



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

# FIELD REPORT

## ALASKA REGION

Autumn 2007 Vol. 5, No. 1

Rib bones with Fireweed. © Gregory Gusse

### Offroad impact reduced in Wrangell–St. Elias

NPCA and its co-plaintiffs, the Alaska Center for the Environment and The Wilderness Society, successfully settled last summer's lawsuit with the National Park Service challenging illegal all-terrain vehicle (ATV) use on nine trails in Wrangell–St. Elias National Park &



ATV trail Wrangell-St. Elias. © NPS

Preserve. The lawsuit sought to protect the park from unregulated recreational ATV use that is damaging tundra

ecosystems, including wildlife habitat and water quality. Trustees for Alaska, an Anchorage-based public interest environmental law firm, provided legal representation.

“Wrangell–St. Elias is one of the world's premier wilderness parks, and today we are starting the journey to heal some serious wounds to the land caused by recreational ATV riding,” said NPCA Alaska Regional Director Jim Stratton. “We are pleased that the National Park Service saw the merits of our legal challenge and chose to settle this case in a manner that protects park resources.”

The settlement requires the Park Service to evaluate the impacts of recreational ATV use on park resources. Even if research shows that recreational ATVs

are relatively harmless, the Park Service must still determine whether or not ATV use is compatible with the park's mission—to maintain unimpaired the park's “scenic beauty and quality of high mountain peaks, foothills, glacial systems, lakes, and streams, valleys, and coastal landscapes in their natural state” and to protect “habitat for, and populations of, fish and wildlife.”

Lastly, the three most damaged trails—Copper Lake, Tanada Lake and Suslota Lake—will only be open in colder months, when the ground is frozen at least six inches deep and can support the weight of an ATV.

NPCA expects the National Park Service to begin working on environmental assessment this fall.

### Katmai Bears Take Center Stage

In a favorable response to 11,000 comments from NPCA members and a similar outpouring of support from other partners, the Alaska Board of Game voted in March 2007 to reverse a controversial 2005 decision to open the state lands of the Kamishak Special Use Area to brown bear hunting. Despite strong opposition in 2005, the Board of Game voted to open the Kamishak Special Use Area—including the 95,000 acres that lie inside the boundaries



Brown Bear, Katmai National Park & Preserve  
© NPCA

of Katmai National Park—to sport hunting of bears for the first time since 1985. NPCA was unsuccessful in halting that decision two years ago, but with your help, we returned to the Board of Game this year and convinced them to reverse their decision. The campaign attracted national and international attention, thanks to coverage on CBS Weekend News and several of the country's largest

(see “Katmai Bears” page 6)



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## Alaska Region FIELD REPORT

Autumn 2007

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## A Message from Regional Director Jim Stratton

It's been almost 30 years since my first foray into public lands advocacy. I was working with the Oregon Wilderness Coalition hustling letters to support designating road less areas in Oregon's

national forests. One of the things I remember most about those early days of my conservation career was the fighting attitude everyone had towards federal land management agencies. Federal land managers made the rules that cut down trees or allowed cows to over graze, all of which degraded wilderness. It was a battle and the lines were clearly drawn.

It's amazing what a few years perspective and a little time working for a public land agency can do for one's view of how to get things done. While there is still a need to draw lines in the sand, as NPCA did during the Management Policy debates of last year, I've found that working with land managers on creative problem solving is a far more productive way to go. This approach involves compromise, no doubt. But in the long run a little give and take makes for better neighbors, a stronger and longer lasting solution to whatever problem or issue was at hand, and you have energy left over for the next issue on your list.

In this issue of the Alaska Field Report we report on a number of access issues where we've worked closely with the Park Service to protect park resources while supporting good comprehensive solutions to subsistence ATV riding near Cantwell, access to inholdings, and ATV riding at Dry Bay in Glacier Bay National Preserve. Our litigation against the Park Service on illegal recreational ATV riding in Wrangell-St. Elias ended without going to court as we were able to agree with the Park Service on a reasonable approach to addressing the muddy mess created by ATV riding off the Nabesna Road on the park's north side. Some of these issues have been around as long as the Alaska Lands Act and we're pleased to have helped positively move the discussion forward.

