



## Visitor survey update: February 2007

Researchers examining the expectations and quality of experiences of Denali Park Road vehicle users completed the first of two phases of the study in 2006. As part of this first phase of the study, researchers conducted qualitative interviews with over 120 Denali Park visitors representing four user groups (Fig. 1). These user groups were visitors who utilized (1) shuttle buses, (2) tour buses, (3) buses from lodges in Kantishna, and (4) their own recreational vehicle (RV) to access the park. Visitors were asked to identify and describe issues important to their experience on the Denali Park road.



*Figure 1. University of Vermont researcher Jeff Hallo interviews a visitor about her trip on the Denali Park Road and what qualities made that experience memorable. NPS Photo.*

Interviewers asked visitors questions about the quality of their experience on the park road, impacts to their experience, the number of vehicles on the road, and the management of vehicles using the road. Results from these interviews suggest a wide variety of potential indicators for the quality of a visitor's experience. These variables include the number of vehicles seen, encounters with other vehicles, frequency/duration of wildlife stops, distance of wildlife from the road, dust generated by vehicle traffic, number of visitors at rest stops, the condition and maintenance of buses, behavior/actions of other visitors while on buses, number/type of facilities along the road, vehicle congestion, and the quality of educational information provided by bus drivers. Results also

provide insights into how these variables affect visitor experiences and potential differences among user groups. For example, seeing moving buses diminished the sense of “being in the wilderness” for some visitors, but seeing stopped buses positively effected the experience by indicating areas where wildlife might be viewed.

Researchers will begin the second phase of the study in 2007 to gather data that will help set standards for indicators selected from results of the first phase of study. Park managers will eventually use resulting indicators and standards to evaluate and manage vehicle traffic by monitoring indicator variables and using a computer simulation model to estimate maximum acceptable vehicle use levels.