

HJR

68

SENATE COMMITTEE REPORT

DATE: 5/6/98

FURTHER:

DATE TURNED IN TO OFFICE: 5/12/98

Resources Committee considered HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 68 am

Relating to continued operation of the McKinley Park airstrip for general aviation and access to Denali National Park and Preserve.

and recommends:

- be replaced with _____ CS _____ (_____)
- adopt previous _____ CS _____ (_____)
- attached amendment(s)
- adopt Letter of Intent by _____ Committee
- further referral to the _____ Committee

- Senate Bill:**
- same title
 - new title
- House Bill:**
- same title
 - technical title
 - new: SCR# _____

SIGNING DO PASS	DP	OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS	NR	DNP	AM
<i>John L. ...</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<i>Amendment with ...</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
<i>Kevin ...</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
<i>[Signature]</i>					
<i>[Signature]</i>					
CHAIR: <i>Rick Halford</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	CHAIR:			

NEW FISCAL NOTE(S):

Department	Date	Zero	Fiscal

PREVIOUS FISCAL NOTE(S):*

Department	Date	Zero	Fiscal
<i>HTCA</i>	<i>4/30</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>2</i>

APPROPRIATION -- no fiscal note

*include fiscal notes accompanying Governor's bill

FISCAL NOTE

No: 1

STATE OF ALASKA
1998 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

BILL NO. Bill Version: HJR 68
(H) Publish Date: 5/2/98

Title: Continue Operation of McKinley Park Airstrip
Sponsor: House Finance
Requestor: House Transportation

Dept. Affected: Legislature
BRU:
Components:
Serial #:

EXPENDITURES/REVENUES: (THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS)

OPERATING	FY 99	FY 00	FY 01	FY 02	FY 03	FY 04
Personal Services	0.0					
Travel	0.0					
Contractual	0.0					
Supplies	0.0					
Equipment	0.0					
Land & Structures	0.0					
Grants, Claims	0.0					
Miscellaneous	0.0					
TOTAL OPERATING	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
CAPITAL	0.0					
REVENUE	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

FUNDING: (THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS)

General Fund	0.0					
Federal Fund	0.0					
Other	0.0					
TOTAL	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

POSITIONS:

Full-Time	0					
Part-Time	0					
Temporary	0					

ANALYSIS: (ATTACH A SEPARATE PAGE IF NECESSARY)

Prepared by: Peter Ecklund, Staff
House Transportation Committee
Bill Williams, Chairman

Date: 4/30/98
Phone: 465-3424
Phone:

COMMITTEE COPY



U.S. Department
of Transportation
Federal Aviation
Administration

Office of the Regional Administrator
Alaskan Region

222 W. 7th Avenue #14
Anchorage, AK 99513-7587
Phone: (907) 271-5645
Fax: (907) 271-5113

APR 30 1998

Mr. Robert G. Stanton
Director, National Park Service
1849 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Mr. Stanton:

I am writing to express my concern relative to the proposed closure of the McKinley National Park airstrip. I am aware that there has been considerable opposition to this proposal both from the standpoint of public access to the park as well as from the aviation safety perspective. It is the latter issue which causes me considerable concern.

We in the Federal Aviation Administration are keenly aware of the high number of aviation accidents which occur in Alaska each year. Unlike the "lower 48" states, Alaska is highly dependent upon aviation as the sole means of accessibility to much of the entire state, and a significant number of Alaska residents are pilots and airplane owners. One of every 70 residents in Alaska is a pilot, and there is one registered aircraft to every 68 people in the state. Alaska has approximately 7 times as many pilots per capita and 12 times as many aircraft per capita as the rest of the United States.

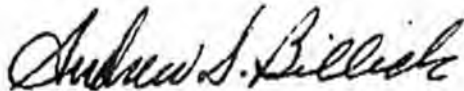
The corridor between Anchorage and Fairbanks, two of the largest population centers in the state, is used extensively by both general aviation and air taxi operators throughout the year. Unfortunately, the number of available airports along this route is very limited which does pose a problem when weather conditions deteriorate or other emergencies arise which necessitate the termination of a flight. Additionally, Mt. McKinley attracts a large number of aircraft throughout the year associated with both public and private flightseeing activities, resulting in a relatively large number of aircraft which are in the area of the McKinley National Park airstrip at various times during the year. Given the important role which this airport has played for many years, I feel it is a compromise of safety to consider closing this very important aviation facility.

I realize that the Healy River airport is less than fifty miles to the northwest of the McKinley National Park airstrip. However, due to the frequency of high winds in this area, it oft times is not possible for small aircraft to safely proceed (or return) to the Healy River facility. Nor is it sometimes feasible to proceed (or return) to the Cantwell airstrip, which is slightly further in distance at the southern entrance to Windy Pass. The McKinley National Park airstrip is critically situated along this route and has, no doubt, saved the

lives of many pilots and passengers who have had to make unscheduled landings due to weather conditions or other emergencies which have occurred in this area.

