

INTRODUCTION

By Alaskan standards Denali is an unusual national park. First, it is an old park, having been established in 1917, and unlike many of the newer Alaskan parks it has a management tradition, existing development, and established patterns of visitor use. Second, Denali lies between the state's two major population centers, Anchorage and Fairbanks, from which it is accessible by private automobile, tour bus, railroad, and airplane. And finally, Denali contains resources of international significance--the highest mountain on the North American continent and the largest continuously protected ecosystem in the world. For this reason it has gained international recognition through its designation as a biosphere reserve under the Man and the Biosphere program of the United Nations. Because it is an established, well-known park with relatively easy access and outstanding features, Denali has attracted large numbers of visitors in the past, and indications are that it will continue to do so in the future.

In 1980 Denali National Park was expanded by the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (PL 96-487, hereafter cited as ANILCA). Previously confined to the north side of the McKinley massif, the park now also encompasses the south side, which has considerably different landscape features and resource values from the north side and offers additional opportunities for visitor use.

Today Denali is confronted with a serious threat of overuse along the park road corridor. A recent study (NPS, Singer and Beattie 1984) demonstrated some disruption to wildlife populations caused by increasing visitor traffic along the park road, indicating that one of the principal visitor experiences, wildlife viewing, may be in jeopardy. The current experience is unique because Denali is the only place in the national park system where visitors can consistently expect to see caribou, Dall sheep, moose, and bears--the "big four" of Alaskan wildlife--in a single day of travel. Park managers are challenged to ensure the long-range preservation of Denali's remarkable wildlife viewing opportunities while at the same time meeting the expectations of this generation of visitors.

This plan focuses on visitor use of the park and preserve: how and where increasing levels of use can be accommodated, opportunities for enhancing the visitor experience, and what actions are required to ensure that use does not unacceptably degrade Denali's natural and cultural values.

DOCUMENT ORGANIZATION

This document contains various plans prepared to meet the requirements set forth in ANILCA and other legislation and policies, as follows:

A "General Management Plan" is presented in compliance with section 1301 of ANILCA and section 604 of the National Parks and Recreation Act.

A "Land Protection Plan" is presented in compliance with section 1301 of ANILCA and the Department of the Interior policy on land protection.

A "Wilderness Suitability Review" is presented in compliance with section 1317(a) of ANILCA and sections 3(c) and (d) of the Wilderness Act, as amended.

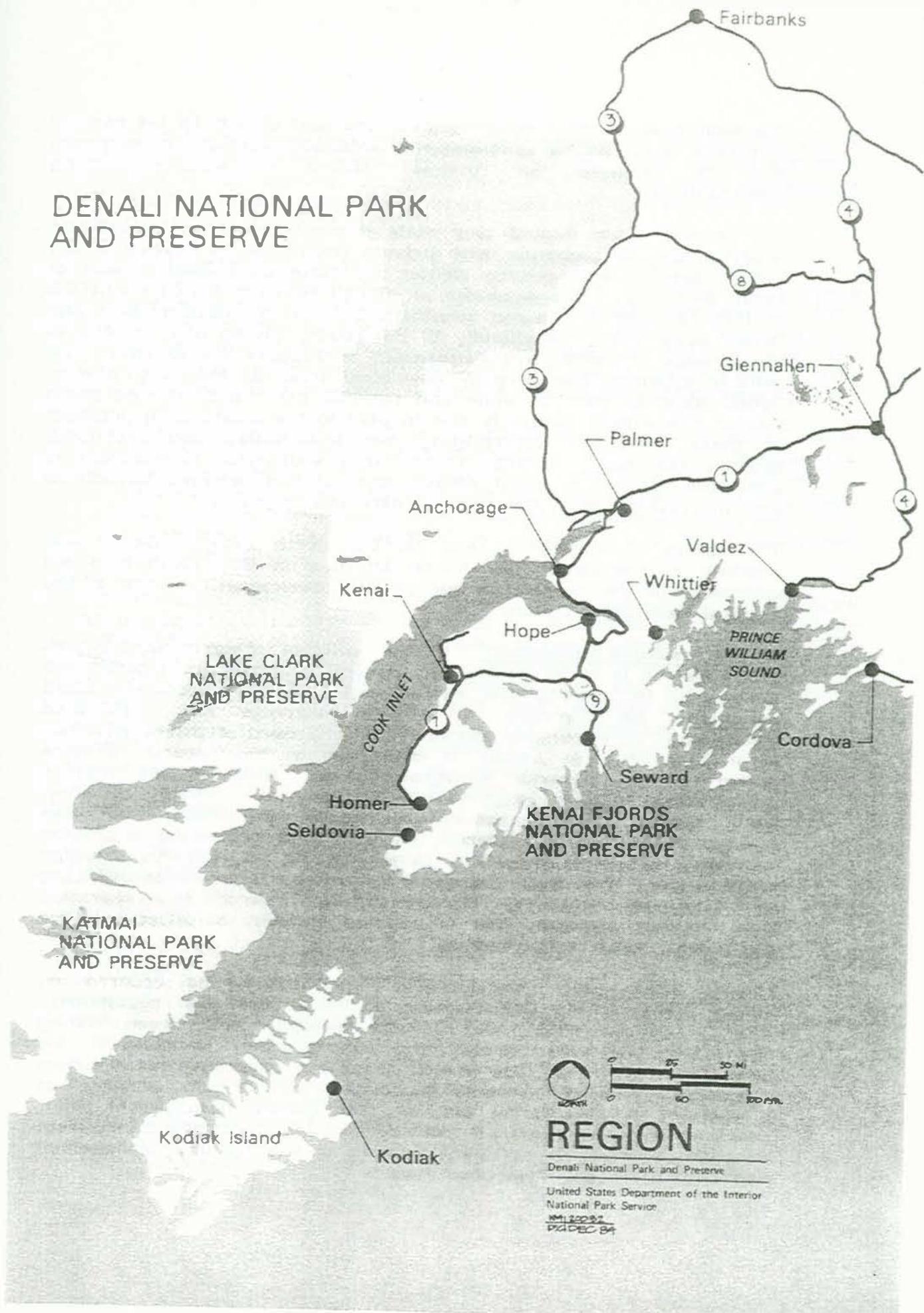
The NPS planning process is described in appendix A.

