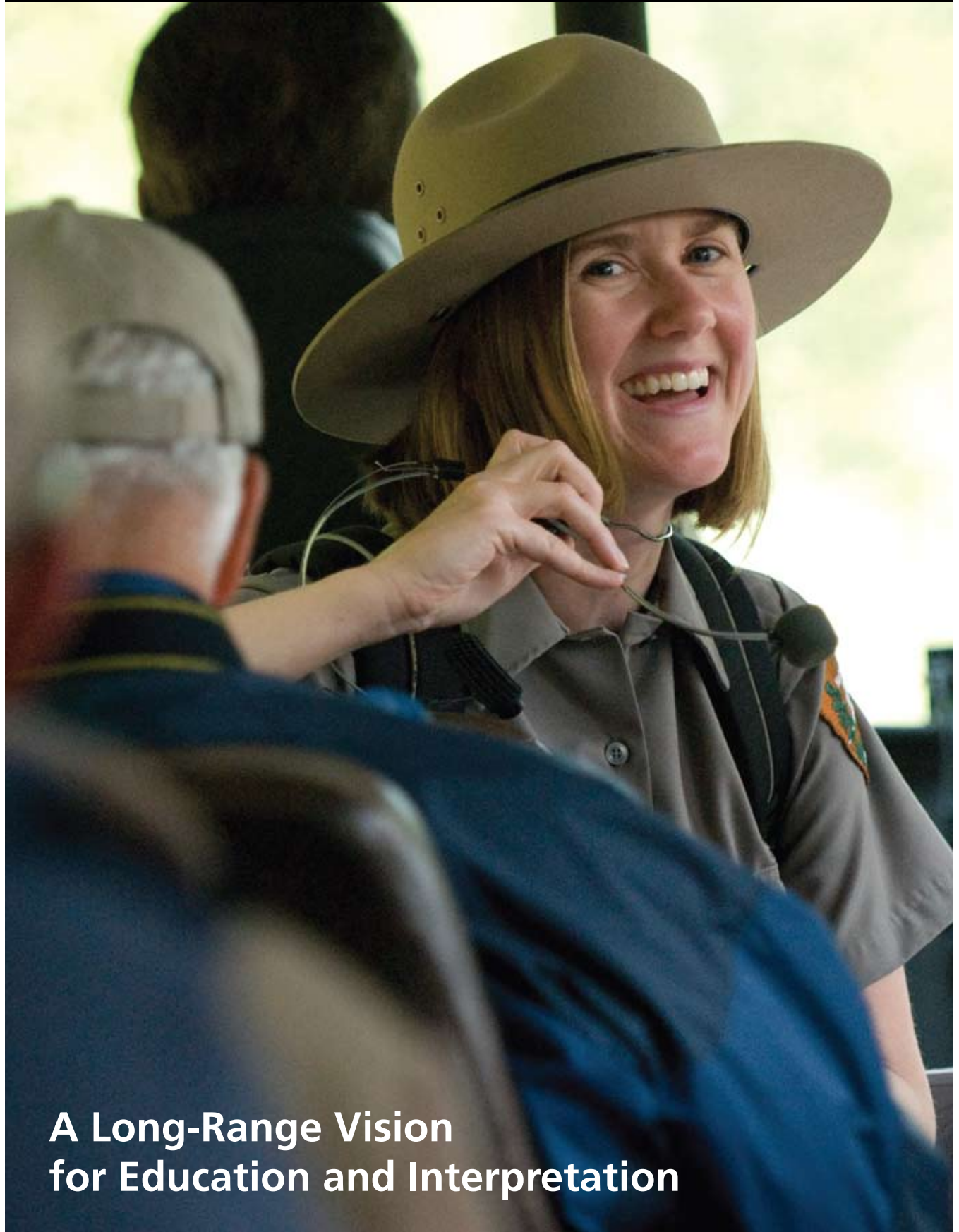


# Denali National Park and Preserve Education Plan

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Denali National Park and Preserve  
Alaska



## A Long-Range Vision for Education and Interpretation



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## Superintendent's Forword

National parks are special places created by Congress because they represent some unique aspect of this nation and, in turn, what it is to be American. More often than not, the meanings our parks embody have universal qualities that are understood and embraced by people around the globe. Since 1916, the National Park Service has been entrusted to care for these places so future generations can come to know their tangible resources, as well as their significance and meanings. In a world of growing complexity, however, it is obvious that the Service alone cannot perform this awesome task. Essential to the future of our parks are learning and education.

We need to learn as much as possible about our park resources, so park managers have the tools to make informed decisions as how best to manage these resources for the future. We need to share what we learn about our parks with the public because an educated public that understands our national parks and their importance will be more inspired to take steps to protect them. We must effectively pass on what we learn to future generations, as parks will only be protected if their resources and values continue to be appreciated and relevant.

It is toward this end that research learning centers rise to a position of great importance as they are places that facilitate science and education efforts for parks. The Murie Science and Learning Center represents eight of Alaska's national parks, including Denali, encompassing almost 50% of the lands within the National Park System. Science opportunities made possible through the center inform park managers and park educators alike. Park managers are equipped to make appropriate management decisions informed by sound science. Park researchers, interpreters, and education specialists use an ever-expanding media palette to share current trends and new findings about park resources with myriad audiences. Through these opportunities audience members gain deeper understanding of our national parks, and perhaps discover the meanings and relevance of parks to their own lives.

It has been said: Through interpretation comes understanding; through understanding comes appreciation; through appreciation comes stewardship. This Denali Education Plan will provide the long-term vision of how best to develop Denali's education efforts in the coming years to help ensure the continued protection for these very special places.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul R. Anderson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Paul R. Anderson  
Superintendent  
Denali National Park and Preserve







# Introduction



NPS photo by Kent Miller

*“National Parks serve as the material and the means to teach, inform, inspire and motivate the people that we and our partners serve.”* (FROM INSPIRING PLACES INSPIRING PEOPLE, AN

EDUCATION STRATEGY FOR THE ALASKA AND PACIFIC WEST REGIONS OF THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, 2000-2004)

The Denali Education Plan (Plan) is a broad-scoped document designed to describe a 20-year vision for the development of an exemplary education program at Denali National Park and Preserve. The overall purpose of the Plan is to communicate the park’s long-term vision, key interpretive themes, educational priorities and strategies to three primary audiences, each of which has a vital role in the future of education at Denali. These audiences are the Denali National Park and Preserve staff; Alaska regional NPS staff; and a full array of the park’s current and potential educational partners, including Alaska State Parks and communities beyond park boundaries. Here, the term education includes both traditional interpretive services and non-traditional curriculum-based approaches. The Plan also covers community outreach, training, evaluation, and the critical role of relation-

ship building with partners offering a growing suite of programs to audiences within and beyond park boundaries.

In a changing world it is critical that the Denali education program be guided by a long-term vision, yet adaptable to changing visitor interests and needs, shifting demographic and tourism trends, shifting global environmental conditions, and fluctuations in the park’s funding base. The Plan is meant to serve as a flexible tool that provides both a clear compass bearing forward and a strong bridge to past approaches, original park purposes, mission, and enabling statutes.

Most importantly, the Plan presents a vision for the future of education at Denali; identifies current obstacles to achieving the vision; and names key approaches to addressing those obstacles. Finally, the Plan is outcome-oriented: It lays a foundation for continuous improvement and innovation through program evaluation and measuring long-term program outcomes.

Functionally, the Plan is meant to help direct and focus all efforts related to interpretive and educational services at the park in the following ways:

- Coordinate and integrate future educational program development within the framework of a vision and strategies shared by all park staff, partners, and local communities and Denali State Park.
- Enable park management to evaluate the performance of the park's Center for Resources Science and Learning (CRSL) out of which are derived education initiatives and future partnerships.
- Fully realize the potential of the Murie Science and Learning Center (MSLC).
- Strengthen and clarify roles and relationships of the park's educational partners.
- Serve as a foundation for an expanding base of leveraged outside resources.



### Role of Education in National Parks

In late 2006, ten years out from its centennial, the National Park Service began to lay the groundwork for an Interpretation and Education Renaissance. The action plan stated:

*Intangible meanings are the engines that originally created national parks and continue to foster their stewardship. To preserve only the tangible is to abrogate the power of the parks. Interpretation and education are fundamental National Park Service activities designed specifically to help people understand and identify with the intangible meanings inherent in the National Park System.*

For example:

- Without our access to meanings, the grizzly bears and wolves would just be lingering relics of the way things used to be.
- Without our access to meanings, Mount McKinley would be just another mountain to photograph or hill to climb.
- Without our access to meanings, the subsistence lifestyle would be just another job.
- Without our access to meanings, invasive species would be another way to see green.



## The Planning Process

Park and regional leadership in interpretation embrace the tenets of the national Interpretive Renaissance Action Plan that recommends a significant paradigm shift in the following five areas of interpretation and education:

***Engage People to Make Enduring Connections to America's Special Places:*** In order to connect all Americans to the recreational, educational, and inspirational power of national parks, we must equip interpreters and educators with knowledge, skills, and approaches necessary for community and civic engagement. Programs must be created in collaboration with communities and partners rather than for them.

***Use New Technologies:*** Technology offers new and tremendous opportunities—not to replace national park experiences, but to make intangible meanings available in ways never before imagined. To remain relevant to today's visitor, the NPS must be a leader in the use of technology applied to informal learning.

***Embrace Interpretation and Education Partners:*** As many as 70,000 volunteers, concessionaires, and other partners provide interpretive services. The NPS ranger must increasingly facilitate partners in the attainment of excellence.

***Develop and Implement Professional Standards:*** In the last decade, the NPS has begun to develop professional standards, but their use has been inconsistent. Now is the time to apply these standards to all who deliver interpretation and education services.

***Create a Culture of Evaluation:*** We have very little scientifically valid information about the direct outcomes and impact of interpretation and education programs. Evaluation must become an integral part of program design and delivery to ensure ongoing program improvement, effectiveness, and efficiency.

There is a unity of purpose between resource protection and education in national parks. At Denali, as in all national parks, education is both a means to achieving the wilderness resource protection goals of the park and a means of providing, through enjoyment and inspiration, opportunities for experience and growth that benefit the individual and society irrespective of benefits to specific parks.

### Education Planning at Denali

Denali National Park and Preserve has a planning history that spans over 80 years. During this period the levels and types of visitor use have changed significantly. The park has gone from a lightly visited, "old-line" railroad accessed park to a prime international destination with high visitor expectation. Denali is one of the most-visited national parks in Alaska and a cornerstone of the Alaska tourist economy. Changes over the past 40 years, both internal and external to the park and National Park Service, have in some ways significantly influenced the visitor experience. For example, the George Parks Highway was completed in the fall of 1971, making it possible for visitors to drive directly to the park. The following year, the Park Road



was closed to most private vehicle use and a visitor transportation system was begun. In 1980, the park tripled in size with the passage of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act. Area hotel capacity grew by 1500 rooms in 2006. Between 2004 and 2008, the park opened three new visitor facilities, each with its own challenges for staffing, program development, and facilities management.

Education at Denali National Park has evolved significantly, along with changes to park boundaries, growth in visitation and concession relationships over the past 90 years. Congressional legislative mandates, improved science, changing demographics and visitor needs, and shifting budgets have pushed educational programming in new directions. Denali's educational themes have adapted to seismic changes in the global environment to ensure that the park meets its wilderness stewardship mission while continuing to stay relevant as a place that connects people to nature and culture in meaningful ways.

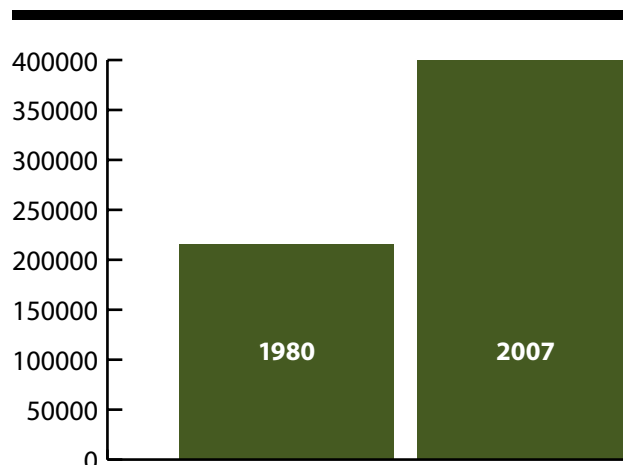
Education and interpretation planning and development flow from the park's enabling legislation, resource significance, and its stewardship mandate. The missions of the National Park Service, of Denali, and of education and interpretation will continue to drive the mandate for an exemplary education program at Denali over the next 20 years. Past planning for the visitor experience at Denali was established in these foundational acts and plans:

- 1916 National Park Service Organic Act
- 1917 Act of Congress establishing Mount McKinley National Park
- 1965 and 1975 Master Plans
- 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act
- 1980 Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act
- 1986 General Management Plan
- National Park Service Purpose and Mission Statements
- Denali National Park Mission Statement
- Education and Interpretation Mission Statement
- 1990 Interpretive Prospectus
- 1995 Statement of Park Purpose and Significance
- 1997 Entrance Area and Road Corridor Development Concept Plan\*
- 1997 Southside Denali Development Concept Plan\*

- 1998 Resource Management Plan
- 1999 Entrance Area Plan
- 2006 Southside Implementation Plan
- 2006 Backcountry Management Plan\*
- 2006 General Management Plan Amendment
- 2009 Resource Stewardship Strategy

The educational components of the 2006 General Management Plan Amendment were informed by the plans marked with an (\*) above. The 2006 Southside Implementation Plan provides more specific guidance for interpretation on the southside of the Alaska Range for both Denali National Park and Preserve and Denali State Park. The 2009 Resource Stewardship Strategy also contains strategic guidance for education at Denali. These documents include plans for visitor center improvements and development, waysides, trails, and other educational infrastructure within all sections of the park including the entrance area, headquarters, road corridor, Kantishna/Wonder Lake, west, and South Denali. Various mandates for partnering outside of park boundaries and interpretation theme guidelines and guidelines for interpretation within wilderness areas are also included.

*For details about the Denali Education Plan planning process and list of participants see Appendix A: The Planning Process.*



Due in great part to the development of the cruise ship industry in Alaska, visitation jumped from around 216,000 visitors annually in 1980 to over 400,000 visitors in 2007.



NPS photo by Neil Blake

## Education and Interpretation Themes

Interpretive themes capture the essence of the park's significance. They include the most important stories and represent core messages that every audience should have the opportunity to hear. The following six themes were developed for Denali through a series of meetings in 2006 involving park staff, stakeholders, and partners.

### Theme 1: Extensive Natural Ecosystems

Denali's intact, natural ecosystem embodies a wisdom from which humans can learn and promote the workings of a healthy planet for a sustainable future.

### Theme 2: Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat

The size and ecological integrity of Denali preserves a home of extraordinary quality for populations of large northern mammals, birds, and other wildlife, where they can live and be observed interacting with one another and their natural habitat with minimal human disruption.

### Theme 3: Denali/Mount McKinley

Mount McKinley's magnitude captivates human imagination and inspires exploration and protection of the Denali region's landscapes, wildlife, and wilderness.

### Theme 4: Wilderness Values and Wilderness Recreation

Denali's wild lands create a refuge from modern civilization where we can discover, challenge, and connect with the primal pulses and prevailing forces of nature.

### Theme 5: People and the Land

The ways Denali shapes and is shaped by the character, lives, and values of people past and present offers us insights into our relationship with our natural heritage.

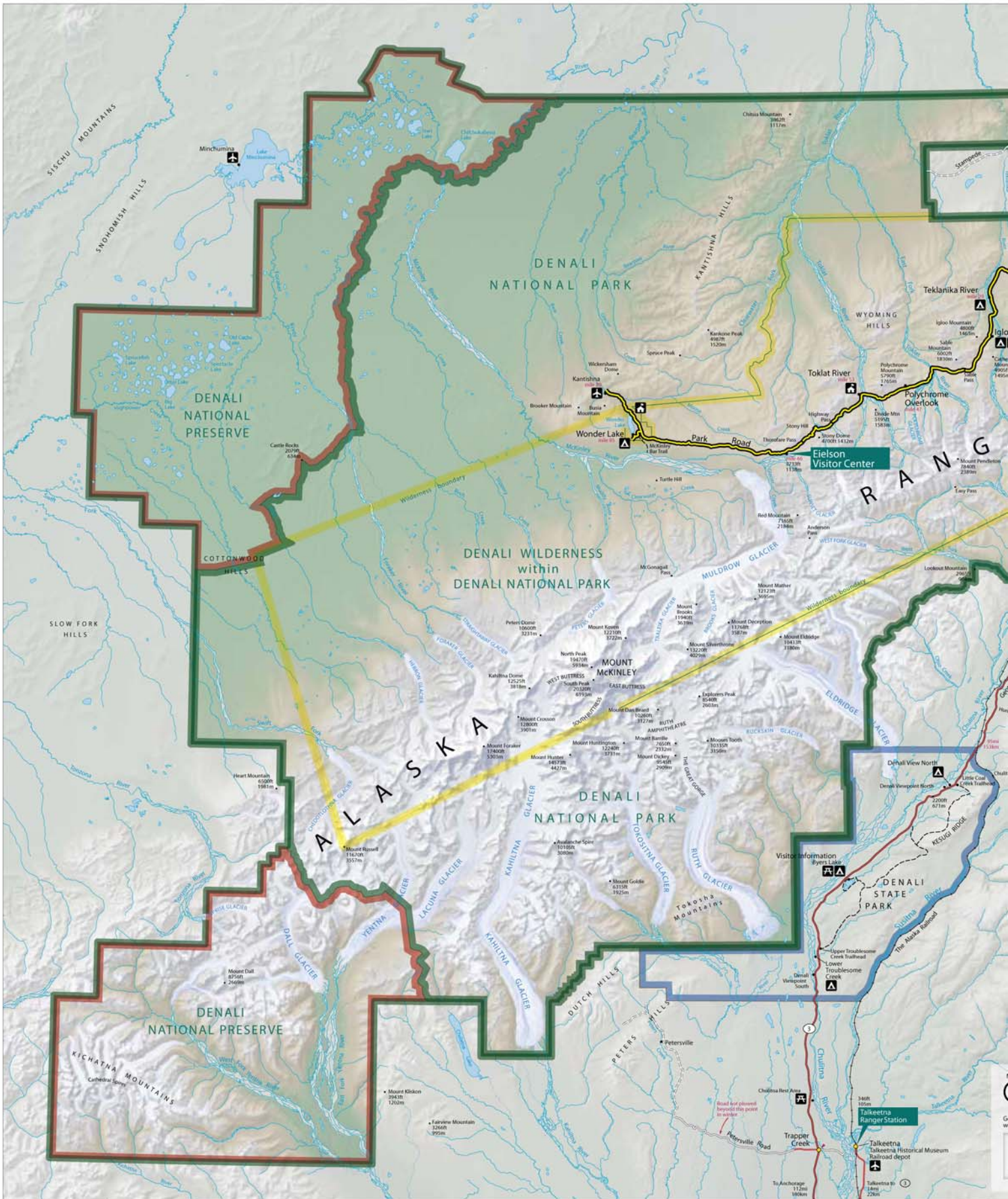
### Theme 6: Dynamic Change

Denali preserves a dynamic landscape, ever shifting, changing and adjusting to cycles and processes, seen and unseen.

Park themes should be reviewed and revised regularly, and communicated regularly to park partners and communities around the park as program development increasingly reflects the vision, needs, and identities of local communities, schools, and partnering organizations. As major efforts are made during the coming years to grow programming and relationships beyond park boundaries, park themes need to remain a primary and relevant touchstone.

*For the complete list of park themes and related concepts see Appendix B: Theme Matrix.*

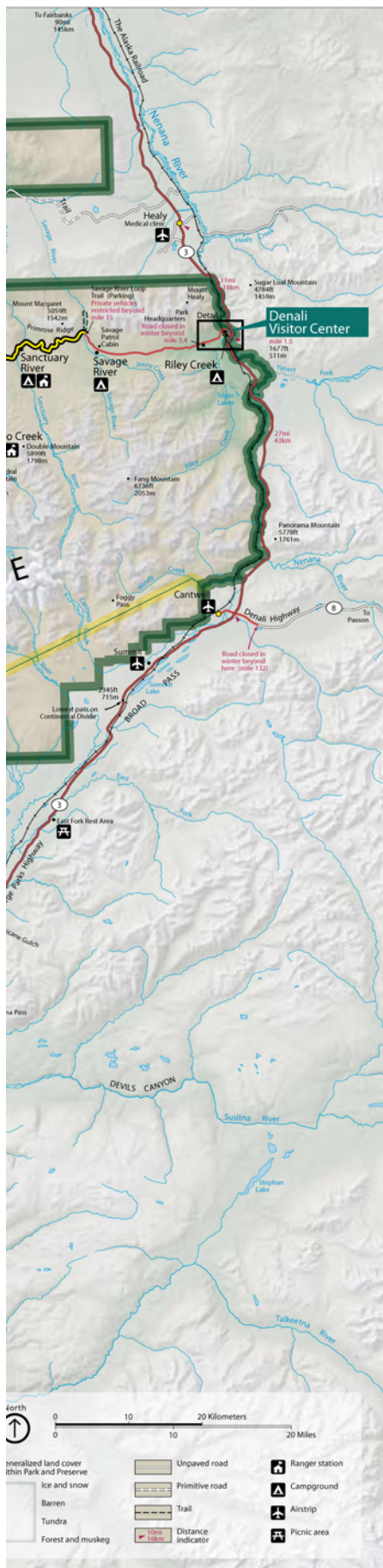




To Anchorage



# Park Map and Overview



## Park Bounderies

-  Old Park
-  New Park
-  Denali National Preserve
-  Denali State Park

**1917**

**1917**

Mount McKinley National Park is “set apart as a public park for the benefit and enjoyment of the people.” Due to the attraction of wildlife viewing, the “said park shall be, and is hereby established as a game refuge.” 1,591,897 acres total.

**1922**

**1922**

Park boundary expansion of 355,175 acres.

**1923**

**1923**

Park Road construction begins.

