

Chapter Two: Charles Sheldon's Vision

As noted in Chapter 1, few non-Natives visited the Mount McKinley region—either north or south of the Alaska Range—before the 1890s. The first visitors were prospectors, followed by both civilian and military exploration parties. After the turn of the century, outsiders ventured closer to the mountain massif than they had previously, and in 1903 two parties—one from Fairbanks and another from outside of Alaska—made the first attempts to climb Mount McKinley. While both attempts were unsuccessful, the leaders of these parties left the area duly impressed by its scenic majesty, and one party found gold particles in a Kantishna Hills streambed. That discovery brought others into the area, and in 1905 a gold rush brought thousands of prospectors, primarily from Fairbanks and nearby points.

The First Park Advocates

Virtually everyone who visited the north side of the Alaska Range during this period were on practical missions; the U.S. Geological Survey crews, for example, were asked to describe the area's topography and geology for a government publication, the Army expeditions were making a general reconnaissance, and the two parties that arrived in 1903 were there to climb Mount McKinley, nothing more. Despite the pragmatism of these men, however, the reports that they wrote effusively described two remarkable qualities about the area: its scenery and its wildlife. The magnificence of the overall scenery by close-up observers, coupled with praise of the mountain massif, was first recorded by Muldrow, Eldridge, and Herron in the late 1890s, and virtually everyone who came thereafter was similarly impressed.

Beginning in 1902, the area's remarkable wildlife—diverse and plentiful—was lauded as well. Alfred Brooks, for example, noted that “On the north slopes of the mountains, moose, caribou, and mountain sheep, or big horns, were unusually plentiful . . . the party was never without fresh meat.” Wickersham, in 1903, wrote that “the beautiful rolling grass-lands and moss covered hills make it a favorite feeding ground for caribou, and the sharp crags to the east are the home of Tebay, the white sheep. . . . We kill ptarmigan on the hills and ducks on the lakes – it is a hunter's paradise.” And Dr. Cook and his party were profoundly impressed; “Here along the northern slope of the McKinley ground,” he wrote, we crossed the best game country in America. Caribou, moose, mountain sheep,

and grizzly bears were constantly in evidence.”¹ Cook's superlative—“the best game country in America”—would be repeated, in later years as a rallying cry. And Wickersham, too, saw something of the superlative as he traveled through the area; between Wonder Lake and the McKinley River, his party was delighted to discover a large spruce forest. Wickersham, obviously impressed, noted that “This forest ought to be withdrawn from disposal and preserved for the use of those who shall come after us to explore the highest and most royal of American mountains.”²

For Wickersham, or any other Alaska official, to suggest a scenic land withdrawal in 1903 was a highly unusual move. This is because conservation, as we know it today, was still in its embryonic stages. The United States, at this time, had established a ragtag series of forest reserves. These designations were only marginally effective, however, in stopping the ongoing desecration of the country's forested lands, and the U.S. Forest Service had not yet been established.³ The first federal bird reservation, on tiny Pelican Island in Florida—which was the initial element in what would later evolve into a nationwide network of national wildlife refuges—had been established only a few months earlier.⁴ And as far as national parks were concerned, the first had been established more than 30 years earlier, but by 1903, only eight had been established – and those few were being nominally administered by the U.S. Army, if at all. The Antiquities Act, and the national monuments established by that act, were still years in the future.⁵

Conservation was even less of a concern in remote Alaska. Virtually the only lands in the District that were reserved for conservation purposes at the time were the Afognak Forest and Fish Culture Reserve, established in 1892; the small Alexander Archipelago Forest Reserve, which was a forerunner of what would become the Tongass National Forest; and Indian River Park, a tiny reservation on the outskirts of Sitka.⁶ Pragmatic Alaskans, driven by the potential riches of the quickly-developing area, were in no mood to tolerate new federal land withdrawals, and the widespread protests that greeted President Roosevelt's closure of Alaska's coal lands, in November 1906, merely confirmed that notion.⁷

In the midst of this antagonistic atmosphere, a visitor from Vermont came to Alaska in search of the gamelands north of the Alaska Range. Charles Sheldon was financially comfortable,

Early visitors to the north side of the Alaska Range were impressed with the area's abundant wildlife, referring to it as “the best game country in America.” DENA 3812, Denali National Park



Charles Sheldon made an expedition to the north slopes of the Mount McKinley region to hunt and study the little-known Dall sheep in the summer of 1906. Denali National Park and Preserve Museum Collection

politically savvy, and moved with ease among members of the Eastern elite. Because of his wealth—gained from the supervision of various railroad construction projects and lucrative shares in a Mexican silver mine—he could well have retired and enjoyed a life of ease and idleness. But Sheldon was a hunter-naturalist, in the tradition of Theodore Roosevelt; he enjoyed “roughing it” and the accomplishments that came through physical hardship. And he also had a strong altruistic streak. Given those passions, he developed a deep interest in the study and preservation of mountain sheep, and upon advice from biologists Edward W. Nelson and C. Hart Merriam, he decided to travel to Alaska to observe the relatively little-known Dall sheep in its natural habitat.⁸

