



FIELDREPORT

Alaska Region | Winter 2017-2018



Bears and Wolves in Alaska's National Preserves Threatened

In 2015, the National Park Service passed rules limiting egregious hunting tactics aimed at reducing bear and wolf populations on national preserves. These methods included practices like using artificial light to find and kill mother bears and cubs in their winter dens,

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Top: Mushers racing the Yukon Quest (a 1,000 mile sled dog race between Fairbanks, Alaska and Whitehorse, Yukon) travel through Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve. NPS employees volunteer at the historic Slaven's Roadhouse where mushers can enjoy a hot meal and a warm place to rest. ©Stephan Pietzko | Dreamstime **Above:** Brown bear cubs in Katmai National Park wait for their mother to bring them salmon ©Grayfoxx1942 | Dreamstime

BIG COURT WIN Protections Continue for Rivers and Lakes Inside Park Boundaries

In October, three judges from the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit held that the National Park Service (NPS) has the authority to restrict hovercraft on rivers and lakes in national parks and preserves. This is an important win. Although the case, *Sturgeon v. Frost*, started as a dispute about hovercraft, it has grown into an argument over whether the Park Service—or any other federal land agency—has the authority to prevent some uses of navigable rivers and lakes, including designated wild and scenic rivers, on federal land in Alaska.

This case began when John Sturgeon sued the Park Service, arguing that the agency had no authority to stop him from using his hovercraft in the Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve. Hovercraft are generally banned from parks because they are excessively loud and can travel over land, damaging sensitive habitat like wetlands, mudflats and nesting areas. The state soon joined the suit, arguing the Park Service had no authority over navigable rivers and lakes within park boundaries.

NPCA participated as a “friend of the court” in the case, supporting the Park Service and providing examples of the dramatic down-

sides of taking away the Park Service’s authority. Among the possibilities: state sanctioned predator control could occur on frozen rivers and lakes, heavy mining equipment could be transported within the banks of wild and scenic rivers and mining could take place within any riverbed on federal land, even in designated wilderness.

The suit could also have overturned an important part of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act that ensures that rural residents of Alaska—primarily, although not exclusively, Native Alaskans—have priority access to fish. Under at least some scenarios, federal agencies without control of the waters within their parks, preserves, refuges and other lands would not have been able to ensure priority access to fish for rural residents.

This is the second time the case has gone to the Ninth Circuit. The first time, the court ruled in the National Park Service’s favor, but used such an odd rationale that the Supreme Court sent it back to the Ninth Circuit to reconsider. We expect Mr. Sturgeon and the state of Alaska to appeal to the Supreme Court again, so stay tuned for the next chapter in the effort to ensure that rivers and lakes remain protected within Alaska’s national parks.

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ALASKA CORNER

New Staffer Joins NPCA's Efforts to Protect Alaska Parks

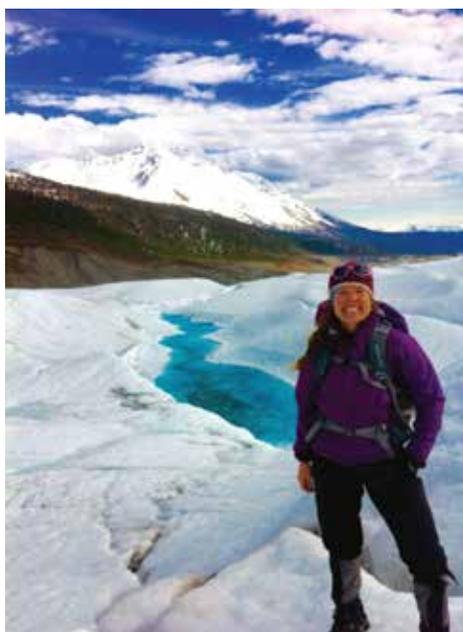
Big things—both good and bad—happened for national parks in Alaska in the past six months. The decision by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit in support of the National Park Service's authority to manage rivers and lakes within its own boundaries was a bright ray of sunshine. More discouraging were actions by the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Interior to revisit decisions to protect the nation's largest wild salmon run and bears and wolves. Nationwide, we were disheartened by the administration's proposed budget that recommends large cuts to the Park Service budget. But, thankfully, none of these decisions are final yet. The public still has a chance to act on behalf of our parks and influence those decisions. When parks—or other important American values—are threatened, we can choose to be powerful.

