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Friday, August 29, 2003 (6).max

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

In 1993 the National Park Service published a *Draft Development Concept Plan and Environmental Impact Statement* that proposed several south side developments, including an orientation center in Denali State Park along the George Parks Highway, scenic and interpretive waysides along the highway, public use cabins and backcountry trails, a campground in Cantwell, and a possible visitor center in Talkeetna. While there has been a generally shared vision among public land managers in the region and others that the south side of Denali should receive greater use and development for visitors, the size and location of facilities have generated extensive public controversy for many years.[1]

Unfortunately, the 1993 draft plan/impact statement did not resolve the controversy and, in 1994, Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt requested the formation of a task force to make recommendations on, among other matters, the cooperative management and recreation development of Denali's south side by federal, state, and borough governments. The Denali Task Force submitted its final report to the National Park System Advisory Board in December 1994. The advisory board accepted it with a caveat to further address north side access, which is being studied by the National Park Service, the state, and others in a separate public process. The south side recommendations, which triggered the revised draft development concept plan/environmental impact statement, were adopted by the advisory board without modification (see appendix A for a summary of the Denali Task Force recommendations).

After completion of the task force report, south side planning was reinitiated as a cooperative project by intergovernmental planning partners. The cooperative planning partners included representatives from the state of Alaska, National Park Service, Denali Borough, Matanuska-Susitna Borough, and two Native regional corporations (Ahtna, Inc., and Cook Inlet Region, Inc.). Governor Tony Knowles has directed that the state take a lead role in this cooperative effort to increase recreational and tourism opportunities on the south side of Denali. This *Final Development Concept Plan* is one component of this cooperative endeavor. Other components include an update of the *Susitna Area Plan*, transportation improvements in the context of the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program, and local borough planning and associated land use actions. This effort also dovetails with the governor's plan for improved trails and recreation access for Alaska (TRAAK).

Section 1306 of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) allows the National Park Service to site visitor facilities outside the boundaries and in the vicinity of a national park.

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1. For the purposes of this plan, the south side is defined to include the 1980 ANILCA addition on the south side of Denali National Park and Preserve; Denali State Park; lands extending south to include Chelatna Lake, the Petersville Road area, and Talkeetna; and the road/rail corridor as far north as Cantwell. (See the Existing Conditions/Project Area map and the Existing Conditions Detail – Denali State Park map.)

In compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended, the National Park Service was the lead federal agency responsible for the environmental impact statement prepared for this plan; the state and the two boroughs were cooperating agencies. The two Native corporations were not able to serve as cooperating agencies under the National Environmental Policy Act, but were considered planning partners in accordance with NPS guidelines and the Federal Advisory Committee Act. All six partners in this cooperative effort have land management authorities on the south side. This *Final Development Concept Plan* is based on south side recommendations made by the Denali Task Force, with some modifications made by the cooperative planning partners based on additional public input, cost considerations, and impact considerations. Other sections of the development concept plan are based on the 1993 draft plan, also with modifications made in response to public comments. A final development concept plan/environmental impact statement was published in December 1996, and a record of decision was signed in February 1997 (see appendix B).

This *Final Development Concept Plan* is the result of a collaborative process that takes a regional rather than a jurisdictional approach to planning. Even though the plan proposes little development within the boundaries of Denali National Park and Preserve, a federal plan and environmental impact statement are nonetheless necessary because federal expenditures will be required to implement the plan, and because the developments will serve visitors to both the national and state parks. Critical to the implementation of a South Side Denali plan will be the establishment of an intergovernmental implementation team and development of a logical and cost-effective phasing scenario.

PURPOSE AND NEED

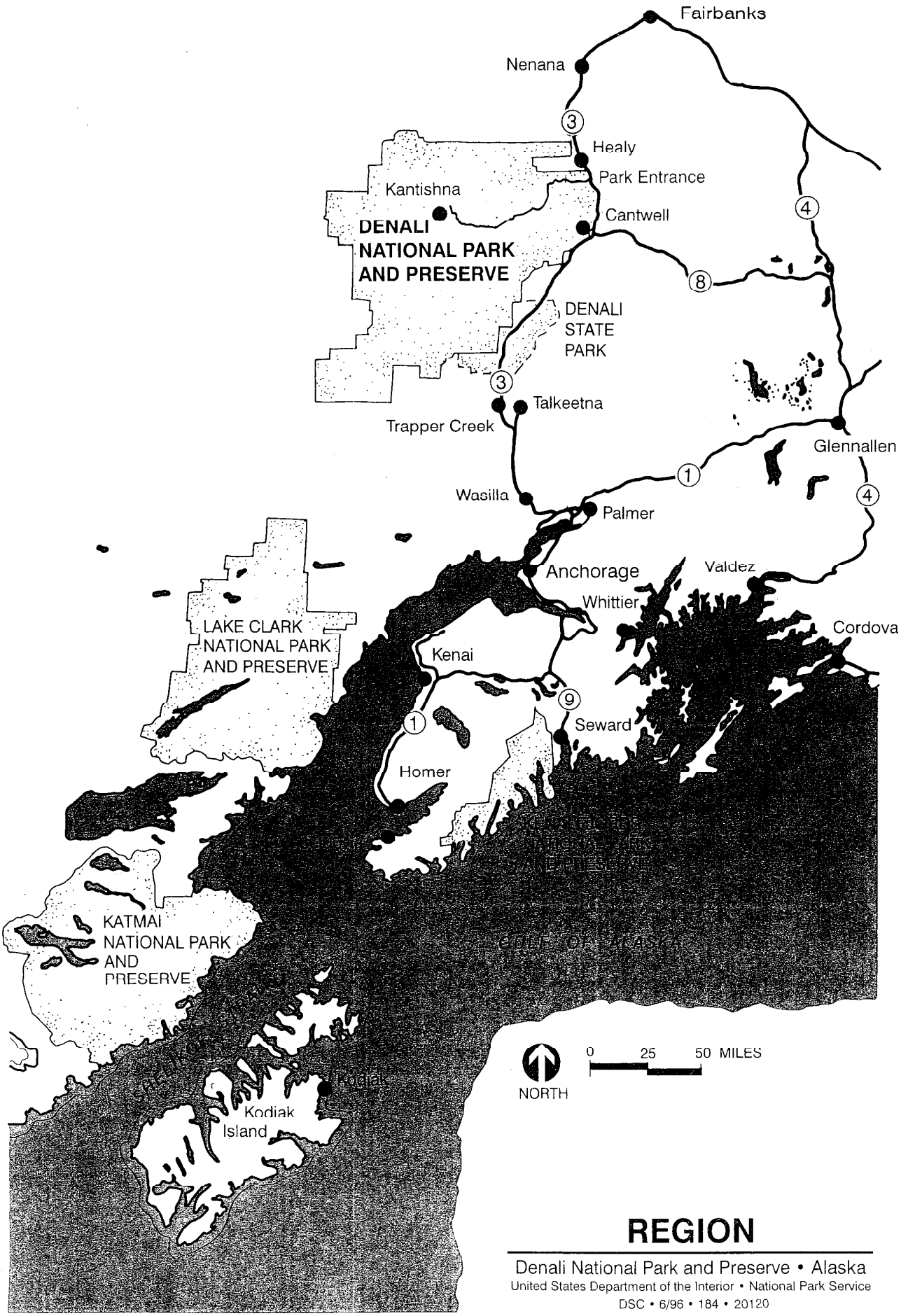
This document sets the stage for establishing working partnerships for funding and phasing appropriate visitor facilities and services on the south side of the Alaska Range. This document also serves as an amendment to the 1986 *General Management Plan* for Denali National Park and Preserve.

Most of the south side of the Alaska Range was made part of the national park system under the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) in 1980 or part of the state park system by the State Legislature in 1970 and 1976.

The south side of the Alaska Range contains magnificent scenery, including views of North America's tallest peak, Mount McKinley. It also contains a range of vegetation types and wildlife. Visitors from Alaska and around the world travel through this area to view and experience the jagged, permanently snow-covered peaks; glaciers; braided rivers; rolling tundra-covered hills; forests of spruce, aspen, and birch; and the wildlife for which Alaska is famous: grizzly bear, black bear, caribou, moose, and Dall sheep.

Several previous planning efforts have recognized the need to plan for the south side in order to better serve the interests of both the public and the land managing agencies in the region. However, until now the area has not been comprehensively addressed as an intergovernmental, cooperative planning effort in a long-range planning document such as this.

The need for south side visitor facilities and services is illustrated by the steady increase in visitation to the Denali region, both north and south. Bus traffic on the Denali National Park and Preserve's single developed access route is at or near capacity much of the summer, and flightseeing is increasing rapidly. Likewise, the number of users of Denali State Park has increased. Campgrounds are full, backcountry uses are on the rise, and snowmachine use is escalating. In addition, a new hotel on private lands in the state park will open in 1997.


Fairbanks
Nenana
3
Healy
Park Entrance
Kantishna
Cantwell
4
DENALI
NATIONAL PARK
AND PRESERVE
8
DENALI
STATE
PARK
3
Talkeetna
Trapper Creek
Glennallen
1
4
Wasilla
Palmer
Anchorage
Valdez
Whittier
Cordova
LAKE CLARK
NATIONAL PARK
AND PRESERVE
Kenai
9
1
Seward
Homer
KATMAI
NATIONAL PARK
AND
PRESERVE
GULF OF ALASKA
Kodiak
Kodiak
Island
0 25 50 MILES
NORTH
REGION
Denali National Park and Preserve • Alaska
United States Department of the Interior • National Park Service
DSC • 6/96 • 184 • 20120

All indicators point to continued growth and demand. The challenge lies in guiding and controlling growth by linking new recreational opportunities with actions that minimize impacts. Given the pattern of landownership on the south side, this can only be successfully achieved in a partnership effort among the major land and resource managers and with a continuing dialogue with the public.

The south side is a relatively untapped recreation resource that can provide new opportunities for the increasing number of visitors to Alaska and for Alaska residents. With attention to appropriateness, siting and design, and control of direct and indirect impacts, development of visitor information and interpretive facilities, trails, and camping facilities along the south side will help satisfy existing and future visitors to this region.

DIRECTION FOR THE PLAN

The following vision of the future guides this plan and any subsequent development for the south side:

- Opportunities for high quality, resource-based destination experiences and information, orientation, and recreation services and facilities convenient to park visitors are provided.
- Facilities and access in a location and manner that minimizes impacts on resources, local lifestyles, and communities are developed.
- Working partnerships for funding and phasing development outlined in this concept plan are established.