**1932**

**1932**

Park boundary expansion of 246,693 acres.

**1939**

**1939**

Park Road is completed 90 miles to Kantishna, connecting the mining district to the Alaska Railroad.

**1976**

**1976**

Park designated as a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) International Biosphere Reserve.

**1978**

**1978**

President Carter establishes Denali National Monument north, west and south of the park; approx. 4,178,600 acres in size.

**1980**

**1980**

The Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) establishes a newly named and newly enlarged Denali National Park, the Wilderness area, and Preserve Lands. Total acreage 6,075,030.



NPS photo by Kent Miller

# Park Purpose

## Legislative History

The park purpose is a clear statement of why Congress and the president established the park as a unit of the National Park System as derived from the law(s) establishing the park. The purpose of Denali National Park and Preserve has evolved from the time Congress established the original Mount McKinley National Park to the present and has increased in complexity because of the different mandates that apply to the old park (the original Mount McKinley National Park), the national park additions (added by ANILCA), the national preserve (also added by ANILCA), and the designated wilderness (covering most of the old park).

## Mount McKinley National Park (Old Park)

In 1917 Congress established Mount McKinley National Park as 1) “a public park for the benefit and enjoyment of the people” and 2) a “game refuge.” Consistent with these purposes, the statute directed the Secretary of Interior to publish rules and regulations “aimed at 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.” (39 Stat. 938).

## Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA)

ANCSA resulted in new lands in Native ownership around the park, impacted the outcome of future legislation (Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act), and laid the groundwork for formalization of subsistence uses within Denali National Park and Preserve and a broadening of the scope and audience for Denali education.

## Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act/ Denali National Park and Preserve

The passing of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) resulted in a renaming and near tripling in size of the old Mount McKinley National Park with the addition of 2.43 million acres of new parkland, and 1.33 million acres of preserve land. Approximately 2.1 million acres (99%) of land within the former Mount McKinley National Park was designated federal Wilderness. Traditional subsistence use was now permitted on the new park and preserve lands. Sport hunting was now permitted on preserve lands.

ANILCA’s section 101 sets forth the broad purposes of new and enlarged national parks and preserves throughout Alaska, including the following:

- Preserve lands and waters for the benefit, use, education, and inspiration of present and future generations.
- Preserve unrivaled scenic and geological values associated with natural landscapes.
- Maintain sound populations of, and habitat for, wildlife species.
- Preserve extensive, unaltered ecosystems in their natural state.
- Protect resources related to subsistence needs.
- Protect historic and archeological sites.
- Preserve wilderness resource values and related recreational opportunities such as hiking, canoeing, fishing, and sport hunting.



- Maintain opportunities for scientific research and undisturbed ecosystems.
- Provide the opportunity for rural residents engaged in a subsistence way of life to continue to do so.

Section 202 of ANILCA specified that the additions to Denali National Park and Preserve were to be managed for the following purposes, among others:

- Protect and interpret the entire mountain massif, and the additional scenic mountain peaks and formations.
- Protect habitat for, and populations of, fish and wildlife including, but not limited to, brown/grizzly bears, moose, caribou, Dall sheep, wolves, swans and other waterfowl.
- Provide continued opportunities, including reasonable access, for mountain climbing, mountaineering, and other wilderness recreational values.

The purpose of Denali is further clarified by the legislative history of ANILCA. The northern addition was to provide large sanctuaries for wildlife, protect entire ecological systems, and preserve the critical range for caribou and wolves. The southern addition was to include the entire Mount McKinley massif and provide ecological diversity and opportunities for recreation and access.

### Denali Wilderness

Section 701 of ANILCA designated the “Denali Wilderness of approximately one million nine

hundred thousand acres” (later remapped at 2.1 million acres) under the Wilderness Act as depicted on a map referenced in Section 202 of ANILCA and including 99% of the former Mount McKinley National Park. According to the Wilderness Act, these lands are to be “administered for the use and enjoyment of the American people in such manner as will leave them unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness, and so as to provide for the protection of these areas, the preservation of their wilderness character, and for the gathering and dissemination of information regarding their use and enjoyment as wilderness.”

### Denali National Preserve

Section 1313 of ANILCA addresses the purpose of national preserves created by the act.

*A National Preserve in Alaska shall be administered and managed as a unit of the National Park System in the same manner as a national park except as otherwise provided in this Act and except that the taking of fish and wildlife for sport purposes and subsistence uses, and trapping shall be allowed in a national preserve under applicable State and Federal law and regulation.*

It is important to distinguish a “purpose” from an allowable use. The ANILCA language specifies that the preserve has the same purpose as the rest of the park, and is distinguished only by having an additional allowable use. Likewise, in the park and preserve additions subsistence is an allowable use, but not a purpose. ANILCA Sec. 202(3)(a) reads, “Subsistence uses by local residents shall be permitted in the additions to the park where such uses are traditional....”

### Administrative History

In addition to its legislative history, the park’s administrative history also clarifies the park purpose. As stated in the 1986 General Management Plan: *Because of its early designation within the park system, Denali has evolved to become one the most well-established of the national parks...Still, development and use have been limited because of the park’s remote location (compared to the lower 48 states) and by park plans and management decision aimed at achieving its legislative purposes....*



NPS photo by Jared Withers



## Fundamental Resources and Values

The Fundamental Resources and Values are part of the foundation for all planning and management at the park. The particular features, systems, processes, experiences, scenery, sounds, etc., that are key to achieving the park's purposes and maintaining its significance constitute its Fundamental Resources and Values. Denali's fundamental resources and values are those which Congress identified specifically for the park through legislation. These resources and values may be synthesized as follows:

### 1. **Wildlife populations, wildlife habitat, and the processes and components of the park's natural ecosystem.**

The original Mount McKinley National Park was established as a "game refuge" set aside in part for "the preservation of animals, birds, and fish." ANILCA indicated the park additions were established "to protect habitat for, and populations of fish and wildlife," thereby extending this fundamental purpose to the entirety of the expanded park and preserve. ANILCA also established a purpose of protecting entire ecosystems, not just wildlife. Denali's large size, remoteness, and early protection of the original park make possible the ongoing preservation of an intact natural ecosystem sufficient to support even large, wide-ranging mammals such as caribou and wolves.

### 2. **Wilderness character, wilderness resource values, and wilderness recreational opportunities.**

The passage of ANILCA in 1980 recognized the wilderness resource values of the original park and the additions. Section 701 designated 99% of the former Mount McKinley National Park (now mapped at 2.1 million acres) as the Denali Wilderness to be managed under the provisions of the Wilderness Act which states wilderness lands should be "administered for the use and enjoyment of the American people in such manner as will leave them unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness...and for the gathering and dissemination of information regarding their use and enjoyment as wilderness." ANILCA specified a purpose of the park additions as "to provide continued opportunities, including reasonable access, for mountain climbing, mountaineering, and other wilderness recreational activities." Section 101 of ANILCA provided that a general purpose of the Alaska conservation system units is to "preserve wilderness resource values and related recreational opportunities such as hiking, canoeing, fishing, and sport hunting" and section 102 defines wilderness in the same manner as the Wilderness Act. A wilderness suitability study in 1986 found that virtually all of the park additions and preserve with the exception of some mining-disturbed lands in the Kantishna Hills were suitable for wilderness designation.

The key components of wilderness described in the Wilderness Act include 1) generally appearing to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable and 2) opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation. Denali possesses both very accessible wilderness recreational activities and activities that are very remote and require self-reliance, significant time commitments, and thorough advance planning. Denali also offers the opportunity for visitors who never leave a bus or airplane to enjoy the undeveloped wilderness character of the park.

### **3. Scenic and geologic values of Mount McKinley and surrounding mountain landscape.**

Management of the original Mount McKinley National Park was intended in part, "for the preservation of the natural curiosities and scenic beauties thereof..." ANILCA expanded the national park to include the entire Mount McKinley massif, and specified one purpose of the park additions to be "protect and interpret the entire mountain massif and the additional scenic mountain peaks and formations." In addition to Mount McKinley, the tallest mountain in North America, Denali contains a myriad of other high Alaska Range mountains, including Mount Foraker and the Cathedral Spires, some of the largest glaciers in North America, and glacier-carved gorges such as the Ruth Gorge.

### **4. Visitor enjoyment and inspiration from observing wildlife in its natural habitat and other natural features.**

Congress set aside the original Mount McKinley National Park "as a public park for the benefit and enjoyment of the people..." A general purpose of all of the ANILCA lands is to "preserve lands and waters for the benefit, use, education, and inspiration of present and future generations." Because of the location and conservative management of the Denali Park Road, the park is one of the best places in the world for the public to observe large northern mammals in their natural habitat. Visitors also have many opportunities to observe smaller mammals and birds, some of which are rarely seen elsewhere in North America. Mount McKinley, other Alaska Range features such as the Ruth Gorge and Ruth Amphitheater, and many other scenic features are also a source of visitor enjoyment and inspiration.

## **Other Important Resources and Values**

The fundamental resources and values are those which are so significant that Congress felt it was important to designate a national park to protect them. Denali National Park and Preserve has other important resources and values that are not primary to the park's purpose and significance but are important for both park management and visitors. These are resources and values that Denali possesses and which the National Park Service has a legal or policy mandate to protect—including general direction for all the ANILCA conservation system units—but which do not account for the establishment of the park and preserve. These other important resources and values include:

### **5. Historic, archeological, and ethnographic resources.**

Denali has 257 known cultural resource sites within the park's boundaries, including both prehistoric and historic sites. It is anticipated that additional resources will be found as inventories are conducted and completed. Protection of historic, archeological, and ethnographic resources is mandated by several federal laws and regulations and by NPS policy. A general purpose of ANILCA conservation system units is to "protect historic and archeological sites."

### **6. Paleontological resources.**

Recent discoveries of fossilized tracks and other prints of hadrosaurs, theropods, and birds from the Cretaceous period have added a new dimension to park resources protected under the NPS Organic Act.

### **7. Air quality.**

Denali has exceptionally clean air that is a resource in its own right, but also supports visitor enjoyment of the park's scenic resources and the health of the park's ecosystem. Denali National Park and Preserve is designated as a Class I area under the Clean Air Act, the category which is most protective of air quality and related values. The Clean Air Act, however, does not protect park air quality from intercontinental airborne contaminants.

### **8. Subsistence resources and opportunities.**

ANILCA generally specifies a purpose for Alaska conservation system units as to "provide the opportunity for rural residents engaged in a subsistence way of life to continue to do so." Specifically for Denali, ANILCA identifies subsistence as a permitted use, but not as a purpose. Subsistence users actively harvest Denali resources particularly in the northwestern park and preserve from Lake Minchumina, in the southeastern park additions near Cantwell, and in the Kantishna Hills.

**9. Scientific research, education, and interpretation about natural ecosystems and geologic features and processes.**

General language from both ANILCA and the Wilderness Act indicate that lands designated under these laws include education and research among their purposes. ANILCA mentions interpretation of the mountain massif and other geologic features to be a specific purpose for the Denali additions. Section 4(b) of the Wilderness Act states that education and research are primary public purposes within areas preserved as wilderness.



**There is a direct one-to-one linkage between the following:**

- The park themes
- The Resource-Condition Dependent Visitor Experience as expressed in the General Management Plan
- Associated fundamental resources and values
- Associated other important resources and values

**To see the linkage as articulated in the Denali Resource Stewardship Strategy see Appendix C: Visitor Experience/Resource Conditions Matrix.**



# Guiding Mission and Purpose Statements

## Relevant Mission Statements

<b>National Park Service</b>	<i>The National Park Service preserves unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the National Park System for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations. The Park Service cooperates with partners to extend the benefits of natural and cultural resource conservation and outdoor recreation throughout this country and the world.</i>
<b>Denali National Park and Preserve</b>	<i>We protect intact, the globally significant Denali ecosystems, including their cultural, aesthetic and wilderness values and ensure opportunities for inspiration, education, research, recreation, and subsistence for this and future generations.</i>
<b>Denali National Park and Preserve Education and Interpretation</b>	<i>While fostering preservation, understanding, and enjoyment of Denali National Park and Preserve, we challenge the public to explore the connections between themselves and Denali's diverse environment, and to integrate the resulting insights into their everyday lives.</i>
<b>Murie Science and Learning Center</b>	<i>The mission of the MSLC is to provide research, discovery, and learning opportunities within northern Alaska national parks and to promote understanding and appreciation for our natural and cultural heritage.</i>

## Resource Protection Messages

The following resource protection messages should be inherent in the message we communicate with all who seek to learn about Denali, whether they visit in person or not. These messages were identified by park resource staff through a series of meetings in 2006:

1. The protection of Denali's resources and values depends on all individuals limiting their actions and impacts when visiting the park.
2. Denali was created for specific purposes and cannot accommodate all human uses and activities.
3. Denali's subarctic ecosystem is susceptible to threats beyond its borders.
4. The day-to-day conservation practices of individuals can make a real contribution to protecting Denali's resources for the future.

## Wildland Fire Messages

Wildland fire is fundamental to boreal forests and wetlands, which make up a large part of Alaska, including Denali National Park and Preserve. Wildland fire management agencies and organizations in Alaska share a common goal: to enhance personal safety and reduce loss of life while preserving and enhancing the health of forests and wetlands. For the public to truly understand the role of wildland fire, we must communicate clearly and consistently across all agencies and disciplines.

1. Public and firefighter safety is our first priority.
2. Wildland fire happens. Be ready.
3. Wildland fire is an essential natural process.
4. Alaskans work together to manage wildland fire.
5. Managing wildland fire in Alaska balances risks and benefits in an ever-changing environment.



NPS photo by Neil Blake

# Visitor Experience Goals

Visitor experience goals identify a suite of fundamental experiences that park education and interpretive staff hope to facilitate through the park’s natural resources, facilities, and programs. These statements can be viewed as ideal outcomes from a trip to Denali. They reflect both tangible and intangible aspects of what the visitor takes away from a trip to Denali and complement the park’s resource protection goals. It is important for all park and partner staffs to know and understand the diverse and varied goals of visitors so that they can assist visitors in obtaining information and experiences that will meet or exceed expectations.

## Visitors to Denali will have the opportunity to:

### Core Interpretative Themes

- Learn the park’s key messages/themes through a variety of means, including personal contact with an employee of the park, concessioner or park partner; formal interpretive programs; non-personal media; and curricula.

### Visitor Enjoyment

- Experience Denali National Park and Preserve in a way that provides them with a sense of awe and discovery without impairing its wild character.
- Easily access orientation information and choose from a range of high-quality visitor programs throughout the park and surrounding lands.

- Participate in safe, varied, and highly satisfying naturalist-guided and self-guided learning experiences.
- Visit park learning centers that are sustainably designed, well maintained, inspirational, and that provide access to a wide variety of learning tools.

### Science Literacy

- Discover how science is used to manage the park’s natural and cultural resources.

### Curriculum-Based Learning

- Participate in curriculum-based educational programs in classrooms inside and outside the park, through distance learning technologies, face-to-face instruction, and through teacher training programs.



NPS photo by Neil Blake

## Desired Visitor Outcomes

### **Knowledge and Understanding**

Visitors understand the meanings, values, and vulnerabilities of the Denali Wilderness. They gain knowledge about the plants, ecology, role of fire, geology, animals, and cultural history of the Denali region and come to understand how Denali's intact ecosystem fits into the bigger picture of Alaska's wildlands.

### **Enjoyment and Inspiration**

Visitors experience Denali in a way that leaves them with a sense of satisfaction, pleasure, and peace. They develop a deep connection to Denali and a sense of responsibility for this landscape and other public lands in Alaska. They leave hoping to return.

### **Action**

Visitors understand their personal actions make a difference. They understand the role they can play and the choices they have to make. They are ready to change their behaviors and act on behalf of public lands.





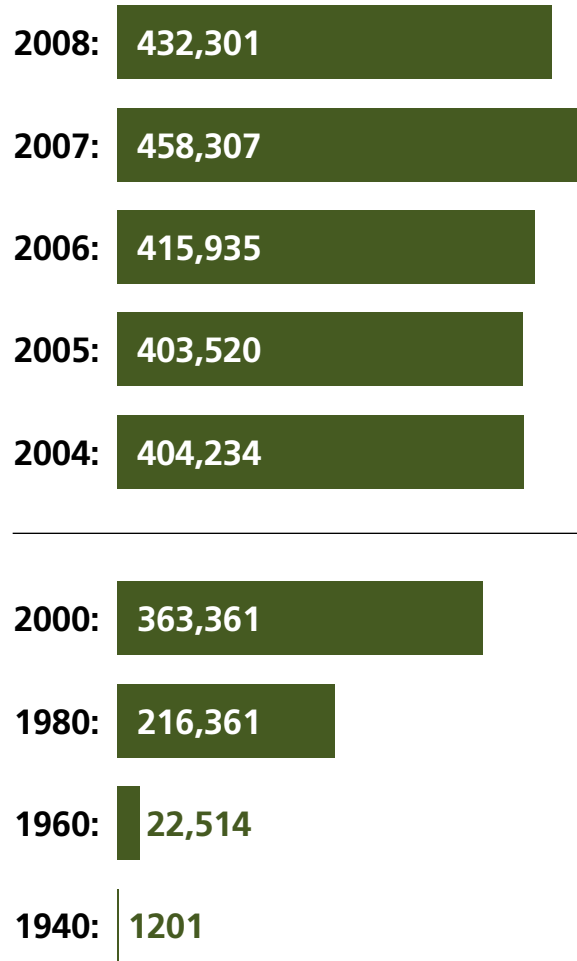
# Visitors to Denali

## Park Audiences and their Needs

Denali has a broad range of audiences, from would-be climbers of Mount McKinley to decision makers who influence park funding in Alaska or nationally. Many park “visitors” will never physically visit the park because of travel costs and the remoteness of Alaska. Many visitors will visit the park first via books, video, magazine articles, through shared research, or by the Internet. Primary needs are the same for many of Denali’s visitors, since even Alaskans have to travel a significant distance to visit the park: accurate information about park operations; educational opportunities; lodging, including camping, food, recreational opportunities, and other amenities available according to the season and in local communities adjacent to the park; and the opportunity to register in advance, via tour companies or directly through the park. However, for a number of user groups there are very specific information needs and resource needs at the park unique to the goals of their visit. One objective of the park is to make it an easy place to navigate—from a distance and up close. Much information is available on the park website and in the park visitor guide, the *Alpenglow*.

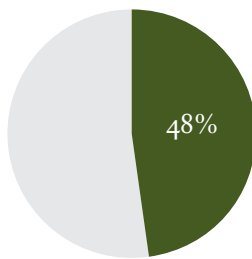
See Appendix D: Audiences and Needs

## Park Visitation

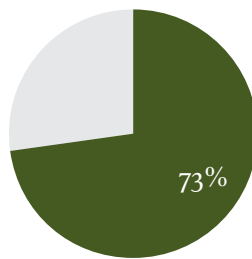




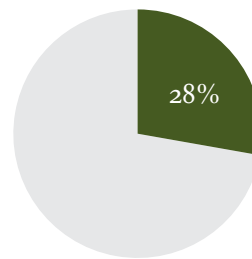
### According to visitor surveys from 2006:



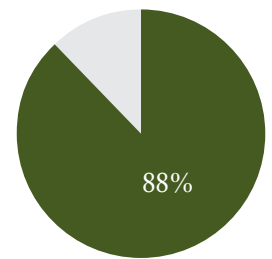
48% of summer visitors are retirees.



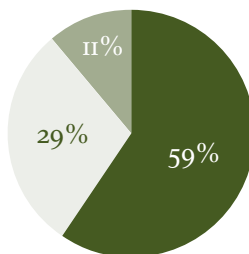
73% of summer visitors are in Alaska for the first time.



28% of visitors are Alaskans and people of the Pacific Northwest.



88% are US citizens. Of the remaining international travelers, the majority are from Canada. Families with children are a minority.



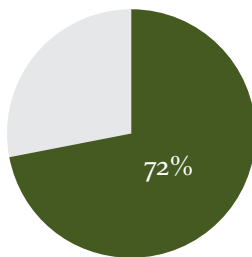
59% of the total visitor base are part of a large group package tour from three principal companies: Holland America Lines, Princess Cruise Lines, Royal Celebrity.

29% of visitors are traveling in small groups.

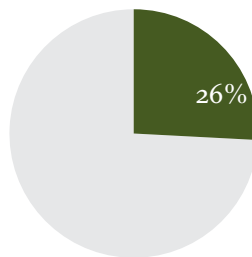
11% of visitors are independent travelers.

Total visitation includes more than 10,500 winter visitors and close to 31,000 visitors who visit the south side of the park, including 18,300 contacts at the Talkeetna Ranger Station, almost 11,000 scenic air tour passengers who land on a glacier in the park, and 1,700 mountaineers. In addition to the mountaineers, there are about 3,400 park visitors who stay overnight in the backcountry for at least one night.

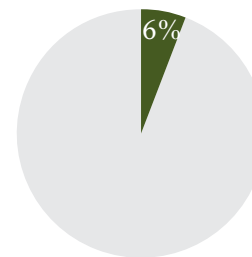
### Of the approximately 415,000 annual visitors to the park:



72% travel past Mile 15 on a bus.



26% of these ride the VTS.



6% ride Kantishna inholding buses (Camp Denali/Northface Lodge, Denali Backcountry Lodge, or Kantishna Roadhouse).

More than two thirds of all bus riders (298,000) are joining one of three guided bus tours operated by the primary concessioner, Doyon/Aramark Denali National Park Concession Joint Venture.



NPS photo by Kent Miller

# Existing Conditions

This section provides a current snapshot of existing education and interpretation programs, education facilities, staff and other resources offered by the park and its educational partners to visitors.

Only in the last ten years have facilities been upgraded to the point where the park can adequately accommodate the rapid surge in visitation brought about by package tourism since the early 1990s. Excellent road and rail systems, new centers, spacious campgrounds, abundant teaching materials including the technology required to use them, excellent core teaching staff, a wayside program, and an unparalleled outdoor classroom have all contributed to the park’s ability to adapt to the increase in visitation and visitor needs.

Through restructuring, the park has taken steps to bring researchers and educators into closer working proximity.