Based on the foregoing, I am asking that you reconsider this proposal and allow the McKinley National Park airstrip to remain in operation which will greatly assist in meeting the needs of the many aviators who fly in this area on a daily basis. Your decision to keep this airport open has the potential to save both lives and property in a land that is so dependent on aviation. Thank you for your consideration of this very important aviation safety consideration. If I can be of further assistance, please call me at your convenience.

Sincerely,



Andrew S. Billick
Regional Administrator,
FAA Alaskan Region

(11)

By:
Introduced:
Adopted:

Mike Young
03/26/98
03/26/98

RESOLUTION NO. 98-023

A RESOLUTION OPPOSING THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE'S DECISION TO
CLOSE THE MCKINLEY PARK AIRSTRIP

WHEREAS, the National Park Service (NPS) has determined in their current Frontcountry Plan that the McKinley Park Airstrip should be closed; and

WHEREAS, the NPS suggested five alternatives in their original draft plan and only one alternative suggested that the McKinley Park Airstrip be closed (Alternative C), one alternative (Alternative E) called for expansion of the current airstrip and Alternatives A and B maintained the existing airstrip; and

WHEREAS, the NPS also determined in this plan that the McKinley Park Airstrip will remain open until suitable alternatives become available; and

WHEREAS, Fairbanks residents and pilots use the McKinley Park Airstrip for immediate access to Denali National Park; and

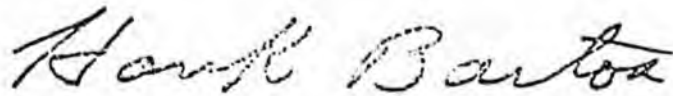
WHEREAS, the other two airstrips in the area are not as convenient or as accessible to Denali National Park and do not qualify as suitable alternatives; the Healy Airport is located approximately 10 miles away and is owned by the State of Alaska; the Denali Private Airstrip is owned privately and is also approximately 10 miles away; and

WHEREAS, the NPS owns the McKinley Park Airstrip and it would appear to be more economical to continue operations there than to close the airstrip and pay to use either the Denali Private Airstrip or the Healy Airport; and

WHEREAS, the NPS needs both wheel-plane and ski-plane access for its operations and neither the Healy Airport or the Denali Private Airstrip currently allow access for planes to land on snow; in the winter the NPS flies Piper Cubs which only have skis and need snow access to land; and currently those planes are able to land at the McKinley Park Airstrip.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Fairbanks North Star Borough Assembly opposes the closure of the McKinley Park Airstrip and requests the NPS to either keep the airstrip open indefinitely or build another airstrip within the Park, which would allow pilots and other visitors closer access to existing Park facilities.

PASSED AND APPROVED THIS 26TH DAY OF MARCH, 1998.



Hank Bartos
Hank Bartos
Presiding Officer

ATTEST:



Mona Lisa Drexler, CMC/AAE
Mona Lisa Drexler, CMC/AAE
Municipal Borough Clerk

Ayes: LaSota, Sattley, Solie, Sonaf Frank, Prax, Webb, Young, McBride, Bartos
Noes: None



Greater Fairbanks

Chamber

of Commerce

(10)

250 Cushman Street, Suite 2D

(907) 452-1105

Fairbanks, Alaska 99701-4665

FAX: (907) 456-6968

Introduced by: Transportation Committee
Date Introduced: January 19, 1998
Dated Passed: January 26, 1998
Date Transmitted: January 28, 1998

RESOLUTION 98-0126

A RESOLUTION BY THE GREATER FAIRBANKS CHAMBER OF COMMERCE IN SUPPORT OF KEEPING THE MCKINLEY NATIONAL PARK AIRSTRIP OPEN FOR GENERAL AVIATION USE.

WHEREAS, Denali National Park and Preserve (Denali Park) is the top visitor destination in Alaska and a critical element in the Alaska visitor/tourism industry and access into Denali Park is extremely restricted due to the limited existing transportation infrastructure; and

WHEREAS, visiting Denali Park is a high priority for many Alaskan citizens and many of the Alaskan visitors who fly their personal aircraft to Alaska; and

WHEREAS, the McKinley National Park airstrip (McKinley airstrip) has served public aviation users since it was constructed in the early 1940's; and

WHEREAS, the McKinley airstrip offers intermodal connections such as access to the National Park entrance area by foot, and direct convenient access to the Alaska Railroad and the Parks system of surface transportation; and

WHEREAS, the McKinley airstrip as a public airport facility operates well as a multi-nodal transfer point; and