In addition, the cooperative planning partners have identified a number of more specific goals:

- Provide access to and a location for interpretation of the special qualities found in Denali National Park and Preserve and Denali State Park, including access to the spectacular alpine landscape on the south side of the Alaska Range.
- Offer a range of experiences and opportunities to meet the diverse needs of the traveling public, including information and orientation to the region; new or improved recreation facilities; enhanced state and national park interpretation; and shelter in bad weather.
- Ensure that, viewed as a whole, facilities and services benefit all visitors, including Alaska residents, independent travelers, and package tour travelers.
- Design and develop facilities and access improvements to support public use and understanding of the south side and its outstanding resources.
- Establish a research program and identify management needs to guide facility and road development.
- Facilitate orderly economic development in the region consistent with resource protection.
- Minimize and mitigate adverse effects on fish and wildlife resources, habitat, cultural resources, local rural quality of life, and existing public land and resource uses, including subsistence uses.
- Establish methods, responsibilities, and necessary steps to control unwanted secondary impacts of tourism and to minimize conflicts between different visitor groups.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLAN

This section emphasizes the importance of coordinated implementation and illustrates the commitments being made by the planning partners, individually and collectively.

Most facilities in this plan are intended for state park land and general state land outside the national park. Facilities located on nonfederal land will be considered in conjunction with applicable state and borough management plans. In the case of discrepancies, the south side plan facilities should be viewed as indications of what the cooperative planning partners consider appropriate for federal funding assistance or cost-sharing arrangements. When state or borough plans differ or conflict with this development concept plan, the state or borough plans will prevail, unless they are updated to conform with this plan. In all cases, state and borough officials have final authority over their respective land management decisions.

Just as this plan could not be successfully prepared and approved without the work of the Denali Task Force and the intensive cooperative effort between the major public landowners and managers on the south side in consultation with the public, plan implementation will necessitate a continuing cooperative partnership approach, also with public input. A Denali South Side Plan Implementation Partnership, established by the governor of Alaska, will ensure that the cooperative approach taken in developing the plan will continue throughout plan implementation. The group will be comprised of those necessary to implement the plan.

Implementation will be closely coordinated to meet state, NPS, borough, Native corporation, and local community needs. The partnership team will serve as a monitoring group, with substantial community involvement, to evaluate the progress of implementation activities and associated mitigation actions and to keep these functions linked. The partnership will be strongly committed to continued citizen/public meetings and other means of public involvement throughout plan implementation.

Implementation of the development concept plan will occur under a logical and cost-effective phasing scheme developed by the Denali South Side Plan Implementation Partnership. Phasing in practical, achievable steps will be critical to successful implementation to ensure that appropriate controls and mitigation are in place when needed. Developing a feasible funding strategy is also key to implementing the south side plan. Due to the uncertainties of funding sources and complexities of possible additional road planning, this plan does not include the details of what specific development will be included during various phases. (See "The Plan" chapter for a more detailed discussion of logical sequencing.)

Land use management/controls will also be critical to effective implementation of the plan. Additional or revised land management plans and controls must be in effect *before* major development occurs. The plan should be sensitive to local concerns, ensuring that local input helps guide follow-up decision making to reduce effects on area residents (e.g., emergency services and the local tax base). Corridor management techniques should control strip development before it becomes a problem. For example, substantial development at the Tokositna site will be preceded by planning and development controls in the area. The adequacy of these controls will be determined by the partnership team, in consultation with the public, prior to proceeding with development implementation.

NPS, state, borough, and Native corporation commitments to plan implementation are listed below. Joint commitments are listed first, followed by a list for each partner. Additional details on these tasks can be found in the next sections of this document.

JOINT COMMITMENTS

- Assist in overall project development and research.
- Develop additional details on phasing, funding, and plan implementation.
- Continue coordination on related issues that affect multiple landownerships.
- Secure funding for additional studies, facility site planning, design, and construction.
- Pursue creative funding strategies, including private sector options for construction and operation.
- Ensure projects are accomplished in a cost-effective manner.
- Ensure that necessary staffing and operating funds are available to implement the plan.
- Work with local residents, businesses, and applicable volunteer service organizations to help address the need for services (fire protection, EMS, ambulance) resulting from plan implementation.
- Coordinate management of existing uses (both motorized and nonmotorized) such as snowmachining, ATV use, boating, skiing, dogsledding, mining, hunting, and aircraft use.
- Assess the progress of plan implementation after three years in light of funding availability, results of wildlife research, and progress on identified mitigation strategies, and adjust priorities or management emphasis as needed.
- Coordinate any significant amendments to the south side plan, if needed.
- Complete additional NEPA compliance prior to construction of major facilities and access upgrades.
- Ensure continued public involvement and review at all levels.
- Review and comment on draft documents prepared for implementation.
- Ensure that additional or revised land management plans and controls are in effect before major development occurs.
- Coordinate transportation planning with the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities and pursue creative funding strategies with the Federal Highway Administration, particularly for early phases of Petersville Road development.

STATE OF ALASKA

- Review and modify as necessary the *Susitna Area Plan* and other policies to designate the immediate road corridor lands for retention in public ownership.

- Consider land exchanges with the borough along the Petersville Road to provide alternate borough lands that are better suited to development.
- In cooperation with the National Park Service, conduct wildlife and habitat research for the south side, as needed, prior to construction of facilities.
- Analyze recreational and other public uses.
- Research land status.
- Manage fish and wildlife resources, including watchable wildlife areas.
- Participate in corridor management planning and seek scenic byway designation for portions of the George Parks Highway.
- Manage state rights-of-way to maintain safety and protect scenic values, including selective brushing along the George Parks Highway.
- Support continued, environmentally sound mining activities and work with the mining industry and individual claim holders to address mining issues in the project area.
- Manage state land along the Petersville Road to protect scenic, wildlife, and other resource values and traditional activities, such as mining.
- Incorporate into the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program a project to improve and extend access on the Petersville Road commensurate with construction phasing.
- Plan and complete environmental work for upgrading and extending the Petersville Road.

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

- In cooperation with the state, conduct wildlife and habitat research for the south side, as needed, prior to construction of facilities.
- Analyze recreational and other public uses.
- Conduct land status research.
- Conduct archaeological research.
- Complete a backcountry management plan.
- Complete detailed site planning for facilities and services and environmental work, as well as NEPA compliance, if federal monies are involved.
- Implement ANILCA, Title XIII, with regard to federal expenditures for visitor centers, facilities, and services.

DENALI BOROUGH

- Undertake local community and regional land use planning and regulation, as appropriate.

MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH

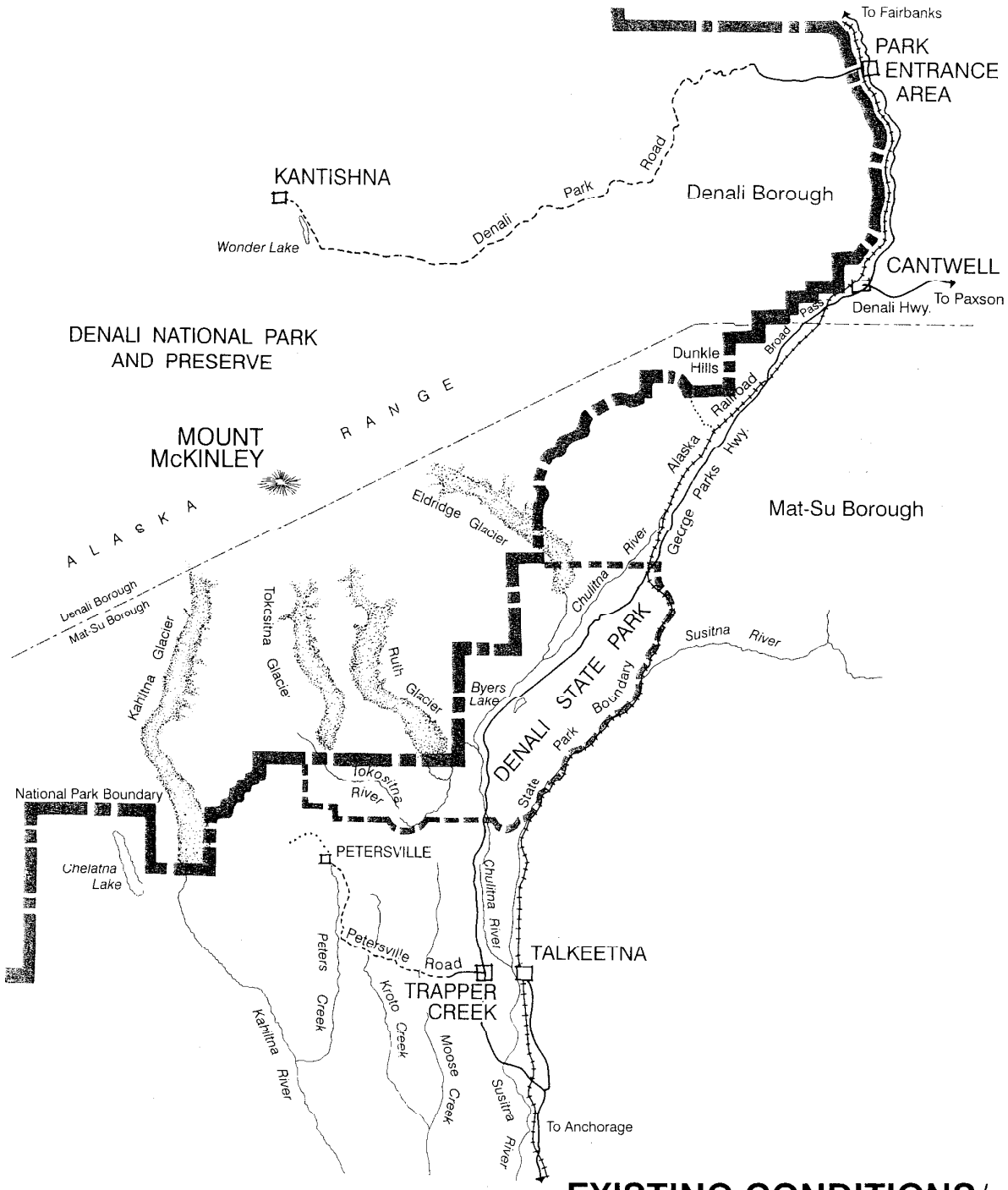
- Undertake local community and regional land use planning and regulation, as appropriate.
- Complete corridor management plans for the Petersville Road and portions of the George Parks Highway.
- Use community-based recommendations for managing growth associated with the proposed development and methods for improving current corridor use.
- Consider state scenic byway designation for portions of the George Parks Highway, including the section in Denali State Park.
- Consider land exchanges with the state to provide alternative borough lands elsewhere that are better suited for development.
- Use deed restrictions or other measures (e.g., vegetative buffers) to protect corridor values during borough land disposals.
- Manage borough lands along the George Parks Highway and Petersville Road to protect resource values and maintain and enhance the scenic driving experience.

AHTNA, INC.

- Explore the potential to develop/operate tourism facilities.

COOK INLET REGION, INC.

- Explore the potential to develop/operate tourism facilities.