I'd also like to say a big thank you to Jeremiah Millen and Claire LeClair—two awesome NPCA staff members who moved on from NPCA in the past few months. Their commitment to Parks and dedication to NPCA was heartfelt and deep and we thank them for their time with us. And I'd like to welcome Melissa Blair and Jeanette Hanneman to the team. Melissa and Jeanette join Joan Frankevich and me as we continue to look for those positive solutions to sticky problems...oh, and have a little fun along the way.

## Photos Welcome

We always welcome photos from members enjoying Alaska's National Parks. If you have pictures to share please send them to us. They may be included in future NPCA publications. Digital images can be emailed to:

[jhanneman@npca.org](mailto:jhanneman@npca.org).



Wonder Lake, Denali NP

© Reality Shot Photography/Garrett Crispell

# Jeanette Hanneman Joins NPCA's Alaska Region Office Staff

Background photograph  
© Reality Shot Photography/Garrett Crispell

Jeanette Hanneman arrived in Alaska in October 2006 as a veterinary nurse at Pet Emergency Treatment Veterinary Hospital. Despite the onset of an arctic winter and months of darkness, she knew she had found her new home, complete with friendly encounters with a fox and a moose with her baby while walking to work!

Jeanette is a general falconer and loves to spend time flying raptors and bird watching. She has a degree in biology and veterinary technology, with an emphasis in wildlife medicine. In her home state of California, Jeanette worked in a wildlife rehabilitation environment, and also as an office manager and executive secretary. Her daughter and 3 grandchildren are undoubtedly her favorite people to

spend time with, and her 2 dogs, Delilah and Twinkie, are this animal lover's delight.

Jeanette joined the NPCA team as the part-time Office Coordinator in June 2007. She says, "By supporting the Alaska Regional office staff administratively, I feel like I am helping wildlife and wild places in a whole new way." She has already checked out Kenai Fjords National Park and is eager to start exploring Alaska's 16 other national parks.



## Meet Field Representative Melissa Blair

Melissa Blair joined NPCA as the Alaska Field Representative in Spring 2007. A native Texan, Melissa considers herself extremely fortunate to have enjoyed over 6 years of working, playing and traveling throughout Alaska with Katmai, Kenai Fjords, Wrangell-St. Elias, Lake Clark, and Denali National Parks are among her favorite places!



While pursuing a bachelors in Geography (specializing in Natural Resource Management) at the University of Texas at Austin, Melissa spent breaks backpacking and hiking throughout Big Bend National Park and along the Padre Island National Seashore. Following graduation, Melissa completed a yearlong internship with the National Park Service at the Mojave

National Preserve in the California desert where she investigated hazardous material and safety concerns at 25 abandoned mines within the preserve.

In 2001, she arrived in Alaska as a recreation technician for the Bureau of Land Management to explore millions of acres of pristine public lands in search of unique and remarkable rivers worthy of being designated into the National Wild and Scenic River System, and also work along the National Historic Trail of the famous Iditarod Sled Dog Race.

In 2005, Melissa joined Alaska Coalition where she engaged with

Native Alaskans, sporting groups, and commercial fishermen in a strong campaign to oppose southwest Alaska's proposed Pebble Mine, a controversial copper-gold-molybdenum deposit that threatens the pristine headwaters of Bristol Bay's world-class salmon fishery and located only mere miles from the border of Lake Clark National Park and Preserve.

In the land of the midnight sun, Melissa is loving life with her fiancé, Jake, and their two labs; usually with a fishing rod in hand on the deck of their boat in Prince William Sound, kissing the skies from the wing of Jake's tandem paraglide, or hiking in Alaska's endless mountains. However, once Alaska's winter wonderland arrives again, she'll be curled up reading in front of a cozy fire, plowing through fresh powder on her snowmachine, or pursuing her favorite winter pastime – traveling to warm, sunny places!