The needs and gaps tend to be in internal human resource capacities: adequate numbers of skilled staff; soft infrastructure including knowledge and information management; training systems; marketing, outreach, publications; communication and partner management, and community building. Because of the high percentage of package tours to overall visitation, the park’s concessions and nonprofit partners currently deliver a high percentage of overall programs and will likely continue to do so into the future. The

challenge is to build an enduring foundation under these partnerships—an exemplary education program where internal human resource capacity supports the infrastructure.

The following sections on the park’s existing conditions reflect the significant administrative restructuring and building efforts of the past ten years.

## Center for Resources, Science and Learning (CRSL)

### Existing Conditions

Recognizing the important role science plays in the resource stewardship mission at Denali and the need for a strong bridge between science and education, park managers reorganized the education and interpretive divisions within a newly created CRSL in 2004. The CRSL effectively places the tools of science and education together to serve resource stewardship and visitor enjoyment goals. The center is comprised of professional and technical staff with specialties in the biological and physical sciences, history, ethnography, archeology, interpretation, and education.

The CRSL provides a strategic and interdisciplinary linkage between science and public education as a means to build public support for stewardship, and to address complex and sensitive management

challenges. These include: aircraft, off-road vehicle, and snow machine use; wilderness resource values; wildlife populations and habitat; sport and subsistence harvesting; air quality and soundscape; fire effects; mining reclamation; and archeological and historic preservation. Center staff work directly with scientists doing research at Denali to make research findings and data available to educators at Denali and to the general public in a variety of ways including publishing a science reprint series, mandating and facilitating educational outreach components of research permits, providing a resource library, and computer terminal links to scientific reports and theses.

CRSL staff work directly with visiting scientists and, through the Murie Science and Learning Center (MSLC), with non-scientific audiences including schools and the general public to make science data, findings, workshops, programs and citizen science opportunities available. Denali is a member of the Central Alaska Network (CAKN), which includes three national parks encompassing 21.7 million acres of Alaska wildlands. The network coordinates vital sign inventory and monitoring throughout the CAKN region. In 2005, the Network completed the Vital Signs Monitoring Plan, a blueprint for the long-term monitoring of 11 vital signs (climate, air quality, snow-pack, vegetation, water quality, macroinvertebrates, passerines, peregrine falcons, golden eagles, moose, and wolves).

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

Translating complex scientific studies and findings for a variety of non-scientific audiences is difficult, yet critical to the success of the Denali stewardship mission. It requires trained, highly skilled teachers who have a high comfort level and interest in stewardship science. The education outreach staff within the MSLC need to have more frequent and direct contact with the CRSL's science staff in order to better disseminate information, i.e. an educator that has spent some time with a researcher will be a much more effective teacher. The CRSL's capacity to link to the public through education, though well on its way, is not yet fully realized. The MSLC offers a major opportunity for the center to make the vital connection between research and key Denali audiences. But currently, there are several areas of Denali science that the MSLC staff knows little about. Firsthand or in-person relaying of information on the full range of Denali research projects provides for better understanding by MSLC staff.

A major opportunity in the coming years lies in MSLC as a premiere synthesizer of scientific knowledge of great value to both professional and non-professional

audiences. With full staffing, including the position of research-education liaison, and funding it will be able to team effectively with the CRSL and with other Alaska park research initiatives, and with communities throughout Alaska over the long run. The Denali Resource Stewardship Strategy will also inform this effort.

Until the transition to digital technology is complete, the park owns a variety of equipment for slide presentations, including projectors, dissolves, and carousels. Visiting lecturers do, on occasion, still require slide projectors.

*See Appendix E: Educational Tools and Resources.*

## **Denali Entrance Area Campus**

### **Existing Conditions**

Over the past few years, Denali has made wholesale changes to the visitor services, programs, and education infrastructure at the entrance to the park. This redevelopment of the front country, including \$24.1 million in new construction for facilities from partners and leveraged congressional appropriations, was designed to accommodate major growth in visitation while improving the visitor experience through better traffic flow, new educational facilities, and major improvements to exhibits, trails and programs.

Improvements included a re-routing of the entrance road and renovations of the railroad depot and bus stop with extensive wayside exhibits at the depot and bus stop, comfort stations, a new restaurant, and a bookstore. Trail and wayside improvements included a new self-guided system of cultural resource trails connecting the visitor center with natural and historic features, with waysides at the Morino Homestead site, and with a bridge over Hines Creek to the original park headquarters.

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

A major challenge is accommodating a growing number of visitors in an environment where there is a strict limit on the number of trips on the Park Road during the main visitor season (currently 10,512). The Denali Visitor Center, Murie Science and Learning Center, and other front country campus buildings, trails, programs, wayside exhibits and interpretive resources, including collections, impromptu ranger programs, and new kinds of self-guiding experience (including Questing opportunities), may hold the key to meeting visitor experience goals in the future. Another challenge is movement of visitors between local businesses/hotels and the park, as most arrive to the area without their own transportation. Work is



underway on a Denali Transportation Plan Environmental Impact Statement that could lead to an improved transportation system that makes it easier for visitors to take advantage of learning opportunities offered in the park and throughout the area.

## Denali Visitor Center (DVC)

### Existing Conditions

Completed in 2005, the Denali Visitor Center (DVC) is the flagship for the front country. It is centrally located near the park entrance in a “visitor campus” composed of a new bookstore, restaurant, comfort station, bus stop, railroad depot, education center (MSLC), and interpretive trails and waysides. The purpose of the center is to create a powerful and inspiring visitor experience that highlights the essence of Denali and its people. In 2006, the DVC won a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) silver award.

Exhibits immerse the visitor in Denali’s subarctic environment through a 3-D simulated environment, murals, interactive audio-visuals, tactile exhibits, and close proximity to trails. There are also exhibits of Denali-inspired art and a small exhibit about the green design of the building. The objective of the exhibits is to instill a sense of wonder, to foster stewardship, and to orient the visitor to the unique nature of Denali.

*Heartbeats of Denali*, an award-winning 18-minute feature film, is shown regularly in the center’s 285-seat theater. The film is designed in part to provide a virtual experience for visitors who would not visit Denali beyond the Park Road. Approximately 200,000 people view the film annually.

### Challenges and Opportunities

The goal of the DVC is to serve 90% of the visitors as a point of general orientation to the park, its history, mission, and its global importance and regional context; as a place for learning about the ecosystems, plants, animals and cultures of the park; and as a place to inspire visitors to action. According to ranger staff, approximately 50% of all visitors enter the visitor center annually. Rangers note that “staying time” in the center is often much longer than the estimated 45 minutes.

Obstacles to achieving 90% visitation from park guests include the scheduling and timeframe of package tours; weak transportation links to the hotels in the Canyon; limited hours of operation; and visitor confusion about how to navigate in the front country. Underutilization of the visitor center is likely to be a short-term issue as visitation continues to increase at Denali, and the park and community improve local bus and shuttle systems.



NPS photo by Chris Arend

*The Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Green Building Rating Program™ is a certification program that sets the benchmark for design, construction, and operation of high performance green buildings.*

Overutilization and crowding inside the center may become the more serious problem.

Visitors who are part of a packaged tour will most likely find themselves with a pre-planned, highly structured park visit. For over 200,000-plus visitors this includes one of three guided tours into the park: the Tundra Wilderness Tour (TWT), the Denali Natural History Tour (DNHT), and the Kantishna Experience (KE). Of these three tours, only the KE makes a stop at a park visitor center (Eielson). It should be noted that the TWT does have limited time at the Toklat Contact Station, where ranger presence and displays are minimal; this brief stop, however, should not be considered a substitute for time in a more fully staffed and thoughtfully crafted visitor center. Following a tour, visitors may or may not make the effort to navigate to the DVC during their remaining time in the area. With creative scheduling, it may be possible to include time at the DVC into a park tour experience.

The different functions between front country facilities are not clear to visitors. Though the Wilder-

## New Approaches for Science Education: The ALISON Project

*By exploring new emerging educational approaches, the MSLC is working to provide new ways of facilitating a connection to the NPS through scientific literacy and science-based stewardship.*

*Two classes of Tri-Valley School/Denali Borough School District (DBSD) fourth and fifth graders trek the 1.5-miles to Horseshoe Lake as part of a citizen science project known as the Alaska Lake Ice and Snow Observatory Network (ALISON). Through this citizen science program, students record lake ice and snow measurements in order to provide data that may help detect changes in the ice and snow levels throughout the state over time. The Horseshoe Lake site is one of 16 sites across the state that make up the ALISON network initiated by Dr. Martin Jeffries of the University of Alaska Fairbanks.*

*In 2007, DBSD Elementary School Teacher Dorothy DeBlauw, Service Learning Coordinator Kris Capps, and DENA Education Specialist Kristen Friesen received a prestigious Toyota Tapestry science grant and award for excellence in science education for their work on ALISON.*



NPS photo by Kent Miller

ness Access Center (WAC) is a transportation facility, visitors expect to get the full spectrum of visitor information services from its staff. The DVC provides visitors information to help them make the most of their visit, yet does not sell bus tickets. Those who would like to camp in the backcountry also need to visit the Backcountry Information Center. In some cases there is cross-over: visitors must book their Discovery Hikes at the DVC but must book their Discovery Hike bus at the WAC. Clarity of purpose and some degree of shared duties seems necessary to provide good customer service to visitors.

The elements of Denali are taxing on exhibits. Dust is an issue in the summer months. Denali's winters are long and very cold. The DVC is designed to go cold in the winter to save energy. This tests exhibit materials in ways they have not been tested before. With a very limited budget and no dedicated staff to monitor and maintain exhibit quality, it is possible that the DVC may degrade in quality simply due to weathering. A dedicated staff person and funding is needed to maintain the government's investment in this facility.

## The Murie Science and Learning Center (MSLC)

### Existing Conditions

Formation of the MSLC in 2003 was inspired by the Natural Resource Challenge, an initiative designed to promote science and education in parks. The MSLC serves as a hub for educational partnerships and the goal is to one day fully serve all seven other Alaska national parks and their partners to link science and education.

To date, the MSLC has piloted several programs aimed at expanding science-informed decision making and the communication of science to the public across a full spectrum of partners. For example, public/private partnership programs have provided funding for two research fellowship programs and an education grant program that provide project seed money and are available to meet needs in all partner parks.

The primary responsibility of MSLC staff today is to promote research, education and discovery opportunities within central and northern Alaska national parks. The MSLC has developed a successful model of science education by leveraging limited government funds with private funds and developing cost-recovery programs. A variety of camps with science-based curriculum, summer job opportunities, and special projects have engaged youths, both local and those from around the state, with MSLC parks. At Denali, MSLC education programs with the gate-



way community schools have played a key role in increasing understanding between the park and local communities. For example, the MSLC facilitated the building of a traditional Athabaskan moose-skin boat by elders and a Cantwell student.

The MSLC facility in Denali currently provides a large interactive central gathering area with five learning stations and natural history exhibits, including a mounted wolf skeleton exhibit constructed by Cantwell Middle School students. The learning stations feature videos, digital slide shows, and web-based programs on a variety of research topics. Other assets include: work spaces for scientists and staff; a large meeting room with AV equipment for distance learning, communication with remote partners, educational programs and meetings; and a field camp located adjacent to the Teklanika Campground. Future plans call for the construction of a residential facility for visiting educators and scientists, workshop enrollees, and school groups. The MSLC also features three IT networks to accommodate a variety of users: NPS staff, non-NPS employees, and other users.

### Challenges and Opportunities

The MSLC has come a long way in recent years to foster greater understanding of the Denali ecosystem and the stewardship mission of the park and to forge links between scientists, educators, and Denali audiences. Bridging science and non-scientific communities through education is a long-term proposition made more difficult by current funding limitations.

The principle strategic opportunity at MSLC is to expand and enhance partnerships. Successful partnering means continued improvement to lines of communication among partners, clarifying the definition of successful partnership, establishing clear partner roles and responsibilities, and clarifying the decision making structure. Clear policies for program development and evaluation need to be developed, including establishing criteria for new program proposals.

Among the most promising partners are the other national parks in Alaska. Representatives of partner parks in attendance at a planning retreat in April 2005 determined the following to be the MSLC's short-term priorities:

- Developing the technological capacity to serve as an informational hub to eight partner parks.
- Building deep and enduring partnerships with MSLC partners at Denali.
- Growing and developing MSLC programs to share information and build constituency.

### Curriculum-Based Science Education

*Curriculum-based approaches typically involve long-term engagements and opportunities for multidisciplinary learning. Curriculum-based approaches share, but are not limited to, these characteristics:*

- They are park resource-based programs relevant to park interpretive themes.
- They link park themes to national standards and state curriculum frameworks.
- They involve educators, students, and the community in program planning and development.
- Pre-visit materials provide background information and suggest activities that prepare students for the experience.
- Post-visit materials extend learning beyond the site experience.
- They recognize and accommodate different learning styles and are multidisciplinary.
- They include an evaluation instrument that is integral to the program.
- Learning experiences and skill development are directly linked to real world outcomes.



Alaska Geographic photo by Debbie Whitecar

## Place-Based Approaches

*Place-based educational approaches teach across all the disciplines, focusing on all aspects of the local environment including local cultures, history, social-political issues, the natural world, and the environment constructed by humans. The approach includes a clear focus on learning through participation and service projects of obvious relevance to the local school and community.*

## Civic Engagement

*Civic Engagement is a discipline and a practice of the NPS that extends civic responsibility by building long-term, collaborative relationships with a broad range of communities, fostering a widespread investment in stewardship of the nation's resources.*



The potential for the MSLC to have a positive impact on parks, their resources, and the public is great.

A coordinated effort through the MSLC could focus research areas of emphasis across park networks as articulated in the Alaska Region Science Strategy and under the direction of the Alaska Regional Science Advisor. This would put data from environmental impacts in a larger context, and consequently allow park managers to make more informed decisions. Trends across Alaska would be more evident for issues such as climate change, increasing human use, development within and surrounding parks, global and local contaminants, and exotic species. Information collected in this regional research effort would then be communicated more efficiently and broadly through the coordinated education efforts, thus leveraging existing education staff capacity by ensuring curriculum development and programming could be used by multiple parks to reach diverse audiences through a variety of means.

Studies initiated by the MSLC will provide park managers with the knowledge required to facilitate subsistence activities while protecting park resources. Continued and expanded education efforts aimed primarily at young stakeholders will nurture the next generation of subsistence users and facilitate a greater understanding between park managers and park constituents. Distant education efforts will help the greater public understand the need to allow traditional activities in Alaska's parks.

The MSLC website is under development. Fully realized, the website could become the principal conduit for dissemination of scientific findings and education materials for all eight partner parks.

## Denali Bookstore

### Existing Conditions

Run by the Alaska Geographic Association (AKGEO), the Denali Bookstore provides information and materials to visitors about the natural and cultural heritage of Denali. The AKGEO bookstore has a long tradition at Denali and until 2005 was located in a 450-square-foot corner of the Wilderness Access Center (WAC). In 2005, the Denali Bookstore moved into a new 2,500-square-foot building adjacent to the new Denali Visitor Center. The building is within the concessioner's land assignment and, unique to Denali, there is an agreement that AKGEO will allocate 25% of the sales space to sell items on behalf of the Doyon/Aramark Denali National Park Concession Joint Venture (JV). The concessioner has a store in the WAC and sells AKGEO products there in a similar



arrangement. Each item AKGEO sells in the store is vetted and approved through park interpretation and education staff. In addition to the Denali Bookstore, AKGEO operates and staffs sales functions in the Backcountry Information Center, Toklat rest stop, Talkeetna Ranger Station, the MSLC, and the dog sled demonstration area. Gross sales from all areas totaled in excess of \$1.8 million in 2007. Approximately 10-12% of gross sales are returned to support the park's interpretive and education programs.

### Challenges and Opportunities

With the increased space of the new store building, there is the opportunity to integrate interpretive themes into the store as part of the merchandizing of books and product. For example, a display/exhibit on the sled dog program at Denali could be placed with AKGEO's publication *Sled Dogs of Denali* and other sled dog related products. Integrating themes into the store will bring added relevance to the educational function of the store. There is a need for more Denali-specific product. Concession items are not vetted or approved through the same park process and are mixed in with AKGEO items giving the visitor the impression that the store is a gift shop and not an educational bookstore. Sharing sales areas has brought the two organizations closer and has resulted in a need to work together to define which group should sell what items.

## Wilderness Access Center (WAC)

### Existing Conditions

The WAC is the primary transportation hub for the Denali Visitor Transport System (VTS). It also provides park information and reservations for park campgrounds and other concession activities such as the Denali Natural History Tour and Tundra Wilderness Tour. Many of its operations and all of its exhibits are designed around the interpretive theme, "Portal to Wilderness." It is the primary point of departure for day hikers and backpackers headed, via the VTS, into the Denali backcountry. All Denali Natural History Tours stop at the WAC to watch the short film, *Across Time and Tundra*, which is also available to the public on a limited schedule. Management of the WAC has been by the JV since 2005. Exhibits for the WAC have been planned and installed by JV in recent years.

### Challenges and Opportunities

The WAC is the transportation gateway for many independent travelers planning to go into the backcountry. It presents opportunities for interpretation and education that are not yet fully realized (interpretive panels were installed in 2006). Currently, guided hike and campground reservations, information,



and tickets are distributed in four different locations: DVC for ranger-guided hike reservations and information; Backcountry Information Center (BIC) for general backcountry use information and overnight permits; WAC and the Riley Creek Mercantile for bus ticket and campground sales. Respectively, the DVC is approximately one mile and the Riley Creek Mercantile is about half a mile from the WAC. Visitors who do not have their own transportation either walk or take the courtesy shuttle between the facilities. The BIC is in the parking lot of the WAC.

Improving and expanding information services at the WAC can help smooth the visitor's transition from the front country into the backcountry. The park service does not staff the WAC; staffing is the responsibility of the primary concessioner. Concession staff would benefit from cross-training as park information specialists. Backcountry experiences, self-guided or guided, represent one of the great promises of Denali for most independent travelers, the majority of whom have gone to great pains and cost to arrive at the WAC. The opportunity to improve the visitor experience is significant at the WAC.

## Backcountry Information Center (BIC)

### Existing Conditions

The BIC is housed in a trailer in the parking lot of the WAC and may move to a new location near the DVC Campus when funding becomes available. This is where visitors get permits for overnight trips into the backcountry and check out a bear-resistant food container for use free of charge during their trip. Managed by the Ranger Division, the BIC contains landscape-based information on scenic views, river crossings, wildlife viewing areas and closures. BIC staff sells topographical maps and other related backcountry travel items provided by AKGEO.



### Challenges and Opportunities

The BIC is in close proximity to the WAC, and could serve as a contact station for WAC visitors who wanted to talk to NPS staff. Visitors seeking day-hiking information or who wanted to sign up for Discovery Hikes could be directed to the BIC. However, funding for the BIC is limited and it is possible that its limited staff could quickly be overwhelmed by visitors other than those seeking backcountry information and permits.

## Entrance Area Trails

### Existing Conditions

Ranging from the relatively flat McKinley Station Trail and Savage River Trail to the steep Healy Overlook Trail, the entrance area trails stretch from less than a mile to three miles in length. Several are wheelchair accessible. Nineteen miles of trails spider through the area surrounding the DVC, the WAC and the MSLC.

### Challenges and Opportunities

New trails and linkages are at various stages of execution. New trails include a re-route of the Horseshoe Lake Trail, an interpretive trail with wayside exhibits associated with the Savage Destination Rest Stop, and a Savage Alpine Trail that links the Savage Campground with the parking lot at the Savage River bridge. There will soon be a footbridge over Riley Creek, providing a link between front country trails and the Triple Lakes Trail. Currently there are no trails that can easily be started from the MSLC. To reach the existing trails from MSLC requires that one cross through the DVC parking lot or to take a back route that meets up with the Taiga Trail. In many cases, to get onto a trail one must go in the opposite direction of the area that one wishes to visit.

## Denali Park Road

### Existing Conditions

The Park Road is a highly significant educational feature of Denali. It provides visitors of all abilities an opportunity to travel through and access Denali's wilderness landscape, to view wildlife, and to experience a type of guided wilderness travel unique to the National Park System. The road connects visitors to the culture and history of the region as well, linking the entrance area to the historic mining community of Kantishna and to a series of six patrol cabins, all of which are on the National Register of Historic Places. The road is a cultural artifact, intentionally kept narrow and unpaved for low speed, deliberate travel with frequent stops for viewing wildlife. The road's primitive character is considered an important aspect of the wilderness aesthetic experience.

### Challenges and Opportunities

The primary challenge of the road is to maintain and manage it successfully in such a way that it balances competing values of protecting wilderness and providing safe access and quality educational opportunities. That means holding to strictly defined limits on such things as numbers of buses, vehicle speed, and infrastructure development. Vehicle passes for MSLC educational purposes are limited. A major challenge for educational groups that use the bus service is the inability to keep a group together on multiple hiking stops or on a return trip. A system of saved seats would resolve this problem.

Ranger educational programs and informal contacts at campgrounds, rest stops, the Toklat Contact Station, and Eielson Visitor Center, currently provide important opportunities for enhancing the visitor experience. These programs could be expanded but increasing access for rangers increases traffic. How many vehicles are too many before wilderness experience and wildlife viewing opportunities are impacted? How much activity can there be along the road before the special wilderness feel of the road corridor is lost? These questions are beyond the scope of the Education Plan, but need to be objectively determined.





NPS photo by Kent Miller

markers are planned. The goal is to provide higher quality activities for the independent traveler in the Savage area.

## Rest Areas

### Existing Conditions

Rest stops at Teklanika, Polychrome and Toklat have restrooms, viewing decks, and limited wayside interpretation. Toklat is the turn-around point for the Tundra Wilderness Tour except on days with good Mount McKinley visibility when they continue west to Stony Hill Overlook. There is a fabric-walled structure at Toklat constructed as a temporary replacement for the old Eielson Visitor Center when the new center was under construction. During that time, the structure featured an information desk staffed by NPS interpretive rangers, reference materials, and educational book sales area. Now that Eielson has reopened, uniformed interpretive rangers are not present at Toklat on a regular basis. Hands-on interpretive props, such as animal furs and skulls, and a few displays are available for visitor self-discovery. The book sales area remains open and is manned by an AKGEO staff person.

