



National Parks Conservation Association®  
Protecting Our National Parks for Future Generations®

# FIELD REPORT

## ALASKA REGION

Autumn 2006

Aniakchak Bay in Aniakchak National Preserve  
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## Lawsuit Challenges Recreational ATV Use in Wrangell-St. Elias

Recreational all-terrain vehicle (ATV) riding in our national parks is allowed only under specific circumstances, only on designated trails, and only when found not to damage the resources for which a park was created to protect. Although the required analysis has never been conducted on the impacts of recreational ATV riding in Wrangell-St. Elias National Park & Preserve, the park has allowed this use to occur through a permit system for the past 20 years. Those who secure a permit from the Park Service may ride their ATVs on nine trails, mostly located along the Nabesna Road.

This network of trails has grown into a muddy mess, with wetter areas of trail as wide as several hundred yards in some places. In response to this problem NPCA, with co-plaintiffs The Wilderness Society and Alaska Center for the Environment, filed a lawsuit challenging the legality of the

permitting system.

NPCA's lawsuit does not seek to restrict access to the park by the local subsistence users living in resident zone communities around the Wrangells nor did it seek an injunction against riding this past summer. In looking for a long-term solution, NPCA is specifically asking the Park Service to conduct the required analysis to determine, in a formal "finding", if recreational ATV riding is compatible with park purposes and to conduct a public review of their finding in an Environmental Impact Statement. In addition, NPCA's lawsuit contends that issuing permits for recreational ATV riding violates the National Park Organic Act, which directs the Park Service to "conserve" park scenery, objects, and wildlife "by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations." The only exception to this rule is when an action or

activity is otherwise authorized by Congress.

NPCA is represented by the Anchorage based environmental law firm Trustees for Alaska and is currently waiting for the government to reply to its complaint.



NPCA recently filed a lawsuit challenging the park service to comply with its own rules regarding recreational ATV use in national parks. This photo was taken along a recreational ATV trail in Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve, the only national park in Alaska that allows recreational ATV riding. © NPCA

## Who's Counting the Wildlife in Alaska's National Parks?



At a Congressional hearing held in Anchorage in August (see article page 3), the Alaska Office of NPCA released *Who's Counting? How insufficient support for science is hindering national park wildlife management in Alaska*. This study illuminates the lack of data available to the National Park Service for evaluating how management decisions effect park wildlife, especially hunted species.

"Hunting itself is not a threat to park resources," said NPCA Regional Director Jim Stratton, "but a lack of pertinent data could inadvertently allow the overharvest of some species and threaten the health of a park's ecosystem. The best way to ensure

continued hunting opportunities, especially for subsistence, and provide for natural and healthy wildlife populations, as directed by Congress, is to make sure you know how many animals live in a park and how many are being taken each year."

The report calls on the Park Service to:

- increase support for conducting and analyzing base population science for hunted species;
- support regularly scheduled community harvest surveys for all villages in and near national park units; and
- support a new position for a statewide wildlife data manager to analyze all the

(see Who's Counting on page 4)



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## Alaska Region FIELD REPORT

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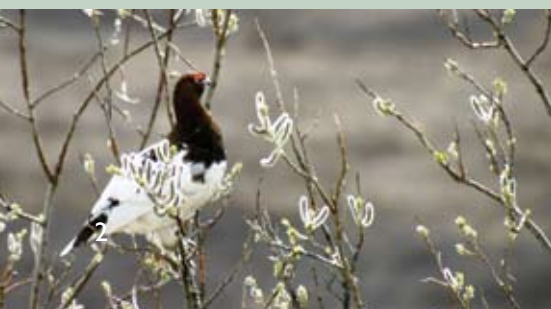
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## A Message from Field Representative Jeremiah Millen

Growing up in small town Iowa on the banks of the Mississippi River was a gift I didn't fully comprehend until much later. The majority of my youth was spent hunting and fishing across wild midwestern landscapes.

The culture of my family and community was woven together by a strong attachment to the land and a collective stewardship obligation to maintain a healthy environment for future generations.

As I grew older I came to realize that America's National Park system is perhaps our country's greatest gift to ourselves. Not only do national parks ensure protected landscapes and robust wildlife populations they also document our shared history and culture. They represent us at our finest, a collective will, like that of my childhood community, to leave a legacy unimpaired for future generations.

Alaska's national parks are some of our country's most valuable assets which, if managed properly, can help sustain Alaska's economic health and cultural identity. I believe Alaskans have a strong attachment to the land and a distinct shared identity and that this common ground holds much promise for the national parks in our state.

Unfortunately our parks face increasing threats as we work toward striking a balance between protection and use. NPCA's recent ATV lawsuit challenging the National Park Service over damaging all-terrain vehicle (ATV) use in Wrangell-St. Elias National Park & Preserve exemplifies one of the many struggles our parks face.

Without proper funding, the Park Service is hampered in its ability to conserve and protect the environment, provide recreational opportunities and educate the public. The recent NPCA report *Who's Counting* examines the data available to the National Park Service in considering the management of wildlife populations and advocates for increased funding to support park science and make more informed management decisions.