Sheldon, then 38 years old⁹, ventured down the Yukon River in the early summer of 1906. Along the way, in Dawson, he hired Jack Haydon, and after arriving in Fairbanks, he brought on Harry Karstens, another veteran of the Klondike stampede. Sheldon and the two packers approached the Mt. McKinley area much as Wickersham’s party had done three years earlier. To judge by his diary, which was published two years after his death, Sheldon thoroughly enjoyed the trip; he waxed ecstatically when he first saw Mount McKinley (in mid-July) from a hilltop near Wonder Lake, and he remained captivated by the area for the remainder of the summer as he wound through the area observing—and occasionally harvesting—the area’s sheep, caribou, bears, and other megafauna. He stayed as long as he could, knowing that if he delayed any further, he would miss the last Yukon River steamboat of the season. But when he left, he did so with two overriding convictions. First, he knew that the Dall sheep’s life history “could not be learned without a much longer stay among them and [he] determined to return and devote a year to their study. With this in view I planned to revisit the region. . .” He also was struck by both the usefulness and intelligence of one of his packers, Harry Karstens; he noted that the man was “brimful of good nature” and was fully supportive of Sheldon’s work.¹⁰

Just as he had promised, Sheldon returned to Fairbanks the following year for a longer sojourn in the shadow of Mt. McKinley. He and Karstens trekked south and entered the upper gamelands on or about August 1, 1907, and they imme-

diately set to work building a cabin on the right bank of the Toklat River, opposite the mouth of present-day Sheldon Creek and just upriver from its confluence with present-day Cabin Creek. Sheldon’s primary purpose, it will be recalled, was to study the area’s Dall sheep populations and to collect a few specimens of them for study and display Outside. But he did far more. A man of catholic interests, he immersed himself in the studies of other mammal populations as well as on birds, vegetation, and other items of interest.¹¹

And the more he learned, the more he grew to appreciate the area. In the middle of that winter, he first wrote in his journal about an idea that he had first discussed with Karstens back in the summer of 1906. Because of the “beauties of the country and of the variety of the game,” he wrote, the area “would make an ideal park and game preserve.” Tourists, too, would be an important part of the equation, and he easily anticipated the area’s “enjoyment and inspiration [that] visitors will receive.” The idea of a “Denali National Park,” which was broached in the January 12 diary entry, remained a fixture for Sheldon throughout the rest of his stay. He and Karstens, after that date, paid keen attention to the meandering wildlife in order to create park boundaries that might best protect them. And just prior to returning to Fairbanks, Sheldon noted that the sorrow he felt upon leaving the game country was tempered by his commitment to seeing the area become a designated game preserve.¹²

As noted above, the promulgation of a large national park in Alaska, at this early date, would have been a startling departure from the norm. But to Sheldon, such a proposition was not altogether surprising. The Boone and Crockett Club, of which he was a member, had gone on record as being interested in the establishment of game refuges. And as the longtime chair of the club’s Game Conservation Committee, the club’s position “inspired in him the thought of preserving



Charles Sheldon is pictured here at his 1906 camp at the Forks of the Toklat River where he collected specimens of the Dall sheep and other wildlife for the American Museum of Natural History. Karstens Library Collection

This group of Alaskan miners, the "Sourdough Expedition," made the first ascent of Mt. McKinley's north peak in 1910. DENA 4003, Denali National Park and Preserve Museum Collection



this area after personally studying the situation in that land.” Another factor that underscored his interest was a darkening cloud on the horizon: market hunters. During his time in the game-lands, he had met several of these men at camps in the Savage, Teklanika, Toklat and Sanctuary river valleys. These camps helped supply meat to Fairbanks and adjacent mining camps. But their work worried him, and he was particularly appalled that half or more of the meat that they harvested was fed to their dogs before it was delivered to its destination.¹³

Shortly after he returned to New York, in January 1909, Sheldon pitched the idea of a game preserve in a speech at the Boone and Crockett club’s annual dinner. Club members responded with unmitigated enthusiasm. Politically, however, members recognized that Congress had a waning interest in conservation—Roosevelt was about to be succeeded by William Howard Taft—and Sheldon recognized that the idea would have to wait. For the next several years, the park idea remained in an embryonic stage, but as time went on, Sheldon and other like-minded individuals continued to refine the idea that had first erupted during Sheldon and Karstens’ winter sojourn. In the meantime, Sheldon gained a key Alaskan ally. James Wickersham, the former district judge in Fairbanks, became Alaska’s non-voting delegate to Congress in 1909. Wickersham, by good fortune, was a friend of Sheldon’s. He had been an occasional guest at Boone and Crockett Club dinners, and because of his 1903 adventure on Mount McKinley and in the Kantishna area, he was familiar with the country and he admired both its scenery and its remarkable animal life.¹⁴

Wickersham, as it turned out, was the first of several parties to attempt a Mount McKinley ascent. Just two months later, Dr. Frederick Cook and Robert Dunn made it as far the 11,000-foot level on Peters Glacier before turning back. Cook, obviously smitten by the mountain’s lure, returned in 1906 with Belmore Browne, Herschel Parker and Robert Barrill; he loudly claimed to have reached the top, but many were skeptical, and in 1910 Browne and Parker made another trek into the area and refuted much of what Cook had proclaimed as gospel. Cook’s claims, and the counter-claims of many others, made headlines for months afterwards, among both explorer’s groups and the general public.¹⁵

