



Scoping Report

Nabesna ORV Trail Environmental Impact Statement

July 2008



TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	Introduction.....	1
A.	Overview/purpose and need.....	1
B.	Description of the scoping process	2
C.	Other agencies.....	3
D.	Collaboration with tribes.....	4
II.	Comment and issue summary	4
A.	Summary of public comments by issue (in alphabetical order).....	4
1.	Access	4
2.	Cultural resources	5
3.	Global warming	5
4.	Law enforcement	6
5.	Planning process	6
6.	Scenic quality.....	6
7.	Soils.....	6
8.	Soundscape	7
9.	Subsistence.....	7
10.	Vegetation.....	8
11.	Visitor opportunities	8
12.	Wetlands	9
13.	Wilderness.....	9
14.	Wildlife	10
15.	Water quality and fish habitat.....	10
B.	Studies and technical data requested.....	11
C.	Issues raised during scoping that will not be addressed	11
1.	Facilities along Nabesna Road.....	11
2.	Maintenance of the Nabesna Road	11
D.	Comments related to alternative management actions.....	12
1.	General trail management approach	12
2.	Education/outreach	12
3.	Range of alternatives.....	12
4.	Expenditure of funds.....	13
5.	Large rigs, tracked rigs	13
6.	Regulation as a limiting factor.....	13
7.	Trail closures based on trail conditions	14
8.	Trail designation and signage	14
9.	Trail maintenance methods.....	14
10.	Trail re-routes.....	15
11.	User fees.....	15
12.	Volunteers	15
III.	Summary of future steps in the planning process	16
A.	Scoping	16
B.	Management alternative development	16
C.	Draft EIS	16
D.	Final EIS and Record of Decision	16
IV.	Opportunities for public participation.....	17
A.	Being informed	17
B.	Submitting comments	17
V.	Acronyms.....	18

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. Overview

The history of off-road vehicle (ORV) use in the Nabesna District predates the establishment of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve in 1980. It commenced after the World War II era when surplus military vehicles were used by hunters, miners, and others for personal use and access to remote areas. In the late 1970s, the all-terrain vehicle (typically 3 or 4-wheelers) emerged as a new and more affordable mode of cross-country travel in rural Alaska. When Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve was created by the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) in 1980, there was an established trail network in the Nabesna District, with most use confined to the lowlands. These trails are used by recreational and subsistence users as well as a means to access private inholdings and commercial establishments. They are used in the winter as well by skiers, mushers and trappers. Snowmachines are the typical motorized use in the winter months.

In 1983, the park commenced issuing permits for recreational use of established trails in the Nabesna District under 36 CFR section 13.14. This regulation provides the superintendent authority to allow ORVs on existing trails (not in wilderness) pursuant to a permit after a compatibility finding. This regulation was later repealed and revised as 43 CFR 36.11(g)(2). The permits require recreational users to stay on existing trails and to adhere to certain conditions for resource protection. The number of permits issued has risen from 64 in 1985 to 294 permits in 2005. Recreational ORV use is currently permitted on nine trails in the Nabesna District.

On June 29, 2006, the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA), Alaska Center for the Environment, and The Wilderness Society filed a lawsuit against the National Park Service (NPS) regarding recreational ORV use on the nine trails. The plaintiffs challenged the NPS' ability to issue recreational ORV permits saying that the NPS failed to make the finding required by regulation that such ORV use is compatible with the purposes and values of the Park and Preserve. They also claimed that the NPS failed to prepare an environmental analysis evaluating the impacts of recreational use of ORVs.

In the May 15, 2007 settlement agreement, the NPS agreed to complete an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) by December 31, 2010. The analysis presented in the EIS will determine if recreational ORV use is compatible with the purposes and values of the Park and Preserve. During the EIS process, the NPS can issue permits authorizing recreational use of ORVs on the Suslota Lake Trail, Tanada Lake Trail, and a portion of the Copper Lake Trail only when the ground is frozen. These trails were singled out because they are in particularly poor condition, with lots of mudholes and swampy areas that lead to ORV operators driving around bad spots and creating trail braiding and widening. The NPS may continue to issue permits for recreational ORV use on the remaining six trails while the EIS is being completed. The litigation and settlement did not change the use of ORVs by local rural residents engaged in subsistence uses. The trails remain open to other uses such as hiking, skiing, riding snowmachines, or horseback riding.