On that note, I am pleased to announce that a third member joined our Alaska team to help us, and Alaskans, be powerful

advocates for the parks. In late October, NPCA welcomed Erica Carroll as our Alaska Field Representative. Erica is based in Anchorage, and will work with Alaskans to help them support Alaska's national parks. Erica first moved to Alaska in 2010 and led the Nordic Ski Club and Camp Habitat programs in Fairbanks. Prior to that, she spent years on active duty in the Air Force, and is leaving a position as a major in the Alaska Air National Guard to join us.

Erica brings with her a M.A. in International Relations, experience as a professional ski instructor, and a great ability to connect with and empower people. We feel lucky to have her work with us as we engage a great coalition of park supporters to keep Alaska's national parks the best in the world.

Left: Erica on the Root Glacier in Wrangell-St. Elias National Preserve. Photo courtesy of Erica Carroll. **Right:** The sun rises in Denali National Park, one of the Alaska parks Erica will be working to protect. ©Mathiasrhode | Dreamstime



When parks—or other important American values—are threatened, we can choose to be powerful.

— JIM ADAMS, NPCA

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK! What do you like about this newsletter? What other topics or features would you like to see? Would you prefer to receive this newsletter electronically? Please contact our office with your feedback at alaska@npca.org

To learn more about exciting volunteer opportunities with NPCA, go to npca.org/events or email alaska@npca.org

Ambler Mining Road – Your Chance to Comment!

What do you think about an industrial access road crossing our nation’s premier wilderness park? The environmental review for the ill-advised Ambler Mining Road has begun and your comments are critical. Public input on the portion crossing Gates of the Arctic National Preserve is requested through January 31, 2018.

The state of Alaska is proposing the construction of a 220-mile private road along the southern Brooks Range to transport ore from remote copper deposits in the north-west region of the state. The road would traverse 20 miles of Gates of the Arctic National Preserve and cross the Kobuk Wild River. Gates of the Arctic was established by Congress to maintain its “wild and undeveloped character” and provide “opportunities for visitors to experience solitude.” If this mining road is built, the area will experience heavy truck traffic that will create noise pollution and dust, impact wilderness recreation, disturb wildlife, damage wetlands and permanently alter rural lifestyles dependent on subsistence resources.

NPCA opposes the road, but the National Park Service cannot simply say “no road” because Congress allowed for a transportation corridor across the preserve when Gates of the Arctic was created in 1980. What’s needed now are public comments that help advise NPS on the route and conditions that best protect the park and preserve. Though two potential routes are being considered, NPCA prefers the southern route which is shorter and disturbs less land. The northern route is within sight and sound of Walker Lake, a designated wilderness area popular with campers and canoeists. Additionally, NPCA will ask that the road be constructed in a manner that minimizes disruption to caribou

COMMENT DEADLINE: JANUARY 31

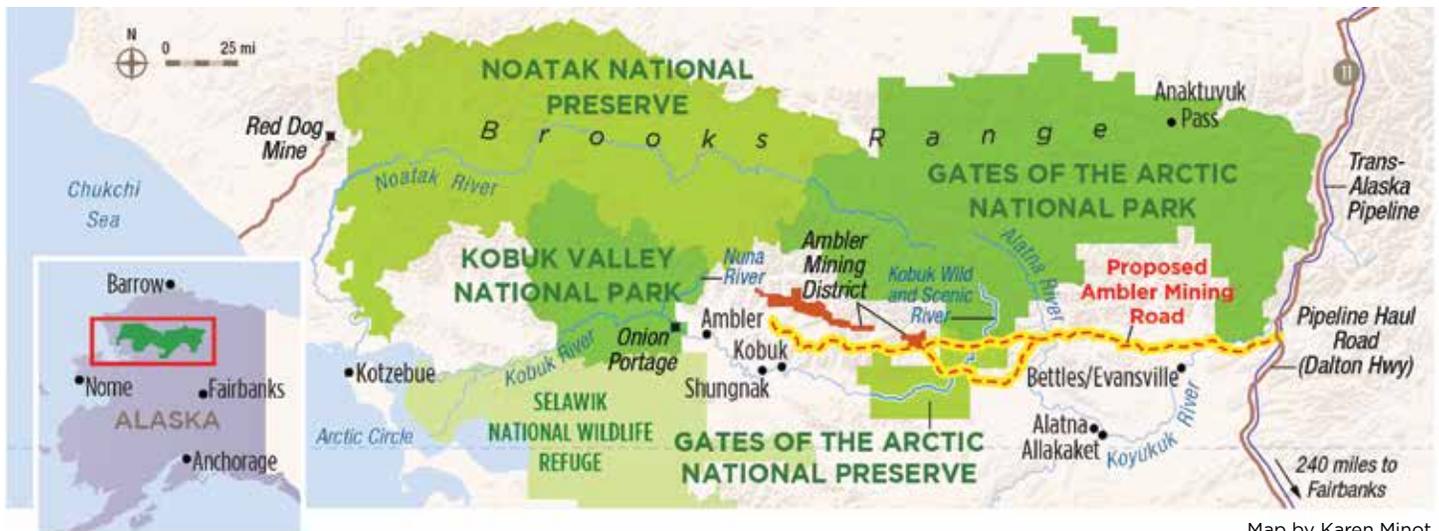
migration and salmon movement, and that reduces harm to other fish and wildlife important to both the ecosystem and local subsistence users.