EXISTING CONDITIONS/ PROJECT AREA

SOUTH SIDE - DENALI

Denali State Park • Alaska
Denali National Park and Preserve • Alaska
United States Department of the Interior • National Park Service
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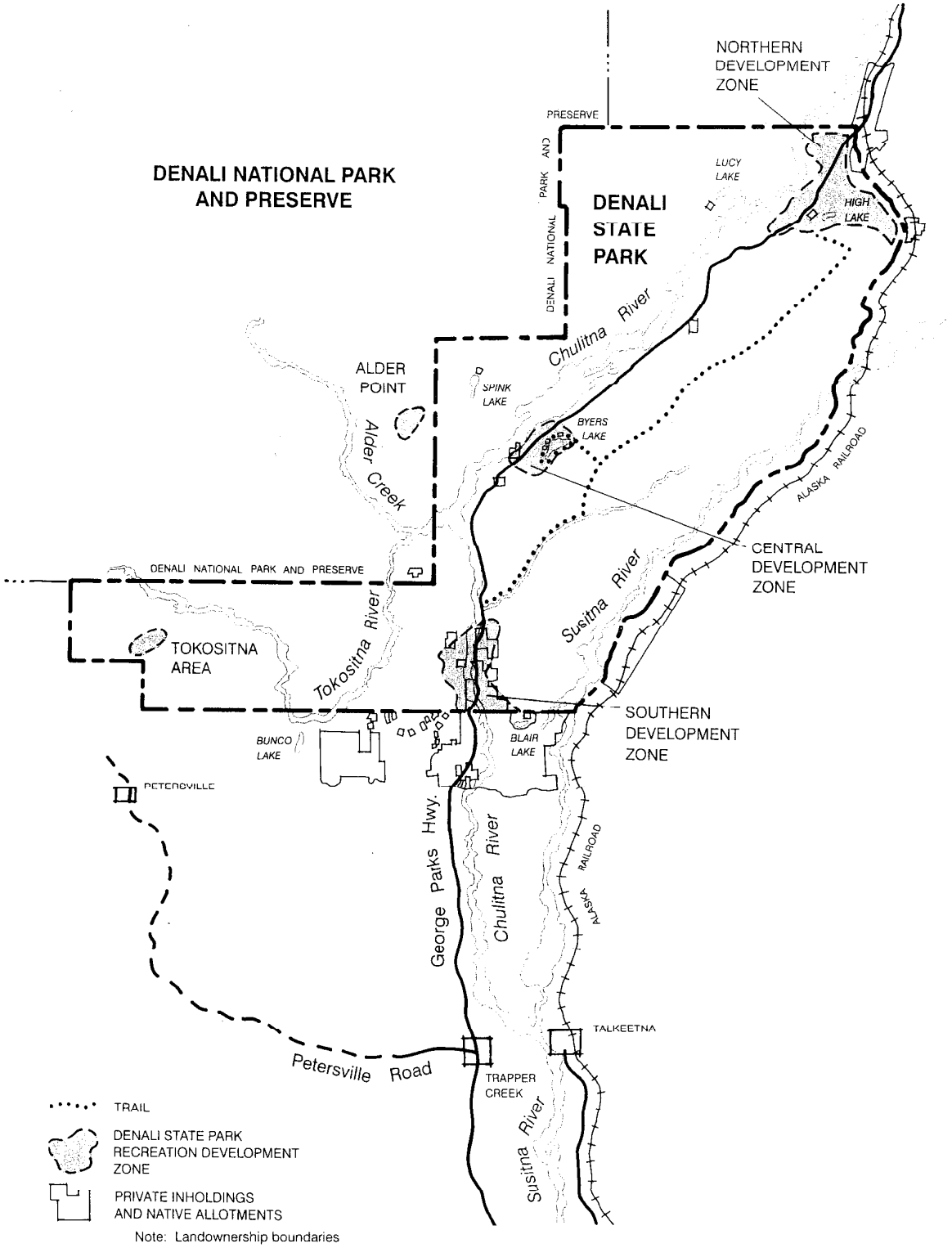
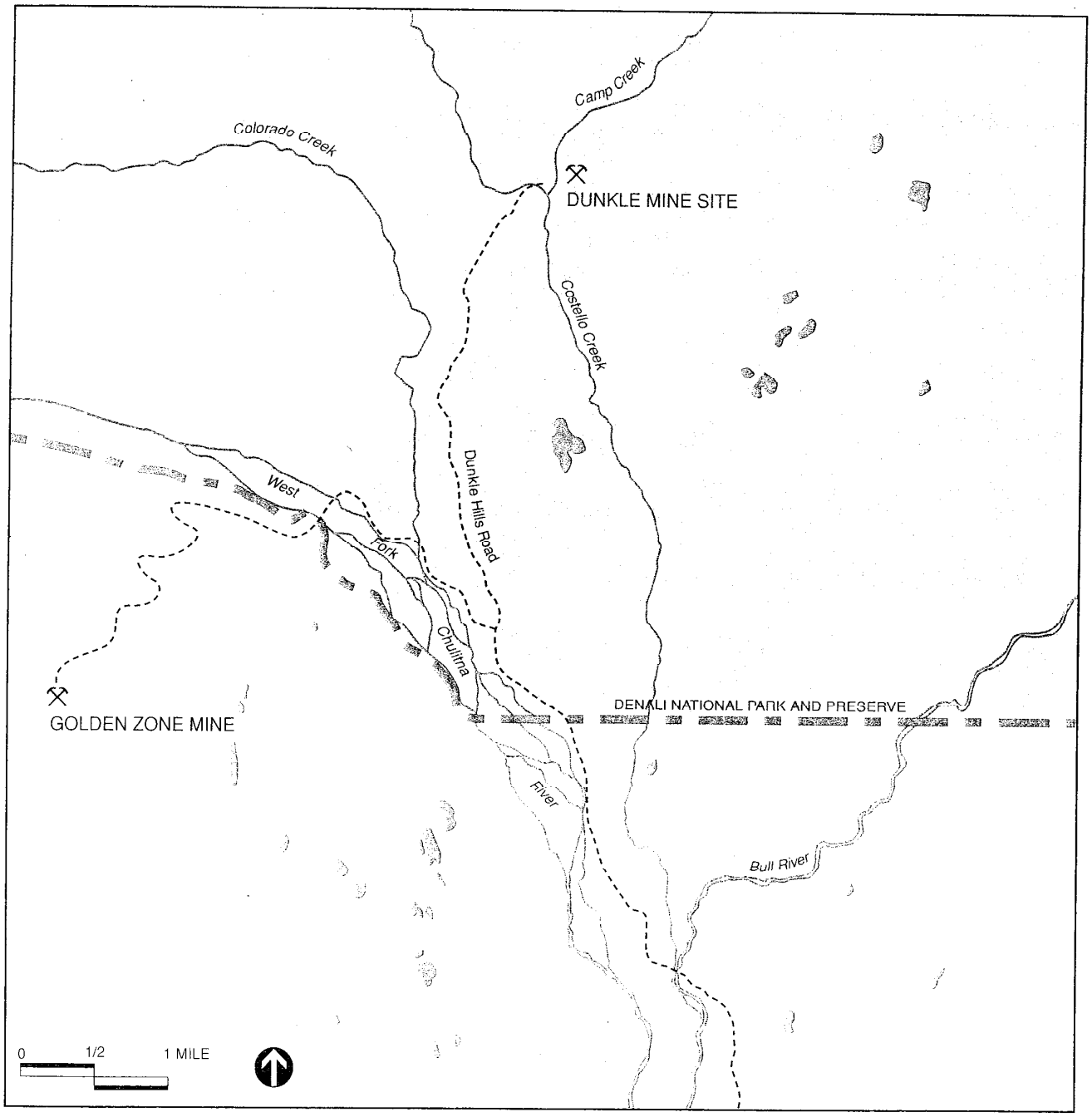


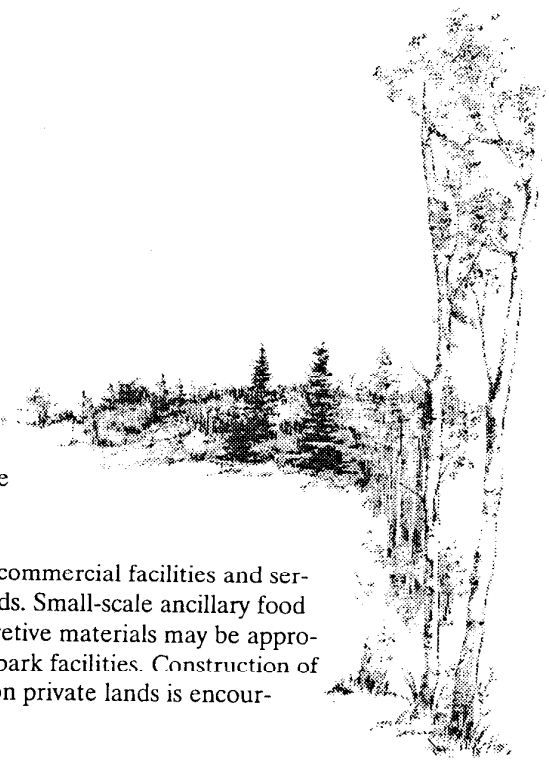
EXISTING CONDITIONS DETAIL:
Denali State Park

Denali State Park • Alaska
Denali National Park and Preserve • Alaska
United States Department of the Interior • National Park Service
DSC • 9/96 • 184 • 20115A



EXISTING CONDITIONS DETAIL: Dunkle Hills Area

Denali State Park • Alaska
Denali National Park and Preserve • Alaska
United States Department of the Interior • National Park Service
DSC • 10/96 • 184 • 20148



THE PLAN

GENERAL POLICIES AND ACTIONS

Certain general policies and actions will be implemented under the plan.[2]

Lodging, restaurants, and other primarily commercial facilities and services should not be developed on park lands. Small-scale ancillary food service and sale of educational and interpretive materials may be appropriate in some cases on park lands and in park facilities. Construction of full-service campgrounds (with hookups) on private lands is encouraged.

Except in specific development areas highlighted in this plan, the wild character of Denali State Park and Denali National Park and Preserve will be protected.

Additional or revised land management plans and land use controls will be in effect before major development occurs.

The state will review and modify, as necessary, portions of the *Susitna Area Plan* and related policies to designate state lands in the immediate Petersville Road corridor for retention in public ownership to protect the scenic, wildlife, mineral, recreation, and other resource values. (The *Susitna Area Plan* already prohibits disposal of state land along the Petersville Road north of the Forks Roadhouse.)

New facilities and uses will be designed and located to minimize impacts on existing uses (e.g., mining, subsistence, wildland recreation).

Construction will be restricted to the minimum area required and work will be monitored to ensure that work methods minimize adverse impacts on lands near the construction site(s) and that mitigating measures identified in the contracts are followed.

Pursuant to ANILCA, sections 1306 and 1307 and respective implementation policy and regulations, the National Park Service will continue its commitment to giving priority to the application of Title XIII with regard to federal expenditures for visitor centers, facilities, and services.

Development will be phased in practical and achievable steps and projects will be accomplished in a cost-effective manner.

Creative funding strategies will be pursued, including private sector options for construction and operation of facilities.

2. Note that these were listed as "Elements Common to all Action Alternatives" in the *Final Development Concept Plan/Environmental Impact Statement* and are the same as shown in the record of decision.

