National Park Service
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Park Roads & Parkways Program
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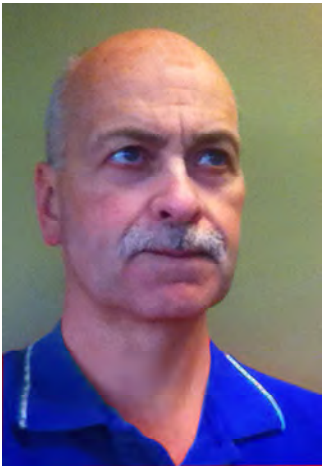
Meet The Team: Mr. Paul Schrooten

Paul Schrooten, a landscape architect who's been with the NPS Alaska Regional Office for 14 years, wound up in a career not very different from several he was considering as early as his high school years.

"I thought I was going to end up as an architect, engineer, historian, artist, educator, geographer, or politician," Paul said in a recent interview. "I didn't even know what a landscape architect was until I was a sophomore in college. In a way, I took on attributes of all of those professions in becoming a licensed landscape architect."

And those career directions do seem related...except, a politician? But then, if you consider Paul's recent work with the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) for Federal Lands in Alaska, he's certainly used a politician's skill set as well. (See related story on the LRTP in this month's NPS Transportation web update.)

Paul Schrooten is the NPS Transportation Program Manager for the Alaska Region, and one of the moving forces behind Alaska's new Long-Range Transportation Plan for Federal lands.



After graduating from the University of Minnesota with a Bachelor of Landscape Architecture degree, Paul began working for landscape design firms, first in Minnesota, and then in Connecticut. When the bottom dropped out of the real estate market, and his section at the Connecticut firm was cut from eighteen personnel to four, Paul was part of the eighteen. He departed for Anchorage in 1991 to work as a landscape architect for the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

In 1998, Ken Pendleton, another landscape architect with the NPS Alaska Regional Office, thought Paul might be interested in transferring his talents to the National Park Service, and encouraged him to apply for a position that had become available. "I must have had the right credentials, because my selection and transfer to the NPS went rather smoothly," said Paul.

"I've managed the Alaska Regional Transportation Program since 2007," he said. "I'm a certified project manager for the NPS and as such have PM responsibilities for various line item construction projects. I also serve as the Alaska Regional landscape architect since none of the parks have their own expertise."

Paul said that today, 60% of his time by position function is dedicated to the Federal Lands Highway Program, and the other 40% is funded from the Planning, Design and Maintenance team. "As such, I find myself serving in both programmatic and technical roles on many projects," he said. "My transportation program management tasks often coincide with a park's need for landscape architectural expertise."

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Paul spent his first years with the NPS working on the project management for high-profile visitor center projects. "I'm not an architect or an engineer, but I was thrown into the role of managing these two projects, both of which were started in 1998. One is at Seward, and the second, the Northwest Arctic Heritage Center, is in Kotzebue," Paul said. "These were both

partnered projects, which made them extremely complex. The Kotzebue project got built, and the contract is now being issued for an administrative headquarters project at Seward.

Paul says he's enjoyed a lot of help and support during his stint at the NPS. "There are so many people that have provided me with guidance over the years that it would fill pages," he said. "Lucy Gonyea initially hired me, and felt comfortable in putting me into my role with the two visitor center projects, which certainly broadened my project management experience."

"The Alaska Region offers some unusual landscaping projects, including a dog kennel at Denali National Park, and trail markings for ice roads."

Paul also mentioned a couple of practitioners who have spent considerable time teaching him to be a better landscape architect. "Ken Pendleton, Alaska Region landscape architect, who is now retired, still provides me with a great deal of professional and personal advice," said Paul. "And Brad Richie, Alaska Region architect, is a professional collaborator and a close friend who shares many of my ideals for the Service."

According to Paul, the Alaska Region offers some unusual landscaping projects. Three that he mentioned are a dog kennel at Denali National Park, the winter trail markings for dog sleds and snow machines on northern Alaska roads, and the Katmai National Park Road project, upgrading a road from Brooks Camp out to the visitor contact overlook at the Valley of 10,000 Smokes.

