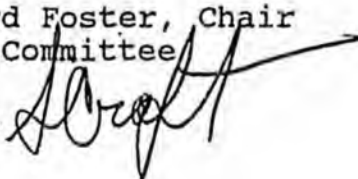
119 North Cushman, #201
Fairbanks, Alaska 99701
(907) 452-4882
Fax: 452-3254



Room 125, State Capitol
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1182
(907) 465-3834
Fax: 586-6246

Shirley Craft
Alaska State Senator

To: Representative Richard Foster, Chair
House Transportation Committee

From: Senator Shirley Craft 

Date: April 27, 1992

Re: House CS for CS Senate Joint Resolution 44; Supporting increased access near Mt. McKinley through establishment of a visitor activity area at Kantishna.

I would appreciate your prompt scheduling of SJR 44 by the House Transportation Committee.

There has been continued debate in the legislature over access into the Kantishna area for years. These discussions have continuously revolved around the use of state funds to build a road into the area. Unfortunately, in these days of declining revenues, the state is caught in a "Catch 22" situation. On the one hand, the public sector can no longer afford the costs associated with the construction and maintenance of a transportation system into Kantishna. On the other hand, with the state's growing reliance on the tourism industry, I pose the question: can we afford not to provide access? The solution to these questions, as I see it, comes from the state. Not in the building of structures, but in facilitating efforts by the private sector in attaining the necessary right of way lands from the federal government. Inherent in this action is that the state, with its' own plans, do not preclude any transportation systems that might be preferable to the private sector.

SJR 44 would ask that the Governor to use the resources he has at his disposal to address two questions:

- 1) That the administration aggressively pursue development of access into Kantishna and a Kantishna Historical Visitor Activity Area;
- 2) That the appropriate state agencies work with the National Park Service and the private sector in investigating the construction and operation of a transportation system into Kantishna.

The resolution also asks the Governor, as well as members of the Congressional Delegation and the President, to take the necessary actions in resolving any questions regarding permits and land acquisition.

The prompt consideration by your committee on this bill would be greatly appreciated. If you have any questions please contact Tom Brice of my staff at x3834.



*Department of Transportation
and Public Facilities*

POSITION PAPER

BILL NO: SJR 44

APPROVED:

[Handwritten signature] for FT

TITLE: Visitor Area at Kantishna

DATE: February 20, 1992

The department supports this resolution. System enhancement focused on economic development is one of three major initiatives in the department's new State Transportation Plan. The department has proposed seven projects for activity within the next six years of the federal highways act, and a surface transportation route from the Parks Highway to Kantishna is one of these projects. Accordingly, the proposed visitor activity area at Kantishna is consistent with the direction the department is taking in this area.

For Further Information contact Katy McHugh at 465-3900.



ALASKA VISITORS ASSOCIATION

501 West Northern Lights, Suite 201 • Anchorage, Alaska 99503

Tel: (907) 276-6663 • Fax: (907) 258-4036

1991-92

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Southeast Stevedoring

Ketchikan, Alaska

1st Vice-President

Bob Jacobsen

Wings of Alaska

Juneau, Alaska

2nd Vice-President

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Richard West

Alaska Sightseeing/
CruiseWest

Tim Worthen

Regency Cruises

Karen Cowart

Executive Director

#92-04

A RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF DENALI NATIONAL PARK ACCESS

WHEREAS, Denali National Park is one of the top two visitor destinations in Alaska, and

WHEREAS, the current limits on access into Denali National Park restrict many visitors from entering the park that would like to, and

WHEREAS, these restrictions on park access limit the ability of the visitor industry to grow in an environmentally sound manner and decrease the State's dependence on the oil industry, and

WHEREAS, the National Park Service is not planning any road or right-of-way development with the South Denali Concept Plan now under development, and

WHEREAS, the National Park Service Denali Task Force report recently released did not provide for any immediate increase in capacity on the current north entrance road, and

WHEREAS, Denali National Park is a critical element to the Alaska Visitor industry throughout the State, and,

WHEREAS, the State of Alaska has the ability to acquire right-of-ways through Denali National Park, and

WHEREAS, the Senate Joint Resolution No. 44 (SJR44) instructs the Alaska Governor and the Alaska U.S. Legislators to proceed with the State land right-of-way access through Denali National Park;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Alaska Visitors Association (AVA) Board of Directors strongly supports the State of Alaska's pursuit to acquire right-of-way lands through Denali National Park. The AVA Board also supports SJR44.

NOW THEREFORE ALSO BE IT RESOLVED that AVA supports the State of Alaska study of various ground transportation methods through this new right-of-way; be it a road, a concession railroad, or a concession road.

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that AVA supports the new National Park Service Alternative Transportation Mode Study that includes analysis of increasing the capacity of the current Denali National Park Road through alternative modes of transportation.

Adopted by the Alaska Visitors Association

Board of Directors

April 30, 1992

Kodiak, Alaska



ALASKA VISITORS ASSOCIATION

501 West Northern Lights, Suite 201 • Anchorage, Alaska 99503

Tel: (907) 276-6663 • Fax: (907) 258-4036

1991-92

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Terry Underwood

HAL-Westours Inc.

Richard West

Alaska Sightseeing/
CruiseWest

Tim Worthen

Regency Cruises

Karen Cowart

Executive Director

May 4, 1992

Senator Craft
Alaska State Legislature
P.O. Box V (MS 3100)
Juneau, AK 99811

Dear Senator Craft:

On April 30, 1992, the Alaska Visitors Association (AVA) Board of Directors met and discussed SJR44 which encourages the State Administration to pursue acquisition of right-of-way through Denali National Park. The AVA Board passed a resolution in support of SJR44 which you will find attached.

The existing Denali National Park road is now at capacity and the National Park Service has no plans for increased access in the near future. AVA requests that the State become very active in helping the visitor industry establish increased access into Denali National Park. The State of Alaska acquiring a right-of-way through the Park is an excellent first step.

You may have concerns that building a road will cost the State too much money, but we believe this situation can be settled satisfactorily. Federal highway funds is one option along with the possibility of a toll road or concessioning a railroad over this right-of-way.

The AVA Board would appreciate your continuing support of SJR44.

Sincerely

Johne Binkley
Park Access Committee Co-Chair

Tim Worthen
Park Access Committee Co-Chair

USIBELLI COAL MINE, INC. .

MARKETING
122 First Avenue
Suite 302
Fairbanks, Alaska 99701
(907) 452-2625
FAX 451-6543

March 6, 1992

Senator Shirley Craft
Senate
State Capitol
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1182

Dear Senator Craft:

Usibelli Coal Mine, Inc. urges the Senate to adopt Senate Joint Resolution No. 44 which supports increased access near Mt. McKinley through establishment of a visitor activity area at Kantishna.

Improved and alternate access into Kantishna is greatly needed and especially to provide for high quality experiences on the part of tourists who flock to Alaska's prime visitor attraction.

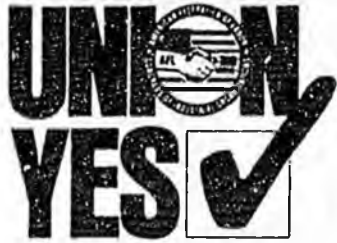
Sincerely,



John Sims

Vice President Marketing

JS/me



FAIRBANKS CENTRAL LABOR COUNCIL

AFL-CIO

315 Barnette Street
Fairbanks, Alaska 99701-4566
(907) 456-4584

JOE THOMAS
President
MIKE ANDREWS
Secretary-Treasurer

March 19, 1992

Senator Shirley Craft
Alaska State Senate
State Capitol
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1182

Dear Senator Craft:

The Fairbanks Central Labor Council encourages your support of SJR 44 regarding increased access near Mt. McKinley/Denali through establishment of a visitor activity area at Kantishna. We support this resolution following discussion with Kantishna Group Incorporated. We understand that the proposed electric railroad will increase access while minimizing environmental impact.

The Kantishna Group Incorporated has also committed to union labor in construction and maintenance of the railroad. The project will bring badly needed jobs to the Interior while developing our vital tourism industry.

With the developers committment to union labor, we encourage your support for SJR44.

Sincerely,

Richard Seward
President

Jack Jakubiec
Secretary/Treasurer

Kantishna Group Incorporated

Post Office Box 71047,
Fairbanks, Alaska 99707
Tel: 907-451-7455
FAX: 907-452-6997

Offices:
3515 Van Horn Road
Fairbanks, Alaska
99701

April 29, 1992

Representative Johnny Ellis,
P.O. Box V,
Juneau, Alaska 99811

Dear Representative Ellis:

I attended the public meeting of the House IT&T Committee on 4-23-92 (via teleconference) and thought that the questions and reservations you expressed at that time regarding CS for SJR 44 deserved a reply.

Kantishna Group Inc., is an Alaskan corporation which has proposed building an electric railroad from Lignite to Kantishna with private funds. Our preliminary estimates were done by Thomas Engineering of Fairbanks a leading transportation engineering firm in Alaska and the one quoted in the Denali Access Task Force Report. Thomas Engineering is our consulting engineer for this project and predicts economic feasibility for this undertaking.

Our interest in Denali Park access stems from our knowledge of the efforts by the National Park Service and the State of Alaska to solve the dilemma presented by the limited carrying capacity of the existing Park road and the volume of the existing tourism market there. The Park Service has been up-grading the road piecemeal but even when this is done the problem of crowding and its effect on wildlife will still exist. The State has and is planning for extension of its transportation network, including access to Kantishna in the Park.

The Park Service ("Denali Access Task Force Report", 1991) and the Alaska Environmental Lobby ("Issue Paper, 4/20/92") have expressed disfavor toward a road to Kantishna. But they found interest in the concept of a railroad. The "...Task Force Report" calls alternative forms of access "captivating". I have enclosed a copy of the "Issue Paper" and our reply to it. I have also enclosed a copy of the "Denali Access Task Force Report".

We embraced the concept of an electric railroad several years ago in anticipation of the current access problem. The concept a of State acquired right of way and the Visitor Activity Zone came to us from the obvious need for the State of Alaska, and its citizens to become more involved in the Tourist Industry as one means toward economic diversity.

Our support for the passage of SJR 44 is to urge the State of Alaska to give specific consideration to the concepts of the Railroad and the Visitor Activity Zone in the course of their planning functions, likewise to move our project forward in a responsible manner

The State could acquire a right of way to Kantishna upon which a private developer could build a railroad, producing fees, rents or tariffs etc., to the State. The State could acquire a Tourism Activity Zone at Kantishna and lease or concession development rights to private developers, retaining rights of control and deriving revenues. In these ways development could happen, the bottleneck at Denali would be broken while controls imposed by the State would eliminate the potential for a "tinsel town" to develop. This is responsible development. Of course the National Park Service could do all this but then the State would have no involvement, no control.

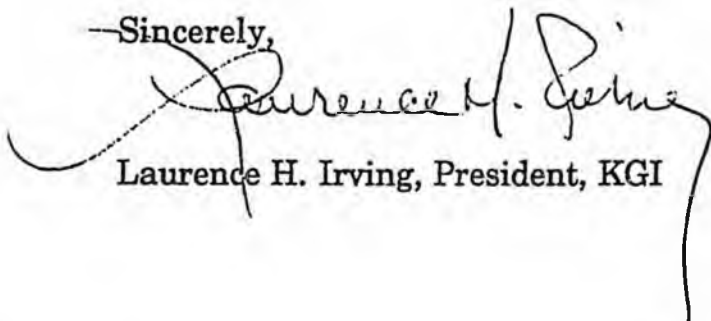
We think involvement in the tourism industry is important for Alaska. With the existence of 8 National Parks, 3 National Preserves, 13 National Wildlife Refuges and 5 National Monuments, the State of Alaska has been effectively shut out of involvement in tourist development within its own borders.

In closing we hope to make clear that we do not propose any political message but we do have an economic message. We want to stimulate and participate in the tourism economy of Alaska, to create new jobs and new capital circulation within the State.

Representative Ellis, communication is important to the success of any undertaking. If you have any questions or suggestions please feel free to call me collect (907) 456-4298, day or night, or write me at the above address.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Laurence H. Irving". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Laurence H. Irving, President, KGI

cc:
Sen. Craft
Rep. Koponen
Rep. Moyer

LHI/jnf

Kantishna Group Incorporated

Post Office Box 71047,
Fairbanks, Alaska 99707
TEL: 907-451-7458
FAX: 907-452-6997

Offices:
3515 Van Horn Rd.
Fairbanks, Alaska
99701

Laurence H. Irving, President

April 29, 1992

ALASKA ENVIRONMENTAL LOBBY, INC.
P.O. BOX 22151
Juneau, Alaska 99802
Attn: Linda Franklin

Re: SJR 44 Kantishna Tourism Development.

Dear Ms. Franklin:

We were happy to observe your interest in Denali Park Tourism development but feel constrained to attempt correction of some apparent mis-information in your issue paper of 4/20/92.

1. Need for visitor services: The Alaska Visitors Association has stated a urgent need for improved access for Denali Park as has the Alaska State Chamber of Commerce. Improved access is needed as much for the visitor industry as for the inholders. That the existing access system is strained to the limit of its carrying capacity is apparent to most observers. But but this huge park is certainly not overcrowded. Most of its area is never trod upon by human feet.

We at Kantishna Group feel that quality of access is an important consideration. Controlled access on a quiet non-polluting electric railroad can provide that quality access. Thomas Engineering, who is the engineer for the Kantishna Group, made the preliminary estimate based on Alaska Railroad and DOT/PF cost projections. Kantishna Group Inc., a private developer, could effect considerable cost savings in such construction without sacrificing quality. Such private development carried out under careful supervision could provide the much needed access **without** the expenditure of public funds. There is ample precedent for this public/private cooperation in Denali Park; private tour busses operate on the public right of way of the Park road and private aircraft land on Mt. McKinley by permission of the Park Service. At no time has Kantishna Group Inc., or Thomas Engineering suggested the expenditure of public funds for the building of the railroad.

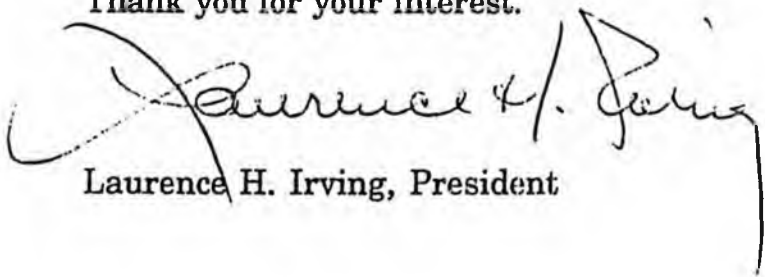
2. Spreading the wealth around: Denali is the State's premier tourist attraction in large part because it has public access. We feel that State dollars would be ill spent trying to open up more remote parks which currently lack access and therefor notoriety. Lets leave the the other 7 National Parks, 3 National Preserves and 4 National Monuments in the "pristine" bank for the future.

KGI / AEL 04-29-92 Pg2.

SJR 44 does not authorize nor propose the expenditure of funds. It supports areas of investigation for future development which have been in the past, are now or will be in the near future under study by both the State and Federal Governments. To ignore the possibility of such future development in Denali Park and Preserve is folly.

Again, Kantishna Group Inc., feels that controlled access by a clean, quiet, slow moving electric railroad, built and operated with private rather than public funds, is the modern mass transit solution to the strained carrying capacity and environmentally less desirable present access system.