Up to two additional roadside exhibits will be developed at existing pullouts along the George Parks Highway.

Watchable Wildlife areas along the George Parks Highway and/or the Petersville Road will be identified and established based on existing and additional scientific information (e.g., wildlife, habitat).

Self-guiding interpretive brochures will be developed for appropriate portions of the George Parks Highway and the Susitna River.

The Matanuska-Susitna Borough's Special Land Use District currently in place in Denali State Park will be reviewed and revised, as appropriate, to improve implementation and enforcement.

The state, the National Park Service, the boroughs, and other jurisdictions, as appropriate, will continue to coordinate on issues that affect multiple ownership. In addition, they will work together, as appropriate, to manage recreational activities and other uses of public lands in the area. These uses will continue but will be managed to protect the area and preserve a quality experience. Existing travel modes, both motorized and nonmotorized (aircraft, snowmobiles, boats, ATVs, skis, dogsleds, etc.), will be examined to determine the need for, and appropriateness of, new access points, parking, restrooms, trails, corridors, signing, mapping, and other special measures.

The need for services (fire protection, emergency medical services, ambulance) resulting from plan implementation will be addressed through work with local residents, businesses, and applicable volunteer organizations.

The Matanuska-Susitna Borough will complete separate corridor management plans for the Petersville Road and portions of the George Parks Highway to protect resource values associated with developments resulting from the South Side Denali plan, maintain and enhance the scenic driving experience, and develop community-based recommendations for managing continued growth in the region.

The state will continue to manage state rights-of-way to maintain safety and protect scenic values. Management tools include vegetation management, driveway and pullout location and design, frontage roads, enforcement of sign laws, and addressing encroachments. Selective brushing and vista clearing will be conducted to improve views along the George Parks Highway.

State land management plans and policies will support the maintenance of environmentally sound mining activities. The state will work with the mining industry and individual claim holders to address mining issues in the project area, such as RS 2477 rights-of-way, recreational mining proposals, status and shared use of roads, and avoidance/mitigation of conflicts between mining and other land uses.

State scenic byway designation for portions of the George Parks Highway, including the section in Denali State Park, will be considered following corridor management planning by local governments.

Land exchanges will be considered between the state and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough along the Petersville Road to provide the borough with alternate lands elsewhere that are better suited to development.

Studies on the natural and cultural resources and human uses of the planning area will be conducted in advance of south side development, as appropriate. The National Park Service, the state, and others will work cooperatively to secure funding and carry out these studies. Studies will have the objectives of providing broad spectrum resource data useful in environmental analyses and in addressing human use issues; providing site-specific resource information for facility design and siting; and filling voids in existing baseline information, particularly as it relates to sensitive species or ecosystem elements.

Necessary staffing and operating funds will be made available to implement the plan.

Additional planning and environmental impact assessment will be completed prior to construction of major facilities and access upgrades.

Any significant amendments to the South Side Denali plan will be coordinated among the planning/implementation partnership.

A Denali South Side Plan Implementation Partnership will be formally established to continue the cooperative partnership approach in implementing the development concept plan. This partnership team will develop additional details on phasing, funding, and plan implementation. It will also serve as a monitoring group to evaluate the progress of implementation activities and associated mitigation actions and to keep these two items linked. Substantial community involvement will be a part of this plan implementation.

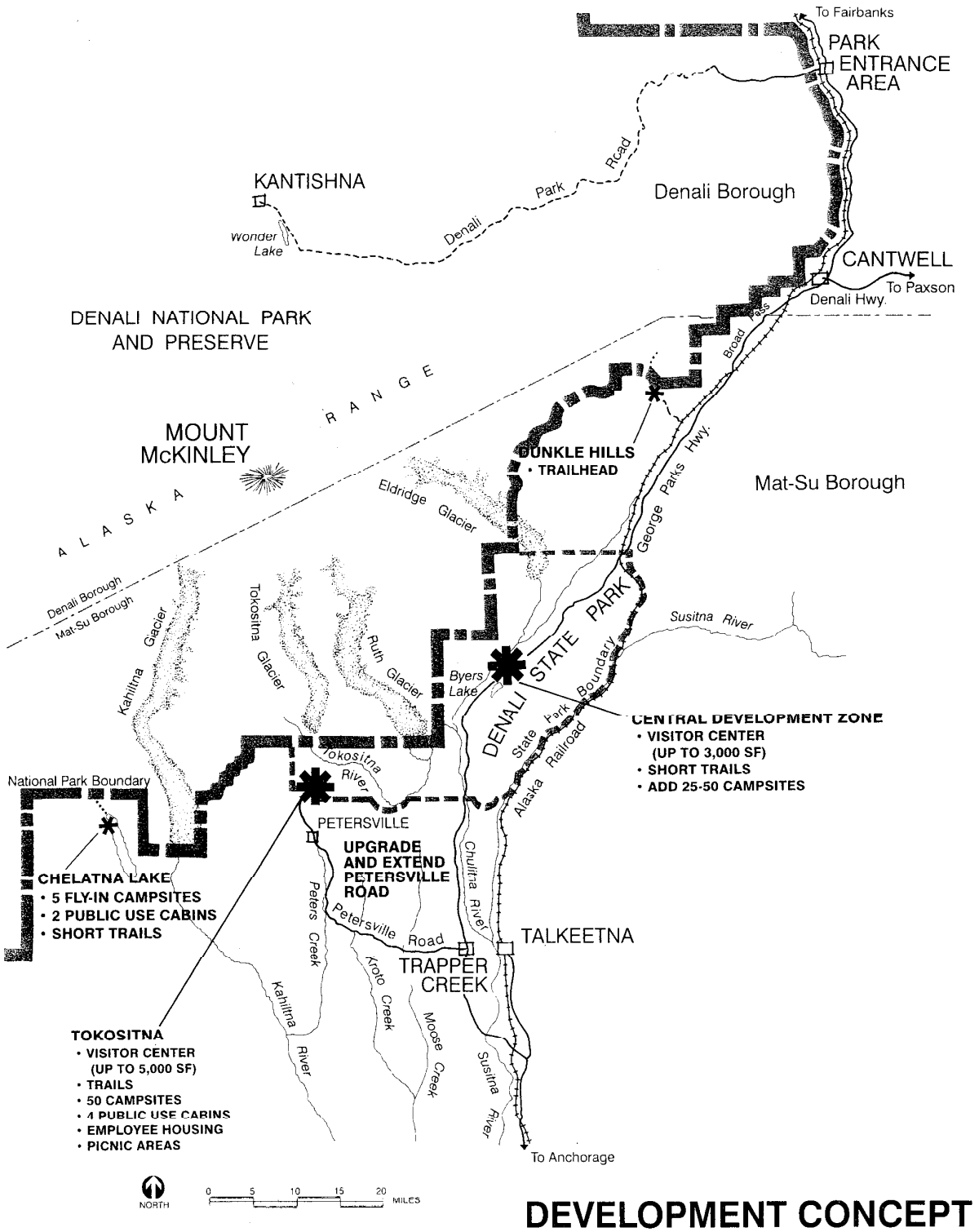
Progress on plan implementation will be assessed by the Denali South Side Plan Implementation Partnership after three years in light of funding availability, results of wildlife research, and progress on identified mitigation strategies, and priorities or management emphasis will be adjusted as needed.

SPECIFIC ELEMENTS OF THE PLAN

Concept

The emphasis of the plan is on providing visitor facilities and services throughout the south side to meet a wide range of needs and interests of the region's diverse user groups. Visitor facilities will be developed in the Tokositna area near the end of the Petersville Road and along the George Parks Highway in Denali State Park, at Chelatna Lake, and in the Dunkle Hills area.

In the Tokositna area visitors will obtain area-specific park orientation and interpretive information at a visitor center, explore the area and access Denali National Park and Preserve via hiking/interpretive trails, or make use of a campsite or public use cabin (see the Development Concept map). This component of the plan will provide the visitor with a sense of departing the main highway and its faster pace and arriving at a wilder, slower-paced locale. Facilities and road improvements will be designed with this purpose in mind. Development at Tokositna will provide access to the superb views in the area and provide opportunities for the visitor to immerse oneself in the landscape and be surrounded by the Alaska Range. Facilities will be designed to encourage visitors to leave their vehicles and experience the adjacent tundra/alpine landscape in both the state and national park. Tokositna will also serve as a jumping-off point for longer hiking or backcountry trips in the surrounding wild lands.



DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT

SOUTH SIDE - DENALI

Denali State Park • Alaska
Denali National Park and Preserve • Alaska
United States Department of the Interior • National Park Service
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Other areas will also be developed to allow visitors to more fully experience the south side. An interpretive center, a campground, interpretive roadside exhibits, and trails will be available and accessible in Denali State Park via the George Parks Highway. These facilities will be provided for visitors seeking convenient information and orientation to the area, for those wishing to use that area of the state park for recreation, and for those users who do not have the time, interest, or resources for an off-the-main-highway experience such as at Tokositna.

Additionally, a hiking trail, a few campsites, and some public use cabins will be available primarily for fly-in visitors at Chelatna Lake. A trailhead will also be developed in the Dunkle Hills.

Viewed as a whole, these south side facilities and services should benefit all visitors, including Alaska residents, independent travelers, and package tour travelers.

What follows are conceptual descriptions of the proposed visitor facilities. More detailed information and analysis of the exact site location, design, capacity, and function of each component will be covered as part of concept refinement through other subsequent, site-specific planning, environmental analyses, and public involvement. Refer to appendixes C and D for cost estimates related to proposed development, staffing, operations, and maintenance.

The state will manage state-owned lands along the Petersville Road to protect scenic, wildlife, mineral, recreation, and other resource values.

Land management plans and controls will have to be in effect and resource studies completed before significant development may occur. The implementation partnership team, in consultation with the public, will determine when such controls and studies are sufficient to begin development.

Phasing

Critical to the implementation of this alternative will be the development of a phasing scenario based on practical and achievable steps. This phasing will allow proposed development to be implemented over time, a 15- to 20-year period, as funding becomes available for construction. Some developments may occur in 3 to 5 years; others may occur in 5 to 15 years or more. Partnerships will be explored among the state of Alaska, tourism groups, Cook Inlet Region, Inc., the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, the National Park Service, and others determined critical to plan implementation.

Determining appropriate phasing is not only important for scheduling development activities, but also is necessary to allow time for completion of needed additional plans and environmental evaluations, implementation of needed land use actions, development of additional knowledge about the resources that may be affected, and securing adequate staffing to operate the facilities.

Due to the uncertainties of funding sources and complexities of the additional road planning, this development concept plan does not include details of what development will be included in different phases; however, it indicates a logical sequence for development as highlighted in the box on the next page.

Additional details on phasing will be developed in follow-up plans and in subsequent site-specific analyses. Determining phases and ensuring necessary follow-up work will be a key responsibility of the implementation partnership team discussed above.

