



ORV Planning Newsletter

Final EIS to be Released Summer 2011

This newsletter is intended to inform and update interested public regarding progress on the Nabesna Off-Road Vehicle Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The EIS is being written as one of the conditions of a settlement agreement resulting from a 2006 lawsuit filed against the National

Following is a brief summary of comments received on the Draft EIS by alternative.

Park Service (NPS). The lawsuit challenged NPS issuance of permits for recreational Off Road Vehicle (ORV) use on nine trails in the Nabesna District of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve (WRST). The purpose of this fifth newsletter is to provide an update and to inform interested parties of the pending release of the Final EIS.

The NPS published a Draft EIS in August 2010 and made it available for a 90-day public review period. The Draft EIS analyzed five different management alternatives, as follows:

Alternative 1: No Action. No trail improvements proposed. Recreational ORV use would not be permitted on the Suslota, Tanada Lake, or Copper Lake trails. Subsistence ORV use would continue.

Alternative 2: Represents pre-lawsuit conditions. No trail improvements proposed. Recreational ORV use permitted on all nine trails. Subsistence ORV use would continue.

Alternative 3: Few trail improvements. No



Trail repairs on BLM lands off the Denali Highway. This is a good example of the type of trail hardening proposed within the Nabesna ORV EIS.

recreational ORV use permitted. Subsistence ORV use would continue, subject to monitoring to make sure conditions on unimproved trails do not get worse.

Alternative 4: Most trails would be improved to a maintainable level. After improvements, recreational ORV use would be permitted on trails in the national preserve, not the national park (Copper Lake, Tanada Lake, Boomerang). Subsistence ORV use would continue, subject to monitoring to make sure conditions on unimproved trails do not get worse.

Alternative 5: Most trails improved to a maintainable level.

After improvements, recreational ORV use would be permitted on all nine improved trails (but not in the designated wilderness). Subsistence ORV use would continue, subject to monitoring to make sure conditions on unimproved trails do not get worse. And, subsistence ORV users would be required to stay on designated trails in the wilderness. Alternative 5 was identified as the NPS preferred alternative.

During the 90-day comment period on the Draft EIS, comments were received via hard mail, e-mail, through the WRST website, and through the NPS Planning Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) website. In total, 153 comments were received. Some comments included multiple signatures. Of course, the 153 comments include organizations that represent tens, hundreds, or thousands of people, including Alaska Outdoor Council, Coalition of Retired NPS Employees, National Parks Conservation

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Final EIS to be released . . .

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Caribou Creek Trail.

Association (NPCA), Specialty Vehicle Institute, Slana Alaskans Unite, Safari Club International, Copper Country Alliance, Alaska Quiet Rights Coalition, Residents of the Wrangells, and a Slana Citizens Group with 210 signatures. Agencies submitting comments included the State of Alaska and Environmental Protection Agency. Advisory Boards or Commissions included the Wrangell-St. Elias Subsistence Resource Commission, Eastern Interior RAC, and the Citizens Advisory Commission on Federal Areas. Native groups included Ahtna Inc. and Cheesh-Na Tribal Council. In addition, we received 12,587 electronic form letters from NPCA members. These form letters all say the same thing but are each submitted by individuals through the organization's website.

Following is a brief summary of comments received on the Draft EIS by alternative:

Alternative 1 (No Action): No one supported

Alternative 2: Two individuals specifically supported Alternative 2. However, there were 35 comments that did not specify an alternative but were basically pro-access. It was hard to tell if these comments supported or opposed trail improvements. These comments had several common themes:

- Keep trails open to all ORV use

- Do not restrict access
- Do not differentiate or regulate between recreational ORV use and subsistence ORV use.

Alternative 3: Thirteen comments specifically supported Alternative 3. Others supported not permitting recreational ORV use but requested consideration of additional restrictions on subsistence ORV use.

Alternative 4: Aside from the 12,587 form letters, this alternative was specifically supported by 19 comments. Those generally supporting the alternative expressed support for the following:

- No recreational ORV use on trails in the national park portions of the analysis area, before or after trail improvement.
- Support for non-motorized trail opportunities.

Alternative 5: There were 35 comments generally supporting Alternative 5. Many of these were short and did not get into specifics.

Organizations/agencies supporting Alternative 5 included State of Alaska, Alaska Outdoor Council, Specialty Vehicle Institute of America, and the Environmental Protection Agency.



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

The history of off-road vehicle (ORV) use in the Nabesna District predates the establishment of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. It commenced after the World War II era when surplus military vehicles were used by hunters, miners, and others for personal use and access to remote areas. Several of the trails in question started out as winter trails, used under frozen conditions and never intended for summertime use.

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The National Park Service cares for the special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

What Happens Next?

The comments on the Draft EIS will result in changes to the document. These changes will be displayed in the Final EIS, which is scheduled to be released for public review in late July, 2011. The Final EIS also will include NPS responses to all substantive comments.

Based on the public comments, the Final EIS will analyze a sixth alternative which combines elements of Alternatives 4 and 5 from the Draft EIS. Basic elements of the sixth alternative include:

- Improvement of the nine trails to a maintainable level.
- Permitting recreational ORV use on improved trail in the national preserve.

- Subsistence use would continue, subject to monitoring of unimproved trails and off-trail use. Additionally, subsistence ORV users would be required to stay on designated trails in the wilderness, with allowance for game retrieval.
- Some construction of non-motorized trails.

When the Final EIS is printed, a Notice of Availability (NOA) will be published in the Federal Register. In addition, NPS will alert interested publics regarding the release of the Final EIS.

The Final EIS will be posted on the PEPC website at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov> and on the

WRST website at <http://www.nps.gov/wrst>. Additionally, you may request a hard copy or CD by using the post card provided in this newsletter. NPS must wait 30 days after the NOA is published in the Federal Register before releasing a Record of Decision. The Record of Decision is the decision document for an EIS and describes the agencies decision and rationale for it.

If you have any questions, please contact Bruce Rogers at 907-822-7276 or e-mail Bruce_Rogers@nps.gov.



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You can also view the Final EIS online at: <http://www.nps.gov/wrst>