

general management plan  
land protection plan  
wilderness suitability review

# KOBUK VALLEY

NATIONAL PARK / ALASKA



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# KOBUK VALLEY

NATIONAL PARK



GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN    LAND PROTECTION PLAN  
WILDERNESS SUITABILITY REVIEW



## SUMMARY

This document is composed of the general management plan, the land protection plan, and the wilderness suitability review for Kobuk Valley National Park. Similar plans have been prepared for Cape Krusenstern National Monument and Noatak National Preserve.

The general management plan contains approved actions for managing the park. Programs for management of natural and cultural resources are presented, including studies to be conducted and methods of protection to be used. Public use of the park for subsistence, recreation, and other uses are addressed. Operational requirements, including staffing, administrative facilities, and cooperative agreements with other agencies are also addressed. Some of the key proposals in the plan are: additional facilities in Kotzebue for presenting information and administering the park; methods for protecting and interpreting major archeological sites; methods of involving local people in managing the park; cooperative management arrangements with other federal and state agencies; facilities in or near the park for seasonal operational use; and distribution of public information about the park.

The land protection plan presents information about land status in the park and the intentions of the National Park Service for protecting resources and uses on nonfederal lands within the park. The recommended approach to native allotments in the park is: to secure cooperative agreements with all allottees; to acquire easements on allotments containing significant cultural resources and important public access; and to acquire the allotment on the Great Kobuk Sand Dunes. The recommended approach to native corporation lands is to secure agreements and acquire easements. State lands in the park are recommended for closure to mineral entry and other forms of appropriation.

The wilderness suitability review finds that most federal lands within the park are suitable for inclusion in the national wilderness preservation system. However, recommendations regarding which lands should be added to the national wilderness preservation system have not yet been formulated. Recommendations on wilderness designations will be presented in a subsequent environmental impact statement, and will be subject to public review and comment.

Western edge of the Great Kobuk Sand Dunes.



House pit excavated in the 1940s.



Old river channels and Kobuk River.

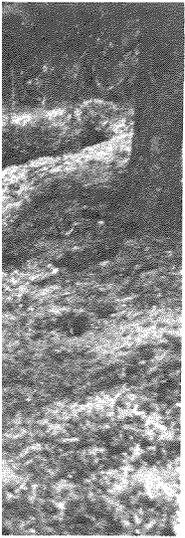


Caribou Trail, Onion Portage.

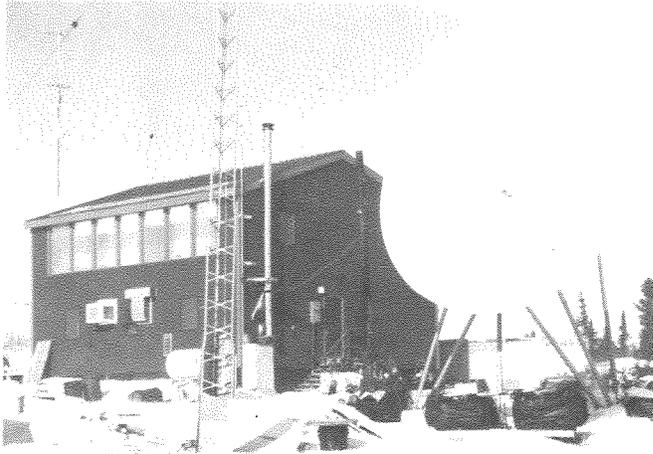


Caribou herd near Onion Portage.





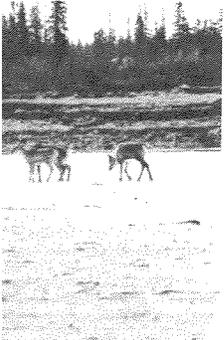
Ambler, Alaska.



Western edge of the Great Kobuk Sand Dunes.



Ice fishing on Kobuk River.





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# INTRODUCTION

Kobuk River and Baird Mountains.