Step one could include the following:

- Conduct resource studies and additional public involvement.
- Implement land management controls and mitigation actions.
- Develop detailed plans for the Petersville Road upgrade, guided by the South Side development concept plan. Complete environmental impact statement for the Petersville Road improvement that will detail road design standards and a phasing scenario.
- Develop plans for interpretive and recreation developments at the Tokositna site and on the George Parks Highway, coordinated with the phasing scenario developed for the road improvements. One or more project-specific environmental assessments will be prepared for this facility development.
- Develop access strategy for Dunkle Hills area.

Step two could include the following:

- Develop access to the Tokositna site.
- Develop facilities and trails at Tokositna.
- Develop George Parks Highway facilities.
- Develop Chelatna Lake facilities.
- Develop Dunkle Hills access.

Visitor Centers

The plan proposes two visitor centers, one in the Tokositna area and one near Byers Lake. These visitor centers could be built as a joint effort between the state, federal government, boroughs, or Native corporations, or as a public-private partnership. In either case, construction of the facilities will be contingent on an agreement between the National Park Service and the Alaska Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation regarding cost sharing, operation and maintenance, exact location, and site and facility design as well as appropriation of sufficient funding. The public will have opportunities to review and comment on the specific location of the centers (and associated facilities such as trails and picnic areas) and site-specific and architectural designs during future environmental analyses.

Tokositna Visitor Center and Associated Petersville Road Improvements. A visitor center (up to 5,000 square feet) will be constructed near the Tokositna overlook, an alpine saddle above the Tokositna River and Glacier in the Ramsdyke Creek and Long Point area of Denali State Park (see the Development Concept map). The Tokositna visitor center will serve the needs of both Denali State Park and Denali National Park and Preserve, and will be expected to receive approximately 207,000 visitors per year by the year 2012. As stated above, this center will be constructed in phases based on funding availability and coordinated with the phasing scenario developed for the Petersville Road improvements/upgrade (see details below on the road).

The visitor center will include space to provide information and orientation to the Tokositna area, an indoor exhibit room, an indoor and outdoor viewing area, a simple food service area that will not require kitchen facilities, a small interpretation-oriented sales shop, and public restrooms. Administrative space for a combined state and NPS staff will also be included, along with maintenance and storage space. Covered and uncovered, open-air picnic facilities with a capacity for about 50 people will be provided in the vicinity of the visitor center. A helicopter pad for use in emergency situations will also be sited nearby. Parking will be provided for up to 45 cars and 30 buses or RVs.

The center will be intended primarily for summer use, but will be designed and built for year-round capability. Winter maintenance of the Petersville Road will not extend beyond the Forks Roadhouse at about mile 19, and winter access will be by snowmachine or skis.

Winterized accommodations for a caretaker and up to three park rangers (for a staffing coverage of two rangers per day, seven days per week) will be provided to allow for limited visitor services in the winter and to give rangers a base for year-round patrols. Decisions on the exact location of the employee housing (e.g., whether part of the visitor center or separate from it) will be made during the design phase. Additional housing for seasonal employees will be a combination of cabins or bunkhouses in the vicinity of the Tokositna facilities and housing provided in nearby local communities from which employees will commute. For purposes of this document, it is assumed that up to five 200-square-foot cabins, accommodating two people each, will be constructed for seasonal employees. The cabins themselves will have no water, but a 500-square-foot showerhouse and central cooking and eating facility will be constructed nearby.

All utilities associated with the Tokositna visitor center, except those related to solid waste disposal, will be provided onsite. Electricity will be provided by a generator, and fuel storage will also be onsite. A septic system will be needed. Solid waste will be transported to another location for disposal. State-of-the-art technology and practices for remote sites will be implemented, emphasizing sustainable design and use.

The plan includes a major upgrade and extension of the Petersville Road. Improvements to the road will involve building up and widening the road base from mile 19 at the Forks Roadhouse to the Tokositna site at about mile 40. Extensive reconstruction will be done along the road from Petersville through Peters Creek Canyon. Six to seven miles of new construction from the west end of the canyon to the visitor center site will be required to complete access. This plan does not propose additional work on the portion of the road from the George Parks Highway to mile 19, as it is assumed that the road standards and conditions along this section are generally adequate for the purposes of this South Side development concept plan. Furthermore, maintenance of this section and additional improvements will likely be carried out by the state regardless of this plan.

As stated above, improvement and upgrade of the Petersville Road will likely take place over a number of years, depending on funding, mitigation, and other factors. Ultimately, the entire length of the road will likely be paved and designed to accommodate a variety of vehicle types, including automobiles, RVs, and buses. Appropriately sited bicycle and pedestrian enhancements will also be provided as part of, or separate from, the road and will be in keeping with the vision, goals, and objectives of the south side plan and with the state's TRAAK program. It will also be designed for safe travel and be cost-effective to maintain. Interpretive signs and pullouts will be placed along the road; specific locations and designs for these structures will be identified during future planning efforts. Winter maintenance of the road will not extend to the Tokositna site, but only from the George Parks Highway junction to the Forks Roadhouse at about mile 19 of the Petersville Road. For analysis purposes, the following three options for Petersville Road development were prepared:

Option one — a road with two 10-foot driving lanes with 2-foot-wide paved shoulders and a separated 10-foot-wide paved bicycle/pedestrian pathway.

Option two — a road with two 12-foot-wide driving lanes with 2-foot paved shoulders and a separated 10-foot-wide paved bicycle/ pedestrian pathway.

Option three — a road with two 12-foot-wide driving lanes with 6-foot paved shoulders to accommodate bicycles/pedestrians (i.e., no separated pathway).

Even under options one and two, about 3 miles of the bicycle/pedestrian pathway would have to be constructed on the shoulder of the road when passing through the Peters Creek Canyon and other areas due to terrain conditions. Based on the visitor experience outlined above, final design standards, as well as possible controls on access, will be developed by the state in a follow-up design process with tiered environmental documentation.

The full appreciation of a visit to a state or national park depends on a safe and enjoyable travel experience. The character of the Petersville Road will play a role in the Tokositna experience. Consequently, the rehabilitation/reconstruction of the Petersville Road will be designed to enhance the traveler's experience en route to the Tokositna visitor center by taking advantage of the area's natural beauty as an additional benefit to the "park" experience.

The Petersville Road beyond the Forks Roadhouse will be designed with horizontal and vertical curves that fit the landscape rather than long tangents that encourage high speed travel. The location and design of a road that includes an enjoyable pedestrian facility will require a blending of experiences for both the vehicular traveler and the pedestrian or biker.

The road will service roadside recreational opportunities and local access as well as the scenic attractions. Finally, the upgrade of the road must include practical environmental protection measures and accepted best management practices.

The state will address issues related to development and anticipated increased public use of state land along the Petersville Road through additional land planning and management. The state will reevaluate the provisions of the *Susitna Area Plan* for state land along the Petersville Road, with the intent of protecting scenic, wildlife, mineral, recreation, and other resource values. The state will develop proposed amendments to the *Susitna Area Plan* to define what uses will be allowed on state land along the road. The *Susitna Area Plan* already prohibits disposals of state land along the Petersville Road north of the Forks Roadhouse. Subsequent planning will evaluate additional state land between the George Parks Highway and the Forks Roadhouse that should also be retained in state ownership. Land exchanges with the state could be considered to provide alternative borough lands elsewhere that are better suited for development. (See the Landownership – Petersville Road Area map in appendix E.)

The concepts in the *Denali State Park Master Plan* are consistent with those in the *Final South Side Denali Development Concept Plan/Environmental Impact Statement*. The objectives of the Tokositna component are more clearly defined in the final document than in the draft document, and the visitor facility at the Tokositna location is downsized considerably. Given these two changes between the draft and final development concept plans/environmental impact statements, a revision of the master plan may not be necessary. As facility siting details and designs are fleshed out, the need to revise the master plan will be evaluated by the state, in consultation with the implementation partnership and others.

Other Visitor Facilities and Related Services . In cooperation and, where desirable, a partnership among the National Park Service, local communities, ANCSA Native corporations, and the state of Alaska will develop visitor facilities and services at Talkeetna, Broad Pass, and in the central development zone of Denali State Park when the need and opportunity to do so are established. Consultation and coordination with local communities to define need and determine appropriate courses of action will be essential. For the state park central development zone this will entail constructing a visitor center up to 3,000 square feet in size. See the Existing Conditions Detail – Denali State Park map.

The soon-to-be completed 320-square-foot visitor contact facility adjacent to the Alaska Veterans Memorial at Byers Lake will provide general visitor information until a new 3,000-square-foot visitor center can be built in this general area. The 3,000-square-foot visitor center will be constructed within the central development zone of Denali State Park within easy access of the George Parks Highway. It will be a joint state and national park facility and will be intended initially for summer use, but will be designed for year-round operations capability. The center will include space for distributing trip planning/orientation information and Denali National Park and Preserve shuttle bus reservations, a small area for interpretive displays, and public restrooms. Administrative space for a combined state and NPS staff of two to three people also will be included, as will storage areas. Parking will be provided for up to 25 cars and 15 buses or RVs. An access road of up to 2,000 linear feet will also be constructed, depending on the location of the visitor center.

All utilities associated with this smaller visitor center, except those related to solid waste disposal, will be provided onsite. Onsite fuel storage also will be provided. Solid waste will be transported to another location for disposal.

An exact location for this visitor center will be selected through subsequent planning. Siting will consider views of Mount McKinley, hiking opportunities, wildlife and other impacts, and highway safety considerations.

In cooperation, and where desirable, partnerships for providing additional visitor services along the George Parks Highway may be pursued.

Campgrounds

Under the plan, only standard public campgrounds will be developed, as these are currently underprovided by the private sector. For purposes of this plan, standard campgrounds are defined as those having basic facilities such as water, picnic tables, grills, and vault toilets. They may even be more primitive in certain areas. They do not provide full RV-type services such as electrical hookups, RV dump stations, or shower-type restroom facilities. Construction of full-service campgrounds is encouraged on private lands in the south side planning area.

Public camping facilities will be developed or expanded in the Tokositna area, central development zone of Denali State Park, and Chelatna Lake.

Tokositna Area. Up to 50 sites will be built in the vicinity of the proposed Tokositna visitor center for tents or primitive RV camping. Additional detail on exactly where campsites will be developed will be determined through subsequent planning and appropriate NEPA compliance for the developed area. Separated tent camping or walk-in sites may be considered. Camping facilities may be operated by the state, National Park Service, private concessions, or some combination thereof.

Central Development Zone. Camping opportunities in Denali State Park will be increased either by expanding the existing facility by up to 25 new sites at Byers Lake or developing a new campground of up to 50 sites elsewhere in the central development zone of the state park. Details on this campground expansion will be developed in a state park master plan amendment.

Chelatna Lake. Up to five primitive fly-in only tent camping sites will be developed at Chelatna Lake. Siting for these facilities will be done by state of Alaska personnel, in consideration of several factors — protection of wildlife, wetlands, and water quality; private lands in the area; and proximity to trail access.

