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## Alaska National Parks News Release

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### Climate Change Response Strategy Released by NPS Alaska

**Anchorage, Alaska** – Glacier Bay without the glaciers? It's not going to happen soon, but a changing climate is causing changes to national park landscapes across Alaska. A newly released Climate Change Response Strategy for Alaska's national parks provides details of what we know about climate change in Alaska parks, describes potential changes in the visitor experience, and provides goals for the Service to meet over time.

"A better understanding of probable rates of change and potential effects across Alaska and in specific park locations will help managers make informed decisions and consider their alternatives in issues as diverse as invasive species, historic buildings, wildland fire, and visitor destinations," said Dr. Robert Winfree, Science Advisor for NPS Alaska Region.

Climate change will challenge the National Park Service in how it manages parks because many guiding policies and legal mandates are premised on a stable climate. Requirements in law, for instance, to maintain habitat for seals and other marine life that depend on glacial ice, or to protect habitat for and populations of birds, fish and wildlife in upland areas, may be increasingly difficult to meet as glaciers retreat and the vegetation changes in parks.

- The strategy document also notes several examples of changes already taking place in Alaska parks. Glaciers in Wrangell-St. Elias, Kenai Fjords, Glacier Bay and other parks are shrinking in size. Newly unglaciated ground can slowly rise up, changing shorelines and causing hazards to near-shore navigation. Tidewater glaciers have long been a favorite destination of cruise ships in Glacier Bay and elsewhere in Alaska; as they become more difficult to see, visitation patterns may change.
- Coastal erosion is accelerating as sea ice diminishes along Alaska's northwest coast, causing the loss of archeological sites from Cape Krusenstern and other northwest parks. The same forces can also cause the loss of visitor facilities.
- Small and shallow lakes are shrinking, changing the habitat available for birds and other wildlife. In the past 27 years, a quarter of the small, shallow lakes studies in Denali have shrunk markedly. Warmer and drier landscapes also host different vegetation, changing the resources available for sport and subsistence hunters.

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

The Alaska strategy lays out four broad goals for the NPS in Alaska as part of a national response to climate change:

- **Science:** To support resource inventories, monitoring and research to better understand the current and potential impact of changing climate on park resources.
- **Adaptation:** to modify park management practices to adjust for climate change.
- **Mitigation:**, Through innovation, demonstration projects and new business practices, to have parks become models of environmentally sustainable operation.
- **Communication:** To increase public and employee understanding and awareness of the causes and effects of climate change and measures that will reduce or mitigate these effects.

The NPS has already begun changing operations and priorities in response to the overall NPS focus on climate change. Planning documents are beginning to discuss climate change as parks look to the future of construction projects and other work within parks. Increased coordination of research and monitoring work is taking places between the NPS and other state and federal land managers, as well as cooperating university researchers. A vigorous natural resources inventory and monitoring program is underway across all Alaska parks, with particular emphasis on resource “vital signs” that may illustrate how climate change is affecting parks.

“Climate change will undoubtedly affect how NPS manages park resources and services in the Alaska Region” Winfree said. “We share many issues with parks in the Lower 48, but in many cases the effects of climate change are occurring more quickly and with more severity in Alaska. Working with the best available information, and with others, will help NPS to protect and preserve America’s natural and cultural heritage for current and future generations “

The strategy and an executive summary are available at <http://www.nps.gov/akso/climatechange.html>

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