The purpose of the EIS is to evaluate a range of alternatives for managing recreational ORV use on the following trails: Caribou Creek, Lost Creek, Trail Creek, Reeve Field, Boomerang Lake, Soda Lake, Suslota Lake, Copper Lake and Tanada Lake. Evaluating management alternatives includes analyzing and displaying potential impacts to soils, vegetation, wetlands, wildlife, visitor experience, scenic quality, cultural resources, subsistence opportunities, natural sounds, and other recreational activities and access.

B. Description of the scoping process

A Notice of Intent was published in the Federal Register on December 23, 2007. This marked the beginning of the scoping process for this EIS. Scoping is an early and open process to determine the purpose and need for the project, the environmental issues, and alternatives to be addressed in the EIS. Scoping occurs within the NPS and with the general public and other major stakeholders such as State or federal agencies or tribal governments. For this planning process, scoping included a newsletter, public meetings held in the affected areas, and meetings with key stakeholders. Scoping comments were accepted for 60 days after the last public scoping meeting was held making the deadline for comments June 3, 2008.

A newsletter was mailed to the Park's base mailing list and to recreational ORV permit holders, a total of 360 addresses. In addition, the newsletter was posted on the Park's website. The

newsletter described the planning process, the issues and objectives, and asked the public for their input and opinions about trail conditions, use, and management strategies. It contained the dates and locations of the public scoping meetings as well as information about how to submit comments and get more information about the planning process and issues.

Five public scoping meetings were held from March 26th to April 3rd, 2008 in Tok, Slana, Glennallen, Fairbanks, and Anchorage with a total of 91 members of the public in attendance. Park Service resource specialists and planners attended the meetings to answer questions and talk about planning issues. The meetings were held in an open house format with posters showing planning objectives and issues, NPS regulations related to ORV use, maps of the affected area, the planning process, and a range of management options to provide information and help generate comments. Copies of the newsletter, lawsuit, and settlement were also available. Participants were provided with a comment form that could be filled out that evening and handed in or mailed back to the NPS at a later date. The meetings were publicized through local venues including the Mukluk News, Copper River Record, Anchorage Daily News (Outdoors Hotline), Fairbanks Daily News Miner (Outdoor Calendar and online Calendar of Events), and the What's Up Listserve. Public service announcements aired over KCHU, KCAM, and KNBQ

A mailing list has been continually updated throughout the planning process with names of those who attended the public meetings or have requested to be included on the mailing list.

C. Other agencies

NPS has met with several other agencies to discuss planning issues, answer questions related to the EIS process, and give updates as to planning progress. The NPS has consulted with Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) biologists regarding the relationships between current trail conditions, potential trail improvements, and access to moose and Dall sheep harvest opportunities. A briefing for State of Alaska DNR and ADF&G staff was held in February, 2008. The purpose of the briefing was to inform key State personnel about the project, the planning process, preliminary issues, and discuss the best way to coordinate during the planning process. Since then, NPS has entered into a cooperative agreement with ADF&G to conduct fish habitat assessments at all ORV stream crossings in the project area.

Endangered Species Act section 7 informal consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was initiated in January, 2008. NPS received a reply stating that no species currently listed as threatened or endangered are known to occur within the project area.

D. Collaboration with tribes

The NPS has held government to government meetings with local native villages of Mentasta and Cheesh'na to brief them on the planning process and ask for their participation. In addition, NPS provided a briefing to the Ahtna Customary and Traditional Committee. Park planners have also met with individual Ahtna shareholders to discuss the history of the trails and possible re-route options. The Park recognizes the importance of the involvement of local villages and native land owners in the planning process for the purposes of preserving cultural resources and the local knowledge of the area.

II. COMMENT AND ISSUE SUMMARY

A. Summary of public comments by issue (in alphabetical order)

1. Access

Most of the comments received related to the issue of access. Many people at the public meetings were concerned that the temporary seasonal closure of the trails would become permanent and they would lose motorized access to the areas they have been hunting and recreating in for years. Tanada Lake and Copper Lake trails, both seasonally closed as a result of the lawsuit settlement, were mentioned in several comments as being the most important trails to remain open.