A 1910 trek up the slopes of Mount McKinley, by the so-called “sourdough expedition,” resulted in four Fairbanks men hauling a 14-foot-long spruce flagpole to the top of the mountain’s North Peak (19,470 feet). But McKinley’s South Peak—two miles to the southeast and 850 feet higher in elevation—remained elusive. So two years later, Browne and Parker returned to the mountain yet again, this time accompanied by Merle La Voy. Following another route up McKinley’s northern flanks, they muscled their way up past the 19,000-foot level. Once there, however, a clear day turned into a snow-laden gale, and less than 200 yards from the summit, they were forced to retreat down the ridge and back to a base camp on upper Cache Creek. While there, on July 6, they felt a major earthquake, most likely from the Denali Fault; the quake had a significant impact on their camp, and it launched major avalanches on the surrounding mountains. Low on food, the

Belmore Browne's 1912 expedition traveled by dog team north to the Alaska Range, across it, and to the beginning of their climbing route on the north side of Mt. McKinley. Farquhar Collection, 81-208-17, University of Alaska Fairbanks Archives



expedition returned to Fairbanks.¹⁶

A year later, a new expedition—headed by Archdeacon Hudson Stuck, accompanied by Harry Karstens, Walter Harper, and Robert Tatum—attacked the mountain once again. Once on the mountain, the party learned that the previous summer's earthquake had strewn ice and boulders asunder and made the ascent, of present-day Karstens Ridge, far more difficult. Despite those impediments, the four men climbed up to the 17,500-foot level and camped. Then, at 4 a.m. on June 7, they set off toward the summit. Hiking in full sun, a keen wind, and a temperature of -4° F, the group—first Harper, then the others—reached the top. Ninety minutes later, they headed back down, and less than two weeks later, all four safely reached the Tanana River. The party's conquest of Mt. McKinley, North America's tallest peak, captured the imagination of thousands. Among Alaskans, the men's efforts were duly respected, but each soon returned to their previous lives with nary a look back.¹⁷

Congress Opts for a Railroad

In 1912, toward the end of Taft's term, Congress showed more interest in Alaska than it had since the Klondike days of the late 1890s. In August of that year, it passed Alaska's second Organic Act. This act changed Alaska from a district to a full-fledged territory, and it established a territorial legislature. More important from Sheldon's point of view, however, the act established an Alaska Railroad Commission, which was asked to report on the most viable route for a government railroad between Alaska's southern coast and the interior. In short order, the commission recommended several routes, including one that followed the Copper River and Northwestern

Railway (CR&NW) and the Valdez-Fairbanks wagon road,¹⁸ and another that followed the old Alaska Central line from Seward to Turnagain Arm, continued north to the Matanuska (Chickaloon) coal fields, then northwest into the Kuskokwim drainage and the Iditarod River.

Congress passed the Alaska Railroad Act on March 12, 1914, which provided funding to build the rail line. The legislation, however, did not bind the government to the previously-completed survey recommendations, and at one time, routes with five different warm-water termini were being considered. The three members of the newly-established Alaska Engineering Commission soon began surveying these routes, and in time, just two routes were under serious consideration: the CR&NW-based route noted above, and a new, Seward-based route that wound north up the Susitna River valley to Broad Pass, from where it descended to the Tanana River via the Nenana River and continued on to Fairbanks. Given the certainty that one of these two routes would be constructed, opportunists flocked to the mouth of Ship Creek (present-day Anchorage) and to Seward in hopes that President Woodrow Wilson would choose the Seward-based route. Those opportunists, evidently thinking that the government was unlikely to purchase the CR&NW from the powerful (and widely despised) Guggenheim-Morgan Syndicate, proved visionary; on April 10, 1915, Wilson signed an executive order choosing a route that would run from Seward to Fairbanks.¹⁹ Alaskans in general, and particularly the residents of towns along the proposed railroad route, were overjoyed to know that a major railroad was on the verge of construction in their territory. Charles Sheldon, however, had decidedly mixed

feelings about Wilson's action. On the one hand, he knew that the new railroad—which would be built along the Nenana River—would make it far easier for tourists and nature-lovers of all stripes to visit the gamelands he knew so well. But he was also concerned because that same railroad would ease access for market hunters whom, he feared, might easily wipe out the area's sheep, caribou, and other large game. These hunters, he knew all too well, would now have the responsibility to feed thousands of railroad construction workers in addition to Fairbanks and other



Based at cabins such as this one, market hunters harvested sheep, caribou and moose to sell in the mining camps and railroad construction camps. Charles Porter Collection, 79G-11F-44, National Archives

Interior residents.²⁰ Sadly, Sheldon's concern had considerable justification; between 1913 and 1916, market hunters harvested between 1,500 and 2,000 Dall sheep each winter from the Toklat and Teklanika river basins alone.²¹

Given that challenge, Sheldon and his colleagues knew that they had to act quickly. In order to protect the cherished wildlife, they needed to convince Congress to pass a park bill, and in addition they needed to convince Congress to expend funds on park enforcement staff. And all of this needed to be done before railroad construction neared the boundaries of the newly-established park. Sheldon's first response to the impending challenge was to secure passage, by the Boone and Crockett Club, of a resolution that endorsed the idea of a Mount McKinley National Park.²² This was accomplished on September 21, 1915. Sheldon and Madison Grant—the latter a historian and fellow Club member—then organized as an ad hoc lobbying committee.