Thank you for your interest.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Laurence H. Irving". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Laurence H. Irving, President

cc: Northern Environmental Center
Rep. Ellis
Sen. Craft

STATE OF ALASKA

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND PUBLIC FACILITIES

NORTHERN REGION, REGIONAL DIRECTOR

WALTER J. HICKEL, GOVERNOR

2301 PEGER ROAD
FAIRBANKS, ALASKA 99709-5316
PHONE: (907) 451-2210

April 20, 1992

Re: Kantishna Access

Laurance Irving, President
Kantishna Group Inc.
P.O. Box 71047
Fairbanks, AK 99707

Dear Mr. Irving:

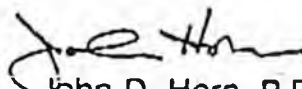
The Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT&PF) recently received your application requesting a railroad right of way between the Healy and Kantishna areas. This application was forwarded to us by the Department of Natural Resources. However, we cannot process your application since the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) does not allow us to simply adopt mode and alignment recommendations and proceed with project development.

DOT&PF is currently initiating the required Location/Environmental Study for a Kantishna access project. The study will include a thorough evaluation of alternate transportation modes, including rail. We will incorporate information from your application, as well as future information that you may wish to provide, into our study.

The State of Alaska believes that rights of way between the Alaska Railroad/Parks Highway corridor and Kantishna exist under Revised Statute 2477. However, we expect that a modern transportation facility will require additional right of way under Title XI of the Alaska National Interest Lands Act (ANILCA). We expect to pursue such right of way if a "build" alternative is adopted.

We appreciate your interest in Kantishna access and look forward to your participation and input as our study progresses. Please contact me if you have questions.

Sincerely,



John D. Horn, P.E.
Director

Laurence Irving

- 2 -

April 20, 1992

NP/slw

cc: Frank G. Turpin, Commissioner, Headquarters
W. Keith Gerken, Deputy Commissioner, Headquarters
John D. Martin, P.E., Chief of Planning & Admin. Services
Catherine McHugh, Legislative Liaison, Headquarters
Stephen Sisk, Director, Design and Construction
Clyde Stolfus, Chief, Office of Strategic Management Planning & Policy
Harold Hienze, Commissioner, Department of Natural Resources
Frederick Smith, Regional Manager, Northern Regional Offices, DNR

To the House Transportation Committee:

Denali Citizen's Council strongly opposes SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO.44, a resolution on Denali National Park's Kantishna, that will be heard in House Transportation on May 5 at 8:30 AM.

Denali Citizen's Council (DCC) is a non-profit, all volunteer organization started in 1974 to act as a watchdog over Denali National Park. DCC is not connected with the National Park Service, but serves as a vocal group of citizens who detect and publicize problems concerning Denali National Park.

SJR 44 is based on erroneous information and faulty assumptions, and will HARM Denali National Park, NOT enhance the experience.

\$\$\$ The National Park Service has studied a northern Kantishna route for over a year and has recently come to the conclusion that a "new road is not justifiable for park purposes, wildlife, economics or visitor services. (See press release and Denali Access Task Force Report enclosed.) NPS has been actively buying inholdings in Kantishna, and is opposed to new commercial construction in this fragile wilderness location. An unnecessary road will damage the unique remoteness that attract tourists.

\$\$\$ NOT A ZERO FISCAL NOTE!!! SJR 44 proposes that the private sector should build a new road. Estimates from the Dept. of Transportation acknowledge the road would cost \$80-120 million! (Promoter Thomas Engineering of Fairbanks estimates \$216 million) How can private industry do this without State money?

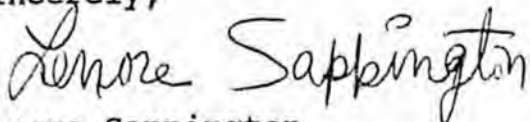
\$\$\$ The State has not done a comprehensive study on the need for another road into Kantishna. DOT is planning to spend public money this summer on preliminary engineering for this road even before the DOT 6 year plan is final! Alaska should not start a large project without public support and a proven need!

\$\$\$ Why should funds be spent on an area already developed for tourism when so many other parts of the state need facilities? Why not spread the tourist wealth throughout the state?

\$\$\$ The State of Alaska does not have right-of-way into Kantishna. The hotly contested RS 2477 assertions will certainly cost thousands of dollars and years in litigation.

SJR 44 is simplistic and has the potential to seriously damage Alaska's major tourist attraction. VOTE NO on SJR 44 !!!

Sincerely,



Lenore Sappington
Denali Citizen's Council Board





United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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



IN REPLY REFER TO:

L1425 (ARO-OL)

APR 23 1992

Lenore Sappington
Denali Citizens Council
3127 Tarwater #11
Anchorage, Alaska 99508

Dear Ms. Sappington:

During your visit to our office on April 22, 1992, you requested information on the National Park Service (NPS) land acquisition program in the Kantishna area of Denali National Park. The NPS is currently working to implement the August 21, 1990, Record of Decision for the Final Environmental Impact Statement, Cumulative Impacts of Mining, Denali National Park and Preserve, Alaska. This document calls for the acquisition of all mining claims within Denali National Park and Preserve. Following is a summary of the acquisition program status.

In fiscal year 1991 Congress appropriated \$6,000,000 for the purchase of mineral properties in Denali National Park. Of that amount, \$2,650,000 has been spent for the purchase of 329 acres of patented property in the Kantishna area together with approximately \$90,000 for closing, title insurance, hazardous substance survey, and relocation costs associated with that transaction. Another \$900,000 has been spent or obligated for hazardous substance surveys, appraisals, and title information required for future purchases.

In fiscal year 1992 the National Park Service received an additional \$3,060,000 to continue the acquisition program. This amount added to the \$2,360,000 remaining from the original appropriation results in a unobligated program balance of \$5,420,000.

Sincerely,

Catherine B. Sheppard

Catherine B. Sheppard
Realty Specialist

F30(330)

(Cover letter for Kantishna Resource
Management Plan 1990)

Honorable Robert C. Byrd
Chairman, Subcommittee on
Interior and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

JUL 5 1990

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Language contained in Conference Report 101-264, Fiscal Year 1990 Appropriations for the Department of the Interior, directed the National Park Service to prepare a list of all private inholdings in Denali National Park and Preserve, Alaska; the name of each owner or owners; the statutory basis for the inholding (Mining Act, Homestead Act, etc.); the approximate acreage of the inholdings; its current, and potential, relative threat to park values; its location and number on an accompanying map; and a comprehensive resource management plan for the Kantishna region no later than May 1, 1990.

In response to the directive, the Park Service is pleased to provide the report in the enclosure to this letter. The report concludes that the National Park Service should acquire all inholdings in the Kantishna Hills under a phased acquisition plan. Acquisition could take place over four years at a total cost of \$17.2 million.

The Department of the Interior intends to utilize its usual land acquisition priority-setting process to determine whether to request funds for Kantishna Hills acquisition in the fiscal year 1992 President's Budget.

A similar letter is being sent to the Honorable Sidney R. Yates, Chairman, Subcommittee on Interior and Related Agencies, Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives.

Sincerely,

LEOR
LOU GALLEGOS
Assistant Secretary
Policy, Management & Budget

Enclosures

cc: Honorable James A. McClure
Ranking Minority Member
Subcommittee on Interior
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

to the local community by the businesses adjacent to the Park entrance is estimated at \$15-18 million. Most of these businesses have been created since 1982. Their major attraction is Denali National Park itself, and they advertise their proximity to the park as providing one of the most spectacular wildlife viewing opportunities in the world.

The park co-existed from its establishment in 1917 until 1980 with mining activity and small commercial lodges just outside its boundaries in the Kantishna Hills. The park was enlarged in 1980 by the ANILCA to cover all of the Kantishna Hills including three commercial lodges and 47 patented and 375 unpatented mining claims.

Because of poor minerals management under existing regulations and lack of an aggressive land protection plan, mining and commercial facilities expanded rapidly after the Kantishna Hills were included in the Park. Today the effects of mining are visible on over 200 acres of land covering 10 drainages. Four commercial lodges operated in 1989 and a fifth is scheduled for construction during the summer of 1990.

The future of mining in the Park has been uncertain since a 1985 lawsuit halted operations. The National Park Service (NPS) is currently enjoined from considering new plans of operations for approval until it completes an environmental impact statement (EIS) on the cumulative effects of mining. The EIS is currently under review and is not expected to become final before the summer of 1990.

Because of mining uncertainty and rapidly increasing recreational demands, inholders in the Kantishna Hills are realizing the real estate value and commercial development potential of their properties within the Park. Fee simple lands (patented mining claims, homesites, and other surface ownerships) have been and are being subdivided and developed with guest houses, lodges and hotels. The less than fee lands (unpatented mining claims) are being patented for the same ultimate purpose.

The adverse impacts to park resources from past mining and current commercial development, and the potential impacts from future mining and rapidly expanding commercial activity in the Kantishna Hills are major concerns of the National Park Service (NPS).

The NPS is particularly concerned by commercial development that would cause a major shift in focus of the park experience away from a nature preserve where wildlife viewing along the Denali park road corridor is a primary resource. to a hub for access to commercial recreational facilities. The Park road would become an access corridor between two development nodes. One node at the Park entrance would be devoted to Park-related activities and the other node would be at Kantishna devoted to commercial recreation. The resulting congestion caused by increased traffic in the Park road corridor would impede the park experience and decrease the opportunity for visitors to observe wildlife. Such impacts are also inimical to the legislated purpose of parks (16 USC 1).

from Kantishna Resource Management Plan
Denali National Park 1990

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

The conclusions drawn from the potential for adverse environmental impacts related to current and potential commercial development in the Kantishna Hills and the Park's management directives are:

1. New commercial development on fee simple mining properties is incompatible with the purposes for which Denali was established.
2. Current commercial activity which adversely affects park resources including wildlife in the park road corridor is incompatible with the purposes for which Denali was established.
3. Properties on which incompatible use is occurring or where the potential for incompatible use exists should be acquired.
4. Patented and potentially patented claims may, in the future, be used for commercial resort development.

Recommendation. The National Park Service should acquire all inholdings in the Kantishna Hills under a phased acquisition plan.

A detailed description of the inholdings, current status, and acquisition timing and costs are given in the appendices. The inholdings are listed by tract number and name in Appendix A. The current status of activity on the inholdings is also summarized. Appendix B includes several maps. Appendix C is a detailed list of inholdings detailing each tract, its size and owner(s) by priority year of acquisition. Appendix D gives details on the appraisal methods used for this report.

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 19, 1992

CONTACT: John Quinley
Public Affairs (907) 257-2696

DENALI TASK FORCE RECOMMENDS NO NEW ROAD

A task force of high-level National Park Service officials has found that with some improvements, the existing road in Denali National Park and Preserve is adequate and that a second road to Kantishna is not justified.

The question of a second road was the most prominent issue for the task force, which was appointed last year by James Ridenour, director of the National Park Service. The recommendation is contained in the task force's report to the director, which was released this week.

The recommendations are the opinion of task force members, and have not been endorsed by Ridenour or the Department of the Interior.

The task force was directed to examine how the park has balanced the protection of natural resources with increased public demand for access to the park interior, to consider the safety and adequacy of the existing park road, and to consider alternative access to Kantishna, the major collection of private inholdings in the park's interior.

Public comment, testimony from private industry and the state of Alaska, and research into the park's mandates were used to reach the conclusions. The recommendations are aimed at protecting wildlife and other park values, improving safety, increasing visitation, and making park visits easier for people.

-- MORE --



The six recommendations are:

1. A new road into the Kantishna area of Denali National Park and Preserve is not justified in terms of its effect on the park purposes or on wildlife. Neither is it justified with regard to economics or visitor service.
2. Further study of alternative transportation technology, such as railroads or a monorail, is warranted. These have the potential advantage of being more environmentally sound than road transportation, and could provide a unique and high-quality park experience for additional visitors.
3. Portions of the existing park road should be upgraded immediately to improve safety and wildlife viewing experiences. A dust palliative should be considered.
4. Federal regulations for the control of private vehicle traffic along the Denali park road should be proposed. The park should maintain the current permit system for landowners needing to use private vehicles.
5. If cost-effective, the government should consider lease or purchase of a dedicated fleet of buses similar in size and quality to those used by the concessioner.
6. The park should consider a nationwide reservation system.

The task force found access to the first 15 miles of park road, hiking trails, major exhibits, lectures and demonstrations comparable to many parks in the Lower 48.

"Access to the park interior is not available on demand for every person who desires it. With some planning and flexibility, most people -- particularly resident Alaskans -- can travel the entire park road within two days of their arrival at Denali. With the existing Anchorage and Fairbanks in-person reservation system, even that 48-hour uncertainty is removed for many visitors," the report said.

"At some level, though, the Denali that people come to see -- the wildlife close to the road, the relative solitude, the sweeping vistas of the Alaska Range -- cannot be available for all who might wish to see it. A limit on road traffic is necessary to preserve the very viewing opportunities that make Denali unique. Tinkering with bus sizes, schedules and reservation systems is likely to squeeze several thousand more visitors into the park's 100-day season, but will not answer critics who insist upon unlimited access for all comers," the task force members said.

-- MORE --

The task force supported completion of the development plans for the south side of Denali, plans which will evaluate sites for a visitor center, trails, and other facilities. The four draft concepts for development were outlined in a workbook made public February 14. Public comment will run through April 10, 1992.

The task force also supported the Alaska Region's facility development priorities for parks other than Denali. "Investing in other areas -- with visitor centers, trails, campgrounds and the necessary administrative facilities -- would bring Alaska far greater, and surer, benefits than would expanded facilities in the Kantishna area," the report concluded.

The members of the task force were John M. Morehead, associate director for operations, Washington, D.C. (since appointed Alaska regional director); Don Castleberry, regional director, NPS Midwest Region; Paul Haertel, associate regional director, Alaska Region; Bob Barbee, superintendent, Yellowstone National Park; Russell W. Berry, Jr., superintendent, Denali National Park and Preserve; Elmer Hernandez and Jim Straughan, transportation planners, NPS Denver Service Center.

-- NPS --

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As one of the premier wildlife viewing areas in the National Park System, Denali National Park and Preserve is properly considered a major visitor destination for people around the world. More than any other attraction, the mountains and wildlife of Denali define Alaska for thousands of visitors and for scores of companies marketing the Last Frontier.

Like national parks in the Lower 48, Denali has struggled to accommodate growing visitation and respect the rights of inholders while at the same time has fulfilled its mission to protect the wild life, natural processes, and scenery of the park for generations to come.

The focus of that struggle has been the 90-mile park road, a narrow ribbon reaching deep into a wilderness valley. The balance struck for the past 20 years -- limited private vehicle access, provision of free public transportation and encouragement of inholders to minimize their use of the park's only road -- has, for the most part, worked.

This task force was charged with examining that balance, to consider the safety and adequacy of the park road, and to consider alternative access to Kantishna, the major collection of inholdings in the park's interior.

After several public meetings and meetings with state, local and business organizations, the task force recognized there existed a broad range of opinion regarding the future of Denali National Park. Further, the task force realized that any compromise which maintains the balance of the Park Service's mission will necessarily leave some interest groups less than satisfied.

