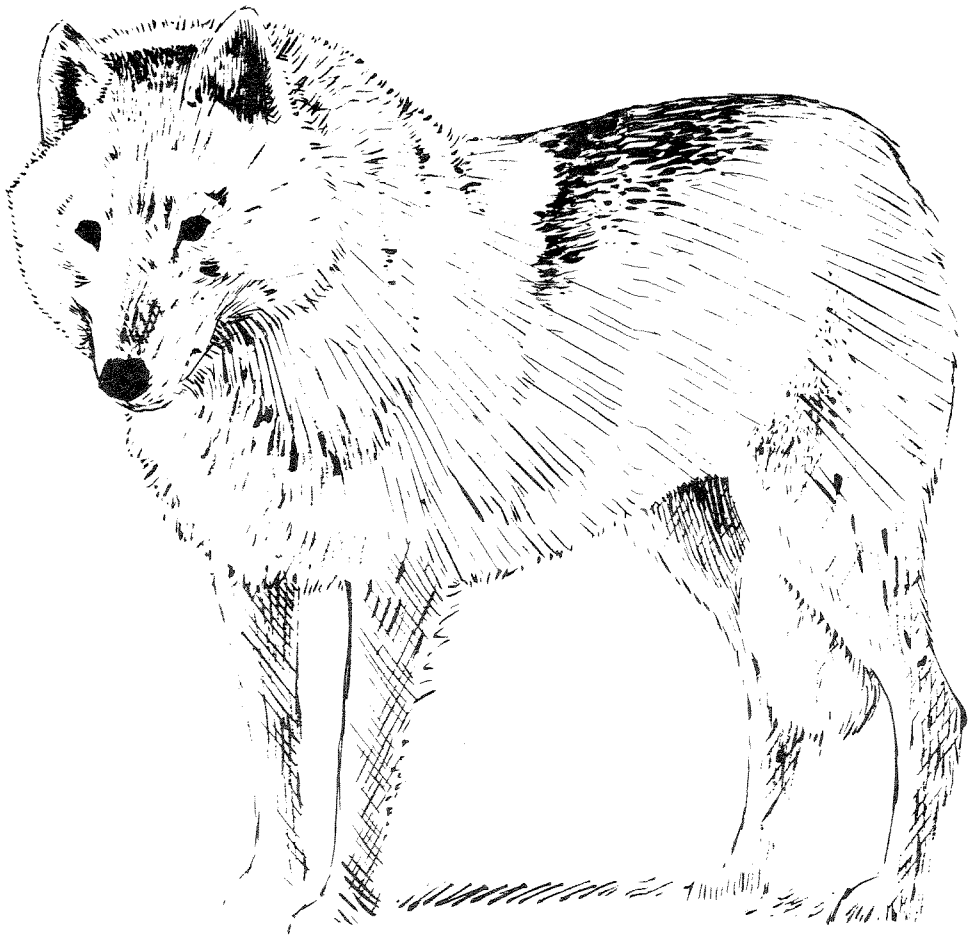
WILDERNESS



Chapter I	Introduction - This section explains why the GMP is being done, what the changes are in the text from the March 1985 Draft General Management Plan and in the December 1985 Revised Draft General Management Plan, what the management objectives are for the preserve, and what some of the planning issues and management concerns are for Noatak National Preserve.
Chapter II	The Region and Preserve - this section describes the northwest region of Alaska in general and the Noatak National Preserve specifically.
Chapter III	General Management Plan - The management strategies for natural and cultural resources, public uses, and preserve operations are set forth in this section.
Chapter IV	Land Protection Plan - This section proposes options and priorities for protection of federal lands within Noatak National Preserve from activities that might take place on private lands within or adjacent to the preserve, and proposes two possible boundary changes.
CHAPTER V	WILDERNESS SUITABILITY REVIEW - THE EXISTING WILDERNESS MANAGEMENT AND ANALYSIS OF SUITABILITY OF NONWILDERNESS FEDERAL LAND WITHIN THE NOATAK NATIONAL PRESERVE FOR POTENTIAL INCLUSION INTO THE NATIONAL WILDERNESS PRESERVATION SYSTEM ARE DESCRIBED IN THIS SECTION.

WILDERNESS MANAGEMENT

Section 701 of ANILCA designated approximately 5.8 million of the 6.5 million acres of Noatak National Preserve as wilderness and directed that this wilderness be managed in accordance with the Wilderness Act of 1964 except as otherwise expressly provided for in ANILCA. The Wilderness Act states that wilderness areas

> shall 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.