The lack of funding for Alaska's parks is a local example of a much larger funding challenge facing our entire park system. Crippled by an annual operating budget deficit of over \$600 million and a multi-billion-dollar backlog of maintenance projects, these funding shortfalls adversely impact visitor services, educational opportunities and resource protection. Fortunately, Congress has noticed these challenges. Bipartisan federal legislation, the National Park Centennial Act (H.R.1124,) was introduced last year to address critical funding needs by establishing the National Park Centennial Fund. At a recent congressional hearing in Anchorage this past summer sponsored by Republican Congressman Mark Souder (R-IN), NPCA Regional Director Jim Stratton addressed many of the unique challenges facing Alaska's parks. The Centennial Act is a positive step toward protecting the places we treasure.

NPCA members (left to right) Vernon, Lindsey, Alicia and Nick Orange take a rest on the Root Glacier in Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve this past June. One of the Orange family's goals has been to visit as many national parks as they can; they hope to continue pursuing this goal in Alaska. When the family moved to Alaska in 2004, Alicia called the regional office to volunteer and we put her to work right away. Her most recent project was making edits to and fact checking the report "Federal Assistance for Land Acquisition in Alaska" in preparation for printing (see story page four). © Scott Acocks



# Congressional Hearing in Alaska focuses on National Park funding

On August 14, 2006 Alaska Regional Director Jim Stratton testified before a Congressional field hearing in Anchorage hosted by Government Reform, Criminal Justice Subcommittee Chairman Mark Souder (R-IN). It was the ninth in a series of congressional hearings held across the country to look into the state of America's national parks, with special attention to examining national park funding needs in-depth and identifying solutions to meet the challenges. Rep. Souder will use the information gathered during the hearings to establish a comprehensive record of the needs of the nation's parks.

In his testimony Stratton cited federal funding shortages made worse by the one-of-a-kind management directions in the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA). He highlighted national park wildlife management as an example, based on the findings from NPCA's new report, *Who's Counting? How insufficient support for science is hindering national park wildlife management in Alaska* (see article on page 1).

Stratton's testimony also pointed out that the remote nature and the immense size of Alaska's parks requires rangers to patrol by airplane—a cost not often incurred by parks in the lower 48. The skyrocketing cost of aviation fuel, as well as the overall cost of aircraft maintenance and training pilots, is limiting park managers' ability to patrol by air.

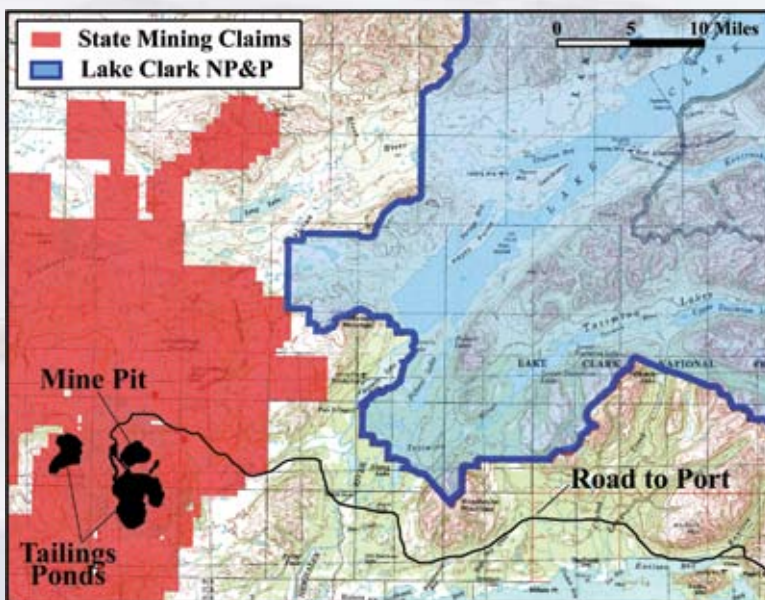
Stratton thanked Ted Stevens (R-AK) for his help in improving visitor centers, maintenance facilities, and ranger stations at the ten new parks created by ANILCA in 1980. However, he noted more needs to be done to improve visitor experiences, such as finishing the Mary Lowell Visitor Center for Kenai Fjords in Seward and partnering with the state of Alaska to improve the McCarthy Road—the key access road for Wrangell-St. Elias National Park & Preserve.

Congressman Souder's final report is due out this fall.

# Secretary of the Interior Kempthorne Holds 'Listening Session' in Fairbanks

During the months of August and September, newly appointed Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne and representatives of other federal agencies including the Environmental Protection Agency and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, held two-dozen "listening sessions" around the country seeking citizen input on cooperative conservation and what that means at the local level. Alaska Regional Director Jim Stratton traveled to Fairbanks to participate in Alaska's only session on August 28.

Stratton made a number of key points during his three minutes at the microphone including thanks to Secretary Kempthorne for endorsing a strong set of Management Policies for the National Park Service that both protects our national park heritage and is respectful of local communities, and for his announcement of a pending Centennial Challenge to celebrate the Park Service's 100th birthday in 2016. Stratton also made a pitch for additional funding for NPS, including sorely needed funds to improve the available science necessary to make sound wildlife management decisions (see article page 1). In all, over 60 people spoke in Fairbanks with a strong majority seeking cooperation from the Secretary and other officials to protect the wilds of Alaska from oil & gas development.