Kobuk Valley National Park is a new park, designated as a national monument by presidential proclamation in 1978 and established as a national park by an act of Congress in 1980.

The park, containing approximately 1,726,500 acres of federal lands, encompasses a nearly enclosed mountain basin on the middle section of the Kobuk River in northwest Alaska. Trees approach their northern limit in the park, where forest and tundra meet, creating a mosaic of forest and open tundra. Thousands of caribou funnel through mountain passes and cross the Kobuk River on their spring and fall migrations. Salmon and arctic char migrate to spawning grounds within the park. These and other seasonally abundant plant and animal resources have made the middle section of the Kobuk River favorable for human habitation and use. Native people have hunted, fished, and lived along the Kobuk River for at least 12,500 years, and the subsistence use of resources of the Kobuk Valley continues into the present. This vast natural landscape is home for the Inupiat Eskimo people who currently live along the Kobuk, upstream and downstream from Kobuk Valley National Park.

The general management plan is intended to guide the management of the park for approximately 10 years. The land protection plan addresses nonfederal lands in and around the park. The plan will be reviewed every two years and updated as necessary. Together these plans treat all the major aspects of park management: resource management, public uses of the park, facilities, administrative tasks, and approaches to treatment of nonfederal lands within and adjacent to the park.

These plans have been developed with public involvement. Numerous people attended public meetings or wrote letters to express their ideas about how the park should be managed. The "Consultation and Coordination" section presents the public involvement process followed in preparing the plans, summarizes the comments made on the draft plans, and describes the major changes that have been made from the draft plans to the final plans.

Plans have also been prepared for other newly established National Park Service units in northwest Alaska. Cape Krusenstern National Monument, Noatak National Preserve, and Kobuk Valley National Park are managed jointly by a staff in Kotzebue. Because the park units have similar resources and uses, many aspects of their management will be similar.

## MANDATES FOR MANAGEMENT OF THE PARK

Kobuk Valley National Park was established by the Alaska National Interest Land Conservation Act (ANILCA), Public Law 96-487. Section 201(6) of this act directs the following:

Kobuk Valley National Park shall be managed for the following purposes, among others: To maintain the environmental integrity of the natural features of the Kobuk River Valley, including the Kobuk, Salmon, and other rivers, the boreal forest, and the Great Kobuk Sand Dunes, in an undeveloped state; to protect and interpret, in cooperation with Native Alaskans, archeological sites associated with Native cultures; to protect migration routes for the Arctic caribou herd; to protect habitat for, and populations of, fish and wildlife including but not limited to caribou, moose, black and grizzly bears, wolves, and waterfowl; and to protect the viability of subsistence resources. Subsistence uses by local residents shall be permitted in the park in accordance with the provisions of title VIII. Except at such times when, and locations where, to do so would be inconsistent with the purposes of the park, the Secretary shall permit aircraft to continue to land at sites in the upper Salmon River watershed.

Section 203 of ANILCA directs that Kobuk Valley National Park be administered as a new area of the national park system, pursuant to the provisions of the organic act of the National Park Service (39 Stat. 535), as amended. Management and use of all units of the national park system are also directed by federal regulations (title 36, chapter 1, Code of Federal Regulations), some of which are specific to national park system units in Alaska (see appendix A), and by NPS policies and guidelines. Other laws that guide management of the park include the Wildernes Act and the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

## MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

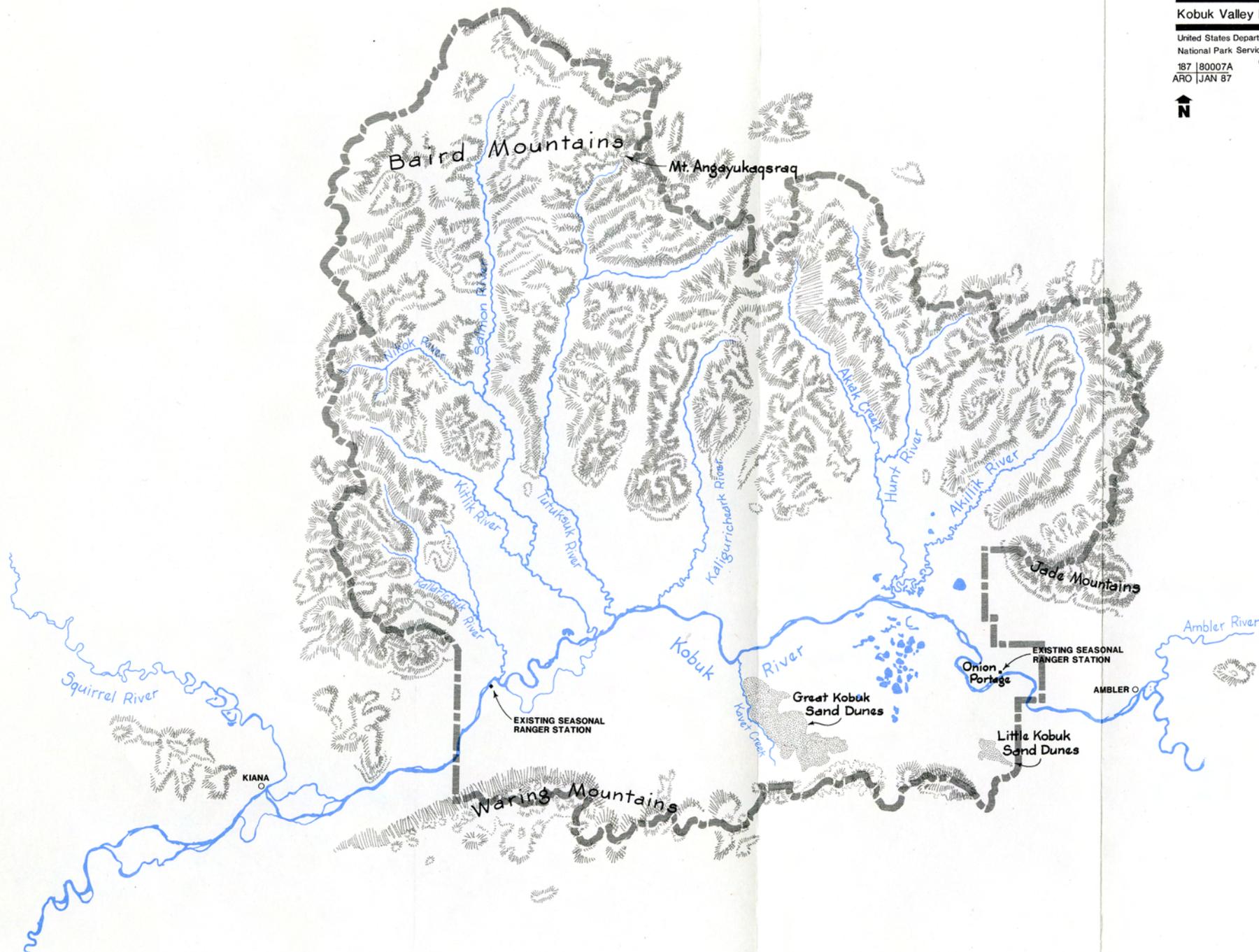
A "Statement for Management" for Kobuk Valley National Park was approved in August 1984. This document presents objectives for management of the park's natural and cultural resources, public use, visitor protection and safety, development of facilities, concessions, administration, and cooperative planning (see appendix B for the complete text of the management objectives). These objectives guide all subsequent planning and management of the park. They are subject to public review and comment and will be periodically updated.