At the time that the Club's lobbying campaign began, Alaskans were just as dead-set against federal regulations and reservations as they had ever been. They resented the 1908 Game Law, which had been passed over their objections. They resented President Taft's 1910 withdrawal of Alaska's oil-bearing tracts. And because the onset of World War I (in Europe) diverted some ships away from the Alaskan trade, they were particularly resentful of any actions that might prevent them from gaining access to locally available meat supplies. Sheldon, Grant, and other conservationists were firm in their desire to have a park established that would allow no commercial hunting. They knew, however, that many Alaskans might fight such a bill; and more impor-

tant, they knew that any bill passing Congress would need to be completely acceptable to the state's non-voting delegate, James Wickersham. Sheldon therefore began his campaign by writing his old friend and asking for his thoughts on the matter.²³ Wickersham soon responded. Sheldon, as a result of that interaction, noted that any park in this area "should be created under provisions which will protect local interests in mining." More specifically, any park bill would need to contain provisions protecting both existing and future mining claims.²⁴

In the next few months, Sheldon contacted others for support, both inside and outside of government. That December, the Boone and Crockett Club Preservation Committee chief wrote to Stephen T. Mather, who at that time was Interior Secretary Franklin Lane's assistant in charge of the national parks. (Congress did not establish the National Park Service until August 1916, after which Mather became the new agency's director.)

Sheldon told Mather that, with the possible exception of the Grand Canyon, nothing could compare to that "region of the Alaska Range for the grandeur of the scenery and the topographical interest. . .," and because of the area's "vast reservoir of game," he had long "believed that someday this region must be made a national park." In his letter, Sheldon was careful to note political realities regarding existing and future mining activity. Mather, at first, was less than enthusiastic. His primary focus was on additions to Yosemite, Sequoia, and Rocky Mountain national parks, along with establishing Grand Canyon; as a result, he would "temporarily forget" pushing for any other new park areas. But perhaps in response to the objections of Horace Albright, Mather's assistant, Mather soon became fully supportive of Sheldon's plan; in fact, he went so far as to speak with Boone and Crockett members on that subject at the club's January 6, 1916 meeting.²⁵

Over the next few months, word spread about the Boone and Crockett proposal, and leaders both inside and outside Alaska voiced their support. On a national level, Sheldon soon learned that Belmore Browne of the Camp Fire Club of America had been formulating his own proposal for preserving the Denali landscape. (Browne, like Sheldon, was thoroughly familiar with the beauties of the Alaska Range; he was a veteran of three previous attempts to climb Mount McKinley, in 1906, 1910, and 1912.²⁶) Browne quickly joined Sheldon's effort, and soon afterward the American Game Protective and Propagation Association, headed by John B. Burnham,

was included as well. Within Alaska, delegate Wickersham voiced his strong support for a park bill, recognizing that it would stimulate tourism to Alaska. Thomas B. Riggs, head of the Alaska Engineering Commission—which was then constructing the railroad between Seward and Fairbanks—also saw the bill’s benefits, noting that a national park would boost tourist travel along the line.²⁷

Because Sheldon, Riggs, and Browne all knew the country well, and because all three men supported a park bill, they were the primary determinants of the park’s boundaries. Sheldon, in mid-January 1916, sent Riggs a description of the park’s boundaries as he envisioned them. That boundary included much of the magnificent gamelands located north of the Alaska Range; it also included the spine of the range itself, along with additional thousands of acres south of the Alaska Range. (See Map 2.) But it did not include the Kantishna area; in fact, it completely avoided the Kantishna Hills because of the preponderance of mineral claims and the potential for continued mining-related activity. Two weeks later, Thomas Riggs replied to Sheldon. He fully agreed with the general concept that Sheldon had presented, but it differed in several particulars. He told Sheldon that he was offering a new boundary

which, I think, suits our conditions a little better than yours. I have so drawn the boundary as to be largely controlled by natural features; I have also eliminated about 700 square miles to the south of Mt. McKinley which would be of no use to anybody but which, when added to a withdrawal, makes the size of the park appear very formidable.

Browne then weighed in with a suggestion to include additional acreage in a broad band south of Wonder Lake. Then, at some point between January and April 1916, someone—perhaps Mather or Albright, who were the only two Interior Department employees advocating for what would become the National Park Service—responded by agreeing to Riggs’s general notions but by simplifying his boundary recommendations. Those revised boundaries were never again modified during the Congressional debate over the park bill.²⁸