The task force makes the following six primary recommendations to the Director of the National Park Service:

1. **There is no need for an additional gravel or paved road into the Kantishna area of Denali National Park and Preserve. A new road is not justifiable in terms of its effect on the park purposes or on wildlife. Neither is it justifiable with regard to economics or visitor services. The park's major concessioner, large tour companies and smaller inholder operations oppose both a northern access route and major changes to the character of the existing road.**

RECOMMENDATIONS

Regarding Alternative Access Proposals

Regarding the proposals for alternate access routes, the task force makes two recommendations. First, there is no need for a new road, and, second, there is need for further study of rail transportation into the park. A detailed discussion follows:

1. No need for new road

The task force finds no convincing argument for a new road in the park for the purposes of access for Kantishna inholders and accommodation of current and foreseeable visitation. The primary reasons for this conclusion are fourfold:

1. CURRENT CONDITIONS -- The level of business activity, new business starts, visitation and mining do not justify additional access. There are only four active businesses in the area. They are seasonal operations, and are not currently filling all existing rooms. Two of the four existing businesses oppose a new, northern access route.

No mining has taken place for six years. The policy of the Department of the Interior is to follow the 1990 environmental impact statements which recommended the public acquisition of mining claims in Kantishna. There are many willing sellers, and Congress has begun appropriating money for the purchase and reclamation of claims. The preponderance of evidence is that, in coming years, much of the private property in Kantishna will return to public ownership, and that businesses will remain small, family-run, operations, offering a high-quality, low-volume experiences.

2. PARK PURPOSES -- The northern portion of the park was added by Congress in 1980 in large part to protect the habitat of bears, moose, caribou, sheep, wolves, swans and other waterfowl. The construction of a north-side road, and subsequent use by private and government vehicles, would clearly cause new disturbances to wildlife. The extent of this disturbance is unknown. This concern would be even stronger if calls for a year-round access road are heeded. The northern route crosses large areas of wetlands -- an obstacle which 70 years ago contributed to the choice of the existing road alignment. Most winter routes from the Healy area to Kantishna were routed, in part, along frozen glacial river beds -- a problematic alignment for summer travel.

STATE OF ALASKA

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND PUBLIC FACILITIES

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

WALTER J. HICKEL, GOVERNOR

3132 CHANNEL DRIVE
JUNEAU, ALASKA 99801-7898
PHONE: (907) 465-3900

April 10, 1992

Mr. Jack Morehead, Director
National Park Service
1689 C Street, Suite 100
Anchorage, AK 99501-5151

Dear Jack,

As we discussed, this is a preliminary response to the Denali Access Task Force Report (NPS, November, 1991). For the lack of time and space, it does not address all of our concerns about the report. It only addresses enough of the major ones to indicate that in our opinion the report should not be used as a decision making tool.

We are disappointed the Park Service did not perform an objective study of the need for increased access to the north side of the park. Also, we are concerned by National Park Service (NPS) value judgements that misrepresent the position of the state and its tourist industry. The report goes to great length to overstate the impacts, to understate the benefits, and to misrepresent many of the relevant facts concerning the concept of new access into the north side of Denali National Park. We feel the facts and input that went into the report are designed to support a predetermined and predictable negative conclusion. We also feel that there are logical and constructive solutions to many of the "problems" the report associates with new access to the Kantishna area. Those solutions need to be identified and objectively evaluated.

The bottom line is that development of the highest quality, most reliable, practical Mt. McKinley viewing point is important to the long term health of Alaska's tourist industry. For decades the existing Park Road satisfied the demand. Since its use has been significantly restricted, it has not satisfied the demand. Alaska, with its increasing economic reliance on tourism, cannot afford to attract tourists and then deny them the greatest practical opportunity to see the state's premier scenic resource. When they are denied the opportunity to get a quality view of the mountain, it is Alaskan tourism--not the National Park Service--that suffers as visitors pass the word back to the rest of the world.

No route, inside or outside of the park, can be built to totally avoid any impact on habitat. On the other hand, a road can be built and maintained to the scenic resources of the Kantishna area without:

- 1) Increasing traffic over the existing Park Road.
- 2) Impacting the swan/waterfowl habitat concentration along the North edge of the park.
- 3) Requiring a twelve-hour shuttlebus ride over a substandard road.
- 4) Allowing uncontrolled access to adjacent lands (control is exercised along the existing road).

Viewing Mt. McKinley is non-consumptive. No matter how many people are successful in their attempts to gain a quality view, it will still be available, in its natural state, for future generations. Developing a new, efficient route to serve that viewing will not eliminate, or significantly reduce, the opportunity for wilderness type solitude around the mountain. (A one-mile wide impact corridor along fifty-five miles of road, between the Shushana River and Kantishna, would involve .6%--six tenths of one percent--of the Park/Preserve.) Note that land beyond 150 feet from the existing Park Road centerline is officially considered to be wilderness.

On a larger scale, Denali National Park is one of only two major National Park/Preserve Units, out of thirteen in Alaska, to be penetrated by the highway system. That level of access is not excessive and should not be compared to parks in the lower 48, like Yellowstone, which receive over ten times the visitation within a fraction of the area. The purported ills of the entire National Park System cannot, and should not, be resolved by placing a moratorium on significant access improvements in the Alaskan National Parks. With only two of thirteen major park units in Alaska penetrated by the road system, we see the need for some compromise on the access issue. That compromise can only be reached by objectively studying demands and solutions.

Some of our major comments on the Task Force Report are:

Executive Summary Pages 4-6

The conclusion that "there is no need for an additional gravel or paved road into the Kantishna area of Denali National Park and Preserve" appears to contradict numerous other statements made in the report. They include:

- 1) That Denali Park is a "major visitor destination for people around the world."
- 2) That "Denali has struggled to accommodate visitation."

- 3) That people come to Denali to view wildlife along the existing Park Road and to view Mt. McKinley.
- 4) That increased traffic on the existing Park Road would be detrimental to the splendid wildlife viewing along that route.
- 5) That sometimes people have to wait two days to catch a bus into the park (especially during good mountain viewing weather).
- 6) That 1,600 cars entered the park in one day during an end-of-season opening.

Those apparent contradictions should be objectively discussed. The statement (Page 6) that "Mt. McKinley viewing is superior on the south side of the Alaska Range" should be substantiated or deleted. In reality, the view from the north enjoys a continental type climate while that from the south contends with a higher incidence of cloudiness and precipitation (see precipitation contour maps in the Alaska Environmental Atlas, University of Alaska, 1969). Also, the mountain stands out better from the north side, with fewer intermediate mountains to compete with. If the view from the south was "superior," the art work and photography that has been published would not put so much emphasis on the view from the north. Also, the Park Service would have emphasized access from the south in the 1920's and 1930's when improving access to park resources was a higher priority to them.

The conclusion that "Investing in other areas...would bring Alaska far greater, and surer, benefits than would expanded facilities in Kantishna area" (page 6) should be deleted from this study. That type of value judgement should be left to the state. That conclusion ignores the state's ability to make tourist industry related decisions. In reality, reliable accessible viewing of Mt. McKinley is important to the state's tourist industry. The current inability for many tourists to see the mountain negatively impacts the industry (rather than the Park Service). Improved access would provide long-term, non-consumptive service to the tourist industry and would make improved mountain viewing available to future generations. There is probably no other current single development that could provide as much long-term benefit to Alaska's tourist industry.

Introduction Pages 7-11

The conclusion (Page 9) that since bed space in Kantishna is not filled to capacity, there must not be a great demand for access, is invalid. Lodge patronage and demand for access are not directly related. This section should note that, during one end-of-season opening, up to 1,600 cars entered on one day (Page 28) and that the concessioner's bus tours travel at virtually 100% capacity (Page 32). It should also note that, as demand increases, even more people will leave dissatisfied.

This section puts too much effort into defending the existing shuttlebus service and existing restrictions on the Park Road to be of value to an objective study of the Denali National Park access issue.

Denali Fact Sheet Page 12

If this fact sheet is going to be included in the report, it needs to present facts to support both sides of the issue. It is missing information such as:

- 1) The number of people who wish to view Mt. McKinley but are unsuccessful.
- 2) The number of people who "pile up" outside of the park entrance waiting to get in.
- 3) Projections of future demand, congestion and disappointment.
- 4) The value of quality, reliable Mt. McKinley viewing to the state's tourist industry.
- 5) Analysis of how many people could be served by additional access.

Public Comment Pages 14-16

This section does not fairly present the facts. For instance, it purports that a 175 mile bus ride into Kantishna and back is too long to be attractive to travelers. That statement assumes that such a ride would be by school bus over a substandard route (i.e., the existing Park Road). It ignores the fact that a lot of people, including elderly travelers, each put thousands of miles on buses each year on trips to Alaska. A 175 mile trip, on a quality bus, over a quality road, would be a very enjoyable experience to them. It would offer a very viable and attractive trip (one day or overnight) to get an opportunity to view Mt. McKinley.

The comparison of visitor limitations on bear concentration areas and on a walrus haul out area is invalid (page 15). The strict limitation on visitors, which is needed to avoid disturbance to bears and walruses, is not needed to protect Mt. McKinley. Unlike bears or walruses, Mt. McKinley will not relocate. The "sample of the range of other comments" on page 15 is also invalid. A member of the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (ADOT&PF) Northern Region staff attended each of the three public meetings and heard a good deal of input that advocated improved access into the Kantishna area. His notes (copy enclosed) indicate that of 50 people that offered input at the three meetings, twenty-eight favored increased access, three sounded neutral, and nineteen opposed increased access. In any event, the three to one opposition indicated by the "sample of the range of other comments" in the report is inaccurate and misleading.

Alternate Access Proposals Pages 17-19

Rather than objectively evaluating realistic access alternatives, this section is devoted almost entirely to discrediting possible road alternatives, and to suggesting unrealistic alternatives such as a monorail.

The one-way loop (or partial one-way loop) should be addressed as a possibility. The fact that some bridges would be required is noteworthy but the indication that they would be "expensive" (Page 18) and would be required over "several major glacial rivers" is an example of overstatement to support what we believe to be a predetermined conclusion. The state has built and/or maintains many bridges over larger rivers than any of those between the Parks Highway and Kantishna. In reality, an alignment between Lignite and Kantishna could be located to cross only two glacial rivers, the Toklat and the Teklanika. Estimates for the construction of all required bridges have been included in previously prepared route development estimates.

The discussion of rail access to Kantishna (Page 18) is short but generally good. The likelihood of building a \$216 million railroad as opposed to an \$80 million road should be discussed though. On the other hand an \$800 million to \$3.2 billion monorail should not be presented as a viable alternative worthy of further study. To do so is simply misleading and counter productive. That is especially true since a monorail would probably still require a road for construction and maintenance.

Recommendations Pages 20-25

This analysis of utilization of room occupancy at Kantishna (Page 20) does not lead to a valid conclusion on the current or future need to provide access to the Kantishna area. The fact that there is no mining activity in the area (because none is allowed) also does not lead to a valid conclusion.

It is our understanding that the choice of alignments seventy years ago (Page 20) was based largely on scenery. Previous access to Kantishna, which was not constrained by land management designations, used the northern alignments almost exclusively. Also, it was important to NPS that the road be located within the park. In any event, the hydrological conditions of some of the possible alignments available along the north side of the park do not inhibit construction of a modern, high quality road. This section should not indicate that they would.

A new road would not put the wildlife viewing that occurs along the existing Park Road at risk. It could actually channel non-wildlife oriented traffic away from the existing road, thus, enhancing the wildlife viewing opportunity.

The statement that a new route "adds nothing to a visitors ability to see the mountain" (Page 20) is not true. A new road on the north side would significantly increase the quality of, and the success rate for, Mt. McKinley viewing.

The assumption that a new road would involve a "one way only" loop is premature. It would offer such an opportunity to people who would not want to ride over the existing Park Road twice. It is unlikely that a new road would be limited to one way traffic.

The fact that a Park Service survey shows that "more than 40 percent of those visiting Denali spend only one night at the park" doesn't seem relevant (Page 21). What do the other 60% do? How many of the total want to see Mt. McKinley? How many would spend more time if they could realize a quality experience, rather than waiting around the park entrance?

The assertion that "the current 55 mile trip into the Park is too long" (Page 21) seems to add credence to the need for a quality route. Instead, NPS appears to conclude from it that no significant improvements are warranted. A 175 mile round trip, over a quality road, in a quality vehicle, is comfortably within industry parameters for a day trip. NPS should not go to such lengths to discount its value.

An improved reservation system (Page 22) might help avoid the pile up that occurs around the park entrance but it will not serve to increase the ability for numbers of people to gain access to reliable, quality, Mt. McKinley viewing. It does little to solve the current capacity problems or to meet future demand.

The NPS conclusion on the basis of this report, that "there is no economic justification for state or federal construction of a second road to Kantishna" (Page 23) is unsubstantiated. The NPS conclusion that the cost of a new road could be better invested elsewhere in the National Park System (Page 23) is also unsubstantiated. It ignores the state's ability to identify need, and adds nothing constructive to the report. We recognize other needed improvements but prioritize this one as of primary importance to our tourist industry.

That some number of people can visit the park's (Page 24) interior does not necessarily satisfy the demand for reliable, quality viewing of Mt. McKinley. NPS should determine why those people want to access the park's interior, and then objectively study ways to adequately satisfy that need.

Access to Kantishna Pages 26-28

The information presented in this section (re: access rights of inholders and 1,600 vehicles in one day) seems to support the need for a new access route that would not adversely affect the wildlife viewing along the existing road.

Recommendations Page 29 and Pages 34-37

Developing regulations specific to the management of the existing Park Road (Page 29) is not likely to serve the demand for access to the resources available in the Kantishna area. Instead, they would likely result in even more restriction.

The existing permit system (Page 29) is not meeting demand for access. The problem will become more acute in the future.

Increased maintenance and localized improvements (Page 34) on the existing road will not satisfy demand.

The NPS conclusion that "the (existing) Park Road will clearly be the primary, if not the only, vehicle route into the park interior and into Kantishna for many years" (Page 34) is not acceptable to the state. It does nothing to accommodate growth in our tourist industry. Instead, it arbitrarily inhibits growth upon which Alaska will be critically dependent.

Advocating a switch from 40 passenger buses to 48 passenger buses (Page 35), as even a significant partial solution to the access problem, is unrealistic. That would provide a token increase, under the current access restrictions, but would do virtually nothing to meet the need for improved access to the Kantishna area.

Increased interpretive efforts (Page 37) may be useful, but also will not serve to significantly satisfy access needs. The same is true of an improved reservation system.

IN SUMMARY, we agree that Denali National Park contains valuable resources that should be protected for future generations. We disagree with apparent NPS conclusions that significant access improvements should not be allowed. The wildlife viewing opportunity (which seems to be used extensively to argue against any improved access) along the existing Park Road is valuable. The wildlife viewing demands would indicate to us that:

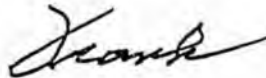
- 1) More low impact-low volume wildlife viewing opportunities are needed. Other National Park units may be able to offer such opportunities.
- 2) A route that could access north side mountain viewing, without adding traffic to the existing road, should be sought. Possible alignments which avoid the existing road corridor, and which avoid the concentrated swan/waterfowl habitat along the north edge of the park, are available and should be studied.

Congress recognized that Alaska's transportation system is "largely undeveloped." They established a mechanism by which improvements in National Conservation System Units could be developed to serve the state's

transportation needs, Title XI of Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA). Access to the Kantishna area is a situation where NPS has to recognize the need for flexibility in its philosophy in order to allow the state's needs to be met.