# THE PARK

Kobuk Valley National Park

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

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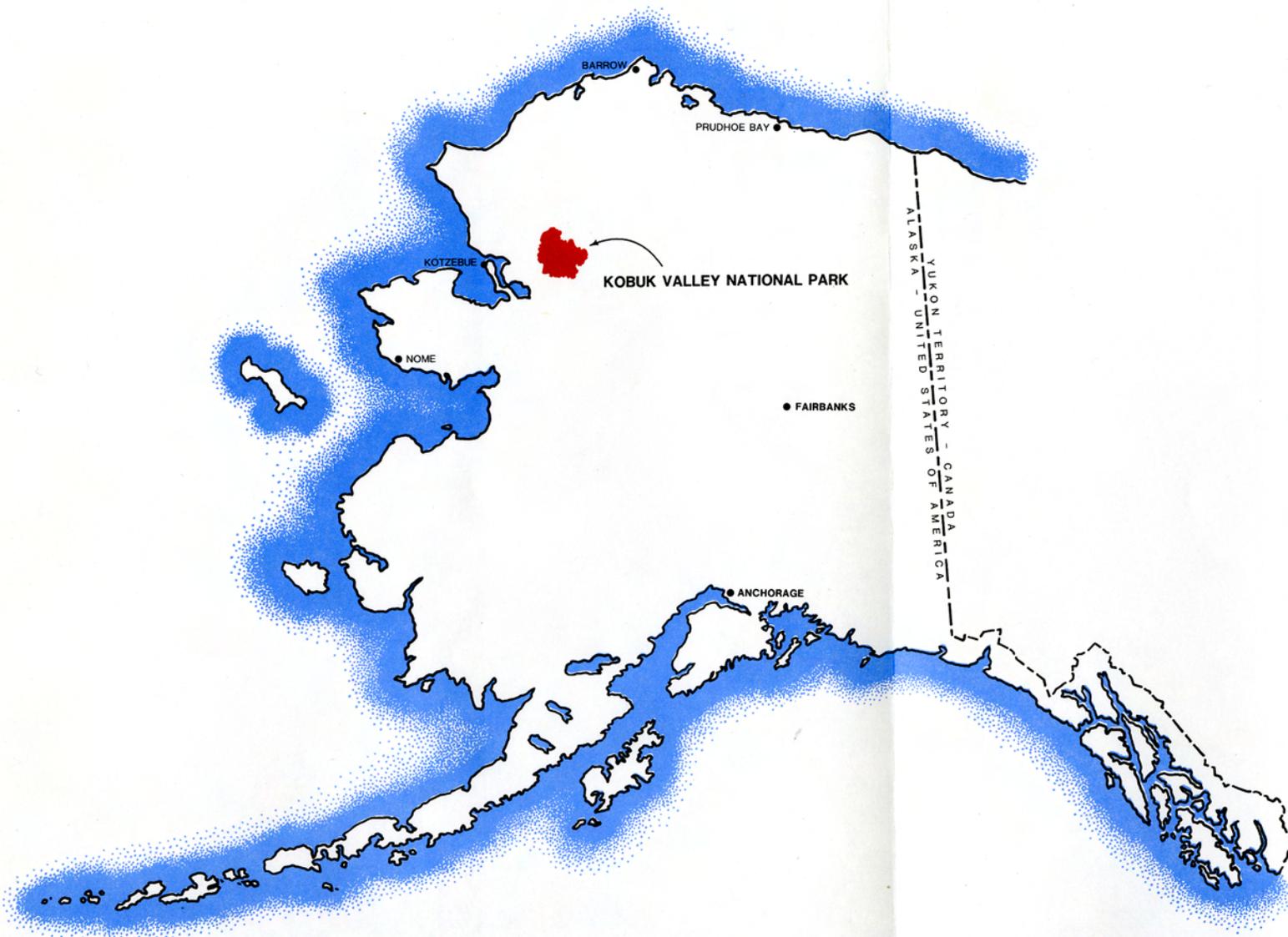


## REGION

### Kobuk Valley National Park

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

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KOBUK VALLEY  
NATIONAL PARK



YELLOWSTONE  
NATIONAL PARK



## PUBLIC CONCERNS AND ISSUES

Several major issues relating to use and management of Kobuk Valley National Park have been identified in public meetings, in discussions with individuals and organizations, and in the public review of the draft management plans and the park's "Statement for Management." The issues identified to date are presented below. The general management plan and the land protection plan contain proposals to resolve the major issues of this new national park.

