

STATE OF ALASKA

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OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET DIVISION OF GOVERNMENTAL COORDINATION

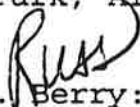
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November 9, 1992

Russ Berry
Superintendent
Denali National Park and Preserve
Post Office Box 9
Denali Park, Alaska 99755

Dear Mr.  Berry:

The State of Alaska has received your August 26 letter regarding bear/human conflicts in the vicinity of the Denali National Park and Preserve. We apologize for the delay in responding, but the issues you have raised are complex.

State resource agencies are aware of and appreciate your concerns. In fact, the negative consequences of unauthorized camping along the Parks Highway go beyond impacts to bears and include problems associated with human health and safety as well. This letter outlines state agencies' short-term plans to address this issue, and explores more comprehensive long-term solutions. We are sending a copy of your letter and this reply under separate cover to local landowners and businesses in the area to alert them to the problem and apprise them of state agency actions and proposals.

Camping on state land without a permit is only allowed for 14 days. Most of those camping at Hornet Creek and similar sites are the seasonal employees of local businesses, many of which have insufficient employee housing. Others choose to camp to save money and/or remain independent. None of these people have camping permits from the State.

You may also be aware that the Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has very limited staff to monitor use of state lands. Further, the legislature has not given DNR citation authority to effectively enforce this unauthorized use. The State's enforcement tools related to fish and wildlife, water, and solid waste management are similarly hampered. Consequently this problem will not be easy to solve.

There are several actions that the State can take in the short-term to help remedy the problem; however longer-term solutions must also involve the National Park Service, the Denali Borough, and the private landowners and businesses in the area.

Short-term

The State Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT/PF) will close the access road to the Hornet Creek squatters camp in early spring 1993 with large debris from local rock slides. Closing the Hornet Creek area to vehicle access will not take care of the problem, however, since this will simply displace some of the unauthorized camping to other areas. It will only reduce the impacts at the worst of the sites and buy some time to look at more comprehensive solutions.

Therefore the State plans to convene a problem-solving team to investigate and recommend solutions to the camping conflicts along the 5-mile stretch of the Nenana River Gorge. The team, similar to that recommended by the DNR Tanana Basin Area Plan Update in 1990, will recommend where camping should be allowed and where it should be prohibited. The problem solving team will consist of representatives of DNR, DOT/PF, Departments of Environmental Conservation and Fish and Game. The National Park Service is invited to become involved, and the Denali Borough and local business participation will also be sought.

To prohibit camping, a special use area would need to be designated by DNR pursuant to state regulation 11 AAC 96.010. To address DNR's lack of field management capabilities, one option is to offer a concession contract to privately manage any camping area(s) identified by the problem solving team. I understand that DNR has identified funding for such concessionaire facilities on their legislative wish-list for next summer.

Long-term

The big picture illustrates that bear encounters and unsanitary squatter camps are largely a result of insufficient camping facilities in proximity to the entrance to Denali National Park. The State has little accessible land in the area with immediate development potential to address this need.

For longer-term consideration, however, the State owns a large parcel of land across the Nenana River from the park entrance that is suitable for development to meet existing and future camping needs. Access remains a barrier to developing that potential. DOT/PF is researching access options to that area, and the new federal Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) may provide a source of future funding.

Another area suitable for new camping facilities is the National Park Service land east of the highway and west of the Nenana River. Use of this parcel would not require expensive new access. It could be managed by the NPS or by another party through a land exchange.

In addition, local businesses should be encouraged to provide ample affordable employee housing whenever possible.

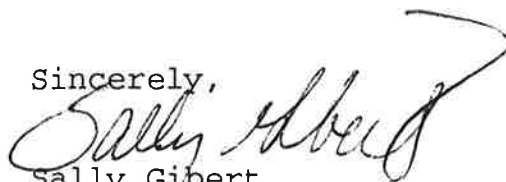
Your letter stresses the importance of bear resistant food storage and garbage containers. The State recognizes the value of these items; however, the State cannot comprehensively require their use. The interagency team can look at this issue in the context of providing developed camping facilities on public lands. Private landowners and businesses, however, will need to take their own initiative to set up and utilize bear resistant containers.

The State supports your efforts to encourage proper food and garbage containment among private businesses in the area. We believe such an effort should be supplemented with education for businesses and employees alike, since many people will voluntarily change their behavior if they have better information. Perhaps the NPS could consider offering technical support, and possibly even funding, for those who wish to improve their facilities. This may be small price to pay for protecting the viability of the Denali Park ecosystem.

The State looks forward to working with you, the Borough, and others on the host of challenges that lie ahead. We agree that only good cooperation among all agencies and land users will provide effective solutions. Please contact me at 561-6131 so that we may begin to set-up the problem-solving team.

Thank you for your letter on this timely subject. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Sally Gibert
State CSU Coordinator

cc:

John Morehead, Regional Director, National Park Service
Glenn Olds, Commissioner, Department of Natural Resources
Carl Rosier, Commissioner, Department of Fish and Game
John Sandor, Commissioner, Department of Environmental
Conservation

Frank Turpin, Commissioner, Department of Transportation and
Public Facilities

Richard Burton, Commissioner, Department of Public Safety
Rick S. Brewer, Mayor, Denali Borough

**CSU Distribution List
SQUATTER CAMPS AND BEARS
November 12, 1992**

Tina Cunning, Department of Fish & Game, Anchorage
Terry Haynes, Department of Fish & Game, Fairbanks
Toby Boudreau, ADF&G, Wildlife Conservation, Fairbanks
Herman Griese, Department of Fish & Game, Palmer

Priscilla Wohl, Department of Environmental Conservation, Anchorage
Renee Evans, Department of Environmental Conservation, Fairbanks

Alice Iliff, Department of Natural Resources, Land, Anchorage
Anna Plager, Department of Natural Resources, Land, Fairbanks
Rick Smith, Department of Natural Resources, Land, Fairbanks

Jeff Ottesen, Department of Transportation/Public Facilities, Juneau
Norm Piispanen, Department of Transportation/Public Facilities, Fairbanks

Paul Rusanowski, Division of Governmental Coordination, Juneau

Connel Murray, Division of Tourism, Juneau
Wendy Wolf, Div. of Tourism, Juneau

Stan Leaphart, CACFA, Fairbanks