WHEREAS, the McKinley airstrip AWOS supplies invaluable weather information to pilots traveling through Windy Pass, and the airstrip provides an emergency landing area in otherwise forbidding terrain in the event a pilot experiences bad weather conditions, or mechanical problems with their aircraft; and

WHEREAS, the closest public alternative, the Healy River Airport, has limited space available for transient aircraft, limited transient service facilities, is 10 miles from the entrance to Denali Park, and often experiences severe winds that pose a flying hazard; and

CHAMBER BENEFACTORS

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WHEREAS, the Denali Landing Strip is 8 miles south from the entrance to Denali Park, operates only as a private airstrip; and is not open for public use; and

WHEREAS, the potential closure of the McKinley airstrip was not included as part of the proposed alternative in the Entrance Area and Road Corridor Development Concept Plan (Frontcountry Plan) during public hearings in 1996, and this action has therefore not received the benefit of proper public scrutiny and review; and

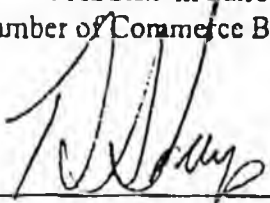
WHEREAS, the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities' Planning Section has determined that closure of the McKinley airstrip is not recommended at this time.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Greater Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce urges the National Park Service to reconsider and reverse it's decision to close the McKinley National Park Airstrip and keep it open to citizens and available to fulfill its' very important function for general aviation and visitor convenience.


BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this resolution be distributed to:

Steve Martin, Superintendent, Denali National Park and Preserve
Bruce Babbitt, Secretary, U.S. Department of the Interior
Senator Ted Stevens
Senator Frank Murkowski
Representative Don Young
The Honorable Tony Knowles, Governor of the State of Alaska
Alaska State Legislature
Alaska State Chamber of Commerce
The Fairbanks Convention and Visitors Bureau
The Alaska Airmen's Association

PASSED in Fairbanks, Alaska this 26th Day of January 1998 by the Greater Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors.



Therese Sharp
Chairwoman of the Board



Pamela J. Held
President/CEO



FAIRBANKS INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Airport Marketing • 6450 Airport Way • Fairbanks, Alaska 99709 • Phone: (907) 479-8700 • Fax: (907) 479-7090 • SITA: FAIAPXH

January 21, 1998

Mr. Robert Stanton
Director of National Park Services
National Park Service
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Mr. Stanton,

I am writing to express my concern and dismay over the National Park Service's decision to close the McKinley Park Airstrip.

I only learned of the airstrip's possible closure as a rumor last August. Now, having read the October 7, 1997, Briefing Statement by Park Superintendent Mr. Stephen P. Martin (copy enclosed), I see the closure was a "done deal" as of the February, 1997, signing of a record of decision.

Through my job and personal interests I keep up to date on general aviation-related issues in Alaska. To my knowledge the NPS did not make any substantive effort to inform the State's aviation community (or the general public) of the airstrip's possible closure in the course of your agency's solicitation of public comment on the Frontcountry Plan. This failure to communicate to affected users via any of several readily available media (e.g., direct mail to licensed Alaskan pilots, news releases or display ads in the Alaska Flyer, the Alaska Airmen's Association Newsletter, or AOPA Pilot, etc.) should in itself warrant a review of your decision.

Indeed, if you had genuinely solicited the flying (and non-flying) public's perspective you would have heard unanimous opposition to the closing the airstrip. I do not know of anyone, inside or outside the aviation community, who supports the airstrip's closure.

Nevertheless, closing the current McKinley Park Airstrip would be acceptable when "suitable alternatives," as noted in Mr. Martin's Briefing Statement, become available. If indeed the current airstrip is needed, as he stated, "for potential expansion of the railroad depot" [despite being on the "wrong" side of the tracks], a new NPS-constructed replacement airstrip in the same immediate area would amply meet all general aviation safety and access needs.

A key criterion for any "suitable alternative" is a reasonable walking distance (a mile or less) from the airstrip to the park entrance facilities and attractions (Visitor Reception Center, park hotel and restaurants, nature and other hiking trails such as Horseshoe Lake and Mt. Healy, etc.). On a personal note, our family has enjoyed innumerable day trips by air from Fairbanks to the park - in our experience, it's the best wheeled aircraft-accessible excursion in Alaska, and we would be very sorry to lose Frontcountry air access to the park.

A cooperative program with the Fairbanks International Airport

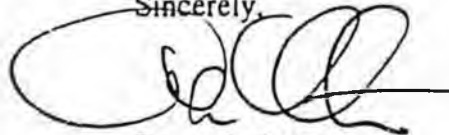
Mr. Robert Stanton
January 21, 1998
Page 2 of 2

In this regard, neither the Healy nor Denali Private airstrips qualify as a "suitable alternative" for general aviation access to the park. The Denali Private airstrip is off-limits to the general public, and the Healy airstrip is about ten miles from the park entrance and thus well beyond walking distance.

