

## **Summary of Management of the Denali Park Road**

Before 1972, Denali visitation was relatively low since travelers arrived either by train or by an arduous overland route on the unimproved Denali Highway. In 1972 park visitation doubled in direct response to the opening of the George Parks Highway, which created a direct corridor from Anchorage and Fairbanks to the park. Anticipating this increase, park managers implemented a mandatory visitor transportation system that same year to minimize disturbances to wildlife and scenery. This was one of the first mandatory visitor transportation systems in the National Park System. The bus tours offered by the park concessioner had been taking visitors out the park road since the mid-1920s.

The new system allowed only visitors with overnight or other special use permits to drive their vehicles beyond the Savage River at Mile 15. The purpose of limiting vehicles past mile 15 was to protect wildlife viewing opportunities, wildlife health and habitat, and the wilderness character of the park road. Similar to today, visitors could take a narrated bus tour or take a shuttle bus which allowed riders to get on and off. Over the next 12 years visitor use grew to a total of 394,426 annual recreational visits, about 9 times the amount that arrived the year before the highway opened.

To better manage the park experience in light of increased pressures, the 1986 General Management Plan (GMP) for the park established a limit of 10,512 motor vehicle trips on the Park Road during the core season from Memorial Day weekend to after Labor Day . For many years, the established transportation system has been an effective mechanism to control vehicle use while providing for quality visitor opportunities along the park road. However, consistent growth in Alaska tourism during the last decade has correlated to a direct increase in annual park visitation. Denali is now one of the most visited subarctic national parks in the world, with the vast majority of visitation focused along the 90-mile park road. Park visitation is approaching 500,000, with 90 percent arriving during the summer season. With the sustained growth in Alaska's tourism industry, Denali continues to be a featured part of travelers' itineraries.