Many people that attended the Tok and Slana public meetings expressed the opinion that special interest groups used the court system to manage resources that they have no real knowledge of and have never enjoyed. They also feel that the decisions are already made and that the planning process is "just a front." There is strong sentiment that the maintenance of motorized and non-motorized access to fishing, hunting, recreation, subsistence, and to inholdings is critical and should be the main objective of this planning process.

Many individuals are struggling with the conundrum of recognizing that environmental impacts are occurring, but wanting the trails “left alone” for fear that a better trail surface will increase use. A few are happy with the current conditions and feel the muck-holes play a role in keeping use numbers down in the area. They feel that current trail conditions are just how it is and see it as a challenge offered by the area.

Alaska Quiet Rights Coalition supports limiting access to non-motorized use only and feels that this action does not limit access it just changes the access method. They believe that there is currently an imbalance in the number of motorized and non-motorized trail opportunities in the area, with most trails being open to some kind of motorized use. One comment said that expecting people to access the wilderness with an airplane, not ORV is acceptable. More prevalent is the opinion that ORVs are necessary to be able to access Park backcountry and wilderness experiences. Many stated that they do not have the time to walk great distances to reach a backcountry or wilderness destination within the Park. ORV access allows families to recreate together and allows ease of access for persons with disabilities and the elderly. One commenter said that more facilities and universally accessible trails should be created to allow more people to get off the road and enjoy nature.

The majority of the comments support reasonable, appropriate and authorized motorized vehicle use for accessing private inholdings and subsistence resources so long as environmental impacts are minimized. The State of Alaska acknowledges that in certain areas, resource conditions that cannot be otherwise addressed may lead to restrictions that affect all user groups, including subsistence.

2. Cultural resources

Comments made by local native village governments and Ahtna focused on the need for an inventory and the protection of cultural sites in the area. Any trail re-routes or maintenance should not impact existing sites.

3. Global warming

A comment asked that the EIS incorporate alternatives and a trail management strategy for proactively addressing and responding to the effects of climate change and global warming.

4. Law enforcement

Commenters requested that methods of trail regulation enforcement should be considered, identified and evaluated in the Draft EIS. One commenter feels that more patrols are needed to monitor trailhead activity and that most users are very conscientious of trail impacts and conditions. Those who tear up the trails should be held responsible for their actions. This cannot happen without increased patrol and enforcement efforts. One commenter stated that not enough was being done to discourage reckless behavior, particularly alcohol consumption while driving on an ORV, on a snowmachine, or while hunting.

5. Planning process

At the public meetings, many people requested copies of the lawsuit, settlement, and the poster displays. They said that it would be helpful in formulating meaningful comments to have these materials available on the Park website for downloading instead of having to request them. People were also very interested in how they were going to be informed about future opportunities to participate in this planning process.

6. Scenic quality

Commenters that mentioned the natural beauty of the landscapes in the Nabesna area all stated the need to protect the current condition of this resource. Some stated it as the sole purpose for their trip into the area. They believe the Park should regard the scenic resources as important as other natural resources and take action to maintain and enhance them. Some comments mentioned current trail braiding conditions and the extensive width of trails in wetland areas as impacts to the scenic quality of the area.

National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) commented that ANILCA specifically provides that Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve: “shall be managed for the following purposes, among others: To maintain unimpaired the scenic beauty and quality of high mountain peaks, foothills, glacial systems, lakes, and streams, valleys, and coastal landscapes in their natural state.”

7. Soils

Comments expressed concern about the melting of permafrost caused by ORV use. One commenter wants the EIS to evaluate the indirect impact to permafrost caused by the repair, maintenance and re-routing of trails done with heavy machinery stating that the solution should

not do more damage than the problem. Some commenters stated that several trails in the area were never intended to be summer trails and their inappropriate use during wet seasons has caused the resulting muck-holes.

8. *Soundscape*

Several comments were received that mentioned the importance of the natural soundscape. There was concern over the noise impacts from the existing trail system and a need for baseline data and they feel a soundscape inventory should be conducted for the Nabesna District as a part of this planning process. The EIS should consider the natural soundscape a critical resource to the area and protect it as such.