The NPS report clearly does not satisfy established federal standards for decision making documents. A study which does satisfy those standards is needed. It could be done to satisfy Title XI of ANILCA as well as federal highway development guidelines. I intend to initiate such a study. That study and any possible recommended developments will need the objective participation of the National Park Service. I look forward to working with you on an objective, in-depth study, and request your cooperation.

Sincerely,



Frank G. Turpin
Commissioner

Enclosure

cc: The Honorable John B. Coghil, Lt. Governor
The Honorable Frank Murkowski, United States Senate
The Honorable Harold Heinze, Commissioner, DNR
John Katz, Special Counsel, State/Federal Relations, Office of the Governor
John D. Horn, P.E., Regional Director, Northern Region, DOT&PF
M. Clyde Stoltzfus, Chief, Office of Strategic Management, Planning & Policy

MEMORANDUM

State of Alaska
Department of Transportation & Public FacilitiesTO: Jonathan A. Widdis, Manager
Capital Projects Planning

DATE: March 12, 1991

FILE NO:

TELEPHONE NO: 474-2423

FROM: Norm Plispanen
Access PlannerSUBJECT: National Park Service
Meetings to Gather Input
on Denali Park/Kantishna
Access

Attached are notes that I took at each of a series of public meetings which the National Park Service held to gather input on how the access situation in Denali National Park should be addressed. The meetings were held in Anchorage on February 20, 1991; Fairbanks on February 21, 1991; and Healy on February 22, 1991.

The meetings were each two to three hours long. They consisted of an opening statement by Russ Berry, Denali National Park Superintendent, followed by a brief introduction of the Park Service planning team:

Jack Morehead - representing NPS Washington D.C. office
Elmer Hernandez - NPS Support Division
Don Castleberry - NPS Midwest Region Director
Boyd Evison - NPS Alaska Region Director
Paul Haertel - NPS Alaska Region
Robert Barbee - Yellowstone NP Superintendent
Russell Berry - Denali NP Superintendent

Mr. Berry then opened each meeting to speakers from the audience, calling on them in the order in which they had signed up to speak. The attached notes cover all speakers at each meeting.

Even though the input was mostly very polarized (proponents of new access vs. opponents of new access) the audience was polite. There was little input from the audience during individual presentations. The different points of view did draw some applause from each faction in response to respectively favorable input. After the speakers were finished each meeting ended with a "mingling" session between the public and the NPS team.

The input from these meetings was fairly well split and generally predictable. Tour bus drivers and the Denali Citizens Council appear to be uncompromisingly opposed to more traffic or additional access. On the other hand, people who want to view Mt. McKinley, and to take visiting relatives and friends into the park, express the need for new and/or improved access. One point that was made many times during the meetings is that a lot of tourists who wish to see Mt. McKinley are thwarted, largely because of the lack of access, and that they convey their disappointment outside to other prospective visitors.

Widdis

- 2 -

March 12, 1991

The National Park Service team which conducted these meetings will be back next summer to tour and visit before making recommendations. They need to be encouraged to visit and experience the Kantishna area, take the same bus trip that is offered to the public, and then go back to the Park Headquarters/Hornet Creek Pad area to mingle with people who are "hanging out" trying to get in to see the mountain. That should give them a good perspective on the resource, the service, and the demand.

dd

Attachments

NPS MEETING ON DENALI/KANTISHNA ACCESS

Anchorage Museum of History & Art
February 20, 1991

100 Attendees (estimated) plus NPS Team

- Russ Berry - Introduction/purpose of meeting. Went right to speakers.
- Mary Grisgow - Park Visitors Association
Supports buying private property . Would reduce the need for a new road. Alaska Parks should be wilderness. People expect to ride buses. Support status quo. Improving road would not improve safety. Width would add speed.
- Jack Hession - Sierra Club
Commend NPS for handling of road and for shuttle bus system. Supports NPS land acquisition. Shuttle adequate. New road is inconsistent with purpose of the park.
- Dr. Gordon Haber - Conducted research on Denali Park Wildlife for 25 years. Road is near capacity as pseudo wilderness experience, as opposed to zoo experience. Visitor quota is necessary. NPS should take a conservative approach. Shuttle system has added a lot of back country use. Animals can wander out of the park. Further expansion of bus system would have adverse impacts. Suggests extreme caution on consideration of north access or loop. Proposed alignment sensitive from wildlife and scenery standpoints. If there is a road it should go north (Stampede to Glacier) rather than up Clearwater Creek and down Moose Creek. Wildlife research is important and should be protected. Road is important to that research. Promoting recreation would be at expense of research.
- Linda Clark - Citizen who loves Denali, also represents an inholder.
People wish to see the park and many are turned away. NPS should study possibilities to enhance visitor opportunity.
- Father Mike Hornick - Former member of the Alaska Land Use Council (ALUC).
ALUC recommended access improvements many times. NPS resisted constantly. This meeting is a surprise. RS2477 Task Force Study (Sen Transportation Committee) identifies major benefit of road. Access would substantially increase tourism opportunity but is opposed by environmentalists and NPS. RS2477 report questions ownership of existing Park Road. NPS should develop accurate statistics. Traffic is not automatically in conflict with biology.

Note: All names spelled phonetically as heard by Norm Pilsanen.

NPS Meeting - Anchorage

Bill Shore -

Worked in Denali Park for three years.

NPS has a difficult task. Wildlife viewing is sensitive and valuable. Bus drivers are an extension of NPS through communication and control. Also through information. Unsupervised traffic is a problem. Dollars prevail over common sense. Traffic would push animals back. Denali Park is unique. Any decision should be well studied.

Henry Friedman -

Denali Citizens Council

Council does not believe there is a safety problem on road (by sheer #'s of accidents). Speed (straight road) is less safe than curves. Safety record is excellent. Traffic disturbs wildlife. More traffic will increase disturbance. Council doesn't believe there is great demand to get to Kantishna. Inholders want new access. People used permits to Wonder Lake Campground as excuse to drive road. New road would not solve problem. Development would counter Park goals.

Bruce Campbell -

Worked for Alaska Road Commission on "new" Denali Highway.

Also worked for Bureau of Public Roads and State Department of Highways. Was Commissioner of Highways from 1972 to 1974. Gave the panel good compilation of road history on north side of the Park.

The Park Road was built to serve mining in Kantishna. Was for freighting use by wagons. Road can be improved. It's not the worst around. NPS overspent on Toklat River Bridge - should have used some of the money on road improvements. Upgrading should not be restricted out of gravel bar material sources and off the tundra. Omnibus Acts gave state the road system. RS2477 also gave state rights. State also was 33' each side of section lines, surveyed or protracted. DOH studied north route in 60's. Earthquake put brakes on plan. Most people want to see Mt. McKinley. There should be hotels to accommodate people who want to see the mountain. Turn the existing road into wilderness road by building a new route in. Everyone has a right to the park. ROW's exist. Road can be upgraded. Alternate routes are very possible. The existing road is not bad. Wildlife viewing along Dalton Hwy was not destroyed as was predicted.

Scott Baily -

What is nature of park? People - animals, or both? New access will create conflict. Animals will lose. NPS should buy inholdings at Kantishna.

Steve Boreil -

Executive Director, Ak Miners Association.

Thanked Bruce Campbell. Denali Park is magnificent. Taxpayers should be considered. Upgraded access should be provided so more people can see the park. Buses are hard on the elderly. Dust and noise are

NPS Meeting - Anchorage

hard on animals. Dust accumulates on vegetation. Access improvement is needed to support guaranteed access for miners. ANILCA guaranteed such access but NPS took it away. Upgrade should involve slight improvement and paving. Buyout of inholdings would be expensive. Estimated \$268 million by one estimate. It is a very mineralized area. Mining can co-exist with other uses. Modern mining includes reclamation. Encourages new Kantishna access. It would double opportunities for mountain and wildlife viewing.

Jerry Beining -

Average Alaskan citizen.

Has visited for 15 years. NPS created traffic jams by stopping everyone at the gate. Citizens have a right to enter. He could not get a permit this year. Citizens cannot access most of the park. We need more road to increase opportunity.

Kurt Hesse -

Ak Wildlife Adventures

Has operated tour groups since 1977. The existing road is adequate. Current use levels are okay. Kantishna should be protected as a natural history zone. Natural history tours are valuable. A lot of people are disappointed by not being able to view the mountain, but they should be better informed.

NPS MEETING - FAIRBANKS
FEBRUARY 21, 1991

50 Attendees (estimated) plus NPS Team

Russ Berry -

Introduction
Written Comments can be sent to:
Russ Berry, Supt.
Denali National Park
P.O. Box 9
Denali Park, AK 99755

Larry Kelly -

President, Fbks. Chamber of Commerce
Chamber of Commerce has supported access improvements to Denali Park for number of years. Access improvements are needed quickly and responsibly. Thanked NPS for this opportunity and referred to input presented during earlier Chamber of Commerce/NPS meeting.

Willy ?? -

Worked in Denali Park.
Noted that tourists commented that the drive in was too long. Length makes any potential loop unreasonable. A new road would be two way. Improvement would increase speed, increase accidents, reduce animal presence. . .

Josh Moore -

Inholder. Owner of Nimbus 1-6
Stampede Road should be built. The bus system is an attraction. Omnibus quitclaim deed transferred the park road to the state. State has a liability. State should trade interest in road to NPS for the Dunkle township. The Permanent Fund is jeopardized by state's liability.

Celia Hunter -

Access discussion has been long and hard. She went in first in 1947 and built Camp Denali so people would have a tourist opportunity at Kantishna. Camp Denali is world class and should be protected. Road has been improved over the years. She would hate to see four lane pavement through the park. Wildlife would be the victim of Park Road improvement. The existing road is safe if used right. NPS would get nothing but grief by opening road to public. A second road is not an answer. It would be very expensive to build. Stampede Road has been impassable since day one. South side development would take some pressure off of Park Rd. Fairbanks should improve town rather than worrying about north side development versus south side development.

NOTE: All names spelled phonetically as heard by Norm Pilsanen.

NPS Meeting - Fairbanks

- Bob Thomas - Does not agree with Celia Hunter's solutions. Denali Park is Alaska's top attraction but weather keeps many people from seeing mountain. The north side offers better viewing because of weather. A new road in should not necessarily be a loop, but should allow split so that people can go in one way and out the other. Disappointed tourists blame Alaska tourist industry for failure to see mountain. Kantishna is not pristine. Road is feasible but unlikely because of opposition so he switched support to a railroad, privately built and privately operated. A railroad would provide access while allowing restriction.
- Glenn Bouten - Koyukuk River Miner
Gates of the Arctic offers wilderness - Denali should offer service. Supports more and better access into Denali Park.
- Hal Whitney - Not an inholder - just a taxpayer.
Read his own letter in opposition to Park Road lottery system. He proposes making drive in commercial/toll/fee. Should open to traffic in fall, charge, make loop from Stampede Rd. He feels the existing road serves concessionaire and park personnel.
- Rex Blazen - Northern Ak. Env. Center. (Grass roots local environmental organization.) On record as opposing any increased access. NPS should emphasize quality over quantity.
- Micheal Tombolt - Thanked Sen Stevens for acquisition funds. Purchases should be done soon on willing seller basis. He is concerned about too much Kantishna development. Mountain viewing and wildlife viewing bring people to Alaska. NPS should protect wildlife viewing. NPS should plan for low impact development to handle masses.
- Valerie Mundt - Inholder. Access to inholders has been progressively reduced. Bus traffic is up 110% over 10 years. There is also a large increase in NPS traffic while a decrease in private vehicles. The park road is deeded to state. NPS does not own concession rights. RR does and they transferred to the state with sale of the railroad. The park is subject to valid existing rights. State constitution gives citizens common rights. Should build elevated road. There are many solutions to access problem. Wilderness designation is inappropriate for north side. Move Park boundary back to pre ANILCA boundary.
- Dan Ashbrock - 30 year inholder.
The Park Road is inadequate for demand. Should be fall & spring opportunity. There is a lot of off season potential and a lot of foreign potential.

NPS Meeting - Fairbanks

- Rose Rybachek - Agrees with Bob Thomas - Valerie - Dan Ashbrook. She has enjoyed lower 48 parks but can't enjoy Denali because of access system. She supports northern access. Inholders have access rights. People have access rights.
- Susan Knapman - Has been in tour, mining businesses. Gravel roads are okay. Has enjoyed lower 48 parks. People should have that experience. Everybody owns the park. It should not be for just the few that have access ability. Australian "Rock" should be used as an example of tasteful development.
- George Hiller - Central - have gravel road. We're surrounded by parks with no access. NPS has created a combat tourist situation (like Kenai combat fishing). Access should be opened all the way to King Salmon. Spread out opportunity over the tremendous space available. Alaska does not have the necessary vote power to control its own Park destiny.
- Stan Rybachek - Access is issue/tool of special interests. Some people get theirs but are eager to deny others. Access is needed. People are being deprived of access. The park should not be frozen in time.
- Ginny Wood - Long history in Denali Park. The road has been gradually upgraded. Recent upgrading was "ruining" the experience so NPS quit. Road is safe - some people are not. Buses were not initially well received but have worked well. A high speed road will increase accidents. A year around road would be very expensive to maintain. Too many people dilute experience. She turned down big money to preserve Camp Denali. North access would increase impact. She touted southside development. "Keep north side down. Quality not quantity."
- Roger Burgraff - Good testimony - all sides. Denali is beautiful place - a national treasure that people should be able to see. Access is a problem in Denali Park. Wildlife should be protected. The existing road is dangerous. We need more access for public. We should build northern access. North side offers more reliable view. Kantishna has developmental potential. Southside could be developed too. Chamber of Commerce has done good work - it should be considered. He would like to see NPS get aggressive.

NPS Meeting - Fairbanks

- Jane Haigh - Historian - park user.
Too many people. NPS wanted the road initially. It took years to build. It served visitation which was needed to get funding. Mines stayed small because of limited access. Polychrome Pass is bad road location but was scenic. The existing road is inadequate. There are going to be more people. We need to accommodate their desire to get into the park. The north side is not wilderness. Mining is a historic resource and should be interpreted. Not pristine. Would like to see a new road built. We should protect the existing road. Would need to restrict Kantishna development. Also supports hotel on south side. People would be happy to see mountain.
- James Barker - Impressed by scenery and wildlife on Park Road. The park is an economic drawing card. The park should be protected. Mining should be allowed. We need new access - northern route. New road should be unrestricted. It'll eventually need extension to southwest Ak.
- Eidon Parks - The character of Denali Park is being diminished by development. He compared it to Vail, Colorado. Moving pressure will dilute character. Denali Headquarters area gets overused. Develop access on southside.
- Keith Pollock - Resident - citizen - Denali Citizens Council.
Road is safe. No problem. Increased traffic would be detrimental. New road would be detrimental. Develop southside. Miners want public to build their access. Would like to see status quo, especially in Park Road corridor.
- Dcn Emery - Assisted with Southwest desert plan. Protection involves keeping people away. He is for a loop road. Current NPS direction is to put facilities outside the park. Studies should have been done before lockup. Mineralization would have been considered and left out of park.
- Dcn Lowell - State has road (4 1/2 miles) and maybe Kantishna Airport. Last summer DOT worked on road and runway. Polychrome Pass and Eielson sections are dangerous and could easily be repaired (i.e. super) NPS should fix the most hazardous problems. The state would cooperate in design. Ambivalence is the wrong approach. There should be guardrail. He supports second route in. Increase opportunity. Allow for growth.