Finally, how does the NPS reconcile its stated Frontcountry Plan objective, by Mr. Martin's report, of "increased visitor access" with "working to implement the highest priority items, including airstrip closure"? Obviously, the airstrip's closure will decrease, not increase, visitor access.

I trust you and your staff will see fit to reconsider your decision, this time with meaningful aviation user input, on the future of the McKinley Park airstrip.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dave Carlstrom". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and "C".

Dave Carlstrom
Director of Airport Marketing

cc: The Honorable Ted Stevens, U.S. Senator
The Honorable Frank Murkowski, U.S. Senator
The Honorable Don Young, U.S. Congressman
The Honorable Tony Knowles, Governor, State of Alaska
Mr. Phil Boyer, President, AOPA
Ms. Dee Hanson, Executive Director, Alaska Airmen's Association
Mr. Tom George, Alaskan Aviation Safety Foundation
Ms. Pam Held, President & CEO, Greater Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce
Ms. Sheila Romero, Executive Director, Fairbanks Convention and Visitors Bureau
Mr. Bruce Babbitt, Secretary, U. S. Department of the Interior
Mr. Stephen P. Martin, Park Superintendent, Denali National Park

Encl.



IN REPLY REFER TO:

United States Department of the Interior

(9)

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Alaska Regional Office
2525 Gambell Street, Room 107
Anchorage, Alaska 99503-2892

L38 (DENA-S)

FEB 26 1998

Mr. Dave Carlstrom
Director of Airport Marketing
6450 Airport Way
Fairbanks, Alaska 99709

Dear Mr. Carlstrom:

Thank you for your letter expressing your concerns about closing the McKinley Park Airstrip in the entrance area of Denali National Park. Closing the airstrip was a carefully considered decision that is part of an overall development concept plan for the entrance area. I will ensure that the issues you raised are considered as the plan is implemented. We hope to ensure that acceptable alternatives exist for those visitors wishing to travel to Denali National Park by aircraft.

The Entrance Area and Road Corridor Development Concept Plan ("frontcountry plan"), for which the Record of Decision was signed in February 1997, calls for closing the park airstrip to provide for potential expansion of the railroad depot and also to reduce the overall level of resource impacts in the entrance area. Relocating the airstrip within the entrance area of the park is not included as an option in the final plan because of the need to limit development in this critical wildlife habitat (over 20 years of research have shown it to be an important moose calving area). Space for development is therefore at a premium in this part of the park, and the priority has been placed on new visitor facilities that would ultimately serve over 500,000 visitors during the summer season alone.

The possibility of closing the park airstrip was discussed during public scoping for the plan in summer and fall 1995. Open houses on Denali National Park planning were held in several Alaska communities, including Fairbanks, during August 1995. The airstrip closure alternative was discussed along with other information presented during the Fairbanks meeting at the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities building. This and other open houses were advertised throughout the state in posters, newspaper advertisements, and public service announcements.

The planning alternative that included airstrip closure was also in the draft plan that was available for public review from June 21 through August 19, 1996. The availability of the draft plan and public comment period were announced in the *Federal Register* and in press releases issued statewide and to national news organizations. Public meetings were similarly publicized and were held at various locations throughout Alaska between

August 5 and 14, 1996. One of these meetings was held at the Westmark Hotel in Fairbanks on August 8 and was advertised in the *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, the *Anchorage Daily News*, and on Alaska public radio.

A small percentage of over 300 public comments received addressed the airstrip. Several substantive comments were received on the overall level of resource impacts in the entrance area, raising the issue of using the airstrip location for other functions or rehabilitating the area after removal.

In response to concerns that you and others in the aviation community have raised, we are now planning to phase out use of the McKinley Park airstrip as other options for air access to the park are identified. The Healy Airport and the Denali Private Airstrip are both within 10 miles of the park strip and are being considered for future National Park Service operations. The Healy Airport is paved and is available for commercial use and general aviation. The Denali Private Airstrip is used mainly for flightseeing operations but is also available for emergency use, and at 5000 feet is substantially longer than either of the other two in the area.

The frontcountry plan calls for construction of several new facilities in the entrance area such as a new interpretive center, a visitor services building, additional campsites, and a camper conveniences center. Recognizing that a wide range of overnight accommodations and restaurants are being provided by the private sector immediately outside the park entrance, the park hotel and restaurant are scheduled for removal in 2002. When these buildings were moved into the park in 1973, they were intended as a temporary replacement for the permanent hotel that had been destroyed by fire. The frontcountry plan calls for replacement of these buildings with an environmental education and science center.

As the briefing statement issued by the park indicates, the McKinley Park airstrip will remain open for National Park Service and general aviation use until suitable alternatives become available. Shuttle bus service and taxi service are now available to the Healy and McKinley Village areas, so transportation to the park and to visitor facilities just outside the park entrance is available for visitor who do not travel by private vehicle. Many of our visitors who arrive by train or bus use these services.

