



FIELDREPORT

Alaska Region | Summer 2017



Denali Turns 100 Years Old

By Joan Frankevich

Celebrate Denali's 100th birthday by planning an outing to Alaska's most famous national park. And when you see moose, caribou or especially Dall sheep, consider giving a silent word of thanks to Charles Sheldon, the visionary whose efforts led to the creation of Mt. McKinley National Park on February 26, 1917 (renamed Denali in 1980). When Sheldon explored the region in the early 1900s, he was dismayed to discover that large numbers of Dall sheep and other animals were being killed and the meat sold commercially to local miners and railroad crews. Thanks in large part to his tireless advocacy to create a refuge for these animals, Denali offers outstanding wildlife-viewing opportunities today.

The National Park Service is planning centennial events throughout the summer, so this is a great year to visit. Here are a few of my favorite Denali activities:

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Top: A backpacker visits the Arrigetch Peaks of Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve. Learn how to see more of this adventure on page 2. ©Luc Mehl **Right:** Reducing the infrastructure backlog will help keep trails and bridges safe for visitors like this hiker on the Chilkoot Trail in the Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park. ©Design Pics Inc. | Alamy

Restoring Our National Parks

By Jim Adams

In 2016, a record-breaking 2.8 million park visitors spent an estimated \$1.3 billion in local gateway regions while visiting National Park Service lands in Alaska. Those expenditures supported 18,900 jobs.

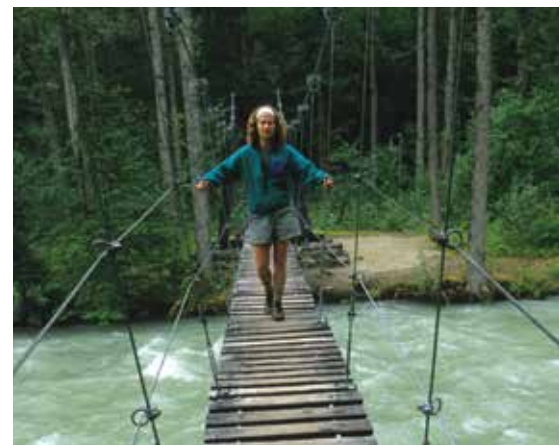
National parks across the country, in fact, saw record visitation last year. But while parks are more popular than ever, they are facing an incredible challenge: an over \$11 billion infrastructure repair backlog coupled with chronic underfunding.

In Alaska alone, our infrastructure repair backlog is \$114 million. Denali's \$50 million in needed repairs is the largest in the state. Some of this backlog is unsurprising: the Denali Park Road, for instance, constantly needs work. The park is also, of course, a prime tourist attraction that props up economies from Anchorage to Fairbanks.

Other popular parks such as Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park and Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve face bills to repair historic buildings, like Wrangell-St. Elias's Kennecott Mill and townsite.

Some items on Alaska's list are not only critical to parks, they're important to local communities, too. In western Alaska, the emergency shelters that locals use if stranded by bad weather in the Bering Land Bridge

National Preserve are in need of long-overdue maintenance. In the north, repairs are needed to the living quarters for the ranger who spends the summer in Anaktuvuk Pass as a connection between Gates of the Arctic National Park and the Anaktuvuk Pass community.



Recently, U.S. Senators Mark Warner (D-VA) and Rob Portman (R-OH) introduced legislation to provide the Park Service more resources to tackle the backlog. The National Park Service Legacy Act would allocate \$500 million to the Park Service from existing federal oil and natural gas royalties every year until 2047. It would be very good for Alaska national parklands, and NPCA strongly supports it.

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Alaska Corner by AK Regional Director Jim Adams



Last summer, my wife, two young kids and I spent four days camping in Denali National Park. We hiked; we cooked over a campfire; we roasted marshmallows and, when necessary, we went to the grocery store for milk. It wasn't "hardcore," but it was just the right level of adventure for our family. The national parks in Alaska offer a vast array of spectacular, very accessible adventures, from viewing history at the Kennecott Mill in Wrangell-St. Elias to watching glaciers calve from a cruise ship in Glacier Bay.

Alaska parks also offer unbelievable wilderness experiences. I was reminded of this recently when looking at my friend Luc Mehl's adventure website. Using bikes, skis, packrafts and plain old feet, Luc has had some incredible adventures in Alaska's

national parklands, including summiting Denali and traversing the awesomely rugged Katmai and Gates of the Arctic parks.

I will never do what Luc does in the national parks, but seeing what he does inspires me. It inspires me to get out and visit our parks, and it inspires me to protect them and make sure that these special places remain remarkable. For a peek at Luc's national park adventures, check out short videos of his Denali traverse: www.bit.ly/2rM4Sen; his Aniakchak Crater visit: www.bit.ly/2qO4Bub; or his Gates of the Arctic traverse: www.bit.ly/2rawbTv.

Then come join me for some adventures—restful, adrenaline-filled or somewhere in-between—in Alaska's national parks this summer!