PLANNING ISSUES AND MANAGEMENT CONCERNS

The following issues are addressed by the plans included in this document.

Visitor use and general development: Until now nearly all visitors to Denali have been confined to the road corridor that extends from Riley Creek to Kantishna. However, there is growing evidence that escalating use along the road has begun to disrupt the natural behavior and movements of wildlife (NPS, Singer and Beattie 1984). Also, the campgrounds, interpretive facilities, utilities, and the roadway itself are in need of rehabilitation to safely accommodate even the existing levels of use--and another increase in visitation of

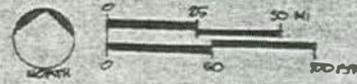
DENALI NATIONAL PARK AND PRESERVE



LAKE CLARK
NATIONAL PARK
AND PRESERVE

KENAI FJORDS
NATIONAL PARK
AND PRESERVE

KATMAI
NATIONAL PARK
AND PRESERVE



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the magnitude of what occurred over the past decade (a 144 percent increase) could not be accommodated without major new development and the potential for further decline of wildlife viewing opportunities.

For several years federal and state planners have been exploring opportunities to cooperate with private enterprise to develop a new visitor service and activity center on state park lands south of Mount McKinley. The expansion of Denali National Park by ANILCA in 1980 resulted in a shared boundary between the national park and Denali State Park, immediately to the south, giving new impetus to the concept of cooperative management to support visitor use. The shift in attention from already developed areas on the north side of Denali National Park to state and national park lands on the south side of the Alaska Range is due in part to the outstanding potential of these areas for interpreting Mount McKinley and associated geologic features. Another reason that south-side development is attractive is that it could relieve some of the problems associated with increasing use of the existing park road corridor.

The issues of controlling use on the north side of Denali and creating a new center for visitor activities on the south side are addressed in the visitor use and general development section of the "General Management Plan."

Natural resource management: If the ecological integrity of the park and preserve is to be maintained, natural processes must be allowed to prevail in shaping the environment. Natural processes could potentially be disrupted by visitor activities and associated development or by mining operations. Management of these activities to protect resource values is addressed in the natural resource section of the "General Management Plan." Because too little is known about natural processes to evaluate with certainty at what point human activities become disruptive influences, the plan includes a program of research, analysis, and monitoring to provide managers with the requisite understanding of Denali's complex environment. This basic management strategy is consistent with the park's current "Resources Management Plan," which is a separate, more detailed document that is updated annually to reflect specific management needs and priorities.

Minerals management: Considerable mining activity has occurred on mining claims within Denali under applicable laws and regulations. Conflicts between mining and resource protection and between mining and visitor use are complex and controversial. Because of the specialized nature of the mining issue, a comprehensive minerals management plan/environmental impact statement is being prepared as a separate implementation plan for the general management plan. The minerals management plan will be consistent with the management objectives outlined in pertinent sections of the "General Management Plan" and the "Land Protection Plan."

Cultural resource management: All significant cultural resources must be identified, evaluated, and protected under federal and state laws. The cultural resource section of the "General Management Plan" describes the long-range strategy for carrying out this mandate.

Land protection: The "Land Protection Plan" identifies the techniques available to ensure the long-term protection of the park and preserve and describes the specific actions the National Park Service intends to pursue in the immediate future. The proposed management of mineral development operations on patented and valid unpatented claims is discussed in both the "Land Protection Plan" and the natural resource section of the "General Management Plan."

Wilderness suitability: The National Park Service has evaluated all federal lands within Denali National Park and Preserve to determine their suitability for inclusion in the national wilderness preservation system. Factors such as landownership, existing uses, and potential development were considered in determining wilderness suitability. This evaluation is described in the "Wilderness Suitability Review."