Flightseeing operations are no longer based at the park airstrip and remaining commercial use will be phased out in the next two years in keeping with the direction in the frontcountry plan. Suitable alternatives for flightseeing and commercial use are currently available at the Healy and Denali Private airstrips.

The frontcountry plan calls for retaining helipads in the entrance area after airstrip closure to allow for medical evacuations by helicopter. Medical evacuations by fixed wing aircraft will continue to use the Healy and Kantishna airstrips.

We do not wish to reduce access to Denali National Park, and we are working to ensure that other options are available for visitors who choose to travel to the park by aircraft. Thank you again for your comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Paul R. Anderson".

~~for~~ Robert D. Barbee
Regional Director

cc:
Deborah Williams
Supt, Denali National Park and Preserve

TEO STEVENS, ALASKA CHAIRMAN

THAD COCHRAN, MISSISSIPPI
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Post-It™ brand fax transmittal memo 7871		# of pages
To <i>Tom George</i>	From <i>Doc</i>	
Co.	Co.	
Dept.	Phone #	
Fax # <i>474-5567</i>	Fax #	

211
CO

November 21, 1997

6

John Spalding
President
Alaska Airmen's Assn., Inc.
P.O. Box 241185
Anchorage, Alaska 99524-1185

Dear John:

Thanks for contacting me to express your opposition to the proposed closure of the airstrip near the entrance to Denali National Park and Preserve.

In January, the National Park Service released its Final Entrance Area and Road Corridor Development Concept Plan ("Plan") for Denali. According to the Plan, the McKinley Park airstrip would be closed for "potential expansion of the Alaska Railroad Depot and to reduce resource impacts in the entrance area." The Park Service wants to phase out the McKinley Park airstrip and shift Park Service, flightseeing and air taxi service flights to a strip in Healy and a privately-owned strip near the park entrance. According to Park Superintendent Steve Martin, the closure is two to five years in the offing.

Unfortunately, the Plan does not consider the many people who use the strip for private flights or emergency landings into the Park. Also, closing the strip and requiring the use of another ten miles away begs the question of whether adequate land transportation will be available between the alternative strips and the Park. Mr. Martin has advised me that final closure will not occur until a suitable alternative for private traffic is found.

Proposals to restrict access to public lands in Alaska concern me greatly. I will continue to monitor developments regarding the McKinley Park airstrip and will keep your comments in mind when the Park Service's budget request next comes before the Appropriations Committee for review. Thanks again for bringing this matter to my attention.

With best wishes,

Cordially,

Ted Stevens

TED STEVENS

*FYI
Gunny* (4)



ALASKA AIR CARRIERS ASSOCIATION

1117 E. 35th Avenue, Suite 102
Anchorage, Alaska 99508
(907) 277-0071 Fax (907) 277-0072

October 8, 1997

Mr. Robert D. Barbee
Alaska Regional Director
National Park Service
2525 Gambell Street
Anchorage, Alaska 99501

Ref: McKinley Park Airstrip

Dear Mr. Barbee,

It has recently come to the attention of the Alaska Air Carriers Association that the National Park Service is considering closure of the airport at the McKinley Park Hotel site. AACGA supports the position of the Alaskan Aviation Safety Foundation, and agrees that closure of this strip is of immense concern to the Alaska aviation community due to the important public safety role this particular airstrip provides.

AACA represents more than 100 air carriers operating in Alaska, and as such, is often in alliance with other aviation user groups in our quest to provide the safest and most viable aviation environment for aviators to operate in. As the Alaskan Aviation Safety Foundation aptly stated in correspondence to you on Sept. 9, 1997, "...this airport is very strategically located between Cantwell and Healy, the two places where adverse weather frequently occurs for low level flights through Windy Pass, one of Alaska's busiest flyways for small airplanes." In the interest of safety, that reason alone is certainly justification enough to reconsider closure of the airstrip. Furthermore, considering the roles the McKinley airstrip plays in medevac operations, the airstrip's use as an alternate airport for aviation emergencies, and increasing the accessibility of the Park for severely handicapped visitors, it seems closure of the McKinley airstrip is unthinkable.

ALASKA AIR CARRIERS ASSOCIATION
1117 E. 35th Avenue, Suite 102
Anchorage, Alaska 99508
(907) 277-0071 Fax (907) 277-0072

TO: Mr. Robert D. Barbee
National Park Service
2525 Gambell Street
Anchorage, Alaska 99501

FROM: Alaska Air Carriers Association
1117 E. 35th Avenue, Suite 102
Anchorage, Alaska 99508
(907) 277-0071 Fax (907) 277-0072

SUBJECT: McKinley Park Airstrip

DATE: October 8, 1997

RE: Mr. Barbee's letter to AACGA dated September 25, 1997.