## Savage River Check Station

### Existing Conditions

The Savage River check station is a checkpoint at Mile 15 that represents the beginning of limits to private vehicle access on the 92-mile Park Road. A uniformed ranger boards all buses at the check station and speaks briefly to the visitor group, welcoming them to the park. There is a fixed number of trips on the road (10, 512) during the core season late May through mid-September.

### Challenges and Opportunities

A major challenge to the park staff is face-to-face opportunities to convey important park messages and welcome visitors. All vehicles going beyond Savage must stop at the check station, so this venue is a good opportunity for rangers to provide a welcome and key stewardship message to the traveling public. The Tundra Wilderness Tour, Denali Natural History Tour and the VTS system are all operated by the park concessioner, this exposure to a ranger is the only NPS contact these visitors may experience. The check station provides an excellent opportunity for an official welcome from a ranger to one of our nation's treasures.

There are plans to upgrade visitor parking and interpretive facilities at Mile 15, Savage Turnaround. New trailhead signs, interpretive cultural trails, and

### Challenges and Opportunities

The rest stops are trip enhancement opportunities. They provide both the opportunity to walk unguided into the landscape and, when a roving ranger is present, the opportunity to speak face-to-face with an interpretive naturalist. Rest stops also offer opportunities for park staff to use non-personal interpretive tools: waysides, signage, backpacks, and toolkits in new ways. Reconfiguration of the trails at the Polychrome rest stop provide visitors the opportunity to get away from the road and up close to myriad wild flowers.

During the shoulder seasons, the road is closed at the Teklanika rest stop. Prior to the start of tours and following the season when busses have stopped but the road is still passable, visitors can drive their own vehicles to Teklanika. Stationing an interpreter at the Teklanika rest stop to make contact with these shoulder-season visitors could enhance the park experience for these few, but intrepid travelers.

## Eielson Visitor Center

### Existing Conditions

A new Eielson Visitor Center (EVC), located at Mile 66 of the Park Road, opened to the public in 2008. The center replaced an obsolete center built in 1959-1960 and torn down in 2005. The original was an eyesore

for many and too small for the growing number of visitors who made it deep into the park. The design challenge at Eielson was to work with the extreme weather and landscape conditions to create a state-of-the-art sustainable building that fits the remote wilderness setting. Through innovative design, the center disappears into the contours of a low hill and is aligned for stunning views of Mount McKinley. The EVC earned a Platinum LEED certification, the highest rating possible in the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design Program.

The object at Eielson is to get visitors out of buses and to give them opportunities for enrichment. Eielson offers self-guiding opportunities, as well as guided walks on river and ridge trails, the few trails that will be available in the Denali wilderness which is virtually trail-less. The overarching theme is “honoring the spirit of the place by understanding and respecting its wildness.” Art, conservation, and exploration are explored through journals, artwork, and photography. A variety of exhibits interpret the Mount McKinley massif, and examine the themes of ecosystem connections, people’s place in the wilderness, and preservation by design. A major focal point is the view of Mount McKinley, if visible. The exhibit focal point is a large topographic model of Mount McKinley displaying historical and contemporary climbing routes. The facility also offers restrooms and an indoor and outdoor eating area, but no food or drink sales.

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

The Eielson project experienced significant support and some opposition locally during early planning stages. The initial challenge was that of working effectively with local community groups to design a sustainable, low-impact facility in a wilderness setting. Today, the challenge is to develop visitor use and management policies that improve the visitor experience for large numbers without impairing wilderness resources. VTS travelers and guests on Kantishna lodge buses will be able to access the center.

A second challenge presents itself around exhibits, collections management, and exhibit turnover. Exhibit needs and opportunities change over time. Maintenance is ongoing. A system for maintaining, rotating out, circulating, and adapting exhibits is not currently in place.

The third and related challenge is to fund proper ranger staffing levels so that the value of Eielson as an educational resource that stays with the visitor long after his or her trip to Denali is assured.



## **Wonder Lake Ranger Station**

### **Existing Conditions**

The Wonder Lake Ranger Station is a timber-framed building with a front office area and two bedrooms. Behind the station are four small cabins that serve as seasonal housing, a common shower house, and several small miscellaneous structures. Originally built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1939, the station underwent significant rehabilitation in 2000 and sustainability improvements during 2004-2006 related to reducing noise and hazardous materials pollution, improving energy efficiency, and reducing system maintenance costs.

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

The ongoing challenge to the park is to create facilities in the subarctic that are minimally polluting, energy efficient and cost-effective to maintain. Wonder Lake Ranger Station is an excellent model and lesson in sustainability. The educational opportunity is to use this mandate for sustainability/efficiency as an educational sub-theme throughout the park.

## **Campgrounds**

### **Existing Conditions**

Denali has six campgrounds within the park. Campgrounds are important places to provide educational opportunities of many types to visitors at Denali. They are a staging area and jumping off place for many visitors seeking a non-guided backcountry experience. Campfire evening programs, non-personal outreach and education, and informal face-to-face encounters can significantly enrich visitor experience of the Denali backcountry by reinforcing important wilderness resource values, wilderness use messages, and by highlighting the unique natural and cultural resources of one of the greatest outdoor classrooms on Earth.





### Challenges and Opportunities

Because of limited funding, Denali has had to cut back the frequency of formal campground programs. Keeping up with messaging on bulletin boards has also proven to be high maintenance. Most bulletin boards at the campgrounds need to be replaced or taken down. There are alternatives to bulletin boards that could be lower maintenance, professional looking, and more effective. Adequate funding would ensure that campground programs were offered on a nightly basis. Park staff can also work more closely with campground hosts to ensure that information posted is current and appropriate.

## Backcountry

### Existing Conditions

Denali's Backcountry Management Plan (January 2006) describes backcountry management policies and practices. Resource protection and education are fundamental goals of backcountry management at Denali. Backcountry use is managed to achieve no-impairment, low impact standards over the long-term. There are no non-personal educational resources allowed in the backcountry. Instead, non-personal educational programming and information services are concentrated in the entrance area and front country road corridor, including campgrounds.

The backcountry starts 150 feet from the centerline of the Park Road. Formal educational programming beyond the line is limited to ranger-led Discovery Hikes, and guided educational programs led by the MSLC, the park's educational partners and by commercial recreational and educational service concessions, including Kantishna-based commercial operations. Priority is given to park-led educational programs in the backcountry, including those provided by the MSLC, and to grandfathered Kantishna inholders

holding concessions and leading educational field trips in the center of the park at the end of the Park Road. A key goal of the Denali backcountry managers and educators is that all commercial service providers become fully integrated educational partners over time.

The backcountry has few maintained trails and group size is limited to a maximum of 12. Day hikers are free to hike in any area not subject to a closure. Users who plan to overnight are restricted to movement within certain management areas and units, and must meet guidelines and standards of wilderness use described in the Backcountry Management Plan.

### Challenges and Opportunities

Developing educational standards and guidelines for concessions currently using or proposing to lead educational tours into the backcountry presents an important challenge and opportunity to park resource protection managers and educators. Devising ways to understand program effectiveness in the backcountry through evaluation protocols is a related major challenge. Building strong relationships and sharing information with commercial and nonprofit partners represents a real opportunity for success. It is important that Kantishna businesses be brought into full partnership.

For day hikers, backpackers, and climbers who do not go into the backcountry with a guide there is a need for current, competitive guidebooks and web resources that are consistent with the park's backcountry management policy and wilderness policies. Materials produced by other publishers do not generally fulfill this need and some presently on the market actually work against NPS goals. The education of Denali's backcountry user is one of the most powerful tools the park can use to achieve its stewardship mission.

## Talkeetna Ranger Station

### Existing Conditions

The ranger station in Talkeetna was constructed in 1997 to provide the full-spectrum of park services to southside communities, including general public education and interpretation. It also serves as the point of contact for mountaineering groups: registration, permitting, orientation, and ranger base camp, patrol and rescue coordination. The Talkeetna Ranger Station has exhibits about Mount McKinley and mountaineering, a sitting area and a small sales area for materials provided by AKGEO. Education staffing in Talkeetna varies from season to season depending on funding. The Talkeetna education staff seeks to provide daily programs at the local museum, centered around the Bradford Washburn model of Mount McKinley. If possible, staff offer evening programs at the ranger station as well as weekly kids programming during the summer. The park film on climbing Mount McKinley is shown regularly in the ranger station to climbers and the general public. The station served over 33,836 general public visitors in 2008, in addition to climbing groups, and the number is growing.

Talkeetna, a stop on the railroad line and at the end of a paved, spur road off the George Parks Highway, is home to 1,000 permanent residents, and a destination for a wide range of tourists, fisherman, sport hunters, and guests of the CIRI lodge in Talkeetna and the Princess lodge just up the highway.

### Challenges and Opportunities

Talkeetna will likely play a different role if and when a new southside visitor center comes on line. The current challenge is to accommodate a broad range of visitor audiences—not just mountaineers—even though this is not in keeping with the primary purposes put forth in the 2007 General Management Plan. There are opportunities to reach new audiences concentrated in Talkeetna as well, including the 9,000 visitors who fly out of Talkeetna on flightseeing tours, and an equal number taking scenic tours on the Susitna River. While the Park Road corridor north of the Alaska Range is reaching the saturation point, Talkeetna, Trapper Creek, and communities near the junction of the George Parks Highway and the Talkeetna Spur Road (“Y Communities”) present greater opportunities for viewing Mount McKinley, more diverse visitor amenities, and fewer challenges or impediments to the growth of education-driven visitor experience. There are opportunities in the south to brand a new identity for Denali through educational efforts that is attractive and a draw to all Alaskans.



NPS photo



Photo by ©Chris A. Reid

## Arts at Denali

### Existing Conditions

Science and art are rooted in the natural world. Both have been used to connect people to natural and cultural history. The National Park System was created through strong connections with the arts, and Denali National Park and Preserve is no exception. For decades, artists such as Sydney Lawrence, Belmore Browne, and a host of contemporary figures have captured the park environs on canvas, sculpture, and film, providing society with a window into northern ecosystems. In fact, artist/explorer Belmore Browne was seminal in the movement to create Mount McKinley National Park.

Currently, the values of using the arts and culture as educational tools are beginning to be recognized by the park and its partners.

The Artist-in-Residence (AIR) Program began in 2002, and offers professional artists the opportunity to pursue their work amidst the natural splendors of Denali. Through a competitive process, the park provides selected artists use of the historic East Fork Cabin for ten-day periods from June through August. In return for this opportunity, artists donate to the



park an original piece of work inspired by their stay. Donated artwork captures Denali's character for present and future generations and offers the park visitor and the general public an opportunity to see the park through the eyes of significant contemporary artists. Artists also present at least one public program during their residency. Works created by artists-in-residence are on display in the visitor centers at the park entrance and at Eielson.

Additional art involvement throughout the community includes art exhibits at the Denali Education Center and MSLC curriculum-based arts education programs. In 2007, the National Park Service began partnering with Alaska Geographic Association (AKGEO) in management of the program. An arts working group of the AKGEO board of directors has been created.

### Challenges and Opportunities

In the future, the park and its partners will have created a shared vision that more fully integrates art into the parks education and interpretation programming. A donation to the arts working group could be seed money for creation of an art gallery in Denali, providing a venue that displays the art to its greatest advantage while providing the proper environmental conditions to protect the works. The park will also create a traveling exhibition of Denali's artwork that could be shown in venues around the country. Park and partner developed workshops in a variety of disciplines will make it possible for participants to explore their connections with Denali more deeply through their own artistic interpretation, as well as inspiring others when the results of such workshops are shared to a broader audience.

## Accessibility/Universal Design

### Existing Conditions

By law, the NPS is required to meet accessibility standards as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The visitor center construction has brought about the awareness and the opportunity to meet ADA requirements and employ universal design. All recent construction within the park has employed universal design concepts where practicable, but more can be done. Some trails in the entrance area and at the Savage rest stop are appropriate for wheelchairs. Films at the Denali Visitor Center and Talkeetna Ranger Station feature closed-captioning.

### Opportunities and Challenges

The role of the park ADA coordinator is a collateral duty that rests in the Commercial Services Division. Keeping up with accessibility policies and guidelines

### National Park Service 1916—2016

*The Centennial Initiative will enhance visitor experiences and provide significant resources to restore and better protect the culture, natural, and historical resources of parks in preparation for the 100th birthday of the National Park Service in 2016.*



NPS photo by Kent Miller



NPS photo by Kent Miller

is challenging. The practical application of universal design concepts is not broadly understood. Universal design is the approach to design all products and environments to be as usable as possible by as many as possible regardless of age, ability or situation. As barriers to understanding can come in myriad forms, staff members in all facets of park operations should be educated in universal design concepts appropriate to their areas of expertise, so standards can be considered in the creation, refurbishing, and replacement of facilities and exhibits.

## Denali State Park

### Existing Conditions

The 325,240 acre Denali State Park is an integral and spectacular part of the Denali ecosystem. At the south

entrance to the Denali region, bordered by Denali National Park and Preserve to the west and north and the Susitna River on the east, the state park contains approximately 40 miles of the George Parks Highway and is a major potential collaborator with the national park's resource science and education programs. The state park maintains three campgrounds, a trail system, and is a major destination for salmon and trout fishermen and sport hunters.

With few resources available in the state park for education and interpretive programming today (see below), face-to-face programming is limited. Funding for education has been trending downward since the mid-1980s. Two sets of roadside panels interpreting aspects of Mount McKinley's mountaineering history at Denali Viewpoints north and south, attract 15 to 20 buses daily in season (Mile 134 and Mile 162). Five to six hundred visitors stop daily at the Veterans Memorial during peak season. A 15 x 20 visitor center at the memorial is managed by a nonprofit and staffed by volunteers. Sales from the small shop return approximately \$35,000 of unrestricted discretionary funding to the state park annually. Informal oral interpretation in the park is given by volunteers at the Denali viewpoints north and south and the Veteran's Memorial. Since 2005, the state park has been providing multiple programs each day at the Mount McKinley Princess Hotel and is now doing seven programs, seven days a week to large audiences. The National Park Service had been providing these programs, yet chose to pass this opportunity to Alaska State Parks in order to support its interpretive efforts and overall budget.

### Challenges and Opportunities

There are significant opportunities for collaborative educational program development between the state park and Denali National Park and Preserve in the coming years. Interpretation and education programs have witnessed major budget cuts over the years. In spite of the large number of tourists passing through the state park, funding for parks in Alaska is down, and education is not the top priority. Opportunities for broader funding for state park programs through partnerships with the tourism industry are substantial. A new south Denali visitor center, located in the state park, could become the major driver for a redefinition and branding of the south Denali region as a primary destination for both Alaska visitors and for the next generation of tourists coming to experience and learn about Alaska. The major opportunity presenting itself is for a collaborative effort between the parks that employs the strengths and assets of each agency.

The proposed south Denali visitor center would serve as hub for a growing set of education and interpretation programs for tour and independent visitors to the Denali region, planned and implemented in collaboration with Denali State Park and the communities of south Denali to serve a growing visitor population and to alleviate future increased pressure on park resources to the north. A new visitor center, access road, parking, trail system, and other visitor amenities would be located on Curry Ridge off the Parks Highway. The park has also preserved its options to develop the Tokositna site in Denali State Park at a later date.

NPS is working to develop the relationship with Denali State Park's interpretive staff through greater communication, seasonal training, and support materials such as books.

## Denali Interpretive Ranger Staffing Trends

Between the years of 2000 and 2007, 18% of the NPS seasonal interpreter workforce nationwide had been lost. At Denali, seasonal staffing trends mirrored national trends. This was because as base funds ceased to grow and permanent staff salaries and other fixed



NPS photo by Kent Miller

### GS-05 vs. GS-07

*At the national level, a GS-05 level interpreter is considered developmental and should not be expected to create original programming. The GS-07 level is considered full-performance. Interpreters at this level bring to the position a minimum of one year of interpretive experience or educational equivalent.*

costs are difficult to adjust, the only place to cut is 025-Series seasonal salaries. In 2005, the Fee Collection program, including its staff of Visitor Use Assistants (VUA) was moved into the Division of Interpretation to assist at the Information Desk of the DVC and to provide some interpretive programming. The division also hired Student Conservation Association (SCA) interns and Tuskegee University students to work as frontline interpreters. As the VUA job series is not in Interpretation, previous interpretive experience does not factor into job qualifications and cannot take up more than 20% of job duties. Many SCAs and Tuskegee students were also new to interpretation and could only work a limited season.

During this time of staff shrinkage, the park's visitor season seemed to be lengthening. Visitors on package tours were arriving earlier in May and later in September. There was an expectation that when visitors arrived in Denali, the visitor center and various ranger activities would be available.

Acknowledging the hidden costs of training and monitoring inexperienced staff, park management decided to support the upgrade of interpretive positions to the GS-07 level in 2008. Additional funding also made it possible to provide interpretive programming at appropriate levels for the expanded visitor season. This effort coincided with additional funding provided through the Centennial Initiative to hire eight additional seasonal interpreters. Supervisory staff restructured its seasonal training to address a more highly skilled seasonal work staff. Project funds made it possible to hire an interpretive specialist to develop program templates to be used by GS-05 staff, Student Conservation Association interns and volunteers. Templates help to ensure presentations by less experienced staff members meet minimal standards as defined by the NPS Interpretive Development Program.

*For a list of 2008 program offerings and attendance statistics, see Appendix F.*

## Educating Interpreters

### Interpreter Training

Knowledge and interpretive experience among Denali's seasonal staff is disparate, as the staff is typically made up of interpreters, Student Conservation Association interns, volunteers, and student interns. Despite the various hiring categories, however, each staff member will spend a portion of his or her duty time delivering front-line interpretation for the park. The number of returning seasonal staff members has been few in recent years.

To meet the broad needs of this audience, seasonal interpretive training features a combination of classroom instruction and hands-on skill building that takes place over a three-week period in late April/early May of each year.

Classroom instruction includes interpretive skills training and an introduction to relevant park information, such as park mission and history, and current park research. Staff members are also made familiar with resources available for program development, such as props, collections, and park staff who specialize in specific areas. These sessions are delivered by park staff, including interpretive supervisors, researchers, and others; guest speakers are also invited to participate when possible and affordable.

Blended with the classroom training are skill-building sessions that include instruction on leading walks, route-finding for off-trail hikes, and running dogsled demonstrations. By the third week, trainees have divided into smaller groups to focus more intently on specific skills required for each job and duty station.

The park usually provides a day of CPR/basic first-aid training for those requiring certification. New staff members also require park familiarization, as well as an area-wide orientation.

Throughout this training timeframe, park visitation begins to pickup. Any returning staff and many permanent staff seek to provide basic visitor services so seasonal staff can complete their training. Following the formal training, staff members are allowed time to prepare their program(s), and are eventually "eased" into the interpretive schedule. The full range of interpretive offerings is usually available by early June.



NPS photo by Neil Blake





NPS photo by Kent Miller

## Educational Stakeholder Roles

### Role of Park Concessioners in Interpretation and Education

Commercial operators provide a broad range of visitor services within Denali National Park and Preserve. They range from smaller companies that might bring in one guided hiking group a year to large corporations that provide guided bus operations for thousands of visitors annually. The services rendered to park visitors by the authorized concessioners make up an essential element of park operations. Park visitors will spend vastly more time with concessioners than they will with park interpretive rangers. For example, tour drivers (as explained later in this section) log in over one million contact hours annually, compared to the park service interpretive ranger total contact hours of 50,000.

Approximately 20 businesses hold concession contracts with Denali National Park and Preserve, and these operators comprise the majority of commercial services in the park. Another 40 operators conduct occasional commercial activities in the park, authorized through a Commercial Use Authorization (CUA). Concession contracts are authorized for the following activities: transportation services, guided mountaineering, glacier landing air taxi and scenic air tours, Kantishna area air taxi and scenic air tours, guided hiking, guided sport hunting, dog sled passenger service, and freight hauling services.

By law, commercial services can only be authorized in

the park if it has been determined that the services are necessary and appropriate for public use and enjoyment of the park. Commercial services come into play when identified needs are not or cannot be met outside park boundaries or provided in a manner that furthers the protection, conservation, and preservation of the environment and park resources and values.

Park concessioners support interpretation and education both indirectly, through supporting services and logistics, and by providing interpretation directly to visitors. Commercial operators play an important role in supporting basic personal needs, thus creating an audience that is more receptive to an interpretive or educational message.

Some concessioners at Denali play a significant role in interpretation and education by providing interpretation directly to visitors. The delivery of information and the quality of interpretation provided on the bus system has been a strategic element of the concession contract for transportation services. Over time, the interpretive requirement of the transportation service has grown.

### Doyon/Aramark Denali National Park Concession Joint Venture (JV)

JV has held the concession contract for transportation services at Denali since 2003. The centerpiece of this contract is operation of the bus systems within the

park. JV also provides the following visitor services as part of the transportation contract: reservations for campgrounds and bus services; visitor information at the WAC; retail outlets at the WAC, Denali Bookstore and Riley Creek Mercantile; management of Riley Creek and Savage River campgrounds; food services at Morino Grill food court, the WAC coffee bar, Riley Creek Mercantile, and the MSLC dining hall.

The bus transportation system provided by JV likely serves the vast majority of Denali's visitors on some level. The transportation provided falls into three categories: entrance area shuttles, the park road shuttle (or VTS, Visitor Transportation System) and bus tours on the Park Road.

The VTS is primarily used by independent travelers and a small numbers of package tour visitors. Shuttle drivers wear headsets and are expected to provide accurate information, but not full narration, though some drivers might choose to provide an interpretive narrative. VTS ridership over the past five years has fluctuated between 76,231 and 90,685 annually.

The tours provided by JV include the Tundra Wilderness Tour (TWT), the Denali Natural History Tour (DNHT) and the Kantishna Experience (KE). Together, these tours accommodate over 200,000 visitors annually, comprised primarily of visitors arriving at the park with a packaged tour group.