The southern Brooks Range is one of the last, large roadless areas in America. It encompasses an intact ecosystem little changed by the modern world. If the Ambler Mining Road is built, we hope it is done in a way that limits its environmental impact so that our children and grandchildren can experience this arctic wilderness just like we do.

For more information and to provide your input, please visit npca.org/ambler. Comment deadline is January 31, 2018.

Comment Period for Entire Road Also Open through January 31

In addition to the NPS comment period for the section across Gates of the Arctic National Preserve, the Bureau of Land Management is also accepting public input on the remaining 200 miles through January 31, 2018. Please see www.blm.gov/AmblerRoadEIS to learn more.



Map by Karen Minot

Bears and Wolves in Alaska's National Preserves Threatened

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baiting bears with items such as donuts or grease-soaked bread, and trapping wolves in summer when they are denning. In July of this year, however, the Department of Interior (DOI) ordered the Park Service to reexamine its decision, which NPCA fears means the regulations could be dismantled. Reversing the rules would once again place

bears and wolves in the crosshairs, further challenging NPS efforts to protect these animals on national preserves.

One of the primary purposes of Alaska preserves is to protect the habitat and populations of all native wildlife, including bears and wolves. Predators are an essential part of a healthy ecosystem, and the Park

Service has a duty to manage for healthy populations of all wildlife. DOI’s decision to revisit this decision in the face of the Park Service’s congressionally-mandated duty, and in direct opposition to public support, is extremely disappointing. NPCA continues to support these NPS regulations and will help our members participate in the coming public comment process.



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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



Pebble Mine Threatens Bristol Bay's National Parks ... Again

In 2014, after a four-year process, a peer-reviewed scientific analysis and over 1.5 million public comments in support of protecting the habitat and wild salmon of Bristol Bay, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued a “Proposed Determination” that mining the gold and copper Pebble deposit in the Bristol Bay watershed (home to Lake Clark and Katmai National Parks and Preserves) would have unacceptable impacts on the region. That determination was strongly supported by NPCA and our members, who submitted over 85,000 comments on the issue.

Now EPA has reversed course. In May of 2017, EPA announced that it would begin a process to withdraw its “Proposed Determination,” encouraging mine developers to begin the permitting process necessary to open the mine.

Above: Sockeye salmon in Katmai National Park.
©Natador | Dreamstime

Bristol Bay is home to the last great salmon run in the United States. Every year, tens of millions of fish return to the clearwater streams of Bristol Bay, supporting a \$1.5 billion commercial fishing industry, a sport-fishing industry that boasts some of the best trout fishing in the world, and a subsistence fishery central to the culture of Alaska natives in the region. Lake Clark and Katmai National Parks and Preserves, both located in the Bristol Bay region, are the only two national parks in the country explicitly created to protect salmon and salmon habitat.

Pebble Mine, once proposed as the largest open-pit gold and copper mine in North America, would be located only 15 miles from the boundary of Lake Clark. The mining district that might result from the development of Pebble contains deposits upstream of Lake Clark National Park and Preserve in the largest freshwater tributary of the park.

NPCA believes the Pebble Mine, and accompanying mining district, could have significant impacts on our Bristol Bay national parks, the region’s ecosystem, and the people who depend on Bristol Bay salmon for their well-being. We oppose EPA’s decision to reverse course and will continue to oppose the mine if, as now seems likely, a permitting process moves forward.

Gift Giving

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