Wilderness is then defined (in part) as

> an area of undeveloped federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitations, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions.

ANILCA made certain exceptions to the Wilderness Act that apply only to management of wilderness areas in Alaska. These are summarized below.

Section 1110(a) provides that the secretary shall permit the following on conservation system units, which by definition in section 102(4) includes units of the national wilderness preservation system:

> the use of snowmachines (during periods of adequate snow cover...), motorboats, airplanes, and nonmotorized surface transportation methods for traditional activities (where such activities are permitted by this Act or other law) and for travel to and from villages and homesites. Such use shall be subject to reasonable regulations by the Secretary to protect the natural and other values of the [wilderness] . . . areas, and shall not be be prohibited unless, after notice and hearing in the vicinity of the affected unit or area, the Secretary finds that such use would be detrimental to the resource values of the unit or area.

The National Park Service has incorporated this provision into the Code of Federal Regulations (43 CFR 36.11) covering special access in conservation system units in Alaska (see appendix A).

Most of the wilderness is remote; however, airplanes, motorboats, and snowmachines are used to gain access for traditional activities. The continued use of these forms of motorized equipment in designated wilderness is allowed under the above-cited sections of ANILCA and the federal regulations. Helicopter landings are prohibited on preserve lands except in compliance with a permit issued by the superintendent. No other forms of motorized access are permitted except as provided by ANILCA sections 1110 and 1111.

The Wilderness Act, Section 4(c), states that, subject to existing private rights, there shall be:

> no commercial enterprise and no permanent road within any wilderness area . . . and except as necessary to meet minimum requirements for the administration of the area for purposes of this Act (including measures required in emergencies involving health and safety of persons within the area), there shall be no temporary road . . . and no structure or installation within the area.

Section 1303(a)(3) of ANILCA, however, authorizes the use and occupancy of existing cabins or other structures in national park system units under a permit system. Cabins and other structures not under a permit system may be used for official government business, for emergencies involving health and safety, and for general public use. Also under section 1303(a)(4), the secretary may permit the construction and maintenance of cabins or other structures if he determines that the use is necessary to reasonable subsistence use. Section 1315 of ANILCA states:

> Previously existing public use cabins within wilderness . . . may be permitted to continue and may be maintained or replaced subject to such restrictions as the Secretary deems necessary to preserve the wilderness character of the area.

Section 1306 authorizes the establishment of administrative sites within a conservation unit if compatible with the purposes for which the unit was established.

Section 1310 provides, subject to reasonable regulation, for access to and the establishment, operation, and maintenance of air and water navigation aids, communications sites and related facilities, and facilities for weather, climate, and fisheries research and monitoring in wilderness areas.

Section 1315 also allows the construction of new cabins and shelters if necessary for the protection of public health and safety. Appropriate committees of the Congress must be notified of the intention to remove existing or construct new public use cabins or shelters in wilderness.

Section 1316 provides that the secretary shall permit, subject to reasonable regulations, temporary shelters and facilities on lands open to the taking of fish and wildlife (i.e., national preserves) except that the secretary may, subject to adequate notice, determine that such facilities constitute a significant expansion of existing facilities or are detrimental to unit purposes, including wilderness character, and thereupon deny such use. A finding of significant expansion is contained in this general management plan (see "Recreational Uses" section in chapter III).

The decision-making process established in Title XI of ANILCA for the siting of transportation and utility systems applies to designated wilderness in Alaska.

As most of Noatak National Preserve is designated wilderness, a management plan for the preserve is essentially a wilderness management plan. Accordingly, wilderness management under the above-cited mandates has been integrated with other aspects of visitor use and resource management for the preserve and is discussed in chapter III.

WILDERNESS SUITABILITY REVIEW

MANDATES

Section 1317(a) of ANILCA directs that a review be made of the suitability or nonsuitability for preservation as wilderness of all lands within preserve unit boundaries not so designated by the act. Section 1317(b) specifies that "the Secretary shall conduct his review, and the President shall advise the United States Senate and House of Representatives of his recommendations, in accordance with the provisions of sections 3(c) and (d) of the Wilderness Act." The review is to be completed by December 2, 1985. This suitability review meets the requirements of ANILCA.

Recommendations on whether to designate suitable areas as wilderness will be made following completion of the general management plan. An environmental impact statement (EIS) will be prepared as part of the wilderness recommendation process. The public will have an opportunity to review and comment on these recommendations, and public hearings will be held. Upon completion of the EIS and secretarial review, the president will make his recommendations to Congress.