"For the ice roads and trails, I've worked with the Bureau of Land Management and state personnel to provide more permanent winter trail markers," Paul said. "This may sound like a strange transportation project, but that's the mode of transportation up here. Snow machines and dog sleds are essential ways to get from village to village, as well as within several of our parks. In many ways, these trails are more critical than some of the road and rail connections in the lower 48."

Paul said that some of the ice roads and ice trails have to be rebuilt every year. "They sometimes follow rivers and streams that change from year to year, so you can't go in and make any improvements. And you're lucky if you can find a tree

as tall as a person; it's pretty low growth. We're not talking about blazing trails through trees up here."

When Paul is asked about unique challenges of working with a transportation program in Alaska, he has quite a working list. "I'd say those challenges include travel distance, climate, bears, weather, permafrost, remoteness, more bears, multi-modal transportation needs, lack of infrastructure, unfamiliarity of Alaska by non-residents, moose, lack of connectivity to the Lower 48, and still more bears.

Bears and moose show up on the list because Paul has had his fair share of run-ins with some of Alaska's four-footed natives. He related an experience when he and Betty Chon, from the Western Federal Lands Highway Division, were part of the entourage to Brooks Camp, doing field reconnaissance on the Brooks Camp road project.

"When you fly into Brooks Camp, you're in a [de Havilland] Otter with 12 to 16 other people," said Paul. "The plane lands, you walk up the beach a little ways to the cabins, get your orientation, and stay in a fabric sided yurt. There are lots and lots of bears in the area, everything from cubs to bears weighing over 1,000 pounds."

If you haven't seen the web cam focused on brown bears at Brooks Falls, you should give it a look. Click here.

"It's a couple of hundred yards from the yurts to the buildings, through dense vegetation. We were walking along, and all of a sudden there's a 'woof,' and a juvenile bear comes running up to within a couple of yards. We inch our way onto the platform of a building and wait for the bear to depart. Just as we're ready to continue our journey, a second bear arrives, and then runs off in the direction of the first bear. I believe they were playing tag, and we were just in the way. But we were shocked by how fast they would come at you."

While Paul and Betty were well aware of the bears' approach, one moose in the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge was more devious.

"I was out with a survey crew, and we were shooting a line up on an old roadbed, above the highway," Paul reported. "I'm

facing the other surveyor, who is a ways off. He starts waving at me frantically. I wave back. He waves even more frantically. Finally, I turn to move on to my next point. Only five to ten feet away from me is a moose, the largest moose I've ever seen. His legs were as tall as I was; he was at least nine to ten feet high, and he was sporting a rack that would have made a great trophy. I just froze…I didn't move for the longest time. He finally just ambled away."

Paul has a couple of favorite projects, but the one that stands out was completing the design and construction of the Denali Dog Kennel Access area. "The results were far from what the park staff originally had in mind, but they were very pleased with my ability to integrate the footprint into the natural terrain adjacent to the historic headquarters area and operational sled dog kennel.

"One of Paul's projects: the Northwest Arctic Heritage Center in Kotzebue, shown below. "

Paul is also proud of his having initiated an NPS Centennial effort way back in 2003, "before anyone else thought it was important." But his proudest "programmatic" work has been the completion of the long-range transportation plan for the Alaska Region along with other federal land management agencies (see the related story in this NPS Transportation web site update.)

When he's not working on landscape projects or mixing it up with Alaska's abundant wildlife, Paul likes to go camping

with his wife. "We're not quite as nimble as we used to be, so we travel and overnight in our motor home," Paul said.

"Paul's proudest 'programmatic' work has been the completion of the long-range transportation plan for the Alaska Region, working with other Federal land management agencies"

He also likes to hike and bicycle, and is an avid runner. "I put in about 20 to 30 miles every week, and I try to participate in a couple dozen foot races in Alaska every year, three or four of them of the half-marathon variety."

Paul tries to spend any spare time that's left writing a professional sports history that he's been working on for about 10 years. "I'm looking at professional sports—hockey, football, basketball, and baseball—from the viewpoint of the cities they serve," he said. "That book will probably not be finished until I retire from the NPS."

And that's because right now, Paul's time is filled with interesting and challenging landscaping projects and transportation management programs in America's last frontier.