Trails

Under the plan, interpretive trails and/or hiking trails, where possible leading through the brush to alpine terrain in the state and national parks, will be developed in the Tokositna area, Chelatna Lake, the central development zone of Denali State Park, and the Broad Pass/Dunkle Hills areas. The trails will generally be less than 5 miles in length (one-way) and will be developed for a diverse public with varied abilities and interests. Detailed trail locations will be developed through subsequent trail planning by NPS and state of Alaska personnel. Appropriate measures will be taken to minimize or eliminate impacts on vegetation and wildlife (see the "Mitigating Measures" section).

Tokositna Area. A system of short hiking/interpretive trails in the visitor center area and longer trails through the brush to alpine terrain in Denali State Park and Denali National Park and Preserve will be developed in the Tokositna area, including a possible trail to Long Point.

Chelatna Lake. A hiking trail will be constructed through the brush from Chelatna Lake leading to alpine terrain in Denali National Park and Preserve. A sign covering basic trail and safety information will be placed at the trailhead.

Central Development Zone. A hiking/interpretive trail will be developed in conjunction with the visitor center in the central development zone of the state park if the center is not located adjacent to the existing Byers Lake loop trail. Additional short hiking trails may be developed in this area.

Broad Pass/Dunkle Hills. The state right-of-way into the Dunkle Hills and Golden Zone areas could provide increased public access opportunities for hiking, bicycling, and mining-related interpretive opportunities once land status issues are resolved. Access to mining-related interpretation and private inholdings will be the primary function of the main portion of the right-of-way, which leads south across the West Fork of the Chulitna River to the Golden Zone area (see the Existing Conditions Detail – Dunkle Hills Area map). The other portion of the right-of-way, which diverges from the Golden Zone route and leads northeast into the Dunkle Hills, will be primarily for hiking and bicycling, subject to valid existing rights. For the purposes of analysis, this development concept plan assumes construction of a trailhead along the right-of-way at or near the national park boundary to provide improved access to Denali National Park and Preserve and a gravel parking area for 10 vehicles at or near the trailhead.

Due to the important calving habitat it provides for the Denali caribou herd, management of the Dunkle Hills area around the northern right-of-way section will emphasize low density, primarily nonmotorized human activities. This area will provide increased backcountry and day hiking opportunities for visitors to Denali National Park and Preserve. Additional management guidance for this area will be developed in upcoming revisions of the *Backcountry Management Plan* for the national park. Management intent for the right-of-way will be developed in consultation with affected inholders and with the concurrence of the state, which retains jurisdiction over use of the right-of-way. Future specific proposals (e.g., those that will increase public access into the Dunkle Hills area) will require additional, site-specific environmental evaluation and public review.

Public Use Cabins

Public use cabins will be developed in the Tokositna area and at Chelatna Lake. The cabins will be designed and built for year-round use. Each cabin will be up to 400 square feet and will provide sleeping space for four to six people. No water will be provided in these cabins. Cabins will be sited by state personnel, with possible assistance from the National Park Service, based on private land issues in the area and protection of wetlands, water quality, and wildlife.

Tokositna Area. Up to four public use cabins will be built on state land in the vicinity of the Tokositna visitor center, near the site of the public campground.

Chelatna Lake. Up to two fly-in only public use cabins will be built on state land at Chelatna Lake. At least one will likely be located near the proposed trailhead.

MITIGATING MEASURES

Certain measures will be used to minimize the adverse effects of facility construction and later activities associated with use of the facilities. These measures will apply only in the case of actions taken as part of this development concept plan; other actions taken outside this plan or as part of other unrelated plans do not require implementation of these mitigating measures. In some cases mitigation will apply only for federal actions or for state or borough actions. No actions will be implemented unless, and until, necessary mitigating measures can be taken. Unless otherwise noted, mitigating measures will apply to all development identified in this plan, regardless of whether it takes place on state, federal, borough, or Native corporation lands.

All construction will be restricted to the minimum area required. During all phases of construction a project supervisor will review the work to ensure that work methods minimize impacts on lands near the construction site and that mitigating measures written into the contract were followed.

Required Research

Studies on the natural and cultural resources and human uses of the planning area will be conducted in advance of south side development as appropriate. Studies will have the objectives of providing broad spectrum resource data useful in environmental analyses and in addressing human use issues; providing site-specific resource information for facility design and siting; and filling voids in existing information, particularly as it relates to sensitive species or ecosystem elements. Specific tasks will probably include the following:

- aerial photography and resource mapping
- moose survey(s)
- grizzly and black bear studies
- wolf monitoring
- swan and other waterfowl surveys
- raptor nest documentation
- weather station operation
- fish population surveys
- existing human use and impact analyses
- backcountry management analysis

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- vegetation inventory
- archeological, ethnographic, and historic resource surveys

Site-specific tasks will include soils mapping and boring, wetland delineation, and wildlife and vegetation surveys.

Wildlife

To minimize wildlife impacts, facilities will be sited to avoid the following sensitive wildlife habitats or activities:

- wildlife travel areas or corridors
- feeding and resting areas
- bear denning sites
- moose winter range
- moose calving areas
- caribou calving grounds
- Dall sheep winter and spring lambing range
- wolf activity or denning sites
- trumpeter swan and Tule greater white-fronted goose nesting, brood-rearing, or molting areas
- raptor nest sites

In trumpeter swan nesting areas, all land use activities that will disturb nesting swans or detrimentally alter the nesting habitat will be avoided to the extent feasible and prudent. When avoidance is not feasible and prudent, land use activities will be conducted to minimize disturbance to nesting swans or minimize detrimental alteration of habitat. Activities that will damage swan nesting habitat or cause visual or noise disturbance should be restricted or prohibited from April 1 through August 31 within at least .25 mile of swan nesting or staging ponds, marshes, or lakes that are actively being used by swans or for which there is a documented history of use. Particular activities may be restricted or prohibited in a wider area if their potential level of damage or disturbance warrants doing so.

Measures will be taken to reduce the potential for bear/human encounters. Visitors will be educated on the proper behavior when recreating in bear country. Availability and use of bear-proof garbage containers will be required around visitor centers, picnic areas, trails, interpretive waysides, and camping facilities. Backcountry users will be required to carry bear-resistant food containers on NPS lands and may be required to do so on state park lands. Trails or trail sections may be closed temporarily or during certain seasons to protect wildlife.

To further reduce the chance of bear/human encounters, trail segments in high-density bear habitat will be kept as straight as possible, maximizing sight distances, and brushy vegetation will be cleared from trail edges and in areas around other visitor facilities. Where linear trail sections are not appropriate (e.g., due to an area being too wet to allow for a straight route), less densely vegetated sites will be selected. Areas of highly concentrated bear use such as salmon spawning streams will be avoided.

Wetlands

All facilities will be sited to avoid wetlands, or if that is not practicable, to otherwise comply with Executive Order 11990 ("Protection of Wetlands") and regulations of the Clean Water Act. In areas with sensitive natural resources, such as wetlands, muskeg, or streambanks, increased caution will be exercised to protect these resources from damage caused by construction equipment, erosion, siltation, and other activities with the potential to affect these resources. Measures will be taken to keep fill material from escaping work areas especially near streams or natural drainages.

Vegetation

For NPS lands or actions involving NPS funds, development sites will be surveyed by a qualified botanist for possible rare plant species. Proposed routes will be relocated or possibly eliminated from further consideration based on these surveys. Vegetation removed during construction will be salvaged to the extent possible for use in restoring areas disturbed by construction.

Whenever possible, trees will be retained and protected from construction-related damage. Trees destroyed during construction will be used for construction material or fuel, or will be disposed of outside park areas by the contractor if feasible.

A disturbed area revegetation plan will be formulated that will require the use of native species. Specifications for soil preparation, native plant/seed mixes, fertilizer, and mulching will be provided for all areas disturbed by construction activities. A monitoring plan will be developed and implemented to ensure revegetation is successful, plantings are maintained, and unsuccessful plant materials are replaced.

Two aspects of trail development will reduce the impacts on vegetation. First, careful route selection will involve at least three steps: (1) mapping general route alternatives and major control points such as cliffs and bogs, (2) close-hover helicopter overflights of route alternatives as necessary to select the best option based on assessment of terrain characteristics, control points, and general route feasibility, and (3) ground surveys to refine the trail route where necessary because of terrain or resource concerns. Trails will also be designed and maintained to discourage social (informal, user created) trail development. Trails will be built along the easiest, most conveniently located routes to specific attractions given the natural terrain. The number of people expected to use the trail will also be considered, and the size of the trail adjusted accordingly to reduce the need for people to step off-trail to let others pass. Various types of barricades may also be used to keep people on designated trails, thereby reducing the potential for social trails.

The second aspect of trail development needed to reduce vegetative impacts is a commitment to annual maintenance of the trail system. Annual maintenance will reduce the potential for trail deterioration and additional vegetation loss from erosion, groundwater disturbance, trail widening, and slope failure. Maintenance reviews may also determine whether trail modifications are necessary to reduce the number of social trails that have developed or may develop.

For state lands, development will be conducted to minimize disturbance to native vegetation. All disturbed areas will be revegetated unless the landowner specifically requests the area be prepared for natural regeneration of native species. In most cases, revegetation will include native plants. Revegetation plans will be developed in sensitive areas such as

wetlands and streambanks and will include monitoring for at least one full growing season. In areas of known rare plant species (i.e., listed as threatened or endangered), development will be avoided if practicable. Individual land managers may apply additional requirements.

Water Quality and Surface Water Resources

Best management practices will be used during all construction to minimize potential erosion and sedimentation. These practices include measures listed under the subsection on soils below to reduce dust and erosion, and measures listed under the previous subsection on vegetation to restore native plants in areas exposed during construction. Silt fences and settling ponds will also be in place during construction to protect water quality. Proper siting and treatment of human wastes will occur to ensure levels of nutrients entering the water are minimal.

Soils

A program to reduce dust and soil loss will be instituted, as appropriate, for all excavation, grading, construction, and other dust-generating and soil-disturbing activities. This program may include (1) sprinkling unpaved construction areas with water to reduce fugitive dust emissions and covering or seeding disturbed areas, as appropriate; (2) imposing speed limits for construction vehicles in unpaved areas; (3) covering trucks hauling dirt and debris; and (4) salvage and reuse of native soils.

Where feasible, local fill material, preferably from the original site, will be used for trail construction activities. Material excavated during trail construction will generally be used as fill in other trail segments or construction areas.

Cultural Resources

None of the lands on which the proposed actions will be undertaken has been surveyed for archeological resources. Because archeological sites and features tend to be relatively discrete, it is believed that most of the actions can be designed to avoid archeological resources. During early design phases, the sites of proposed nature trails, visitor centers, or roadside exhibits will be surveyed to determine the presence, extent, and significance of any previously unknown archeological resources. Every effort will be made to avoid significant resources. **For federal actions,** if avoidance was not feasible, mitigating measures will be developed according to 36 CFR 800, in consultation with the Alaska State Historic Preservation Office, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, Native American groups, and other interested parties.