Dear Mr. Barbee:

Thank you for your letter of September 25, 1997, regarding the proposed closure of the McKinley Park Airstrip. AACGA is deeply concerned about the potential impact of this closure on the aviation community in Alaska. As you are aware, this airstrip is a vital link in the state's aviation network, particularly for emergency services and low-level flights through Windy Pass.

AACA represents more than 100 air carriers operating in Alaska, and as such, is often in alliance with other aviation user groups in our quest to provide the safest and most viable aviation environment for aviators to operate in. As the Alaskan Aviation Safety Foundation aptly stated in correspondence to you on Sept. 9, 1997, "...this airport is very strategically located between Cantwell and Healy, the two places where adverse weather frequently occurs for low level flights through Windy Pass, one of Alaska's busiest flyways for small airplanes." In the interest of safety, that reason alone is certainly justification enough to reconsider closure of the airstrip.

Furthermore, considering the roles the McKinley airstrip plays in medevac operations, the airstrip's use as an alternate airport for aviation emergencies, and increasing the accessibility of the Park for severely handicapped visitors, it seems closure of the McKinley airstrip is unthinkable.

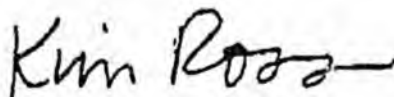
We urge you to reconsider the proposed closure and to explore alternative solutions that would maintain the safety and accessibility of this important airstrip.

Sincerely,
[Signature]

Mr. Robert D. Barbee
National Park Service
Oct. 8, 1997 page two

The diverse and rugged geographic nature of Alaska and the adverse weather conditions found in this state provide enough of an unforgiving environment for aviators to operate in--we don't need to take away the few established safety nets the aviation community depends upon.

Sincerely,



Kimberly S. Ross
Executive Director

cc: Senator Ted Stevens
Senator Frank Murkowski
Congressman Don Young
Federal Aviation Administration
National Transportation Safety Board
Alaskan Aviation Safety Foundation
Alaska Visitors Association
Alaska Almen's Association
AACCA Board of Directors



AIRCRAFT OWNERS AND PILOTS ASSOCIATION

421 Aviation Way • Frederick, MD 21701-4798
Telephone (301) 695-2000 • FAX (301) 695-2375
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INFORMATION
AASF

7 (3)

September 25, 1997

Mr. Robert D. Barbee
Alaska Regional Director
National Park Service
2535 Gambell Street
Anchorage, AK 99503

Dear Mr. Barbee:

The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA) represents the general aviation interests of more than 340,000 individual pilots and aircraft owners in the United States, more than 4,200 of whom reside in the state of Alaska. The organization provides advocacy for the betterment of the general aviation industry including accessibility to airports where general aviation operators will be a primary beneficiary.

It is our understanding that there have been recommendations to close the airport at the McKinley Park Hotel site. AOPA strongly opposes the closure of that facility.

As you well know, Alaska's operational conditions are not the same as the conditions found in the rest of the continental United States. Weather and terrain are major considerations in flying in Alaska. In the case of the McKinley Park Airport, the issue is even more important because of the scarcity of landing facilities in that area.

The importance of this airport, besides being a part of the local transportation system and being beneficial to the local area, is accentuated by safety. The McKinley Airport is a "safety net" for aircraft that encountered unforeseen weather in that area. Furthermore, the difficult accessibility of the area by other means not only justifies but requires an airport in case of emergencies and medical evacuations.

We urge you to actively pursue other options in coordination and cooperation with the users in an attempt to insure that the facility is given due process and consideration.

Should you require any additional information on this or any other related issue, please feel free to contact me at (301) 695-2206. Thank you for your consideration of our views.

Sincerely,

Miguel Vasconcelos
Director
Regional Affairs

①



September 16, 1997

Mr. Robert D. Barbee
Alaska Regional Director
National Park Service
2525 Gambell Street
Anchorage, AK 9950

Dear Barbee:

In the interest of public convenience and safety this organization requests reconsideration of the recommendation to close the airport at the McKinley Park Hotel site.

This airport is very strategically located between Cantwell and Healy, the two places where adverse weather frequently occurs for low level flights through Windy Pass, one of Alaska's busiest flyways for small airplanes. The airport has served the National Park Service and the public very well for more than fifty years.

I have flown very high-level foreign government officials to the Park several times at the service of the U.S. State Department. These people include the Vice Premier of South Korca and the West German equivalent of our Department of Interior Secretary, in addition to several members of the U. S. Senate and Congress. The U.S. public includes many pilots (some of whom are very influential persons) who come to and tour Alaska in personally owned aircraft. No convenient public transportation is available or affordable from Cantwell or Healy. Flying tours of the Park are the only practical way for severely handicapped visitors to enjoy the beauty of this unique Parkland.