JV sees its principal interpretive mission as disseminating important park messages. Additional interpretive activities that JV is involved with include: living history interpretive programming at Savage Cabin and Native Alaskan history at the Primrose Overlook; developing exhibits and displays at the WAC and at Morino Grill; thematic retail at the Denali Bookstore and other outlets; experience enhancement products, such as the DVD to be used on the TWT; interpretive outreach such as programming in hotels, providing editing input on Alaska Geographic booklets, and assisting with park events. The concessioner also often provides free or for-fee bus service for education groups. The MSLC coordinates these transportation needs directly with JV.

Renewal of the concessions contract in 2012 will offer an opportunity to review and, if necessary, make adjustments to current services.

## Guides and Outfitters

In contrast to the large JV contract, the park's other concession contracts are categorized as guide/outfitters. All of the guide/outfitter type operators have a basic requirement in their contract to provide

information about Denali National Park and Preserve and its resources that is accurate, relevant, and includes park themes and mission. These concessioners provide interpretation and education that is directly related to their specific activity, as well as general Denali area natural history and cultural history topics that may or may not be a requirement of their specific contract. For the most part, concessioners are responsible for their own research, training, and monitoring of their operations, and minimum interpretation standards have been established within the various concession authorizations.



### Challenges and Opportunities

Park concessioners offer a wonderful opportunity to increase the reach of NPS messages, helping the park to raise public understanding of the park purpose and mission and the themes in the park. Because concessioners are engaged directly with visitors, they are uniquely positioned to provide interpretation and education. This is most obvious with the bus system, where JV drivers might spend up to 12 hours with visitors, in a "captive" environment. In this manner, JV drivers serve as interpretive guides for the National Park Service and are the front-line interpreter contact for a majority of Denali visitors.

JV staff has depth, both in terms of staff support and tenure in the park. Many of the approximate 125 drivers working for JV have over 20 years of experience as drivers and guides in the park. The high return rate among drivers represents a valuable and knowledgeable park resource. Additionally, JV has its own interpretive staff of eight, including a dedicated manager for interpretation and interpretive coaches. The JV interpretive staff is responsible for overseeing driver interpretive training, exhibit and film development, and internal evaluation. Tour drivers receive 32 hours of interpretive training and certification through the National Association for Interpretation, the professional organization for interpreters and environmental educators. Drivers also receive a minimum of eight hours of resource training from



NPS staff, in addition to four hours of general NPS training provided to all JV employees. The current staff and resources of the JV present an opportunity that can provide additional support to interpretation and education in Denali.

Many challenges need to be overcome in order to leverage commercial operators to build Denali's strength in interpretation and education. The park vision for the role of concessioners in interpretation and education must be clearly defined and articulated so that standards and expectations can be incorporated into performance plans.

The major challenge will be cultivating the paradigm shift, both in the NPS and concessioner organizations, required to support integration of concessioners as legitimate providers of interpretive services. Both groups need to shift away from the assumption that park values and profitability are not compatible. Within the NPS culture there exists an assumption that concessioners could not be motivated to align with the park's mission. Additionally, providing interpretation would by default be a second-level goal for most operators whose primary focus is safely providing the visitor service that is their specialty. Training, communication, and relationship building will be required for personnel in both organizations.

Creating a balance and clear boundaries between educational and commercial opportunities within the park will be needed if concessioners are to become partners in interpretation. MSLC programming is in a strong period of growth and development, and the park continues to seek additional educational offerings. These opportunities and experiences

compete for visitor time and interest and, if not managed appropriately could, either in reality or in perception, create an unfair playing field for concessioners. Sensitivity over this issue is likely to increase as the park raises the interpretive requirements and standards for commercial operators.

Our challenge and opportunity is that these concessioners can do a lot for us and can reach many park visitors if we are able to take the time and share with them our desired outcome.

## Role of Concessions Management in Education

The Commercial Services Division provides the direct link between the park and commercial operators. The division oversees commercial services planning, makes the determination if services are both necessary for visitors and appropriate activities to take place in the park, authorizes commercial services through contracts and Commercial Use Authorizations, evaluates services, and approves rates. Concession management plays a role in education by providing the tools that integrate education and interpretation into the performance expectations of concessioners; functioning as a liaison between other divisions and concessioners; and consolidating all performance feedback into an annual evaluation that documents how well the concessioner performed on all requirements of their contract.

The evaluation program is the primary tool used to gain compliance with concessioners. Concession regulations require that concessioners receive an annual evaluation as well as one or two periodic



evaluations throughout the season. The ability to provide sufficient and detailed evaluation is limited due to NPS staffing levels, the number of operators, the far ranging types of activities, and the remote locations in which they take place.

For guide/outfitter operations, periodic and annual evaluations are conducted on the majority of these operators but they only provide a brief snapshot into the quality of service provided. The annual evaluation is often more concentrated on contract compliance rather than on interpretation or education. The smaller operations do not receive any regular evaluation unless there are resource concerns or they receive a negative visitor comment.

Due to the size and reach of the JV contract, that operation receives a higher level of oversight. The Commercial Services staff conducts two formal periodic evaluations of all services and a comprehensive annual evaluation. In addition, staff tries to conduct ride-along evaluations of all bus services. In 2006, an evaluation tool template was created for the TWT and DNHT. These evaluations noted specific operational items such as bus cleanliness, driver appearance, as well as certain trigger references by the driver such as mentioning wildlife safety and conveying the park purpose and park mission. Other evaluation tools include the visitor survey conducted by NPS, a third party visitor survey conducted by JV, the employee access program which allows NPS staff to ride the VTS at no charge if they complete an evaluation form, and the JV's internal interpretive evaluation program.

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

Commercial Services staff is generally focused on contract management, not education. Greater involvement by education staff in the development of contract requirements, the development of evaluation standards, and the process of collecting evaluation and feedback would help ensure that important park messages and themes are reaching the appropriate audiences. Program evaluation plays a critical role in program development.

A major challenge facing the park is the pressures exerted on capacity by the large package operators. These providers are bringing visitors to the park 50 or more at a time, and their ability to command resources and book capacity months in advance has the potential to edge out independent visitors. It is the challenge of concessions management, and the park as a whole to find and maintain a capacity balance between visitors that access the park in large groups and visitors who

come to the park as an individual or an independent group.

Luckily with all change comes significant opportunity. The external pressures to change the bus systems are creating an opportunity to review and reconfigure the types of trips that are provided, which could serve to enhance the educational focus of those trips. Denali is in the middle of a major road corridor study that is looking at the wildlife and social use impacts of the Park Road. One of the outcomes of the study is data and analysis that can help predict, through computer simulation, current and future impacts at different use levels. The study will be used to support future decisions about the capacity of the Park Road and the types and quantities of vehicle trips. In 2007, the park introduced some experimental changes in the VTS in an effort to generate additional rider capacity on that bus system. The additional information from these studies and tests could provide additional educational and interpretive opportunities on the Park Road.

JV is actively looking for opportunities to enhance existing or to provide additional visitor services. Improved buses and new technology like video cameras and high quality sound systems can contribute significantly to the visitor experience.

When the types of services or the providers of those services change, concessions management has the greatest opportunity to evolve the service requirements for concessioners. The contracts for dog sled, air taxi, and guided hiking services were renewed over the past few years. This opens an opportunity to coach the new operators in a manner that is consistent with the interpretive vision of the park. It creates challenges to change the contract once it's put into effect.

The challenges and opportunities for the guide/outfitter concessioner are often limited time and limited budgets. They operate seasonally with bases of operation all over the world, often with low profit margins and regular staff turn-over. Training time is highly valuable and sometimes takes place in mid-operating season. We need to be able to provide these concessioners training and evaluation. The majority of concessioners have expressed interest in having more interaction with the NPS interpretive and resource divisions.

Development at the south side of the park presents an opportunity to define necessary and appropriate services and to find operators that can provide those services in a manner that supports park goals for education.



NPS photo by Kent Miller

## Alaska Geographic Association

The Alaska Geographic Association (AKGEO, formerly known as the Alaska Natural History Association) has a long history of partnership with Denali, where it works under a cooperating association agreement to operate an educational bookstore and more recently as the park's primary nonprofit partner in the MSLC.

AKGEO is a nonprofit organization that works in cooperation with Denali National Park and Preserve and other public lands throughout Alaska to connect people to educational information and to inspire stewardship of the natural, historical, and cultural resources of these lands. AKGEO operates educational bookstores, publishes materials, offers hands-on programs, and generates support for Alaska's public lands. With an annual budget in excess of five million dollars and offices in Anchorage, Alaska, AKGEO generates 85% of its annual operating revenue through earned sources—books, films, and other publications.

Nearly one-third of the AKGEO program budget is focused on Denali. It operates the Denali Bookstore (two management positions and 15-plus summer sales positions) adjacent to the Denali Visitor Center, with satellite branches at the MSLC, BIC, Toklat, and Talkeetna. A percentage of net proceeds from bookstore sales are held in reserve for the park's interpretation, education, and research programs. Denali receives approximately 10-12% of gross

retail sales annually from book sales. These funds are administered by AKGEO based on budgets submitted by the park each fiscal year, with all unused amounts carrying over from year to year.

AKGEO is the park's primary partner at the MSLC. AKGEO staff is considered part of the education branch of AKGEO, which is known as Alaska Geographic Institutes. To the public, institutes staff and programming in Denali goes under the name of MSLC. Two institutes staff persons work with park personnel to provide services, and to create and deliver educational programs (See section on MSLC). Institutes education efforts feature a spectrum of experiences from 3-5-hour programs to weekend teacher trainings and seminars for families and the general public. This is accomplished through the MSLC in Denali, and through institutes programming state-wide. From the AKGEO perspective, with the scope of their publications and programs increasingly Alaska-wide, growing citizen science and other field-based opportunities are important and expanding niches.

AKGEO's publishing efforts have produced a number of Denali-specific publications including two tour booklets included exclusively with the primary concession's two bus tours. All participants on TWTs and DNHTs receive a booklet as part of the tour experience and as a method of better connecting them to the park mission. The net income from the sale of the booklets to the concession is split with the park, where funds are earmarked for development of the MSLC. Tour booklets have supported much of the MSLC

facilities furnishings and funds day-to-day institutes operations, programs, and two institutes positions.

When the park receives grants or other soft monies, AKGEO can accept those monies through a cooperative agreement and serve as the direct provider of a variety of media products from interpretive signage and exhibits to curriculum development and films.

Since there are limits on the numbers of individuals that can be reached through one-on-one education and outreach, and because the preservation of Alaska's public lands depends in part on people who may never visit, web-based distance learning tools will become increasingly important to MSLC outreach. Developing a strong web presence collaboratively won't replace direct learning but would serve to facilitate it—a tool to connect people in new ways to the park, as scaffolding on either side of field experiences and as a way to keep dialogues between educators and interpreters going long after direct park engagements.

## Denali Education Center

Until early 2007, the Denali Education Center was known as the Denali Foundation. Founded in 1990, the foundation was initially conceived of as an educational program provider and a “friends group” that could bring outside leverage funding for research and new audiences to the park. Located six miles south of the park entrance on the George Parks Highway, the center has its own residential campus including 12 sleeping cabins, the Charles Sheldon Visitor Center/Headquarters, a resource room/classroom and employee housing for 25 full- and part-time employees during the summer. The center operates Elder Hostel programs for 800 visitors through an agreement that defines a special relationship with the park. The center has raised money for park programs and materials such as buying bear-resistant food containers, and has added value to the park by providing high-quality educational programs, including camp/adventure programs in the park for youth and at-risk teens, in-school programs, and adult volunteer opportunities. The center's evening lectures attract locals and hotel guests, and fill a niche left open when the park service cut back on visitor center evening programs. The park Artist-In-Residence presentations take place at the Charles Sheldon Center.

The center is an active MSLC partner and its programs now pass through an NPS approval for MSLC inclusion. Its Discover Denali Program, designed to provide visitors a meaningful experience in the park's entrance area, is considered a model by park

education staff for how future programs might be brought on line. Discover Denali was developed for a package tour company with NPS oversight through MSLC. It now serves between 1,200 to 3,000 package tour visitors annually. A percentage of the fees that are collected support a grants program for scientific research at Denali that is administered through MSLC. This program helped the center become Partner of the Year for the NPS Alaska Region in 2006.

The center has strong links through its volunteers and board to local communities, relationships that can help strengthen local and regional connections to the park. The center is at the beginning stages of program development with schools in Anchorage and is planning to convert its campus to year-round use.

## Denali Borough School District

The Denali Borough School District has been actively working with the park for many years to broaden opportunities for teachers to use the park and park educational and natural resources to enhance educational offerings in the region. The district's Service Learning Coordinator is a key liaison between the park and schools. Students from the borough have an expanding menu of opportunities at the park, thanks to the borough working through park partners and directly with the park. The district was the NPS Alaska Region Partner of the year in 2007.



NPS photo by Kent Miller



## Part Two: Vision, Strategies and Objectives



### Vision



A vision is a mental picture of the future that reflects the hopes and aspirations of all who share it. The statements below grew out of vision workshops attended by representatives from the park and Denali community. The basis of the educational vision is of a vast, intact subarctic ecosystem that has not been adversely affected by human use. This is the foundation of all human experience at Denali whether it is a walk into the Denali wilderness or an hour spent in the Denali Visitor Center.

### Interpretation

#### *Face-to-face interpretive opportunities abound.*

Personal interactions with ranger naturalists and other highly skilled educators from partnering organizations and the community continue to be the distinctive characteristic of the educational experience at Denali. Whether they work for the park, for a private business outside the park or for a concessioner, interpreters work together on behalf of Denali. Twenty years from now the menu of guided opportunities will have expanded, but every visitor will have the same opportunity to shape their experience at every visitor center in the park, on trails, and while flightseeing and rafting. Through these experiences visitors will come to know and take steps to care for Denali.

### Accessibility

#### *Denali is truly accessible.*

Visitors with sight, hearing, mobility, and other challenges seen and unseen find a full range of stimulating opportunities to experience the park. Park staff is adequately trained to seamlessly address the needs of all visitors.

### Visitor Centers

#### *The Denali front country presents a broad range of face-to-face and non-personal learning experiences that both orient the majority of visitors and invite deeper learning.*

Visitor centers at Denali have flexible operating hours for interpretation and education programming and continuing education depending on visitor flow. The front entrance campus is a stimulating place in the evenings. Transportation links from the commercial center to the park campus are free, easy to find and frequent, with a bus circling area hotels each evening to bring people to and from evening programs.

The park has the capacity for a changing exhibits program and makes good use of collections within the park and beyond. Exhibits are designed to be flexible and easily changeable, while a select few have the capacity to travel throughout Alaska and the country serving the dual function of linking communities outside the park to ongoing research in the park.

### MSLC

#### *MSLC programs help in-person and virtual visitors connect to the park through science.*

Partnerships are the rule, not the exception, for how education is designed and delivered. Many new partnerships in science and learning have emerged and matured out of the MSLC. MSLC has a special relationship with the University of Alaska that provides a steady stream of graduate students and interns. The role of research coordinator at MSLC is key to connecting Denali to the entire Cooperative

Ecosystem Study Unit network. MSLC manages a sabbatical-in-the-parks program with a national and international reach. The MSLC has its residential facility up and running and is fully funded from a variety of sources, and its mission to serve all eight national parks is now more fully realized. There is a variety of media from podcasts to booklets available on specialized topics—all built into purchase fees for the visitors traveling the Park Road on one of several transportation options.

## Concessions

### *Denali offers high-quality experiences.*

All visitors who choose a concession-led experience in the park are provided a high-quality experience by knowledgeable guides who understand and are committed to the mission, key themes, and resource protection messages of the park. Concession guides understand the importance of stewardship of park resources to the surrounding lands and communities, and they have accurate information about the cultural and natural resources and natural processes of the sub-arctic.

### *The Tour Experience*

Tours remain the primary experience for the majority of visitors who pass through the north entrance into the park. Each trip into the park retains the sense of adventure it has today, but the educational experience has undergone several generations of improvements:

- All drivers receive in-park training and wear some semblance of “park colors” so there is strong evidence of park partnership and mutual support on every bus.
- Drivers have a range of new tools at their disposal.
- The buses have changed not only to make incremental improvements to visitor comfort and wildlife viewing, but the fleet reflects the latest improvements in fuel efficiency and low emission technology.
- Opportunities for riders to meet ranger naturalists and walk short trails have increased.

### *The VTS Experience*

- Drivers and ranger naturalists represent one community of park experts. VTS riders have opportunities to meet with and talk to rangers at visitor centers and rest stops. When rangers ride the park shuttle, they are welcomed by the drivers

in the spirit of collegiality and shared purpose.

- The VTS and the broad suite of experiences it offers the visitor are well promoted and the process from getting information to boarding at the WAC is easy and informative.
- VTS riders explore the Eielson Visitor Center fully staffed by ranger naturalists.

## Backcountry

### *The Denali backcountry experience is undiminished.*

The opportunity to experience wilderness at Denali remains undiminished in terms of the health and diversity of the ecosystems. Human-caused noise and visual impacts on the landscape are minimal to nonexistent. Opportunities for secluded personal experience, inspiration, and small group discoveries are as powerful as ever.



NPS photo by Kent Miller

## Southside

***Visitors are able to participate in a full range of enjoyable and meaningful educational experiences on the south side of the Alaska Range.***

The southside has developed its own brand identity as a place to see Mount McKinley and experience Denali National Park and Preserve. The Talkeetna Ranger Station has seen education and interpretive improvements that recognize its importance to the entire community and tourist economy. The new visitor center reflects the key themes of the park which now take into consideration the different range of uses, resources (including salmon), and coordinated management objectives at play in the southern districts of the park. Denali is able to accommodate a near doubling of education-based tourism growth over 20 years, primarily by developing educational opportunities to the south at the state park, within area hotels, and within local communities. An expanding business sector is a growing funding partner to education at Denali. Marketing approaches have adapted and visitor expectations have broadened so that “going to Denali” includes a very broad variety of experience choices.



## Local Community

***Local Alaska citizens and Alaska communities are fully empowered educational partners.***

Local Alaska communities are active partners in several important ways. Public attitudes have seen a significant shift in 20 years such that ordinary Alaskans understand and support the educational mission of the park and the economic implications of strong parks linking to strong communities. The park has made a sustained effort to collaborate with local communities through school to work programs, jointly designed community-based curriculum learning initiatives, traveling exhibits, and more programming in the park for local schools. The park also provides technical support to communities working on projects to preserve historic sites and create visitor centers, trails, and kiosks that highlight special cultural and natural features. Because of these efforts, the park is well supported publicly.

## Web

***The Internet and information technology have become fully employed tools to augment and support the park's direct experience-focused education programs.***

Denali has a strong web presence that can support educational adventuring into Denali from a distance. The world that can never visit Denali will have opportunities to learn of its resources, stewardship issues, and meanings. Denali will benefit from limited and appropriate technological developments in the park, such as web cams and pod-casting. Technologies like distance learning will be employed to improve interpretation staff training and evaluation, and web-based menu and registration forms will be used to help audiences planning trips build their own experience. Use of the web routinely enables school students to visit Denali, to participate in MSLC scientific research, to share perspectives, data, values and action steps across the wide distances that both separate and connect students globally. It augments but does not supplant the direct and powerful experience of the Denali landscapes, natural communities, and teachers offered by Denali National Park and Preserve.

Alaska Geographic photo by Debbie Whitecar





NPS photo by Neil Blake

## Arts

*Arts are woven throughout the experience of science and education at Denali.*

The arts are flourishing throughout the park, which displays the work of visual artists, writers, and craftsmen in its visitor centers. Galleries, museums, workshops, and institutes are available to day visitors and to visitors who stay much longer. Through celebration of the arts and nature, Denali has marketed itself as a place to spend significantly longer amounts of time for learners of all ages.



NPS photo by Carol Harding

## Schools

*The park is a full educational partner.*

Schools look at parks as stimulating learning environments that offer real world and virtual opportunities to learn and apply skills. Park programs are not only fun for students, they are relevant and useful to teachers. They meet state/national curricula standards and are cognizant of national education trends. Through the MSLC, the park offers teacher trainings to show them how the park and its stories can help them in the classroom. Schools from anywhere within a six-hour driving radius routinely participate in educational programs including in-depth residential student programs led by MSLC partners, service-learning programs, and sustained teacher professional development programs.

There is much that schools and education professionals can offer to park visitors. Students will regularly make contributions to the public's understanding of Denali as citizen scientists through scientific research, oral history, arts and drama projects. Students throughout Alaska will contribute as seasonal volunteers, as artists-in-residence, and as ambassadors of the park. Schools will contribute the skills of its teaching staff in park training and program development. Schools from around the nation and globe will have opportunities to experience Denali's remarkable resources.



## Obstacles to Achieving the Vision

### Staffing

- **Operations:** With the major building phase near completion (exception of southside visitor center and MSLC residential building) there is a new impetus to shift job responsibilities and hire new staff for building operation and maintenance. Infrastructure growth without increasing program staffing capacity is a huge drain on staff morale and retention. Proper staffing of centers is critical to achieving center objectives, including interpretive face-to-face tours, facility and exhibit maintenance, and program development. While the park may decide to continue to outsource certain educational services, outsourcing becomes a major obstacle when key skill sets are lost in house: training and evaluation, community outreach, written and oral communication publication, graphic arts and exhibit development, web design and management, facilitation skills, event planning and strategic planning.
- **Community:** To foster connections with schools and communities, the park cannot rely on non-permanent or seasonal staff. Long-term relationship building requires a commitment to staff positions. In the short term, a new education paradigm at the park will require shifting responsibilities rather than adding many new positions, since large increases in the education budget may not be feasible at this time. For example, the park should attempt to shift the emphasis of its professional interpretive staff

from direct service to training and evaluation, community outreach, and coordinating message delivery with concession partners and local businesses. Even this kind of shift is challenging to current staff and will require additional resources.

- **MSLC:** To lead in the area of science education, the MSLC needs an investment in staffing and program development systems. MSLC needs a research liaison staff. Scientists are generally not trained educators and feel they don't have time to teach or share information with educators.
- **Housing:** There is not adequate affordable housing for Denali staff.