WILDERNESS SUITABILITY CRITERIA

The Wilderness Act of 1964 defines wilderness as follows:

> A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain. An area of wilderness is further defined to mean in this Act an area of undeveloped federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which (1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable; (2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; (3) has at least five thousand acres of land or is of sufficent size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; and (4) may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value.

Wilderness suitability criteria were developed that reflect the definition of wilderness contained in the Wilderness Act and the provisions of ANILCA specific to wilderness areas in Alaska. These criteria were applied to all nonwilderness lands in the preserve to determine their suitability for designation. These criteria relate to the physical character of the land and current land status. Other factors such as appropriateness for management as wilderness and state and local concerns with wilderness management will be considered during the formulation of the recommendations.

All future wilderness recommendations will recognize valid existing rights including rights-of-way under RS 2477.

The following criteria were used in determining the suitability or nonsuitability for wilderness designation:

Table 9. Criteria Used in Determining Wilderness Suitability

	Description of Land or Activity	Suitable for Wilderness	Not Suitable for Wilderness	Suitability Pending
Land Status	Federal	X		
	Federal, under application or selection			X
	State and private land patented and tentatively approved		X	
	Private ownership of subsurface estate		X	
Mining	Areas with minor ground disturbances from past mining activities	X		
	Areas with major past ground disturbances from mining activities		X	
	Current mining activities and ground disturbances		X	
Roads and ORV Trails	Unimproved roads or ORV trails that are unused or little used by motor vehicles	X		
	Improved roads or ORV trails regularly used by motor vehicles		X	
Airstrips	Unimproved or minimally improved and maintained	X		
	Improved and maintained		X	

Cabins	Uninhabited structures; hunter, hiker and patrol cabins	X	
	Inhabited as a primary place of residence		X
Size of Unit	Greater than 5,000 acres adjacent to existing wilderness, or of a manageable size	X	
	Less than 5,000 acres or of unmanageable size		X

LANDS SUBJECT TO REVIEW

Of the approximately 6.5 million acres comprising Noatak National Preserve, approximately 5.8 million acres were designated as wilderness by ANILCA. The remaining lands consisting of over 759,000 acres in the southwest portion of the preserve are subject to the wilderness suitability review required by section 1317.

All federal lands determined suitable for wilderness designation will be managed under the terms of ANILCA to maintain the wilderness character and values of the lands until designation recommendations have been proposed and Congress has acted on these proposals.

WILDERNESS STUDY AREAS AND SUITABILITY DETERMINATION

Using the above criteria, all of the nonwilderness federal lands within the preserve have been determined suitable for wilderness designation based on their present undeveloped and unimpaired state. There are no major past or current mining developments, improved roads or ATV trails, improved or maintained airstrips, or inhabited cabins on the federal lands subject to this review. However, 288,717 acres have been selected by regional and village native corporations under terms of ANCSA (see Land Status map). Whether these lands will be transferred out of federal ownership is uncertain at this time.

For purposes of this suitability review, two preliminary wilderness study areas--those lands under selection (suitability pending) and those that will definitely remain in federal ownership (suitable)--have been identified and analyzed (see Wilderness Suitability map). A determination of suitability does not affect any pending land selections or other prior existing land disposal actions.

Area 1 (approximately 290,000 acres) - These are the lands selected by the native corporations and individuals; they are east of the Noatak River in the southwestern-most portion of the preserve and consist primarily of bottomlands along the river. In the southern portion they

take in a portion of the Igichuk Hills. They also encompass the downstream portions of the Agashashok and Eli river drainages. They are undeveloped and would, if retained in federal ownership, complement the adjoining preserve lands to the east. The lands or any portions thereof are unsuitable if conveyed out of federal ownership and suitable if retained in federal ownership. These lands are shown as "Suitability Pending" on the Wilderness Suitability map.

Area 2 (approximately 469,000 acres) - These lands encompass the upstream portions of the Agashashok and Eli river drainages as well as the southern end of the Maiyumerak Mountains. They are undeveloped and, therefore, suitable for further consideration as wilderness. As such, they are a logical geographic extension of the already designated wilderness lands to the north. These lands are shown as "Suitable" on the Wilderness Suitability map.

Changes in land status ocurring or likely to occur between now and when future wilderness recommendations are made to the Congress will be reflected in those recommendations. All future wilderness recommendations will be made subject to valid existing rights.