# Meet Leif and Bonnie, Our Summer Interns

Leif Mjos was born in Anchorage and considers himself lucky to have been raised with



plenty of exposure to wild Alaska and national parks like Denali, Kenai Fjords, Katmai, and Wrangell-St. Elias. "I have particularly fond memories of picking blueberries and cloudberry in Denali as a young boy," recalls Leif. After high school, he attended a year of folk high school in Norway. At Prescott College in Arizona, Leif explored much of the southwest, and even far away places like Tanzania, thanks to the amazing field courses of his Environmental Studies degree. More recently, he volunteered at the Wrangell Mountains Center in McCarthy and gained a sense of place in that remote community located in the heart of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park. He loves skiing and hiking in

the mountains, as well as kayaking the ocean and coast of the Gulf of Alaska.

Leif is working on a seven-month internship for NPCA to write a report on the status of wildlife research in Alaskan national parks. He is collecting records of existing wildlife research in Alaska's parks and is working with park staff to further identify what additional studies are needed so that park managers have sufficient information to make good management decisions. A lack of funding is the general reason for any shortcomings of the current research effort and NPCA continually supports increased base budget funding for the National Park Service and its wildlife research programs.

Bonnie O'Neill is a senior majoring in environmental and political science at Furman University in Greenville, South Carolina, and actively involved in her school's environmental action group and environmental science club. Last year,

she studied international environmental challenges in Costa Rica and Ecuador and visited her sister and brother here in Alaska.



As a summer intern with NPCA, Bonnie is tracking and evaluating the impact of liberalizing state hunting regulations on wolf and bear harvest levels in national preserves. She is also developing a tracking system to determine how often the Alaska Board of Game accepts National Park Service recommendations for changes to existing or proposed new hunting regulations. In her free time she enjoys tennis, running, reading, and kayaking. She is eagerly looking forward to her first visit to Denali National Park this summer!

## \$200 Million Increase Anticipated for Park Service Budget

*Outstanding Support from Alaska Delegation!*

In a tremendous display of commitment to the future of our National Park System, Sen. Ted Stevens (R-AK), Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), and Rep. Don Young (D-AK) recently supported visionary proposals to address chronic funding shortfall that has crippled management of America's national parks for years. In June 2007, the Senate Appropriations Committee approved a bill intended to increase the National Park Service's annual operating budget by approximately \$200 million; the House appropriations bill included a similar increase. A Conference Committee will determine the final fiscal year 2008 Interior

appropriations bill later this fall.

National park units in Alaska are poised to receive a budgetary boost upwards of \$6 million in annual operating funds. "Part of that money would restore positions and services cut in Alaska in the last two years," said Alaska Park Service spokesman John Quinley. Approximately \$2 million—or a third of the new funds—have been proposed for the hiring of about 120 seasonal staff that are desperately needed to address statewide priorities including improving visitor services and resource protection, and support for critical maintenance projects.

Background photograph  
© Reality Shot Photography/Garrett Crispell

## Access Issues in Alaska's Parks

One of the Alaska Lands Act's most unique features is its language allowing access to inholdings, and for subsistence and other traditional activities, so long as park resources are protected. Maintaining the balance between access provisions and park protection is one of the Park Service's most challenging tasks. During the past several years, NPCA has been working closely with the Park Service on three specific types of access, and that work is coming to completion.

Title XI of the Alaska Lands Act provides owners of private property inside park boundaries with access their inholdings subject to reasonable regulations that protect natural and cultural resources of the park. But the Park Service was not consistently applying its rules, creating confusion among property owners. In order to help clarify the rules to homeowners within Alaska parks, NPS recently published an *Interim User's Guide to Accessing Inholdings in National Park System Units in Alaska*. The purpose of the guide is not to present new regulations—it simply attempts to collect and clarify existing policy and processes in a single document.

In the process of writing the inholder's

guide, the Park Service addressed key policy questions, including fees, duration, and circumstances under which the agency can make changes. A copy of the guide is available on-line at [www.nps.gov/akso](http://www.nps.gov/akso).