KANTISHNA/DENALI PARK ACCESS PUBLIC MEETINGHEALYFEBRUARY 22, 1991

70 Attendees (estimated) plus NPS Team

- Russ Berry - Introduction
- Burl Mercer - History - He conducted pack trips into the park. We need more access into the park. He recommends that a new road take off from Rex Bridge. That would allow more people into the park and would allow good viewing of mountain. It would serve local and worldwide demand. The park should be open to everyone.
- Linda Franklin - Denali Citizens Council Board Member. Denali Park has an access problem - has an access problem history. Council opposes new access. Mining is no longer feasible so doesn't need access. ANILCA allows reasonable access. The real issue is tourism. A new route would alleviate pressure on existing road. New access would be expensive and involve impacts. NPS hasn't supported new access. NPS should buy out Kantishna inholdings. DCC opposes significant upgrading of the existing road. DCC supports spot improvements of the existing road. Emphasize a few minor places. Denali is a wilderness park. NPS should communicate with visitors to reduce their expectations. People can wait in lines.
- Jane St. Peter - Also on Board of DCC. Ditto to previous comments. Restates Anchorage meeting concerns about safety and impact. Reiterate purpose of the park. People keep coming back even though opportunity to view mountain is limited. Concerned about price for Kantishna buyout. Would increase with new road access.
- Ken Peacocks - Is opposed to building of Stampede Road. Is opposed to paving of Park Road. Supports buyout of inholdings. Denali Park has more access than comparable sub arctic parks units. Improvement is steady and gradual. Park has enough now. Action here will set standard for other Alaska Parks.
- Jim ?? - Tour bus driver. NPS should take point of view of future visitor. The team should tour on a busy day, mingle with the crowd at end of the day. Visit KCA facility to see how non-tour visitors feel. He read from Sen. Murkowski letter. NPS should protect wildlife viewing.

NOTE: All names spelled phonetically as heard by Norm Piispanen.

NPS Meeting - Healy

- Joe VanHorn Went from Natural Resource employee of NPS to a park bus driver. NPS should pursue small improvements rather than major new road. People who would profit favor new road. Park visitors do not. He quoted bus riders who do not want to see another Yellowstone. He supports selective improvement but opposes large scale improvements. He opposes northern access route. It would increase commercial effort/promotion. He favors control rather than increase. Visitors understand access restrictions. Tour and commercial operations should be combined into non-profit system. He favors small family run facilities.
- Patricia Nodrock - New road would open up Kantishna to corporations that would be bad. Jobs would not go to local people. We would have another Hornet Creek situation at Kantishna. Profit would not filter into community. NPS should not allow unlimited access to Park Road. That would increase scavenging by bears and bear attacks. NPS should offer scattered interpretive opportunities.
- Linda Kohler - Operates KOA Campground. Doesn't believe Yellowstone is destroyed. Existing road is narrow, unsafe. Bus drivers also don't believe it is safe. The road needs improvement. Gravel is fine. It needs guardrail. She talks with travelers. They are not happy. Buses work but there is a better option. Don't buy out inholders. They were there first. She favors north access, as a little guy. People don't want to be herded. Many can't get on busses at all. Bad word spreads. The few who have privileges should not be allowed to block others. Commercial tour has a monopoly but the money doesn't stay in area. It should stay. Animals will not leave park - they are safe. The pipeline did not harm wildlife. Road won't either. There is a lot of land but only one small road.
- Judy Killion - Bus driver. We don't need more access. Local people enjoy Stampede Rd. Some animals have increased (wolves). She remembers few unhappy visitors. Dust chases animals away. There are sections of narrow road. Instead of spending dollars on north access we should improve the existing road. Improve it, but don't open it to public. Offer more hiking trails off road. The road could be paved - would be good.

NPS Meeting - Healy

- Scott Stowell - Local born and raised. There should be more access. He sees more animals at Usibelli Coal Mine than in the park.
- Jim Caswell - Limestone miner outside of park.
Denali Park has gotten bigger, access has not. More roads would not detract. The park has to manage people on too few facilities. We should be able to see more park. If not, NPS should be honest and say so. Then even the privileged should not be allowed in. People are always looking for the mountain. The existing road should be upgraded. Dirt won't attract animals - it repels them - people too. He's a miner but not for gold. He won't tell miners their claims are not viable. Such comments are not valid. Kantishna people are being deprived. If NPS is going to buy out inholders - do it - don't drag it out. He wants people to enjoy their visit, including seeing mountain.
- Barbara Brees - Opposed to northern access - It would impact/detract.
- Unidentified - Earl Pilgrim mined antimony and freighted ore to Lignite. He wanted a road. He got one but it wasn't good/useful. He had to work in winter. He takes exception to earlier statement about park losing its wilderness character. There was more development in the old days. Upgrade should not be to uniform standards. It should vary.
- Paul Victor - NPS has a responsibility to all; those pro and those con. NPS should provide at least one park with easy access. That should be Denali. He should be able to drive in. Open up Denali Park including access alternates and including a loop road.
- Lolly Medley - She has had very exclusive opportunity to see state. Everybody should have her opportunity. Park is unmatched for wildlife viewing. She lives at 275 Mile Parks Highway next to a 250' wide access reservation to Kantishna. She wishes it would be built. If a new road is put in, it should be put to a mountain view. There should be access to foot of mountain. One road is not enough.

Denali Access Task Force Report

**Denali National Park and Preserve
November 1991**

Access Task Force Report Outline

- I. Executive Summary
- II. Introduction
 - A. Task force directive
 - B. Description of task force activities
 - C. Current conditions
 - D. Fact sheet
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- III. Public Comment
- IV. Alternate access proposals
 - A. State of Alaska proposals
 - 1. Stampede Route
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 - 3. Nenana-McGrath route
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 - C. Recommendations
 - 1. No need for new road
 - 2. Support new technology research
- V. Access to Kantishna
 - A. Multiple use right of way regulations
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 - C. Recommendations
 - 1. Write Denali specific regulations
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- VI. Denali Park road
 - A. History
 - B. Current status
 - 1. Road evaluation study
 - 2. Safety
 - 3. Maintenance level
 - 4. Carrying capacity
 - 5. Visitor enjoyment (dust problems)

C. Recommendations

1. Road evaluation study completion
 - a. Safety improvements
 - b. Correct maintenance problems; add funds
 - c. Eliminate dust
2. Improve visitor transportation system
 - a. Construct needed facilities: bus maintenance, VTS driver housing, VAC parking
 - b. Consider nationwide reservation system
 - c. Purchase dedicated bus fleet and drivers
 1. Carrying capacity
 2. Comfort
 3. Cost
 4. Interpretation

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As one of the premier wildlife viewing areas in the National Park System, Denali National Park and Preserve is properly considered a major visitor destination for people around the world. More than any other attraction, the mountains and wildlife of Denali define Alaska for thousands of visitors and for scores of companies marketing the Last Frontier.

Like national parks in the Lower 48, Denali has struggled to accommodate growing visitation and respect the rights of inholders while at the same time has fulfilled its mission to protect the wild life, natural processes, and scenery of the park for generations to come.

The focus of that struggle has been the 90-mile park road, a narrow ribbon reaching deep into a wilderness valley. The balance struck for the past 20 years -- limited private vehicle access, provision of free public transportation and encouragement of inholders to minimize their use of the park's only road -- has, for the most part, worked.

This task force was charged with examining that balance, to consider the safety and adequacy of the park road, and to consider alternative access to Kantishna, the major collection of inholdings in the park's interior.

After several public meetings and meetings with state, local and business organizations, the task force recognized there existed a broad range of opinion regarding the future of Denali National Park. Further, the task force realized that any compromise which maintains the balance of the Park Service's mission will necessarily leave some interest groups less than satisfied.

The task force makes the following six primary recommendations to the Director of the National Park Service:

1. **There is no need for an additional gravel or paved road into the Kantishna area of Denali National Park and Preserve.** A new road is not justifiable in terms of its effect on the park purposes or on wildlife. Neither is it justifiable with regard to economics or visitor services. The park's major concessioner, large tour companies and smaller inholder operations oppose both a northern access route and major changes to the character of the existing road.

2. **Further study of alternative transportation technology, such as railroads or a monorail, is warranted.** This method has the potential advantage of being more environmentally sound than road transportation, and could provide a unique and high-quality park experience for far more people than currently are able to use the park's transportation systems.
3. **Portions of the existing park road should be upgraded immediately to improve safety and the visitors' wildlife viewing experiences.** Guard rails, road widening and road bed improvements are vital in several areas. The maintenance funding of these improvements should not come out of existing funds, but be added to Denali National Park's base operating budget. An environmentally sound dust palliative or particle binder should be considered for its potential to improve the visitor's comfort in traveling the road. Research should be conducted to determine the effects of dust in forcing wildlife away from the road.
4. **Specific federal regulations for the control of private vehicle traffic along the Denali park road should be proposed.** The park should maintain the current permit system for non-inholders needing to use private vehicles on the park road.
5. **If cost-effective, the government should consider lease or purchase of a dedicated fleet of buses similar in size and quality to those used by the concessioner.** The task force finds significant advantages and disadvantages in both a government-owned fleet and a contract fleet of buses. Government-owned buses would replace the "school bus" fleet now costing the public nearly \$2 million per year. With the purchase of larger buses, the park could realize a significant gain in the number of available seats while the number of vehicles remains unchanged. Well-designed new buses might also remove the stigma perceived by some visitors of riding on a school bus. This purchase must be supported with adequate facility construction, maintenance and operations money for driver training, safety inspections and scheduled vehicle replacement. The disadvantages of a dedicated fleet include eight months per year of idleness, and the need for a sustained program of vehicle replacement.
6. **The park should consider a nationwide reservation system.** Such a system, if cost-effective and well-designed, could help assure an equal opportunity for all visitors to reserve campgrounds and seats on the park shuttle buses.

These recommendations would protect wildlife and other values of the park, improve safety, increase the number of visitors, and make visiting the park easier for most people.

For people seeking access into the first 15 miles of park road, the hiking trails and the major exhibits, lectures and demonstrations, there are no restrictions on the number of vehicles. In this sense, Denali is comparable to many parks in the Lower 48. These entrance area facilities fully meet the needs of visitors who have little time to spend in the park.

Access to the park interior is not available on demand for every person who desires it. With some planning and flexibility, most people -- particularly resident Alaskans -- can travel the entire park road within two days of their arrival at Denali. With the existing Anchorage and Fairbanks in-person reservation system, even that 48-hour uncertainty is removed for many visitors. A nationwide reservation system would expand that advantage.

At some level, though, the Denali that people come to see -- the wildlife close to the road, the relative solitude, the sweeping vistas of the Alaska Range -- cannot be available for all who might wish to see it. A limit on road traffic is necessary to preserve the very viewing opportunities that make Denali unique. Tinkering with bus sizes, schedules and reservation systems is likely to squeeze several thousand more visitors into the park's 100-day season, but will not answer critics who insist upon unlimited access for all comers.

Mount McKinley viewing is superior on the south side of the Alaska Range. The task force supports the completion of the development concept plan for the south side of the park -- a plan which will provide an evaluation of possible sites for a visitor center, trails, and other facilities. The Alaska Region and the park staff should continue their work with state and private landowners to plan appropriate facilities outside the park's southern boundary.

The task force also supports the Alaska Region's facility development priorities for parks other than Denali. Among the 48 million acres of national parkland outside Denali are tremendous opportunities for the development of a new visitor industry that would spread its economic benefits across the state.

Investing in other areas -- with visitor centers, trails, campgrounds and the necessary administrative facilities -- would bring Alaska far greater, and surer, benefits than would expanded facilities in the Kantishna area.

II. INTRODUCTION

For years, the management of the park road at Denali National Park has been the focus of debate and, at times, acrimonious controversy among the National Park Service and the many inholders and user groups served by the park. These debates have often involved members of the Alaska congressional delegation, the directorate of the National Park Service in Washington D.C., and the state government in Alaska.

The debate centers on the National Park Service's limitation on the number of vehicles allowed to travel the 90-mile, dead-end road, a policy which limits the number of visitors that can be accommodated on the road at any one time. Limiting the number of vehicles on the park road helps preserve wildlife viewing opportunities for visitors, yet allows mandated access for inholders.

The park road, built between 1924 and 1938, adequately handled visitors in private cars and tour buses for four decades. Only with the completion of the George Parks Highway in 1972 did the number of park visitors outstrip the capacity of the road. With the relationship between the park and its visitors forever changed that year, the limits on private vehicle traffic were initiated, and the accompanying government and concessioner operated visitor transportation systems put into operation.

Task Force Directive

In October 1990, NPS Director James Ridenour met with United States Senator Frank Murkowski, R-Alaska, and committed to the formation of a high-level task force to look into the lingering questions of the adequacy of access to inholdings at Kantishna at the end of the park road, the safety of the existing road, and alternative access to Kantishna.

The Denali Access Task Force members were John Morehead, then the associate director, operations, Washington D.C.; Don Castleberry, regional director, Midwest Region; Paul Haertel, associate regional director, resource services, Alaska Region; Bob Barbee, superintendent, Yellowstone National Park; Russ Berry, superintendent, Denali National Park and Preserve; and Jim Straughan and Elmer Hernandez, transportation planners, Denver Service Center. The selections were made based on the members' long and varied experience with the Service, encompassing time in the Washington office, in a multitude of field areas, and in working on transportation and visitor use issues.

Task Force Activities

The group first met in February 1991 in Alaska. The objective was to receive input from a broad range of groups and individuals with interests in Denali National Park. The meeting schedule was as follows:

- February 19 Meeting in Juneau with Alaska Lt. Governor Jack Coghill and Harold Heinze, commissioner of the state Department of Natural Resources.
- February 20 Meetings in the Alaska Regional Office with representatives of local and national conservation groups, the Alaska Railroad, Sightseeing Tours, ARA Inc., Gray Line, and Princess Tours. That evening, a public meeting was held in the Anchorage Museum of History and Art.
- February 21 Meeting in Fairbanks with the Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce, and that evening with the public at the Noel Wien Library.
- February 22 Public meeting at the Healy Community Center, located 10 miles from the park entrance.

Each meeting was to solicit opinions, and not to present alternatives, preferred options, or to rule out any suggestions.

The task force members returned in July 1991 to visit Denali National Park during the height of its summer operations. Task force members used the time to evaluate the suggestions made in February. Alternative routes to the north were inspected, private inholdings in Kantishna were visited, the bus transportation system was seen in operation, and discussions were held with park and regional office staff.

With the recommendations contained later in this report, the task force will have met its objectives under Director Ridenour's directive.

Current Park Conditions

During the February meetings, an assertion of lack of access to Kantishna was a significant portion of the criticism leveled at the National Park Service's road policy and management of Denali National Park. The task force found, however, that while the Kantishna access complaints serve as a useful and unifying rallying cry for opponents of National Park Service policies, business conditions at Kantishna are, and have been, far less intense than characterized by some.

In the summer of 1991, four seasonal businesses operated in Kantishna. These are Denali Mountain Lodge, a 48-pillow facility the owners of which have filed for bankruptcy; Camp Denali, a 36-pillow lodge for guests staying several nights; North Face Lodge, a 33-pillow lodge; and the Kantishna Roadhouse, a 40-pillow lodge. At no time during the summer season are there more than a total of 150 guests in the lodges.