A Park Bill Becomes Law

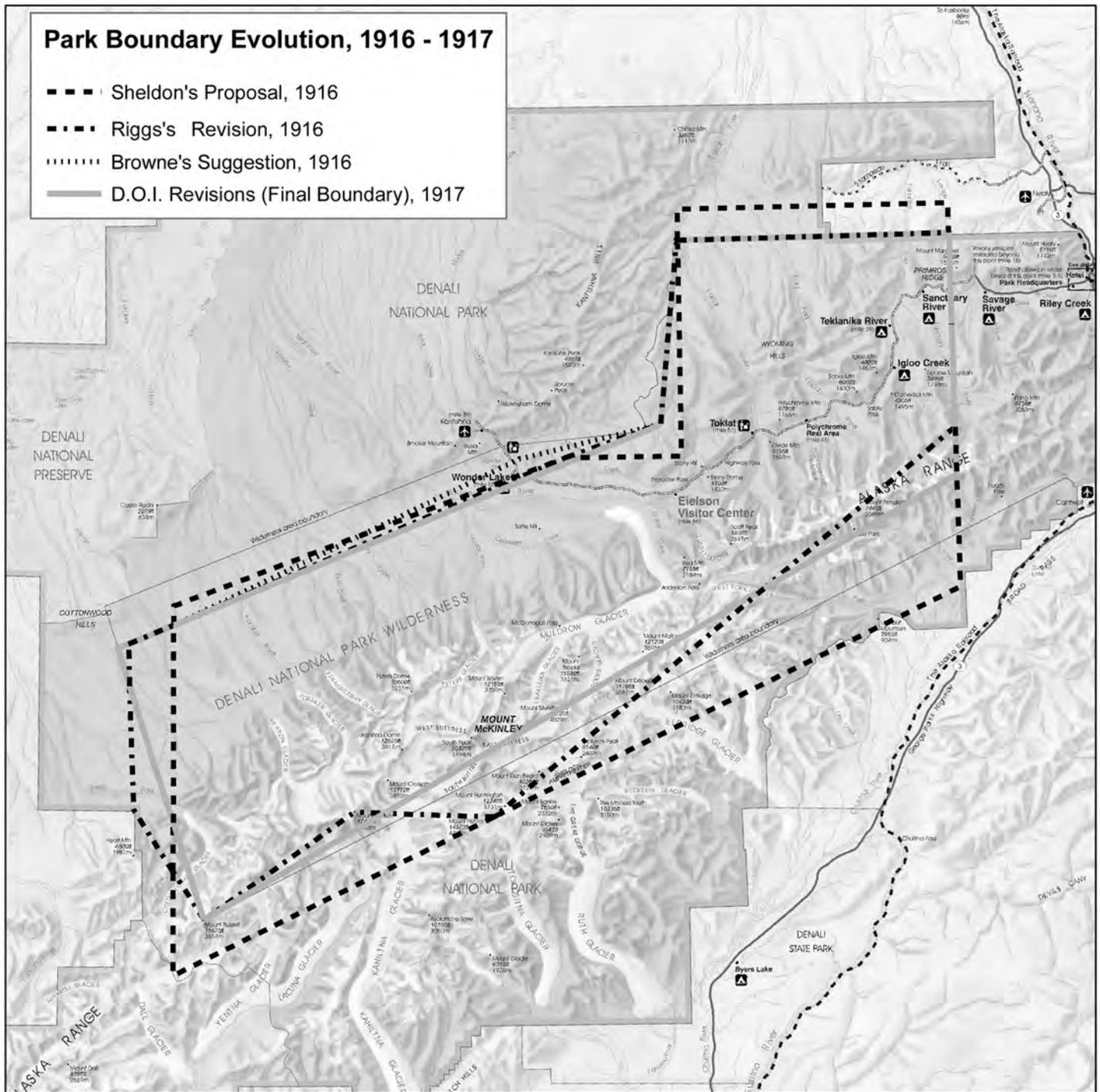
Attention next moved to Congress. Wickersham, Browne, and Sheldon collaborated on the drafting of a park bill (H.R. 14775), which Wicker-

sham submitted to the House of Representatives on April 18, 1916. An identical bill, S. 5716, was introduced by Senator Key Pittman of Nevada four days later. The two bills, as suggested by Sheldon’s earlier communications with Wickersham, broke rank with previous park bills in that they allowed hunting, but only for subsistence purposes. The bills specifically stated that

Prospectors and miners engaged in prospecting or mining in said park may take and kill therein so much game or birds as may be needed for their actual necessities when short of food; but in no case shall animals or birds be killed in said park for sale or removal therefrom, or wantonly.²⁹

Movement on the park bill first took place in the Senate. The Committee on Territories recommended passage of the bill on May 15, and a report to accompany the bill appeared the same day. No changes were recommended by the committee. The Senate Committee Report gave three reasons for the park: “first, the stimulating of travel by tourists and sight-seers to Alaska; second, the preservation of the natural scenery, the facilitating of travel to the park, and the accommodation of tourists; third, the protection of game.” Backers stated that the bill was “heartily supported by the residents of Alaska and by various hunting, camping, and outing clubs.” The report noted that “the game in this vicinity is more abundant than anywhere in the United States,” but it also stated that “prospectors and miners engaged . . . in the park may take and kill game therein for their actual necessities when short of food.” Animals or birds thus killed, however, could not be sold or wasted.³⁰ The bill then moved on to the full Senate for consideration.

The Senate debated S. 5716 on September 8, where it was shepherded through by Sen. Key Pittman, a Nevada Democrat who headed the Committee on Territories. Pittman, back in 1897, had stamped north as part of the Klondike gold rush, and he had remained in Alaska, as a miner and attorney, until 1902; he thus knew northern conditions.³¹ He was able to steer Wickersham’s bill through with just one amendment. Reed Smoot, a Utah Republican, objected to a provision stating that the violation of any rule or regulation promulgated by the Interior Secretary might be charged with a misdemeanor. Pittman, in response, said that this “is largely the same rule that obtains with regard to other national parks,” and he further stated that he had lived in Alaska “too long to think that [harsh punishment for the violation of such rules] would be possible.” The Senate, however, agreed to Smoot’s amend-