### Subsistence and Recreation

Subsistence hunting, fishing, and gathering have supported native people in northwest Alaska for thousands of years. Local residents, predominantly Inupiat Eskimos, continue to sustain themselves physically and culturally from the biological resources of the region, including the land encompassed by Kobuk Valley National Park. Subsistence activities in the park include hunting of caribou, moose, waterfowl, and other animals; trapping; gathering of berries; stripping of birchbark; and fishing with nets. These and other subsistence activities are specifically authorized by the park's establishing legislation. It is estimated that regional residents account for greater than 90 percent of the use of the park during the summer season and an even greater percentage of the year-round use.

Recreational use of the park by out-of-region visitors is still very limited. It is estimated that 25 to 75 out-of-region recreationists have visited the park each year for the past three years.

There have been reported instances of out-of-region recreationists interfering with local subsistence activities or competing for resources with local subsistence users. Although such instances have apparently been few in number to date and have occurred largely outside the park, local residents are concerned about them and about the possibility of increasing conflicts in the future as recreational use grows in the region.

Measures to minimize conflict between recreational use and subsistence use are contained in the general management plan (chapter III) and land protection plan (chapter IV).

### Private Lands and Public Uses

Kobuk Valley National Park contains significant amounts of private lands and land selections within its boundaries. There are 77,086 acres of selections by native corporations and individuals and 13,362 acres of lands owned by native corporations or individuals. Most of these private lands or privately selected lands lie along the Kobuk River corridor, which is the primary public use area of the park for both regional residents and out-of-region visitors.

Many of these private lands and selections are in prime resource areas or on primary access routes. Closure to public use of some of these lands would severely limit public use and access to some of the major features of the park, principally the Great Kobuk Sand Dunes and a number of archeological sites. These private lands have the potential to be developed, and thus

change the character of the park. Additionally, public use of the park could cause hardships upon landowners through trespass and vandalism.

Chapters III and IV present ways to minimize or avoid adverse effects on park uses and resources, and also upon owners of private property within the park.

#### Access to the Upper Salmon River

The Salmon River was designated by ANILCA as a wild river (as defined by the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act). ANILCA specified that aircraft will be allowed to continue landing in the upper Salmon River watershed, unless such aircraft use would be inconsistent with the purposes of the park. Few, if any, fixed-wing aircraft currently land in the upper Salmon River watershed, perhaps in part because no reliable landing sites have been identified or constructed in this area.

The "River Management" section of the general management plan proposes means for aircraft to safely land in the Salmon River watershed and other rivers in the park, so that the public has reliable access to the rivers for float trips and other recreational activities.

#### Park Service Presence

The National Park Service is obligated to perform certain functions within Kobuk Valley National Park, such as the protection of natural and cultural resources, ensuring that opportunities are available for the public to be able to use and enjoy the park, and ensuring that subsistence uses have priority over other consumptive uses. Other kinds of services the Park Service may provide are discretionary, such as offering certain interpretive services within the park and in a regional center and having personnel available within the park to assist the public. Furthermore, required tasks can be accomplished to various levels with differing degrees of effort. For instance, the Park Service can station personnel in the park during the summer to supply park users with information, or these services can be accomplished to a lesser degree by park personnel periodically visiting the park and by maintaining offices in Kotzebue and in nearby park communities. Some members of the public expect and want the National Park Service to provide services within the park, while others prefer to visit this remote park without seeing any government employees.

The general management plan presents the levels and kinds of NPS services to be provided within the park.