9. *Subsistence*

All comments received supported the continued use of motorized vehicles to access subsistence resources. Some added a contingency speaking to the motorized use being reasonable, appropriate and authorized. Many voiced concern that the NPS would close the trails to subsistence users and reiterated the importance of continued access to subsistence resources.

Native entities mentioned that the current level of recreational use has displaced subsistence users and that because of trail damage they are forced to travel in larger hunting groups so they can have help to get stuck ORVs out of muck-holes. This is not how they have traditionally hunted which is alone or in small groups. The trail conditions have had a direct impact on their hunting practices. They feel it is also very important to maintain the ability to have a multi-generational hunting experience to pass on local knowledge and culture.

One user suggested that federally qualified subsistence ORV users be allowed to get a “buddy permit” that they could give to their hunting partner regardless of the partner’s subsistence qualifying status. Two comments were received that spoke to the need to monitor and possibly restrict motorized subsistence use if it began to impact the subsistence resource itself, particularly big game. Some commenters said that the EIS needs to identify and analyze impacts from ORV use and trail deterioration on the local abundance and availability of subsistence resources. There was concern expressed over regulating one set of users but not another, recreational ORV users vs. federally qualified subsistence users.

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game’s November 1995 publication “*Documenting Traditional and Subsistence Access in Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve*” was

offered as a useful resource for documenting the history of use in the area for the ANILCA Section 810 Subsistence Evaluation and affected environment analyses.

10. Vegetation

Comments expressed concern over damage done to vegetation and the vegetative mat by permitted ORV use. Impacts to vegetation caused by the repair, maintenance, and re-routing of trails should be taken into account. NPCA commented that an NPS study conducted between 1994-1996 collected extensive data on the susceptibility of different vegetation communities to vehicle disturbance across the Nabesna trails and would like to it used in the EIS as a reference for evaluating the impacts of ORVs to the Park vegetation.

11. Visitor opportunities

Most commenters seemed to agree that maintaining a recreational ORV trail system allows access to the backcountry for people who cannot afford to fly in. They believe it is unrealistic to expect the public to be able to afford to fly into the park/preserve with a large family and multiple trips for gear. One commenter expressed that with the current access afforded by ORVs, families can use the area several times a year and pass down their love of the outdoors to their children. The sheer size of the Park makes accessing certain backcountry destinations difficult without an ORV. Many commenters mentioned using ORVs to gain access to remote backcountry fishing, camping, and hiking opportunities. One commenter requests that park managers protect one of the only places left in Alaska where the average person can access a sheep hunt without having to pay for a flyin trip.

Several comments were received that identified an imbalance of motorized to non-motorized opportunities along the Nabesna Road, with few non-motorized opportunities available. One point raised is that State and BLM lands are largely managed as open to ORV use and therefore the Park is the logical place to provide for the non-motorized user. A hiker commented that hiking on a motorized trail with muck-holes is not a true hiking experience and does not fulfill their recreation expectations. Some commenters feel that enhancing and expanding opportunities for non-motorized recreation and designation of hiking routes should be a priority objective for the Nabesna Road area and should be considered in the range of alternatives of this planning process.

Environmental groups question whether recreational ORV use is consistent with the wild character of the Park and the purposes for which the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and

Preserve was established. They believe that the use of ORVs on national park lands for purposes other than providing access to private land inholdings and/or subsistence resources may not be legal, appropriate, or compatible with the NPS mandate to protect and enhance the resources of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve for the enjoyment of present and future generations. They question why there is a different standard for parks in Alaska and parks in the lower 48 which do not allow motorized use for recreational purposes that isn't consistent with the purposes for which the parks were designated.

12. Wetlands

The general comments regarding wetlands were in response to photos shown at the public scoping meetings of muck-holes on the trails in Nabesna. Some commenters questioned the significance of the degradation when compared to the value of the access the trails provide. Many do not see the significance of impacts to wetlands and feel the muck-holes are part of the Alaskan trail experience. One comment quantified the acreage of wetland damage on Tanada, Copper, and Suslota Lake trails as 48 acres and stated this is inconsequential when compared to the 13.2 million acres of land within the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve boundaries.

Other commenters spoke of the extensive degradation that has occurred to wetlands from ORV trails in the area, particularly Tanada Lake, Copper Lake, and Suslota Lake trails. They called for a wetlands inventory to be conducted and included in the EIS as baseline data from which to evaluate environmental impacts. Other comments were received that expressed concern, in general terms, to the resource damage caused by ORV trails in the area.