### Funding

- **Seasonal Staff:** The current seasonal staff is funded from a patchwork of sources, including projects and partners who may choose to withdraw funding at any time. Adequate funding to provide core visitor services needs to be allotted through park base funds.
- **Term Staff:** Park base funds need to be secured to move positions serving a critical park need from term to permanent status. Education programs and projects often take several years to develop and employees who may be terminated at any time due to lack of funds are less likely to feel invested in program development opportunities.
- **Exhibit Maintenance:** With the creation of new visitor centers, waysides and interpretive products,

comes the need to maintain and update them to ensure continued visitor enjoyment. Funding and staffing needs to be secured for this purpose.

## Partnerships

- **Communication and Planning:** Partnerships require a whole new way of doing business where communications have to be more consistent, clear, and timely. The park can appear unresponsive when in fact its process is moving along. Planning horizons are different in the private sector. Tour companies plan programs two years out while park operations are dependent on annual funding cycles.
- **Management Styles:** Management structure and style differ among partners. The park can seem autocratic and overly top down. Nonprofits can be fluid and quick to respond to opportunities while for-profit businesses can seem to be concerned with the bottom line. In an ideal partnership, all entities feel empowered and are able to remain aligned with their social, economic, and environmental missions. To be most productive and to take fullest advantage of partnerships, the NPS must move beyond the mentality of control.

## Marketing

- **Visitor Data:** There is a lack of good market-based information about Denali visitors—who they are, what they want, what will bring them back for a second visit, and what will motivate them to take on a sense of responsibility.
- **Misperceptions:** There is a common misperception that a trip out the Park Road is the only way to experience Denali. This misperception has considerable implications for developing other Denali experiences, such as on the south side. Denali is also marketed in such a way that creates often unrealistic expectations for wildlife and views of Mount McKinley. Drivers and park interpreters spend a significant portion of their time adjusting visitors' expectations.

## Community

- **Communication:** Collaboration between the park and local communities is essential to reaching a shared vision for education and interpretation. However, because of inconsistent communication between the park and local communities opportunities are missed.

*“Unrealistic visitor expectations are a considerable obstacle to developing a true understanding of Denali.”*

TOUR BUS DRIVER



NPS photo by Kent Miller

- **Trust:** There is concern among some community members in the south about the negative impacts visitor center development might have on the community. Unaddressed concerns can generate mistrust and promote opposition to the southside project.

## Training and Program Evaluation

- **Shared Training:** Lack of shared training among all park and concession interpreters is an obstacle, as is the lack of provision of regular, current, synchronized information on park programs and logistics to everyone who interfaces with the public from the Alaska Railroad to bed and breakfast owners.
- **Evaluation:** An underdeveloped evaluation program prevents the park from knowing whether programs are working. For example, is the Denali Natural History Tour meeting interpretive goals and visitor expectations? How evaluation should be done and by whom is unclear. There are massive obstacles to doing it well. Additional staffing by both NPS and partners is required.

## Technology

- **Internet:** The park and MSLC have yet to devise the program strategy for fully employing the potential of the Internet to serve existing audiences and reach new ones. Videoconferencing equipment is underused because the park is not yet oriented to outreach programs that require use of it.
- **Wireless Capacity:** While wireless networks exist in the park, staff are unable to use them with people who are not NPS, limiting the ability to support meaningful partnerships





NPS photo by Neil Blake

# Strategic Directions for the Next Twenty Years

## Key Issues of the Denali Education Plan

1. Current and future threats to the health and integrity of Denali ecosystems are significant. A strong stewardship message based on increased (continuing) education is necessary to ensure that Denali's shifting global environmental conditions remain intact.
2. Rapid growth in package tourism at Denali has resulted in key audiences missing key resource protection messages.
3. The size and scope of the Division of Interpretation has not kept pace with the rapid growth of visitation to Denali. The education program is currently under-resourced and the gap between program capacity and need for effective education will continue to widen over time.

### *What Makes an Appropriate Twenty-Year Strategy?*

- *It is overarching.*
- *It is sufficiently long range.*
- *It addresses both key issues and primary goals.*

## Primary Goals of Denali's Education Program

1. To preserve and enhance the Denali wilderness and the ecological and cultural integrity of all of Denali National Park and Preserve.
2. To bring to all key audiences, including youths and children, an understanding of Denali's meanings as an essential element of the American experience.
3. To enable all visitors, personal and virtual, to have a high level of personal enjoyment, satisfaction, and enrichment commensurate with the significant resources of Denali.
4. To provide meaningful links between science and education that effectively inspire and train the next generation of responsible stewards.
5. To stay relevant to the changing world beyond park boundaries.
6. To build understanding, participation and support at the local, national, and global levels.
7. To develop an ethic of continual program improvement and innovation by cultivating a culture of evaluation over time.



## Strategy 1: Interpretive Ranger Corps

*Rebuild and reinvigorate the professional permanent and seasonal interpretive ranger corps at Denali to increase the quality and quantity of ranger-led interpretation programming, and to provide a foundation for achieving all other educational strategies.*

### Reinvigorate Permanent Ranger Corps

*Develop new positions and redirect staff to build core capacities and competencies around the following vital educational functions:*

- Provide a rich and varied selection of interpretive programming by qualified staff, some of which are permanent, and supported by appropriately skilled supervisory interpretive rangers.
- Recruit and manage seasonal rangers, SCAs and volunteers.
- Build interpretation skills and provide training.
- Perform program evaluations.
- Continue curriculum design and exhibit development.
- Embrace technology and graphics.
- Pursue partnership development.
- Improve science literacy.

### Strengthen Seasonal Ranger Corps

- Design recruitment strategy aimed at youth leaders in local communities, Alaska Native youth and Alaska colleges. Recruit students with dual education science majors.
- Institute a graduate science/education dual major degree through the MSCL.

- Provide adequate coaching to build skills of seasonal staff.
- Professionalize seasonal interpreter positions with higher wage scale and higher skills and knowledge expectations.
- Encourage seasonal interpretive rangers to participate in park research.
- Develop peer mentoring approach to build knowledge base and increase skills.
- Create incentive programs to retain Denali experienced interpretive rangers and have a vested interest in their personal/professional growth.

### Develop the Next Generation of Ranger-led Programs

- Devise a hierarchy of ranger-led programs from high priority to low. Seek educational partners to complement the ranger corps with their knowledge base, skills, relationships, and resources.
- Provide appropriate ranger educational staffing at all visitor centers and front country facilities.
- Build on new front country infrastructure. Bolster old and create new visitor center ranger programs at DVC, Eielson, and the future southside visitor center through expanded programs, formal and informal talks, and ranger guided short walks.
- Increase campground programs to nightly at all park campgrounds.
- Maintain a high overall percentage of free ranger-led programs—walks, informal talks, evening programs, and dogsled demos.
- Invest in staff training and information services at the WAC, in partnership with the primary concession.
- Reinstitute an evening program series in the DVC auditorium. Several programs can be offered on a revolving basis.
- Ensure easily accessible and understandable round-trip transportation from lodging centers.
- Provide greater ranger presence to tour passengers.

## Strategy 2: Partners

*Seek to build a regional professional educational group by strengthening and expanding educational partnership relationships and training programs.*

### Possible Approaches

- Look to partnerships and concession agreements as the principle means by which to accomplish the Denali educational mission over the long run. The mission is broader in scope than the capacities of the park ranger staff alone, particularly beyond park boundaries.
- Work with universities to bring masters-level students into seasonal employment. Require specific classes before they come to the park.
- Build a community knowledge database that combines partner and community members' skills and knowledge with those of NPS staff.
- Increase cross training: interpretation training seminars for Denali scientists and science training for interpreters.
- Expand opportunities for JV drivers to observe experienced JV drivers.
- Create opportunities for peer mentoring between drivers, ranger naturalists, and trained guides in Kantishna.
- Offer non-certified training opportunities and park information/orientation to workers in the tourist trade—pilots, fishing guides, and hoteliers.

- Seek underwriting for ongoing training programs from the tourism industry.
- Encourage alignment between all NPS, concession, and other interpreters in the Denali region through a Denali interpreter certification program, based on NPS standards. Provide continuing education and training opportunities, coaching and mentoring programs.
- Create a new symbolic “flat hat” to build alignment and shared identity, shared understandings, and vision/mission among all educators and interpreters of greater Denali ecosystems. Create a new logo and badge that can be worn by all who have earned Denali visitor guide certification.

### MSLC

- Grow the MSLC as the primary means by which vital science and educational partnerships are established and managed.
- Expand regular MSLC multi-day educational offerings in the park that have priority over the expansion of one-day tour visits.
- Offer an expanded range of opportunities for deep, continual learning by professional audiences.
- Strengthen regular communication between MSLC staff and researchers.
- Develop and implement a new public/private leadership model, with clarified responsibilities and relationships between NPS and the primary operating partner, AKGEO (based on a study of



NPS photo by Neil Blake



the full range of research learning center partnership models).

- Provide resources to the MSLC to facilitate the research coordination, grant writing and pursuit of other funding sources, as well as leadership for the overall development of the program.
- Devise an MSLC program vetting model that is objective, fair, and unbiased to all partners.
- Continue to build revenue in the MSLC to fund interpretive programming from multiple sources: Natural Resource Challenge, increase tour booklet sales (VTS/guided hike companion books), Denali Education Center revenues, Discover Denali Program revenues, grants and corporate support.
- Complete the MSLC residential facility to support staff and visiting researchers.



NPS photo by Kent Miller

a streamlined community transportation system between the DVC and Healy in partnership with area businesses.

- Provide sufficient staff and programming at the Eielson Visitor Center so that investments in new infrastructure are met with equal human resource and program investments to ensure high quality interactions between rangers, VTS riders, and west-end lodge visitors.
- Build a new southside visitor center in collaboration with the State of Alaska on Denali State Park lands and as the epicenter of new Denali visitor experiences south of the Alaska range.
- At all centers emphasize the interpretation of Denali's efforts at designing and improving buildings for energy efficiency and long-term sustainability.
- At all centers make effective use of written media, Internet, and video clips.
- Celebrate and use the arts to educate and inspire visitors about Denali's natural and cultural history through exhibitions, workshops, demonstrations, evening interpretive programs, lecture series, the Artist-in-Residence program, and increased curriculum-based field seminars both at Denali and in the MSLC's eight partner parks.
- Explore the feasibility of an arts-related curatorial space relative to the placeholder in the north Denali visitor center village complex, as defined in the 1996 map and vision document.
- Integrate new arts technologies into the infrastructure and education programs.
- Expand trails in the front country, and improve trail signage and trail system linkages to MSLC and McKinley Station. Provide concession opportunities for self-guided and ranger-led hiking opportunities into accessible wilderness.
- Create an expanded trail guide with natural and cultural history interpretation of the entrance area.
- Complete interpretive exhibits at the WAC.
- Increase communication and training between NPS and WAC staffs.
- Improve interpretive signage and program information exchange at campgrounds.
- Build an arch or other form of gateway by the Parks Highway to make it obvious to all visitors that the front country is part of the park, too, and has valuable experiences to offer.

### Strategy 3: Front Country

*Make the best use of Denali's unique strengths in infrastructure in the entrance area and road corridor.*

#### Possible Approaches

- Ensure that every visitor has the opportunity to visit one of the park's visitor centers.
- Broaden and deepen the park's front country visitor experience (north, south, and west) by creating

## Strategy 4: Evaluation

*Develop a culture in Denali in which evaluation is at the core of programmatic development and delivery and the role it plays is highly valued.*

### Possible Approaches

- Adopt the NPS evaluation strategy, when it becomes available. Implement an approach to program evaluation that is outcome and impact-oriented and that holds all park and partnership programs accountable.
- Reassign responsibilities for evaluating the interpretive quality of TWT and DNHT to the Division of Interpretation, though the Commercial Services Division continues in its role of overall contract evaluator.
- Build capacity within the staff of the primary concessioner to monitor and evaluate its staff as the NPS proxy. Evolve current evaluation approaches from audit orientation to team learning. Build in opportunities for self-evaluation, team evaluation, and subjective visitor response analysis, joint training, web-based continual training, and driver peer mentoring.
- Direct MSLC staff to plan, develop, and implement a workshop on developing a culture of evaluation. Invite partners to participate in program design. Invite evaluation experts to participate.
- Encourage risk-taking in program design. Learn from frequent program failures. Create space for reflective action and for innovation to thrive.
- Design school programs and community engagement programs based on open-ended dialogue and evaluation of what communities and schools most need and want.
- Evaluate bookstore product placement on a regular basis and create a set of product placement criteria that reflects the values of Denali.

## Strategy 5: Concessions

*Work in close partnership with all concessions and commercial service providers to continually shape and improve bus tours and other guided tour products at Denali.*

### Possible Approaches

- Use bus touring experiences more effectively to preserve the wilderness by integrating key resource protection messages in all tours: “Denali is differ-

ent and there are good reasons why.”

- Establish an aggressive myth-research-and-debunking program for drivers and provide them with NPS-generated fact sheets.
- Develop new ways to employ JV drivers’ significant skills and knowledge in park education and interpretation programs off buses.
- Build within the driver corps a shared identity with the uniformed NPS ranger.
- Develop new concession tours in partnership with NPS, such as specialized tour buses (photography, birds, paleontology, botany, mining history, cultural history) that target an expanding segment of the general public that is well-educated and inspired to support parks. Vet all new programs with NPS educators and resource protection specialists.
- Provide a variety of opportunities at rest areas to walk short, self-guiding loops within the road corridor front country and reinforce important wilderness resource protection messages of restraint and why there are visitor use limits.
- Preserve current opportunities for interactions in the west end with ranger interpreters.
- Provide regular low cost and free opportunities for local youth and employees of Nenana Canyon businesses to ride VTS. Develop highly discounted special programs for youth groups such as biking, hiking, and camping.
- Continue the VTS approach of mixing user populations for the rich informal exchange it represents—tourists, backpackers, classes, and campers.
- Post student-generated pamphlets and posters on buses.
- Create bus tool chests filled with bones, teeth, fur, laminated illustrations of plants/animals, binoculars, and educational models.
- Improve design of buses through low and fogless windows, comfortable legroom, and fuel efficiency. Stress in all future design the direct relationship between assimilating educational content and comfort.
- Reduce logistical stress for visitors using buses and the WAC to experience the backcountry.
- Improve video enhancements for viewing wildlife.
- Improve the opportunities for visitors to build on their bus trip experience by providing more convenience in the transportation system and expanding opportunities in the evening to visit



WAC, MSLC, DVC, the bookstore, and other entrance area outdoor program venues.

- Build in time on package tours for more reflection and personal connection and for getting off the bus and experiencing a sense of grandeur and solitude at Denali.
- Develop programs that provide opportunities for volunteerism and/or citizen science.

## Strategy 6: Expand Outreach to South of the Alaska Range

*Work with partners to develop and strengthen park educational program opportunities, infrastructure, and park identity south of the Alaska Range.*

### Possible Approaches

- Develop a collaborative approach to program development that stresses the equal partnership of Denali State Park and the local audience.
- Create a vision for a Greater Denali Ecosystem with the designated wilderness at its core.
- Brand southside districts of the park with a name and identity that evokes a sense of place that is different from the wilderness north of the range, such as Chulitna Valley District or River District. Discuss branding within the multi-agency team.
- Adapt the *Alpenglow* visitor guide to reflect off-season activities and opportunities on the south side as well as north of the range.
- Distribute *Alpenglow* widely in southside communities, on the web, and through snowmachine and ski clubs.
- Advertise lottery and biking opportunities on the Park Road.
- Make more effective use of radio to make sure people to the south know what is available throughout the park. Use radio to provide park information and programming from the junction of the George Parks Highway and Talkeetna Spur Road (the “Y”) to Anderson.
- Work with partners to develop and communicate a seamless message about the Interior Alaska experience so visitors will understand, appreciate, and enjoy opportunities available to them as they travel north of the Y on the Parks Highway. Disseminate this message from Fairbanks to Anchorage. Have MSLC host a “Seamless Message Summit.” Promote a system by which organizations are recognized for their efforts to promote this new concept.
- Provide training to state park volunteers, interpreters at summer hotels, bus drivers, air taxis, riverboat guides, and others working in the tourism trade.
- Establish a salmon and river exhibit in Talkeetna with business and civic partners.
- Expand interpretive infrastructure along the Parks Highway from the Talkeetna Spur Road through Anderson and brand it as a park experience similar to the approach of scenic byways.



## Strategy 7: Market

*Create a broad menu of educational program choices with non-governmental partners that also help accomplish the Denali stewardship mission.*

### Possible Approaches

- Know the marketplace: Complete detailed market analysis of key audiences' preferences.
- Research long-term trends in, and predictions for, the Alaska tourism industry to be able to anticipate change.
- Conduct market research with an independent academic source in surrounding communities to establish baseline community attitudes.
- Establish an educational program design system that is both mission and market driven, clearly understood and agreed upon by all partners, and that is responsive to audience interests and partner assets.
- Tailor programs to audience interests and create more in-depth options.
- Design experiences for various levels of awareness/knowledge, as well as various interests.
- Reach out to Alaskans and discover what could bring them to Denali on a regular basis.
- Work with tour companies and other prominent stakeholders in the tourist industry to highlight the vastness of intact wilderness ecosystems while de-emphasizing large mammals and Serengeti imagery in all marketing materials.
- Make information available via web, video, and print materials to bus and train companies so that the Denali experience begins as soon as they board. Work with the existing Alaska Railroad docent program and provide job opportunities for high school students who have spent a season as interpreters on the train system.

## Strategy 8: Community Connections

*Through a robust program of civic engagement, grow strong community connections by engaging local organizations, businesses, and schools on a continual basis and strengthen connections to the larger landscape beyond park boundaries including to Alaska Native traditional lands, other public lands, and sister parks.*

## Possible Approaches

### Community

- Seek program input from all north and south communities regularly. Keep the dialogue flowing.
- Work in close partnership with Denali community to seek ways to build synergy between local businesses, corporations, and the park.
- Provide accurate information about the park mission, themes, and plans to local communities and see that it is widely disseminated via press releases, flyers, and the park website.
- Use resource/research staff in the community as teachers and interpreters.
- Support the development of local interpretive centers, historical sites, museums, and other exhibits run and owned by local organizations.
- Poll attitudes at five-year intervals to see if public perceptions of the park are shifting; plan to do this for at least the next 25 years.
- Expand opportunities for school trips to Denali State Park. Work with Alaska Public Lands Information Centers in Anchorage and Fairbanks to connect more to urban audiences within Alaska.
- Include subsistence and Alaska Native communities, climbers, and a wide range of users in out-reach efforts.

### Students

- Create a wide variety of ongoing standards-based partnerships with local borough schools, including curriculum and place-based approaches, web-linked and citizen science enterprises, camps, workshops, teacher trainings, and residencies.
- Provide teachers and students with opportunities for service learning projects in the park.
- Turn students into citizen scientists and use student-generated data in park exhibits.
- Create a Junior Ranger program in local elementary schools and encourage summer opportunities, which could include internships or volunteer activities, such as serving as docents at the DVC.
- Use the wilderness protection model of Denali as a catalyst for students understanding how to protect the world.
- Use MSLC resources to provide residential programs for students from Anchorage to Fair-

banks and work with education partners to develop and teach these programs.

- Use student technological skills to serve the stewardship mission of Denali with local school links to the park website.
- With Denali Borough School District create Denali curriculum kits that can be shared globally. Give local students opportunities to teach others around the state, nation, and world about their special place.
- Invite older students to teach younger students, and invite students to become stewards.

## Strategy 9: Information Technology

*Embrace and employ innovative technology in interpretative and education offerings.*

### Possible Approaches

- Hire a full-time web master for the MSLC staff.
- Make significant and sustainable improvements to the park and MSLC websites. Add links to partner parks and partners. Put up links to ongoing research in the park and create a virtual science library.
- Broaden video conferencing and distance learning capacity. Make Denali the first center for the distribution of online/interactive outdoor classroom programs available to schools in Alaska and beyond. Seek funding through MSLC partners.
- Create easy-access online program registration functions for all interpretive and educational services in Denali, including bus and backcountry permit needs.
- Use webcams to provide points of ongoing interest and engagement for distant visitors.
- Create a web-based climate change and tundra watch monitoring program for Alaska schools through MSLC.

## Strategy 10: Connect Families to Parks

*Meet developmental needs of youths and children and the logistical needs of families to ensure opportunities for learners of all ages to connect to Denali.*

### Possible Approaches

- Collect data on existing family/youth visits to Denali. Why are they coming? What are they doing while they are here? What, if anything, would they need to enhance their visit? What time frames do they come within a month or within a day?
- Connect current “Denali Days” programming to families in communities: First, the ranger goes to classroom, then the classroom visits the park with the ranger, and then ideally families come with students to a facilitated event in park, such as an open house.
- Continue supporting infrastructure for current successful Junior Ranger Program and Discovery Packs and expand into family-based formal programming.
- Create short, scaffolding programs for local youth and families. For example meet two hours a week for three weeks (once in June, July, and August) with the same audience.
- Create Family Friendly Days/Tours in the park that include a crafted programming of a bus booked for families, auxiliary car seats for children (infants/toddlers/preschoolers), and activities for kids.
- Offer a Family Discovery Package that includes several nights in the park, camping/bus fees discounted, suggested itineraries, and coupon deals at food-related concessions.
- Address existing barriers related to auxiliary car seats in a practical, feasible manner that encourages family visits on park-sanctioned public transportation.
- Create a “Kids Guide to Denali” which is geared toward an adult audience for facilitating youth visits to the park. Include the most kid-friendly options as well as tips and suggestions for engaging youth within the park in a safe, fun manner.
- Address transitioning the interpretive culture at Denali toward attending to the needs of youth within existing programming. For example, mini-discovery packs available to youth on bus tours or GPS ranger devices on shuttle buses.
- Train rangers to incorporate kid-friendly activities on programs that start to show an increasing number of youth on programs.
- Encourage family camping by increasing group site availability.
- Begin discussion of encouraging family friendly services and needs on the southside.