Map 2. Park Boundary Evolution, 1916-1917

ment.³²

Advocates of a park bill, both in the House and Senate, made it plain that if the area's game were to be preserved, quick passage of a park bill was necessary. Their efforts were temporarily stymied, however, by an informal rule of the House Committee on Public Lands stating that it could consider just two park bills in a calendar year. The Committee, for whatever reason, bypassed consideration of a Mount McKinley bill in 1916 in favor of Hawaii and Lassen Volcanic national parks. Therefore, the committee did not debate the bill—still known as S. 5716—until January 10 of the following year. Committee passage

was swift, and it was forwarded on to the full House. The committee urged that the full House act swiftly on the bill; as its report noted, “the new railroad now under consideration will pass within a few miles of this section, and unless this park is created and this protection furnished it will mean that in a very short time the greatest game supply we have will be exterminated.”³³ Also urging quick action on the bill was geologist Stephen Capps, who published a major article in *National Geographic Magazine* about Mount McKinley’s potentially endangered game populations. A group of enthusiastic Congressmen, who had recently returned from the Fourth National Park Conference in Washington, D.C., also

Dall sheep in Mt. McKinley National Park. DENA 3889, Denali National Park and Preserve Museum Collection



liberal appropriation.” The delegate, obviously skeptical, stated that “such a limitation in this bill is a mistake” because it would “leave open to spoliation the herds of wild game which are now within its boundaries.” But he later took a more conciliatory tone, noting that the sum “may be sufficient. . . . The park itself is very large, and it is approached by game upon all sides, so that considerable money will have to be spent in protecting the game if you want it protected.”³⁶

A second amendment, offered by Rep. William Stafford (R-Wisconsin) suggested another austerity measure: that any funds “derived from leases or other privileges” should be “turned into the Treasury as miscellaneous receipts” rather than “utilized for the continuous use of the park.” Stafford’s amendment, which involved the removal of a single sentence from Section 7 of the Senate bill, generated little debate and was agreed to by voice vote. This amendment, as the one above, appears to have passed in light of the “present condition of the Federal treasury,” and the inclusion of both amendments may well have been underscored by the growing war clouds on the horizon and the fiscal implications of the U.S. getting involved in a foreign war.³⁷

A third amendment, potentially explosive, dealt with the issue of hunting by prospectors and miners. As noted above, both the House and Senate bills had consistently included a provision allowing hunting by “prospectors and miners engaged in prospecting or mining in said park.” What provoked discussion, however, was whether the hunting privilege “should be under such regulations as the Secretary of the Interior may prescribe.” Rep. Stafford advocated that such language be included in the bill, arguing that the “occasion may arise when the Secretary of the Interior may think it necessary to proscribe the shooting of game ad libitum by prospectors there.” By so doing, he was following the lead of many leading conservationists, who hoped that this provision might limit or even eliminate hunting in the park. Another representative, however, had sought the views of Interior Secretary Lane, who felt that “under the provisions of this act

that the provision was sufficiently safeguarded [without such language, and the Secretary] would have sufficient jurisdiction to take care of game in the Territory.” Delegate Wickersham, asked to weigh in on the debate, stated that “there were good reasons why [the provision] should not be put in,” and he further noted, to the best of his knowledge, that “there is a general park law which gives [the Secretary] that right without putting it in here.” Implied in Wickersham’s “good reasons” is that the battle over whether hunting should be allowed in the park had first been fought a year or more earlier. Conservationists, while not happy with the outcome, recognized that establishing a large park with a subsistence hunting provision was far better than no park at all. The outcome of Rep. Stafford’s effort was thus a foregone conclusion, and by voice vote, the provision was not included in the park bill.³⁸

A final provision dealt with mining. Because prospecting had been active in the area for more than a decade, and because the small amount of prospecting within the proposed park’s boundaries was not perceived to be detrimental to the park’s primary purposes, both the House and the Senate bills proposed “that the mineral-land laws of the United States are hereby extended to the lands included within the park.” But Rep. Franklin W. Mondell (R-Wyoming) worried that “the mineral laws of the United States, some of them, do not apply to any part of Alaska,” so he recommended that the original sentence be replaced by one more appropriate: “Nothing in this act shall in any way modify or affect the mineral laws now applicable to the lands in said park.” Rep. McClintic, the floor leader, was “very glad to accept” Mondell’s substitution, and the House agreed to the amendment by voice vote.³⁹

The House then passed the entire bill by voice vote and sent it back to the Senate. But the House bill now differed from the Senate-passed bill in several aspects. So to reconcile those differences and to ensure a quick passage of the bill, Key Pittman, on February 20, stood up on the Senate floor and asked the Senate to concur in the amendments that the House had agreed to two days earlier. The Senate agreed to these changes by voice vote, and the bill was now ready to be signed by President Wilson.⁴⁰ Charles Sheldon, who had been closely following the bill’s progress for more than a year (in fact, he had moved from his Vermont home to Washington in order to help move the bill through Congress), was given the honor of delivering the bill to the president. Wilson, at the moment, had other matters to consider; he had just two weeks left before being sworn in for a second term, the end of the 64th Congress brought a host of other

pleaded for quick passage.³⁴

On February 19, S. 5716 was brought before the House, where it was the subject of detailed debate. Rep. James V. McClintic (D-Oklahoma) was asked to oversee debate related to the bill, and at the suggestion of Rep. Irvine Lenroot (R-Wisconsin), McClintic recommended that no more than \$10,000 annually should be allotted “for the maintenance of said park . . . unless the sum shall be first expressly authorized by law.”³⁵ McClintic stated that “in offering this amendment we are only following a precedent that has been established in the creation of all the late parks.” (Indeed, bills establishing each of the three previous national parks, beginning with Rocky Mountain in 1915, had included the \$10,000 annual budgetary limitation.) Rep. James R. Mann (R-Illinois) denounced the budget cap, and stated “I doubt very much whether in the course of a year or two \$10,000 will be enough.” Rep. Lenroot, however, tried to ameliorate the differences between the two sides. He stated that