Below: An adventurer explores Douglas Caldera in Katmai National Park. ©Luc Mehl



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Denali Turns 100 Years Old

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Mingle with the only sled dogs in the National Park System

Visiting the historic park kennel, a highlight for many, holds a special place in my heart as it reminds me of my first winter in Alaska as a kennel volunteer over 30 years ago. In summer, you can tour the historic buildings, pet the huskies, watch a demonstration and learn about the importance of sled dogs to Denali. If you can't make it to the kennels, you can still enjoy the puppies' antics on the park's popular "Puppycam" at www.bit.ly/2cu1q4h.

View the "Seasons of Denali" quilt at Eielson Visitor Center

I absolutely love this fabric art piece; it is so intricate that it looks like a painting from across the room. Local artist Ree Nancarrow hand dyed fabric and used paints, stamps, silkscreens and stencils to create a stunning work of art that depicts Denali's scenery, birds, mammals and wildflowers. To view the quilt, take a park shuttle bus to Eielson Visitor Center, located at mile 66 of the Denali Park Road.

Hike the recently completed Savage Alpine Trail

Last spring, my daughter and I watched three Dall sheep rambling about and butting heads on this excellent trail through alpine



tundra. The U-shaped trail connects the Savage River area and the Savage River campground and can be hiked in either direction. This trail can be accessed by private vehicle or the free Savage River Shuttle, and to return to your starting point you can either walk along the road or use the shuttle.

For more information about Denali's Centennial events, shuttle buses, and park activities, visit the park's webpage at www.nps.gov/dena.

Above: Puppies at the Denali National Park kennel celebrate the park's 100th birthday. ©NPS



Board of Game Fails to Protect Denali Wolves

By Joan Frankevich

In February, the Alaska Board of Game unanimously rejected proposals to reinstate a wolf protection area on state land near the northeast corner of Denali National Park. Research has shown that wolf sightings along the Denali Park Road increase when wolf hunting and trapping in this area is closed. Wildlife watching, including wolf watching, brings jobs and tourism dollars to Alaska and also offers many Alaskans and other park visitors the unique experience of seeing a wild wolf. Despite these benefits, the board chose to prioritize recreational hunting and trapping by just one or two individuals over wildlife watching and tourism.

This outcome is disappointing, but NPCA will continue working to protect Denali wolves through other channels. We support efforts to permanently protect the wolves in this area through state legislation or alternatives such as a land trade or conservation easement. The wolves of Denali are some of the most studied, viewed and photographed wolves in the world and making sure they thrive benefits park visitors and Alaska businesses.

Left: Wolf in Denali National Park. ©Cathy Hart Photography



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Field Updates

By Jim Adams

Protecting the Rivers and Lakes in Alaska's National Parks: In October of 2016, the 9th Circuit for the U.S. Court of Appeals heard oral arguments in *Sturgeon v. Frost* over whether the National Park Service has the authority to ban hovercraft and, by extension, placer mining, predator control, and heavy machinery, on navigable rivers and lakes within the national parks in Alaska. The 9th Circuit has not issued a decision. Learn more about the issue at www.bit.ly/2qdutMh.

Pebble Mine/Lake Clark National Park: Bad news—in May, the Environmental Protection Agency reached a legal settlement with the would-be developers of the Pebble Mine in Bristol Bay, Alaska near Lake Clark National Park that will allow the developers to begin seeking permits for the mine. This unfortunate settlement reverses a 2013 agency decision to protect clean water and wild salmon. Developers now have until November, 2019 to submit a permit application. Learn more about the issue at www.bit.ly/2rar0le.

Ambler Mining Road through Gates of the Arctic: The environmental review of the proposed 220-mile Ambler Mining Road that would bisect the Gates of the Arctic National Preserve has begun. NPCA doesn't believe this project, which will put a road through what may be America's wildest national park, is good for the park, the nearby communities or the nation. For a map and video on the proposed road, visit: npca.org/ambler.

Denali's Zero-Landfill Initiative: Check out Denali's Summerfest on Saturday, June 10, where Subaru of America and NPCA will have booths urging park visitors to help us make Denali a "zero-landfill" park. Learn more about what it means to be zero-landfill at www.bit.ly/2q4aswr.

#Unbearable: In 2015, the National Park Service passed rules limiting the most egregious of the state of Alaska's efforts to reduce bear and wolf populations on national preserves. In December of 2016, the state of Alaska sued NPS, challenging the Park Service's authority to manage wildlife on park lands. NPCA has intervened in the lawsuit on the Park Service's behalf. Our national parks and preserves are special because they support a diversity of life, including predators that have been nearly wiped out in most parts of the world. Learn more about the issue at npca.org/unbearable.

Below: Lake Clark National Park and Bristol Bay salmon are both put at risk by the EPA's reversal on Pebble Mine. ©Design Pics Inc | Alamy



Gift Giving

NPCA works hard every day to protect and enhance our national parks in Alaska—and across the country. Please consider making a gift to ensure our programs remain successful. You can give online at www.npca.org/give.