NPS photo by Kent Miller

## Measuring Success

### Evaluating Education and Interpretation at Denali

A key objective of the Denali Education Plan is that it be both vision-oriented and measurable. A primary strategy for achieving measurability within the Plan is to develop a culture of evaluation at Denali National Park and Preserve. Appendix G describes what an evaluation culture means and why is it important. The section below offers a set of recommended approaches to move Denali toward a culture of evaluation and innovation.

- Task and fund MSLC to host workshops for staff and partners to educate, orient, and plan the next steps to develop a new evaluation paradigm.
- With all concessions, move from a performance-audit model to partnership-learning models using a range of tools beyond third-party survey tools and staff audits.
- Create a permanent evaluator position at Denali, or staff through a long-term partnership.
- Evolve the annual program evaluation and work plan process at Denali. For Denali education staff, build in time for adequate evaluative data gathering, reflection, and response.
- Incorporate the NPS logic model into program planning and evaluation processes at Denali. Involve Denali education staff and education partners in a retreat process to build a logic model specific to Denali's education program.
- Require that new partnership programs be derived from existing evaluation data and put in place agreed upon methodologies for program evaluation at the program design stage.
- Reward program innovations, including failures, where learning from the experience is incorporated into future approaches.
- Qualitative feedback and input from program participants on program effectiveness and success is important, but there is a critical service-wide need for new tools that can measure nationally desired public outcomes and impacts. Maintain a place in the NPS national education dialogue to support the development of these tools.
- Monitor local and statewide attitudes toward the park at regular intervals.
- Monitor public satisfaction inside the park on a regular basis.
- Complete three-year Predictive Study of Use Impacts on the Denali Park Road. Base any changes in programmatic use on program evaluative processes that involve all community, school, non-profit, and concession stakeholders.
- Establish a centralized system for tracking and predicting park total visitation and use.

*See Appendix G: Evaluation*



## Implications of this Plan

### Staffing Implications

It has been said that the beauty and grandeur of Denali speaks for itself. If that were entirely true, then there wouldn't be a need for the education program. While the rocks, trees, sky, mountains, and animals are the voice of Denali, educators are the voice for Denali. They make the vital connections between the visitor and the subtle meanings and functions of the landscape. They create the context for deeper understanding that can grow into stewardship action. They make a strong case to the general public for ongoing science in the parks, and translate that science so it can be understood by everyone. They provide for opportunities to enlarge the scope of education to allow communities to participate in hands-on work in the park.

The job of education at Denali is big. The education program at Denali needs to grow to accommodate the size of the task.

Staffing implications have everything to do with how that growth will be accommodated. This plan points towards partnerships as an important strategic approach to getting the job done. But partnerships are no cure-all. The likely growth in visitation, expansion of facilities and programs south of the Alaska Range, and an expanded mission that increasingly focuses broadly beyond park boundaries will require more professional NPS educators. Expanding partnerships with nonprofits, concession providers, schools, other parks, and volunteer service providers of all varieties can alleviate the need, in some cases, to hire frontline interpreter staff, particularly in the following areas:

- Curriculum development
- Service learning and other school partnerships
- Classroom teaching
- Camps
- Residential programs
- MSLC field camp classes
- Evaluation
- Guided walks, talks, and interpretive programs
- Information technology
- Development and maintenance of interpretive signage, exhibits, and waysides
- Hotel interpretive naturalists

But partnerships cannot fill the entire need for division growth. The primary job of the Division of Interpretation is to hold the whole regional educational enterprise together. That means keeping the vision, mission, and themes of Denali in the forefront of all education and interpretation providers and communities of Denali. It means keeping the focus on the quality of the visitor experience from visitor enjoyment to motivation for stewardship action. The job of the NPS educator is to keep everyone on the same page, to assure the quality and accuracy of data and information through training and evaluation. The education program will have to grow into this role by developing new capacities and competencies in the coming 20 years. This requires that the division retool over time, adapting to changing conditions, and, when funding permits, adding permanent staff positions for vital



Denali Education Center photo

facilitating and educational roles, including the following:

- Managing partner relationships: The park staff will participate increasingly in and facilitate educational experiences managed by partners, including in venues outside of the park.
- Expanding vital in-park programs that park rangers are in the best position to provide.
- Enabling and supporting park science and actively translating this work into public education and stewardship work.
- Training and certifying concessioner staff, NPS and non-NPS interpreters in the communities in and surrounding the park.
- Providing thematic and program information to everyone in the Denali region who interfaces with the public, from Alaska Railroad staff to bed and breakfast owners.
- Managing volunteer-staffed campground and visitor center interpreter services.
- Developing and supporting an expanded innovative guided hikes program, including coordinating a corps of volunteers to lead programs where



NPS photo by Kent Miller

appropriate.

- Supporting school programs and other civic engagement opportunities.
- Building a strong presence on the web.
- Leveraging the power of partnership and cooperation with other parks and public land agencies.

### Other Staffing Implications

- Efforts need to continue to improve the return rate of seasonal employees so investment in training and mentoring can be of benefit to the park for multiple seasons.
- Top-heavy permanent staff needs retraining and redirection of opportunities to stay vital. Greater opportunity for vertical movement and opportunities to carry out cutting edge educational programming are needed to avoid stasis within education staff.
- In the short term, it is likely that any increases in staffing will be term staff and likely be funded from soft money sources. This is an unfortunate reality, but over the coming decades the park should gradually build permanent education staff positions as funding opportunities arise.
- Limited affordable housing options could have an impact on recruitment goals.
- Given current funding restrictions, Denali should consider bringing in a grant writer/fundraiser through partnership relationships.
- Permanent educator grade levels need to be brought up at Denali to reflect NPS pay scale policies.
- Offer more support and encouragement for term staff to stay the course at Denali until federal mandates are in place for increased permanent educational staff.
- Educators whose success depends on building long-term relationships in the community need to be consistently present. These positions need to evolve into permanent positions.

### Concession Implications

The following summarized points concerning implications to concessions came from a planning task force meeting in October 2006.

The heavy reliance the park places on concessioners to provide interpretive visitor services that incorporate key park themes and to represent the mission and stewardship goals will remain undiminished in the coming years and will likely increase.





- All concession businesses need to work collaboratively with NPS trainer/evaluators to further strengthen training, evaluation, and interpretive techniques.
- In the future, training should include opportunities to improve interpretive skills, program development, and testing ideas with others.
- Concessions need to embrace a meaningful framework of standards and evaluation protocols, and follow through with findings.
- Concessions should be contracted to include VTS opportunities and park programs in marketing and information services provided to package tour visitors.
- NPS needs to provide concessions with clear themes and core messages and guidelines for developing interpretive programs.
- Concessions need to base their interpretive programs on NPS themes and the Denali Education Plan, and provide accurate information derived directly from NPS research, educational materials, and NPS orientation and training.
- Educators need to take a more front and center role in tour and guided-hike evaluations.
- The costs of education and interpreter training and evaluation should be built into franchise fees charged to concessions.

### Partner Implications

- The park seeks partnerships that can be long-lasting and that deepen over time.
- Partners represent an important link to communities beyond Denali. They need to be well aligned with the mission and vision of the park, and be committed to communicating key Denali themes and resource protection messages to their clients.
- Partners that have experience in inquiry-based hands-on education that links well with science will be especially critical to Denali's school efforts.
- The park needs to support partners' efforts to develop new capacities in service to the park.
- Whether in the leadership role or supporting role, partners will need to develop flexibility and efficiency around decision making and communication protocols.
- The park must be strategic in choosing partnerships, seeking those that are mutually beneficial, so that access to any income stream provided to partners returns equal monetary and non-monetary benefits to the park education and resource protection initiatives.

### Funding Implications

Costs of the education program at Denali will increase over the next 20-year period to reflect expanding educational programs in the park, particularly south of the Alaska Range. The need to adjust pay scales and base



grades for professional interpreters, recruit and keep high quality trained educators, and convert and hire additional permanent staff will drive these costs.

Base funding increases for the park in the short-term are not feasible, however park administration and regional chiefs should seek opportunities for base funding increases at Denali as soon as possible to reflect the new educational mandate. Significant infrastructure improvements and the need to staff new centers, the growing job of stewardship education at Denali, and increases in park research funding require increases in educational base funding. Investing strategically in educational program capacity should significantly contribute to long-term public support for the protection and enjoyment of Denali's ecosystems.

When and where program growth is able to occur in the short-term is a function of how creative Denali is at leveraging outcomes from base funding with soft funding sources.

These recommendations came out of the October 2006 taskforce workshop on funding implications:

- Invest in a grant writer/development officer to seek public and private funding for designated educational projects.
- Seek cost recovery from the tour industry for a new set of focused guided tours.
- Explore VTS capacity for transporting small group (size limit of 12) tours into the backcountry.
- Expand MSLC educational/research offerings and other MSLC sponsored fee programs.
- Seek franchise fee funding from concessions for training and program evaluation.
- Look for opportunities within the parks nonprofit partners, such as AKGEO and Denali Education Center, for directing new program revenues toward the park educational program.
- Look for local business partnership underwriting of local school initiatives.



NPS photo by Laura Phillips



# Appendix A: The Planning Process



NPS photo by Neil Blake

### Steering Committee

The steering committee was charged with the overall responsibility for the creation of the Plan. It participated in every meeting and workshop; reviewed existing conditions; reviewed interpretive themes and visitor experience objectives; and chose strategic directions. The committee reviewed all drafts of the plan, coordinating input and feedback from stakeholders and recommending changes. Members of the committee include the assistant superintendent for the Center of Resources, Science and Learning (CRSL), who also served as the liaison to the superintendent; the chief of interpretation; a representative for the Murie Science and Learning Center and Alaska Geographic Association; and the interpretive planner.

In 2001, the park (working with Harpers Ferry Center of the National Park Service) produced a draft Long-Range Interpretive Plan (LRIP). This LRIP quickly became dated. Many of its recommendations have been acted on and many of the conditions to which the plan was responding have dramatically changed.

Today, visitation continues to rise modestly, approaching upper limits of the Park Road's carrying capacity. Major improvements to visitor education, transportation, and information infrastructure have been completed at the entrance to the park. These include the new, award-winning Denali Visitor Center and exhibits, new entrance area wayside displays and trails, and a highly celebrated introductory film. The Murie Science and Learning Center (MSLC) came on line. The state-of-the-art Eielson Visitor Center opened in the park's west district in 2008. During this same period, appropriated funds for education have remained relatively flat and the park has had to find innovative ways to deliver education programs through soft money funding methods. Concurrently, the park's nonprofit and concession partners have grown their program offerings.

The first step of the planning process was taken in the fall of 2005 when a small team of park personnel developed a draft planning process, timeline, and task list. In the spring of 2006, park staff formed a Steering Committee, chaired by the acting chief of interpretation. Facilitated meetings among staff, partners, and community stakeholders were held during the summer and fall of 2006.

The chief of interpretation served as committee chair, working closely with the assistant superintendent (director of the CRSL) and the Plan consultants (writer/facilitator team) to coordinate meetings and workshops, and distribute notes and draft materials. The chair also worked closely with the graphic designer, and oversaw logistical aspects of the project, record keeping, final printing, and accounting.

- **Ingrid Nixon**, Chief of Interpretation, NPS [Committee Chair]
- **Philip Hooge**, Assistant Superintendent for Resources, Science and Learning and liaison to the Superintendent, NPS
- **Carol Harding**, Interpretive Planner, NPS
- **Lisa Oakley**, Alaska Geographic Association
- **David Tomeo**, Alaska Geographic Institutes Program Manager for the Murie Science and Learning Center

### Visioning Group

This group created the vision and developed strategic directions. It was made up of the steering committee, park superintendent, and others, including representatives of the concessions, nonprofit partners such as Alaska Geographic Association and Denali Education Center, and other agencies including Denali State Park.

### Focus Groups

Focus groups provided feedback on the developing plan. An open invitation was made to community members, including park personnel.

### Writer/Facilitator Team

A writer/facilitator team contracted to facilitate group discussions, record ideas and write the plan, incorporating feedback and edits from all contributing parties.

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**Facilitation Team**

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Tim Traver ..... Writer

# Appendix B: Theme Matrix

Subject Matter and Interpretive Theme Statement	Concepts and Ideas Some examples of concepts and ideas to be included in the themes. (Some of these concepts may potentially develop or combine into specific program and interpretive media themes.)	Tangibles: Topics and Stories+ Some examples of concepts and ideas to be included in the themes. (Some of these concepts may potentially develop or combine into specific program and interpretive media themes.)	Intangibles and Universals Some examples of deeper meanings of topics.
<p><b>1. Extensive Natural Ecosystems</b></p> <p>Denali's intact, natural ecosystem embodies a wisdom from which humans can learn and promote the workings of a healthy planet for a sustainable future.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An ecosystem consists of living and non-living components and elements seen and unseen.</li> <li>• Complete understanding of such a complex system is impossible.</li> <li>• Unaltered ecosystems can serve as baselines to understand ecosystems that have been impacted.</li> <li>• Unaltered ecosystems provide excellent opportunities for research and learning.</li> <li>• The ambitious vision of ANILCA was to surpass previous conservation efforts by setting aside vast areas that could protect large unfragmented and intact ecosystems. Conserving large protected areas requires recognizing that local people are part of the ecosystem and accommodating some level of human consumptive use of resources.</li> <li>• Intact ecosystems are rare because human activity has eliminated species, altered habitat, and fundamentally changed natural relationships on much of Earth's surface.</li> <li>• The Denali ecosystem is dependent upon the global ecosystem and vulnerable to changes that originate beyond the park's borders.</li> <li>• Denali's ecosystem is recognized to be of international significance. (Biosphere Reserve)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Species specific stories</li> <li>• Species interactions</li> <li>• Illustrations of complexity</li> <li>• Short-term and long-term change</li> <li>• Wildland values</li> <li>• Role of science in preserving parks</li> <li>• Role of science in helping us understand the world at large</li> <li>• Human interaction with landscapes</li> <li>• Opportunity for hands-on discovery</li> <li>• Natural cycles</li> <li>• Exotic species</li> <li>• Nexus of biological and physical worlds</li> </ul>	<p><b>Intangibles:</b></p> <p>Ecosystem Biodiversity Complexity Preservation Rare Sustainability Knowledge Conservation Heritage</p> <p><b>Universals:</b></p> <p>Protection Wonder Humility Mystery Curiosity Survival Wisdom Health</p>
<p><b>2. Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat</b></p> <p>The size and ecological integrity of Denali preserves a home of extraordinary quality for populations of large northern mammals, birds, and other wildlife, where they can live and be observed interacting with one another and their natural habitat with minimal human disruption.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wildlife habitat includes food, water, and shelter in quantities and qualities suitable to specific populations and the communities they form.</li> <li>• Denali offers the visitor unparalleled opportunities to view large northern mammals and their interactions in their natural habitat.</li> <li>• Large unfragmented habitat is needed to ensure survival of large mammal species.</li> <li>• Despite the park's vast protected area, Denali's wildlife remains vulnerable to human activity beyond park borders.</li> <li>• Through management, Denali seeks to preserve the integrity of animal populations and their interactions with one another.</li> <li>• Denali's success as a wildlife sanctuary and a wildlife viewing area is due in part to thoughtful management, but it depends heavily on our visitors.</li> <li>• Opportunities to study natural wildlife activity and interactions are rare and valued by scientists.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enabling legislation and reason for park expansion</li> <li>• Species dynamics</li> <li>• Food web</li> <li>• Migrations</li> <li>• Adaptations</li> <li>• Role of science in helping to make management decisions</li> <li>• Land designations and management</li> <li>• Subarctic habitat</li> </ul>	<p><b>Intangibles:</b></p> <p>Time Interaction Size Northern Relationships Vulnerability</p> <p><b>Universals:</b></p> <p>Integrity Quality Preserve Survival Life Death Community</p>

Subject Matter and Interpretive Theme Statement	Concepts and Ideas Some examples of concepts and ideas to be included in the themes. (Some of these concepts may potentially develop or combine into specific program and interpretive media themes.)	Tangibles: Topics and Stories+ Some examples of concepts and ideas to be included in the themes. (Some of these concepts may potentially develop or combine into specific program and interpretive media themes.)	Intangibles and Universals Some examples of deeper meanings of topics.
<p><b>3. Denali/Mount McKinley</b></p> <p>Mount McKinley's magnitude captivates human imagination and inspires exploration and protection of the Denali region's landscapes, wildlife, and wilderness.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As the tallest peak in North America and so dominant a feature of the landscape, Mount McKinley is a symbol that people from all over the world seek to experience at various levels.</li> <li>• Mount McKinley provides climbers from around the world the opportunity to test their skills.</li> <li>• The mountain came into being because of and continues to be shaped by great geologic forces.</li> <li>• From Native myths to artists to climbers, Mount McKinley continues to engage the human imagination.</li> <li>• So great is its presence on the landscape, Mount McKinley creates its own weather.</li> <li>• Rugged and absolute, Mount McKinley offers a dispassionate challenge to humans seeking to experience wilderness and wildness, especially to the extreme.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Geologic processes</li> <li>• Weather and its influences</li> <li>• Mountaineering</li> <li>• Challenges and character building</li> <li>• History of exploration, past to present</li> <li>• The mountain and human imagination</li> <li>• Absolutes of the mountain environment</li> <li>• Glacial processes and influences.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Intangibles:</b></p> <p>Size Time Challenge Responsibility Vulnerability</p> <p><b>Universals:</b></p> <p>Beauty Danger Fear Survival Life Death Power Humility</p>
<p><b>4. Wilderness Values and Wilderness Recreation</b></p> <p>Denali's wild lands create a refuge from modern civilization where we can discover, challenge and connect with the primal pulses and prevailing forces of nature.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wilderness does not imply a land without people, but a land respected such that the imprint of humankind's work is substantially unnoticeable.</li> <li>• Wilderness is part of our national heritage and can be an inspiration for all peoples on the planet.</li> <li>• Denali provides accessible and diverse wilderness experiences.</li> <li>• Denali's wilderness provides few amenities and little guidance, so backcountry travelers must be self-reliant and interested in outstanding wilderness challenges from hiking without trails to crossing rivers without bridges to climbing the tallest peak in North America.</li> <li>• The opportunity for true solitude is rare in the modern world, but is abundantly available in the Denali backcountry.</li> <li>• The presence of untrammelled wildlife and natural processes are an integral part of the wilderness experience at Denali.</li> <li>• Historically, there has been a strong movement in Denali to preserve its wilderness character to a higher standard than found in many parks and wilderness areas.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protecting Denali means embracing limits to access, behaviors, and activities</li> <li>• Wilderness and the American mind</li> <li>• The challenges of balancing access and preservation (motorized vs. non-motorized access)</li> <li>• Wilderness, especially accessible wilderness, is an increasingly rare commodity on the planet</li> <li>• Wilderness Act and ANILCA</li> </ul>	<p><b>Intangibles:</b></p> <p>Heritage Responsibility Vulnerable Degradation Value Solitude Trust</p> <p><b>Universals:</b></p> <p>Protect Preserve Beauty Survival Loss</p>



Subject Matter and Interpretive Theme Statement	Concepts and Ideas Some examples of concepts and ideas to be included in the themes. (Some of these concepts may potentially develop or combine into specific program and interpretive media themes.)	Tangibles: Topics and Stories+ Some examples of concepts and ideas to be included in the themes. (Some of these concepts may potentially develop or combine into specific program and interpretive media themes.)	Intangibles and Universals Some examples of deeper meanings of topics.
<p><b>5. People and the Land</b></p> <p>The ways Denali shapes and is shaped by the character, lives and values of people past and present offers us insights into our relationship with our natural heritage.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With large predators, swift rivers, tall peaks and uncountable other risks and dangers, the Denali landscape challenges humans to find their limits, both personal and as a society.</li> <li>• Denali preserves human pre-historic and historic structures, artifacts, stories, and practices which demonstrate thousands of years of human involvement in this land.</li> <li>• The structures, artifacts, and stories of the Denali region's early explorers, miners, and park rangers help us understand the entire pioneer era in North America which was crucial for forming the culture and character of the American people and our institutions.</li> <li>• Denali's conservation history reflects changing conservation history and values over time.</li> <li>• The continuation of subsistence practice in the park additions and preserve reflects both 1) a change in our understanding of land conservation in which we accept the ancient role of people as part of the natural ecosystem and 2) a necessary recognition that large scale conservation depends on meeting the needs of rural inhabitants who depend upon park resources for food, shelter, and cultural preservation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traditional/indigenous connections to the Denali region</li> <li>• Past and contemporary subsistence use</li> <li>• Human history since it became a park</li> <li>• Denali's role in the national conservation movement, past and present</li> <li>• In Denali, natural systems are allowed to happen with little or no influence from humans</li> <li>• Wildland values</li> </ul>	<p><b>Intangibles:</b>            Dependence            History            Heritage            Challenge            Family            Aesthetics            Interdependence</p> <p><b>Universals:</b>            Beauty            Survival            Life            Death            Humility            Awe            Hope</p>
<p><b>6. Dynamic Change</b></p> <p>Denali preserves a dynamic landscape, ever shifting, changing and adjusting to cycles and processes, seen and unseen.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As is the essence of natural systems, Denali is inextricably linked to the rest of the planet.</li> <li>• Denali's current landscape is but a glimpse of a continuum of change brought about by geological forces.</li> <li>• Paleontological resources within the park illustrate qualities of this dynamic landscape, as well as the potential for a wealth of natural curiosities yet discovered.</li> <li>• Through science, humans can investigate aspects of systems and processes at work within the Denali landscape, therefore garnering a greater understanding of this landscape now and in the future, and in a broader global context.</li> <li>• Increasingly, human activity is driving measurable change in Denali's community of life.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Glacial processes</li> <li>• Geologic processes</li> <li>• Climate shifts and changes</li> <li>• Extinctions</li> <li>• Regime shifts</li> <li>• Invasive species</li> <li>• Dinosaur finds</li> <li>• Isostatic rebound</li> </ul>	<p><b>Intangibles:</b>            Time            Responsibility            Curiosity            Heritage            Vulnerability</p> <p><b>Universals:</b>            Life            Death            Wonder            Power            Awe            Humility</p>



## Appendix C: Visitor Experience/Resource Conditions Matrix

Resource condition plays a significant role in the effectiveness of the resource in supporting the interpretive themes. The connection between visitor experience, interpretive theme, and resource conditions is an important consideration in defining desired conditions. The visitor experiences and their linkages with resources are given in Table 7. The statements about resource-condition dependent visitor experiences are derived from the General Management Plan (GMP) and can be summarized for use within Table 7 as:

- A.** Visitors will discover a variety of facilities and services that meet the needs of varied audiences seeking different levels of experience with the park's resources. (GMP: Park Development zone only—Park Road and entrance area)
- B.** All backcountry areas will provide opportunities for wilderness recreational activities. (GMP: Natural zone)
- C.** Visitors will have the opportunity to view wildlife in its natural habitat (GMP: parkwide, but most strongly stated for the Park Road).
- D.** Visitors will have the opportunity to study and appreciate historic and cultural features (GMP: Historic zone)
- E.** Visitors will have the opportunity to view Mount McKinley and other spectacular geologic features and scenery in the Alaska Range (GMP: most strongly stated in reference to South Denali, but also the Park Road).
- F.** Visitors will have the feeling of being on the threshold of wilderness/immersed in natural landscape (GMP: most park development sub-zones)

Note: While some parks' Resource Stewardship Strategies may link visitor experiences within management zones as defined in the GMP, this approach does not work at Denali National Park and Preserve where interpretation and education clearly cut across all zones and represent parkwide resources.