13. Wilderness

The Alaska Quiet Rights Coalition commented that they do not believe that motorized use is compatible with a Wilderness Area or a wilderness experience. They do not support the use of any mechanized equipment to gain access to Wilderness or more remote backcountry locations.

Copper Country Alliance commented that there is no persuasive evidence that Congress thought that intrusive and damaging motorized recreation were any more consistent with Wilderness or National Park Service values in Alaska than in the rest of the country. They commented that motorized recreation is not allowed in designated Wilderness Areas in the lower 48 and subsequently should not be allowed in an Alaskan Park.

14. Wildlife

Several comments were received that expressed wildlife concerns. One comment was that the EIS needs to display how trail management and trail activities impact big game populations and habitat. One comment expressed concern about wildlife harassment or disturbance resulting from ORV use. Another posed the question that if more park funds are spent on trail improvements, will there be less money available for necessary studies related to wildlife? Does the public need to “choose” where the park spends their funds or are the programs not fiscally connected?

The National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) is concerned that ORV assisted sport hunting within the Wrangell Mountains may be incompatible with wildlife management goals in national park wilderness areas. NPCA also would like NPS to evaluate the possibility that the recreational ORV use of the Tanada Lakes trail to access non-subsistence hunting opportunities in the non-motorized designated wilderness of the national preserve could be concentrating intensive harvesting of the local Dall sheep population. They request that both issues be evaluated and discussed in the draft EIS.

The ADF&G wildlife biologist out of Tok feels that improvement of motorized trails that access portions of Game Management Unit (GMU) 12 could lead to more use of the trails and more intensive harvest of Dall sheep in that area, a situation that would need to be monitored. He feels sport hunting pressure for sheep could increase in the Mentasta Mountains as a result of recent state regulatory changes for sheep in some portions of GMU 13.

15. Water quality and fish habitat

Few comments specifically mentioned water quality and fish habitat, although many spoke of a general concern for all resources impacted by ORV trails which implies water quality and fish habitat. There was general agreement that the fish habitat and water quality of the area should be protected from impacts associated with ORV use. One specific comment was submitted that spoke to concerns about the impacts associated with using gravel from local streambeds for the purposes of trail maintenance and re-routes. The State of Alaska mentioned that the NPS is working with ADF&G to assess any resource concerns at anadromous stream crossings.

B. Studies and technical data requested

- Include numbers of inholders, hikers, and subsistence users verses recreational users of the area in the EIS; do a historical profile of each user group.
- Evaluate impacts from different types of ORVs (tread tires, sizes, weights)
- Comprehensive trail condition assessments and monitoring should continue on a regular, annual basis.
- Employ strategies to differentiate between trail impacts that occur as a result of ORV use for subsistence, recreation, and access to inholdings purposes.
- Acquire actual numbers for how many people (and what type of use) occurs on each trail every year. How many each day, each month, annually.
- Evaluate ORV impacts on non-motorized users; determine user tolerances and extent of user conflict.
- Soundscape inventory of Nabesna area and the entire Park.
- Rather than making a solid decision in 2010, design a study limiting ORV access in certain areas, and compare effects/recovery in those areas to area with unlimited access.

C. Issues raised during scoping that will not be addressed

1. Facilities along Nabesna Road

A comment asked for more outhouse facilities to be installed along the Nabesna Road. This is outside the scope of this planning process.

2. Maintenance of the Nabesna Road

Comments were received asking for the Nabesna Road to be graded during hunting season and for the current road and water conditions to be posted at the beginning of the road, year round. Road conditions can be obtained by calling the Slana Ranger Station, during the summer, and the

Mentasta Lodge in the winter. Road maintenance is the responsibility of the Alaska Department of Transportation and is therefore outside the scope of this planning process.

D. Comments related to alternative management actions

1. General trail management approach

Although comments fell along all ends of the spectrum, some saying to “leave it alone” and some to close it to motorized use completely, the majority of the comments came from the mindset that the NPS needs to be an active trail manager and repair existing trail conditions to maintain access and reduce environmental impacts. Many comments mentioned that they do not want “super-highways” out there, referring to an over built trail. Motorized users desire a challenging ride that still has the “Alaskan feel.” Some say that resource protection should take precedence.