I am in favor of the creation at this time of national parks containing great scenic beauty or natural curiosities. [However,] I am opposed to the expenditure of any large sums of money on new national parks in the present condition of the Federal Treasury. . . . In the very nature of things the amount that Congress will annually appropriate for the development of parks is limited. If you strike out all limitation . . . it will amount to nothing so far as actual utility is concerned, and that money should be confined to four or five national parks until they are developed, and begin to gain some revenue. . . . [A park bill] ought to be adopted, and so far as Alaska is concerned, by the time the Alaskan Railway is completed, by the time that tourist travel shall go there in any large numbers, that will be time enough for Congress to remove the limitation that ought to be adopted by this amendment.

Shortly after Rep. Lenroot’s statement, James Wickersham was asked if “\$10,000 a year for the protection of game in one single park is a fairly



Snowshoe hare in winter. Charles Ott Photo, DENA 3467, Denali National Park and Preserve Museum Collection

bills to his desk, and the sinking of Allied ships by German submarines was forcing the U.S. ever closer to declaring war on the Central Powers. But Sheldon, for his part, visited the White House each day to see if Wilson was ready to sign the McKinley park bill. On February 26, perhaps frustrated that the bill had not yet been signed, Sheldon took the day off. But in an ironic footnote, Wilson chose that day to sign the park bill.⁴¹ The following day, Horace Albright congratulated Sheldon for his part in the creation of a great national park. Sheldon, unaware of Wilson’s action, was dumbstruck. As Albright recounted it many years later, “He kicked himself the rest of his life that that was the one day he didn’t go up there.”⁴²

What emerged from the legislative battle was a park that largely reflected the vision that Charles Sheldon and Harry Karstens had first developed almost a decade earlier. The new national park, the first to be established after Congress had created the National Park Service, encompassed an area of almost 1.6 million acres (see Appendix A);⁴³ it stretched more than 100 miles from northeast to southwest, and it was between 20 and 35 miles wide. Within those protected acres was North America’s highest peak, a remarkable array of plant and animal habitat, and perhaps most important, it gave legal protection to vast expanses of habitat where various large mammals thrived. Given those remarkable resources, Congress stated that its primary intent in establishing the park was “the freest use of the said park for recreation purposes by the public and for the preservation of animals, birds, and fish and for the preservation of the natural curiosities and scenic beauties thereof.” It further stated that “said park shall be, and is hereby established as a game refuge” although, as noted above, an exception was provided in order to allow subsistence

24 John M. Kauffmann, *Mount McKinley National Park, Alaska; A History of its Establishment and Revision of its Boundaries* (Washington, D.C., NPS, July 1954), 7-8. The verbiage Sheldon used in his December letter to Mather indicates that Wickersham had already weighed in on the subject.

25 Brown, *A History*, 89, 91; Horace Albright and Marian Albright Schenck, *Creating the National Park Service; the Missing Years* (Norman, Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 110.

26 Brown, *A History*, 38-41, 44-45.

27 Brown, *A History*, 91.

28 Kauffmann, *Mount McKinley National Park*, 6, 9-10, Map 1. Sheldon had no qualms with Riggs' proposed removal of the countryside south of the high peaks. As he stated, "I do not feel that the south lines are so important," and his colleague Belmore Browne noted that the area was "not a game country" and was "a region which protects itself."

29 64th Congress, 1st Session; H.R. 14775 (April 18, 1916) and S. 5716 (April 22, 1916).

30 64th Congress, 1st Session, *Senate Report No. 440*, May 15, 1916.

31 Despite that familiarity, Pittman was apparently uninformed about where the proposed boundaries lay; he stated that the park was a "proposed 25-mile square" and that the north side of Mount McKinley had "a slope to the base which just about reaches to the [park's] border line." *Congressional Record* 64 (September 8, 1916), 14133.

32 *Congressional Record* 64 (September 8, 1916), 14133-34.

hunting by prospectors and miners.⁴⁴

Thanks to the persuasiveness of Charles Sheldon and other visionaries,⁴⁵ Congress and the President had established a large park that provided federal protection to the magnificent game herds located north of the Alaska Range. It was now up to the newly-minted National Park Service, along with such partners whom they could enlist in its behalf, to carry out the various goals that Congress had set forth.

Notes - Chapter 2

1 Evans, Gail E. H., *From Myth to Reality: Travel Experiences and Landscape Perceptions in the Shadow of Mount McKinley, Alaska, 1876-1938*, unpublished N.A. Thesis, U.C. Santa Barbara, February 1987, 72-79.

2 *Ibid.*, 76-77.

3 Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, revised edition (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1967), 133-38.

4 James B. Trefethen, *An American Crusade for Wildlife* (Alexandria, Va., Boone and Crockett Club, 1975), 122.

5 Richard West Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks; A History* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1997), 11-14, 25-26.

6 Lawrence W. Rakestraw, *A History of the United States Forest Service in Alaska* (Anchorage, Alaska Historical Commission, 1981), 8-10, 16-21; Joan M. Antonson and William S. Hanable, *Administrative History of Sitka National Historical Park* (Anchorage, NPS, December 1987), 5-6.