Access for lodge guests is generally by a lodge-operated bus or van. Private vehicle access is allowed under ANILCA, and lodge owners can notify the NPS to allow their guests to drive private vehicles to Kantishna. Provisions are also made for employee and other business travel along the park road.

Some use of the Kantishna airstrip is made by flightseeing companies working in conjunction with the lodges. The airstrip is also used by a small number of park visitors in private aircraft. State maintenance personnel also travel to Kantishna for work on the state portion of the road (between Wonder Lake and the Kantishna airstrip).

No mining has occurred in Kantishna since 1985, although several miners continue to visit the area to maintain buildings and equipment. The prohibition on mining is the result of a United States District Court injunction which came after environmental groups successfully argued the Park Service had failed to properly regulate mining. The injunction was lifted in early 1991, giving the National Park Service authority to approve or deny plans of operation. No plans have been approved as of this writing.

Two facts lead the task force to find that major mining operations are unlikely to begin in Kantishna. First, given the regulatory framework for mining in Alaska and in any national park, prospective miners will find it difficult to meet water quality and other resource standards. Second, the National Park Service is pursuing the acquisition of mining claims in Kantishna, as called for in the environmental impact statements which resulted from the 1985 lawsuit.

In 1991, the NPS purchased 327 acres of mining claims, and is negotiating to spend the balance of a \$6 million FY-91 appropriation. Additional appropriations are anticipated to purchase claims from willing sellers. Several miners have approached the NPS regarding the sale of their property.

Even if mining does continue in Kantishna, the prospect of a large center of employment developing is unlikely. Mining began in the Kantishna Hills in 1904, but except for the early years, it was never a large settlement. In 1980, there were 47 patented and 375 unpatented mining claims. In 1983, shortly after the Kantishna area became part of the national park, there were 17 placer mining operations employing about 150 people at least part-time. In 1984, that declined to 11 operating mines; in 1985, there were nine placer operations employing about 50 people. A 1985 federal court order stopped most mining in national parks in Alaska beginning with the 1986 season.

Mining in Kantishna was seasonal, running from June through September. Mining in the Kantishna hills has occurred in several drainages and disturbed more than 1,500 acres. About 75 miles of mining-related roads and trails criss-cross the area.

Private inholder traffic on the park road (including lodge employees, clients and contractors) represents about 5 percent of the traffic on the park road. In 1991, there were 6,148 people who went to Kantishna to stay in one of the four lodges.

In contrast with the level of activity in Kantishna, activity elsewhere in the park is far more intense. This year, 93,200 people took the wildlife tour offered by the park concessioner. This bus tour, which costs \$41 and lasts about six hours, goes 55 miles in on the park road -- a distance some clients feel is too long. The Park Service shuttle buses also carried about 93,200 people beyond Savage River (Mile 15). Shuttle bus passengers pay only a park entrance fee -- \$3 per person or \$5 per family. The Alaska Railroad delivered 90,429 people to the park entrance in 1990.

A one-day, concessioner-operated tour to Kantishna, costing \$89, is increasingly popular as it is often the only way for a person with only one day in the park to ride the entire road.

Through most of the summer, visitors without bus reservations can get on a park shuttle bus into the interior of Denali within 24 hours of their arrival at the park. A visitor arriving in the morning may be on a bus that same afternoon. During busier days, the rider will often wait until the following morning. Only on a handful of the busiest days during 1991 did visitors have to reserve a bus two days after their arrival. On three days in 1991, even buses two days in advance were filled, and some visitors either waited longer than two days or were unable to visit the interior of the park.

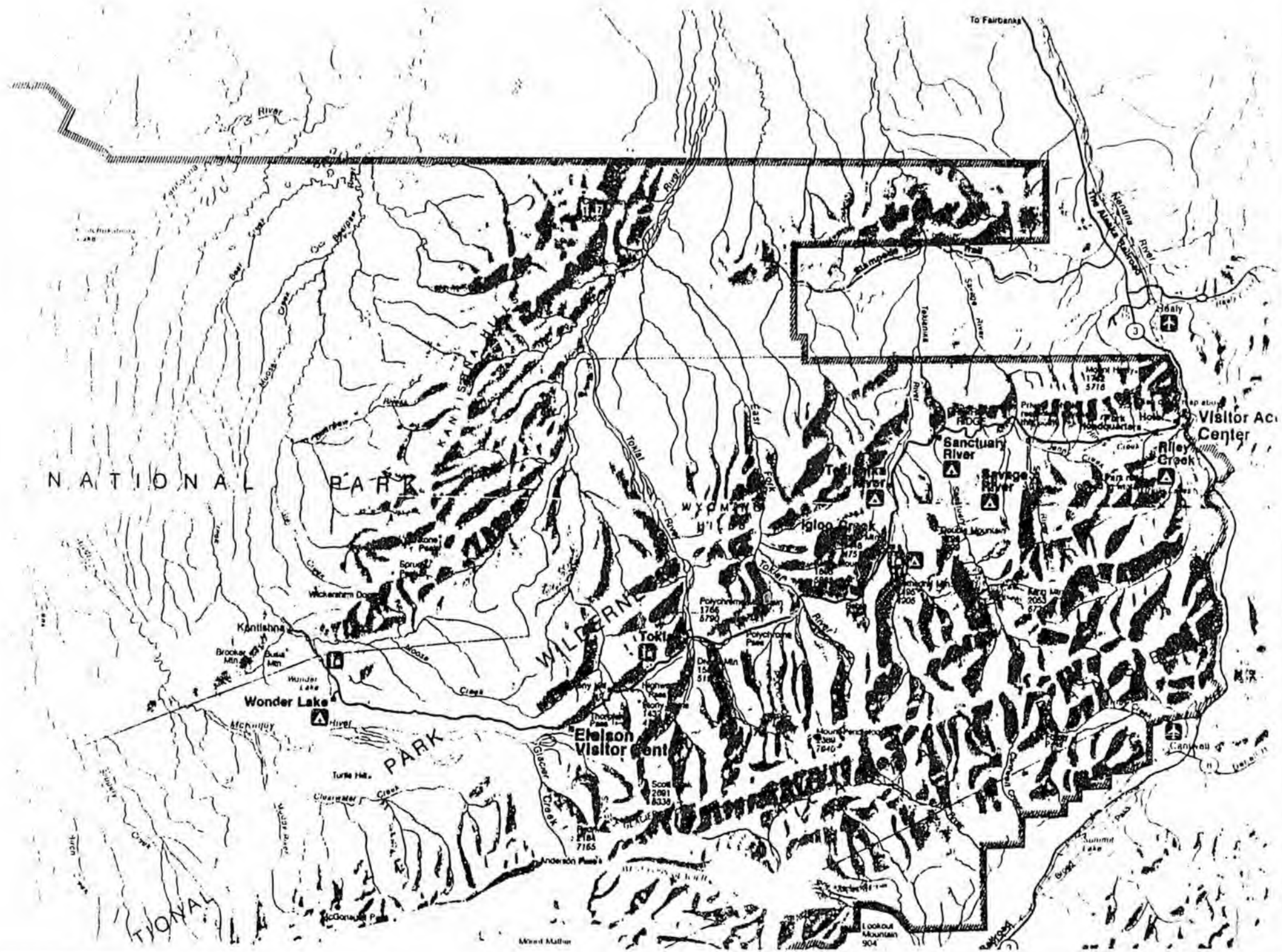
The bus system, while running essentially at capacity, is subject to the vagaries of the weather. A string of clear days will push bus traffic beyond its capacity; a stretch of rainy weather will give visitors almost immediate access to shuttle bus seats.

During the summer, private vehicle access is generally prohibited for people other than inholders or the clients, contractors or employees of businesses in Kantishna. About 30 miles of the park road is open in the spring prior to Memorial Day weekend for all travelers. A four-day fall opening after Labor Day allows 300 vehicles per day to access the entire road. A lottery is used to select those allowed to drive the road. After the lottery period ends, the road is again open for the first 30 miles for all who choose to drive, until the road is closed by snow.

DENALI ACCESS TASK FORCE

Denali Fact Sheet

1. The 90-mile road into the park interior was built between 1924 and 1938, and was paid for by the National Park Service.
2. The National Park Service's visitor transportation system (the shuttle buses) have operated since 1972, the year that the paved George Parks Highway opened between Anchorage and Fairbanks.
3. In 1991, the N.P.S. ran 3,366 bus trips into the interior of the park, more than 99 percent of the total allotment of 3,394 bus trips. During peak season, 37 N.P.S. buses per day leave the east end of the park -- about one every 20 minutes. The concessioner runs 2,089 buses between Memorial Day and Labor Day, and additional buses in the shoulder season.
4. In 1991, the NPS bus system carried 93,200 people beyond Mile 15. Another 20,000 people rode to the sled dog demonstrations, and 25,000 people rode on a short loop stopping at Riley Creek Campground, the Visitor Access Center and the park hotel.
5. In 1991, the entire N.P.S. shuttle bus system cost taxpayers about \$1.8 million to operate.
6. In 1989, the most recent year available, the Alaska Visitors Association reported 427,900 summer vacation and pleasure non-resident visitors to Alaska. About 40 percent (roughly 175,000 people) included Denali among their destinations.
7. About 14 percent of the visitors going beyond Mile 15 are Alaska residents, according to a NPS 1988 survey.
8. Of the 93,200 N.P.S. shuttle passengers who go beyond Mile 15, only 21,600 go the entire length of the road to Wonder Lake -- a 12-hour roundtrip from the Visitor Access Center.
9. In 1990, about 15,000 people visited the south side of Denali by air, and about 5,000 of those landed in the park.
10. In 1980, about 133 hotel rooms were available outside, but close to, the park entrance; in 1988, there were 640 rooms; in 1992, there will be about 900 rooms.



NATIONAL PARK

WILDERNESS

Elson Visitor Center

Visitor Activity Center

To Fairbanks

Moore Mather

Lookout Mountain 904

III. PUBLIC COMMENT

In public meetings and written testimony, the opinions expressed regarding Kantishna access and the adequacy of the park road have been quite varied. Many business interests in Fairbanks, represented in part by the Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce, endorsed additional northern access. Residents of Healy and other park entrance communities generally opposed additional access roads and major improvements to the existing road. In Anchorage, opinions ranged from endorsement of new roads and railroads to opposition to any major access changes.



State of Alaska officials, in meetings with the task force, made several important points:

- Tourism, and winter tourism in particular, are increasingly vital to the state's interest.
- Development on both the north side of the park and south side of the park should occur.
- A northern link to the existing park road at Kantishna should be built, and the now-unpaved section of park road should be paved.

The park's major concessioner, and other business interests, also met with the task force.

ARA Denali National Park Company, the park's major concessioner, supports NPS programs aimed at controlling adverse impacts of vehicle traffic along the park road. The company said the park road should not be upgraded to allow more vehicles or greater speed.

"In its present condition with controlled and limited traffic, it provides visitors a primitive wilderness experience along with incomparable roadside wildlife viewing opportunities. A road designed to provide access to a destination will encourage greater speed, less wildlife viewing, more disturbance to wildlife and increase the risk associated with travel along the route," the company stated.

✓ Several business representatives, including ARA, said the suggestions for a 175-mile, one-way loop road are not in the interest of their customers. The current wildlife tours are timed to meet arriving and departing trains, giving package tour visitors one night at the park. Extending the road trip -- already judged too long by some clients -- would make coordination with the train difficult, the business operators said. The number of visitors being accommodated would decrease, or hotel rooms would have to be built to accommodate visitors for a second night.

★ ★ The Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce supports funding to open access to the Kantishna area via a northern route. The route is seen as providing year-round access, increasing visitor traffic in Alaska, marketing the historic value of the Kantishna mining district, and providing optimum Mount McKinley viewing.

The chamber estimates the cost for the 60-100 miles of new road to be from \$80 million to \$125 million.

Several comments, including testimony of The Wilderness Society and National Parks and Conservation Association, noted that strict limits on the number of visitors are accepted when applied to other natural areas in Alaska. The state allows only 10 people per day, by lottery, at its McNeil River Bear Sanctuary. Access is also limited to Pack Creek on Admiralty Island and the walrus haulout areas on Round Island.

A sample of the range of other comments follows:

• Jack Hession, Sierra Club: Believes the shuttle system is adequate, and opposes northern access route as incompatible with the park's purpose.

Steve Borrell, Alaska Miners Association: Supports upgrade of existing road, including paving. Feels rights of inholders have been impinged upon and the promises of ANILCA have not been kept. Encouraged development of a northern access route as a part of a one-way loop.

Celia Hunter: Believes Denali is primarily a wildlife viewing experience and that road improvements would detract from that experience. Favors development on the south side of the park.

Linda Franklin, Denali Citizen's Council: Opposed to a new road or upgrade. The park needs to communicate the NPS objective to visitors so their expectations will be in line with what they experience.

Other comments directed at the National Park Service showed an underlying dissatisfaction with subjects over which the agency has no control. These included the visibility of the mountain due to weather, the cost of non-concession hotels, and the expense of reaching Alaska from the Lower 48.

IV. ALTERNATE ACCESS PROPOSALS

State of Alaska Proposals

With the intention of allowing greater private vehicle traffic into the park interior, boosting overall visitation, and easing access for Kantishna inholders, several routes for a new road have been proposed by the state of Alaska, individuals and organizations.

Representatives of Governor Walter Hickel's administration made clear to the task force their desire to see additional road access. This desire fits with the administration's stated goal of "opening up the country," and pursuing new overland transportation routes in several areas, including road and rail improvements in the Wrangell Mountains, a road to Cordova, a rail extension to the Yukon River at Tanana, and opening the entire Dalton Highway to public traffic.

The state administration favors substantial tourism development in Kantishna, and the extension of the visitor season into the winter. The existing park road should be paved, state officials said.

The state's Tanana Basin Area Plan identifies a corridor for construction of a possible highway link from the George Parks Highway to Kantishna and, eventually, on to McGrath (140 miles to the west). The primary purpose of the route would be to access Kantishna, with McGrath access a possible long-term future project. Three possible alignments involve taking off from the Parks Highway at Rex, Lignite or Nenana.

A route largely in state ownership exists from the Parks Highway at Lignite to Stampede, and is referred to as the Stampede route. This route, driveable and state-maintained for only eight miles, is not useable for vehicles after that point, deteriorating to an at-best ATV track and in places losing its identity altogether. Historically, the Stampede route allowed winter access to Earl Pilgrim's antimony mine at Stampede, and was part of a winter route from the railroad corridor to Kantishna. The primary route from Stampede to Kantishna, and several roughly parallel routes across federal land, have been identified as possible state RS-2477 rights of way. Many of these routes are little more than overgrown trails; much of the route to Stampede beyond Eight-Mile Lake is impassable in summer.

The route originating at Rex would generally follow an existing winter trail to the west before turning south toward Kantishna. The Rex route was identified by state road planners more than 20 years ago, with a route to link Rex with McGrath and the Kuskokwim Valley being designated during the Egan administration. Planning work was stopped by Governor Jay Hammond.

The route from Nenana would run through the proposed Totchaket agricultural project before turning south to Kantishna.

The state Department of Commerce and Economic Development submitted statements supporting the Stampede route. An upgrade of the current park road, and construction of a link between Kantishna and Stampede, and the institution of one-way traffic was proposed in the department's comments to the task force.