## Visitor Experiences Defined within Resource-condition Dependent Visitor Experiences and RSS Resources and Values.

Interpretive Theme	Resource-condition Dependent Visitor Experience as Expressed in the GMP	Associated Fundamental Resources and Values (See p. 12-13)	Associated Other Important Resources and Values (See p. 13-14)
Extensive Natural Ecosystems	A, C, F	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Wildlife populations, habitat, and ecosystems</li> <li>2. Wilderness character, resource values, recreational opportunities</li> <li>3. Scenic and geologic values.</li> <li>4. Visitor enjoyment and inspiration from observing wildlife and other natural features</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. Air quality</li> <li>9. Scientific research, education, and interpretation about natural ecosystems and geologic features and processes</li> </ol>
Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat	A, C, F	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Wildlife populations, habitat, and ecosystems</li> <li>2. Wilderness character, resource values, recreational opportunities</li> <li>4. Visitor enjoyment and inspiration from observing wildlife and other natural features</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. Air quality</li> <li>9. Scientific research, education, and interpretation about natural ecosystems and geologic features and processes</li> </ol>
Denali/ Mount McKinley	A, E, F	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Wilderness character, resource values, recreational opportunities</li> <li>3. Scenic and geologic values</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9. Scientific research, education, and interpretation about natural ecosystems and geologic features and processes</li> </ol>
Wilderness Values and Wilderness Recreation	A, B, F	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Wilderness character, resource values, recreational opportunities</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8. Subsistence resources and opportunities</li> </ol>
People and the Land	A, D	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Wilderness character, resource values, recreational opportunities</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Historic, archaeological, and ethnographic resources</li> <li>8. Subsistence resources and opportunities</li> </ol>
Dynamic Change	A, E, F	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Wildlife populations, habitat, and ecosystems</li> <li>2. Wilderness character, resource values, recreational opportunities</li> <li>3. Scenic and geologic values</li> <li>4. Visitor enjoyment and inspiration from observing wildlife and other natural features</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Historic, archaeological, and ethnographic resources</li> <li>6. Paleontological resources</li> <li>7. Air quality</li> <li>9. Scientific research, education, and interpretation about natural ecosystems and geologic features and processes</li> </ol>



# Appendix D: Park Visitor and Other Park Users Primary Needs by Season and Audience Type

## A. Tour Groups

Type	Primary Needs
Kantishna Lodge guests	General park info: What to expect, logistics, safety, park significance, and resource protection guidelines.
Large Package Tours	Information on both north and south sides, park programs including VTS system, remote registration option, clear transportation links between canyon hotels and park entrance campus, and program menu.
Small Package Tours	Same as above, with particular attention to Discovery Hikes and other fee-for-service guided experiences available.

## B. Visitor Groups

Passing Through	Boundary signs, pullout opportunities, interpretive handouts, and audio programs by radio or recording.
Shoulder Season	Accurate information about pre- or post-season access including lottery, bike travel, shoulder season restrictions, and other recreational opportunities.
Winter Visitors	Information about which facilities are open and the range of winter programs, opportunities, and restrictions.
Virtual Visitors	Virtual Denali tour: video clips, history, stories, people, research, web cam, natural history, climbing. Also information on threats to the Denali ecosystem and ways to get involved from a distance.

## C. Active Park Users

Type	Primary Needs
Artist-in-Residence Program	Artist-in-Residence program available. Links to partners websites and program offerings, photo exhibits, arts festivals in the area, links to other Alaska photography sites. Professional photographer access program. Volunteer opportunities in the park and gallery links.
Backpackers	General park info: What to expect, permits, in-park transportation, safety, closures, ranger programs, rules for travel, local visitor services, and local transportation.
Bicyclists	Park mission, purpose, maps, bike routes in and around park, rules about biking on the Park Road, links to tour companies, links to bike shops, repair and support, and clubs.
Campground Users	Accurate park info: what to expect, campground availability, in-park transportation, safety, ranger programs, rules for travel, and local visitor services.
Children and Youth	Junior naturalist info, park trails, visitor center and MSLC programs, camps, youth program opportunities, education opportunities. Real-time video footage of large animals and real time stories of climbers. Music and art downloads, podcasts. Denali kids' pages: what kids are doing to save Denali and real time research and monitoring opportunities to participate in. Volunteer opportunities. Online version of Junior Ranger program.
Climbers	Park mission and purpose. Talkeetna Ranger Station serves as link for registration, preparation, history of climbing, safety, rescue policies, guiding and air taxi concessions.
Day Hikers	Accurate park info: safety and closure info, in-park transportation, ranger programs, rules for travel, and local visitor services.
Local Residents and Businesses, Concessioners	Regular information from the park on what's going on in the park, what's coming up, information about any school/park partnerships in process, and any planning sessions in the works. Road lottery, winter festival, winter hours and winter visitor center programs, any changes in winter use regulations.
Local Schools	Access to place-based curricula that allows them to interact with the local environment while exploring myriad subjects. Contact with a live ranger, opportunities to visit park lands , and citizen science opportunities.
Non-Local Schools	Web-based market information on learning opportunities at Denali.
Scientists	Summaries of scientific research going on in the park, description of ongoing research needs, opportunities and requirements for sharing scientific work with professionals and the general public. Papers and publications online. Information about the research permitting process.
Seasonal Employees	Employment options posted on web. Also opportunities for seasonal staff to learn more about Denali resources and community businesses.
Sport Hunters	Mission, management objectives, guides, rules and regulations, seasons, links to Alaska Department of Fish and Game, license information, access information.
University Students	Seasonal jobs, research, volunteer opportunities, and grants. Distance learning using colleges as partners, and in-park classes offered as partnerships with colleges.
Visiting Dignitaries	The Denali experience encapsulated in a day: mission, purpose, program highpoints, and vital stats—enduring picture of its uniqueness and importance.
Volunteers	Clearly described opportunities for volunteering, contact and liaison, orientation and training materials. Online applications.

## D. Business Groups

Air Taxis and Clients	Rules and regulations, interpretive training, themes and orientation resources, resource protection, park messages, and additional visitor opportunities.
All interested in Denali Planning	Documents available for review at park visitor facilities. Public information and discussion opportunities. Website reference sources including <a href="http://www.parkplanning.nps.gov">www.parkplanning.nps.gov</a> and <a href="http://www.nps.gov/parkmgmt/planning">www.nps.gov/parkmgmt/planning</a>
Dog Mushing Concessioners and Clients	Clear communication from the park, as well as information regarding resources, resource protection, park messages, and additional visitor opportunities.
NPS Partners	Clear, frequent communications from the park.
Potential NPS Partners	Clear, frequent communications from the park regarding possible business opportunities.

## E. Special Needs Groups

At-Risk Youths	Opportunities for guided wilderness experience, volunteer and community service opportunities.
Elder Hostellers	Links to Denali Education Center and MSLC.
Inholders	Clear and frequent communication from the park, advance notice of planning sessions, stakeholder meetings, and projects of interest. The same information provided to businesses.
Minorities	Outreach to these communities, relevant programming, welcoming messages, and language options.
Subsistence Users/ Native Population	Mission, purpose of park, resource management objectives, ongoing wildlife research links, park themes, rules and restrictions, seasons, maps, and boundaries. Clear liaison to park staff, opportunities for collaboration and input, information on subsistence uses in park, and job opportunities.





Murie Science and Learning Center photo

## Appendix E: Education Tools and Resources

The Center for Resources, Science and Learning (CRSL) provides numerous types of scientific data and report resources to park educators. They maintain a library with close to 2,000 books and documents at headquarters. Indexes are available in the library and a virtual search engine is provided via the ProCite database, kept current by CRSL staff. Over 1,700 reports are catalogued on ProCite, which allows users to search by key words, authors, dates, and report number. A computer terminal with ProCite data management software and the database will soon be set up at the MSLC. ProCite includes reference materials beyond the park. CRSL published a reprint series and a summary of all Denali projects, including a DVD meant to give an all-encompassing view of current research and scientific resources at Denali.

CRSL provides fact sheets on a wide-range of park research and education activities. Fact sheets are one page (front and back) and follow a standard format. The CRSL also produces a complete update on Denali research projects annually.

### Photo Resources

The Division of Interpretation maintains a collection of approximately 5,000 digital images acquired by or donated to the park. Many images were scanned from slides. The collection is managed with Extensis

Portfolio software. The park museum also has a photo collection.

With the growth of digital photography, there is a growing collection of electronic images of varied quality. Attention must be paid to this growing collection in three ways: 1.) some effort must be spent sorting out permissions granted with each photo donation to ensure the park uses and distributes photos per the donator's request; 2.) the backlog of digital photos needs to be sorted and marginal images eliminated; 3.) digital images retained need to be entered into the Extensis Portfolio database.

### CRSL Natural and Historical Artifacts

The park museum (not open to the general public) also houses herbarium specimens, natural history collections (parts of which are at the University of Alaska in Fairbanks), lithic materials, fossils, and historic artifacts and documents. While many of these materials are not allowed off-site, numerous items that cannot be referenced in time and space will be made available as part of teaching collections in the future. The museum curator envisions educational programs in the future that invite students into the archive. Archive materials are also routinely used in visitor center exhibits, such as Charles Sheldon's pen and Adolph Murie's camera.

**Division of Interpretation Collection**

Throughout the years, the Division of Interpretation has acquired a wide variety of props for use by staff in program delivery. Most are animal parts, such as skins, skulls, scat, stuffed specimens, horns, antlers, various body parts, and plaster casts of tracks. Cultural artifacts include such items as traps, gold pans, clothing, and researcher tools.

Upkeep of this collection has been sporadic and many items are over 20 years old. Various skins, such as those for Dall sheep and caribou, shed incessantly. In 2005, the collection was tested for arsenic, which was a common ingredient used in preservation prior to 1980. Some contaminated props were removed from the collection. In 2007, the park used project monies to acquire a variety of animal skins, skulls, maps, and other tools.

**Portable Sound System**

The Division of Interpretation has audio systems, wireless microphones, tripod stands, and carry bags. These are used at special events and throughout the winter when the park film is shown in the MSLC classroom.

**AV Equipment**

The park owns and maintains several digital projectors and laptops for presentations. It also has multiple videoconferencing units.

Abbreviations of Program Providers for Appendix F	
AGI - Alaska Geographic Institutes/AKGEO	MSLC - Murie Science and Learning Center Partnership Consortium
DBSD - Denali Borough School District	NPS - National Park Service
DEC - Denali Education Center	P - Princess Tours
HAL - Holland America Line	UAF - University of Alaska Fairbanks
JV - Doyon/Aramark Joint Venture	USSWCD - Upper Susitna Soil and Water Conservation District
KEA - Kigluait Educational Adventures	

# Appendix F: Program Statistics

## 2008 Education and Interpretation Programs at Denali by NPS and NPS partners

Program Name	Program Provider(s)	Number of Programs	Number of Participants	Notes
<b>Road-based Experiences</b>				
Tundra Wilderness Tour	JV	2626	128,216	Fully narrated tour to Mile 63; 6 - 8 hours; at 99% of capacity
Denali Natural History Tour	JV	1850	80,123	Fully narrated tour to Mile 17; 4 - 5 hours; at 80% of capacity
Visitor Transportation System	JV	3395	85,063	Transportation for park visitors; distance into park and length of tour varies; driver shares information
Kantishna Experience	JV/NPS	105	3742	12-hour RT tour to Kantishna; driver and ranger share narration; guided tour at the end of the road
Experience Denali	AGI/NPS through MSLC	89	3265	Education program that travels to Mile 12; 4 hours
<b>East District</b>				
Dog Sled Demonstration	NPS	327	44,089	3x/day in peak season; the most highly attended ranger-led program
DVC Theater Program	NPS/P	168	16,636	Twice daily in the core of the summer
DVC Ranger Chat	NPS	87	1310	Spontaneous short presentation done in the lobby of the DVC when many visitors are present
Student Safety Ranger Chat	NPS/DBSD	Not Available	3489	Short informal talks about safety issues offered to visitors at the WAC while waiting to board buses
Chalet Lobby Rove	NPS/HAL	89	2269	Informal rove of property to contact individuals
McKinley Station Trail Hike	NPS	93	1015	2 hour hike through the park's historic district departing from the DVC
Horseshoe Lake Hike	NPS	95	1587	2 - 3 hour popular walk to entrance area lake
Riley Creek Campground	NPS	112	3457	45-minute programs offered in the campground amphitheater
Savage Creek Campground	NPS	84	1374	45-minute programs offered in the campground amphitheater
Heartbeats of Denali Film	NPS	1959	185,123	18-minute film offered continuously throughout the day in the DVC theater
Princess Train	NPS/P	32	12,821	2.5 hour train trip from Mile 171 George Parks Highway to the park; 2x/weekly
Discover Denali	DEC/NPS through MSLC	46	1867	Frontcountry program; 4 hours
Elderhostel	DEC	26	752	Week-long program; DEC provided some park access through General Agreement
Science Series	AGI	63	804	Science-based programs; 1 hour
MSLC Evening Speaker Series	AGI	19	335	Various topics addressed
<b>Field-based Programs (All Districts)</b>				
Discovery Hikes (East and West)	NPS	88	849	Guided dayhikes in the backcountry; group size limited to 12, including ranger
Eielson Stroll	NPS	84	1175	Short hike offered daily at Eielson
Denali Backcountry Adventures	DEC/NPS through MSLC	1	9	5-day backcountry camp with research component
Wild About Denali	DEC	1	9	Experiential program for developmentally challenged youths and adults
Denali Discovery Camp	DEC/NPS through MSLC	1	35	Week-long camp for local youths with overnight in park component
Field Seminars / Teacher Trainings	AGI/NPS through MSLC	19	168	Based out of MSLC field camp at Mile 29 / Teklanika Campground
Junior Ranger Program	NPS	On Demand	3800	Kids work on booklets at own pace to earn a badge
Discovery Packs	NPS	435	770	Backpack filled with educational activities loaned to visitors free of charge
Exploration Camp	NPS/KEA/USSWCD	1	25	Two-week science-based nature camp for kids in the Southside communities
Alaska Summer Research Academy	UAF/NPS through MSLC	2	22	Two-week program where students learn professional skills on specific topics
Alaska Scientists of the Future	NPS/DBSD through MSLC	1	15	Week-long field camp using technology



Program Name	Program Provider(s)	Number of Programs	Number of Participants	Notes
<b>West-District Programs</b>				
Climbing NA Icy Crown Film	NPS	Not Available	Not Available	Shown throughout the day at Eielson Visitor Center
Informal Talks	NPS	432	4373	Informal presentations with visitors at Eielson Visitor Center and Toklat Rest Area
Wonder Lake Campground	NPS	94	1718	45-minute programs offered in the campground amphitheater
Teklanika Campground	NPS	73	1635	45-minute programs offered in the campground amphitheater
<b>South-District Programs</b>				
Evening Program	NPS	92	673	Evening talk at Talkeetna Ranger Station
Museum Programs	NPS	182	2468	Talks at the Bradford Washburn model housed in Talkeetna Historical Society building
Terrific Tuesdays	NPS	6	42	Activities for local youths at the Talkeetna Ranger Station
Informal Ranger Chats	NPS	30	132	Conducted as needed when there are many visitors at the Talkeetna Ranger Station
Climbing NA Icy Crown Film	NPS	Not Available	9375	Shown five times per day at the Talkeetna Ranger Station
Guest Programs	NPS Facilitated	4	147	Presentations for the community by guest speakers
<b>Winter Programming</b>				
Snowshoe Walk	NPS	6	36	Offered on weekends in late winter when temperatures are above minus 10 degrees
Winterfest	NPS and Community Partners	1	300 in park	3-day event in late February; approx. 1500 participate in park and community events
ALISON Project	DBSD/NPS/UAF	8	39	Citizen science; local students travel to park to measure ice and snow thickness, etc.
<b>Outreach</b>				
Denali Days	NPS/Local School Districts	N/A	490	Rangers travel to schools; schools on the road system travel to the park
E-Field Trips	NPS	2	20,332	Web-based interactive program about Denali's mammals and climbing Mount McKinley
Earth Day	NPS	1	220	Conducted for southside communities

# Appendix G: Evaluation



NPS photo by Kent Miller

strategies at Denali? In October 2006, the NPS hosted a groundbreaking conference entitled Interpretation and Evaluation Summit at the University of Denver. Over 100 NPS leaders, professional staff, academic experts, and park partner professionals attended. The statements below, most of which are gleaned from this summit and the work leading up to it, describe the significant characteristics of an evaluation culture.

***An evaluation culture ensures that evaluation is integrated with the program planning process at all phases of program development to foster continual learning.***

## The Characteristics of a Culture of Evaluation

The National Education Council, established in 2004 to help the NPS renew and encourage its educational mission, assigned the task of developing an evaluation strategy for the NPS to its Educational Evaluation Coordination Team (EECT). In August 2006, the EECT released a Service-wide Interpretation and Education Evaluation Strategy (SIEES), which provides a strong foundation for evaluation at Denali.

The SIEES document envisions the following future conditions:

- The NPS fully embraces evaluation, resulting in enhanced resource stewardship and visitor enjoyment.
- Evaluation at all levels of the NPS leads to sound decision making that ensures cost-effectiveness, financial accountability, and that interpretation and education meet or exceed rigorous standards.
- Within a culture of evaluation, compelling evidence is used continually to improve programming and demonstrate that programs are relevant, engaging, and effective.

SIEES asserts the strong future role evaluation should play in program planning and provides goals, objectives, and a logic model (attached) identifying the desired outcomes and impacts of NPS education programs. These translate directly to Denali.

## Evaluation Culture Described

What does a culture of evaluation mean and how does it apply to the vision, conditions, and educational

- Evaluation helps to ensure and demonstrate a return on investment. It puts NPS on a level playing field with other public programs so that the values underlying public investment decisions can be clearly understood and compared.
- An evaluation culture evolves away from the present, widely shared sense of the futility of evaluation (as something that is done to you), to a broadly shared sense of evaluation (as something you do for yourself), to fulfill the values that brought you to work for the NPS. Evaluation must take hold as the interpretation and education staff's agenda. An overworked, under-valued education staff will never be able to muster the time to let the culture of evaluation take hold.
- Evaluation is a constant reflection on a program's successes and failures, and what that means with the aim of implementing improvements based on what is learned and on creating well-focused programs. An evaluation culture stresses:
  - » Learning rather than paperwork accountability
  - » Time built in for reflection on evaluation findings
  - » Learning by doing
  - » Real-time evaluation processes that link directly to work plan changes
  - » Close integration of evaluation with planning
  - » Rigorous and regular independent evaluation of the overall strategy and selective major program elements
  - » Evaluative thinking at every stage of project development from early conceptual stage to program development to post implementation.

### ***Evaluation ensures that programs link to core values.***

- An evaluation culture ensures that programs link to core values. This is first and foremost a function of effective leadership and second a function of enabling frontline staff and their supervisors to question and seek improvement through evaluative inquiry.

### ***An evaluation culture is one of innovation.***

- Improving something on the margin does not equal innovation.
- Good evaluation flourishes in places that encourage risk-taking.
- A culture of evaluation encourages staff to take appropriate risks in their program planning, experimenting while keeping in mind ultimate desired outcomes and impacts.
- Bad news should not be punishable but used as a way to learn: “Fail fast, fail frequently, fail forward.”

### ***An evaluation culture is focused on accountability and continual learning.***

- An evaluation culture holds people accountable for learning from what they do.
- Evaluation is an honor culture, not an audit culture—honoring educators’ and partners’ highest ideals.
- An evaluation culture is not about testing people or judging them, it’s about giving them a voice in changing their world.
- Evaluation derives from asking critical questions of interest to the educator, stakeholders, and program clients.
- Evaluation asks open-ended questions rather than deterministic dichotomous questions. Questions like: In what ways?; Under what conditions?; and to what extent?

### ***An evaluation culture promotes civic engagement.***

- Evaluation is inclusive. It engages all stakeholders. For example indigenous voices, stories, and perspectives play an important role in all conversations about the stewardship of natural and cultural resources.
- An effective evaluation program uses a range of evaluation tools besides post-project surveys and questionnaires. Face-to face dialogue that offers an exchange of open-ended questions prior to designing new or improving existing programs is critical to building public consensus around what programs are needed most.
- Park interpreters are increasingly positioned as facilitators of the people telling their own story of their park. Evaluation strengthens the park’s ability to stand in that and other newly evolving roles.
- Through co-construction, stakeholders are involved together with NPS staff in program design and evaluation design.
- Evaluation is a way to strengthen collaboration with communities.





National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Denali National Park and Preserve  
Alaska



## Denali National Park and Preserve Education Plan

A Long-Range Vision for Education and Interpretation