# Open Pit Mine Proposed Near Lake Clark National Park

Lake Clark National Park & Preserve is located just across Cook Inlet from the Kenai Peninsula, is easily accessible by air from Anchorage and encompasses about

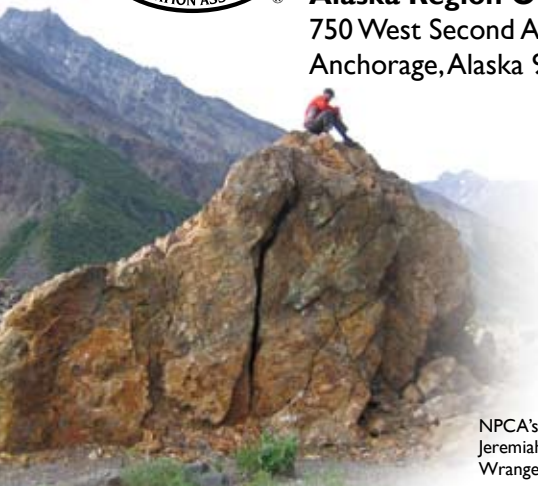
4 million acres of remote wilderness. Located within 15 miles of the park's SW boundary lies the proposed Pebble Open Pit Gold & Copper Mine, which,

if developed, would be one of the largest mines in the world. Northern Dynasty Minerals recently applied for state permits to construct what would become the largest dam in the world (4.3 miles long and 740 feet high) to hold back mine tailings. NPCA is supporting the many organizations working to defeat this mine proposal, including the Renewable Resources Coalition. For more information about Pebble Mine and how you can get involved in stopping this ill-advised development, log onto [www.renewableresourcescoalition.org](http://www.renewableresourcescoalition.org).



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NPCA's Alaska field representative, Jeremiah Millen, takes a break in Wrangell-St. Elias NP&P © Matt Rafferty



(continued from "Who's Counting")

available data and provide meaningful information to park superintendents.

*Who's Counting?* demonstrates that timely and scientifically sound population and harvest data and the ability to analyze the information are not always available to park managers. The lack of data is not an indication of a lack of interest by the Park Service, but rather it underscores the funding shortfalls that affect the entire National Park System.

The report's author, NPCA intern Andy Moderow, worked closely with the Park Service to analyze all available data from both NPS and the State of Alaska in order to determine information gaps and to make recommendations for improvement. Copies of the report are available from the Anchorage office or on-line at: [www.npca.org/alaska/wildlife/](http://www.npca.org/alaska/wildlife/).

## NPCA Board of Trustees Meets in Glacier Bay

In June, NPCA's Board of Trustees traveled from across the nation to meet in Glacier Bay. The meeting included a discussion about the current and future direction of NPCA, with a focus on analyzing various political and financial scenarios and possible policy responses. This discussion will help the board design a long-term strategic plan to best care for America's National Park System. Board members also participated in a detailed presenta-

## NPCA Publishes Guide to Land Acquisition Grants

Alaska's national park units encompass over three million acres of inholdings in over 1,100 separate parcels owned by Alaska native corporations, the University of Alaska, the State of Alaska or private individuals. Much of it is for sale and NPCA has just released a comprehensive guide to assist both agencies and private organizations in finding federal funds to purchase biologically and culturally critical lands from willing sellers.

To assist both the Park Service and private conservation organizations that specialize in land acquisition NPCA intern Luke Knowles conducted extensive research on the many federal programs that can be used to buy land or conservation

easements. Some programs, such as the Land and Water Conservation Fund, are well known. But Luke also discovered some very obscure programs that one wouldn't think could be used for land acquisition, such as one located within the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

All of Luke's research has been compiled into a report jointly published by NPCA and The Conservation Fund titled *Federal Assistance for Land Acquisition in Alaska: A Comprehensive Guide to Federal Grant Programs Eligible for use in Acquiring Land and/or Conservation Easements in Alaska*. If this publication can be of use to you, please contact the office in Anchorage and we'll send you a copy.

tion on the many unique issues facing the national parks in Alaska presented by the Alaska Region staff.

In addition to conducting general business and committee meetings, the board explored Glacier Bay by kayak, on foot and on the day-long tour up bay by boat. Some board members also visited Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park in Skagway and Lake Clark National Park during pre and post-meeting trips.

NPCA was fortunate to have a number of special guests attend portions of the meeting including Tomie Lee, Glacier Bay Superintendent, Marcia Blaszk, NPS

Regional Director, and Hans Neidig – DOI Special Assistant in Alaska as well as numerous NPS staff and local community members such as Bob Howe, the first on-site Superintendent of Glacier Bay. Native elders from the village of Hoonah visited with the board one evening and spoke of their historical ties to the park.

Native elders from Hoonah present NPCA president Tom Kiernan with a map of Glacier Bay listing traditional place names in Tlingit. © Ray Foote/NPCA