Any road construction on the north side of the existing road would entail expensive bridging of several major glacial rivers, the primary ones being the Savage, Teklanika, East Fork of the Toklat, and the Toklat.

Alternate transportation proposals

The idea for additional access into Denali National Park by a means other than road construction is captivating in many respects. Several variations using alternate technology have been proposed, but all have in common the result of getting individuals out of their personal automobiles and on mass transit conveyances. The potential for moving large numbers of people with potentially little disruption to wildlife is appealing, and is a topic with application across the National Park System.

A light rail proposal has been forwarded by several people and groups, with Thomas Engineering of Fairbanks being the leading proponent.

The Thomas proposal describes the construction of a 90-mile railroad from Healy west to Kantishna. The purpose is to gain access to fine views of Mount McKinley and provide private property owners with additional access.

The railroad also is promoted as a means to extend the state's tourist season and as a compatible project with the existing road. Several routes have been presented by Thomas Engineering, but generally follow the Stampede route to the Toklat River, then southwest to Kantishna. They have in common an attempt to follow established trails, and incur minimal grades and curves.

cost
estimates

Thomas Engineering estimates the 1991 capital cost of the rail bed, track, stations and bridges at \$189 million, with rolling stock and maintenance equipment adding about \$27 million. Thomas estimates annual ridership of 1.1 million, and asserts that with \$50 roundtrip tickets, an operation would be profitable. The state Department of Transportation estimates the cost of laying new track in Alaska at about \$2 million per mile.

☆

An alternative to be studied by the National Park Service is the use of monorails in three national parks, including Denali. Senator Malcolm Wallop, R-Wyoming, this year has sponsored a \$300,000 appropriation for the study of monorail systems in Denali, Yellowstone and Yosemite national parks. Wallop envisions monorails adding access, and not replacing existing roads.

\$ 180-
\$ 216
million

Studies of a monorail system are expected to begin in 1992. While most monorails are used for high-density, urban traffic, the concept as applied to Denali appears to offer similar and possibly greater advantages than a railroad. If elevated, the monorail would eliminate concerns for animals crossing the tracks. Each winter, Alaska Railroad trains kill several hundred moose between Anchorage and Fairbanks. Moose use the plowed corridor along the tracks for travel instead of slogging through deeper snow away from the track.

A monorail offers the similar advantage of getting people out of individual vehicles, and eliminates several problems associated with a road, including dust and traffic jams when several vehicles stop for animal viewing.

Cost is likely to be a major obstacle in the construction or operation of a monorail. To date, monorails have been used over fairly short distances, carrying a large number of urban passengers on a year-round basis. The cost of urban systems has ranged from \$10 million to \$40 million per mile.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Regarding Alternative Access Proposals

Regarding the proposals for alternate access routes, the task force makes two recommendations. First, there is no need for a new road, and, second, there is need for further study of rail transportation into the park. A detailed discussion follows:

1. No need for new road

The task force finds no convincing argument for a new road in the park for the purposes of access for Kantishna inholders and accommodation of current and foreseeable visitation. The primary reasons for this conclusion are fourfold:

1. CURRENT CONDITIONS -- The level of business activity, new business starts, visitation and mining do not justify additional access. There are only four active businesses in the area. They are seasonal operations, and are not currently filling all existing rooms. Two of the four existing businesses oppose a new, northern access route.

No mining has taken place for six years. The policy of the Department of the Interior is to follow the 1990 environmental impact statements which recommended the public acquisition of mining claims in Kantishna. There are many willing sellers, and Congress has begun appropriating money for the purchase and reclamation of claims. The preponderance of evidence is that, in coming years, much of the private property in Kantishna will return to public ownership, and that businesses will remain small, family-run operations, offering a high-quality, low-volume experiences.

2. PARK PURPOSES -- The northern portion of the park was added by Congress in 1980 in large part to protect the habitat of bears, moose, caribou, sheep, wolves, swans and other waterfowl. The construction of a north-side road, and subsequent use by private and government vehicles, would clearly cause new disturbances to wildlife. The extent of this disturbance is unknown. This concern would be even stronger if calls for a year-round access road are heeded. The northern route crosses large areas of wetlands -- an obstacle which 70 years ago contributed to the choice of the existing road alignment. Most winter routes from the Healy area to Kantishna were routed, in part, along frozen glacial river beds -- a problematic alignment for summer travel.

Park Service management policies do not preclude new road construction, but pose significant questions about the appropriateness of building a second road to a location already served by a road.

The policy states, in part: "Park roads are generally not intended to provide fast and convenient transportation; they are intended to enhance the quality of a visit while providing safe and efficient travel. . . Where roads are chronically used to capacity, the use of public transit or limitations on use will be considered as alternatives to road improvements. Although they do not meet current engineering standards, some existing roads are cultural and recreational resources and their values will be preserved." (Chapter 9:8, Dec 88)

Beyond NPS policy considerations, a second road would dramatically change the character of the park. That change has not been fully considered by those who propose a second road as a boon to tourism. The system of roads presented to the task force puts at risk the up-close viewing of animals that draws people to Denali. It adds nothing to a visitor's ability to see the mountain. And it changes the visitor's perception that he is riding to a special place, a place set apart from the urban world of pavement and high speed transportation.

3. VISITOR NEEDS -- A new road to the north and the institution of one-way traffic fails to meet the needs of park visitors. Tourism in Alaska mixes independent travelers and users of packaged tours. The latter are a significant percentage of Denali's visitation. They average 58 years of age, come without private transportation, and are often less interested than younger travellers in taking a lengthy bus ride.

A Park Service survey shows more than 40 percent of those visiting Denali spend only one night at the park. Major tour operators say some of their clients feel the current 55-mile trip into the park is too long. A 17-mile short tour has been used as an alternative to the longer trip, and to handle overbookings on the wildlife tour.

Suggestions for one-way traffic would, some claim, allow for twice the number of visitors to use the road. However, there are significant practical problems. Unlike the tour buses, the visitor transportation system is designed to allow park visitors to get on and off the buses almost at will. Once a visitor is on the bus system, he can design a trip of virtually any length, timing and destination. A one-way road would commit all bus riders and campers to a 175-mile round trip, significantly limiting their ability to explore areas off the road. The option of a short trip into the park interior -- often preferred by young families, older visitors, and visitors planning a short stay -- would be foreclosed by this option.

One-way traffic would place significant demands and costs on park management for everything from road maintenance to emergency medical response.

Alaskan visitors to Denali and non-Alaskans using private vehicles have demonstrated a strong interest in driving the park road for the same reasons other visitors come to the park -- to see wildlife and view Mount McKinley. Whether Alaskans in private vehicles would be willin~ to take a 175-mile round trip drive for those views is unclear. The wildlife and mountain views on the north side are significantly less dramatic compared to the existing route.

Allowing shorter trips through the use of a network of bypass roads (suggestions to the task force include a road roughly parallel to the Toklat River) multiply the environmental effects, raise the cost, and would only provide service equivalent to today's route.

★ The addition of multiple roads through park wilderness -- even if successfully pushed through an inevitable court battle -- would alter the character of Denali to an unimagineable degree. ★ 111
000

Alaska residents already have a significant advantage over other visitors in reserving park shuttle bus seats and campgrounds. The Alaska Public Lands Information Centers in Anchorage and Fairbanks provide reservations between seven and 21 days in advance for up to two campsites and eight bus seats per person. While available to all comers, this system works best for residents.)

A reservation system at the park allows bus seats and campgrounds to be reserved up to two days in advance. This system has eliminated the storied early morning lines for buses that occurred in the mid-1980s. A nationwide reservation system has the potential to add certainty to more visitors' travel plans.

4. ECONOMICS -- While an accurate cost estimate of new road construction is impossible without detailed route studies, the state's estimate of \$85 million to \$125 million was cited in the 1986 General Management Plan. The cost today would be at least as high. At that price range, there is no economic justification for state or federal construction of a second road to Kantishna -- currently a four-business, road-accessible community.

Considering current environmental regulations and the findings of the 1990 environmental impact statements which recommended buying patented and unpatented mining claims from willing sellers in Kantishna, there will be little mining activity in the Kantishna Hills. The task force, while not examining the economic argument in detail, is unconvinced that a second road even made economic sense prior to 1980. The state's one-time \$400,000-to-\$500,000 investment in a minimal upgrade of the Stampede route beyond Eight-Mile Lake in the early 1960s quickly deteriorated and was never followed by any significant amount of public travel.

While individual miners have undoubtedly legitimate complaints about road permit mistakes and overzealous enforcement, the overall level of mining activity in the past two decades in Kantishna has not been significantly affected by the NPS road traffic limitations that have been in effect since 1972.

Visitor improvements, such as a major hotel, in the Kantishna area have been talked about for many years. The current developments in the area are small lodges, offering visitors a less commercialized, more personal experience in the park than the hotels near the park entrance. While private land has been available for many years in Kantishna, only one new lodge has built since 1985. Access to the lodges has been adequate. The park General Management Plan gives direction that the current level of commercial development in Kantishna is appropriate. The current and foreseeable level of visitor accommodations in Kantishna does not justify an additional road.

Any visitor service development in Kantishna that would generate the volume of traffic necessitating a second road would represent a major departure from the park's General Management Plan.

If \$80 million to \$150 million for capital investment in national parkland access and visitor amenities is available, the task force feels that visitors to national parks, whether at Denali or elsewhere in Alaska, would be far better served by projects other than a north-side road.

In Denali, a development concept plan for the south slope of the Alaska Range will identify sites for visitor facilities, trailheads, interpretive exhibits and backcountry huts. There are several sites on state and private land near the boundary of the national park which offer dramatic views of Mount McKinley and may be suitable for development.

In other national parks there are also major visitor access projects which could better meet the goal of increasing visitation to Alaska. The stabilization and possible acquisition of historic buildings at Kennecott in Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve is a major project under consideration by the National Park Service. The state of Alaska and the National Park Service have appropriated about \$650,000 for emergency stabilization in the past two years. The state has also proposed significant road improvements on the McCarthy Road; similar improvements could be made to the state-maintained Nabesna Road. State and private land along the state road is easily accessible and developable.

Trail, camping and visitor center improvements at several national parks across Alaska have been outlined in the park general management plans, and a 48-site priority list for construction prepared by the Alaska Region. For the cost of a second road to Kantishna, the majority of those projects could be completed. Most are non-controversial and could be accomplished without the seemingly inevitable litigation which would come with a second Denali road proposal.

2. Support for new technology research

While a new road on the north side of the park appears to offer few, if any, advantages to the general public, the embryonic idea of a monorail or alternative transportation method merits more study.

The National Park Service and its Denali concessioner have found 40-48 passenger buses to be the most economical method of moving large numbers of visitors. In 1991, roughly 200,000 people will see the park interior in that manner. Nevertheless, the success with buses traveling down a gravel road should not dissuade the Park Service from considering emerging technology for the mass movement of park visitors.

A monorail or more conventional train appears to offer advantages over the current road. They produce little or no dust, may be quieter, and might carry more passengers in greater comfort. They preserve the advantages obtained with buses -- eliminating wildlife harassment by individual passengers getting out of their vehicles, providing multiple "flag stops" for passengers who wish to day hike or begin backpacking trips, giving a high vantage point for viewing wildlife, and leaving visitors with a unique park experience, as opposed to driving just another road.

The cost for such a system is higher than for a road, and could prove an impossible obstacle. Interest by major tour companies and the Alaska Railroad would be essential to its success. The system could prove a valuable demonstration project for other federal parks and be a convincing demonstration of mass transit for urban park visitors.

A monorail or train has far greater potential than a road to meet the expectations of visitors for national parks to offer a unique experience, and one respectful of the environment -- as opposed to another gravel road along a wetland route rejected seven decades earlier.

V. ACCESS TO KANTISHNA

Multiple use right of way regulations

The provisions in the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) allowing access to inholdings for "economic and other purposes" were aimed at assuring that inholders could reach their property when it was surrounded by parkland and no public right of way existed. These parcels, such as mining claims, native allotments and homesteads, have a legitimate need and right to surface access along rivers or across ground where no formal roads or trails existed.

The subsequent regulations (at 43 CFR) to implement the ANILCA access provisions were drafted with this type of access in mind. The regulations work well for individual land owners who will be the only ones using a particular access route.

The situation at Denali National Park is far different. Application of the ANILCA access regulations to an existing park road has been unwieldy. In Denali, multiple owners can assert the essentially unlimited access rights provided for in ANILCA.

The number and type of vehicles on the park road are limited by safety concerns and evidence that as traffic increases, wildlife moves away from the road.

This puts the park in the potential position of meeting the legal rights of a relative few inholders and denying access to far greater numbers of park visitors. To date, this situation has not occurred. Inholder traffic is minimal. Lodge owners have small operations and voluntarily discourage private vehicle use by their clients. Mining claim owners have added little traffic since there has been no mining after 1985.

The potential for disruption was seen in 1990 when an inholder proposed a 200-site recreational vehicle campground in Kantishna. The business -- which never materialized -- would have required allowing up to 200 recreational vehicles per day along the park road. This would have posed a safety problem for shuttle and concessioner buses, and possibly caused the periodic closure of the bus system beyond Mile 30 (where the road narrows). The effect on the general public, the park visitor, and the economic interests of the park community would have been very detrimental. This situation remains a possibility, held off only by the cooperative attitude of inholders who choose not to exercise their full rights under ANILCA.

Park resource concerns: Wildlife viewing and safety

Wildlife viewing is one of the primary reasons people come to Denali National Park. Impressive views of Mount McKinley are available in locations outside the park to the east and south. Inside the park, the mountain is visible about one day in three during the summer because of persistent clouds along the Alaska Range. Nowhere in the state, though, is the variety of wildlife available to visitors in such a small and accessible area.

A 1988 survey indicated nearly every visitor who went into the park interior saw a Dall sheep, brown bear or a caribou. Nearly one-quarter of those surveyed saw a wolf. Additionally, visitors often see moose, foxes, golden eagles, and many other smaller birds and animals.

Studies show that as park road traffic increases, particularly private traffic with individuals getting out of their vehicles, wildlife moves farther from the road, making viewing more difficult. Additionally, greater numbers of vehicles on the gravel road add to the dust clouds, further obscuring wildlife. Studies should be started to better understand the effects of dust on roadside wildlife habitat and animals' behavior.

The buses -- both the government-provided system and the concessioner tours -- also give visitors a higher vantage point at which more wildlife can be seen than at car level. Lastly, many visitors report that a bus-load of people -- with 30 or 40 pairs of eyes scanning for wildlife -- is more likely than three or four people in a private vehicle to see wildlife.

Visitor and wildlife safety are also well-served by the controlled access along most of the Denali park road. Park policies require passengers to stay on the bus when they are close to wildlife. On the first 15 miles of park road, where there are no limits on private vehicles (and fewer animals), visitors often stop their car and walk close to wildlife. Depending on the animal, this has the potential of putting the visitor in danger, causing the animal to stop feeding and move away, or, given an often poor parking job by visitors, cause a considerable traffic jam on the road. While visitors are cautioned about approaching animals, the urge to get a closer for a photograph generally takes precedence.

Farther into the park, as the road narrows and the number of animals -- particularly bears, caribou and sheep -- increase, the safety problem becomes more acute. The traffic jams associated with private vehicles were well documented during the end-of-season openings (prior to the lottery) which saw up to 1,600 cars enter on one day.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Regarding Kantishna Access

The task force makes two recommendations regarding the regulatory aspects of access to Kantishna along the existing park road.