A great deal of specific guidance for the future management of the park and preserve--particularly as it relates to established traditional uses by local residents--is provided by ANILCA and by the federal regulations for public use of Alaskan parks. These provisions, which are an integral part of the management of Denali National Park and Preserve, are not repeated in the "General Management Plan" section of this document; however, major provisions of ANILCA are summarized for reference in appendix B, and the federal regulations are reprinted for reference in appendix C. Also included, in appendix D, are the management objectives for the park, which provide broad direction for day-to-day park management.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

Introduction

The planning for and management of the units of the national park system in Alaska is an evolving and dynamic process. The general management plan provides overall guidance and direction for the management of the park and announces the intent of the National Park Service to undertake a variety of actions pursuant to established law, regulation, and policy. Actions proposed in this plan, such as closures, use restrictions, boundary adjustments, major developments, and new or revised regulations do not become effective upon approval of the general management plan unless explicitly identified as doing so. With those few exceptions, further information collection and analysis and appropriate public involvement are needed before these actions become final.

It is recognized that involving the public in the development of significant policies and management practices and in further planning for Denali National Park and Preserve can result in more comprehensive and better proposals and actions by the National Park Service, as well as better public understanding of them.

This section outlines the means by which the National Park Service will ensure continued public involvement in the ongoing planning for and management of Denali National Park and Preserve. Described here are the procedures that the National Park Service will use for public involvement in the areas of policy development, action plans, closures, restrictions or openings, new or revised regulations, and amendments to this general management plan. The superintendent is expected to consult with all affected and interested parties as an integral part of the management of the area.

It is the policy of the Department of the Interior to offer the public meaningful opportunities for participation in decision-making processes leading to actions and policies that may significantly affect or interest them (301 DM 2.1). Accordingly, the National Park Service will integrate public participation and the decision-making process. Public participation activities will be scheduled with other elements of the decision-making process to ensure that the timing of information both to and from the public results in the expression of public comment at points in the decision-making process where it can make the greatest contribution. The overall public participation process, closely tied to the decision-making process, will be flexible enough that methods may be added or deleted as public input shows a new level of need or interest.

Policy Development

The National Park Service manages the parks, monuments, and preserves in Alaska for the national interest and recognizes that the policies and management practices implemented by the Park Service can be of great interest to the people of Alaska and the nation. These policies and practices can also affect the lives of individuals living in or near the areas and the public using the areas.

To the extent practicable, when a new policy or management practice that affects the public is to be developed or an existing policy or practice is to be revised, there will be public notification, ample opportunity for comment, and thorough consideration of comments received. If significant changes are made to the proposed policy or management practice as a result of public comment, there will be additional review prior to the policy or practice being adopted.

Action Plans

Several specific action plans are identified in this general management plan. Future plans include a resource management plan, development

concept plans, wilderness recommendations, revisions to the land protection plan, a subsistence management plan, transportation and access planning, and boundary adjustment recommendations. These plans and the required public involvement are described in the appropriate management sections of this plan, and the major ones are summarized in appendix A, "NPS Planning Process." These more detailed plans will be initiated by the superintendent over the life of the general management plan. Although it is the intention of the National Park Service to initiate all of the implementing plans identified in the general management plan in a timely manner, the undertaking of these plans will depend on funding and other considerations that cannot be accurately forecast at this time.

All public review documents will be submitted to the state of Alaska for coordinated state review. The National Park Service will maintain an active mailing list of groups, agencies, and individuals who have expressed interest in reviewing the documents. These groups, agencies, and individuals will be notified of the availability of public review documents and upon request, copies of such documents will be made available to them.

As part of the ongoing planning and management for the area, internal planning documents will be prepared. These include an interpretive prospectus, a scope of collections statement, and a visitor services study. Formal public review of these types of plans and studies is not anticipated; however, parties expressing an interest in these plans will be involved as appropriate in their preparation and invited to comment on them before they are finalized. Copies will be available upon request from the superintendent.

Closures, Restrictions, and Openings

In cases where the closure of areas within the unit or restrictions on activities are proposed in the general management plan, the procedures of 36 CFR 1.5 and 13.30 (13.46, 13.49, and 13.50 in the case of subsistence) and 43 CFR 36.11(h) must be followed before any proposed closures or restrictions take effect. These procedures also apply to any future proposals to open an area to public use or activity that is otherwise prohibited. The procedures of 36 CFR 1.5, 13.30, 13.46, 13.49, and 13.50 and 43 CFR 36.11(h) are contained in appendix C.

Regulations

New regulations and revisions to existing regulations will be proposed in accordance with the requirements of the Administrative Procedure Act (5 USC 553). The National Park Service will provide a minimum 60-day comment period.

Amendment of the General Management Plan

Specific parts of the general management plan may be amended to allow for changing conditions or needs, or when a significant new issue arises that requires consideration. Amendments to this general management plan will include public involvement and compliance with all laws, regulations, and policies. If the proposed amendments are minor and not highly controversial, public notice and a 60-day waiting period will take place prior to making decisions to incorporate the changes into the plan. If the amendments are significant or highly controversial, the public will be provided opportunities to participate in the development and review of alternatives and the proposed action. This will include a minimum 60-day public comment period and public meetings as necessary and appropriate. All amendments to the general management plan must be approved by the regional director.

In the future, changing conditions will warrant preparation of a new general management plan. The public will be involved throughout the development of a new plan.