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November 28, 1995

Mr. Roger Kennedy
Director
National Park Service
P.O. Box 37127
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

Dear Mr. Kennedy:

The State of Alaska appreciates the opportunity to respond to your request for input regarding the future direction of the National Park Service into the 21st century. This letter represents the consolidated views of those State resource agencies that have regularly worked with the National Park Service here in Alaska. You have requested that respondents indicate how much they agree or disagree with the seven goal statements, and rank them based on their relative importance. The seven goals are:

- 1) Scientific/scholarly basis for resource management decisions.
- 2) Protection of park resources.
- 3) Sustainability in park operations and development.
- 4) People's emotional, intellectual, and recreational ties with their heritage.
- 5) National initiative to reorganize and perpetuate heritage resources.
- 6) More responsive, efficient, and accountable organization.
- 7) Maximum benefit through alternative approaches to support park operations.

The State's response is geared toward the National Park Service's operations here in Alaska. Our focus on Alaska is appropriate given that the majority of the nation's parklands as designated by the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act in 1980 (ANILCA) are located in Alaska. All of the goals as stated are generally appropriate for the national park system. Several of the goals coincide with Governor Knowles' guiding principles for resources development. These principles are 1) sound science that guides, but does not dictate policy; 2) sustainability and conservation; and 3) a consensus-based public process that brings Alaskans to the decision making table.

The State most strongly agrees with goals 1, 4 and 7 for the following reasons:

1) "Scientific/scholarly basis for resource management decisions"

Since most Alaska parks are new to the national system, there is a relative paucity of data regarding resources and public use (both historical and current). Since ANILCA links many resource and public use decisions to information which has not yet been collected, Alaska requires a special focus on research and information gathering.

4) "People's emotional, intellectual, and recreational ties with their heritage"

To the extent that public use of most of Alaska's parks is in its infancy, a special focus is warranted on ways to make Alaska's park units more accessible and enjoyable for both Alaskans and visitors. While most parks in the lower 48 have a fairly stable visitation base, most Alaska parks are just beginning to define themselves.

In addition, Alaska parks created by ANILCA reflect a significant departure from the park system management elsewhere in the nation, particularly provisions for continued subsistence use. Some acknowledgement of the unique aspects of Alaska parks is warranted even in the broad context of these goals, especially if these goals may ultimately be tied to funding priorities.

7) "Maximum benefit through alternative approaches to support park operation".

The current trend toward exploring partnerships and collaborative decision making is laudible. As with many lower 48 park units, boundaries between management jurisdictions in Alaska are often arbitrary. Working together across these boundaries can provide cost efficiencies and benefits which are greater than can be accomplished by individual agencies. The federal/state/local/native cooperative effort currently studying new visitor development on the south side of Denali National Park is an excellent example of a successful partnership.

The State also agrees with goals 2, 3 and 6. All these stem from basic sound public policy.

5) "National initiative to reorganize and perpetuate heritage resource"

The State's agreement with this goal is contingent on the assumption that the National Park Service expects to accomplish additional protection of heritage resources largely outside the context of the national park system and in partnership with state and local government and non-profit organizations (as proposed earlier this year in the report "An American Network of Parks and Open Space: Creating a Conservation and Recreation Legacy"). As we previously stated in response to that report, the National Park Service should not use this goal to create a new layer of federal bureaucracy, especially in light of the declining federal budget.

Consistent with these comments, the State believes that, for Alaska at least, goals 1,4, and 7 are the "most important". The remaining goals are "moderately important".

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments. If you have any questions, please contact me at 907-269-7477.

Sincerely,



Sally Gibert
State CSU Coordinator

cc: Robert Barbee, Alaska Field Director, National Park Service
John Katz, Governor's Office, Washington, D.C.
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FOR YOUR INFORMATION

from Sally Gibert

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