1. Write Denali specific regulations

To address the potential disruption and lack of public benefit caused by a small number of inholders having unlimited access rights along the park road, the task force recommends specific access regulations for Denali National Park. These would address how traffic is regulated on this unique multiple use right of way, and should be added to 43 CFR Part 36.

In no way should the regulation prevent existing property owners in Kantishna from accessing their property in the means and numbers now experienced. Provisions should be made for the transportation of lodge guests, employees and contractors along the park road.

The task force also recommends that the existing visitor transportation system and limitations on private vehicle use by non-Kantishna landowners be formally adopted by federal regulation. The system has been in place for nearly 20 years, and has proven an efficient way to move large numbers of people along the park road while preserving wildlife viewing and legal access for inholders.

2. Continue permit system

The current permit system for visitors and others who do not have inholder access rights under ANILCA should continue. The system of limited access permits for professional photographers, park employees living at Toklat, and contractors is working well.

VI. DENALI PARK ROAD

History of the road

From 1906, when hunter-naturalist Charles Sheldon first formulated his idea for a national park at Mount McKinley, the idea of a road allowing access to the park scenery and wildlife had been prominent. In 1921, the park superintendent reported to the Director that "A main artery road through the upper passes is the park's most urgent need."

The year before, a survey was done that would determine the primary route to Kantishna. Alaska Road Commission engineer Hawley Sterling made a reconnaissance for a wagon road from the railroad to Kantishna. He went west on a route from Lignite to the Toklat River and on to Kantishna via the Clearwater fork and Canyon and Caribou Creek. (That route is roughly the proposed Stampede route and railroad route.) He found more than half the route swampy and plagued by glacial muck, leading to high construction and maintenance costs.

He returned to Riley Creek, through the high passes traversed by today's park road. Because of this route's dry and naturally graveled stretches, the initial wagon road could be easily improved. It also offered a natural gateway into the park, and offered -- to the cash poor road commission -- funding from the National Park Service.

In 1921, the Alaska Road Commission initiated correspondence with NPS Director Stephen Mather which culminated in a 1922 cooperative agreement. The commission, following NPS guidelines and using NPS funds, would build and maintain the park road.

The route selection was important, NPS historian Bill Brown notes, for it "produced a kind of shotgun wedding between the miners and the NPS, one that over the years demonstrated the stresses of such forced alliances." After the completion of the road, its dual purpose -- as a wildlife viewing corridor and as an industrial link -- was accommodated by the park's issuance of nominal-fee permits which stipulated load limits, size of equipment and time-of-use regulations.

Road work began with the brushing of pioneer roads and trails from park headquarters at the McKinley Park train station. The superintendent wanted to get visitors to Savage River where they could get a view of the mountain; the Alaska Road Commission aimed for the relief of Kantishna miners.

The road to Savage River (13.5 miles) was completed in 1925. It went to Toklat (Mile 54) in 1931. It went to Eielson (Mile 66) the following year, and in 1937 reached the park boundary near Wonder Lake. By 1938, the road to Kantishna was completed.

Visitation to Denali stayed below 40,000 visits through 1968. In 1971, the paved George Parks Highway between Anchorage and Fairbanks was completed and forever changed the character of park visitation at the park. In 1973, recreational visits numbered 137,000; 10 years later it had topped 345,000, and has since reached roughly 600,000 visits.

Recognizing that highway access would put an immediate strain on the park road, the NPS in 1972 instituted the visitor transportation system using buses. The first year, 24,279 boardings were logged. That increased to 75,000 by 1980, and has grown steadily, with more than 93,000 passengers this year. Concessioner-operated tour bus traffic has increased more than eight-fold since 1972, from 13,581 boardings to 93,200 boardings in 1991.

Current Status

Road evaluation study

A road evaluation study for the Denali Park Road was started in 1980 by the Denver Service Center, and continued intermittently until 1986 when it was stopped.

The study, if updated and completed, could form the basis of informed decision making regarding the maintenance or improvement of the road.

Safety .

The safety of the park road was questioned by several people during public testimony.

The first 15 miles of road are paved and in excellent condition. The next 15 miles, to the Teklanika River, are two-lane gravel and are also in excellent condition, although the road can be dusty during dry periods. West from Teklanika, the park road narrows to less than 16 feet at some points. Over the passes, particularly at Polychrome and on the east side of the Eielson Visitor Center, the winding road narrows, and has steep or sheer slopes on one side and equally steep drops of up to 300 feet on the other.

On the whole, though, the road is close to meeting NPS standards. A 1985 study by the park engineer found that to bring the road completely into compliance with NPS standards, including extra road width to allow for bus traffic, an average of less than two feet in width needs to be added to the road from Mile 30 to Kantishna.

Drivers for the concessioner and the NPS have considerable experience and training, and have radio communications. Private traffic, although minimal, has neither advantage. Other road areas to the west are also muddy and slippery after rains. There have been few serious accidents involving buses on the park road in 20 years.

Maintenance

Denali National Park and Preserve's budget is too small to provide adequate maintenance of the park road, while meeting the other obligations of park management. The park road maintenance budget (labor, equipment, supplies and overhead) totals just over \$1 million per year.

The park estimates that to properly maintain the road at its current width and alignment would cost nearly \$2 million per year.

Carrying capacity

The concessioner's tour buses are travelling at virtually 100 percent capacity. If tours are overbooked, some visitors are being offered the shorter tour which does not encounter anywhere near the amount of wildlife as seen on the longer tour. Visitors are also turning to a growing flightseeing business which provides helicopter and fixed-wing overflights of the park. For operations originating outside the park, the National Park Service has no control over rates, schedules, itinerary or quality of service. With the exception of stringent enforcement of the Airborne Hunting Act, park units have little control over airspace use.

The Park Service's Visitor Transportation System is also nearing its capacity. Larger buses would add somewhat to the system's available seating, and some fine-tuning of the system might allow a small increase in the total ridership. However, for the system to allow people to get on and off the bus at will along the road, there must be seats left empty when buses depart the east end of the park. Filling the shuttle buses to 100 percent of their capacity would represent a significant limitation of visitor access to the park.

Any change in the transportation systems which provides for additional visitor use along the park road must also incorporate new capacity in the park's basic facilities. The Eielson Visitor Center (Mile 66) is often filled beyond capacity, particularly on bad weather days when visitors stay inside and do not use the center as a starting point for hikes or bus re-boarding to Wonder Lake. The restrooms at Teklanika are similarly crowded, particularly in the morning when tour and shuttle buses converge on the portable toilets.

Visitor enjoyment/dust problems

A common visitor complaint is that there is considerable dust along the road. Using buses maximizes the number of visitors while minimizing the number of vehicles; nevertheless, there are many times when buses and other vehicles end up following each other for many miles, with all but the first in line taking the brunt of the dust. While some level of dust is inherent with a gravel road, efforts should be made to reduce dust in Denali, given its preeminent status as a wildlife viewing area.

The task force supports the park's pursuit of lab analysis and proposed field testing in 1992 of an organic pine tar/resin emulsion or enzyme solution for dust control. If the road treatment is as effective as estimated, the amount of grading also would be reduced and the loss of road gravel cut by 50 to 70 percent. That would result in less use of park gravel sources, and could eliminate the need for some trucks and drivers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Regarding the Denali Park Road

The task force makes seven recommendations regarding operations and maintenance of the park road and the Visitor Transportation System.

1. Road evaluation study

The park road will clearly be the primary, if not the only, vehicle route into the park interior and into Kantishna for many years. Most necessary is a clear plan of maintenance, an outline of what, if any, improvements to the road are anticipated, and estimated funding needs.

The road evaluation study that was ended in 1986 should be updated and completed by the Denver Service Center. Such a study should provide the baseline information needed for maintenance work, and the preliminary engineering and environmental evaluation of any major improvements, as well as a discussion of the environmental, engineering and maintenance consequences of paving additional sections of the road.

2. Safety

The task force further recommends that several road safety improvement projects be made before the completion of the survey. These include widening the narrowest sections of road so as to accommodate passing vehicles, adding turnouts on narrow sections for safer passing, installing guard rails along sections with steep drop offs, and adding gravel to wet and muddy sections.

3. Maintenance

The task force recommends that funding should be provided for the adequate maintenance of a safe and enjoyable park road, based on the findings of the road evaluation study. The park road should continue to be a gravel road of primitive, although safe, character from roughly Mile 30 to Wonder Lake.

4. Eliminate dust

The park is pursuing the right course in testing an environmentally sound dust palliative and particle binder for use on the park road. If tests produce a workable combination of treatment and maintenance, the task force recommends support of adequate funding for the proper application and maintenance of the road treatment.

5. Improve visitor transportation system

Since 1972, the visitor transportation system has worked well in reducing private vehicle traffic on the park road. The park-contract buses move more than 93,000 people beyond Mile 15 over a three-month season, and concessioner buses move about the same number. Shuttle bus boardings are far higher, since the same person will often use the system more than once during his stay. An entrance area bus loop attracted 25,000 riders this year in its first year of operation; clearly, Denali visitors are willing to use mass transit.

The transportation system costs about \$1.8 million per year. The total number of individuals using the system is unclear, but the subsidy appears in the range of \$15 to \$20 per person. The National Park Service should consider requesting the authority from Congress to charge a fee for transportation beyond Mile 15 in order to recover a portion of the cost of providing buses.

6. Consider bus purchase

Two-thirds of the contract buses seat 46 people, and one-third seat 40 people. These are passenger buses used by school districts during the rest of the year. The seat spacing is modified to handle adults.

The concessioner uses a dedicated fleet of buses that carry 48 passengers each.

The National Park Service, by either requiring larger buses in its contract or by purchasing buses with 48 seats, could raise by roughly 10 percent the number of available shuttle bus seats. This would be, by far, the least expensive and most environmentally sound way to quickly increase the carrying capacity of the transportation system, and should be considered.

The task force notes, though, that some park buses will have different requirements than the tour buses. Some must be outfitted for carrying camper gear, others to carry the larger amount of cargo that day hikers will have. Some seats must be left open to have a true shuttle system. Even in 1991 with the system operating at almost capacity, the average ridership over the season was 28 people per bus.

The current "school bus" seats are spaced for adult-sized legs, although the straight backed seats are uncomfortable for some riders. If buses are purchased, options for more comfortable seating -- while maintaining the high seat count -- should be explored.

No matter what vehicle is used, the 170-mile round trip to Wonder Lake is going to involve several hours of sitting. The task force is unconvinced that any conveyance requiring passengers to be seated is going to significantly increase visitor comfort.

Leasing 44-passenger buses from the General Services Administration is estimated at \$258,000 per year, with an additional \$223,000 in fuel and \$1.55 million in personnel costs. The total cost for leasing buses is about \$2 million, slightly more than the current contract.

Hiring bus drivers as park employees would require the provision of housing, a significant expense. Housing would be required both at the east end of the park and at the west end for some drivers.

The purchase of buses would cost about \$60,000 each, or \$3 million for the anticipated fleet of 50 buses.

With government-owned buses, a maintenance facility and staff equal to the task of keeping buses on the road 18 hours a day also will be required.

A related recommendation regards the Visitor Access Center. In operation since 1990, it has provided a major step forward in serving park visitors' needs for reserving bus seats, campgrounds and backcountry permits. The parking area, however, is inadequate to handle the cars and motorhomes that crowd the park on many days of the summer. The task force recommends additional overflow parking for the VAC.

7. Interpretation

Receiving information about Denali's natural and cultural resources is an important element of any visitor's stay at the park. Evening programs, interpreter-led hikes and printed material are consistently informative means for meeting this need.

The interpretive presentations to shuttle bus passengers, though, are somewhat sporadic. Contract bus drivers often have years of experience at the park and provide a good interpretive presentation. But their job is driving safely along the park road, and these employees should not be expected to carry the additional burden of interpretation.

The park in 1991 began putting interpreters on some buses for short stretches of the road to deliver messages about wildlife in the area or other features of the park. This has been well received by visitors and viewed as successful by the interpretive staff.

The task force recommends that these programs be expanded and made a regular part of riding the visitor transportation system.

8. Reservation systems

Some members of the public complained about arriving at the park uncertain if they would have a campsite or a seat on the shuttle bus. While the Anchorage and Fairbanks reservation systems and the in-park reservation system eliminate that worry for some people, the level of certainty for visitors could be substantially improved with a nationwide reservation system. Such a system could have the added benefit of reducing congestion in the entrance area by giving people the ability to time their arrival for a particular bus trip, rather than the current first-come, first-served situation.

The task force recommends that the Alaska Region begin negotiations to tie Denali National Park and Preserve into a nationwide reservation system.

SUBJECT: SJR 44
MODERATOR: JUDY
SITE: ANCHORAGE

PARTICIPANT LIST

TESTIFIER

NAME/REPRESENTING	ADDRESS	PHONE	BILL NO.
1. TIM WORTHEN/AK VISITORS ASSN	<i>Yes</i>		SJR 44
2. LENORE SAPPINGTON/DENALI CITIZENS COUNCIL		<i>No</i>	SJR 44
3.			
4.	CA		
5.			

OBSERVER

NAME/REPRESENTING	ADDRESS	PHONE	BILL NO.
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 * DELIVER TO: LHSCTRA
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 * SENT: 05/05/92 TIME: 10:08
 * FROM: LIOCMIL
 * SUBJECT: 92-04-129;FS;(H)TRANS;5/5
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SUBJECT LINE TO READ: TC NO.; PL NO. OR FS; SHORT SUBJECT; DATE

JRU MOD: SEAN

T/C NO: 92-04-129
 DATE: 5/5
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 SUBJECT: SJR 44
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FINAL STATS

 TESTIFIER

NAME/REPRESENTING	ADDRESS	PHONE	BILL NO.
1. TIN WORTHEN/AVA/REGENCY TOURS	PO BOX 211969 99521	279-0061	SJR 44
2. LENORE SAPPINGTON/DENALI CITIZENS COUNCI	3127 TARWATER AVE. #11 99508	276-1067	SJR 44

 OBSERVER

NAME/RERESENTING	ADDRESS	PHONE	BILL NO.
1. JERRY MCCUTCHEON			SJR 44

TESTIFIED: 2
 UNABLE: 1
 OBSERVED: 0
 TOTAL: 3

START TIME 8:50 END TIME: 9:55



House Transportation Committee

DATE: 5/5/92

PLACE: Room 17

SUBJECT OF MEETING:
SJR 44
HB 462

NAME	REPRESENTING	BUSINESS/PERSONAL MAILING ADDRESS	ZIP	(H) PHONE	(W) PHONE	DO YOU WANT TO TESTIFY?		WHAT SUBJECT/ WHICH BILL?
Tom Brice	Sen. Craft	Rm 125			3834	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Y	<input type="radio"/> N	SJR 44
Mark Hickey	ALASKA FREIGHT	9091 SHEPHERD WAY JUNEAU, ALASKA	99801		790-2424	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Y	<input type="radio"/> N	HB 462
Clyde Stoltefus	DOT+PF	Box 2, Juneau, AK	99801		5-3900	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Y	<input type="radio"/> N	SJR 44
Robin Taylor						<input type="radio"/> Y	<input type="radio"/> N	
						<input type="radio"/> Y	<input type="radio"/> N	
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