2. Education/outreach

At the Tok public meetings the need for an education curriculum in local schools about ethical trail riding was brought up. Getting children actively involved and aware of the impacts of trail riding would foster stewardship of trails. Teaching children the historical, important, and current role trails play in our lives would help educate them about their responsibility to help maintain this valuable resource.

Two comments mentioned the need for viewing an ethical trail riding video that could be a requirement of obtaining a permit to ride the trails within the Park. Such a video, similar to the bear safety training required before backpacking in Denali National Park, would at least make people stop and think about how they use the trails.

3. Range of alternatives

Six different environmental groups commented that an alternative should be evaluated that does not permit recreational ORV use on any of the nine trails. They feel that a positive compatibility finding for recreational ORV within the Nabesna District of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve is premature and an alternative should be evaluated that accommodates a negative compatibility finding. One group feels that the “no action” alternative presented in the scoping process is not a legitimate “no action” alternative as required by NEPA because it continues to permit recreational ORV use. They believe that a true “no action” alternative would be one that prohibits recreational ORV use within the Nabesna District.

Another comment submitted requests that the EIS alternatives distinguish between ORV use options for National Preserve lands and National Park lands. “For example, the NPS should include an alternative that disallows permitted recreational riding within the hard Park under 43 C.F.R. § 36.11, and this or another alternative should explore opportunities for allowing recreational riding on trails established under 36 C.F.R. § 4.10 on preserve land, if the threshold for trail system designation has been met.”

4. Expenditure of funds

There was a general consensus that certain trails were going to be more expensive to fix than others, i.e. Tanada Lake and Copper Lake. These two trails were also mentioned several times as a priority for maintenance and addressing resource concerns. Any improvements that are made should be long-term, sustainable fixes, not patches. Pro-active actions were also mentioned as a way to save money in the long run but fixing the smaller problems before they become big.

5. Large rigs, tracked rigs

Comments received relating to larger, tracked rigs were all in support of limiting their use. People said that large rigs are not compatible with a trail that is designed for an ORV and feel that weight limits are a possible way to address the issue. Another idea presented is to require large rigs to register and prove they are under a certain weight or psi. This would allow park law enforcement to get a better handle on large rig use and the damage that they cause.

6. Regulation as a limiting factor

Three comments were received that related to the use of a permitting process for allowing ORV use within the park. Those comments stated that 1) a permitting system should not place undo burden on the ability of the general public to enjoy the park; 2) a lottery system was one option for handing out permits for recreational ORV use within the park; and 3) there should be some sort of feedback to NPS managers associated with the permit so they can get information about trail conditions and use numbers.

Other regulatory actions mentioned as being acceptable include limitations based on ORV type (weight and size) and the restriction of aggressive tread tires. Neither of these was overwhelmingly supported by any user group but were suggested by individuals for consideration. NPCA requested that ORV user capacity limits be discussed in the range of alternatives.

7. Trail closures based on trail conditions

The comments were split on the use of trail conditions to dictate trail closures and limitations. Some felt that closing a trail to ORV use during the wet season, when a majority of the impacts to vegetation and soils occur, was a legitimate and cost-effective way to manage trail impacts. The trails could still be used when they are dry or frozen. Others feared that temporary closures would lead to permanent ones and asked who makes the judgment call that a trail is not fit for recreational ORV use? They argue that closing some trails will increase use on others and simply displace the impacts to another location and that if you continue to allow subsistence use of the trails, then the impacts are still occurring. One commenter states that it is okay to limit “recreational” access if studies find that additional use by recreational users significantly impacts ecosystems more than use by subsistence users.

8. Trail designation and signage

Only two comments talked about using trail designation and signage as a means for managing trail use. The comments supported limiting use to designated trails to stop trail proliferation and side trail impacts. It was stated that most people want to stay on the trail and do the right thing but it is sometimes hard to know where the designated route is; Tanada Lake Trail was mentioned as an example. The use of more trail markers (such as carsonite posts), to mark the trail would be helpful.