7 Clarence Hulley, *Alaska: Past and Present*, third edition (Portland, Binford and Mort, 1970), 303; Walter R. Borneman, *Alaska, Saga of a Bold Land* (New York, HarperCollins, 2003), 240.

8 William E. Brown, *A History of the Denali-Mount McKinley Region*, 75; Evans, *From Myth to Reality*, 149-50; Timothy Rawson, *Changing Tracks; Predators and Politics in Mt. McKinley National Park* (Fairbanks, University of Alaska Press, 2001), 21.

9 Sheldon was born on October 17, 1867. See "Charles Sheldon," *Who Was Who in America; Vol. 1, 1897-1942* (Chicago, A. N. Marquis, 1943), 1113.

10 Brown, *A History*, 77-83; Evans, *From Myth to Reality*, 150-51; Sheldon, *The Wilderness of Denali* (New York, Charles Scribner's, 1930), 3. The quotes are from Sheldon, pp. 65 and 103.

11 Rawson, *Changing Tracks*, 22-23.

12 Sheldon, *Wilderness of Denali*, 261, 272, 385; Brown, *A History*, 85.

13 Brown, *A History*, 84-85; Tom Walker, "The Battle for McKinley Park," *Anchorage Daily News*, December 15, 1991, C-6; Sheldon, *Wilderness of Denali*, xvi, 288, 293.

14 Brown, *A History*, 85; Rawson, *Changing Tracks*, 24.

15 Brown, *A History*, 35-43.

16 *Ibid.*, 43-48; Belmore Browne, "Hitting the Home Trail from Mount McKinley," *Outing* 62 (July 1913), 387-404; Jane Bryant emails, November 23 and December 5, 2005.

17 Brown, *A History*, 48-54.

18 This route was known as the Valdez Trail until 1919, when it was known as the Valdez-Fairbanks Road, and by 1923 it was known as the Richardson Road. Frank Norris, *Gawking at the Midnight Sun; The Tourist in Early Alaska*, Alaska Historical Commission Studies in History No. 170 (Anchorage, the Commission, June 1985), 42; Alaska Road Commission, *Annual Report for 1919* (Part I, p. 2092) and 1923 (Part I, p. 2095).

19 Lone Janson, *The Copper Strike* (Anchorage, Alaska Northwest, 1975), 139-41, 144; Mary Barry, *Seward, Alaska; a History of the Gateway City; Volume II, the Alaska Railroad Construction Years, 1914-1923* (Anchorage, the author, 1993), 5-7, 13-15.

20 Rawson, *Changing Tracks*, 26; Brown, *A History*, 86.

21 Tom Walker, "The Battle for McKinley Park," C-6; Stephen R. Capps, "A Game Country Without Rival in America; the Proposed Mount McKinley National Park," *National Geographic Magazine* 31 (January 1917), 81.

22 Sheldon, as noted above, deferred to Native usage and consistently preferred "Denali," and Archdeacon Hudson Stuck, an Episcopal prelate who organized the first successful summit climb in 1913, was also an advocate of this term. Most others, however, recognized that "Mount McKinley" was the official name of the mountain; thus they were unwilling to consider another name for the proposed national park.

23 Brown, *A History*, 86. Sheldon sent his letter to Wickersham in October 1915.

33 64th Congress, 2nd Session, *House Report No. 1273*, January 10, 1917; Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks*, 12.

34 Capps, "A Game Country Without Rival in America," 69-84; Brown, *A History*, 92; Janet McDonnell (NPS), email to the author, June 7, 2005.

35 Horace Albright, in his *Creating the National Park Service; the Missing Years*, p. 126, noted that Lenroot was "deeply opposed to more bureaucracy."

36 *Congressional Record* 64 (February 19, 1917), 3628-30.

37 *Ibid.*, 3628, 3630.

38 *Ibid.*, 3628; Brown, *A History*, 93.

39 *Congressional Record* 64 (February 19, 1917), 3628, 3630.

40 *Ibid.* (February 20, 1917), 3662-63.

41 *Ibid.* (February 26, 1917), 4271.

42 Horace Albright interview (December 1986) in *Boone and Crockett News* 4 (Spring 1987), 4, as noted in Brown, *A History*, 92.

43 Just a few days after the park bill became law, Interior Secretary Lane noted that the park "embraces an area of approximately 2,200 square miles or 1,408,000 acres." (64th Congress, 2nd Session, *Senate Document No. 742*, p. 2, March 2, 1917). These figures, which were gross estimates based on the lack of survey work that had been conducted in the area at that time, was widely quoted as accurate for years afterward. By the 1930s, cartographers had acquired the ability to make a far more accurate estimate. Despite that scientific progress, however, the NPS—as late as the 1970s—continued to use the old figures as the basis for the park's area. In recent years, cartographers recalculated that the area within the original park boundaries was 1,591,897 acres – more than 183,000 acres larger than Lane had stated. DENA Ownership Map, Segment 01, AKRO-L Working Files.

44 *United States Statutes at Large* 39 (February 26, 1917), p. 938.

⁴⁵ NPS founder Horace Albright, many years later, stated that "To Congress, the whole Territory of Alaska was some far-off place like Mars. It was really only the forceful work of the Boone and Crockett Club members (one of whom was Theodore Roosevelt) that brought McKinley enough recognition to make it a park. McKinley was ... a long, hard pull." Albright and Schenck, *Creating the National Park Service: the Missing Years*, 300-01.