The largest number of inholdings is in Wrangell-St. Elias, where long driveways that lead to inholdings crisscross over parkland. This fall, the Park Service is expected to conduct an environmental review focusing on about 40 of these situations.

Meanwhile, Denali National Park & Preserve is finalizing a plan to allow for limited all-terrain vehicle (ATV) access for subsistence hunting on several trails near Cantwell. Twenty years ago, the Park Service found that ATV riding for subsistence was not a traditionally employed mode of transportation when they wrote the park's original general management plan. Subsequently, Cantwell's residents worked alongside the Park Service to establish the fact that some ATV use was traditional to their culture; the Park Service is now in the final process of determining that traditional trail network. NPCA



© Melissa Blair/NPCA

supports limited ATV access for subsistence hunting, as long as there is little damage to park resources. We look forward to reviewing the final plan due out this fall.

At Glacier Bay National Preserve, the Alaska Lands Act allows ATV use for commercial fishing near Dry Bay at 1979 use levels. Over the years, the existing trail system had expanded beyond what Congress intended. So last year, in an effort to dial back and reduce impacts to the park, the Park Service promulgated the establishment of a Dry Bay ATV trail system. Glacier Bay is now evaluating which trails to close, and intends to identify a legally sound trail system in the near future. NPCA will continue to support this kind of limited ATV access.

## North Denali Access Route Finally Defeated

A long-standing threat to build a 90-mile road through the heart of Denali National Park may have been put to rest. A proposal to build a second north access route from Stampede Road near Healy to Kantishna was expensive, unnecessary, and potentially harmful to wildlife, but gained a lot of traction among business interests in Fairbanks looking to boost tourism.

Thankfully, several events during the

past year helped put on end to the ill-conceived project. Last fall, the Alaska Department of Transportation published a North Denali Access Route Reconnaissance Report. Although the lengthy report avoids making clear conclusions, it suggests halting any further work on a project that the department implies, makes little sense. In January, Governor Sarah Palin revoked \$5 million for upgrades to the Stampede Road that had been approved under

former governor Frank Murkowski. About the same time, state transportation officials withdrew permit applications for road improvements on Stampede Road. And perhaps most importantly, Murkowski is no longer serving in public office. As both a U.S. Senator and as governor, Murkowski was an ardent supporter of North Denali Access and made repeated attempts to have it built. The project has few other supporters, which means future attempts are unlikely.



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Brown Bear Tracks,  
Katmai National Park & Preserve  
© Melissa Blair/NPCA

(continued from “Katmai Bears” page 1)  
newspapers. NPCA worked closely with several groups including bear viewing guides from Homer, concerned hunters, wildlife photographers, and other conservation organizations.

But another issue continues to plague the Katmai bears. The Alaska Board of Game sets hunting rules on all lands open to sport hunting, including national preserves, so long as those rules don't conflict with federal laws. In 2003, biologists with the Alaska Department of Fish & Game stated that roughly 16 brown bears could be harvested sustainably within a regulatory year (a regulatory year includes both a fall and spring hunt) in Katmai Preserve. But in the past two seasons, hunters took down at least twice that number of bears—an increase so drastic that bear-viewing guides have observed a marked decline in the local population. NPCA believes that this decline is in conflict with a Congressional mandate for the National Park Service (NPS) to manage Katmai for “high concentrations” of brown bears.

Although many of the same Kamishak partners echoed NPCA's plea for the Board of Game to address this problem by reducing this fall's harvest level, no action was taken. In an August 2007 letter to the National Park Service, NPCA and others made the case that



Halo Bay Brown Bear © Melissa Blair/NPCA

current hunting regulations are in conflict with federal laws and requested that the Park Service take action by shortening the fall hunting season in order to prevent further depletion of local brown bear numbers. The letter also recommends that the state and the Park Service develop a comprehensive

brown bear management plan for Katmai National Preserve that ensures a plentiful bear population. Unless NPS steps in to shorten the season or find another way to restrict the number of hunters allowed each year, over-harvesting will likely happen again this fall. We are waiting for the Park Service reply.



Bear Sighting vs. Harvest Graph  
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