If any previously unknown archeological remains are discovered during construction, all work will be halted in the discovery area until the significance of the finding can be determined by cultural resource staff. If protection is not feasible, appropriate mitigation of adverse impacts on those resources will be determined as outlined above. **For state actions,** project planning must comply with state statutes that prohibit the excavation, damage, and removal of archeological and historic resources located on state land without proper permits. All projects should be coordinated through the Alaska Office of History and Archeology. **For borough actions,** as a certified local government, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough will comply with local preservation ordinances and state statutes. If any proposed development will involve direct modification, preservation, or use of a structure or district

on or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, such development will be carried out according to the 1992 *Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Historic Preservation Projects.*

Historically, the south side area fell within the Valdez Creek Mining District. Although there is no additional site survey information to include at this time and no anticipated surveys at or near the south side, there is strong geographical evidence to indicate that historic mining resources may exist throughout the region. In defining the mining context for the area, attention should be given to the geographic place names that allude to mining activities. Equally important will be the understanding of placer mining landscape features that may exist on tributaries and creeks in the area. Isolated features including sluice boxes, dams, piping, and tent frames may exist along placer creeks. Mining landscape features including fill, changes in stream coursing, and tailings may also be found. Survey of these types of features are necessary when the final sites for development are determined. Historic resources associated with parallel activities to mining, including hunting, fishing, and trapping will also require consideration. Many miners pursued these activities to raise cash and supplement sideline mining ventures. Associated property types for these historic land uses can be included in later plans or once the sites for development are determined.

Sustainable Design Principles and Aesthetics

The visitor centers and other facilities will be simple in function, reflecting the wild setting. While detailed design solutions will emerge through subsequent analyses and planning, solutions will consider the effects of scale, natural/rustic appearance, materials, color, texture, continuity, furniture, and other issues related to the built environment that will contribute to the visitor experience and minimize visual and natural resource impacts.

Where federal funding is used, all appropriate state-of-the-art water and energy conservation technologies, sustainable practices, and materials recycling will be incorporated into the design of the proposed facilities according to NPS policy on sustainable development practices.

CONSULTATION & COORDINATION

The National Park Service published a notice of intent to prepare a revised draft development concept plan and environmental impact statement for the south side of Denali National Park and Preserve in the *Federal Register* on October 25, 1997 (vol. 60, no. 206, p. 54705).

Public issues and concerns regarding south side planning were identified during the scoping process for the 1993 *Draft Development Concept Plan/Environmental Impact Statement* and were carried over to the 1996 *Revised Draft Development Concept Plan/Environmental Impact Statement*. Recommendations for the south side, provided by the Denali Task Force in its 1994 report to the National Park System Advisory Board, provided a basis for potential visitor services and facilities to consider in a revised draft document. Additional public input also was solicited as part of developing the revised draft. Public input was obtained through distribution of a newsletter and through a series of public open houses. The newsletter, published on August 11, 1995, provided an update on planning for Denali National Park and Preserve, including the south side. It included a brief description of preliminary ideas for south side visitor facilities and services, invited written comments from the public on these ideas, and announced the dates and locations of public open houses to discuss and obtain feedback on theses ideas and to solicit additional suggestions. Several public open houses were held to update the public on these planning efforts. The open houses were announced in the newsletter and in a notice in local newspapers. They were held the last two weeks in August in the communities of Fairbanks, Cantwell, Healy/Denali Park, Anchorage, Talkeetna/Trapper Creek, and Wasilla/Palmer. With regard to the south side, a new proposed action and two other development alternatives were presented to the public for comment and discussion. Other items related to past or current planning for the south side, including copies of the 1994 Denali Task Force report, were also provided at this time as background material.

On March 25, 1996, the National Park Service published a notice in the *Federal Register* announcing the availability of the *Revised Draft Development Concept Plan/Environmental Impact Statement* (vol. 61, no. 58, pp. 12095–6). The document was made available to the public the week of March 17, 1996; approximately 1,300 copies were distributed.

The revised draft document was a product of a cooperative partnership between six major landowners and managers on the south side: the state of Alaska, the Denali and Matanuska-Susitna Boroughs, Ahtna, Inc., Cook Inlet Region Inc., and the National Park Service. As part of this planning process, the cooperative planning partners attended five cooperative planning meetings in Anchorage (May 23, June 30, July 28, September 13, October 12, and December 8, 1995). In addition to these formal meetings, the partners engaged in a number of informal meetings and telephone discussions to further exchange ideas and information about the south side.

Public hearings on the revised draft document were held in several Alaskan communities in the spring of 1996. A total of about 330 people attended the hearings held in April (Fairbanks, Healy, Cantwell, Trapper Creek, Talkeetna, and Anchorage) and in May (Wasilla). The number of people testifying at each meeting is given below.

Fairbanks meeting (April 16, 1996); 6 people provided formal testimony

Healy meeting (April 17, 1996); 3 people provided formal testimony

Cantwell meeting (April 18, 1996); 4 people provided formal testimony

Trapper Creek meeting (April 23, 1996); 16 people provided formal testimony

Talkeetna meeting (April 24, 1996); 28 people provided formal testimony

Anchorage meeting (April 25, 1996); 21 people provided formal testimony

Wasilla meeting (May 15, 1996); 19 people provided formal testimony.

The closing date of the public review period for the revised draft document was initially May 21,1996, but was extended to June 5, 1996. During the review period about 480 written comments (letters, postcards, and statements) were received from agencies, interest groups, businesses, and individuals.

A *Final Development Concept Plan/Environmental Impact Statement* was published in December 1996, and a notice of availability appeared on January 24, 1997, in the *Federal Register* (vol. 62, no. 16, page 3681). A record of decision was signed on February 25, 1997 (see appendix B), and a notice appeared on March 17, 1997, in the *Federal Register* (vol. 62, no. 51, p. 12664).

All letters with substantive comments received on the revised draft plan/environmental statement were reprinted in volume 2 of the final plan/environmental statement, with responses printed alongside the letters for easy reference. Volume 2 also contains excerpted comments from testimony given at the seven public hearings. The original letters are available for review at Denali National Park and Preserve, as well as at the National Park Service in Anchorage. Copies of the complete transcript for each public hearing are available for review at the Talkeetna Library and at the offices of Denali National Park and Preserve, the National Park Service in Anchorage, and the Alaska Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation in Anchorage.

COORDINATION WITH THE U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

In August 1995, pursuant to NPS policy and guidelines and in compliance with section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, the National Park Service requested from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service information on federally listed plant and animal species that might occur within the south side planning area for the development concept plan. A response was received on October 6, 1995, stating that one endangered species and five species of concern may occur in the project area. A copy of the *Revised Draft Development Concept Plan/Environmental Impact Statement* was sent to the agency under separate cover on April 2, 1996. In a response dated December 16, 1996, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said that they understand that the plan is very conceptual and will require additional planning and investigation. They agreed with the conclusion that until specific surveys are done, it cannot be determined if, or to what degree, listed species would be affected by the proposed development.

COORDINATION WITH THE ALASKA STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE AND THE WESTERN OFFICE OF THE ADVISORY COUNCIL ON HISTORIC PRESERVATION

The National Park Service has consulted with the Alaska State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and the Western Office of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation since the initiation of this project. A copy of the 1996 *Revised Draft Development Concept Plan/Environmental Impact Statement* was sent to both of these offices in order to initiate and plan for coordination of survey, eligibility, effect, and mitigation of possible cultural resources in the proposed project areas early in the planning process. Copies of the revised draft document were sent to the SHPO and the advisory council under separate cover on April 4, 1996; no response letters were received. Telephone communications between Tim Smith, SHPO, and Nancy Swanton, Denali National Park and Preserve, on September 12, 1996, confirmed that the SHPO has no concerns or comments regarding this conceptual plan, but would like to stay informed of any future site-specific plans that may follow this development concept plan. The *Final Development Concept Plan/Environmental Impact Statement* was sent to the SHPO.

APPENDIX A

Summary of Denali Task Force
Recommendations for the South Side, 1994

GENERAL SOUTH SIDE RECOMMENDATIONS

New Denali-oriented destinations are needed, especially on the underutilized south side, to take advantage of outstanding recreational and mountain viewing opportunities. An array of visitor services is needed to serve both tour groups and independent travelers. No one site can meet all objectives and opportunities for south side development. New development must be accompanied by planning and land use actions to ensure protection of scenic, primitive, and wildlife values of the state and national parks and minimize uncontrolled strip development. Some or all visitor centers should be operated cooperatively with the state. At least one should be accessible to the Alaska Railroad. Specific size and location is dependent on demand, recreational opportunities, and natural resource constraints. No commercial lodging should be provided on public lands, although small-scale ancillary food service may be appropriate (e.g., Tokositna). Visitor centers and major access improvements should be at least partially funded through federal sources due to the national park orientation. Trail recommendations focus on short interpretive trails, especially in the vicinity of visitor centers, and trails that provide access to the national park and/or alpine terrain.

TOKOSITNA

Modest visitor center in Denali State Park near Long Point, about 3 miles from the national park boundary. Excellent view in national park caliber alpine setting. Site requires substantial upgrade and 6–7 mile extension of the 40-mile-long Petersville Road. Related facilities: campground, cabins, short interpretive trails, trail access to national park.

TALKEETNA

Mountaineering-oriented visitor information/interpretive site. Has road, rail, and air access. Supports existing and future private development. Related facilities. Local trails, river recreation, private lodging.

BYERS LAKE

Small visitor center along the George Parks Highway in the vicinity of Byers Lake in Denali State Park. Site is centrally located to high quality recreational opportunities and does not involve land acquisition costs or conflicts with adjacent private lands. Expand existing campground.

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BROAD PASS

Good location for private recreation facilities on private, borough, or nonpark state land. Accessible by road, rail, and air. If the private sector develops this area, a small park resource protection and multiagency visitor contact center is recommended. Use of the Dunkle Hills road for hiking access, possible bus tours. Related facilities: trailheads.

CHELATNA LAKE

Fly-in recreation site on state land at Chelatna Lake, including one or more public use cabins, kiosk with interpretive information, and a trail through dense vegetation to alpine terrain and national park lands.

SCENIC HIGHWAY OR CORRIDOR DESIGNATION FOR PORTIONS OF THE GEORGE PARKS HIGHWAY AND/OR RAILROAD

Implement highway right-of-way restrictions, e.g., setback requirements, vegetative screening, frontage roads, and billboard restrictions. Improve roadside pullouts, interpretive signs, and selected brushing to improve views. Develop self-guided interpretive brochures.

WATCHABLE WILDLIFE

Establish corridors.

APPENDIX C

Development Cost Estimates

Following are development cost estimates for the plan as of 1996. Most cost estimates are rough NPS "class C" estimates based on the average cost of similar facilities constructed in Alaska (adjusted for Denali National Park and Preserve) through federal government contracts. Actual costs may be higher or lower depending on the final design, site conditions, and the contracting agency. Facilities may be constructed by the National Park Service, the state of Alaska, or some other entity such as a private or nonprofit corporation. Gross construction includes net government contract costs, construction supervision, and contingencies (net construction+31%). Construction planning includes surveys, more detailed site planning, facility design, construction documents, and additional project compliance activities (25% of net).

