

STATE OF ALASKA

WALTER J. HICKEL, GOVERNOR

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET DIVISION OF GOVERNMENTAL COORDINATION

SOUTHCENTRAL REGIONAL OFFICE
3601 "C" STREET, SUITE 370
ANCHORAGE, ALASKA 99503-2798
PH: (907) 561-6131/FAX: (907) 561-6134

CENTRAL OFFICE
P.O. BOX 110030
JUNEAU, ALASKA 99811-0030
PH: (907) 465-3562/FAX: (907) 465-3075

NORTHERN REGIONAL OFFICE
675 SEVENTH AVE., STATION H
FAIRBANKS, ALASKA 99701-4596
PH: (907) 451-2818/FAX: (907) 451-2814

June 11, 1992

John Morehead
Regional Director
National Park Service
2525 Gambell Street, Room 107
Anchorage, Alaska 99503

Dear Mr. Morehead:

The State of Alaska has reviewed the Environmental Assessment concerning the Bear Viewing Platform in Katmai National Park and Preserve. This letter represents the consolidated comments of the State's resource agencies.

The State supports the construction of a second Brooks River bear viewing platform and associated walkways. The proposal does not conflict with the State's desire to retain existing sport fishing opportunities and partially addresses our long-standing position that the NPS should develop more visitor facilities designed to reduce bear/human encounters. The design also appears to protect natural vegetation and is not expected to create any water quality concerns. We also understand that a majority of public comment on the 1991 Development Concept Plan (DCP) alternatives workbook endorsed establishment of additional walkways and viewing platforms.

The State would have preferred, however, to see this proposal addressed in the context of the larger DCP to take advantage of new information, e.g. more comprehensive bear movement studies. (The need for such information was also emphasized in public comment on the DCP alternatives workbook.) As a rule, the State does not support piecemeal implementation of facilities in the middle of a comprehensive planning process. Such piecemeal decision-making circumvents the intent of NEPA and establishes an undesirable precedent. We are, however, aware of Senator Steven's direction to move forward with this project, and the resulting lack of flexibility to look at more comprehensive needs. We hope that future developments, however beneficial, are considered in the context of appropriate planning processes.

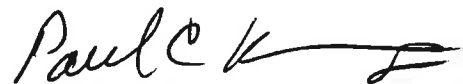
The State is also concerned that the proposed project does not address the very serious visitor safety problem of the adjacent floating bridge. Visitors arriving by plane or staying at the lodge must use the floating bridge across the Brooks River to access some sport fishing areas, walk to the bear viewing areas, or ride to the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes. The bridge is believed to be an impediment to bear movements, and the National Park Service is investing considerable staff effort into assuring the safety of visitors crossing the bridge. The EA concludes that the proposed bear viewing platform may actually necessitate additional staff and higher operating costs at this location to assure the safety of visitors.

We question whether the National Park Service has considered the costs and liability risk of choosing to construct an additional platform on the south side rather than elevating the floating bridge. In contrast, elevating the bridge to allow unimpeded bear passage would not only reduce the serious bear/human encounters at the crossing but could also serve as an additional bear viewing platform regardless of whether Brooks Camp is eventually moved to the south side.

We have reviewed the ANILCA Section 810 evaluation and concur with the finding that the proposed action will not result in a significant restriction of subsistence uses.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments. If you have any questions, please call Sally Gibert at 561-6131.

Sincerely,



Paul C. Rusanowski, Ph.D.
Director

cc:

Alan Eliason, Superintendent, Katmai NPPr
Larry Wright, Division of Environmental Quality, NPS
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

Distribution for Katmai Bear Viewing Platform
June 16, 1992

Tina Cunning, Department of Fish & Game, Anchorage
Terry Haynes, Department of Fish & Game, Fairbanks
Priscilla Wohl, Dept of Environmental Conservation, Anchorage
Rob Walkinshaw, Department of Natural Resources, Anchorage
Jenny Olendorff, Dept of Transportation/PF, Anchorage
Steve Jacoby, Division of Governmental Coordination, Juneau
Beth Kertulla, Attorney General's Office, Juneau
Connel Murray, Director of Tourism, Juneau
Dick Swainbank, Dept of Commerce & Economic Develop., Fairbanks
Colonel Jack Jordon, Fish & Wildlife, Anchorage
Sue Flensburg, Bristol Bay CRSA, Dillingham
Stan Leaphart, Citizens Advisory Commission, Fairbanks
Glen Vernon, Lake & Peninsula Borough, King Salmon