

STATE OF ALASKA

SEAN PARNELL, Governor

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March 15, 2010

Miriam Valentine, Team Leader
Denali National Park and Preserve Planning
P.O. Box 588
Talkeetna, AK 99676

Dear Ms. Valentine:

The State of Alaska reviewed the Winter 2010 Denali Park Road Planning Workbook. The following comments represent the consolidated view of the State's resource agencies.

We are supportive of the Service's intent to accommodate visitation growth and provide an improved Park experience for visitors. We appreciate the opportunity for the public to provide input at this early stage to help shape the future of transportation along the Park Road. The following comments are intended to assist the Service with developing strategies and management options.

Express Tour

It takes a significant time commitment to travel to the outer reaches of the Park Road. Some visitors, such as those who access the park more frequently or desire quieter, uninterrupted travel, may benefit from an express transportation option. We recommend exploring the merits of a one-way express service or an express return-trip, either as a separate option or in combination with other transit or tour options.

Family-Oriented Tour

The Workbook indicates family-oriented tours may be offered as specialized tours. We appreciate the inclusion; however, specialized tours are described as providing premium tour experiences, which are more costly. We recommend also providing more affordable tours that address the specific needs of families traveling with young children. Providing affordable options will encourage families to travel the Park Road and result in more children getting outdoors and gaining an appreciation for nature and the Park.

Economy Tour

We appreciate the concept of an economy tour that provides a more affordable tour on the Park Road. While less expensive than the premium and specialized tours, the economy tour described in Management Concept B does not appear to differ significantly from the transit service, given they are both priced similarly and visitors can disembark to pursue off-the-bus recreational

opportunities. Perhaps the economy tour can be further distinguished by offering some of the activities listed for specialized tours at a reduced rate, similar to our suggestion for family-oriented tours.

In addition, while we appreciate the flexibility associated with being able to exit an economy tour and return to the Wilderness Center on a transit bus, this could result in overcrowding on the transit buses. This type of overcrowding already occurs under the current bus system and might not be alleviated under the new system.

We recognize the management concepts described in the Workbook may be intended as a draft range of alternatives for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). We observe that Management Concept B appears to provide the most options and opportunities for travel along the Park Road by addressing the public's desire for more affordable transit and family-oriented tours. Conversely, Management Concept D appears more challenging to manage, with fewer viable solutions addressing visitor concerns.

Page-Specific Comments

Page 10, Bullet 1 – The Workbook explains the purpose for creating a wildlife viewing sub-zone 3; however, it is unclear what management changes would result. Will vehicle access from Eielson Visitor Center to Wonder Lake junction be limited? Will visitor facilities, such as pull outs and contact stations, be prohibited? Additionally, the document states the creation of the new sub-zone would reaffirm the Park Road as a key cultural resource (Page 17, bullet 6). We recommend the DEIS clarify the management intent for the new sub-zone.

Page 13-14 Potential Indicators – The purposes of the indicators for the *Natural Resource Condition* and *Visitor Satisfaction* sub-headings are expressed in absolute terms. We recommend substituting “no degradation” with “limited degradation.”

Page 13, Sheep Gap Spacing – As described in the Workbook, this indicator may be too narrow as a standalone indicator. We recommend the Wildlife Gap Spacing indicator use Dall's Sheep as a focus for the indicator.

Page 16, Proposed Strategies for All Concepts – Some of the proposed strategies provided may be difficult to measure. Ideally, we recommend use of measurable strategies that can be clearly defined.

Page 22, Specialized Tours – Under Management Concepts C and D, the proposal to eliminate the current specialized tours and replace these tours with introductory tours that terminate at Savage River is not recommended. A better option might be to offer off-the-road experience stations at the more desirable pull-out areas where visitors driving to Savage River could gain a wilderness experience without enduring the complication and expense of a bus tour. The introductory tour option will mostly consist of visitors arriving at the park with packaged tours, since those with personal vehicles will already have unlimited access along the same stretch of road.

Page 23, Affordability – The ticketing proposal appears counter-intuitive. It seems that concessioners would rather provide lower prices for advanced purchase to determine demand while holding a few seats on each bus for standby seating. The proposed ticketing system would give no incentive for planning ahead and booking early, which is usually the case with other forms of transportation. The proposal would also give Park staff very little warning about peaks and valleys in visitor use, while potentially creating standby passenger conflicts and visitors who are unable to purchase tickets for a bus.

Table 1 - We appreciate the thoughtful and wide-ranging array of potential changes proposed for management of “other vehicle use” outside the public bus system. We look forward to providing further input on managing these uses based a more detailed comparative analysis in the upcoming DEIS.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. Please contact me at (907) 269-7529 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Magee', written in a cursive style.

Susan E. Magee
ANILCA Project Coordinator

cc: Sally Gibert, ANILCA Program Coordinator