Most facility costs were developed using the NPS/Denver Service Center cost estimating data base. Some figures were adjusted using data provided by the Alaska System Support Office and Denali National Park and Preserve staff. Certain facilities, such as cabins, will be developed using "off the shelf" plans and "day labor" construction and therefore are not identified for design, construction supervision, and contingency costs. The Tokositna area road upgrading cost estimates were provided by the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities. The state estimates that the gross construction costs could range from $32 million to $36 million (includes bicycle enhancements) depending on the final road design standards used. The $36 million figure is used in the following table to be conservative. The state uses about 10% for project supervision and contingencies and estimates about $3 million for design and compliance needs on this road project.

These estimates are intended primarily to assist in comparing the relative cost of alternatives. Some figures may not add up due to rounding.

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DEVELOPMENT COSTS

AREA	GROSS CONSTR. COST	CONSTR. PLANNING	TOTAL COST
Tokositna			
Upgrade 22-mile access road	$36,000,000	$3,000,000	$39,000,000
Visitor center (5,000 sq. ft.)	1,310,000	250,000	1,560,000
Interpretive media (1,000 sq. ft.)	328,000	63,000	391,000
Visitor center furnishing (15% of net vis. ctr. cost)	197,000	38,000	235,000
Landscape development (25% of net vis. ctr. cost)	328,000	62,000	390,000
Parking (45 cars)	118,000	22,000	140,000
Oversize parking (30 buses/RVs)	275,000	52,000	327,000
Campsites (50)	118,000	22,000	140,000
Campground toilets (2 large vault)	118,000	22,000	140,000
Picnic shelter (1,500 sq. ft.)	114,000	22,000	136,000
Public use cabins (4 @ 400 sq. ft., without water)	160,000	0	160,000
Vault toilet for public use cabins (2 small)	26,000	5,000	31,000
Employee cabins (5 @ 200 sq. ft., without water)	100,000	0	100,000
Employee shower house (500 sq. ft.)	147,000	28,000	175,000
Onsite water system	288,000	55,000	343,000
Wastewater treatment system	288,000	55,000	343,000
Electric generation system	164,000	31,000	195,000
Trails (assume 5 miles)	200,000	0	200,000
Subtotal	**$40,279,000**	**$3,727,000**	**$44,006,000**
Byers Lake			
Visitor center (3,000 sq. ft.)	$786,000	$150,000	$936,000
Interpretive media (400 sq. ft.)	131,000	25,000	156,000
Visitor center furnishing (15% of net vis. ctr. cost)	118,000	22,000	140,000
Landscape development (25% of net vis. ctr. cost)	196,000	38,000	234,000
Parking (25 car)	66,000	12,000	78,000
Oversize parking (15 bus/RV)	138,000	26,000	164,000
Onsite water system	98,000	19,000	117,000
Wastewater treatment system	98,000	19,000	117,000
Electric generation	118,000	22,000	140,000
Campground addition (50 sites)	118,000	22,000	140,000
Campground toilets (2 large vault)	118,000	22,000	140,000
Access road (assume 2,000 lin. ft.)	524,000	100,000	624,000
Trails (assume 3 miles)	120,000	0	120,000
Subtotal	**$2,629,000**	**$477,000**	**$3,106,000**
Chelatna Lake			
Primitive campsites (5)	$ 13,000	$2,000	$ 15,000
Public use cabins (2 @ 400 sq. ft., without water)	80,000	0	80,000
Vault toilet (small)	10,000	0	10,000
Trails (assume 3 miles)	120,000	0	120,000
Subtotal	**$223,000**	**$2,000**	**$225,000**
Dunkle Hills			
Trailhead (10 cars, gravel) - Subtotal	$ 20,000	$ 4,000	$ 24,000
Interpretive Roadside Exhibits			
Media and shelters (2) - **Subtotal**	**$44,000**	**$8,000**	**$52,000**
TOTAL*	**$43,195,000**	**$4,218,000	***$47,413,000**

* Net construction costs plus supervision and contingencies
** Design/compliance costs
*** Total gross development costs

APPENDIX D

Staffing, Operation, and Maintenance Cost Estimates

ASSUMPTIONS AND COMMENTS

The following staffing and cost figures are rough 1996 estimates based on a number of assumptions about conceptual plans and locations. They are subject to change as sites are chosen, design decisions are made, plans are finalized, and a better understanding of facility operation requirements is gained. The staffing titles listed below are state position descriptions except where position titles are preceded with "NPS" (National Park Service). This does not mean the position will be filled only by state (or NPS) employees; whether the state, the National Park Service, or the private sector provides the staffing is a decision to be made in subsequent negotiations.

Costs will vary depending on the operating season. These initial estimates assume full operation of all campgrounds and visitor centers from around June 1 through September 30, and limited operation of the Tokositna Visitor Center during the winter. Full operation of the visitor centers is defined as being open to the public 12 hours per day, 7 days per week. Operating seasons of some facilities may be extended in the future.

Snow removal will be provided only in the shoulder seasons to prolong the late summer use or enable early thaw at the beginning of the summer season. Costs will vary depending on whether services (including provision of related employee housing) are privately contracted or provided by state or federal employees or volunteers.

In addition to the operating costs in this appendix, initial one-time equipment and gear purchases will be necessary. Some examples include ranger pickup trucks, snowmachines, search and rescue equipment, radios, and uniform items. These purchases will likely be funded through a separate capital appropriation. An additional road grader or truck-mounted snow blower will need to be purchased depending on whether the upgraded/extended Petersville Road was operated seasonally or year-round, respectively.

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STAFFING COSTS

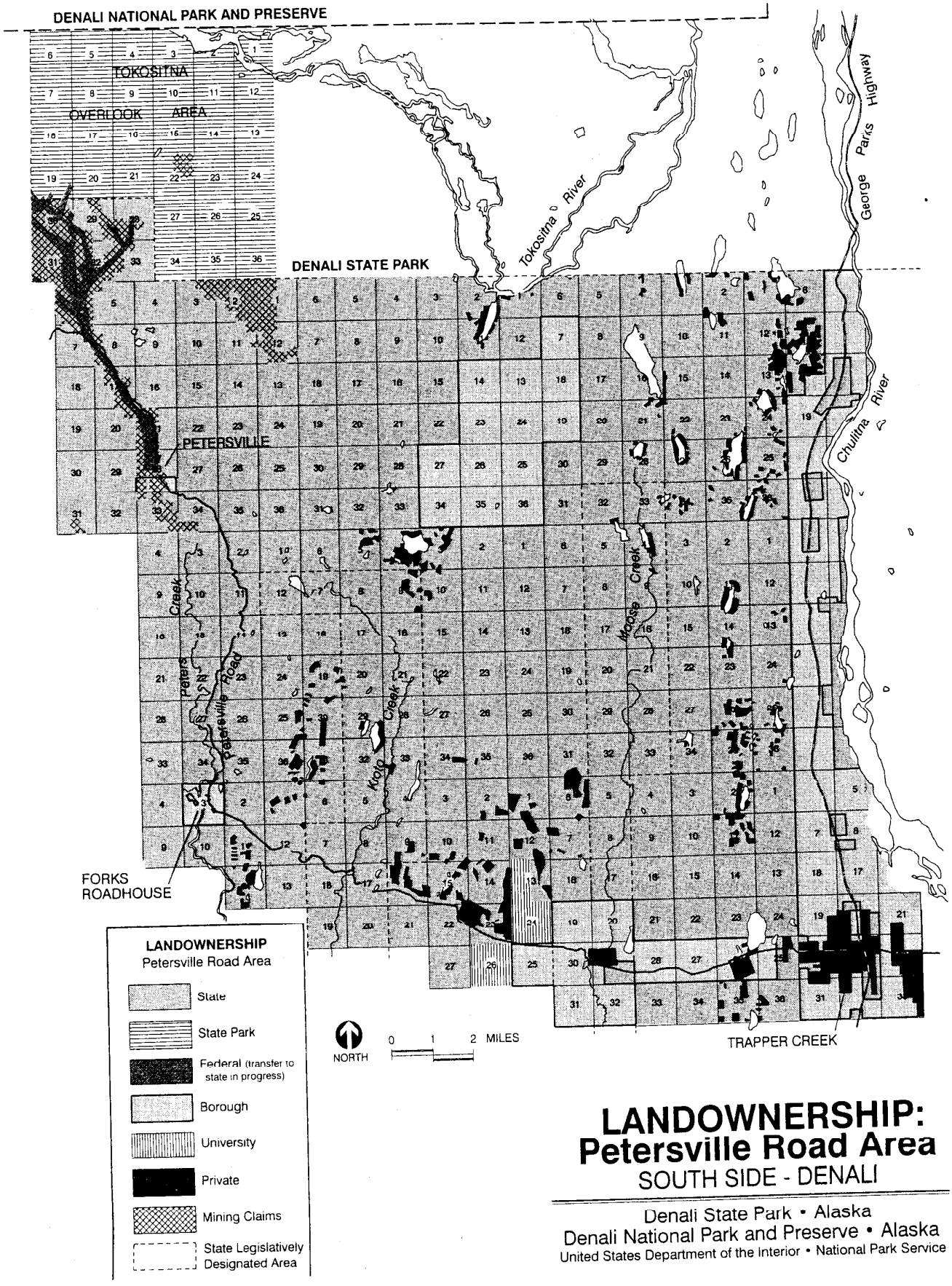
Position (at full build-out)	Number	Appointment	Total Estimated Salary Per Year
Park Ranger II	1	seasonal (6 months)	$32,080
Park Ranger I	1	year-round	41,904
Park Ranger I	1	seasonal (6 months)	27,936
NPS Biological Technician	1	seasonal (5 months)	16,000
NPS Backcountry Ranger	2	seasonal (4 months)	15,900
Maintenance Worker I	1	year-round	45,000
Laborer	1	seasonal (6 months)	26,000
Natural Resource Technician II (Interpretation/Information Services)	6	seasonal (6 months)	110,628
Park Volunteers	2	year-round	7, 200
	8	seasonal (5 months)	8, 000
TOTAL	**24**		**$330,648**

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE COSTS

Facility/Operation (at full build-out)	Estimated Total Cost Per Year
Additional maintenance for upgraded/extended Petersville Road	$127,650
Utilities (water, sewer, heat, electricity, phone)	150,000
Janitorial maintenance contracts, supplies, materials	80,000
Vehicles, air charters	45,000
Snowplowing (seasonal)	10,000
Emergency repairs	20,000
Visitor center interpretive equipment, exhibit upkeep, supplies, materials, etc.	20,000
Trail maintenance	10,000
TOTAL COST	**$462,650**

PPENDIX E

ndownership — Petersville Road Area



LANDOWNERSHIP: Petersville Road Area

SOUTH SIDE - DENALI

Denali State Park • Alaska
Denali National Park and Preserve • Alaska
United States Department of the Interior • National Park Service

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