The significance of the airport to the Alaska Railroad is difficult to quantify but I have personally flown the Trackmaster and Railroad Manager to the Park airport to help in emergency derailment instances where rail or highway travel was not timely.

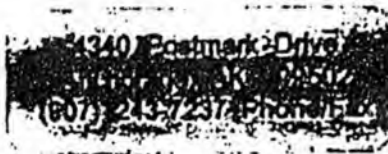
The small amount of labor and material required to maintain this airport is surely repaid in the public interest of aviation safety, for medical evacuation of staff or visitors, and convenience of that portion of the visiting population who are handicapped and unable to enjoy the hiking or bus tours available there.

Sincerely,

Thomas H Wardleigh

Thomas H. Wardleigh, Chairman
Board of Directors

cc: Babbitt, Williams, Sen. Stevens, Sen. Murkowski
Congressman Young, Steve Martin/Denali Park, AOPA.



②



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Denali National Park and Preserve
Post Office Box 9
Denali Park, Alaska 99756

IN REPLY REFER TO:

L38 (DENA-S)

October 23, 1997

Thomas H. Wardleigh
Chairman, Board of Directors
Alaskan Aviation Safety Foundation
4340 Postmark Drive
Anchorage, Alaska 99502

Dear Mr. Wardleigh:

On behalf of the Regional Director we would like to thank you for your letter expressing your concerns about closing the McKinley Park Airstrip in the entrance area of Denali National Park. Closing the airstrip was a carefully considered decision that is part of an overall development concept plan for the entrance area. As we implement the plan, we will consider the issues you raised so that we can ensure acceptable alternatives exist for those visitors wishing to travel to Denali National Park by aircraft.

The Entrance Area and Road Corridor Development Concept Plan (Frontcountry Plan), for which the record of decision was signed in February 1997, calls for closing the park airstrip to provide for potential expansion of the railroad depot and also to reduce the overall level of resource impacts in the entrance area. The possibility of closing the airstrip was discussed during public scoping for the plan in summer and fall 1995, and it was part of one alternative of the draft plan that was available for public review from June 21 through August 19, 1996. Public meetings were also held at various locations throughout Alaska between August 5 and 14, 1996. Only a small percentage of public comments received addressed the airstrip. Several substantive comments were received on the overall level of resource impacts in the entrance area, raising the issue of using the airstrip location for other functions or rehabilitating the area after removal.

We believe the Frontcountry Plan provides for an even better visitor experience, increased visitor access, and improved resource protection, and we are working to implement the highest priority items, including airstrip closure. However, we recognize the concerns you and others in the aviation community have raised and are now planning to phase out use of the McKinley Park airstrip as other options for air access to the park are identified. The Healy Airport and the Denali Private Airstrip are both within 10 miles of the park strip and are being considered for future National

TW
McKinley?

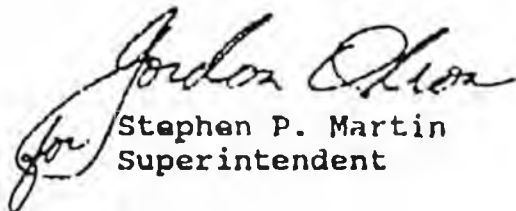
Park Service operations. The Healy Airport is paved and is available for commercial use and general aviation. The Denali Private Airstrip is used mainly for flightseeing operations but is also available for emergency use and, at 5000 feet, is substantially longer than either of the other two in the area.

The McKinley Park airstrip will remain open for National Park Service and general aviation use until suitable alternatives become available. Flightseeing operations are no longer based at the airstrip and remaining commercial use will be phased out in the next two years in keeping with the direction in the frontcountry plan. Suitable alternatives for flightseeing and commercial use are currently available at the Healy and Denali Private airstrips.

The Frontcountry Plan also calls for retaining helipads in the entrance area after airstrip closure to allow for medical evacuations by helicopter. Medical evacuations by fixed wing aircraft will continue to use the Healy and Kantishna airstrips.

We do not wish to reduce access to Denali National Park, and we are working to ensure that other options are available for visitors who choose to travel to the park by aircraft. Thank you again for your comments.

Sincerely,



Stephen P. Martin
Superintendent

cc:
Deborah Williams
Bob Barbee

⑤



November 17, 1997

Mr. Stephen P. Martin, Superintendent
Denali National Park and Preserve
P.O. Box 9
Denali Park, AK 90755

Ref: McKinley Air Strip

Dear Sir:

Thank you for your letter of October 23, 1997, and the assurance that the McKinley Park airstrip will remain in place for public use until "suitable alternatives" are available. Our members who have recently visited Healy and Cantwell report that no public services are available at either airport, with the exception that fuel is available at Cantwell. There are no taxi, rental car, or even public telephones convenient to the runways. The Denali private airstrip does not cater to the general aviation fleet. There are no transient tie down facilities for visitors.