NOATAK NATIONAL PRESERVE

WILDERNESS SUITABILITY

Noatak National Preserve

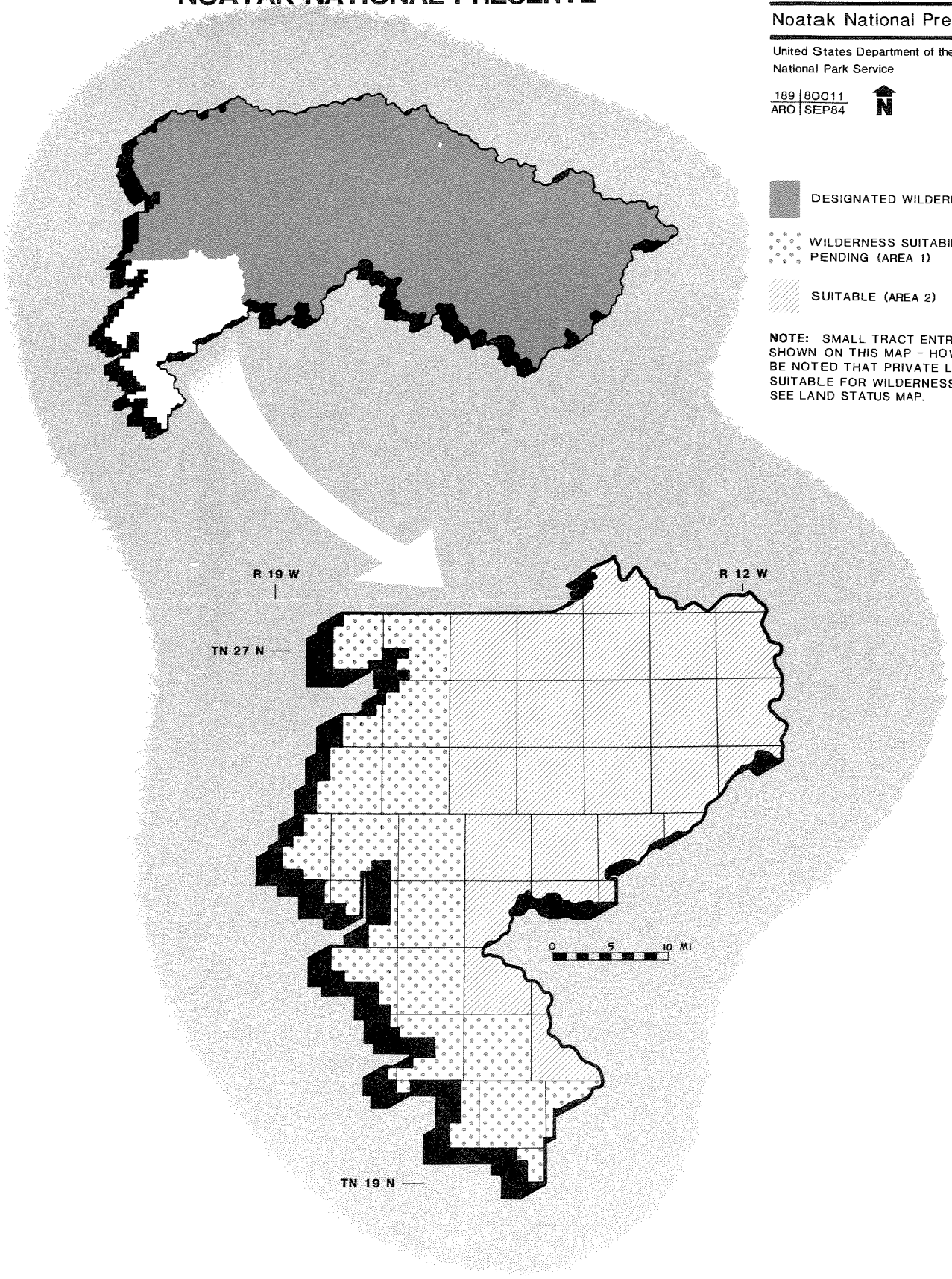
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

189 | 80011
ARO | SEP84

N

DESIGNATED WILDERNESS

WILDERNESS SUITABILITY PENDING (AREA 1)

SUITABLE (AREA 2)

NOTE: SMALL TRACT ENTRIES ARE NOT SHOWN ON THIS MAP - HOWEVER IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT PRIVATE LANDS ARE NOT SUITABLE FOR WILDERNESS DESIGNATION. SEE LAND STATUS MAP.