9. Trail maintenance methods

The support or disapproval of particular trail maintenance methods rarely was commented on in blanket statements with the exception of the use of geo-block and synthetics for hardening trail surfaces. Four comments specifically supported the use of these materials while one did not approve of their use stating that it is too costly. The majority of the comments related to acceptable trail maintenance aimed at a moderate approach with a combination of re-routes, spot hardening, and water control as warranted per trail conditions. Many commenters do not want to see an overly built up trail. A specific method suggested for trail hardening was a chain link fence over corduroy in boggy areas. One commenter suggested the use of woodchips for trail stabilization. See section below for specifics related to the use of re-routes.

10. Trail re-routes

There was general support for re-routing trails when they travel through very wet, boggy areas, specifically Tanada Lakes, Copper Lake, and Suslota Lake trails. Locals and village members identified old trail routes on higher ground that may provide a more sustainable trail location. They said that the original trails didn't go through the wetlands and support re-routing them to reduce impacts to vegetation and soils. Private land owners in the area would support any re-route that would eliminate trespass and impact to their land. Many comments singled out a specific Tanada Lake Trail re-route option as a poor choice as it would create a conflict between motorized users and current non-motorized sheep hunters in the area. Concern was also expressed over whether the Park has the legal authority to create a "new" motorized trail within the hard park portion of the park/preserve.

11. User fees

Two commenters felt that charging a fee for the use of the trails would be acceptable as long as the money went directly back into maintaining the trails. The people who use the trails should be the ones who pay to maintain them. They feel it would foster stewardship of the trails. Appropriate fee levels mentioned included \$50, \$100, and \$500 per year. Another member of the public felt that abusers of the trails should be fined and denied access to the area for 2-3 years, again directly linking trail damage to those responsible.

12. Volunteers

At the Tok and Slana public meetings, numerous people talked of a willingness to volunteer to help maintain or do maintenance on these trails. Other contacts made through the public process offered to help organize volunteers for trail construction projects.

III. SUMMARY OF FUTURE STEPS IN THE PLANNING PROCESS

Environmental Impact Statements take a long time to complete because there are several steps in the planning process. Following is a list of future steps in this planning process where there will be opportunities for public participation, comment, or review.

A. Scoping

This is the stage that has just been completed. It included five public meetings and a 60-day public comment period, the results of which are summarized in this report.

B. Management alternative development

Based on the feedback we received from public scoping, a management proposal will be developed that addresses the purpose and need and the issues that have been identified. Then, alternative management actions are developed that allow us to consider and display a varying degree of environmental effects. A draft set of alternatives will be available for public review and comment by mid-September, 2008.

C. Draft EIS

The management alternatives will be analyzed and environmental effects from each alternative displayed in a Draft EIS. There will be public meetings and a comment period of 60 days once the Draft EIS is printed and distributed. This is tentatively scheduled for the fall of 2009.

D. Final EIS and Record of Decision

Based on comments received, changes will be made to the Draft EIS and a Final EIS and Record of Decision will be printed. This is tentatively scheduled for the fall of 2010.

IV. OPPORTUNITIES FOR PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

A. Being informed

The planning mailing list is the best way to make sure you are kept up-to-date about the planning process and opportunities for participation. If you have attended a public meeting, submitted comments, or have obtained a permit in the past you were automatically entered into the mailing database and will receive future correspondence. To be sure you are in the database send your mailing information to Bruce_rogers@nps.gov. All public involvement opportunities will also be publicized through press releases in local newspapers and in project newsletters.

B. Submitting comments

Formal comments will be accepted at several stages of the planning process, as outlined above. You can submit comments via the internet, e-mail, or regular mail. Electronic comments may be submitted to the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) web site at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/WRST>. Written comments may be mailed to: Meg Jensen, Park Superintendent, Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve, P.O. Box 439, Copper Center, Alaska, 99573.

For more information about the planning process please contact Bruce Rogers, project manager, at 822-7276.

V. ACRONYMS

ADF&G.....	Alaska Department of Fish and Game
ANILCA	Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act
BLM.....	Bureau of Land Management
CFR.....	Code Federal Regulation
DNR	Department of Natural Resources (State of Alaska)
EIS.....	Environmental Impact Statement
GMU	Game Management Unit
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NPCA.....	National Parks Conservation Association
NPS	National Park Service
ORV	off-road vehicle
psi.....	pounds per square inch
WRST	Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve