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January 18, 1994

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


Dear Mr. Morehead: *Jack*

When Governor Hickel met with Secretary of the Interior Babbitt on December 13, Denali access and visitor use were among the issues discussed. Both the Governor and the Secretary reiterated their support for a broad-based Denali working group. The State sees great value in a forum designed to seek solutions to maintain the integrity of the national park and adjacent state park while providing expanded opportunities for public use and enjoyment.

In the meantime, State agencies have been further assessing options for the development of visitor facilities on the south side of Denali National Park. We believe there are specific proposals from the Southside Denali Development Concept Plan (DCP) that should move forward in the near term, even though the DCP as a whole was widely criticized. The State, therefore, offers the attached recommendations for your consideration.

Many controversial issues concerning the Denali region will require further dialogue; but we have identified several relatively non-controversial facilities which we believe may proceed to more detailed levels of coordinated planning. We request the opportunity to work with you to complete a final DCP/EIS that incorporates the State's recommendations. In this manner, short-term solutions may proceed while interested parties initiate a dialogue about critical park-wide access and visitation issues in the larger forum that the Governor and the Secretary discussed.

Sincerely,



Sally Gibert
State CSU Coordinator

CC:

Bruce Babbitt, Secretary of the Interior

Roger Kennedy, Director, National Park Service

John Katz, Governor's Office, Washington, D.C.

Harry Noah, Commissioner, Department of Natural Resources

Carl Rosier, Commissioner, Department of Fish and Game

John Sandor, Commissioner, Department of Environmental
Conservation

Bruce Campbell, Commissioner, Department of Transportation and
Public Facilities

Richard Burton, Commissioner, Department of Public Safety

State of Alaska
Short-Term Recommendations
South Side Denali Visitor Facilities

Purpose of Recommendations

The National Park Service's Development Concept Plan (DCP) for the South Side of Denali elicited widespread public criticism of the plan and planning process. Nevertheless, the DCP contains some relatively non-controversial proposals which merit continued attention in the DCP process. State agency representatives met on December 15, 1993 to identify projects that should be pursued in the short-term. The State recommends moving forward with these proposals, itemized below, with the full understanding that other issues in the DCP, and those concerning the entire Denali region, will require more time and consensus-building prior to or during additional comprehensive planning.

Criteria and Assumptions Underlying these Recommendations

- * Numerous key issues associated with Denali region access and visitor use require additional consultation among the NPS, State, local governments, other landowners and the public. In the meantime, selected proposals have received sufficient study and support to proceed.
- * There is little consensus about backcountry improvements. To avoid addressing a host of controversial impacts to backcountry resources and uses (habitat, hunting, mining, wilderness, etc.), regardless of ownership, the State suggests initial location of developments along the state road system.
- * Given the land status and geography of the Denali region, the most reasonable location for near-term highway accessible visitor improvements is in or near Denali State Park.
- * Design of any visitor facilities must take into consideration highway safety for recreational highway users as well as through traffic and commercial trucking.
- * Appropriately designed and sited visitor facilities along the George Parks Highway will enhance Alaska tourism generally, and will provide specific benefits for visitors to both Denali State Park and Denali National Park.

State Agency Recommendations for Short-Term Consideration

The following proposals from the NPS South Side Denali DCP should be further developed in a final plan/EIS. Other DCP proposals and larger Denali issues such as north side access, should be

comprehensively addressed in a separate consensus-building forum as discussed recently by Governor Hickel and Secretary Babbitt.

VISITOR CENTER

A joint NPS/State visitor center providing interpretation of the south Denali region should be built along the Parks Highway approximately between Mile 135 and Mile 140 (south end of Denali State Park). This area, which has the best views of Denali, contains a mix of state and private land, including several Native allotments. The facility should be set back a short distance from the highway to promote highway safety, and to create a sound and visual buffer. Siting and design studies should consider acquisition of land, easements, or development rights sufficient to protect the integrity of the site. Funding for development should include sufficient monies for any recommended land/easement acquisition.

The State supports continued consideration of the CIRI/Talkeetna site, but recognizes the need to address NPS and community concerns in more depth before general consensus can be reached.

HIGHWAY INTERPRETIVE FACILITIES

Three or four interpretive sites should be located along the Parks Highway within Denali State Park. Precise locations could be determined by a joint state/federal field team, recognizing the existing sites already developed and operated by Alaska State Parks. Provision should be made for sanitary facilities, garbage collection and highway safety. At least one interpretive site should have a wildlife theme. At this time, the State does not support interpretive exhibits outside Denali State Park due primarily to cost and maintenance considerations.

TRAILS

Short trails should be considered in association with the above facilities. The Visitor Center should be accompanied by short interpretive trails or loops which provide good views of Denali and take advantage of local interpretive themes. Longer trails providing access to the backcountry should receive more scrutiny and therefore cannot be endorsed at this time.

CAMPGROUNDS

The State conceptually supports private development of the public campground proposed on Ahtna land near Cantwell.

OTHER DCP PROPOSALS

Remaining DCP proposals should be deferred pending additional dialogue among interested parties.

**CSU Distribution List
South Denali Recommendations
January 18, 1994**

*Tina Cunning, Department of Fish & Game, Anchorage
Kim Sundberg, Department of Fish & Game, Anchorage
Terry Haynes, Department of Fish & Game, Fairbanks*

*Priscilla Wohl, Department of Environmental Conservation, Anchorage
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Becky Gay, RDC

Larry Kimball, CIRI

Chip Dennerlein, NPCA

Johnny Gonzalas, Denali Borough Mayor, Healy

Donald Moore, Borough Manager, Matanuska-Susitna Borough, Palmer