We regret that we were not in receipt of the notice of opportunity to comment during 1995 and 1996. It is easy to imagine that public meetings in Cantwell and Healy would not generate concerned responses as to the safety of flight for itinerant pilots or aviation groups from the "outside" locales who plan to visit the Park as part of a flying tour of Alaska. We note that the Aircraft Owners and Pilot's Association (AOPA), with 340,000 members, the Seaplane Pilot Association, the National Aeronautic Association (NAA), Alaska Air Carrier Association and Alaska Airmen, Alaska Ninety-nines (International association of women pilots) were not solicited for their input to the scoping and planning process for these changes to the Park. It is recommended that future publicity include information to the General Aviation News & Flyer - P.O. Box 39099-Tacoma, WA 98439-0099, * AOPA Pilot Magazine-421 Aviation Way-Frederick, MD 21701, The Alaska Air Carriers Assoc.- 929 E. 81st #108-Anchorage, AK 99518* The Cessna Pilots Assn.-P.O. Bx 5817-Santa Maria, CA 93456. These are the people most affected by changes in the airport availability for enjoying this National Park. Without their input the planning process appears to be seriously flawed.

The Alaskan Aviation Safety Foundation is available as a resource

for you to assist with future planning concerning the accommodations for the flying public at the Park. It is essential that the Visual Flight Rules (VFR) flight safety in this busy corridor connecting Alaska's largest cities not be diminished.
Sincerely,



Thomas H. Wardleigh, Chairman
Board of Directors

4346 Postmark Drive
Anchorage, AK 99502
(907) 243-7237 Phone/Fax

Post-It* Fax Note

7671

Date

12/9/97

of

pages

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To	Don Lowell	From	Mike Tranel
Co./Dept	Alaska DOT&PF	Co.	NPS - Denali
Phone #	951-2325	Phone #	683-9552
Fax #	951-2313	Fax #	683-9639

Department of the Interior
National Park Service
Briefing Statement

(7)

October 7, 1997

Region/Park: Alaska Region/Denali National Park and Preserve

Project/Issue: Closing McKinley Park Airstrip

Background: The McKinley Park Airstrip was constructed with National Park Service funds. It is owned by the U.S. Government and is maintained by Denali National Park staff. The Entrance Area and Road Corridor Development Concept Plan (Frontcountry Plan), for which the record of decision was signed in February 1997, calls for closing the park airstrip to provide for potential expansion of the railroad depot and also to reduce the overall level of resource impacts in the entrance area. The possibility of closing the airstrip was discussed during public scoping for the plan in summer and fall 1995, and it was part of one alternative of the draft plan that was available for public review from June 21 through August 19, 1996. Public meetings were also held at various locations throughout Alaska between August 5 and 14, 1996. Only a small percentage of public comments addressed the airstrip. Several substantive comments were received on the overall level of resource impacts in the entrance area, raising the issue of using the airstrip location for other functions or rehabilitating the area after removal.

Current Status: The National Park Service is planning to phase out use of the McKinley Park airstrip as other options for air access to the park are identified. The Healy Airport and the Denali Private Airstrip are both within 10 air miles and are being considered for future NPS operations. The Healy Airport is paved and is available for commercial use and general aviation. The Denali Private Airstrip is used mainly for flightseeing operations but is also available for emergency use, and at 5000 feet it is substantially longer than either of the other two in the area.

The McKinley Park airstrip will remain open for NPS and general aviation use until suitable alternatives become available. Flightseeing operations are no longer based at the airstrip and remaining commercial use will be phased out in the next two years in keeping with the direction in the frontcountry plan. Suitable alternatives for flightseeing and commercial use are currently available at the Healy and Denali Private airstrips.

Service Position: The NPS believes that the Frontcountry Plan provides for an even better visitor experience, increased visitor access, and improved resource protection, and the park is working to implement the highest priority items, including airstrip closure. Because of concerns that have been raised, the NPS is also working to ensure that

acceptable alternatives exist for those visitors wishing to travel to Denali National Park by aircraft.

Position of Other Interested Parties: During August and September 1997, the park received approximately 15-20 comments by telephone and letter opposing closure of the McKinley Park Airstrip. The primary issues raised have been that the airstrip is needed for continued access to the park and for an additional margin of safety for private pilots. Groups expressing opposition have included the Alaska Air Carriers Association, the Alaska Aviation Safety Foundation, and the Alaska Ninety-Nines.

Also more recently: Alaska Airman's Association

Contact: Stephen P. Martin, Superintendent, Denali National Park and Preserve (907) 683-2294

or Mike Tranel
683-9552

* up to 30-40 comments
by Dec. 8.